The Role of Affect in Shaping Archivists’ Experiences while Documenting the HIV/AIDS Epidemic

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Abstract
In this presentation, we discuss how individuals working in LGBTQIA+ archives navigate their emotional experiences while documenting the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States. Specifically, we report on the feelings that participants experience while documenting the epidemic and how they navigated them. Relying on semi-structured interviews, convenience sampling, and grounded theory, the present study builds upon interview data with 25 archivists working in LGBTQIA+ archives. Our results indicate that our participants experienced their archival labor as both an inspiration and a burden. As an inspiration, documenting the HIV/AIDS epidemic motivated our participants to bring to light the structural injustices faced by the LGBTQIA+ community and make accessible the stories of resilience and courage of people who lived with HIV/AIDS. As a burden, documenting the epidemic led our participants to experience shock, sorrow, and grief; emotions that they navigated with a combination of individual and relational strategies. Our results are the first step of a larger effort to develop trauma-informed resources to serve individuals working in LGBTQIA+ archives. We believe our work can be adapted to assess the emotional experiences of other marginalized communities, such as black and Latinx populations.

About the authors
Allan A. Martell is an assistant professor at the School of Information and Library Science at Indiana University. His research centers on social memories of violence such as civil wars, genocides, or dictatorships. In his work, Martell traces the interactions of youths with historical representations of violence in cultural heritage organizations — such as memorials, museum exhibitions, and archival records — and how the curatorial decisions around such representations shape these interactions. He received a B.A. in Social Communications from the Central American University in El Salvador, an M.S. in Digital Media from the Georgia Institute of Technology, and a Ph.D. in Information from the University of Michigan.

Travis L. Wagner is an assistant professor in the School of Information Sciences at the University of Illinois Urbana- Champaign. Wagner's research interests include critical information studies, queer archives, and LGBTQIA+ advocacy in sociotechnical systems. Their work investigates how LGBTQIA+ communities create identity in opposition to sociotechnical systems that characterize and limit those identities. Multiple projects within the classroom and with community organizations have led to Wagner exploring and publishing the unique relationships between obsolete archival mediums and queer counter-historical work across archival contexts. Their recent publications include articles in the Journal of Documentation, Critical Departures in Qualitative Inquiry, and Artifact & Apparatus.

Shannon M. Oltmann is an Associate Professor in the School of Information Science at the University of Kentucky. She obtained her Ph.D. from Indiana University. Oltmann studies the implementation of and resistance to censorship in libraries and other spaces (including online). This work is increasingly important as book bans soar across the country. Her work examines
how libraries combat censorship and connect with their communities through diverse resources. Another stream of work investigates information precarity, a lack of information and resources brought about by systemic marginalization. She wrote the book Practicing Intellectual Freedom in Libraries and edited The Fight Against Book Bans: Perspectives from the Field. Oltmann’s work has been funded by the American Library Association and the Institute of Museum & Library Services. She has presented her research at numerous academic and professional conferences and webinars and has published widely.