The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion

"She Started Wearing Men's Clothes and Acting More Masculine": Queering Historical Knowledge, Gendered Identity Making, and Trans Potentialities in Visual Information

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Abstract

This paper examines two examples of archival visual information with potentially transgender and non-binary representation to interrogate the descriptive challenges latent within such materials. By using gender theory and queer historiography, this paper deploys a critical case study to consider the particularities of naming gender when contextual evidence provides little to no authoritative guidance. By talking through the way gender makes itself visible within visual information, the paper guides readers through the way transgender or non-binary identity might exist within both pieces of visual information. The paper then provides suggestions on how to provide respectful and inclusive descriptive records that attend to the complexities of a still-evolving queer history. By offering both a statement on the impossibility of naming identity within intersecting forms of queer embodiment alongside reference points for methods of discussing potential gendered identities, the paper offers practical approaches to describing transgender and non-binary identities for information professionals.

Keywords: archival description; cataloging; critical information studies; queer theory; transgender identity

Publication Type: research article

Introduction

While transgender and gender non-binary persons have long existed, their visibility within public discourse remains relatively new. Given how this population challenges once rigid, socially constructed notions of gender requires both theoretical and practical answers about how to best describe, affirm, and represent their narratives within the appropriate historical and cultural contexts. Almost all practices of description rely upon verbal affirmations of identity, wherein the naming of gender requires locating discursive markers to confirm a person's given identity. Such affirmations can come from the individual in question, but it is often equally plausible that those descriptions emerge through others' perceptions. Simply, if a person does not say their gender then it is up to the person describing a piece of information to interpret it.

However, for information such as moving images or photographs whose existence is primarily non-textual, the practice of interpreting and labelling gender identity proves more complicated. Further, visual non-textual information representing humans from early years may or may not

ISSN 2574-3430, https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ijidi
DOI: 10.33137/ijidi.v5i4.36492

match up with how we identify and make assumptions about humans today. Suppose the visual information is older, such as the mid-19th century daguerreotype. Does the gender expression represent a trans masculine identity or an aesthetics of such as stone butch lesbianism? This paper considers how representations of potentially transgender or gender non-binary identities within visual information exist as a form of inherent queerness.

This paper employs a case study of two disparate archival images of queer embodiment at the intersection of transgender and non-binary gender identity to attend to these challenges. By analyzing how each image takes up the representation of transgender and non-binary identities, how each makes this representation visible, and how each interrogates the naming of public and private transgender embodiment, the paper offers tenuous but forward-looking suggestions on descriptive practice. Alongside this analysis, the paper considers how the materials make visible gender in both subversive and normative ways by considering how each item exists in decidedly different spaces, and advocates for how information professionals can participate in the building, defining, and understanding of transgender visual information history.

Literature Review

This literature review situates critical ideas within this case study by first understanding contemporary debates around gender identity, particularly highlighting what modern queer theory understands as the performative elements of gender. This discussion then considers the role of queerness as both an identity and a politics of practice, examining how queer identity exists to disrupt and challenge normative ideologies, here with a particular focus placed on normative gender ideologies. The discussion then emphasizes relationship between cultural heritage institutions (libraries, archives, museums, etc.) and queer embodiment before shifting to how these same institutions approach gender within descriptive practices.

Gender as Performance

Judith Butler (1990) decentralizes gender as a rigid identity tied to sex-assigned-at-birth by moving its function from the factual to the performative. She notes that "the presumption of a non-binary gender system implicitly retains a belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it." (p. 6). Butler notes that historically the ideas of masculinity presumed an inherent linkage to maleness, whereas to be a woman presumed one's existence singularly within the realm of the feminine. Butler's ideas raised two concerns: our notion of gender has nothing to do with our sex-assigned-at-birth and second, that gender, even if it is a deeply ritualized experience, remains better understood as deeply individualized phenomena. To this end, there exist myriad gender identities both within and beyond a binary. Further, regulatory mechanisms within society award individuals for performing a gender identity that aligns with their sex-assigned-at-birth.

Attending to Butler's work, others expand on the complexities around seeing and doing gender within a cisnormative (presuming that all persons possess a gender identity that matches their sex assigned at birth) society. Transgender activist and theorist, Kate Bornstein (1994) described gender as akin to one's fashion, noting that her "identity becomes [her] body which becomes [her] fashion." (p. 1). Such a framing of gender echoes how one performs gender, but it specifically prioritizes individual agency within one's gender. As Bornstein further clarifies, this means not only that she, as a transgender woman, engages in a unique relationship with femininity but that any person who expresses and does femininity does so individually.

ISSN 2574-3430, jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ijidi/index
DOI: 10.33137/ijidi.v5i4.36492

Jack Halberstam (1998) expands on Bornstein by identifying dominant ideologies that provide a normative presumption around what gender can and should be. Halberstam deconstructs "heroic masculinity" to illuminate how a limited and restrictive notion of what masculinity looks like and who has access to this masculinity prioritizes and centers patriarchal values centered on cisgender, heterosexual white men. Halberstam asserts that such normalizing power works not only to render alternative masculinities (transgender or otherwise) invisible but assumes them a joke. Deftly, Halberstam takes up this presumption and argues that if such versions of masculinity are themselves a parody than so too is cisgender masculinity, Halberstam queers the very notion of gender as a performance. This notion of queer as a verb opens possibilities concerning how one might understand the imperatives to describe gender beyond a binary.

The Act of Queering

Queering as a verb challenges perceptions of normalcy and interrogates the presumptions latent within (Dilley, 1999). The act of queering and doing queerness operates to unsettle the notion of a binarized and essentialized way of thinking. Taking up debates around normativity and any notion of natural sexuality, queering works to locate how both an identity and its antonymic relationship (i.e., ab/normal or un/natural) might benefit from critical examination. Such examinations show how binaries often operate discursively through shared social ideologies with little grounding in truth (Jagose, 1996).

Queering challenges not merely what is different but also what is similar. One such widespread uptake of queer theory centers around the debate of one's queer identity as being a product of either nature or nurture. Scholars note that while there are likely some genetic explanations around one's potential queer identity (including sexual orientations and gender identity), it is equally likely that one's social environments inform queer identity. Queering then becomes at once an action (to make something queer), an identification (to find queerness in contexts), and a thing to celebrate (to evoke moments of queerness throughout history). In each instantiation, queerness intends to disrupt systems and logics in ways that often seem chaotic and fractured but prove quite agentic and deliberate.

Queerness in Institutions

Perhaps most integral to queer theory and its informing of cultural heritage institutions' work is the unsettling of a rigid notion of fact and fiction. Such a destabilization responds to the historical erasure of queer history. Examples of this erasure: the avoidance of calling gay men gay by instead evoking terms like a bachelor (Madden, 2019) or through the inability to deploy terms consistent with historical moments when trans identity might be present in a historical figure's life (Wagner, 2019). In both examples, the idea of fact or even truth remains limited by the language of a moment. In response to such limits, queerness asks questions of to whom a person is normal and how such normalcy becomes contingent on the space and time of the person in question and who is viewing them.

Since much of the engagement with queering happens at the level of individual encounters, the binary of user and subject becomes complicated. To see a figure in history as queer requires one to be critical of histories of normativity in the first place, an action often informed by one's queerness. This need for queer-identification is likely because bodies within modern Western thought must become oriented towards other bodies phenomenologically using identification practices to make meaning of oneself as situated against the other (Ahmed, 2006). One's desire

ISSN 2574-3430, jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ijidi/index
DOI: 10.33137/ijidi.v5i4.36492

to see their queerness manifest within contemporary spaces often results in their seeking out potential versions of this from the past to normalize their identity in the present. While anachronistic, this action works to produce a version of queer history that is self-affirming. Queer historical maneuvers also mean that the queer subject is always in the present. Heather Love (2007) identifies this project as an affective endeavor. For Love and those seeking a queer history, it is both a project of individual meaning-making and imagining the possibility of queerness as existing throughout time despite attempts by institutions to delegitimize, ignore, and even destroy such histories. As such, the role of personal history-making against institutional malevolence marks a particular feature of the visual information record of transgender and non-binary persons.

Such an individually driven approach to history building helps explain the impetus by many queer communities to build their own archival spaces. The othering of queerness against heteronormativity and cisnormativity meant that their histories were at best ignored and at worst deliberately destroyed. Further, questions like consent within traditional archival practice become central to LGBTQIA+ communities as outness in private spaces does not always equate to outness within public spaces wherein one's job security, health and well-being, and emotional support are all subject to threats from persistent anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiments. Queer oriented cultural heritage spaces and queer archives prioritize the safety of community as a response. Gina Watts (2018) brilliantly chronicles these systemic exclusions and the radical practices undertaken by queer archives to do justice to queer history, noting that they run parallel to existing archival practices, while also offering new inroads for such spaces to better attend to their queer collections and users. In turn, the photographs and moving images discussed later become further complex as they represent stories whose narratives may exist within traditional institutions, as well as those very same spaces wherein alternative, community-protective history making occurs. One exists in a historical archive where concern for authentic representation of the potentially queer identities was never prioritized, and its impact reflects the current challenges such spaces are facing with amending such exclusions. Another shows the approach given to gender diversity within a queer-oriented archive, illuminating how similar questions are framed at community-protection and affirmation. Yet, both represent a larger concern for how to attend to queer historiography at the intersection of an action done by the society often reified at institutional levels such as a cataloger's desk.

The Cataloger/Archivist as Gendering Agent

In 1982 Susan Martin discussed the role of authority standards within librarianship and information organization as a "set of procedures which determines consistent names and terminology in the face of...changing names; changing subject terminology; and changing relationships between and among scholarly disciplines, corporate bodies and governmental agencies" (p. 2). An initial reading invites optimism regarding information organization as profoundly malleable or as a set of standards willing to shift for the sake of inclusivity. However, what Martin makes less clear is that the word central to authority standards is not one of change but consistency. Like predecessors of information organization like Melvil Dewey (1899) and S.R. Ranganathan (1937), Martin's version of authority control relies on universality, an authority tasked with naming all bodies. As Melissa Adler (2017) deftly states, "the library inhibits intersectionality and intertextuality by reducing bodies of literature to disciplined, discrete subjects distributed across the library." (p. xii). Of course, the library is an institution within which individuals work, suggesting that the cataloger is complicit within the description of

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information. Yet the position of the cataloger is one rarely explored, especially within critical contexts.

In a similar vein, archives have been theorized as sites of authority for history, though oft challenged by critical theorists such as Michel Foucault (1969) and Jacques Derrida (1996). Within the realm of information professionals their deemed them sites of neutral truth telling. In particular, the archive became an evidentiary institution operating as a site of historical truth, even as that truth would eventually be a contested one (Cook, 1997). In particular, practitioner scholars like Verne Harris (2002) argued that institutional archives, especially those operating on behalf of governments, work to both directly and passively destroy histories which render them in negative lights, particularly with regards to systemic oppressions. While Harris refers specifically to apartheid within South Africa, his concerns extended beyond racism and invited theorizing around similar exclusions at the site of gender and sexuality as well. As note, the emergence of alternative archives for queer history was in response to this failed neutrality and such spaces operate as a direct challenge to this falsely held concept of neutral record keeping. In fact, K.J. Rawson (2015) makes this point in his introduction to the Transgender Studies Quarterly special issue on archives. Noting that the emergence of transgender as a term is not indicative of an absence of such persons within history, but a new moment in which visibility and demand for historical recognition has produced the bodies of transgender persons within community and traditional archives as sites of "political change" (p. 548). Specifically, the reality that gender non-binary within archives whose gender identities challenges cisnormativity and its production of the site of gender as a normative identity. The duality of transgender historiography and transgender subjectivity did not politicize archives, but merely made abundantly clear what was already politicized by refusing space to render such identities visible to begin with. Further, as Aaron Devor (2014) notes, it was trans identity which specifically destabilized archival praxis for queer history making, asserting that this identity and the complexities around its visibility and description, impacted both activists and historians alike. Further, attendant to this journal's international scope and the aforementioned work of Verne Harris, the political work of making transgender identity visible often happens at the intersections of colonialism and racism, as evidenced by the emergence of transgender archives within Sub-Saharan Africa rooted in the region's own political queer activism (Theron & Kgositau, 2015). In turn, these types of politicized realities inform not only cataloging, but how gender is described and perceived of within the records of such bodies.

Cataloger's judgment stands in as a framing device for the positionality of the cataloger in describing a piece of information. While theorized as a method to understanding the onus placed upon catalogers to make available and accessible as possible a piece of information. The idea as currently utilized situates the practitioner as a descriptive agent of information from a vantage point of neutrality. Most scholarship asks the cataloger to think critically of their role in making information available to users, while never noting how the identities of those users and catalogers inform descriptive presumptions (Diao, 2018). Latent here is that a cataloger, on behalf of their respective institution, can imagine all potential user needs or can see all potential representations within a given piece of information. From an ethical standpoint such presumptions fail to attend, first to the systemic exclusions observed by Adler and others, while also assuming that cataloger's identities are simultaneously cohesive enough and diverse enough to prepare, with proper education, a record for access. Fox and Reece (2012) extend this issue by arguing that the notion of a cataloging ethics exists without any central theoretical framework from which to orient ethical practice meaning that concepts such as minimal bias and neutrality exist without considering in what ways an information professional might be biased, driven by

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identarian blindsight or otherwise. In response, Fox (2016) asserts that one such method of integrating positionality into cataloging would be through the framework of intersectionality, understanding that one's lived identities (race, class, gender, sexuality) work to afford access or produce barriers to social spaces and services. Understanding this concept, Fox argues, will allow for catalogers to examine how their own identities exist situationally to cataloging as practice and the ethical choices made in their work, thus resulting in better work judging the content they describe not for neutral access, but from how it works to undo regimes of oppression. In response, the following discussion explores how cataloging produces notions of queerness and ascribes queerness to bodies in ways that reproduce normativity.

Adler, as well as critical treatises by Sanford Berman (1971) and Hope Olson (2002), notes the challenges of naming queer bodies. Contemporary complexities regarding transgender and non-binary bodies came to light when the information organization standard Resource Description and Access (RDA) sought to provide users with an easy way to describe gender. To provide users with a means to describe gender in all types of information resources, RDA prioritized traditional print materials. Those describing resources were initially only given the categorical options of male and female. Following the advocacy of Biiley et al. (2014) RDA now allows for any gender option. However, RDA still stipulates that such prescriptions of gender come from declarations made by the person within the piece of information. While alleviating some immediate issues concerning the misgendering of individuals within materials from a metatheoretical level, it still assumes a coherent shared queer body of knowledge. Such insistence upon consistency, for this type of organizational framework, relies on some point of initial reference, resulting in yet other examples of problematic queer description. This has led to the design and implementation of alternative authority standards such as the Homosaurus, which aims to, like queer archives, prioritize the community representation of LGBTQIA+ identity, as opposed to assuming that a current standard can appropriately exist as inclusive of such identities. As will be discussed, the Homosaurus works to imagine multiple ways of being queer and affording descriptions space to exhaustively name these iterations of identity rather than merely picking the most relevant term at the cost of essentializing one's identity. This demand for consistency becomes a challenge when dealing with predominantly non-textual and visual information (Wagner, 2019). Visual information requires contextual specifics, noting not only what one sees but the informational contexts of the item and, crucially, who is sharing and using the piece of visual information.

When practitioners have tackled the question of gender diverse representation with cataloging, it is through advocating a refusal to rely on Library of Congress entirely (Roberto, 2011) or to use the failures of the inability to name gender identity in diverse ways as a point of dialogic inquiry between patrons and practitioners (Drabisnki, 2013). Indeed, the consensus across literature for practitioner approaches is to utilize emergent technologies and site-specific practices attendant to the case-specific needs of a collection and its investment in gender diversity (Johnson, 2010). In turn, very little exists around a cohesive "what to do" when it comes to gender non-binary identities within cataloging and even less so when it refers to visual information, suggesting a chronic necessity for such exploration. In response, this paper's remainder approaches these complexities of the competing ideas of consistency and contextuality by offering a nuanced case study of potentially transgender and gender non-binary identity in visual information. However, before engaging with this case study, the methodological choices behind the visual resources and their intended focus require clarification.

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Methods

This paper deploys a case study methodology by highlighting two curated images (one a film of newsreel outtakes the other a photograph from a drag performance) that focus on transgender embodiment. The case study takes an approach through what Robert E. Stake (1995, p. 44) defines as "critical uniqueness." This case study highlights challenges, issues, and contexts relevant to naming and affirming gender diversity when encountered in visual information cataloging. The critical part here, like the earlier discussed archiving and cataloging practices produced by queer communities also centers queerness as a preeminent concern within the case studies, approaching examples "with queer concerns and experiences at the forefront of the logic" (DeCamp, 2020, p. 10). In particular, the images picked for the case study highlight a century of visual information related to transgender and gender non-binary identity, focusing on the historical impetus for how information professionals might understand the gender identities in question. Further, the items discussed work to highlight the respective conduits through which individuals share and engage with queer visual information, including items encountered in differing contexts. These differing contexts produce a binary of institutional and communal archives while understanding this binary to itself be antithetical to queer methods, however, attending to what Tom Boellstorff (2016) defines as "surfing binarisms" these examples contextualize similar challenges across both types of cultural heritage institution, while providing insight into overlapping and divergent practices (p. 222). Each item considers the degrees of visibility provided to a given gender identity, including moments evoking transgender identity in hyper-scientific contexts to moments where non-binary identity exists figuratively, but not through literally visualizing these bodies. Following the analysis of each piece of visual information, the paper considers possible descriptive approaches followed then by a loose, albeit contextually specific method of transgender visual information description.

Limitations

While the images discussed represent and engage with divergent issues around the representation of transgender and non-binary bodies within visual information, their use as case study examples does not come without limitations. The case study prioritizes my interests as a scholar of queer embodiment within archives. As such, the examples do not address all issues concerning queer identities within visual information. Further, the examples given their visibility within queer media history reify issues around homonormativity (Duggan, 2003). All the shown subjects appear to be white and likely of higher socioeconomic classes. This acknowledgment means that while this is about transgender and non-binary embodiment and how to approach description from a visual information perspective, it is decidedly not about how to tackle the equally complex topic of naming race within similar examples. The geographic scope of the samples generally resides within the United States. Further, each example also considers material whose origins revolve around the American South and the suggestions following each case study might need nuance and alteration to better attend to global and even regional challenges. Finally, the items discussed prioritize content over practice and serve not as a perfect representation of how to deal with transgender embodiment across all cultural institutions or within specific cataloging rules or standards, but merely survey issues that cut across these particularities. The idea here is not to offer up criticism or failure but instead to open outwards towards potential solutions.

ISSN 2574-3430, jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ijidi/index
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Case Study 1: Jazz wedding—outtakes

The first piece of footage titled *Jazz wedding--outtakes* (1928) is a Fox Movietone Newsreel outtake held at the University of South Carolina's Moving Image Research Collection and represents footage whose use exists as ephemera to newsreel footage of the early 20th century. The footage depicts a group of individuals who are dressed in clothing indicative of both brides and grooms processing down an outdoor courtyard with arms interlocking. Leading the group is a person in a suit holding a book while raising their hand. The footage then cuts to multiple scenes of brides and grooms kissing (see Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Fox Mews Story C3252: Jazz Wedding-outtakes, Fox Movietone News Collection. Reproduced by permission of the Moving Image Research Collection, The University of South Carolina.

The moving image's description places both "bride" and "groomsmen" in quotation likely due to the footage's ties to the then women's college Brenau University. The presumption that all persons were performing possibly explains the inclusion of subject headings such as "male impersonator" and the decidedly more dated "transvestism." [1]It is also critical to note here that this example is profoundly contextual and represents the particular knowledge of a set of archivists and/or catalogers at a particular location. It is equally plausible that were there knowledgeable information professionals at this site, they would have contextualized the uses of the terms in the subject headings or been keenly aware of the way that this potentially one-time

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event at a women's college were not actual engagements in male impersonation as a form of identity-making (see Fig. 2).

Content Description	Girls of Brenau College hold a jazz wedding to depict the spirit of modern times. Women dress up as both sides of the bridal party, the ceremony is performed and the bride and groom kiss, dancing all the while. Scene of the "bride" dancing with "groomsmen."
Geographic Location	Gainesville (Ga.)
Subject	Transvestism. Male impersonators. Women college students. Dance--United States Weddings. Theater. Costume.

Figure 2. The content description, geographic location, and subject terms for Jazz wedding--outtakes provided by the Moving Image Research Collection. (*Converted to text for accessibility*).

While we cannot presume these to be actual images of transgender men or non-binary persons exploring their identity, we equally cannot assume them to be lesbians. This challenge becomes magnified by the footage's long-term intentions, many of which may not have been known by the students at the time of the recording. This issue is both descriptive and ethical. The question of whether the acts should be digitally visible to begin with, their content reflecting "negotiated intimacy" between students who may never have imagined such acts becoming public and, as such, ask questions about how they might want such things contextualized, let alone defined into a historical record. (Cowan & Rault, 2018, p. 124). The footage is silent and does not suggest the existence of a transgender identity; however, given that the use of women juxtaposed with the deployment of multiple gendered clothing styles does offer up the potential for gender to be queered and for the "groomsmen" to be trans men. This possibility would be historically unprecedented given the 1928 recording date of the footage, a precedent even more unusual given the footage's Georgia location. The challenges of describing this content then emerge from a lack of appropriate terms for the historical version of gender expression occurring in the footage. It is not to say that viewers are not looking at the presence of trans men or even gender-fluid individuals, but that these were not the terms afforded to the persons in the footage. However, this does not deny information professionals the ability to identify and label the content as something akin to contemporary notions of transgender and gender non-binary identities. Such reclamation is the move made by the creators of the hit Amazon Studies show *Transparent*, who used the footage in the opening credits of their show focused on a trans woman's daily life. To navigate how one might understand alternative descriptive practices for this piece of footage, one must first attend to a few points about how it engages with transgender identity and its existence within a historical record. The primary challenge resides because no form of contemporary terminology accurately reflects what identities the participants present and identify within *Jazz wedding--outtakes*.

ISSN 2574-3430, jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ijidi/index
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Again, while there existed both trans men and butch lesbians within this historical moment, the lack of an affirmative statement on the part of the individuals shown in the footage prevents any method on the part of information professionals to assert transgender embodiment authoritatively. Wagner (2018) observes the limitations of schemas like RDA when attempting to assert language used to describe moments of gender non-binary identity face scrutiny due to an overreliance on textual affirmation. In the case of this footage, camera operators (who were almost exclusively cisgender, straight white men) failed to label and identify these individuals as anything more than women playing dress-up. So, for the most queerly astute and forward-thinking individuals cataloging the record, the rules of organizational practice do not allow for asserting a transgender identity upon the subject.

Further, the content itself evokes an ongoing challenge around two dueling ideologies of queer history-making (between trans men and/or butch lesbians). Each side entrenches itself in the project of laying claim to what seemingly few historical queer figures exist. Rarely, if ever, do the two communities within the subset of the LGBTQIA+ umbrella concede to sharing figures, likely due to a larger struggle to seek out and gain recognition within a queer history that overemphasizes the narratives of gay, cisgender, white men (Duggan, 2003). Subsets of queer identity seek out any representations that will help make legitimate identity, even if it means denying another identity in the process. The question almost always becomes an either/or identity instead of offering up the potential of a this/and identity description. Undoing this need for uniformity might liberate the transgender image within visual information.

The challenge of naming a queer identity within *Jazz wedding--outtakes* only exacerbates given that the footage in question exists as outtakes of newsreel footage, much of which exists on the periphery of media history content that never made it to theatrical release (Chambers et al., 2018). The lack of theatrical context makes it impossible to codify *Jazz wedding moments--outtakes* into any particular genre. So too, does the non-public nature of it make the footage's intentions challenging to understand. Further, the outtakes represent repeated actions intended to be re-edited and cut together into linear narrative cohesion. A viewer of *Jazz wedding--outtakes* sees the group processing through a courtyard multiple times, just as they see the images of participants kissing through multiple takes, including the one used in *Transparent*. Further, if the viewer were to take the provided description as truth, then it is women, some in drag, performing a wedding ceremony. Such an additional layer invites new ways of thinking about the sexuality of the footage, never mind its overt confrontation with gender.

Despite the issues mentioned above between histories of transgender masculinity and stone butch lesbianism, footage like *Jazz wedding--outtakes* allows for a space for both histories and further quite evocatively affirms their presence in early twentieth-century queer history. This subversive representation provides a useful connecting point for an equally subversive, yet far more direct representation of transgender embodiment. The question then becomes how might a cataloger or archivist tentatively consider describing this item within their workflow? The following is an attempt to provide a checklist of potential approaches.

Embrace Ambiguity

Given the contentions around *Jazz wedding—outtakes* as a historical representation of queerness at the intersection of transgender and lesbian identity, a cataloger might benefit from simply allowing both identities to exist in conversation. Since the Library of Congress offers no way to name queerness as an identity within a group, alternative approaches remain necessary. Evoking

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these identities as potential standouts affords a cataloger the ability to do their due diligence as an information professional while also not avoiding naming identities because there exist no perfect means to do so. In this case, the embrace of dual identities as a potential becomes almost obligatory. Terms worth deploying include the already existing "Male impersonators," as well as potentially "Transgender people," and even "Lesbians." Though "Transgender men" exists as an option, this inability to affirm that the individuals shown did indeed identify as trans men or transmasculine remains a challenge. The much more open heading of "Transgender people" affords a degree of openness to this uncertainty.

Additionally, emerging subject headings around things like "Gender nonconformity" might also open potential avenues to talk about the footage's complications without naming gender specifically. Such a heading would allow viewers to note that both masculinity and femininity are being performed in the context of the wedding. It is worth remembering here, however, that choices such as these could be misinterpreted as ontological claims, so an information professional should do their best to provide notes and clarifications to the contexts behind such subject headings and their ethical reasons for providing these terms (Fox & Reece, 2012). The work of the cataloger or archivists here becomes about their own positionality in the work and what they understand the context to be, but at no point should this understanding be interpreted at definitive truth. This emphasis on providing specifics within a descriptive framework also provides insight into an additional approach that adheres to context-driven rather than factual description.

Describe Gendered Ways of Being and Not the Gender

An equally legitimate approach to this content would be to avoid the gender-specific tags such as "Transgender men" or "Male impersonators" and keep something like "Gender nonconformity" and then use the space of the content description to describe the particularities of how the clip challenges gender. Instead of describing things like "women dress up as both sides of the bridal party", a description could read as a site of expression. The cataloger might write something like, "group of people at women's college don bridal gowns and tuxedos to recreate a wedding." Note the almost subtle shift of language that confirms what is, ultimately, an unknowable gender identity (save for actual affirmation from the person in the footage). Here details are left to researcher conjecturing or laying claim to queer identities.

Opening the description here also helps legitimize the performance of gender happening by the individuals being read as cisgender women in dresses. Though it does not outright offer a naming of it, such an approach expands the footage's potential to be also understood as either genderqueer or genderfluid.

Make Cautious Use of Preexisting Descriptions

Jazz wedding—outtakes comes with multiple levels of description, including both the descriptions provided by the camera operators at the time of the footage's release, as well as the various interpretations of this data between catalogers over the past few decades. In each case, the person updating the description ought to have wrestled with making sense of what language best describes the persons within the footage shown. Just as shifts in language around race within cataloging have shifted in the past century, too should our notions of the correct or appropriate term are for a piece of footage whose gender exploration is as rich as this. It is also equally likely that the persons describing these figures refuse to see gender identities divergent from cisgender

ISSN 2574-3430, jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ijidi/index
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identity. As Wagner (2020) argues this is likely the case with pioneering queer speedboat racer Joe Carstairs whose refusal to adhere to feminine gender conventions and identification has nonetheless faced constant misgendering not only by archival descriptions but historiographers as well. In turn, when it comes to something like the *Jazz wedding—outtakes* footage, a cataloger researching such footage should provide equal weight to what a current gender studies scholar or queer activist has to say about the content documentation contemporary to the footage's existence. The guidance afforded by standards such as RDA and the Library of Congress prioritize textual affirmation but provide no space for imagining how these affirmations might be products of cisnormative ignorance or, worse, deliberate queer erasure. So even as it may not be an identity spoken about by name, the expression here provides more than enough of a justification to assert its potential. Examples like *Jazz wedding—Outtakes* offer information professionals an item whose emergence within their workflow ties to a pre-existing archival collection with its own rules and ideas; however, there exists an even more significant challenge when engaging with materials whose emergence occurs by happenstance.

Case Study 2: Unidentified Person Performs Onstage at the 1997 Christmas in July Carnival

The title of this piece of visual information, in many ways, describes as best as possible what one sees, without additional interpretation. However, a deeper description of *Unidentified Person Performs Onstage at the 1997 Christmas in July Carnival* (hereafter *Unidentified Person Performs)* might expand the discussion a bit. For example, it might observe that we are seeing a person in a neon-patterned leotard, black shorts, tights, high heels, and sunglasses singing on an outdoor stage. The photograph's faded nature might even lead us to believe that it is from the late eighties or early nineties (Figure 3). Critically, what we do not know about the person is their gender identity and, further, what ways they might be expressing gender within or against the conventions of their sex-assigned-at-birth. However, simply saying a person performing onstage offers very little insight into what might be worthwhile or utilizable to a patron or researcher.

Unidentified Person Performs is one of the many "unidentified" photographs included within the Digital Transgender Archive, a collection of materials focused on helping undo the "significant barriers to the accessibility of trans history" by linking up various and disparate global collections into an isolated digital repository and shifting the representation of transgender history away from being defined by "language" (Overview, 2018). In particular, the Digital Transgender Archive attempts its best to clarify that while there was rarely ever a direct naming of transgender identity within archival collections before the 1990s, there certainly exist materials whose themes, representations, and content reflect transgender potentiality. The Digital Transgender Archive is doing the work of advocating for materials such as the aforementioned *Jazz wedding—outtakes* being included within the still-forming transgender history. There exist works whose representations include self-defined and avowed transgender individuals. There also exist materials such as *Unidentified Person Performs*, which emerge concerning identifiable transgender and nonbinary historical figures. This photograph provides an example of the potential challenges around encountering a piece of visual information with much less context than the newsreel discussed earlier. Indeed, the image only has for reference points its temporal relationship to 1997, its event related to the Christmas in July event, its spatial relationship to Houston, Texas, and its collection links to the photographic works of JD, all of which one can cull from the metadata made available within the Digital Transgender Archive's page for the item (see Fig. 4).

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DOI: 10.33137/ijidi.v5i4.36492

Figure 3. The unidentified person of the *Unidentified Person Performs* photograph housed within the Digital Transgender Archive.

Item Information	
Identifier	kw52j834d
Collection	JD Doyle Photographs (1950-2000)
Institution	JD Doyle Archives
Date Created	1997
Date Covered	1997
Genre	Photographs

ISSN 2574-3430, jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ijidi/index
DOI: 10.33137/ijidi.v5i4.36492

Subject(s)	Christmas in July Carnival
Places	Texas > Harris County > Houston
Topic(s)	Carnivals Crossdressing Photography
Resource Type	Still Image
Analog Format	Color
Language	English
Rights	Contact host institution for more information For more information on copyright, please read our policies

Figure 4. The available linked metadata for *Unidentified Person Performs*. (*Converted to text for accessibility*).

Clicking any of the links related to the collection or the institution redirects a user to other items within the collection, but very little about the actual contexts from which the collection exists, finding that there are materials for drag shows, crossdressing, and theater more broadly. As such, this is the most one can deduce about this image given its ties to an event wherein drag likely occurred, or some variety of theater engages in gender subversion. Similar to *Jazz wedding—outtakes*, a viewer can, at best, only conjecture as to what types of gender experimentations were occurring in this particular time and space. However, this minimal context does not mean that one cannot begin to engage with the gender potentials latent within the photograph. Like the previously discussed materials attempting to contextualize what it means to engage in gender non-binary expression warrants consideration.

A litany of scholars, both through theory (Halberstam, 2005) and qualitative study (Gray, 2009), have taken it upon themselves to challenge a misperception of queer embodiment within rural spaces and, more specifically, the Midwest and American South. Deploying what he calls "metronormativity," Halberstam argues that while we often fail to see transgender identity within rural spaces, there nonetheless existed and continue to exist unique deployments of this identity both all part of the United States. While Houston, Texas is by no means a rural town, its location as a city within Texas offers up space wherein one presumes a lack of open and visible queer culture. The *Unidentified person performs* photograph exists as a challenge to this misperception, even if it is impossible to name this particular moment as one of transgender embodiment. The event, for which this untitled performer is present, is one titled the Christmas in July event, and digitally thumbing through other photographs in the collection allow one to discover that one of the performers here did have a name, and though not the person in the photograph her identification as Crystal Rae Lee Love, allows a researcher to explore and think about her presence within Houston queer culture. One discovers Love not only to be a prominent drag persona within Houston from throughout the 1990s and the 2000s but the recipient of 2002's

ISSN 2574-3430, jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ijidi/index
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"Best Drag Queen," from the *Houston Press*. In the interview and description of Love, she openly identifies as being a "tranny" and as somebody who practices "transvestism," two terms whose utilization, while dated, offer insight into the way drag for many performers exceeds the simplicity of performance and aligns with gender identities beyond cisgender (Best Drag Queen, 2002). It affords a way to link up the performers to engagements which at the very least attempt to engage in gender as an identity. The simultaneous deployment of terms whose evolution now more implicitly reflects transgender identity and the site's actualities as being one that included transgender people allows for this to be a way to talk about the image. Such a discussion cannot aim to name the transgender identity at play, given the uncertainty around the unidentified person in question. Perhaps indicative of the thought and care placed on respect within the Digital Transgender Archive, this photograph's metadata generally represents an appropriate approach to the content, but for purposes of imagination, treating this photograph as something one might find in a shoebox or between photographs of Crystal Rae Lee Love allows one to reflect on the particularities of describing gender.

Like *Jazz wedding—outtakes footage*, there is no evocation of sex-assigned at birth here and even less to go on concerning pre-existing metadata. There is no marker akin to "women dress as both sides of the bridal party." One cannot use terms like "female impersonator" or "male impersonator" here since those rely on a transition between one identity to another. As such, it is telling that the only sort of term within the existing record here utilizes "crossdressing" as a catch-all for expressions blurring between gender identities. A person might utilize "drag shows" as a broader idea or lean into "gender nonconformity" to understand that ultimately, the image confronts cisgender logics of binary identity. In this way, it becomes more about utilizing available descriptors within the image to talk through what is shown and seen as gendered without naming gender itself. Noting that the unidentified performer, for example, has a curly bob haircut/wig and cat-eye sunglasses offer up expressions more traditionally associated with femininity, but avoids naming the identity as feminine.

Similarly, noting the presence of high heels, a black shirt, and pantyhose invite a multitude of interpretations of femininity that allow simultaneous potentials of drag performance as well as feminine gender expression. None of these state that what viewers are looking at is that of a transgender woman. It does, however, allow a potential researcher to build connections between Crystal Rae Lee Love's hypervisibility and this unidentified performer. Such an approach provides a robust, descriptive record that provides users some semblance of what the performer looks like while also remaining ambiguous enough to avoid the one thing that remains wholly uncertain within the footage; the person's gender. In turn, providing some critical points of reference for why such a description matters and justifying these descriptive practices is necessary.

Utilize proximate information

While one can imagine *Unidentified Person Performing* as a standalone item, one whose emergence comes by way of donation, it is also one whose materiality exists in proximity to other definable materials. As observed, it is part of a particular event within Houston's drag culture, and these details afford it some descriptive legitimacy. While it could equally be a photograph whose inclusion in a box of materials is one of mere happenstance, such presumptions do little to aid accessibility and findability. A work such as this benefits from having terms tied to it, ones that, while they may ultimately prove incorrect, place it in front of the eyes of area experts. Hypothetically, one could imagine this passing through the gaze of a researcher of Texas queer history who has found materials elsewhere on the subject. They may encounter the photograph

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and note that it is not from the event or part of this particular drag scene. However, in that realization, it is equally plausible that they will offer up some information on the who and what of the photograph. The value of proximate information here allows for a cataloger to make educated guesses with the materials while also offering up a way for those with information, whether from lived experience or knowledge acquisition, to engage with and add to the materials. Once again, such educated guesses call attention to the lack of an objective or neutral stance in one's work and require the cataloger to be wholly transparent about the ethical framework informing their choices. As an example, the cataloger might note that historically normative institutions have failed to adequately describe such bodies and communities. Users in this case become central points of knowledge as informed by archival queer theory, which here becomes the ethical framing of the cataloger's work (Watts, 2018). Further, from an economic standpoint relying on user knowledge takes the onus of knowing the right thing to say or do off the information professional. Ostensibly, it serves as a necessary reminder that the function of describing information, even one as contextually complex as *Unidentified Person Performing*, is to make users aware of it and to engage with it.

Leveraging alternative text description

One of the significant impetuses of accessibility within digital archival repositories focuses on utilizing alternative text to afford accessibility to users engaged with web-readers. A major challenge of alternative text description occurs around the aesthetics of an image, wherein a person might describe the colors as being nice without detailing this (Ghosal et al., 2019). In this way, artificial intelligence has operated to train computers to fill in the descriptions by noting what potential colors exist within an image, allowing a user to understand these lost details better, should they need help doing so. Given that gender is markedly more complex and certainly not easily learnable for AI (at least in methods not relying on conflating sex-assigned-at-birth), the role of describing gender becomes the burden of a cataloger or related information professional. By leveraging cultural heritage institutions' obligation to be thoughtful about making clear and coherent descriptions available in multiple ways, the exceptionally detailed discussions around gendered expressions within *Unidentified Person Performing* become not simply viable but obligatory. Further, gender is an oft-avoided component of computer-driven alt-text description, suggesting it remains a particularly human-driven descriptive practice. The use of terms like "a person wearing cat-eye glasses, feminine makeup and a black skirt" serves as a two-fold way of providing a discussion for gendered components and a detailed description of the footage itself.

Utilize inclusion-driven organizational methods

One outstanding option for addressing the complexities of gender identity within visual information remains the use and deployment of alternative schemas attuned to gender as a social construct. For example, the Homosauraus, an internationally deployed, linked data system built on the iterative understanding of queer-centered descriptive frameworks offers up thoughtful and inclusive language to better recognize the historical contentions around queer identities. The Homosaurus also connects identities whose meanings remain deeply contextual to other salient and intersecting identities within the LGBTQIA+ community. Originally designed as a horizontal organizational structure by the International Homo/Lesbian Information Center and Archive, the Homosaurus expanded definitions around terms like bisexuality and trans resulting in a realization that a thesaurus of queer-oriented terms would better serve as a supplement to existing organizational standards instead of a standalone framework (About, 2019). The terms

ISSN 2574-3430, jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ijidi/index
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within the Homosaurus, which in no way intends be an exhaustive alternative, allow for nuance around deliberate identity description related to gender without expressly naming gender. For example, noteworthy terms of inclusion might include the already existing choice of "crossdressing" to fill in for the potential of there being some subversion of gender at play. Other notable terms that the Homosauraus utilizes that align with this issue include "clothing", "drag community", "gender blending", "gender binary", "gender expression", "gender identity", "gender non-conforming people", "genderqueer people", "hair", "LGBTQ", "LGBTQ events", "LGBTQ people", "LGBTQ+", "LGBTQIA", "queer (verb)", "queer community", "queer identity", "queer people", "queer theatre", and "subcultures."

The expanse of options intends to be specific choices and a potential list of concurring terms that a record might include. If this seems like a considerable number of terms, it is partially intentional. *Unidentified Person Performing*'s informational potential is such that it could be about any and none of these terms, so the choice to include them embraces this duality. It also follows what Bri Watson (2021) identifies as a queer organizational imperative to identify and embrace the hyper specific and understand that it will help to aid the individual desires within an increasingly expanding landscape of visual media. Since the existence of alternative frameworks such as the Homosaurus understands terms to have deep historical and contextual components, this offers information professionals and the users alike ways to open understandings of gender within *Unidentified Person Performing*. Such understandings note gender here as a profoundly intimate yet, as an archival record, public encounter. Perhaps more than the others suggested, this approach notes that it is not about the certainty with describing gender in visual information and remains resolutely about imagining potentials. With this in mind, the paper now turns toward a sense of collective praxis when describing the transgender body within visual information; however, it remains essential to acknowledge the case studies' limitations as delivered before doing so.

Implications for Practitioners

The prior case studies suggest considerable challenges for information professionals when it comes to meaningfully engaging with materials representing transgender and non-binary persons. While this paper cannot begin to serve as an authoritative stance on the layered issues brought forth, it can provide some suggestions regarding how best to approach one's work. First, like any descriptive or cataloging practice, an information professional ought to do their best to contextualize their choices. While they may not know if a person within a piece of visual information is transgender or non-binary, they can do their best to situate the footage within relevant historical contexts and expand description in response. This, of course, means producing an extension of one's labor and often providing information that might not match across similar records. For example, one record might represent a person who is resolutely a butch lesbian, while another is a transgender man, yet to a passing cataloger the individuals within the footage might appear similar. The queerness latent in such identities, both within their historical record and within contemporary contexts, make an approach to such identities as universal or essential impossible, and this impossibility is deliberate. In turn, instead of suggesting that two records are identical, an informational professional can crosswalk their decisions within available contexts and materials. If possible, information professionals can also clarify their decisions to go with an identity related to gender as opposed to sexuality, or vice versa. In doing so, this will help not only other information professionals, but the users of such materials to examine their own presumptions about the two identity categories and how each fold into one another. As such, it suggests an additional practice for information professionals to consider.

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Since so much of the definitional work around transgender and non-binary individuals remains in flux, working with community members is another way information professionals might address descriptive challenges in such footage. This work can be as simple as networking and sharing complex materials with queer history networks via social media and listservs, wherein raising questions about collection items with a potential to be transgender or gender non-binary affords access to experts in transgender history and a potential overlap of transgender and gender non-binary persons. In turn, these networks will be made aware of materials they likely will have interest in working with and exploring. In the process of doing so, records and appropriate definitions for identities within those records becomes a collaborative project between the institution in question and the researchers' users working with those records. While the layered description mentioned earlier undeniably adds work to the information professional, it is far easier to see this engagement as being one that falls well within the purview of outreach, especially within the contexts of archives and museums.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this shift in work cannot happen in isolation to larger systemic exclusions within a cultural heritage institution as it relates to representing transgender and gender non-binary persons within visual information. Simply, if every record is provided with the most up-to-date and nuanced terminology for the moment, yet staff routinely misgender patrons or reinscribe cisnormativity elsewhere (i.e.., bibliographic information such as abstracts) and this work becomes quite meaningless. Addressing misgendering or avoiding appropriate methods of gender description within a catalog record is but one layer of the way inequity has manifest itself within cultural heritage institutions, and correcting this problem cannot be seen as a panacea for the reality that the population being discussed remains othered and invisible within such spaces beyond the materials themselves (Wagner & Crowley, 2020). Critically, such a practice relies on cultural humility, one that understands the information professional's role to be subject to its own criticism. In particular, work that is done in earnest to be inclusive might reproduce power inequities and one's willingness to learn from those failures and grow, rather than refuse to accept fault becomes a means for producing an anti-oppressive institutional space. It echoes Tai's (2020) notation that such an approach embraces the iterative and cyclical nature of Jessia language around inclusivity and sees the information record as a means to grow and change as necessary. The critical point here worth remembering becomes the value this has for transgender and gender non-binary inclusivity, but the endeavor has impact relevant for other systems of oppression and their role in describing identity (i.e., racial identity). As such, imagining ways of describing persons in an inclusive and respectful way becomes not merely a practice, but a project of hopefulness about the future of transgender inclusion within the profession more broadly.

Towards A Visual Information Logic of Trans Potentiality

Though the examples of visual information deployed within this case study provide hyper specific contexts as to which one might encounter transgender embodiment within information organization, their particularities help define, even if loosely, the look of a visual information organization landscape of transgender potentiality. Borrowing from Jose Esteban Muñoz (2009), this logic of transgender visual information organization deploys politics of hopefulness, wherein the belief that queer representation and inclusion in all spaces necessitates a constant "anticipatory" belief in abundance and expansiveness (p. 3). Using the metaphor of the horizon, Muñoz advocates that there can always be more and better versions of what it means to be positively included within society. In no way is this idea assimilationist in nature as Muñoz intends quite literally for this inclusion to be system-changing instead of system affirming. The

ISSN 2574-3430, jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ijidi/index
DOI: 10.33137/ijidi.v5i4.36492

suggestions made in this case study intentionally challenge the rules for just that reason. The hope is that through exhausting the limits of current ordering that new methods of organization will emerge. As such, information professionals can help anticipate this change by allowing organizational records to be a site of expansion and inclusion instead of locations where transgender embodiment does not fit. The logics of transgender and non-binary embodiment purposefully and resolutely refuse to fit into cisnormative structures. Inclusive options that exist now offer isolation (i.e., single-stall bathrooms) or case-specific rules to describe records. However, with increased visibility, acceptance of transgender individuals will shift, and the conversation from temporary salves to systemic alterations will follow in turn. Information organization can anticipate this shift by appropriately affording space to explore what it means to embody transgender identity by defying structure or binarized ways of thinking within the record. Each approach to describing a transgender body within visual information research, whether that transgender body is un/named or in/visible, must accept that a body cannot be seen as a thing to be corrected and defined within preexisting ideologies. Instead, information professionals must see these as sites of potentiality, change, and imagination. A record for a piece of information is only as good as its engagement with users, and those users are only able to do so if they are seen and seeing themselves within those records.

Endnote

[1] It is important to note that while writing this, the author contacted the archive and noted the potential language issues and received an email stating that they would look into the use of this term on not only this record but others still deploying the term as well.

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ISSN 2574-3430, jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ijidi/index
DOI: 10.33137/ijidi.v5i4.36492