Love in the Archives: Towards a Theory and Praxis of Archival Care

Jennifer Douglas

Archivaria, Number 100, Fall/Winter 2025, pp. 202-239 (Article)

Published by Association of Canadian Archivists

Love in the Archives

Towards a Theory and Praxis of Archival Care[1]

JENNIFER DOUGLAS

ABSTRACT The word *love* is not used very often in archival scholarship or in archival practice. Love is also easy to dismiss as a subject of serious inquiry. This article takes seriously the role of love in archives, engaging with ideas from critical and feminist love studies, where love is understood as a creative and productive force that can be used to bring about transformative change. Drawing on research about grieving and recordkeeping, with both bereaved records creators and practising archivists, and grounded in the expanding critical literature on trauma-informed archival praxis and affect and emotions in archival work, this article considers how the discourse of love is taking shape in archival studies and why any discussion about love in archives has to be grounded in a politics of structural care. Thinking with Tamarin Norwood's notion of *institutional love*, the article argues for a kind of love that is research- and experience-led and embedded in institutions, policies, procedures, and training.

1 This article draws on research funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). I am grateful to the eight parents and 27 archivists who generously shared with me their stories and experiences. I am grateful, too, to the excellent research assistants who worked with me throughout the projects: Alex Alisauskas, Elizabeth Bassett, Noah Duranseaud, Ted Lee, Christina Mantey, Sadaf Ahmadbeigi, Mya Ballin, Catherine Hall and Devon Mordell. Earlier versions of this article were given as presentations at the Association of Canadian Archivists conference in 2024 and as an invited talk for the Society of American Archivists' Crisis, Disaster, and Tragedy Response Working Group in February 2025. Thank you to those who attended the presentations and provided early feedback as well as to the two reviewers whose suggestions helped me, I hope, to deepen the analysis here. As always, Alex Alisauskas has been an astute early reader; I am enormously grateful for her insightful and encouraging comments, which kept me from abandoning this particular article.

RÉSUMÉ Le mot *amour* n'est pas souvent employé dans la recherche et les pratiques archivistiques. L'amour est aussi facilement écarté comme sujet de recherche. Cet article prend au sérieux le rôle de l'amour dans les archives, en s'engageant avec les idées émergeant des études critiques et féministes de l'amour, où l'amour est compris comme une force créatrice et productive pouvant être mobilisée pour provoquer un changement transformatif. Puisant dans les recherches sur le deuil et la préservation d'archives, qui engagent les créateurs. trices de documents endeuillés et les archivistes, et s'appuyant sur la littérature critique en pleine expansion sur les pratiques archivistiques tenant compte des traumatismes et sur l'*affect* et les émotions dans le travail archivistique, cet article considère comment les discours de l'amour prennent forme dans les études archivistiques. Il propose également que toute discussion sur l'amour et les archives doit être fondée sur une dynamique de *care* structurant. Réfléchissant avec le concept d'amour institutionnel de Tamarin Norwood, cet article est un plaidoyer pour une sorte d'amour alimenté par la recherche et les expériences, et intégré dans les institutions, les politiques, les procédures et la formation.

Introduction

Even now, at the distance of calm reflection, I still think it was love. Not a simulation of love, but actual love as it is manifested in institutions.

— *Tamarin Norwood, "Something Good Enough"*[2]

Tamarin Norwood is a writer, artist, scholar, and memoirist. In 2021, an article she wrote was awarded the Wakley Prize by the prestigious medical journal *The Lancet*. In the essay, titled "Something Good Enough," Norwood reflects on the experience of the death of her second son in hospital, shortly after his birth. His death had been anticipated. Earlier in her pregnancy, she had received a diagnosis of anhydramnios: there was not enough amniotic fluid to develop the baby's lungs. Norwood's essay describes the care her family received in hospital, lingering on key moments and memories – for example, how it felt when a nurse or doctor admired her baby, as they would a living child, and how it felt to hold and bathe her son after he had died.

I encountered Norwood's article as a bereaved parent myself. I first read it because I sensed I would find some of my own experience reflected, and the bereaved need that on a regular basis. But as I read, I was struck by Norwood's unabashed use of the term *love* in this professional context and its possibilities not only for medical practice but also for archival practice. Norwood writes, "Over time I have come to understand that these memories of our son's birth and death were not formed by accident at all, but were crafted. They had been lovingly carved by the efforts of many, many people, some of whom we met in the hospital that day and some we never will, their part having been played long ago or far away."[3] Norwood describes how the medical professionals she encountered the day her son died "knew to put in our way something good. Something good enough. Something that would do."[4] There was no bringing her son back, she writes, but the care her family received mattered: "It was still a thing made

2 Tamarin Norwood, "Something Good Enough," *The Lancet* 398, no. 10318 (2021): 2306.

3 Norwood, 2306.

4 Norwood, 2306.

of love," she asserts.[5] The knowledge of what a parent in Norwood's situation needed – and the ability to provide it for her – is a particular kind of love: "love as it is manifested in institutions,"[6] or as Norwood also calls it, *institutional love*.

In 2021, Alexandra Alisauskas and I mused, tentatively, about the potential role for love in archival institutions. In an article in which we discussed key themes that emerged from interviews[7] I had conducted with bereaved parents about recordkeeping as grief work,[8] we posed a series of questions about what it would mean to *look with love* in archives. The idea that love could be used as a lens through which to understand recordkeeping was suggested to us by one of the parents I interviewed. Talking about photographs of her daughter, Eliza, Brooke said she had never had any printed, "in part," she explained, "because I hate to imagine anyone looking at her who does not look at her with love."[9] This

5 Norwood, 2306.

6 Norwood, 2306.

7 This article draws on two sets of interviews conducted as part of the Conceptualizing Recordkeeping as Grief Work: Implications for Archival Theory and Practice project. The first set of interviews was with bereaved parents about their recordkeeping practices and the second set was with archivists and other records professionals about how grief is involved in and impacts their work. More detailed description about the two sets of interviews is available in Jennifer Douglas and Alexandra Alisauskas, "'It Feels Like a Life's Work': Recordkeeping as an Act of Love," *Archivaria*, no. 91 (Spring/Summer 2021): 6-37 and in Jennifer Douglas et al., "'These Are Not Just Pieces of Paper': Acknowledging Grief and Other Emotions in Pursuit of Person-Centred Archives," *Archives & Manuscripts* 50, no.1 (2022): 5-29.

8 The understanding of *grief work* that I worked with was drawn from both literature on the psychology of bereavement and grieving and from my participation in loss communities. Professor of psychology Margaret Stroebe, while acknowledging the different ways that grief work has been understood as models of healthy bereavement have evolved, explains that "whatever the underlying philosophy or particular method employed," grief work is intended to "help the bereaved to adapt to life without the loved person." Margaret Stroebe, "Coping with Bereavement: A Review of the Grief Work Hypothesis," *OMEGA – Journal of Death and Dying* 26, no. 1 (1993): 21. Parents in the different grief communities I participated in used the term *grief work* to talk about the variety of activities they performed "to help themselves process their grief, remember their children, and especially, connect with their children." Jennifer Douglas, Alexandra Alisauskas, and Devon Mordell, "'Treat Them with the Reverence of Archivists': Records Work, Grief Work, and Relationship Work in the Archives," *Archivaria*, no. 88 (Fall 2019): 84–120, 98. Thinking with the continuing-bonds theory of grief, our research aimed to explore how the bereaved engage in different practices to find ways to connect with their lost loved ones and how recordkeeping could be one of these practices. For a fuller discussion of grief work and archives, see Douglas and Alisauskas, "It Feels Like a Life's Work," 6–37.

9 In "It Feels Like a Life's Work," Alisauskas and I write about our decision to use first names (real and pseudonyms) to refer, in publications, to the parents we interviewed. As we explain in that article, the decision was based on our desire to enact friendship and care as research methodologies and reflected the personal nature of those interviews (see footnote 11 in Douglas and Alisauskas, "It Feels Like a Life's Work," 12). In "These Are Not Just Pieces of Paper," we explain that though some of the archivists and records professionals we interviewed agreed to be named, several others did not and that therefore we decided to maintain the confidentiality of

prompted Alex and I to think about what it would mean, in archival practice, to look with love. In which circumstances is looking with love necessary? What new things might looking with love allow us to see? How could looking with love be enacted in archival practices?[10]

My thoughts on love in archives are deeply indebted to the work of numerous scholars and practising archivists who have written or talked about care and person-centred archives, whether explicitly or implicitly,[11] as well as to the scholars who ushered in the affective turn in archival studies.[12] This scholarship has impacted not only *what* we research and write about but also *how* we research, write, and know.[13] In the last decade, the concepts of affect, feeling, and care have moved into the centre of archival theory and practice. Especially since the 2016 publication of Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor's influential

all participants (see p. 10 in Douglas et al., "These Are Not Just Pieces of Paper"). These citation practices are continued throughout this article.

10 Douglas and Alisauskas, "It Feels Like a Life's Work," 32–35.

11 This list of all the work that informs my thinking is too long to include here. Many of these works are cited elsewhere throughout this article. Out of necessity, though, I have had to leave many out. The citations in the footnotes of the introduction to the special issue of *Archivaria* on person-centred archives provide a good start. See Jennifer Douglas, Mya Ballin, and Jessica Lapp, "Introduction," in "Toward Person-Centred Archival Theory and Praxis," ed. Jennifer Douglas, Mya Ballin, Jessica Lapp, and Sadaf Ahmadbeigi, special issue, *Archivaria*, no. 94 (Fall/Winter 2022), 5–21.

12 See, for example, Anne Gilliland, "Moving Past: Probing the Agency and Affect of Recordkeeping in Individual and Community Lives in Post-Conflict Croatia," *Archival Science* 14, no. 3 (2014): 249–75; Verne Harris, "Antonyms of Our Remembering," *Archival Science* 14, no. 3 (2014): 215–29; Michelle Caswell, "The Future of the Painful Past: Archival Labor and Materiality in the South Asian American Digital Archive," in *Excavating Memory: Sites of Remembering and Forgetting*, ed. Maria Theresia Starzmann and John R. Roby (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2016), 376–94; Marika Cifor, "Affecting Relations: Introducing Affect Theory to Archival Discourse," *Archival Science* 16, no. 1 (2016): 7–31; Hariz Halilovich, "Re-Imaging and Re-Imagining the Past After 'Memoricide': Intimate Archives as Inscribed Memories of the Missing," *Archival Science* 16, no. 1 (2016): 77–92; Bernadette Brennan, "*Being* in the Archive: Affect and Scholarly Distance," *Archives and Manuscripts* 46, no. 1 (2018): 3–17.

13 In a keynote to the Association of Canadian Archivists' annual conference in 2020, Michelle Caswell argued convincingly that feelings "provide substantial grounds from which to know." She walked listeners through the ways that we could "take emotions seriously *in tandem with an analysis of power*" and leverage them toward dismantling oppressive systems. Michelle Caswell, "Feeling Liberatory Memory Work: On the Archival Uses of Joy and Anger," *Archivaria*, no. 90 (Fall 2020): 148–64, 152–53. See, also, Caswell's article on feminist-standpoint appraisal, which calls for a shift from a "purportedly objective 'view from nowhere' (which in fact belies a dominant but unnamed white male position), towards the archivist as a socially located, culturally situated agent who situates ways of being and knowing from the margins." Michelle Caswell, "Dusting for Fingerprints: Introducing Feminist Standpoint Appraisal," in "Radical Empathy in Archival Practice," ed. Elvia Arroyo-Ramírez, Jasmine Jones, Shannon O'Neill, and Holly A. Smith, special issue, *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 3, no. 2 (2021): 6–7.

article on radical empathy in archives, itself drawing from the developing scholarship on affect and archives, archival scholars have begun to assert that care "must be recognized as fundamental to the ethical performance of our work."[14] Articulating a feminist ethics of care for archives, Caswell and Cifor ask, "What happens when we . . . start to think of recordkeepers and archivists . . . as caregivers, bound to records creators, subjects, users, and communities through a[n affective] web of mutual responsibility?"[15] This attention to affect, to care, and to an ethics of care, has been accompanied by an emerging emphasis on person-centred records theories and practices;[16] overall, there is a marked shift in archival discourse, over the last decade especially, toward an understanding that archivists provide a form of care not only to records but also to people.

This article thinks with those scholars and archivists whose work on affect, feelings, and care in archives has influenced me,[17] and it thinks in the less-travelled direction of love. Like grief, love is hard to write about, not only because it is hard to write about feelings in academia but also because love eludes capture; it resists definition and theorization. I have started writing this article so many times, so many different ways. I start and stop and start again, then give up in frustration. I do not have a ready theory to propound. I am working my way

14 Douglas, Alisauskas, and Mordell, "Treat Them with the Reverence of Archivists," 118.

15 Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor, "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives," *Archivaria*, no. 81 (Spring 2016): 23–43, 25.

16 There is now an extensive literature informed by Caswell and Cifor's work on radical empathy and a feminist ethics of care in archives; see, especially, "Radical Empathy in Archival Practice," ed. Elvia Arroyo-Ramírez, Jasmine Jones, Shannon O'Neill, and Holly A. Smith, special issue, *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 3, no. 2 (2021). On person-centred archives, see "Toward Person-Centred Archival Theory and Praxis," ed. Jennifer Douglas, Mya Ballin, Jessica Lapp, and Sadaf Ahmadbeigi, special issue, *Archivaria*, no. 94 (Fall/Winter 2022). As the introduction to this special issue shows, although the term *person-centred* is a more recent addition to archival discourse, person-centred approaches "are evident in and across recent archival scholarship, especially scholarship related to personal and community archives, and in scholarship that draws on Indigenous, queer, feminist, anti-racist, anti- and de-colonial, and disability studies." Douglas, Ballin, and Lapp, "Introduction," 7–9.

17 There is so much excellent scholarship that informs this article and that I will not be able to engage with directly in the text in order to keep it within an acceptable word count. My citation practices throughout this article are intended to acknowledge that, even if other scholars' work is not directly quoted or named in the text, it is *always* there, shaping my understanding, and I *think with* my colleagues. I am grateful to Foluke Taylor for introducing me to the importance of *thinking with* rather than *against* other theorists and theories in her discussion of citational practices and ways to read on *The Death Studies Podcast*. Foluke Taylor, Interview on *The Death Studies Podcast*, hosted by Bethany Michael-Fox and Rensske Visser, November 1, 2023, available at www.thedeathstudiespodcast.com, https://doi.org/.6084/m9.figshare.24475006.

toward one, maybe, but I find myself hesitant to make claims and to defend them. I am reminded, constantly, of Max Liboiron's analysis of metaphors of coloniality, so central to Western histories of knowledge building and translation:[18] we "stake out" our research areas, make declarations of "discovery," and "claim" our "areas"; we aim for "mastery";[19] we "disseminate." I think of Zoe Todd's similar critique of the colonialism of ontology, but then, also of her certainty that "we can confront [disciplinary and scholarly] legacies with a great deal of love and accountability, and build processes and structures that are attentive to and accountable for the ongoing impacts of colonial rule."[20] I wonder, What kinds of archival structures can love build? To whom – and for what – will these structures account? Michelle Caswell, who gave us the fire and the permission at least some of us needed to convert feelings to action during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and worldwide protests over the murder of George Floyd, made sure we knew that "care must be viewed structurally."[21] Care must be embedded in our institutions, policies, and practices. It must be a "catalyst for structural change."[22] I think what I want to argue is that love can lay some foundation on which structures of care can be raised. And that love must be recognized as one of the most important motivations for raising such structures.

In the sections that follow, I begin to tentatively illustrate what an animating (almost) theory of archival love can do in the development of structural care. As I shift from grief as a lens to love as a lens, I engage with ideas that have begun to be explored in the wider world of information studies, which draw on critical and feminist love studies to situate love as a productive force. I also consider what I have learned about love and recordkeeping through my research with creators and archivists about how grief and other emotions are involved in the making, keeping and uses of records: how their experiences, and my own,

18 Max Liboiron, "Firsting in Research," *Discard Studies*, January 28, 2021, https://discardstudies.com/2021/01/18/firsting-in-research/.

19 On the "logic of mastery" in scholarship, see Julietta Singh, *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

20 Zoe Todd, "An Indigenous Feminist's Take on the Ontological Turn: 'Ontology' Is Just Another Word for Colonialism," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29, no. 1 (2016): 4–22, 15.

21 Caswell, "Feeling Liberatory Memory Work," 162.

22 Caswell, 164.

connect to scholarly literature on love (inside and outside the archival discipline) and why any discussion about love in archives has to be grounded in a politics of structural care.

Somewhere for the Love to Go: Grief, Love, and Records Creation

On Saturday, I sat with my arm laid out for a pink-haired girl to tattoo. The needles pricking in and out across the thin skin of my inner arm hurt less than I'd anticipated. Today, though, my arm is red and raw and throbbing. A scab is forming over the delicate black lines, the yellow of the flower's petals. A daffodil and the letter "A," her mark on me forever, visible. . . . Shortly after she died I knew I wanted something of her on my body. I have a thick dark scar to show where E left my body and while I know many women who dislike their c-section scars, I have always prized mine. Perhaps the way I feel about it has to do with E's close call. The cut that made the scar most likely saved her life and so I wear that scar like a medal of honour: "we survived," it says. But Anja didn't survive. She wasn't saved. And she left no mark, no physical mark, to remind me that she was here, that, like her sister, she lived and grew inside me, was born, held, kissed, loved. And so, I had a mark made for her. . . . I want this tattoo to say that I am a mother of two, her mother, too. That I grew and birthed and loved a second daughter who is always with me and never with me.

– *Jennifer Douglas, ["A Permanent Record"]*

I wrote these words a few months after my second daughter was stillborn, on the blog I started as part of a desperate attempt to record everything I remembered about my pregnancy and all that I was experiencing as I grieved the loss of my child as well as to connect with other parents who understood that need. As a trained archivist and archival studies scholar, I was primed to think about the kinds of marks that people and experiences leave, and the records we make to mark events and feelings. I thought, from the beginning, of my tattoo as a record, both of the baby I lost and of the person I imagined she might have become: "a permanent reminder of all you were meant to be." In another post about records, I reflected on the terrible inadequacy and simultaneous necessity of the things I "used to remember [her] by": "All these *things* are such a poor

substitute for *you*, but they are what I have. I am the keeper of your memory, the curator of all these objects I invest with significance and arrange just so. I trained as an archivist, you know, and now I try to create an archive of my love for you. It will never be enough."

It is often observed that grief is love that has nowhere to go.[23] The actor Andrew Garfield, in a much-discussed appearance on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, where he talked about the loss of his mother, described grief as "all of the unexpressed love" that remains because "we never get enough time with each other, no matter whether someone lives until 60 or 15 or 99."[24] In my own experience of grieving, I have found that that unexpressed love, the love with nowhere to go, requires an outlet. It wants to be seen and acknowledged. In babyloss communities,[25] we talk frequently about the desire to make our losses visible, about the need we have felt to have the depth of the loss acknowledged, but also about our enormous need to share the love we felt, the love that had nowhere to go because our loves were not here to receive it. We have to *create* places for the love to go, and as I discovered through my own experience and through subsequent research, one way to express love – to share it and to ensure that it has meaning in the world – is to make and keep records. As Ann Cvetkovich has suggested in the context of trauma and queer archives, when no records exist or are left behind, new "forms of documentation, representation, and commemoration" are necessary. The result may be an "unusual" archive, but it is an "archive of feelings," an archive of love.[26]

23 I have seen this quote attributed to Jamie Anderson, a writer for the television series *Dr. Who*, and I have also seen it circulating through different online grief communities and heard it shared in in-person support groups.

24 Stephen Colbert is no stranger himself to grief, or to grief's connection to love. In an episode of *All There Is with Anderson Cooper*, Colbert and Cooper discuss the question, "Can we learn to love the things we most wish had never happened?" *All There Is with Anderson Cooper*, episode 2, "Stephen Colbert: Grateful for Grief," September 21, 2022, https://www.cnn.com/audio/podcasts/all-there-is-with-anderson-cooper/episodes/ae2f9ebb-1bc6-4d47-b0f0-af17008dcd0c. Subsequent to his appearance on Colbert's show, Garfield was also a guest on Cooper's podcast.

25 Babyloss (one word) is a term coined by bereaved parents to try to describe a kind of loss that feels poorly recognized and described by those who have not experienced it.

26 Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 7. Cvetkovich makes this point about archives of trauma more generally: "Because trauma can be unspeakable and unrepresentable and because it is marked by forgetting and dissociation, it often seems to leave behind no records at all. Trauma puts pressure on conventional forms of documentation" and "demands an unusual archive, whose materials, in pointing to trauma's ephemerality, are themselves frequently ephemeral." Cvetkovich, 7.

For the parents I interviewed for the Conceptualizing Recordkeeping as Grief Work (CRAGW) project, love was implicitly part of all records creation and recordkeeping; they often explained that, because they were unable to physically care for and interact with their children, they cared instead for the material traces of their short lives. This type of care was described by one mother, Jane, as "a life's work," and when I asked how she hoped her records would be cared for if they were entrusted to another custodian, she said she wished for the records to be treated with a "sort of reverence." In the answers from the parents who answered this question, there was a sense that, although they knew a future caregiver could never love their baby – and by extension, their records – the way they did, they hoped that any caregiver would be able to respect the profound love the records represent and embody.

Love came up, too, in the interviews I conducted with archivists as part of CRAGW. Though they tended to be less explicit than the parents about the degree to which love factored into recordkeeping, they regularly acknowledged the attachments between people and the records they or their loved ones created, as well as the attachments between themselves and the people with whom they interacted, including archives creators, donors, researchers, and other archivists. Like the parents, several archivists invoked the reverential – even sacred – nature of archival work, and every archivist emphasized its deeply ethical nature. Even if they did not use the words *care* or *love*, these archivists clearly saw themselves as involved in a caring practice.

A few stories I heard stood out to me as examples of deep consideration, care, and what I would call love. One senior archivist working in Australia described an incident where a woman had come into the archives with a photograph she wished to donate:

> So in the early 90s, an Aboriginal woman came in to see me who had a tobacco tin. And she unrolled her tobacco tin, and she had what looked like a piece of cigarette paper, and she said, "I'd like you to look at this." And when she unrolled it, it was a blank sheet of photographic paper. And I said to her "Tell me who is this picture of?" and she said, "This is a picture of my child who was taken away." . . . And she wanted to give it to the library as a donation. And I actually wouldn't take it, because, I said, "It's too important for you to keep. If this is the only thing you have about your child, you should be keeping this." Because

> once it came into the library, its potency was lost. I mean however you document that, unless you do it visually – and we didn't have that sort of technology at the time – how do you document that link between that person and the fact that you've got a blank sheet of photographic paper because she'd rubbed the image off, because she'd lost her child and just sort of wanted to touch it so much. You look at it and you think, in a library this doesn't, it goes into a collection of hundreds of thousands of items and it gets lost forever. Yet for her, it's the one thing she had. I mean I still believe I did the right call by saying you keep it. It wasn't that we didn't want it, it was just too important.

This story is a clear example of the way love is part of the creation and keeping of records: the disappeared image is the material evidence of a mother's love and longing for her child. To me, it is also an example of an archivist looking with love. She sees the value of the rubbed-out photograph to the donor, acknowledges and validates the donor's feelings and experience, and declines to take the photograph into archival custody not only because it would "lose its potency" in the archives but also because it belonged with the mother.

In a similar scenario, another archivist made a different decision. This archivist worked in a small municipal archives and museum near Vancouver. She told me that "one of the most surprising things that I learned working in this job . . . was how much of an element of ministry there is to it." "I'm not a religious person," she emphasized, "but I know it when I see it. People come here with *need*." She described an example that "set the tone" for her:

> A woman came in, literally clutching to her chest possibly the most horrible velvet *Last Supper* I've ever seen. And it was faded, and worn, and it had been hung on a wall for so long that all the corners had tears where the pushpins had held it to the wall. And her best friend had just passed away, and this *Last Supper* had hung over her couch for as many years as this woman could remember. And with tears streaming down her face, she asked us to put this in the museum to remember her friend. Ordinarily that's not something we would have taken, for any list of reasons: it's not displayable . . . it's in terrible condition. But we took it and treated her as kindly as we could and, with as much ceremony as we could muster, got her to fill out the forms and officially

> acknowledged her friend's existence. And this is where it comes up all the time: we have to sing the unsung because nobody else will. And that's a constant theme, that we are acknowledging the lives of people whose lives will not be acknowledged.[27] They will have come and gone never having drawn any attention, never had their name in the paper, who knows what extraordinary things they might have done, but because there's no record, it never gets acknowledged. So if their people bring something to us and tell us their story, even if the thing is not something you'd actually want, you know that's what we do.

This archivist acknowledged that "we could dig that velvet thing out now and probably safely de-accession it," but she believes "it tells us something about people and their care and concern for people that's worthy of memory." This archivist's decision to acquire material is based not on the nature of the "record" itself, but rather on the story and feelings it represents and its value to the donor; while this approach is clearly not feasible for all archives, it is an example of care – of love, too, I think – being foregrounded in an archivist's approach to their work.

The archivists I interviewed gave examples, too, of love and care being experienced, or needed, by researchers. They noted that, like donors, researchers also frequently come to the archives with stories and experiences of trauma or distress that require a sensitive and caring approach. In a story that resembles the story of the donor and the rubbed-out photograph, an archivist who worked with faith-based archives and frequently interacted with Survivors and Intergenerational Survivors of Canada's residential schools recounted a particular interaction:

> I remember one mother coming in, and her . . . her child had died. . . . And she was quite elderly, obviously. But, um, she said, "I'll never . . . I'll never touch him again, but can I touch a page where his name is?" You know? And, there was a time in my life where I would have been like, "Those are restricted." You know? Like, "These are restricted for these

27 On the theme of ordinary lives in the archives, see Region of Peel Archives, "The Quiet Power of Ordinary People: Reminders from the Archives," *Peeling the Past: A Blog About Peel's Historical Records by Staff at the Region of Peel Archives*, December 15, 2020, https://peelarchivesblog.com/2020/12/15/the-quiet-power-of-ordinary-people-reminders-from-the-archives/.

> reasons, and this is why the restriction is in place." But you know, you go and you get the box. And you bring the box out. And . . . you let them lay their hand on that photo, or let them lay their hand on that piece of correspondence announcing the death of their child. You know? Because that's the closest thing they're going to get to something physical.

In this example, as with the *Last Supper* example, the archivist goes against her training and the tenets and conventions of archival preservation to respond to the need of the researcher. This archivist described frequently feeling conflicts between the way she had been educated and trained, the policies of the institution in which she worked, and the need she felt in the community of Survivors and Intergenerational Survivors. She also described feeling like the records she cared for, evidence of children's experiences in residential schools, required a different, more expansive, and loving type of care – especially considering the ways love was denied to these children during their lifetimes.

There are many other stories like these in the interviews with archivists. I feel honoured to have had the conversations I had with archivists and records professionals and to have been entrusted, in many cases, with their feelings and also with their vulnerability. All of this research has prompted me to think more about the ways that love (like grief) underpins archival impulses and about how it can inform archival practices. In the next sections, I turn first to critical discourse on love to look at how love is understood as a lens, as a methodology, and as a practice before returning to the idea of institutional love in an attempt to put some of this experience to use.[28]

28 Drawing on Sara Ahmed's exploration of *queer use*, Claire Malek considers how archivists can be of use to one another. Her articulation of a "radical somatics of critical archival love," discussed in more detail in later sections of this article, is intended, at least in part, to help archivists find new ways to "embody ways of caring and supporting one another, showing up for each other, leveraging our heterogeneous privilege and power and our vulnerability, and doing right by our profession – being of use." Claire Malek, "Bowline on a Bight: Doing Right by the Records of Lilian Bland," *Archivaria*, no. 94 (Fall/Winter 2022): 258–83, 282. See also Sara Ahmed, *What's the Use?: On the Uses of Use* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

From Looking with Love to Putting Love to Use

Scholars of love acknowledge that love can be defined in almost countless ways and that it is difficult, if not impossible, to "endorse a single definition."[29] In an article that sets out to articulate "the aim of critical love studies," Michael Gratzke argues that there is no useful universal definition of love and suggests that love studies scholars think instead about "love acts." In order for an act of any kind to be considered a love act, it must "take place within a normative framework" that renders it "intelligible."[30] Love, in other words, is inherently contextual and "each occurrence of love should be judged against the backdrop of the socio-historic circumstances in which a set of love acts is performed."[31] As the title of Gratzke's article suggests, "love is what people say it is"; it is dependent on a subject's experience of recognizing and receiving love.

Gratzke's emphasis on love acts also suggests that it is most productive to understand love as, in bell hooks's words, "an action rather than a feeling." As hooks writes, "The word 'love' is most often defined as a noun, yet all the more astute theorists of love acknowledge that we would all love better if we used it as a verb."[32] In their introduction to a special issue on feminist love studies in

29 Lena Gunnarsson, Adriana García-Andrade, and Anna G. Jónasdóttir, "The Power of Love: Towards an Interdisciplinary and Multi-theoretical Feminist Love Studies," in *Feminism and the Power of Love: Interdisciplinary Interventions*, ed. Adriana García-Andrade, Lena Gunnarsson, and Anna G. Jónasdóttir (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 4. Theorists who engage with ideas about love often begin by remarking on how difficult it is to talk about love in a scholarly way. For example, Margaret E. Toye observes that "the subject of love usually evokes embarrassed responses" and is surrounded with "an aura of naïveté, sentimentality and religiosity." Margaret E. Toye, "Towards a Poethics of Love: Poststructuralist Feminist Ethics and Literary Creation," *Feminist Theory* 11, no. 1 (2010): 39–55, 40. Anna G. Jónasdóttir likewise acknowledges that it can be "embarrassing and risky for one's good reputation to deal with love" in scholarship. Anna G. Jónasdóttir, "Love Studies: A (Re) New(ed) Field of Knowledge Interests," in *Love: A Question for Feminism in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Anna G. Jónasdóttir and Ann Ferguson (New York: Routledge, 2014), 15. At the same time, these theorists contrast people's "ridiculing" of love "as a topic for serious studies" with "how most people think . . . about love, that it is one of the most valuable 'things' in human life." Ann Ferguson and Anna G. Jónasdóttir, "Introduction," in Jónasdóttir and Ferguson, *Love*, 1. A similar point is made by bell hooks, who argues that, although "all the great movements for social justice in our society have strongly emphasized a love ethic," attempts at serious and rigorous discussion of what love is and what it can do in the world continue to elicit embarrassed responses, uncertainty, and sometimes disdain. bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), xix.

30 Michael Gratzke, "Love Is What People Say It Is: Performativity and Narrativity in Critical Love Studies," *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, no. 6 (2017): 2.

31 Gratzke, 4.

32 hooks, *All About Love*, 13, 4.

the feminist philosophy journal *Hypatia*, Ann Ferguson and Margaret E. Toye trace the development of love "as a serious area of study on its own terms" [33] and likewise emphasize its productive capacity. Within the "new field" of love studies, they explain, love "is being considered as an important ethical, social, and/or political force."[34] Feminist love studies, in particular, emphasize the "productive aspects of love," or "love conceived as a possible important creative force, connecting energy or capacity."[35] In this view, love always has the potential to transform; it is a "transformative force,"[36] an "organizing force, a motion,"[37] and a "creative power . . . with (at least a potential) positive value."[38]

For feminist love scholars, love can make a useful theoretical intervention when it is understood in this transformational and active sense: love conceptualized not only as a lens through which we can see the world differently but also as a practice and a methodology to change the world.[39] In other words, looking with love is not enough; we must also ask what love incites us to *do*. As hooks emphasizes, love is intentional, a choice, and she argues that "to begin by thinking of love as an action rather than a feeling is one way in which anyone using the word in this manner automatically assumes accountability and responsibility."[40] In her study of hooks's writing on love and on the use of love in social work, Naomi Joy Godden contrasts hooks's "ethic of love" with the "ethic of domination" she attributes to "intersecting systems of capitalism, racism and patriarchy."[41] Love, Godden and hooks tell us, is a "practice we choose to engage

33 Ann Ferguson and Margaret E. Toye, "Feminist Love Studies – Editors' Introduction," *Hypatia* 32, no. 1 (2017): 5–18, 5.

34 Ferguson and Toye, 5.

35 Ferguson and Toye, 5.

36 hooks, *All About Love*, xix.

37 Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Theory of Water: Nishnaabe Maps to the Times Ahead* (Toronto, ON: Knopf Canada, 2025), 27.

38 Jónasdóttir, "Love Studies," 12.

39 As Gunnarsson, García-Andrade, and Jónasdóttir note, authors in their edited book conceive of love in all these ways and more, describing and exploring love "in terms of an emotion, affect, practice, energy, or bond, to an ideology, historical code, and/or methodology." Gunnarsson, García-Andrade, and Jónasdóttir, "The Power of Love," 4.

40 hooks, *All About Love*, 13.

41 Naomi Joy Godden, "The Love Ethic: A Radical Theory for Social Work Practice," *Australian Social Work* 70, no. 4 (2017): 405–16, 406.

in" – a "service to others" that relies on "principles and behaviours of trust, commitment, care, respect, knowledge, and responsibility."[42] The reference to accountability and responsibility in hooks's work connects with Ferguson and Toye's assertion that "love places us in relationship."[43] Feminist theorists of love, they explain, "articulate a relational ontology that embeds ethics within their models of subjectivity."[44] In this dynamic, "both parties are transformed through their interactions in the experience of love, and subjectivity is revealed as necessarily relational, and mutually dependent."[45] Love, as a practice and as a "philosophical ontology to guide action,"[46] highlights the importance of attention and intention, of being in relation to another person to whom one is also accountable, and of working toward positive transformation.

Lena Gunnarsson, Adriana García-Andrade, and Anna G. Jónasdóttir assert that love is also a way of "generating knowledge."[47] Citing key theorists such as Alison M. Jaggar, Hilary Rose, and Evelyn Fox Keller, whose earlier work explored how Western scientific and philosophical traditions have treated "emotion as epistemologically subversive,"[48] Ferguson and Jónasdóttir agree that love is, rather, "an uneliminable emotive power in knowledge of the world."[49] Jaggar, for example, explores the ways that emotions like love are central to how we engage with the world and help us to understand the world, to challenge "accepted understandings of how things are,"[50] and to build new knowledge. Thinking about what "love as creative power" creates, Jónasdóttir draws on Jaggar's work to suggest that love not only creates knowledge, it can also help to create *better* knowledge: love, she insists, "can provide more valid and reliable (scientific) knowledge

42 Godden, 406; hooks, *All About Love*, 54.

43 Ferguson and Toye, "Feminist Love Studies," 10.

44 Ferguson and Toye, 10.

45 Ferguson and Toye, 10.

46 Godden, "The Love Ethic," 406.

47 Gunnarsson, García-Andrade, and Jónasdóttir, "The Power of Love," 8.

48 Alison M. Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology," *Inquiry* 32, no. 2 (1989): 151–76, 151.

49 Ferguson and Jónasdóttir, "Introduction," 3. See Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge"; Hilary Rose, *Love, Power and Knowledge: Towards a Feminist Transformation of the Sciences* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1994); and Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

50 Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge," 167.

than a loveless attitude in the knowledge seeker would."[51]

This is a position adopted by archival scholar and practitioner Claire Malek, whose exploration of what it means to do right by a creator's archives through archival description calls attention to the ways that love, particularly as it is felt in our (processing)[52] bodies as we interact with bodies of records, can help us to "become attuned to the records in a new way."[53] Malek thinks about how "theory lives in the body" and describes how bringing the "body to work on and with archival records and the bodies contained and connected through them" is a way of practicing a "radical somatics of critical archival love."[54] Malek sees the body and its feelings as sources of information and understanding: "The body can tell us when we hold too much. . . . It can tell us when to say no and when to say yes, when to make a choice, apply a subject heading, accession or deaccession records, take time away from traumatic records, process what we encounter there, and imagine uses for records."[55] Listening to the body – acknowledging the knowledge it brings – is a way of practising critical archival love, Malek argues, and with critical archival love, "we can envision new ways of being in ongoing relationships with records and the bodies and peoples connected in and through them."[56] Similar to feminist love studies scholars, Malek portrays critical archival love as a kind of creative force that helps her to enter into particular kinds of relationships and access particular types of knowledge. Malek's theorizing of love as part of archival work also helps to illustrate the ways that concepts of love, affect, and care intersect and diverge. Readers of earlier versions of this article wished I would further distinguish the differences between affect, care, and love, but the more I work on this, the more I think that what is important is not so much how we differentiate these notoriously slippery concepts but how we put them into relationship(s) with each other.

51 Jónasdóttir, "Love Studies," 22.

52 For a reflection on the dual use of the word *processing* to talk about emotions, experiences, and archives, see Ted Lee, "Processing Emotions," *Hard Feelings* (blog), November 6, 2020, https://blogs.ubc.ca/hardfeelings/2020/11/06/processing-emotions/.

53 Malek, "Bowline on a Bight," 276.

54 Malek, 282.

55 Malek, 282.

56 Malek, 282.

In her introduction to affect studies for archivists, Marika Cifor acknowledges that there is "no consensus on what affect is" and that it is "associated with different and contradictory movements and articulations"[57] that are dependent on disciplinary contexts. Cifor defines affect as "a force that creates a relation between a body and the world"[58] and draws on understandings of affect from cultural studies (and feminist cultural studies, in particular), which emphasize the way that affects circulate among and stick to different bodies. In their introduction to the first volume of *The Affect Theory Reader*, Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth explain that affect is "found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves."[59] Attempting to pin down some commonalities among varying conceptualizations of affect, Gregg and Seigworth stress the quality that affects have as "visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing."[60] Affects are "vital sources," they continue, "insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension" and that "likewise suspend us" from action.[61]

In this way, affect is something we experience in our bodies that puts us in relation to other bodies and that can move us to respond (or not) in certain ways. Considering how theorists such as hooks, Jónasdóttir, and others have emphasized the use of *love* as a verb, or the application of love as a practice or methodology, we might see how enacting love is one way of marshalling an affective response. If we return to the earlier discussion in this article about grief, love, and the need for an outlet, we might also see love-as-practice as a way of putting the feelings grief evokes to use.

One way that love may be put to use is through the exercising of care. *Care*, like *love*, is a word that belies easy definition and that can be used as both a noun and a verb – or, as Joan Tronto puts it, as both "a practice and a disposi-

57 Cifor, "Affecting Relations," 10.

58 Cifor, 10.

59 Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, ed., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 1.

60 Gregg and Seigworth, 1.

61 Gregg and Seigworth, 1. See, also, Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies," *Social Text* 22, no. 2 (79) (2004): 117–39.

tion."[62] Feminist scholars writing about care ethics generally emphasize aspects of relationality, empathy, context, and responsibility when defining care. They also differentiate between caring *about* and caring *for*, sometimes also considering *caregiving* and *care receiving*.[63] The emphasis on *care* as a verb, or care as labour, some scholars argue, helps in "de-naturalizing and de-gendering" care, bringing to "the foreground of care ethics the intersectional and power analyses" necessary to understand care in its relationship to justice.[64] An emphasis on care as labour, on caring work, helps to draw attention to the ways care has been gendered (and consequently devalued) and to different intersections of privilege and oppression that impact how, and by whom, care is given and received.

The concept of care as labour also allows for a separation of feeling from action; one can, in theory, care *for* someone without, in fact, caring *about* them. As hooks reminds us, "Care is a dimension of love, but simply giving care does not mean we are loving."[65] She considers care as one dimension of love, alongside "commitment, trust, responsibility, respect and knowledge."[66] Many feminist love scholars remark on how *love* and related words like *care* are frequently used interchangeably. Toye notes that "'care', especially . . . has started to *stand in for* 'love.'" "But what is lost," she asks, "in this substitution of a supposed synonym, especially when it turns out the synonym is merely one small part of the whole?"[67] She, too, points to hooks's insistence that "care is a component of love, but it is not love itself."[68] I find Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's articulation of love helpful in thinking through the relationships between affect, care, and love; love, she writes, is "as an ethic that is animated within our relations, and from there propels customs of kindness and generates empathy and systems of care for all forms of life that make up our world."[69] Seen this way, love is a potentially

62 Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 104.

63 See Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*; and Joan C. Tronto and Berenice Fisher, "Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring," in *Family: Critical Concepts in Sociology*, ed. David Cheal (London: Routledge, 2003), 34–39.

64 Jean Keller and Eva Feder Kittay, "Feminist Ethics of Care," in *The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Ann Garry, Serene J. Khader, and Alison Stone (New York: Routledge, 2017), 546, 551.

65 hooks, *All About Love*, 8. Similarly, Tronto reminds us that care is not always *good* care.

66 hooks, *All About Love*, 94.

67 Toye, "Towards a Poethics of Love," 42.

68 Toye, 42.

69 Simpson, *Theory of Water*, 27.

transformative affective force that can move us to create and embed systems and structures of care as well as the foundation from which those systems and structures develop.

Love, but Institutional

Here is where I come back to Norwood and the notion of institutional love, which is, by definition, embedded, structural, and the result of deep commitment. In addition to the Wakley essay discussed at the beginning of this article, Norwood published a short – and heartachingly lovely – memoir recounting her experiences of anticipating the death of her son and of mourning in its aftermath. Again, she describes specific instances of care that she comes to recognize as manifestations of institutional love. For example, she describes how a sonographer complimented her son's features. "I was pleased," Norwood recounts, happy that others recognized "what a dear baby" Gabriel was.[70] Later, Norwood began to "recognize what a generous remark this was, and how well placed." The sonographer understood that "we needed our baby to be admired and adored." She knew, too, that "should he die before birth, hers might be the only such remark of his life."[71] This sonographer knew to put something good in Norwood's way.

Norwood explains the urgency for parents whose babies have died at or near birth to make memories, when there is so little time for memory making to take place.[72] She describes the different ways memories are made, from the carrying out of "normal" activities like bathing and dressing the baby and having family meet him to the blessing given to her son by the hospital chaplain. She remembers wondering how medical staff had "known exactly how to help [them] through the intolerable sorrow of those hours?"[73] What she eventually realizes is how carefully and thoughtfully *planned* her treatment was. "I came

70 Tamarin Norwood, *The Song of the Whole Wide World: On Grief, Motherhood and Poetry* (London: The Indigo Press, 2024), 29.

71 Norwood, 29.

72 Tamarin Norwood, "'Love as It Is Manifested in Institutions': Reflections on the Art and Science of Bereavement Care in the Neonatal Ward," *Pediatric E-Journal*, no. 67 (May 2022): 4.

73 Norwood, 3.

to understand," she writes, "that the excellent care we received had begun long, long before the day our son was with us."[74] This is what distinguishes *institutional love*. It is not the result of an individual carer, spontaneously responding based on their own personal reaction (though this might also be appreciated); institutional love develops out of knowledge and experience and is built into policies, procedures, and practices.

Norwood acknowledges the years of patient advocacy carried out by bereaved parents who came before her, as well as by support organizations like Sands in the United Kingdom.[75] Sands has conducted parent surveys and participated in the research and writing of national maternity reports that have led to the implementation of new standards of care.[76] It is this kind of work, initially behind the scenes for Norwood, that allowed her to feel cared for. As she explains, she could not have known all that she needed to know about making memories and how to spend the short time she had with her son. She needed the hospital staff to know, needed their expertise and care and the structures and systems that had been created as a result of years of listening to and learning from patients, conducting research, writing policies: "Our words and silences have been recorded and transcribed, anonymised, and interpreted by professionals who have watched grief descend many times."[77] And, Norwood suggests, this is how, in an institution, you love.

> You write ethics protocols and data management plans. You learn the craft of writing questionnaires, of listening to parents, of analysing our words. You submit research funding applications pages long, you design interventions and test them, you publish your research and lobby and fight until the voices and silences of the parents spinning and turning in space can return to the labour ward clear and stable

74 Norwood, 3.

75 Sands is a charity that supports anyone affected by pregnancy loss or the death of a baby and advocates on behalf of patient care and the reduction of inequalities in health care provision. Sands also participates in research initiatives to prevent pregnancy loss and neonatal death and to improve patient treatment and care.

76 These parent surveys and maternity reports can be accessed on the Sands website: "National Maternity Reports," Sands, accessed January 24, 2025, https://www.sands.org.uk/national-maternity-reports; "Sands' Parent Surveys and Reports," Sands, accessed January 24, 2025, https://www.sands.org.uk/sands-parent-surveys-and-reports.

77 Norwood, "Something Good Enough," 2306.

> as care recommendations, as protocols, as policies. You review, you recruit, you train staff.[78]

Institutional love, Norwood argues, is essentially "experienced and research-led" care, distinguished by a "history of planning and forethought."[79] When this planning and forethought has taken place, the person at the receiving end of institutional love may not even be aware of the "complexity of systems" through which it is rendered: "We just felt it as love,"[80] Norwood asserts, in a way that calls to mind Gratzke's assertion that love must be intelligible, or recognizable, to those who receive it.

While the situation Norwood describes and the kind of care she receives are very different in nature from the kinds of interactions that occur in archival spaces, there are also many similarities. Research in archival studies is increasingly emphasizing the affective and emotional impact of working with records on researchers, on communities, and on archivists,[81] as well as the potential for not only records, but also archival institutions and practices, to be traumatizing or re-traumatizing.[82] In this context, and thinking back to Brooke's concern for looking with love, it is well worth our time to look at the "intersection of bureaucracy and love"[83] in archives, to use love as an analytical lens that we turn on existing policies and practices in order to understand both our successes and our failures in caring.

78 Norwood, 2306.

79 Norwood, "Love as It Is Manifested in Institutions," 4, 3.

80 Norwood, 4.

81 See, for example, Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario Ramirez, "'To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing': Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives," *American Archivist* 79, no. 1 (2016): 56–81; Gracen Mikus Brilmyer, "'I'm Also Prepared to Not Find Me. It's Great When I Do, But It Doesn't Hurt If I Don't': Crip Time and Anticipatory Erasure for Disabled Archival Users," *Archival Science* 22, no. 2 (2022): 167–88; and Cheryl Regehr, Wendy Duff, Henria Aton, and Christa Sato, "'Humans and Records Are Entangled': Empathic Engagement and Emotional Response in Archivists," *Archival Science* 22, no. 4 (2022): 563–83; Tonia Sutherland, *Resurrecting the Black Body: Race and the Digital Afterlife* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2023); Jess Whyte and Tessa Walsh, "'Carefully and Cautiously': How Canadian Cultural Memory Workers Review Digital Materials for Private and Sensitive Information," *Partnership: Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research* 19, no. 1 (2024): 1–26.

82 See, for example, Kirsten Wright and Nicola Laurent, "Safety, Collaboration, and Empowerment: Trauma-Informed Archival Practice," *Archivaria*, no. 91 (Spring/Summer 2021): 38–73; Lynnette Russell, "Affect in the Archive: Trauma, Grief, Delight and Texts. Some Personal Reflections," *Archives and Manuscripts* 46, no. 2 (2018): 200–207.

83 Norwood, "Love as It Is Manifested in Institutions," 3.

Planning for Love (1): Toward Experience- and Research-Led Care

Norwood's writing makes it exceedingly clear that institutional love is experience- and research-led. For many years, the care parents received in a hospital following the death of a baby did not feel like love, not at all. It was years of advocacy by bereaved parents who insisted on their need to have their experiences – and their babies – acknowledged that began to influence a change in practices. Researchers – often researchers who had experienced this kind of loss themselves, or teams that included bereaved parents as associate researchers – began to survey and interview parents. As research studies and patient advocacy reports accumulated, systematic reviews began to draw out patterns and make recommendations for more caring practices. These studies found that the quality of care experienced by parents could have long-lasting impacts on their future well-being; recognized that *feeling* cared for mattered; and acknowledged that, to be effective, care had to be evidence-based and designed into hospital policies and protocols.[84]

The first step, then, in creating institutional love involves amassing the evidence base required to put good care practices in place. In the hospitals, this evidence came from patients and from health care workers; in archives, it will come from those who work in archives but also, importantly, from those who use archives and, preferably, also from those who do not or will not but potentially could. Archival user studies are limited in number and scope, and as Hea Lim Rhee points out, it is unclear to what extent their findings have been put into practice.[85] For the most part, archival user studies have focused on examining how users interact with and understand finding aids and other descriptive entities rather than on considering users' experiences more broadly – including the experiences of creators and donors of records.

84 For examples of this type of research and systematic review, see Micha D.J. Peters, Karolina Lisy, Dagmara Riitano, Zoe Jordan, and Edoardo Aromataris, "Caring for Families Experiencing Stillbirth: Evidence-Based Guidance for Maternity Care Providers," *Women and Birth* 28, no. 4 (2015): 272–78; Karolina Lisy, Micah D.J. Peters, Dagmara Riitano, Zoe Jordan, and Edoardo Aromataris, "Provision of Meaningful Care at Diagnosis, Birth, and after Stillbirth: A Qualitative Synthesis of Parents' Experiences," *Birth: Issues in Perinatal Care* 43, no. 1 (2016): 6–19; Alison Ellis, Caroline Chebsey, Claire Storey, Stephanie Bradley, Sue Jackson, Vicki Flenady, Alexander Heazell, and Dimitrios Siassakos, "Systematic Review to Understand and Improve Care after Stillbirth: A Review of Parents' and Healthcare Professionals' Experience," *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth* 16, no. 1 (2016): article 16.

85 Hea Lim Rhee, "Reflections on Archival User Studies," *Reference and User Services Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (2015): 29–42.

Sometimes, users of archives describe for us their experiences of interacting with records and with the institutions that house them. For example, in Gracen Brilmyer's work with disabled archives users, they provide accounts of difficult encounters with archival institutions and spaces. One researcher, Jess Waggoner, describes the physical pain that results from having to conform to ideas about how archives need to be handled:

> Your body's automatically positioned in these particular ways. And if those are positions that exacerbate pain, then you're just going to be in pain for two weeks. So for me, those were some of the main issues. . . . But [my issues] have primarily revolved around chronic pain and hunching over materials and not being able to put the materials where I need them to be for me to comfortably engage with them because there are such rigid notions of how the materials [should] be placed and who should be handling them.[86]

Participants in Brilmyer's research spoke about a range of other accessibility issues and also "highlighted how these facets were magnified through other factors such as financial limitations, hours of operation, or academic affiliation."[87] Furthermore, Brilmyer's interlocuters made it clear that "perceptions of the ways disability is understood and valued in institutions"[88] impacted them emotionally. For example, one interviewee, Lili Siegel, was told to access the archival reading room via the freight elevator: "It was at the end of this hall that was lined with dumpsters and garbage. And I got there, and I was like, 'I can't. I can't do that. I can't get on this elevator.' And my mom thought that I was scared of the elevator itself. It was like, 'No . . . I'm not afraid, *I'm a human being*.'"[89] In this example, Siegel shows how the institution and its staff – whether they intend to or not – communicate to disabled users that they are not valued (and certainly not loved). Brilmyer's article includes several other examples of how

86 Jess Waggonner, quoted in Gracen Brilmyer, "'They Weren't Necessarily Designed with Lived Experiences of Disability in Mind': The Affect of Archival In/Accessibility and 'Emotionally Expensive' Spatial Un/Belonging," *Archivaria*, no. 94 (Fall 2022): 120–153, 135.

87 Brilmyer, 136.

88 Brilmyer, 138.

89 Lili Siegel, quoted in Brilmyer, 138.

archival access policies, procedures, and spaces communicate to disabled users that their needs are not prioritized and may not have even been considered.[90]

In another account of archival use, Mary Jane Logan McCallum, a professor and Canada Research Chair in Indigenous People, History and Archives at the University of Winnipeg, identifies some of the ways conducting research on Indigenous histories from inside institutional archives can be "emotionally and intellectually exhausting."[91] She points out that to work successfully within archival systems requires her to "think like a colonizer," which "can do strange things to your head."[92] At the archives, she finds herself "learning information about my family in the wrong way," reviewing records that were written "mostly between people who clearly dislike Indigenous people or at best see them as a problem to be solved," and that were "created and taken" without Indigenous communities' knowledge or consent.[93] She writes, "One hazard of being an Indigenous researcher of federal DIA records is that they are filled with our ancestors, most often in perfunctory ways that sap the humanity from their names and truncate the stories from their lives (if names/stories appear at all). And the paternalism and racism are overt and palpable and hard to take if you offend easily – which I do."[94]

Archivist and scholar Kristen Thorpe also focuses on archives as places where ancestors are encountered. Thorpe is focused on care that recognizes materials

90 See also Ryan Lee Cartwright, "Out of Sorts: A Queer Crip in the Archives," *Feminist Review*, no. 125 (2020): 62–69.

91 Mary Jane Logan McCallum, "Indigenous People, Archives and History," *Shekon Neechie: An Indigenous History Site*, June 21, 2018, https://shekonneechie.ca/2018/06/21/indigenous-people-archives-and-history/.

92 McCallum, "Indigenous People, Archives and History."

93 McCallum, "Indigenous People, Archives and History."

94 McCallum, "Indigenous People, Archives and History." In another article about the difficulty of accessing records about Indigenous people in colonial archives, Indigenous librarian Jessie Loyer and her father, Darrell Loyer, reflect on the amount of time, effort, and resilience that is needed to learn to navigate archival systems and policies and understand "recorded official documents" that are often the result of their creators' "mishearing or misidentifying Indigenous life." Jessie Loyer (Cree-Métis) and Darrell Loyer (Métis), "Talking With My Daughter About Archives: Métis Researchers and Genealogy," *KULA: Knowledge Creation, Dissemination, and Preservation Studies* 5, no. 1 (2021), https://doi.org/10.18357/kula.140. See, also, Crystal Fraser and Zoe Todd, "Decolonial Sensibilities: Indigenous Research and Engaging with Archives in Contemporary Colonial Canada," *L'Internationale*, February 14, 2016, https://archive-2014-2024.internationaleonline.org/research/decolonising_practices/54_decolonial_sensibilities_indigenous_research_and_engaging_with_archives_in_contemporary_colonial_canada/; Krista McCracken and Skylee-Storm Hogan, "'That's My Auntie': Community-Guided Residential School History," *KULA: Knowledge Creation, Dissemination and Preservation Studies* 5, no. 1 (2021): 1–6.

in archives as "not merely objects." "Through an Indigenous lens and worldview," she explains, these materials "also form tangible connections with Ancestors."[95] The existence of these connections requires turning a caring lens onto not only record materials but also the people who interact with and through them. Thorpe describes an exhibition titled *In Living Memory* as an example of work that can "open up the archives for First Nations people to speak back to colonial collections and archives and situate them in community knowing."[96] The curatorial approach to the exhibit emphasized "Indigenous well-being and community ethics," and centred principles of respect, consent, and care, as Stolen Generation Survivors and "their representative groups" were consulted about the display of images and invited to "return love to people's Ancestors" through a process of naming people and places that had not yet been identified in the images.[97] Unfortunately, Thorpe also finds that "while the exhibition brought a moment of change," it did not substantially alter the institution's ways of working and of being in the world.[98] Thorpe shows that significantly more work is needed to extend loving practices beyond the exhibition program and to embed them "on a systems level into archival descriptive practices" and other institutional work.[99] Ultimately, she argues, the reforms needed to return love to Ancestors and "to support Indigenous peoples' [sovereignty and emotional well-being] require a deeper commitment from the archives."[100]

While these accounts focus on experiences of Indigenous and disabled archives users, similar accounts of difficult or harmful encounters with archives and archival spaces can be found or inferred in writing on racism and white

95 Kirsten Thorpe, "Returning Love to Ancestors Captured in the Archives: Indigenous Wellbeing, Sovereignty and Archival Sovereignty," *Archival Science* 24, no. 2 (2024): 125–142, 138.

96 Thorpe, 137.

97 Thorpe, 136.

98 Thorpe, 137.

99 Thorpe, 137.

100 Thorpe, 138.

supremacy in archives,[101] on queer and trans experiences in archives,[102] on trauma and archives,[103] and on the experiences of "care"-experienced people accessing institutional records.[104] These stories do not speak of institutional love, and they suggest that there is a long way to go before many of the people who enter our buildings and use our collections will be able to say we know how to put something good in their way. We have a good deal of listening to do as a field and as a profession. There is a real need to begin to gather the stories and experiences of those who use archives and have painful stories, as well as to conduct further research that can help us to understand where care is missing, what care is needed, and what the consequences of not caring are, both for people who use archives (or who do not because they anticipate harm) and for archivists and the institutions in which they work.

Planning for Love (2): Toward Structural and Embedded Care

If institutional love is experience- and research-led, it also must be structural, embedded into care policies and procedures. In the access stories shared by McCallum, Waggonner, and Siegel, we see, instead, how inequity and harm are

101 See, for example, Lae'l Hughes-Watkins, "Moving Toward a Reparative Archive: A Roadmap for a Holistic Approach to Disrupting Homogenous Histories in Academic Repositories and Creating Inclusive Spaces for Marginalized Voices," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*, no. 5 (2018); Tonia Sutherland, "The Carceral Archive: Documentary Records, Narrative Construction, and Predictive Risk Assessment," *Journal of Cultural Analytics* 4, no. 1 (2019).

102 See, for example, Elliot Freeman, "Defying Description: Searching for Queer History in Institutional Archives," *Archival Science* 23, no. 3 (2023): 447–70; K.J. Rawson, "Accessing Transgender//Desiring Queer(er?) Archival Logics," *Archivaria*, no. 68 (Fall 2009): 123–40. For consideration of how LGBTQ2S+ archives have reinscribed "histories of whiteness, settler-colonialism, and cisnormativity," see Elspeth Brown, "Archival Activism, Symbolic Annihilation, and the LGBTQ2+ Community Archive," *Archivaria*, no. 89 (Spring 2020): 6–33, 6; and Syrus Marcus Ware, "All Power to All People? Black LGBTTI2QQ Activism, Remembrance, and Archiving in Toronto," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (2017): 170–80.

103 See, for example, Wright and Laurent, "Safety, Collaboration, and Empowerment"; and Russell, "Affect in the Archive."

104 See, for example, Jacqueline Z. Wilson and Frank Golding, "Latent Scrutiny: Personal Archives as Perpetual Mementos of the Official Gaze," *Archival Science* 16, no. 1 (2016): 93–109; Cate O'Neill, Vlad Selakovic, and Rachel Tropea, "Access to Records for People Who Were In Out-of-Home Care: Moving Beyond 'Third Dimension' Archival Practice," *Archives and Manuscripts* 40, no. 1 (2012): 29–41; Anna Sexton, Stuart Baker-Brown, Peter Bullimore, Dolly Sen, and Andrew Voyce, "Social Justice and Hearing Voices: Co-Constructing an Archive of Mental Health Recovery," in *Archives, Recordkeeping and Social Justice*, ed. David A. Wallace, Wendy M. Duff, Renée Saucier, and Andrew Flinn (London: Routledge, 2020): 199–222. All these articles include "care"-experienced individuals as authors.

built into our systems for describing and making records available, our reading room spaces, and our policies for handling and working with materials and the people who use them.

In the interviews with archivists, several spoke about the deep sense of responsibility that accompanies their work. Many spoke about an "almost sacred" responsibility to the people documented in archives. One archivist, for example, described their "big sense of responsibility for . . . a person's existence . . . that they walked the earth . . . who they were as a person." Another archivist described the responsibility they felt in creating finding aids, wanting to ensure that "everybody who has a vested interest" in their records, "because they are the subject of those records, or [because] maybe they can find healing in accessing those records," would be able to "read my description and know that this is a place that they can come to do that." Archivists cited the responsibility involved in "helping people get in touch with their origins" and even of helping "to make people feel their lives were worthwhile." These comments about an archivist's sacred responsibility echo Scott Cline's articulation of a "sacred obligation"; like Cline, the archivists I spoke with understood that they entered into a kind of "covenantal" relationship with people and with records as part of their work.[105]

When it came to talking about grief specifically, I heard many fraught stories of archivists working with grieving donors, creators, and researchers and many differing understandings of archivists' responsibilities toward the bereaved. Some acknowledged easily their role in offering care and comfort, while others wondered how they could be held responsible for this kind of care, which extended beyond care for records. Over time, I began to understand that, often, the archivists who more easily accepted this kind of caring role were those who were more explicitly supported in doing so.[106] Archivists in less-supported positions, or who felt unprepared, also described the "heavy responsibility" to care for people connected to records, but it was more likely in these cases that the responsibility could begin to feel like a burden, or a kind of "weight" to carry.

The archivists I interviewed described a range of conditions or behaviours within archival institutions that contributed to this "weight," including funding

105 Scott Cline, *Archival Virtue: Relationship, Obligation, and the Just Archives* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2021), 43.

106 Those who felt more comfortable providing care were also typically those who had experienced some profound loss themselves. Again, as this article argues throughout, while personal experience can be valuable, it should not be the foundation upon which institutional care rests.

scarcity, rapid staff turnover, "triage-like" conditions stemming from a lack of time and resources, a preoccupation with "measurable outcomes," and a failure to prioritize relationships and relationship building. Interviewees also discussed how ideas about professionalism could be levelled against them if they raised concerns about the emotional impacts of their work or attempted to adopt approaches that were more person-centred than record-centred. The archivist quoted earlier who provided access to intergenerational residential school Survivors described being privately taken to task by senior archivists (on several occasions) after she spoke publicly about the emotional dimensions of this work. This same archivist explained that sometimes it felt like adhering to professional norms and representing her institution came "at the expense" of her "humanity." She echoed a sentiment I heard from several other interviewees when she suggested that "a lot of our professional practices may not actually make any sense to the people we serve" and may not, in fact, serve them, "but we've entrenched them as [professional practices]." Using very similar language, for example, an archivist working in a university setting spoke eloquently about the need to recentre what she called "continuity of humanity," by which she meant care for the humanity of people in archives throughout the cycle of record acquisition, preservation, and use.

When we coded the interview transcripts, my research team and I tagged statements where archivists mused about what *could* or *should* happen in archival institutions and education programs to create more supportive and caring spaces where archivists would feel both cared for and capable of extending care. We thought of this as "what archivists want" and optimistically used the term *future of the profession* as we coded. The list was long, but what all the wished-for changes have in common is that they require more than individual will and action. Consistently, we heard calls for systemic change that would create policies, procedures, spaces, and training that support archivists to safely share their experiences of difficult work and to gain skills in managing difficult conversations and interactions; to have more open discussions about grief, trauma, and emotions in the workplace and profession; and to value relationships and relationship-building. Interviewees advocated for institution- and profession-level shifts to more person-centred theory and practice and highlighted the need for sector-wide training in cultural humility, as well as in Indigenous ways of knowing and non-Western world views, in order to be able to better support reconciliation and reparative initiatives. As the Australian archivist put it, we

need to "shift our perspectives" so that we are "thinking about everything we do as being connected to people" and then "embed that" in archival education, training, and institutions.

Interviewees acknowledged that embedding change in archival institutions is difficult. Several archivists have also written about the difficulty of shifting priorities in institutions – and specifically about the difficulty of prioritizing care in institutions. For example, in her article about enacting reparative description policies and practices in Special Collections & Archives at the University of Waterloo Library, Danielle Robichaud explains how institutional factors such as staff turnovers, budgets, mandates, and broader administrative initiatives can enable or constrain change at the program level. Robichaud emphasizes the capacity of individual archivists or small teams of archivists to enact change by showing, for example, how existing descriptive standards allow archivists a substantial amount of autonomy and can even be used to "rationalize the introduction of equity- and reconciliation-informed thinking in day-to-day archival practice."[107] However, her article also demonstrates how easy it is for "neoliberal deflections like time and resources" to be used to counter "meaningful, action-oriented change" and to entrench the misplaced "sanctity of archival neutrality."[108]

In a recent edited collection on "abolitionist futures" in archives, contributors likewise highlighted the conservative nature of institutions. In their introduction, Alison Clemens and Jessica Farrell note that, in academic archives, too often "the drive to preserve the academic institution incentivizes caring about legal and financial risks . . . over how the project will affect individuals involved."[109] This point is echoed in subsequent essays, which show how carceral logic underpins many of the security and preservation policies and practices in archival institutions. Caitlin Rizzo discusses being "placed in positions that pit collections maintenance against community care."[110] The profession, she argues, "seems to have naturalized systems that promote suspicion, distrust, and

107 Danielle Robichaud, "Integrating Equity and Reconciliation Work into Archival Descriptive Practice at the University of Waterloo," *Archivaria*, no. 91 (Spring/Summer 2021): 74–103, 83.

108 Robichaud, 101.

109 Alison Clemens and Jessica Farrell, "Introduction," in *Archivist Actions, Abolitionist Futures: Reimagining Archival Practice Against Incarceration*, ed. Alison Clemens and Jessica Farrell (Alexandria, VA: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2025), 11.

110 Caitlin Rizzo, "Responsible Collections and Ethical Collectives," in Clemens and Farrell, *Archivist Actions, Abolitionist Futures*, 41.

surveillance of the people around collections as the preferred ways to promote collection care."[111] Rizzo shows how "in archives where these measures are often business-as-usual operating practices, it can become very easy to accept these measures as ethical decisions that serve to protect collections," but these practices, she says, "come at a cost" to people who use the records and interact with the archives.[112] As Elvia Arroyo-Ramírez et al. argue, "Too often institutional rules – both academic and carceral – structure collection decisions and place limits on extending care."[113]

In thinking about how archivists can become "complicit in perpetuating harm,"[114] Robichaud invokes Antonina Lewis's notion of *archival fragility*, which, Lewis explains, "subsumes the realities of people who experience records as barbs, barriers, and weapons under a professionally normalized construct of the greater good of the archival mission."[115] This "professionally normalized construct," the easily accepted "ethical decisions" Rizzo references, and the deference to the status quo that the archivists I interviewed identified as a barrier to accepting the emotional aspects of archival work – they all work to obstruct the kind of shift in thinking and practice that is necessary for an archival version of institutional love to develop. They also help us to see exactly where the most work is needed to make this kind of shift: at the level where priorities are identified, decisions made, and policies set.

Advocating for Love in Neoliberal Workplaces: A Call for Courageous Leadership

Many of the archivists and records professionals I interviewed talked about how past personal experience or training in other fields had helped prepare them to provide care not only for records but also for people, but the care deficit in archives cannot be solved by individuals acting fully on their own initiative and unsupported within the institutions that employ them. In the only analysis

111 Rizzo, 41.

112 Rizzo, 41.

113 Elvia Arroyo-Ramírez, Joanne DeCaro, Keramet Reiter, Alexis Rowland, and Lacey Wood, "PrisonPandemic Procedures of Care: Case Study of Letter 154," in Clemens and Farrell, *Archivist Actions, Abolitionist Futures*, 26.

114 Robichaud, "Integrating Equity and Reconciliation Work," 101.

115 Antonina Lewis, "Omelettes in the Stack: Archival Fragility and the Aforeafter," *Archivaria*, no. 86 (Fall 2018): 44–67, 52.

of love in information professions I have found that draws explicitly on love studies, Mary Greenshields and Sarah Polkinghorne show how "much of what demonstrates love in practice in LIS . . . resides in the actions of individual information workers who stand against societal inequities and exclusionary practices through labor that is immeasurable" and easy to discount because it is not recognized in LIS theory or in LIS workplaces.[116] This places a tremendous burden, they argue, "on those who choose to enact" particular types of care.[117] The archivists I interviewed agreed: practising care on an individual level, rather than "hav[ing] it be a systematic norm," was frustrating, exhausting, and unsustainable, and it turned their sense of responsibility from a "privilege" to a "burden."

It is important, too, to reflect on the difference between the kind of institutional love I am advocating for and what is known as *emotional labour*. Arlie Russell Hochschild defines emotional labour as labour that "requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others."[118] Hochschild presents what is now considered a classic example of emotional labour, showing how flight attendants use their own emotional capacity to manage the emotions of their customers. In this relationship, the flight attendants are required to keep paying customers comfortable and happy. Hochschild draws attention to the potentially exploitative nature of emotional labour in uneven power structures, especially where service employees are beholden both to their customers and to upper-level managers.[119] She highlights the strain that can result from displaying feigned feeling and that is compounded by the sense that employment depends on continuing such a display. Hochschild also warns that many types of emotional work are mistaken for emotional labour. Jobs that "call for emotional labour," she explains, have three common characteristics: "First, they require face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact with the public. Second, they require the worker to produce an emotional state in another person – gratitude or fear, for example. Third, they allow the employer, through training and supervision, to exercise a

116 Mary Greenshields and Sarah Polkinghorne, "Love Is a Lens: Locating Love in Library and Information Studies," *Library Trends* 70, no. 4 (2022): 458–71, 465.

117 Greenshields and Polkinghorne, 466.

118 Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2012), 7.

119 Hochschild, 89.

degree of control over the emotional activities of employees."[120] While I am under no illusion that emotional labour is not required of archivists in their interactions with creators, donors, and users of archives, institutional love is something different, and even an antidote, perhaps, to the type of strain emotional labour produces and to the "heavy burden" archivists doing emotional work experience. Institutional love is not primarily an attempt "to produce an emotional state in another person"; it is an attempt to respond to another person's emotional state in ways that are not individual and spontaneous but that are deeply supported by well-researched policies and practices. In this scenario, employers, or managers, are not asserting control over employees; they are empowering them by building love into policies and procedures from the ground up. With institutional love, feelings are not performed; they are embedded.

The challenge, then, is determining how to instigate change at higher levels across the archival sector, how to shift the onus from individual archivists who extend themselves beyond the current parameters of archival care, and how to cultivate new understandings about what care – love as it is practised by institutions – should look like, and how it should be enacted, by systematically embedding it into archival theory, education, standards, policies, and practices.[121] Some work of the kind I am arguing is needed has been started. For example, the Find and Connect and Rights in Records by Design projects in Australia and the MIRRA project (Memory – Identity – Rights in Records – Access) in the United Kingdom have conducted extensive research on the experiences of children who grew up in state care and used this research to make

120 Hochschild, 147.

121 This challenge – or set of challenges –is also at the centre of the recent special issue of *Archival Science*, "Dignity by Design: Pathways to Participatory Recordkeeping Systems," edited by Elliot Freeman, Violet Hamence-Davies, and Joanne Evans. The editors' introduction makes the vital argument that "much participatory archival scholarship to date has tended to focus on identifying and ameliorating archival legacies of harm." As they explain, "while this work is undeniably important, there is a risk that ongoing and emergent recordkeeping challenges will go unaddressed, allowing systemic barriers and structural inequalities to remain, and become even further entrenched. If participatory work focuses only on redressing the past, the opportunity to (re)shape the recordkeeping of the future may be missed." Elliot Freeman, Violet Hamence-Davies, and Joanne Evans, "Dignity by Design: Pathways to Participatory Recordkeeping Systems," *Archival Science* 24, no. 2 (2024): 119–23, 120. Other articles in this special issue engage with questions of how to centre the dignity of the subjects, users, and makers of records in the design of more caring recordkeeping systems. See, also, Mya Ballin, "'Somebody Has to Be Crazy About that Kid': Speculating on the Transformative Recordkeeping Potential of the Caring Corporate Parent," *Archival Science* 24, no. 2 (2024): 871–96.

changes to institutional recordkeeping practices.[122] These research projects have been collaborative, participatory, trauma-informed, and survivor-led. They can serve as models for what is needed now, which is a broader, sector-wide look at what kinds of care are needed in archival spaces and how that care can be built into policies and practices from the ground up.

This will require some courage and creativity from those in leadership and decision-making roles. Here, we can heed the recent call to archival institutions (including those that educate and train archivists) to repay our "archival debt";[123] if the Director of Special Collections at the Library of Congress is arguing for a resetting of priorities and a reorienting of our practices, can we use her example as a kind of warrant to follow suit?

Concluding Thoughts

In her analysis of how love can be used as a theoretical intervention, Toye suggests that an initial step involves "formulat[ing] new concepts of love that can be used as necessary grounds for ethical and political relations with others."[124] This is how I understand the potential of institutional love to archival theory and praxis; institutional love suggests a new concept of love for archives, which we can use to think about how to be in better relationships with those we encounter in and through and alongside our records. This article does not attempt to prescribe ways of loving in archives; there is work to do before we know what those are. But it *does* try to argue that love be taken seriously in archives – that

122 See, for example, Michael Jones and Cate O'Neill, "Identity, Records and Archival Evidence: Exploring the Needs of Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants," *Archives and Records* 35, no. 2 (2014): 110–25; Elizabeth Lomas, Elizabeth Shepherd, Victoria Hoyle, Anna Sexton, and Andrew Flinn, "A Framework for Person-Centred Recordkeeping Drawn through the Lens of Out-of-Home Child-Care Contexts," *Archivaria*, no. 94 (Fall/Winter 2022): 64–93; Elizabeth Shepherd, Victoria Hoyle, Elizabeth Lomas, Andrew Flinn, and Anna Sexton, "Towards a Human-Centred Participatory Approach to Child Social Care Recordkeeping," *Archival Science* 20, no. 4 (2020): 307–25; Sue McKemmish, Jane Bone, Joanne Evans, Frank Golding, Antonina Lewis, Rolan Gregory, Kirsten Thorpe, and Jacqueline Wilson, "Decolonizing Recordkeeping and Archival Praxis in Childhood Out-of-Home Care and Indigenous Archival Collections," *Archival Science* 20, no. 1 (2020): 21–49; Joanne Evans and Rhiannon Abeling, "Codesigning Rights-Based Recordkeeping for Childhood Out-of-Home Care," *European Journal of Social Work*, October 12, 2024, 1–15, https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2024.2408426.

123 Jillian Cuellar, Audra Eagle Yun, Jennifer Meehan, and Jessica Tai, "Defining Archival Debt: Building New Futures for Archives," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*, no. 10 (2023), article 8.

124 Toye, "Towards a Poethics of Love," 41.

it be recognized as a force that motivates and animates the making, use, and keeping of records; as a foundation to create the kind of structural care for which archivists such as Caswell and Cifor, among many others, have advocated; and as a relationship in which care is lovingly crafted to put "something good"[125] in the way of those who need it.

Before I leave these tentative and exploratory ideas about love and archives for others to reflect on and – hopefully – put to use, I want to acknowledge that, as Gunnarsson, García-Andrade, and Jónasdóttir warn, "love's indisputable *power* can be organized in both mutually enhancing and egalitarian and oppressive and exploitative ways."[126] Feminist love scholars, while focusing on love as a transformational, productive force, do not deny the harmful histories of "patriarchal, heterosexist, and colonial concepts of care and love."[127] With these histories in mind, it is crucial to remain "vigilant about *how* love is invoked" in processes of transformation.[128] It is precisely because love is "powerful in the constructive sense" that "people are likely to have an interest in exploiting it."[129] The tendency toward exploitation is strong in the continuation of colonialism and imperialism. "Under colonial rule," Simpson stresses, love can be "conditioned, manipulated and weaponized."[130] And as Dawn Rae Davis shows, when "love" takes the form of benevolence, it is itself a form of colonialism.[131]

Fisher and Tronto warn that we cannot simply assume that "with the right motivation caring becomes unproblematic": "all caring activities entail the political dimensions of power and conflict, and necessarily raise practical and real

125 Norwood, "Something Good Enough," 2306.

126 Gunnarsson, García-Andrade, and Jónasdóttir, "The Power of Love," 3.

127 Ferguson and Toye, "Feminist Love Studies," 5.

128 Jónasdóttir, "Love Studies," 25.

129 Gunnarsson, García-Andrade, and Jónasdóttir, "The Power of Love," 4.

130 Simpson, *Theory of Water*, 27.

131 Davis argues that "love's discourse must be examined for the history it shares with colonialism in the context of the civilizing-Christianizing mission and Enlightenment ethics conditioned by reason." If feminists pursue the "revolutionary possibility of love," it must be by "identifying and deconstructing historical alliances between love and reason and between benevolence and imperialism." Without this analysis, "we collaborate with a violent legacy." Dawn Rae Davis, "(Love Is) The Ability of Not Knowing: Feminist Experience of the Impossible in Ethical Singularity," *Hypatia* 17, no. 2 (2002): 145–61, 146.

questions about justice, equality, and trust."[132] As archivists work toward developing the kind of knowledge and understanding of individual and community needs that is necessary to build the structures and practices of institutional love, we will have to think about how to develop a theory of (archival) love that does not confuse love with a colonialist benevolence and does not "contribute to the consolidation of unequal gender, class and race relations."[133] To go back to Caswell's call to archivists to listen to their feelings, we must recognize that feelings alone are never enough. The work of understanding and implementing institutional love must attend to the "political dimensions of power" as it seeks to transform archival spaces and practices. As Godden notes in her analysis of how love can transform social work, even if love is a "vital starting point for transformative action," "love alone cannot resolve difficulties."[134] Here, though, I also find Carolyn Ureña's words helpful. The transformation that love provokes, she writes, "is a necessarily ongoing practice"; there is no quick or sudden fix. At the same time, Ureña insists, transformation "need not even be realized to remain a worthwhile venture."[135] To love, to try – to move toward transformation – is a worthwhile start.

Some might argue that love is too niche or that not everyone who comes to an archives needs this level of care. Our literature and professional forums, however, increasingly emphasize the emotional and affective dimensions of records and archival work, with growing attention to trauma and healing in archives. Work in these areas is demonstrating how listening to their emotions and feelings helps archivists work in justice-oriented ways and encourages more expansive ideas about what a record or archives can look like or do. It is helping archivists to think about the impact of their work on the people who are connected to and/or interact with records and with archivists and archival institutions, and it is leading to a focus on more "empathetically grounded recordkeeping practice."[136]

132 Tronto and Fisher, "Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring," 31, 33.

133 Matt York, "Building a Culture of Revolutionary Love: The Politics of Love in Radical Social Transformation," in *International Handbook of Love: Transcultural and Transdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Claude-Hélène Mayer and Elizabeth Vanderheiden (Cham, CH: Springer Nature, 2021), 180, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-45996-3_10.

134 Godden, "The Love Ethic," 409.

135 Carolyn Ureña, "Loving from Below: Of (De)colonial Love and Other Demons," *Hypatia* 32, no. 1 (2017): 86–102, 89.

136 Anna Sexton, Elizabeth Shepherd, and Wendy Duff, "Relational and Person-Centred Approaches to Archival Practice and Education," *Journal of Community Informatics* 19, no. 1 (2023): 3–22, 11.

By looking through this new lens, it has become clear to many of us that "individuals' lived experiences and opinions can make seemingly innocuous items affectively powerful" and that we need to acknowledge "the idiosyncrasy of emotive potentiality"[137] in records and records work; in other words, it is not possible to predict which records or interactions will be emotional for which users or in which circumstances, but we can trust that "encounters with materials are always possible affective encounters."[138] It is time to seriously consider how we want people to leave these encounters: feeling, like McCallum or Waggonner, alienated and sore, or feeling, like Norwood, something made of love.

137 Kay Bannell and Anna Sexton, "Affect and Rapid Response Collecting: Exploring the Significance of Emotion in UK Archives' COVID-19 Collecting Projects," *Archives & Records* 45, no. 2 (2024): 153–75, 169.

138 Gina Schlesselman-Tarango and Miguel A. Tarango, "'What You Cannot Get Over': A Photographic Essay Exploring Reproductive Failure, Affect, and Information Work," *Library Trends* 68, no. 3 (2020): 390–408, 406.

BIOGRAPHY Jennifer Douglas is an associate professor at the School of Information, University of British Columbia, on the unceded territory of the Musqueam people. She teaches courses on personal and community archives and on archival arrangement and description in the Master of Archival Studies program. Her research focuses on the creation of and care for personal and community archives, with a particular focus on arrangement and description; on grief and recordkeeping; and on the emotional dimensions of archival work. She is a past general editor and book reviews editor for *Archivaria*.