

SEEKING SEX IN THE ARCHIVE: ORIENTATION, METADATA, AND SARTORIAL
FETISH ITEMS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE
TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF MULTICULTURAL WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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DENTON, TEXAS

AUGUST 2019

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ABSTRACT

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AUGUST 2019

This thesis seeks to illuminate how museums orient users towards clothing items associated with kink and fetish communities (sartorial fetish items) in their collections. Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenological work guides this critical discourse analysis of metadata available on the websites of two archives that house such items. An exploration of the metadata at the Texas Fashion Collection and the Leather Archives and Museum found that how museums discuss these items, other queer items, and their collections as a whole shape how users perceive what might be housed in their archives. Likewise, an examination of the metadata available in the online archives of both cultural institutions found barriers to finding sartorial fetish items and suggests ways to utilize existing structures and tools in queer ways to engage the public with items and topics that are associated with sex and sexuality.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There are vast arrays of items collected in museums and archives. However, I am specifically intrigued by the collection and presentation of clothing, or other wearable items, important to sexual minority groups identifying with kink or fetish sexual expression. Throughout, I will call this group of worn objects sartorial fetish items. Sartorial fetish items encompass a range of worn objects related to an individual's or community's sexual expression and may be worn as markers of sexual expression on a daily basis, during a sexual encounter, or as a way to identify one's self as a fetish community member in society or at group specific gatherings.¹ These items may be made of different materials (e.g., leather, rubber/latex, PVC, fur, etc.) and encompass many costume styles.² Although scholars from multiple disciplines (museum studies, history, and fashion, as well as women's, gender, sexuality, and queer studies) frequently recognize the importance of studying sartorial fetish items and the communities associated with them, there is limited scholarly information focusing on the actual sartorial fetish items already housed in museum and archival collections. There is even less scholarship regarding how museum users are oriented towards sartorial fetish items in collections. In fact, I was unable to locate any scholarly work that specifically focused on how museums and archives orient their users toward clothing items associated with fetish communities.

As such, I've sought to illuminate how we interact with sartorial fetish items in collections, by looking to the digital metadata (mission statements and online archives) available on the websites of two very different archives. The first is the Texas Fashion Collection (TFC) in Denton, Texas, where I served as a volunteer and intern for ten months from 2017-2018. The second is the Leather Archives and Museum (LA&M) in Chicago, Illinois, where I am currently serving as a research and exhibition volunteer. I chose these collections for several reasons 1) because both the Leather Archives and Museum and the Texas Fashion Collection currently have sartorial fetish items as part of their accessioned collections, 2) because both have websites with online archives, 3) because both LA&M and TFC underwent a significant change in the metadata available to users on their website while I was working with each archive, and finally 4) because TFC is a traditional archive, while LA&M is a community archive. I will return to discuss the scope of this study in more detail in the methods section, however; these four elements proved to be fruitful spaces to analyze, and better understand how users are oriented towards sartorial fetish items in different museums and archives.

It feels important to disclose how I came to this topic and why it is important to me because I am not a leather community member. I studied religious garb, specifically how African-American women, who had converted to Islam, viewed their clothing, during my undergraduate tenure. I was drawn to how many women found wearing hijab, or other coverings freeing and wanted to learn more about the relationships that individuals have with what they wear.³ As such, while working on my Master's in Museum Studies, at the University of Oklahoma, I primarily set out to better understand

how to exhibit or collect clothing that was in some way unique and that told the stories of diverse groups and subcultures. What followed was a close examination of the queer community, where I was a member. Although I did not participate in leather culture, it always seemed to be adjacent to the community of which I was a part. I began to speak with individuals in the leather community more about their clothing and how it made them feel empowered at social gatherings in a very unofficial way. Those conversations over drinks at housewarming parties, during the intermission at a play, or while playing pinball at my monthly ladies' nerd meet-up sparked my interest. I started my research by reading more about leather hoods and ball gags, which obscured the face of the wearer, similar to hijab and other religious items, and found myself entirely immersed in learning more about other sartorial fetish items. I have also worked as an oral historian providing a space for kinksters (members of kink communities) to tell stories about their clothing and lives, as well as an exhibit designer and contracted archivist dedicated to creating space for all queer realities in museums and archives.

Since I've said the word "queer" several times it might be helpful to pause and understand what I mean by the term before delving into the background of sartorial fetish items and how we are oriented towards them in museums and archives, as it has many meanings and is a term that can be quite polarizing. Understanding the landscape of the word queer isn't simple. Jennifer Purvis explains that the term queer can be used as "a noun, a verb, an adjective," in contemporary society reflecting the richness of meaning in modern language.⁴ In addition, queer is also a socio-political movement, an academic theory on its way to becoming a full-fledged discipline at the post-secondary education

level, and a reclaimed identity. I used the word queer earlier, as an umbrella term, to describe myself as part of the greater LGBTQ+ community earlier in this study.

However, I will also use queer to describe a set of academic theories and understandings that value social and political progress and change. In many ways, I understand queer theory and queer archival practice as a method of change management, a way to move forward with a set of goals that are, or might be, difficult to achieve.

Likely, the most formal understanding of queer is as a word that means strange or odd.⁵ Although this definition in and of itself seems somewhat benign, there is power in words and the social understandings of them. To be different can sometimes feel like a threat to society, such as in the 1910s when queer became a word associated with homosexual men; the term took on a new meaning, one that was primarily used as a way to slur individuals who acted outside of expected sexual norms.⁶ This legacy proved enduring and queer is still used as a way to demoralize members of the LGBTQ+ community as lesser than their straight counterparts. However, in the 1990s, the term queer began to take a turn and, in many ways, re-framed the meaning of the word in the LGBTQ+ and academic communities. This turn in understanding occurred when LGBTQ+ communities actively claimed the word queer as an identity, as empowering, and as a way to speak back to gender and sexuality norms.

Judith Butler sought to reframe and redefine the term queer in a positive light. She argues that queer is a “site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imagining, [queer] will have to remain that which is in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a

prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political work.”⁷ As such, it is important to understand that queer is also a political space that is collaborative and reflective that fully embraces change in addition to the word’s other meanings. She and other scholars such as Michael Warner and Lisa Duggan began to define the field of queer studies in the early 1990s, as a new field that explored identity in relationship to politics and power.

More specifically, queer grew out of a political and activist movement that sought to point out a “wide field of normalization,” which in turn is used to contest prejudice.⁸ As such, many scholars describe queer as a term that is “slick” or mutable (something that Jennifer Purvis echoes when discussing the usage of queer), since what is understood as “normal” is an ever-moving target which must expand and change over time. However, queer is more than simply a fluctuating set of theories that describes oppression. Queer also intends to “shake things up” by specifically looking to the past and future as a way to identify, combat, and hopefully end, oppression.⁹ As such, queer now goes beyond exploring persecution connected to gender or sexuality, and also includes critiques and solutions for problems involving other identities including, race, class, and dis/ability. Thus, queer is an ideal site for the examination of sartorial fetish items as the items themselves, the designers, and users of the items are routinely disavowed by society as sexually deviant.

Background

Museums have varied in purpose and scope over the past 600 years. The earliest examples of museums, called Cabinets of Curiosity, displayed items depending on

availability, personal or client preference, and collection purpose. Although some existed during the 1500s, they flourished in the 1600s and 1700s when the most well-known example, Museum Wormianum (Ole Worm's Museum), opened in Copenhagen in 1633.¹⁰ Later museums, which more closely resemble modern museums than their early counterparts, began to shape their collections around themes such as types of art, specific historical events, cultures, or sciences. The Louvre is arguably the first example of a modern museum, opening in 1793.¹¹ Only recently have museums dedicated their missions to the sole purpose of collecting items related to sex and sexuality. This practice began with community archives, frequently founded and maintained by volunteers, dedicated to preserving LGBTQ+ histories in the 1970s.¹² However, the practice of collecting sex and sexuality has since spread to the opening of institutional museums, such as the Museum of Sex in New York or the World Erotic Arts Museum in Miami, which specifically collect artistic, cultural, and/or historical items related to sex and sexuality.

Although new museums and archives specifically focused on sex and sexuality are now more commonplace, a majority of museums have items in their collections related to these topics even when they are not part of the museum's mission or exhibitions. An early example of this is the Museo Borbonico (or the Gabinetto Segreto, which translates to the Secret Museum) at the Herculaneum Museum in Portici (now merged with the National Archaeological Museum of Naples) in 1795. The Secret Museum houses artifacts from the excavation of the City of Pompeii depicting sexual acts and human genitals that remained hidden until 2000 when the museum was made

accessible to the public, albeit by appointment only.¹³ Although this is a step towards greater access, the viewership is still limited to adults and all the items depicting sex or related to human sexuality are kept separate from the larger collection of the National Archaeological Museum of Naples.

Likewise, the British Museum began segregating items that they believed were of an obscene nature in their Museum Secretum in 1865, only returning the items to their previous departments in 1953.¹⁴ However, many of the items formerly part of the Museum Secretum are infrequently exhibited in the British Museum. Likewise, a majority of items previously believed to be obscene are exhibited only as part of temporary showcases, rather than as part of permanent displays. As such, items relating to sex and sexuality tend to be outside of the public view, even though they have been returned to the general collection. Furthermore, many items relating to sex and sexuality are interpreted in manners which continue to explain them as deviant, pornographic, or in some way different than societal norms, rather than as diverse or different than societal norms.¹⁵ When items are not included in exhibits it is difficult for people to become introduced to those objects and/or the topics or cultures associated with those items. This is especially true when those artifacts are kept in secret collections that intend to hide topics such as sex and sexuality, as many users would not regularly be acquainted with similar items in their personal lives. Without such exposure, the public, and museums themselves lose an opportunity to re-orient our understanding of these objects and the communities that use them.

Like museums, the fashion industry has also been an area in conversation with the sartorial fetish world. As early as the 1970s, there was a visible exchange between the fashion industry and the kink world. Although Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood's shop, SEX, catered primarily to punks, a majority of their designs were fetish and bondage wear, including leather jackets and pants, skin-tight latex dresses, tight lacing corsets, impossibly high heels, and shirts with straps and buckles which mimicked straightjackets.¹⁶ These items, made famous by the band Sex Pistols, grew in popularity not only in subcultures but also in the fashion industry. By the 1980s, high fashion designers such as Thierry Mugler, Jean-Paul Gaultier, and Gianni Versace were incorporating fetish features into their high fashion designs.¹⁷ While these embodied items are celebrated as art in the fashion industry and in fashion collections, fetish designers who create couture items are less likely to be recognized or collected. For example, in 2016 Solange Knowles attended the Met Gala in a yellow dress and latex stockings reported widely as designed by David LaPort.¹⁸ While it is true that LaPort did design Knowles's dress, there is little to no mention of the Baroness, a latex designer who designed and fitted her stockings. These silences are frequent because society, in general, is not familiar with fetish designers in the same way that they are oriented towards high fashion designers.

Not mentioning fetish designers or collecting their designs in archives is not the result of accidental oversight but of a long-standing tradition in Western society to separate sex and art both in the fashion industry and in museums. Although archives have always mediated what they collect, even before museums became institutions with

official policies, a shift in public perception began occurring in the 1830s, when state and national legislation (specifically in the United States and throughout Western Europe), as well as official museum policy began to both define and classify items as obscene or pornographic.¹⁹ This shift targeted a wide swath of art such as literature, images, objects, and performance, determining if items were pornographic or art, as one was understood to cancel out the other. Although many museums disbanded their secret collections in the 1950s, there are still significant hurdles in displaying and collecting art that depicts or is related to sex or sexuality, as it is frequently deemed obscene. Linda Williams explains that the word obscenity is “given to those sexually explicit acts that once seemed unspeakable, and were thus permanently kept off-scene,” or out of sight.²⁰ Thus, in many cases, objects, artifacts, and art labeled as obscene in past continue to be inaccessible in the present as our orientation towards those items is that of out of sight, out of mind. This is not only true for museum visitors, but also archival professionals as well.

While many museum professionals agree that sartorial fetish items should be accessioned, or officially registered in collections, even when the museum is not specifically focused on the collection or display of such items, there are significant struggles cataloging and displaying these items within existing structures created by archival science. In fact, there has been a wealth of published work that shows that professional archival systems are heteronormatively or patriarchally framed, causing items related to gender, sex, or sexuality to be more difficult to access because of the limited vocabulary available to describe them.²¹ Archival systems frequently place sartorial fetish items in categories such as “other” and occasionally describe these items

as either illicit or pornographic. This reductive or even moralistic categorization, along with the metadata used in cataloging, can lead to items being passed over for exhibition in museums because museum professionals are unable to locate them. Mark Liddiard even argues that museums “actively seek to censor any explicit allusion to the topic” of sex.²² Thus, through either active censorship or the use of limited and outdated archival methods, many sartorial fetish items housed in institutional museums remain hidden.

Methods

I have shown that museums and archives have long acted as a gatekeeper of both items and knowledge related to sex and sexuality. Since I seek to understand how museums and archives orient individual users towards sartorial fetish items in their collection through the examination of metadata available in two archive’s websites, it is important though to understand in what ways both individuals and museums play a part in our understanding of sartorial fetish items. Sara Ahmed provides an ideal starting point for my study by recognizing that there are systems of power that directly contribute to the way people relate to the world around them. Ahmed also tells us that identity, personal history, and proximity to items are key to understanding how people think about them. She illustrates how orientations are highly variable person to person by giving the example of a writer who uses a table to write and a housekeeper who cleans the writer’s table, I will show how metadata (mission statements and online archives) shape how users find and understand sartorial fetish items.²³ She tells us that although the writer and the housekeeper both interact with the same table, they do so in different ways, leading to their distinct understandings of the object. Likewise, how users find, understand, and

interact with sartorial fetish items held by TFC and LA&M vary based on the texts provided to the public, which I show by exploring how those texts shape our understandings and perceptions of these items and their place in the archive.

In a museum, access to items, as well as access to interpretive materials (e.g., finding aids and catalog records), are crucial elements in defining how people understand sartorial fetish items. Sartorial fetish items are sometimes entirely unknown to museum-goers as many people are unaccustomed to encountering them in their personal lives. This means that to become better informed about sartorial fetish items, individuals must first be acquainted with them. Ahmed explains that change can never occur if we are never introduced to items or subjects outside of our current realm of perception.²⁴ A realm of perception is what is proximate to individuals and can include objects, ideas, and knowledge. As such, individuals are more likely to interact with things that are within or adjacent to what they are already oriented towards. For example, individuals who are not members of queer or kink communities are less likely to be aware of sartorial fetish items than someone who actively participates in those communities. This is because neither the information nor objects associated with fetish communities are within of their realm of perception. In many cases, museums can play an integral role in the public understanding of histories and cultures; museum professionals would be remiss to dismiss or marginalize sartorial fetish items, their histories, and communities.²⁵ When curators decide to ignore sartorial fetish items, collections managers choose not to accession them, or metadata does not mention them, opportunities to expand how the public understands and interacts with these objects, as well as how individuals understand and

interact with those who create and wear these items, are erased. In other words, through their institutional work, museum professionals can potentially begin the process of reorienting the public toward sartorial fetish items and sexual minority communities.

Aided by Ahmed's queer phenomenological work, I highlight sartorial fetish items and offer critical discourse analysis as a way to understand the power structures that affect the collection and exhibition of these items. Norman Fairclough describes critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a methodology used to examine how discourse (written, embodied, or visual language) figures into the process of social change, specifically as related to power.²⁶ Fairclough outlines the three characteristics of CDA that specifically distinguish it from traditional discourse analysis. The three criteria are that (1) CDA must go beyond examining discourse (or text) and must instead discuss a relationship between discourse and a "social process;" (2) is not solely a commentary on discourse; and (3) does not seek to merely explain discourse, choosing rather to explore the ways in which an analysis of discourse may mitigate social wrongs.²⁷ As such, I analyze how users are oriented towards sartorial fetish items accessioned in collections through an examination of metadata available on their websites.

I look at mission statements at both LA&M and TFC, as well as their online archives, and analyze how the texts provided orient users towards sartorial fetish items housed in these archives. I look at how these documents orient users towards sartorial fetish items generally, through the language presented in an examination of the mission statements in Chapter Two. Likewise, I also look at how these archives specifically orient users towards leather vests associated with the fetish community in chapter three. By

looking at the resources available online, I am able to analyze what is frequently the first resource that users interact with, which could act as a pathway or a barrier to finding sartorial fetish items based on their previous orientations and how the archives position themselves in relationship to these items.

Literature Review

My review of the existing literature, which discusses the orientation of sartorial fetish items in museums and archives revealed significant gaps. In fact, I found no scholarly work that directly discussed how these sartorial fetish items fared in museums and archives, or how orientation played a role in how people access or understand these items in museums. This required me to broaden my search. To address this gap, I engage the fields of museum studies, queer studies, new materialisms, and fashion theory in an interdisciplinary manner. Many of the sources found in this literature review are themselves interdisciplinary drawing from two or more disciplines to address complex problems. A majority of the information mined is situated in North America and Western Europe, although a minority of the information covers non-Western regions as well, and many of the museum-specific texts explore both traditional and community archives. Each of these fields brings valuable insight to how or why institutional collections might acquire sartorial fetish items and how those items are oriented towards users once the items are officially accessioned by museums, archives, or other collections.

As mentioned, I will draw from Ahmed's new materialist framework to inform my methods but did not draw significantly from this pool of literature otherwise. What should be understood about new materialist arguments is that they tend to ask us to view

objects/things and how we interact with them, or how they interact with each other, through new lenses. This is important to keep in mind and throughout and is an area that researchers such as Bill Brown, Barbara Bolt, and Jane Bennett, amongst many others, have discussed at length. Although there are many directions I could have chosen, I specifically selected Ahmed for this study as she situates her work within in the disciplines of women's, gender, and sexuality studies, as well as queer studies. Similarly, I seek to develop a new lens for sartorial fetish items from a queer perspective, so that these items are understood as valuable pieces of history, art, and culture in a museum, collection, or archive by potentially reorienting individuals in new ways towards items in archival collections.

Disrupting how we think about and understand the world around us is a key tenet of queer studies, which seeks to challenge how objects, individuals, and societies are organized. Although queer theories are relevant to a variety of different topics and disciplines, I work primarily with academic research that discusses sexuality in collections, museums, and archives. Jennifer Tyburczy uses a queer perspective and argues that all museums display objects related to sex as well as suggests that an experimental display tactic might be employed when exhibiting these items. She calls her method "queer curatorship," and describes it as curatorship that "stages alternative spatial configurations for two distinct purposes: to expose how traditional museums socialize heteronormative relationships between objects and visitors and to cope with ethically fraught objects of queer cultures, for example, leather whips as objects with historical ties to both gay leather/kink culture and antebellum slavery."²⁸ Although Tyburczy directly

mentions LA&M, and once worked there, she comments mostly on how items in the museum exhibits relate to each other, rather than how we orient users towards those items. Likewise, although she spends a significant amount of time discussing LA&M, she does not analyze sartorial fetish items. She does offer insight, though, that is particularly relevant to how archives might possibly approach items like sartorial fetish items, through queer curatorship.

Like Tyburczy, Robert Mills also argues for the queering of the museum, specifically stating that there is a tendency in museums to conflate queer curation, exhibition, and/or research with LGBTQ+ histories rather than to understand it as a method of managing items in the museum.²⁹ Although queer is also used as a term that defines an identity, Mills makes the distinction that queer museum practice can, and should be applied to more than just LGBTQ+ exhibits and collections. This experimental technique connects to new materialist arguments by redefining subject-object relationships in a visual way through museum exhibit design and labels, making it an ideal tool for exploring the display of sartorial fetish items in museums and other exhibitions. He argues that this practice can combat the way traditional display methods tend to marginalize the histories of diverse sexualities. Thus, like Tyburczy, Mills specifically draws on the relationship between items, rather than on the relationship that individuals have with those items.

Although traditional museums and archives might be just learning about queer techniques, many community archives already engage a form of queer curatorship by addressing the heteronormative biases that tend to shape mainstream institutions and

eschewing formal archival science practices. For example, Shawn(ta) Smith-Cruz et al. use narrative research to explore the history of the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA) focusing on the “radical departure from conventional archival practices” and community-based structure which has shaken off the organization prevalent in institutional archives.³⁰ The items at LHA cover lesbian histories and realities, which would typically be cataloged in mainstream collections under subject headings that were either derogatory or miscellaneous. As such, standard archival techniques gave way to newly created subject headings that sought to reorient individuals towards items in their collections in ways that decentralized homophobic hierarchies.³¹ Because traditional systems of cataloging and exhibition often hide and marginalize sartorial fetish items, it is important to examine the texts, processes, and structures that orient users—both laypeople and museum professionals—towards these items. However, Smith-Cruz et al. never touch on sexual minorities outside of the lesbian community and lean more towards understanding this specific archive. I will return to discuss some elements of LHA later in Chapters Two and Three.

Re-orientation is about more than juxtaposing items and changing or augmenting the way we catalog. Orientation, in this case, is about changing how users think. While increasing exposure, re-writing exhibit labels, and changing the classifications of sartorial fetish items in catalogs and databases are all vital to the process of changing orientation, we must also begin to change the way that we think about sex in society as a whole. This shift is necessary because sex is no longer something that lurks in the shadows hidden from view. Linda Williams not only defines obscenity as sexually explicit information

hidden off-scene but also offers a helpful way to re-orient society towards material that was once forbidden through the queer lens of “on/scenity.” On/scenity is described as, “the gesture by which a culture brings on to its public arena the very organs, acts, bodies, and pleasures that have heretofore been designated ob/scene,” and is one possible way to indicate that sex in the form of fashion, film (pornographic or otherwise), literature, and other forms of art are now progressively available in the public sphere.³² Thus, a negotiation must ensue where previously museums, collections, and archives sought to hide, forget, or villainize items related to sex or sexuality in the name of public safety. The proliferation of sexual material available in our everyday lives warrants a frank and honest conversation in safe spaces, such as museums and archives, as well as wider collection in those same spaces to reflect these changes in society as there are tangible consequences for their dismissal, including continued prejudice leading to violence against sexual minorities. Although Williams does not specifically discuss museums or sartorial fetish items, she offers a framework for thinking about sex differently, which aligns with my own ideas about the cataloging and display of material related to sex and sexuality.

Like queer studies, the field of museum studies is concerned with the display of sex and sexuality. However, much of the scholarly works in museum studies tend to focus on audience reception and donor relations. Mark Liddiard focuses on the limitations in museum culture and the effect it has on the display and discussion of sex, gender, and sexuality in these spaces through survey and interview data collected from museum visitors and professionals in the United Kingdom.³³ His data shows that both

museum professionals and audience members believe that exhibits are not neutral and frequently leave out or censor contentious topics. Liddiard gives three reasons for the continued avoidance of sex and sexuality in museums including fear of audience discontent, removal of funding as a result of displeasing donors or the state, and museums' implicit understanding of culture as a way to protect society and its members from that which may be harmful or distasteful.³⁴ Liddiard seeks to disprove the first by illustrating that there is significant "public appetite" for museum exhibits that discuss sex. He cites both the increase in consumption of television programs detailing the history of sex, sexuality, pornography, and romance and information gathered in the British Social Attitudes Survey which showed that people are more relaxed in their attitudes towards sex in the media.³⁵ Unfortunately, this relaxation in the general public has not led to lasting or structural changes in the ways that museum exhibit or collection sex in Western Europe and the United States.

What has changed is the proliferation of temporary exhibits exploring ancient artifacts depicting sex and discussing histories relating to LGBTQ+ realities. One such temporary exhibit documented the struggles of displaying LGBTQ+ histories and items in the Chicago History Museum, a museum not focused on the display of sex. Jill Austin et al.'s case study examined the design, curatorial practice, board member and administration buy-in, and audience reception (surveying both LGBTQ+ and straight/cis communities) regarding their exhibit *Out in Chicago*.³⁶ The Chicago History Museum opened the exhibit in 2012 seeking to educate the public about LGBT history in Chicago, with an emphasis discussing sex. While curating the exhibit, Austin et al. faced questions

about the appropriateness of many photos, objects, and subjects as museum administration was worried that some forms of sexuality were “potentially illicit when viewed by children or some heterosexual viewers,” leading to their removal before the opening.³⁷ Austin et al. specifically discuss worn items such as bras, and attempted to discuss BDSM community dynamics. This case study shows a real-world example of an attempt to re-orient the public via museum exhibits.

Austin et al. described the Chicago History Museum’s (CHM) desire to remove items, or place warning signs in front of exhibits that feature sex and sexuality. The museum staff believed the exhibit may “threaten” straight people and children, a common concern in Western museums. Mills, Tyburczy, and other researchers also discuss the urge that museums feel to limit entry to exhibits that discuss LGBTQ sex to adults, which seems to be an industry standard in Western Europe and the United States.³⁸ While this idea reinforces heterosexism and produces an “us versus them” binary where heterosexuality and the supposed asexuality of children is understood as pure and all other sexual practices and orientations are seen as non-normative and thus damaging, it still is a prevalent method used by museums even when the theme of the exhibit purports to do the opposite. Furthermore, *Out in Chicago* decided to depict fetishes by employing a “they’re just like us” framework rather than explaining differences as positive for those involved.³⁹ This framework reinforces a single understanding of sexual desire and prizes traditional monogamous or heterosexual relationships, rather than recognizing that relationships have a variety of forms and dynamics that reach beyond those traditional understandings. Although neither Liddiard nor Austin et al.’s studies specifically discuss

sartorial fetish items, both help to outline how the work products of the professional museum tend to reject topics that have any connection to sex or sexuality. This institutional knowledge is necessary to better understand the mission statements that I review in Chapter Two.

Finally, fashion theorists, Valerie Steele and Frenchy Lunning detail the interconnectedness between sartorial fetish items and mainstream fashion. Steele uses cultural discourse to explore how a diverse array of sartorial fetishism is not only about sex, sexuality, or gender identity, but is also about power and perception in both fetish communities and in the fashion and design industry,⁴⁰ whereas Lunning follows the word fetish from colonizers' interpretations of African religious and cultural practices to contemporary fashion cultures as a way to shed light on the tabooed subject and allow for greater acceptance societally.⁴¹ Because fashion is one of the most accessible forms of art, both seen and worn on a daily basis, it is important that we begin to explore why sartorial fetish items are infrequently displayed in institutional settings where designer pieces heavily influenced by sartorial fetish items are studied and displayed. This is especially important as a way to explore how sartorial items, created both for the fetish community and in relation to the fetish community, enjoy different and unequal power and exposure in collections, archives, and museums.

Gary Needham begins to explore this divide by examining the limits of the relationship between fashion and fetish through Williams's concept of on/scenity. He focuses on the fetish hood or mask, also commonly called a "gimp mask" in popular culture, occasionally referring to additional adornments associated with such hoods. The

hood is understood as tied to horror, dehumanization, and degradation in Western society, making it an unlikely item in the fashion industry.⁴² Although, high fashion design houses such as Givenchy have used hoods in their runway shows, and lookbooks, they almost never appear for sale to the general public.⁴³ While fashion most definitely draws from fetish, the hood seems to be one of the only items that is not understood as acceptable to wear in public, showing that even amongst sartorial fetish items there are hierarchies of acceptability in both fashion and society. This directly connects to how society is oriented towards worn items differently based on how they are positioned.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter Two, I explore the mission statements at LA&M and TFC and how they orient users towards sartorial fetish items housed in these collections. This chapter highlights how similar items in different collections are oriented towards users by using Ahmed's queer phenomenological work "Orientations Matter." In Chapter Three, I discuss how online archives, finding aids, and catalog records shape the way that users understand and interpret items in collections. I look at how LA&M and TFC present their holdings by discussing the different online pathways for finding leather vests associated with sartorial fetish communities. Finally, the conclusion returns to how museums control and shape public perception through the orientation of items and histories in their collections. I emphasize the importance of including sartorial fetish items in museum collections and exhibits, as well as in an institution's metadata, as a way to create acceptance and understanding. Likewise, the conclusion offers areas of further study and

discusses why this subject is a necessary topic in the field of women's and gender studies, as well as other disciplines.

CHAPTER II

METADATA

Twice a week, I made my way to the Texas Fashion Collection (TFC) at the University of North Texas (UNT) in Denton. The terracotta-colored temporary building on the outskirts of campus houses both the TFC and the School of Fashion Design and Merchandising. The building is underwhelming from the outside in fact, for almost a year, the front window was cracked. The door to TFC is always locked since the collection is available to the public by appointment only. So, I send Janelle, the part-time staff assistant, a text message to let her know that I am here. She's late most of the time because her other part-time position as a library aid is across campus. I sit and wait in the mismatched vinyl chairs of the student lounge until she arrives. She always walks in flustered and red-faced, muttering "sorry, sorry, sorry" under her breath while unlocking the door after her walk in the 90-degree heat. As you cross the threshold into the space, it feels different from the sad student lounge with the cracked window or walking across the hot Texas pavement, because the archive is cooled to 67 degrees and filled with over 20,000 items. Motion-sensor-controlled fluorescent lights turn on with an audible click as you walk through the collection, like someone snapping their fingers. Although shelves with hundreds of blueish-grey archival boxes filled with shoes, hats, scarves, textiles, jewelry, and handbags (accessories) surround the perimeter of the archive, a majority of the space is dominated by colorful hanging items. However, this space does not look like a large closet or a retail store with easily accessible items at eye-level, as most of the

collection is located on two-tiered racks 7 feet and 16 feet off the ground, reaching almost to the ceiling.

There are only two staff members: Janelle, who spends twenty hours a week supervising volunteers and acting as the collection manager and registrar, and Annette, the director of the collection who does everything else, meaning she is frequently out of the office. Because the TFC has no exhibition space, setting up and tearing down exhibits at local shopping malls, art galleries, and temporary spaces around campus occupy a tremendous amount of Annette's time. The staff is only augmented by an occasional undergraduate fashion design or merchandising student who spends a few hours on tasks such as sewing padded hangers, cleaning items returned from loans or exhibits, or researching specific designers. Because of the barebones crew, I spent a lot of time alone and unsupervised at TFC. My research was alarmingly silent, and occasionally if I sat long enough examining an item the automatic lights would snap off, and I'd have to stand up and wave my arms to remind them that I was still there staring at a button, a seam, or a weaving pattern.

I've spent a lot of hours in archives as a volunteer, intern, and researcher; and while I am used to archives and museums being cold, sparsely populated, and quiet I've rarely been granted unsupervised, unfettered access to a collection or collection management system like I was afforded at the TFC. By contrast, my work at the LA&M was always supervised by Mel, the archivist. While I completed my research at LA&M, it felt like someone was always watching. This is reinforced because at LA&M every action requires supervision, including opening the front door to the museum. The doors to the

building remain locked, even during business hours. The windowless, former synagogue is located in Rogers Park, the northeasternmost neighborhood in Chicago. Neither the gallery nor the library is visible from the entryway, and only a small sample of pin- and patch-covered vests are displayed near the lockers that all visitors are required to use for their personal belongings.

LA&M boasts two full-time staff members: a director (Gary) and archivist (Mel). Additionally, there are four part-time staff members who assist with bookkeeping (Michelle), facilities operations (José), leather conservation and exhibit preparation (Leslie), and guest services (Adam). At any given time, there are anywhere between eight and twelve volunteers active, who work on a variety of projects from exhibits to the digitization of the collection. In comparison to other archives I've visited, LA&M is frequently noisy and full of people. Most of the volunteers are members of kink or queer communities and are highly skilled, with graduate-level degrees in disciplines such as library science, history, sociology, and visual art. In fact, I frequently run into an emeritus professor of psychology flipping through kink periodicals from the 1970s in the library on Sundays. This sex museum, like many others, is maintained and researched primarily by kink community members. However, those same community members also tend to be highly-trained professionals, or graduate students in the fields of archival, library, conservation, and museum sciences.

My experiences as a researcher at both archives also included hours of interaction with items and information in the digital spaces organized and maintained by both LA&M and TFC on their websites. Although my dealings with LA&M and TFC might

have sent me on a journey analyzing the physical spaces and interactions related to community or traditional archives and museums, as Beins,⁴⁴ Strub⁴⁵ or Tyburczy⁴⁶ do, I was particularly interested in how these burgeoning digital spaces and the information they provide oriented users towards items in their collections. My first interactions happened on the websites of both archives, and I conjecture that for most users, the website is their first and sometimes only connection to cultural institutions. This digital presence is one way in which many archives are changing the way that users interact with archives and the materials they protect.⁴⁷ As such, this chapter seeks to illuminate how one element, the mission statement, orients digital users towards sartorial fetish items at both LA&M and TFC. I accomplish this by examining the language, structure, and presentation of these missions to the public on their respective websites.

Missions are foundational statements meant to act as “an objective, brief, and hopefully inspiring assertion of [a museum’s or archive’s] *raison d’etre*, or relevance.”⁴⁸ Gail Dexter Lord and Barry Lord tell us that a mission statement acts as a guiding document that explains why anyone should care about the museum or archive in question. Likewise, The American Alliance of Museums (AAM), the national professional association of museums in the United States, explains that the mission statement, also occasionally called a statement of purpose, is one of five core documents necessary to operate a professional museum.⁴⁹ Thus, not only does a mission statement tell users why any museum or archive is important, but it also acts as a foundational document for a professional institution. Although visitors or researchers outside of the museum may experience the mission statement as a document created specifically to orient prospective

visitors towards the collection, professionals may understand the document in other ways. This is because mission statements also act as one of the central parts of an archive's collections management policy. Specifically, many professionals understanding the mission as a guiding statement from which all collections activities and policies emanate.⁵⁰ The mission guides how the collections are cared for and presented to the public, how public programs are structured or offered, and how finances are allotted or staff members are hired. As such, the mission statement is a starting point that acts as an orienting document for both professionals and visitors to the institution in a variety of different ways.

Because missions speak to [or “target”?] a wide range of audiences, they become rich sites for analysis, offering insight into how museums and archives view their activities, obligations, audience, and collections, as well as how they align or differ from best practices or common practices used by similar institutions. It is important to keep in mind that mission statements specifically act as orienting devices that gives clues about what items will be “in place” at archives and which are not.⁵¹ Items that are “in place” are those which make sense within the context of their surroundings including the physical and digital space, and in how cultural institutions describe themselves. However, mission statements are also typically brief and general, meaning that they can sometimes be challenging documents that tell us little about the diverse items housed in an archive. This is especially true when you are searching for items that might not be the central focus of a museum or archive. As such, the mission statements at museums and archives rely on users' prior orientations and understandings of the words and concepts presented

within them to frame the archives holdings, goals, and obligations. The reliance on previous orientations becomes particularly important when searching for sartorial fetish items in archives because although few museums and archives specialize in these items, many have them in their collections.

As a researcher specifically interested in sartorial fetish items, I've spent a lot of time searching the websites of cultural institutions, both traditional and those run by community members. As such, I quickly realized that when I accessed mission statements at a variety of archives, they rarely directly mentioned the existence of sartorial fetish items. This was not surprising to me because outside of LA&M, I have not encountered another museum or archive that specifically collects items related to a community that is so closely invested in sartorial fetish items. Many archives do house these items, but do not mention them explicitly, I began to engage in closer readings of the mission statements at archives to see if any clues existed that might indicate that these spaces might have sartorial fetish items. I selected LA&M and TFC because both archives had sartorial fetish items, and both recently made significant changes to their websites and the information available to the public in these digital spaces. Furthermore, I began to think about the mission statements and our preconceived orientations as users, and how they inform the ways in which I access sartorial fetish items in collections. As both a visitor to these archives and a museum professional, I inhabited a unique space where I was an outsider, but one with insider knowledge about how museum and archives function.⁵² This allowed me to examine how metadata were factors in accessing sartorial fetish items in these two archives.

To better understand how mission statements act as orienting devices for all users of archives, including visitors and professionals, it is important to first explain what metadata are and why they are important in archival spaces. Metadata, or data about data, may present itself as formal systems such as Dublin Core, a widely employed schema used in libraries to make locating books simpler for users not familiar with formal library cataloging conventions,⁵³ or as finding aids in museums and archives, which give a brief description of the size, condition, location, and contents of specific collections.⁵⁴ These systems are most recognizable to professionals working in museums, archives, and libraries and seek to organize material in ways that make objects and information more easily accessible. Some are also regulated by national or international governing bodies that help to ensure consistent descriptions, so multiple system users, such as public, university, or national libraries, are able to locate data based on the simplified descriptions in both their own collections and participating collections elsewhere. These schemas tend to be rigid and unforgiving and are slow and difficult to change and adapt because of their overwhelming scale. These metadata conventions and rules tend to be hidden from view of outside users but act as a way to bridge a gap between the needs or wants of a visitor and the complex technical language and systems followed by professionals at these institutions.

Not all metadata systems are as strict as national or international library schemas. In fact, most archives and museums only apply strict library cataloging rules to their circulating libraries and use more flexible forms of metadata to categorize objects and archives in their collections. Although there are best practices for writing finding aids and

general archival description put forth by professional museum and archival associations, such as the AAM or the Society of American Archivists (SAA), the format and content of any of these work products found in a museum or archive are typically governed by the institutions themselves. Because archival science as a field arose primarily as a professional necessity in collections, rather than a purely academic discipline, the knowledge surrounding archival standards and conventions is diverse and sometimes chaotic.⁵⁵ But this diversity allows for difference and inclusion in ways that truly standardized fields, like library science, do not. This is partially possible because archives are typically not public facing and do not require a search system that leads outside users to the exact item that they are hoping to take home with them and curl up on the couch to read with a cup of tea. That being said, many archives now offer some form of access tool to the public, typically finding aids or a search bar on their websites, where websites exist.⁵⁶ I will return to discuss access tools available on websites in more detail in the following chapter.

Finally, in addition to more formal types of metadata, typically in the form of finding aids or online archives, both LA&M and TFC also produce even more relaxed types of metadata for users on their websites. A majority of the information available on websites is informal metadata, including that which covers topics such as staffing, location and hours of operation, calendars of events, and each archive's history, just to name a few. Like their more formal metadata counterparts, informal metadata function as a repository, in this case, a digital repository, of information relating to the collection. Informal metadata is not governed by a singular or standardized conventions or policies,

set forth by a governing body or manager, either internally or externally at museums, archives, and libraries. Although some museums and archives have official policies specifically governing the format and content of their websites, neither TFC nor LA&M have such documents.⁵⁷ Understanding the difference between what formal and informal metadata are is sometimes fuzzy and frequently unknown to visitors to websites. To illustrate this distinction, consider the following: all dog owners who live in Chicago are required to register their pet with the city, and all dogs must wear a tag when in public. However, many dog owners chose to add another tag to their dog's collar with contact information and the name of the pet. The tag required by the city, in this case, is a form of formal metadata describing the dog through a set of prescribed conventions. The second tag, containing demographic information about the pet, is an informal convention that gives information not mandated in any formal fashion. Although I will specifically explore mission statements in this chapter, there is a wealth of information found on these and other websites that needs exploration, since this informal metadata also orients users towards specific items and collections in general.

Mission Statements

In November 2018, LA&M launched an updated version of their website found at leatherarchives.org. The home page is topped by the boot logo and flashes a stream of photos of their exhibits, library, and theater. In the center of the homepage in large type, you find the mission statement of the archive. Although all of the elements present on the home page seek to orient visitors to the website and the museum itself, the mission statement stands out both because of the size of the lettering and the positioning of the

text on the homepage, as you can see in Figure 1. As a visitor to the LA&M website, you are instantly drawn to the mission statement as it is the largest text, centered on the page. The mission statement reads: “Making leather, kink, BDSM, and fetish accessible through research, preservation, education and community engagement.”⁵⁸

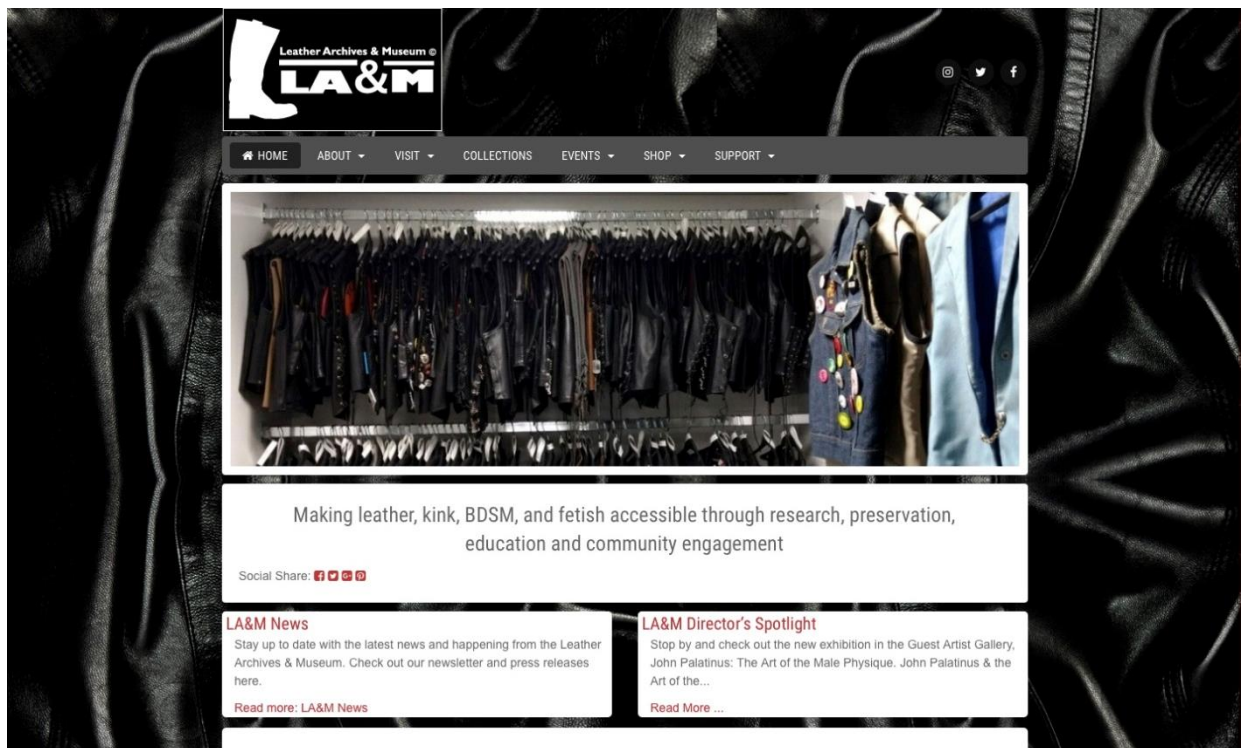


Figure 1. Homepage of the Leather Archives and Museum’s Website. As mentioned, the mission statement is clearly visible from the first page that you see when visiting LA&M’s website. The mission statement is not clearly marked as such, however; it is more widely accessible than many of the mission statements at other institutions.

This mission statement acts as a welcome to the archive and all that it has to offer for visitors to the website. One of my first reactions to the mission statement was that the placement of the mission statement on the homepage of LA&M seemed somewhat unusual. To be honest, it actually seemed very unusual. If you were to stop reading here and visit the website of a museum or archive near you, chances are you would need to

navigate away from the homepage to encounter their mission statement. I have found that many times missions are found under the “about the archive” headings, as there is typically not a place on the homepage that directly says, “mission statement.” At other museums and archives, it is even more difficult to locate and requires several redirects. The Dallas Museum of Art requires visitors to the website to select “about” and then select “mission statement” from the second menu to reach their statement as you can see in Figure 2.⁵⁹ Thus, I was intrigued and wondered why LA&M chose to use the mission statement as one of the first orienting devices visitors would encounter on the website, especially since the mission statement isn’t something that nonprofessional users would expressly seek out when deciding to visit a museum or archive.



Figure 2. Dallas Museum of Art: Pathway to the Mission Statement.

To reach the mission statement of the Dallas Museum of Art visitors must navigate away from the homepage, select about, and then mission statement. This three-step process is common on museum websites, making LA&M’s forward-facing mission statement a somewhat unique structure amongst museums and archives.

As a visitor, you are given several important pieces of orienting information about what you might expect to encounter if you were to come to LA&M. Those items include the goal of the museum (making...accessible), what they collect (leather, kink, BDSM, and fetish), and the intended audience (those who wish to participate in research,

preservation, education, and community engagement surrounding these topics or objects). The intended audience is described in such broad terms that it seems that the archive is aimed towards the general public, which is an interesting choice for a community archive, as these institutions tend to specialize in subcultures. As such, many community museums specifically align themselves with a narrow audience rather than the general public. I will return to the tensions between community and traditional archives this later in this chapter and discuss this more in depth. As an orienting device, the mission at LA&M, acts as a beginning point for visitors, allowing them to proceed from that point and progress to an understanding of the space and objects it might house.⁶⁰ And in this case, since the mission statement is both central to the understanding of LA&M as an institution, and is also central in the home page's design, a visitor would likely deem this an important place to start gathering information about the archive.

The placement of the mission statement on the TFC website, available at tfc.unt.edu, is more traditional, requiring users to navigate away from the homepage. I came across the archive just over a year earlier in August of 2017, when I moved to Denton for graduate school. At that time the TFC mission statement read, "The Texas Fashion Collection, housed at the University of North Texas, is dedicated to the preservation and documentation of historic dress from the nineteenth century, along with twentieth century examples of haute couture, high fashion, and ready-to-wear by notable American and international designers."⁶¹ This mission statement is now the opening line to the "history" section of the website, and a new mission has been posted to

the website since late 2017. However, at the end of 2017, a new mission and vision statement appeared on the website. They read:

“TFC Vision: As part of the College of Visual Arts and Design at the University of North Texas, the Texas Fashion Collection bridges academic and popular understandings of fashion history through research and programming.

TFC Mission: The Texas Fashion Collection preserves and presents the history of fashion relating to its collection of historic and designer garments and accessories.”⁶²

Although similar to the initial mission statement that I encountered, there are subtle differences in the goals, description of the collection, and intended audience that sought to orient users in a different way than they were oriented previously.

The mission statements were, in the case of TFC, revised, or, in the case of LA&M, repositioned, on the websites while I conducted research at these sites from 2017-2019. Each acts as a way to define these cultural institutions and engage the public, making them useful tools when thinking about how users both inside and outside of the collections are oriented towards the items in the archives. Mission statements are many times the beginning for museum professionals working in archives, as missions tend to shape the landscape in which they carry out duties and forming the backbone of policies that govern their day-to-day work. This means that professionals are positioned differently than first-time visitors with no museum or archival background who are not expressly looking for the mission statements and are perhaps just determining if they would like to visit a museum or archive. Ahmed explains that existing orientations “shape how the world coheres around [individuals].”⁶³ As such, it makes sense that how users

interact with these texts shape how they understand these spaces as a whole. Mission statements seemed like an ideal location to start a discussion about how we understand what these documents tell us about the collections at TFC and LA&M for two reasons. First, because LA&M recently reframed the mission statement as an important place to start learning more about their space by placing it on their homepage. Second, because TFC reaffirmed the importance of their mission statement through a significant revision.

Orientations

I initially began volunteering at TFC in 2017 because I'd moved to Denton, TX, for graduate school and needed a place to keep my archival skills sharp. When I emailed the director, Annette, I told her about my background and interests and explained that I understood that there would not be as many opportunities to work with fetish items in the archive, but that I was interested in learning more about high fashion, assuring her that I would be a good fit. I found myself feeling like I needed to explain that I was qualified to volunteer at TFC even though I was interested in studying fetish fashion. I assumed that Annette would begin with negative feelings about my interest in sartorial fetish items based on several factors, but one of those was the mission statement that was posted on the TFC's website in Fall 2017. If I were not living in Denton at the time, I would not have looked more closely at the collection in an attempt to find sartorial fetish items based on this statement. My hesitation stemmed from what they believed was the core of their collection (haute couture, historic dress, ready-to-wear, and high fashion by notable designers). In fact, after reading that mission I was fairly certain that there would be no examples of sartorial fetish items in the collection to study. Upon arrival, I was surprised

to learn that there were two ensembles,⁶⁴ both designed for male-bodied individuals, from the leather communities that were accessioned less than a year before I began volunteering at the archive. Furthermore, Annette was in the process of speaking to a latex designer who eventually donated a dress of her own design to the collection.

The existence of these items at TFC was intriguing to me because of my interactions with the archive's website and my professional background working in museums and archives. Although I would expect to see some items related to sex and sexuality in large, traditional collections such as the British Museum or the Smithsonian Museum, solely because of the vastness of their collections, I generally would not expect to see a leather harness, jock strap, or slave collar at a mid-sized, traditional fashion collection housed within a state-run university's fashion design program. I believed this because I was oriented towards traditional institutions in a way that would discourage me from assuming that sartorial fetish items would be present in the TFC. This is in large part due to the wealth of published arguments about why traditional museum and archives do not, or should not, exhibit or collect items related to sex and sexuality. Some of these reasons include the following: archives are worried about public outcry related to items or themes that might be controversial,⁶⁵ children might happen upon these items or exhibits and these topics are inappropriate for young people,⁶⁶ the collection of items related to sex or sexuality is immoral and, therefore, socially harmful,⁶⁷ sex and sexuality, especially when specific to minority groups, should be housed and interpreted by those minority groups,⁶⁸ and certain forms of sex, specifically kinky or homosexual sex, are not culturally appropriate or natural.⁶⁹ As such, when I entered TFC, I assumed that I would

not find sartorial fetish items because of the way that museum and archival scholarship prepared me to understand traditional archives.

When I began researching at LA&M, I was certain that I would find sartorial fetish items in their archive and did. However, I was astonished to find that those items were not expressly described in the mission statement. I expected to see sartorial fetish items mentioned directly in the missions because worn items are central to the sexual desires of this community. However, I was left to rely on my own knowledge of kink and fetish fashion, the leather community, and archival science, as well as other, primarily informal, forms of metadata (e.g., photographs on the website) and the recognition that LA&M was a community archive.⁷⁰ The mission statement was shockingly similar to many that I had encountered on the websites of traditional archives and museums and led me to wonder why the staff was choosing to orient users via the tools that traditional archives used. This thought was a result of my academic training and orientations towards community archives as well as my knowledge about the relationship to traditional archival and library practice harbored by many community archives that expressly deal with sex and sexuality, and even more specifically with sexual minorities. I will return to this later in this chapter and discuss this rejection of traditional archival science by community archives in more detail in relationship to mission statements.

TFC & LA&M

My orientations towards what I assumed existed in TFC emanated in part from the information I gathered, including the mission statement, and in part from my own experiences. That information changed dramatically, for users when the mission

statement was revised, and there are quite a few differences between the initial mission statement that I encountered in 2017, and the current mission and vision statements on TFC's website. The primary difference is the shift from collecting "haute couture, high fashion, and ready-to-wear" items to collecting "historic and designer garments and accessories." This change in language is one that broadens the possibility that sartorial fetish items, which are primarily created by designers outside of the high fashion realm, might be included at this archive. This space for items outside of the previously defined realm of high fashion is first created in the wording of the new mission. This is important, as Ahmed tells us, because changes in orientation can begin by changes in how we allocate or arrange spaces.⁷¹ In this case, there is new space created by the broadness present in the mission of TFC, which potentially allows visitors with previous knowledge of sartorial fetish items to pause before assuming that this archive does not have the items desired. In addition, this change also allows professionals working at TFC to consider potential new accessions in a different light. Although this does not assure that more sartorial fetish items will enter TFC, it does allow them to enter the archive based on their mission and vision rather than implicitly exclude them, as the mission did before.

The new mission and vision also indicate change through the acknowledgment that "accessories" are part of the collection. Although accessories have always been a part of the archive, since it began as the Neiman Marcus Collection in 1938, they have not always had visibility in the collection.⁷² The inclusion of the word "accessories" in the mission statement tells users explicitly that these items are part of the collection and signals that these items are important to a fashion collection. This inclusion of the word

accessories is more significant than it might seem to individuals outside of fashion design, merchandising, history, or theory. The term “accessory” is understood by many fashion theorists to be an item that accentuates fashion, rather than a part of fashion.⁷³ Although related, accessories such as shoes, hats, jewelry, scarves, and bags, do not tend to draw the same respect in the fashion world as clothing and have historically been relegated to their own, separate category. As such, the inclusion of this genre of items in the mission statement is quietly working to change the way that visitors are oriented towards both the collection and fashion. The mention of accessories in the new mission and vision statements specifically leaves space for sartorial fetish items, such as collars, masks and, hats, as these are items typically understood as accessories. Accessories are typically of high importance in fetish communities because they can be worn to let people in public know that you are a member of a fetish community.⁷⁴ Moreover, at events for the fetish community, accessories signal one’s specific affiliations: two well-known examples include attaching a small fur tail to your pants or skirt to signal that you are a part of the furry community and wearing different colored bandanas in your back pockets to signal a preference for different sexual acts.

While the new mission and vision statements do not necessarily lead individuals without previous exposure to sartorial fetish items towards those items in their collection, the change signals to both someone embedded in the fashion world and someone with no background that there is a potential shift in how TFC understands their collection. This shift could indicate to visitors that there is a change in what TFC collects, how it values what it already has in the archive, and/or how it produces knowledge surrounding those

items. Although something like the accessioning of leather fetish items, which occurred in 2017, might seem small, this action is one that has the potential to change the social contract between TFC and the public. While there is no guarantee that more sartorial fetish accessories will ever end up as accessioned items in TFC, the presence of the word “accessories” does begin to challenge how we are oriented towards these items in the context of fashion.

Because what we “do do” shapes what we “can do” in the future, TFC’s acceptance and recognition of accessories in their mission statement, and in a very limited sense their acceptance of sartorial fetish accessories in their collection, takes small steps towards changing long-held orientations towards these items.⁷⁵ This idea that what we do now shapes what can happen in the future is particularly poignant in the setting of a museum, archive, or collection because these spaces are typically open to the public and seek to educate visitors to their spaces, either in-person or online, about their holdings. Additionally, what we do in a university collection primarily visited by and used by fashion design and merchandising students, faculty, and researchers has the potential to shape how the new professionals and academics, who will populate archives and teach upcoming professionals, think about the objects they protect.

Unlike TFC, the mission statement at LA&M sets the stage both because of its location and because of its content. The mission tells users that LA&M is centered around specific communities (leather, kink, BDSM, fetish) that the reader may or may not be familiar with. This signals that sex-specific material should be accessible to the public, reinforcing that LA&M believes this material is worthy of numerous forms of

engagement, which the general public may participate in directly and indirectly.⁷⁶ The mission of LA&M, as an institution that specifically collects, displays, and preserves sex-specific items, orients users towards the value of these items in a way that TFC does not. The mission directly tells users that they will encounter fetish items; however, it is non-specific about if those items are sartorial items. As such, visitors with no knowledge of leather, kink, BDSM, or fetish communities could surmise that some of the items in the collection are things that are worn though through other clues in the mission statement, something that is in direct contrast with TFC. While TFC tells users that items in their holdings are worn, they do not mention that any of them are directly connected to sex or sexuality.

A keyword that orients users towards the assumption that sartorial leather items might exist in LA&M's collection is the word "leather." For many, the word leather is associated with a material that is worn or used in the same way that cloth might be used. This orientation does not require an understanding of or connection to a sexual minority community but is one that individuals bring with them before interacting with the archive because leather as a material "takes a form that is 'more or less' familiar" to the general public.⁷⁷ For some, leather might remind them of their living room sofa, others may connect it to footballs or baseball mitts, for me, my association has been and always will be shoes. This is because leather is also closely associated with mainstream clothing, as well as fetish fashion. In whatever way users think of leather or leather items, this familiarity allows individuals to make connections, with no information other than the mission statement, and to assume that LA&M might have sartorial fetish items in their

archive based solely on the fact that leather is mentioned. Although both missions contained clues that sartorial fetish items may exist, some were more explicit than others.

Power and Orientation

All users come to museums and archives with a wealth of personal experiences and a lifetime worth of orientations towards things and ideas. It is therefore, important to remember that although visitors exploring a cultural institution or its website are bringing their preconceived notions about the objects curated and protected therein, they are also interacting with an authority (the museum) with which they have an implicit social contract. Because the museum acts as an authority many assume that the items held within its collections are valuable. Carol Duncan argues that the stance of the modern museum is not neutral, despite decades of perceived neutrality and concludes that museums are power structures in society, maintained to control representations of communities, objects, and information through performed rituals (exhibits) which seek to confirm or deny specific identities as valuable.⁷⁸ As such, museums and archives acknowledge the value of certain objects and histories by collecting, exhibiting, preserving, and interpreting some items and ignoring others. This practice creates tension between the orientations that visitors hold and the orientations that cultural institutions wish to create and is the most pronounced when looking at archives that collect items related to controversial topics or communities.

The field of museum studies has historically discussed how museums orient users towards items in collections: texts, objects, and exhibitions produced by museum staff communicate, interact with, or potentially act as a transaction between museum

professionals (or the museum as a whole) and visitors. Some visitors may see the mission statement and interact with LA&M, TFC, or any other archives as Duncan describes, as assumed authorities on worthwhile topics. However, when cultural institutions choose to exhibit sex or sexuality there may be factors that challenge this authority. Americans have long been oriented towards sex, sexuality, and sex-specific items as private, at best, and obscene or pornographic, at worst. This is in part because museums themselves, in the United States and abroad, have historically limited or entirely denied the viewing of material and/or metadata related to sex and sexuality through museum policy and local and federal laws, which have restricted access to such items in museums and archives since the nineteenth century.⁷⁹ Therefore metadata, such as a mission statement found in a general history, art, or science museum may more likely fall into the category of assumed authority that Duncan describes. Visitors interacting with LA&M and TFC may approach the missions, and each archive as a whole, in a different way based on the content of those statements and on their personal orientations towards that perceived content.

Jem Fraser explains that museums and archives are transactional and explains that transaction as a “dynamic interaction between the museum object,” or in this case metadata about types of objects that may be in the custody of the museum, “and the individual visitor.”⁸⁰ This acknowledges that the mission is an informational piece of metadata that visitors to the website may see, but that the presentation of this metadata, and eventually the objects themselves, is not one-sided. Rather, the mission is a negotiation between the existing power structure (the museum) and the experiences,

thoughts, and opinions (previous orientation towards objects of a sexual nature) that a visitor may have when they first encounter the mission statement. It should be understood that the mission and other forms of metadata allow professionals the opportunity to orient new visitors, but they are not absolute, as visitors also bring their previous orientations with them when interacting with the provided texts. This is hopeful as it suggests that orientation is fluid and has the ability to change with the introduction of new information. Ahmed explains that marginalized groups can claim space that has been historically denied to them and in doing so, are able to begin the slow process of changing the orientations of the general public towards both those communities and the spaces they reclaim.⁸¹ At LA&M the mission claims space by valuing fetish items openly, as a museum and an authority, and at TFC the mission creates space so that fetish items might become part of the broader academic understanding of fashion.

Metadata and its Malcontents

Although I have discussed how the structure of LA&M's mission follows best practices for museums set forth by professional organizations, it is important to see how and why this format is unique for a community archive. The Art Institute of Chicago offers the following mission: "The Art Institute of Chicago collects, preserves, and interprets works of art of the highest quality, representing the world's diverse artistic traditions, for the inspiration and education of the public and in accordance with our profession's highest ethical standards and practices."⁸² Like the mission of LA&M, the Art Institute of Chicago is brief and tells users the goals of the museum, the intended audience, and what the Institute collects. This structure is not typical amongst archives

that focus on sex and sexuality because these collections primarily grew out of communities that believed that their histories and objects were ignored or were inadequately or improperly interpreted by traditional institutions. As such, there tend to be significant differences in the structures of the missions of this type of museum or archive. For a visitor with no museum or archival background, it may seem unremarkable that two museums have similarly structured mission statements, especially if they are told that both statements follow the best practices required by a premier professional association.

Many queer community archives decided to reject archival science and, therefore, the forms and structures found in metadata such as mission statements at traditional archives, often as a way to critique the hierarchical power structures that many cultural institutions upheld.⁸³ To illustrate this, consider the mission of the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA), a sexuality specific, community archive in Brooklyn, New York, which is extensive, political, and highly detailed:⁸⁴

“The Lesbian Herstory Archives exists to gather and preserve records of Lesbian lives and activities so that future generations will have ready access to materials relevant to their lives. The process of gathering this material will uncover and collect our herstory denied to us previously by patriarchal historians in the interests of the culture which they serve. We will be able to analyze and reevaluate the Lesbian experience; we also hope the existence of the Archives will encourage Lesbians to record their experiences in order to formulate our living herstory.

We will collect and preserve any materials that are relevant to the lives and experiences of Lesbians: books, magazine, journals, news clippings (from establishment, Feminist or lesbian media), bibliographies, photos, historical information, tapes, films, diaries, oral histories, poetry and prose, biographies, autobiographies, notices of events, posters, graphics and other memorabilia.”⁸⁵

This dense mission statement reads more like a snapshot of a manifesto, and although rich in detail about who the LHA serves, the history of the LHA, and purpose of the archive, it does so in a fashion that is decidedly political, straying from the perceived neutrality of the traditional archive. In addition to sounding like a manifesto, the mission of LHA also seems to serve as a barrier, or way to protect the organization from those who might hold bigoted views towards the material they preserve. This protective instinct is missing from the mission statement of the LA&M. Instead, the mission statement of the LA&M reclaims the power of archival science and resists the urge to over-explain the tension between potential visitor orientations and the orientation that the archival space seeks to create.

These choices made by the LHA are common amongst community archives that collect sex- and sexuality-related items, making LA&M's mission statement stand out because it is so similar to missions created for traditional archives. Ahmed tells us that orientation is about direction and how structures (physical, psychological, or societal) put some objects or information within reach and place barriers in front of others.⁸⁶ In this case, the structure of the mission at LA&M feels as if the institution is seeking to reach a wider audience and break down many of the barriers that sex museums and archives typically employ. The structure of the mission at LA&M may well use metadata to orient users towards leather, kink, BDSM, and fetish objects in a way that feels familiar and comfortable to professionals and visitors alike, while also reasserting its power as a professional archive that just happens to feature sex and sexuality. While visitors may benefit from this because the language in the mission statement is accessible and familiar,

professionals are also reassured that LA&M is a professionally run museum and archive because their statement follows best practices for institutional missions. This breaking down of barriers and reassertion of importance, visible in the LA&M's mission statement, is important because it signals that the archive potentially seeks to orient individuals who might not know much about leather, kink, BDSM, and fetish communities so that their understanding of these communities broadens, something that community sex- and sexuality-specific collections have been wary of doing in the past.

Furthermore, the acceptance of sartorial fetish items might cause alarm amongst kink community members who worry that leather items will be misunderstood and misinterpreted, or worse, vilified. While I recognize the accessioning of sartorial fetish items as a way for TFC to broaden acceptance, others may not. Jane Bennett explains that how we discipline our bodies is constantly fluctuating based on our social relationships and understanding of ethics.⁸⁷ Bennett also tells us that how an individual manages their body (how they present or showcase their body and what they understand as acceptable and unacceptable) is in a state of constant negotiation based on ever-evolving social landscapes. The same is true of archives, which take in or expel items that fit their mission and space by considering the ethical and social obligations that an archive has to the public. Although museums do not discipline themselves, they are shaped and molded by the professionals who work in these spaces; those who staff archives are frequently making decisions about what is ethical or socially acceptable. Thus, many mainstream archives or museums are now creating exhibits that discuss topics like sex and sexuality in ways that they have not before.

One example of this is the *Out in Chicago* exhibit that was on display at the Chicago History Museum (CHM) in 2012, which I referred to in the introductory chapter. . Although *Out in Chicago* was a temporary exhibit it called to attention that exhibits about sex and sexuality were never before discussed at CHM and created space for queer realities in a traditional museum.⁸⁸ Bennett calls small-scale actions, which in this case could be the decision to accession leather fetish items into a traditional archival collection or to exhibit queer sex in a mainstream museum, “micropolitics” and argues that we must take these small political actions into account when creating official policy, lest that policy risks being meaningless.⁸⁹ As such, metadata like mission statements must match the small, everyday actions that the archive participates in to avoid being a set of words that guides neither the actions of professionals in the archive nor visitors seeking to interact with that archive in any meaningful way. Thus, the change in mission at TFC should indicate new relationships and reflect on both what the collection actually does and strives to become.

Where Metadata can take Users

Both LA&M and TFC offered new ways of exploring their connections via their mission statements. While the former did so by repositioning their statement and centralizing its importance, the latter did so by reframing the language used to describe their holdings. Although both missions follow conventions and best practices used in American museums and archives and both spaces house sartorial fetish items, the ways in which they lead you to those items are significantly different. This is likely due in part to the goals of the institutions, their affiliations with their communities or governing bodies

(leather and kink communities vs. University of North Texas), and the histories of how those communities or governing bodies have previously dealt with sartorial fetish items. Likewise, these mission statements are also shaped outside of the museums and archives, by individuals and their own orientations towards sartorial fetish items and their relationship with similar subjects outside of the power structure of these institutions.

Recognizing all of these ever-evolving elements matters. It is necessary to examine each (personal orientation, recognition of museum power, understanding of museum history, metadata produced by the museum), regardless of how you approach museums and collections, if users (professional or otherwise) are to more effectively access sartorial fetish items in the collection. Broadening the ability to access these items will take more than mission statements and will require a thorough examination of other forms of metadata, some of which will be discussed here, and others, such as informal metadata that should be examined elsewhere in the future. Although these forms of metadata are more relaxed, they tell a story that is not being told in the formal metadata and might offer insight into how museum professionals and visitors to those spaces, digital or on-ground, find information about sartorial fetish items (or other items they are seeking) in the archives. These areas of further study and the analysis presented here can begin to reshape how all users access items in archives, whether they do it as professionals working in those spaces or as casual visitors, by taking into consideration how the words we use and the presentation of those words shape how we interact with and understand objects.

CHAPTER III

TECHNOLOGY AND ARCHIVES

Technology helps to make archives more accessible to the general public regardless of where the brick-and-mortar sites are located or if individuals are physically able to visit those sites. Many museums and archives chose to make some, if not all, of their materials (or the metadata that describes these items) searchable, viewable, and/or fully available through using online archives. “Online archive” is an umbrella term that I will use throughout this section to describe an online space that holds a variety of metadata. Online archives typically act as a digital space that stores metadata such as finding aids and/or catalog records. Online archives are called a variety of names, including digital collection, internet archive, and online catalog, so although I will use the term online archive to describe this type of metadata it does not always match the title used museums or archives. In addition to having a variety of names, online archives tend to vary widely in their structure from institution to institution. This makes each search a unique experience, not only because the items in archives are unique but also because the systems and techniques used by these online archives are not governed by formal archival science practices in the same way that national or international library cataloging systems are standardized, organized, and/or codified. As such, online archives are a somewhat messy, grey area where museums and archives present the information they elect to share

with the public in ways that are sometimes vastly different than at institutions with similar subject matter and of a similar size or governance (community, traditional, non-profit, for-profit, etc.).

In this chapter, I seek to examine pathways and barriers to accessing sartorial fetish items in the online archives at both LA&M and TFC. I accomplish this by using the online archive, including available finding aids, catalog records, and other metadata, at both TFC and LA&M. Although both archives house several different items related to fetish communities, I decided to narrow my search to a single type of item, specifically any leather vest associated with leather fetish communities. I selected this type of item for three reasons. First, I know that at least one leather vest associated with leather fetish communities is an accessioned item at both LA&M and TFC because of the research that I have conducted on-site at both archives. Second, the leather vest is an iconic and well-known item in the leather fetish community that is recognizable to both community members and those outside of the leather fetish community as related to this subculture (see Figures 3 and 4 for examples from both LA&M and TFC). Finally, by searching for any leather vest associated with leather fetish communities, rather than a specific leather vest, I honor the situation that many first-time users of these archives might encounter when initially conducting research about an area of interest.



Figure 3. Leather Ensembles at the Texas Fashion Collection, including vest.



Figure 4. Leather Vests on Display at the Leather Archives and Museum.

Although I initially set out to follow identical pathways at both LA&M and TFC when searching for the item in question, the structures and resources available in their online archives did not allow for an identical, or a near identical, process of mapping out how to locate leather vests associated with sartorial fetish communities. As such, I initiated my approaches in an identical way, by accessing the online archives at both TFC and LA&M then examining the metadata tools provided to visitors in the form of finding aids and catalog records. My goal was not to compare and contrast these two archives and find one that was somehow superior but to find where pathways and barriers existed in online archives with known sartorial fetish items. Furthermore, because LA&M is a community archive and TFC is a traditional university archive, this study allowed me to examine my own biases and orientations towards different types of archives and how they provide access to information.

Ahmed explains that sustained orientations are nurtured over time through repeat actions and access to certain objects, which in turn shape how the world comes together around individuals.⁹⁰ In this case, I was influenced by the time I've spent in a variety of different archives and museums as a researcher and volunteer and the steady stream of peer-reviewed research that I have surrounded myself with as a graduate student and researcher. I have found many claims that community archives tend to entirely eschew archival science and that traditional archives strictly adhere to organizational structures set forth for arranging and describing archives.⁹¹ As such, prior to this study, I was oriented towards an acceptance of significant difference in traditional and community archival structures and procedures.

Online Archives, Finding Aids, and Catalog Records

Online archives take a variety of forms, and professionals use several metadata tools to organize the material they chose to present to the public. Some online archives are exact reproductions of the catalogs museum or archival professionals use internally to organize items, some take the form of finding aids, and others are designed specifically to interface with the public and take a form that is more closely rooted in user-experience design used by businesses. Likewise, the scopes of online archives are vastly different, with some making their entire holdings available, while others offer a small sample of what the museum or archive houses. Because museums and archives are particularly jargon-heavy there are three additional terms that I would like to clarify, namely catalog record, finding aid, and collection. Although the word collection shows up in the title of the Texas Fashion Collection and is colloquially used to describe a group of items like the stamps that your grandparent owns in their home, in relation to metadata, a collection refers to a set of items in a museum or archive that is “gathered and arranged in some order.”⁹² Keep in mind that museums and archives tend to have several categories of collections that may or may not be available in online archives or at their brick-and-mortar spaces. Some examples might include permanent collections, education collections, exhibition collections, and/or teaching or study collections.⁹³ In this case, it is important to understand what a collection is because finding aids tend to be used as a way to describe a collection. Although I will not explore the different levels of collection in detail when discussing the finding aids from TFC and LA&M, recognize that this classification system is diverse and wide-reaching within museums and archives.

Additionally, a catalog record is a form of metadata that specifically tells users the who, what, when, and where of a single object in a museum's or archive's holdings.⁹⁴ Catalog records are not always easy to locate, especially if archives contain hundreds or thousands of objects. Unlike searching for a book by its title or author in an online library catalog, searching for an object in an online archive can prove challenging, especially if you are looking for sartorial fetish items. This challenge arises because objects connected to sex and sexuality are not uniformly described or titled in the catalog records of museums and archives. In fact, many of the terms used both in exhibits and in metadata categorization for items relating to sex and sexuality tend to be "misleading, unhelpful, and rather anachronistic."⁹⁵ They are often prescriptive and can act as barriers to retrieving those items even when outside users are seeking them specifically.

One particularly memorable example from my personal experiences in museums and archives occurred at TFC in 2018. While looking for sartorial fetish items in the printed catalogs available only on-ground at the archive, I came across a Post-It note. The yellow piece of paper had nothing written on it, but upon further inspection I found that it covered the description and a photograph of an ensemble of leather fetish items. There were no other Post-It notes in the catalog, nor were there any other sartorial fetish items present. When I inquired why this ensemble was covered, both Annette and Janelle seemed surprised and removed it from the catalog. I believe that neither of the staff at TFC would cover this item; however, it does lead to questions about how the ensemble came to be censored in the catalog and how we as a society deal with sartorial fetish items.

This was just one catalog record, one occurrence for the only photographed sartorial fetish item in the collection, but in many cases, archives have thousands, or tens of thousands, of catalog records they must organize. Because of the profusion of catalog records, many museums and archives create documents called finding aids to help users sift through entire collections rather than through catalog records one by one. As I mentioned above, a catalog record specifically tells users the who, what, when, and where of a single object. On a larger scale, finding aids are essentially the who, what, when, and where of an entire collection of catalog records. Kathleen D. Roe tells us that the core of any finding aid is a collection's inventory (which in an online archive might redirect to digital catalog records); however, it also provides additional information such as the history of the collection as a whole, general administrative information, and indexes and keywords that assist a user to connect this collection with another.⁹⁶ As such, finding aids also provide the answer to the question "why should I access this collection?"

It is useful to think of each of these different forms of metadata as a series of boxes or containers that holds information about an object or collection of objects (Figure 5). The smallest and most numerous are the catalog records that describe a single item. Larger containers called finding aids contain and describe how the catalog records are related. Finally, the online archive holds all of the documents, including finding aids and catalog records. These boxes are organizational in nature and help users find records relating to items without the need to search through every catalog record available. Jeffrey Pomerantz describes how metadata functions as a map, moving users from

general to more specific information,⁹⁷ which can also be applied to the idea of containers.

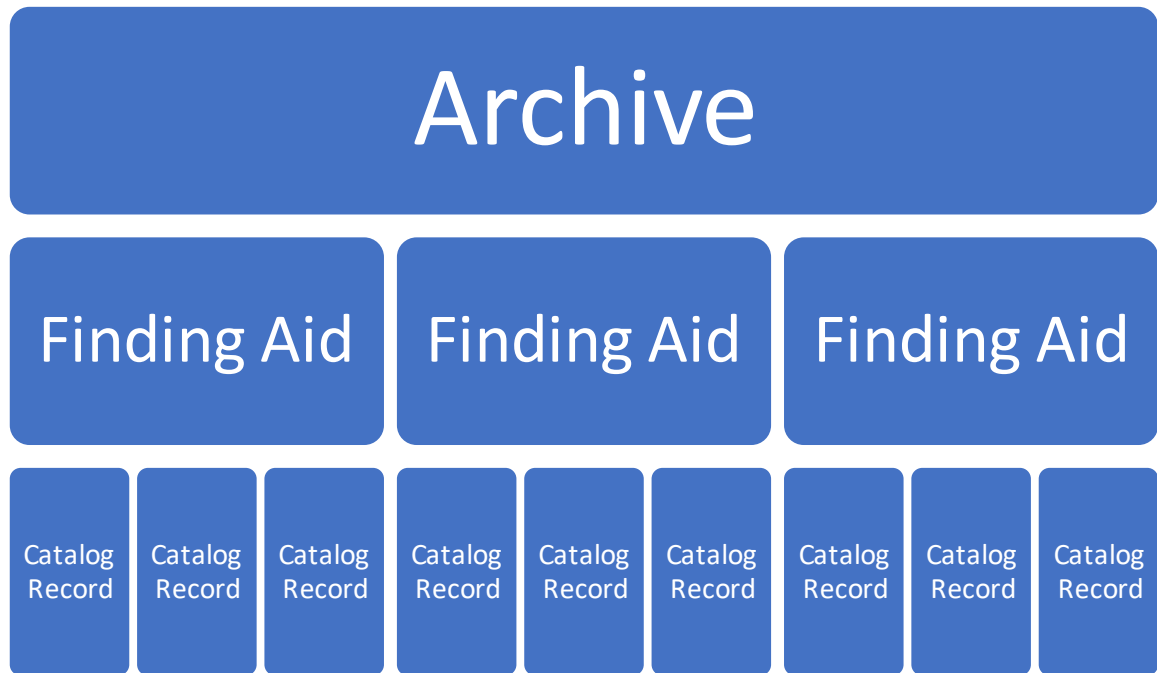


Figure 5. Metadata Containers.

As you can see in Figure 6, if a user is looking for sartorial fetish items, they would begin by opening the online archive, or taking the lid off the largest box, revealing a series of smaller boxes. The smaller boxes revealed inside are the finding aids. Upon reading the description of those finding aids, users are able to narrow their search and only open the boxes that might lead to sartorial fetish items rather than accessing all of the items in the online archive. Finding aids make it possible for users to then select the catalog records and explore the specific items for relevance. Online archives, finding aids, and catalog records are important orienting devices because they function as a way to narrow data, although metadata systems only work when museum professionals describe items in a way that makes them easy to find.

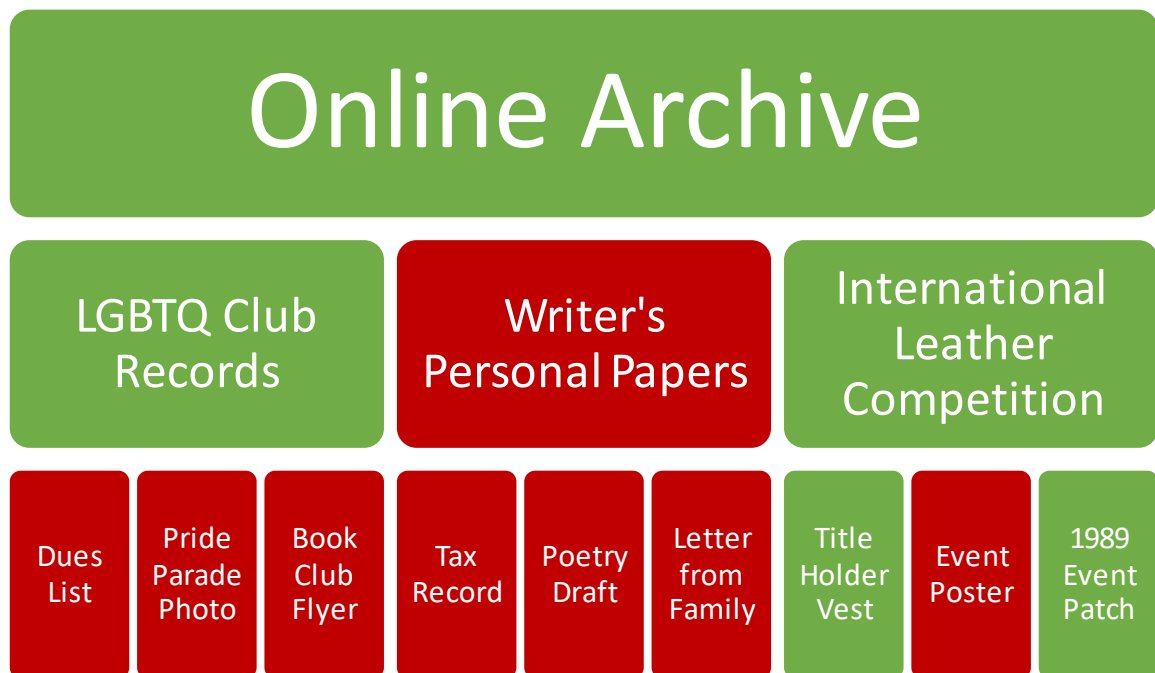


Figure 6. Finding Sartorial Fetish Items.

Green indicates spaces I might look when accessing the online archive if I was looking for sartorial fetish items, red indicates spaces I would not access if searching for sartorial fetish items in this particular archive based on the information given in these titles.

Navigating the Online Archives

The TFC website, like the physical archive on UNT's campus, is underwhelming. When visiting TFC's online archive, visitors can access catalog records; however, there are no finding aids available. Their online archive is managed as part of the UNT Library System and includes a web page that they call an "overview" (Figure 7) which acts roughly like a finding aid for the entire online archive, rather than for a single collection. The "At a Glance" section along with the search bar redirect users to catalog records with photographs for 2,268 of the 20,000 items in TFC's collection. This represents roughly 11 percent of the entire holdings of TFC.⁹⁸ While I intended to begin my search by locating the available finding aids to access collections that might include sartorial fetish

items, I was unable to do so since TFC does not have finding aids available. Instead of moving through the online archive as a series of smaller and smaller boxes as described above, I had to rethink my interactions with the information provided. The online archive allows visitors to type a word or series of words in a search bar and select if they would like to search by full text, metadata (catalog record), title, subjects, creators, or names.⁹⁹

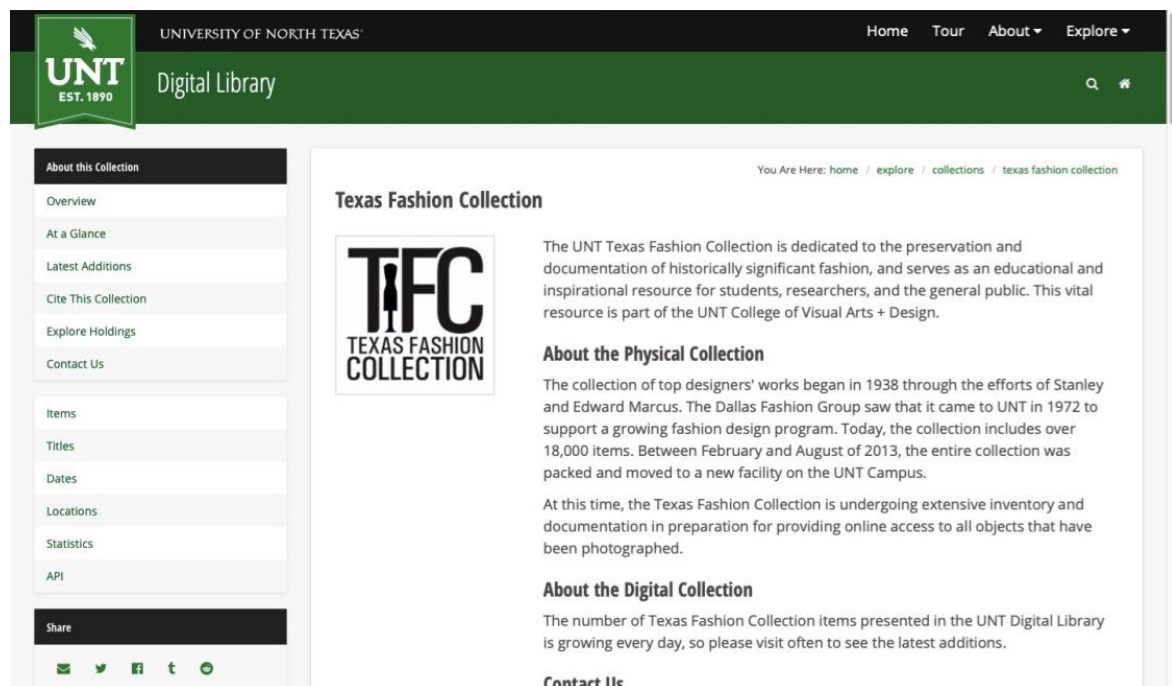


Figure 7. TFC Online Archive.

A keyword search seemed like the easiest and most direct way for me to look for leather vests related to sartorial fetish communities. For my initial search, I used the word “vest” but was unsure if the full-text and metadata (catalog record) search capabilities would return different results. However, both returned the same 17 catalog records.¹⁰⁰ Each of the catalog records had photographs and descriptions of the items. Additionally, where known, the creator of the item (designer), location where the item was created, and when the item was created are indicated. A quick look through the catalog records

revealed 15 women's ensembles (multi-piece sets created to be worn together) and two stand-alone vests, one made of leather and one of made of fur, but none of the items are sartorial fetish items. To be thorough, I also searched "leather vest," which returned three items: the two stand-alone vests mentioned, as the fur vest had leather trim, and one of the ensembles from the first search for vests that included a leather belt. Finally, to make sure that I was not missing items, I searched for "leather," which returned 352 results, most of which were accessories (shoes, hats, bags, and belts). None were sartorial fetish items. No results were returned when I searched the words "fetish" and "kink," and although 60 results populated when I searched "other," I found that each of those entries included the word other in the description of the item. In other words, I was unable to locate a leather vest that was associated with a fetish community through the TFC's online archive. I discuss the significance of this finding below but first describe my experience using LA&M's online archive.

My experience at LA&M was different and more involved as it returned more search results. LA&M's online archive is relatively new, having launched in November 2018. To access it requires entering a user name and password and certify that one is 18 years of age or older, as "contents may be sexually explicit" (Figure 8).¹⁰¹ After logging in, there are several ways to access the information, including a search bar. I bypassed this option to begin with and focused on the navigation links at the top of the page where finding aids are available: archives and browse. I used the "browse" navigation link to search collections as the "archive" navigation link only allows users to access finding aids related to paper archives (e.g., manuscripts, correspondence, photographs, etc.) and,

thus, was unlikely to yield finding aids or catalog records that led to leather vests or other sartorial fetish items.

Leather Archives & Museum
LA&M

ABOUT ARCHIVES BROWSE GALLERY

Search the collections

Welcome to the collections website for the Leather Archives & Museum!

The LA&M is a 501(c)3 non-profit library, repository, and museum for materials related to BDSM, kink and fetish history and culture in Chicago, IL.

For general information visit us at Leatherarchives.org, or log-in below to access the collections.

Username: public
Password: leather

[Contents may be sexually explicit. You must be 18 years old or older to login](#)

USER NAME

PASSWORD

LOGIN

Figure 8. LA&M Log In.

The “browse” navigation link allows users to select collections, objects, or library navigation tabs. The collections tab informs users that there are 341 collections at LA&M; however, only 102 are currently available in the online archive. Three of these are described as museum collections, 14 as library collections, and 85 as archival collections. I investigated the three museum collections first, as I assumed they would contain any artifacts available in the online archive. The three collections returned were titled posters, pins, and patches and banners. Although I wouldn’t typically search for leather vests in collections with these titles, I opened each to investigate their structure and to see if a finding aid existed. In all I found an inventory of items, rather than a traditional finding aid. Each of the items listed in the inventory led to a catalog record that included the title of the object, artifact number, related entities, related places, and a description of the item. Only a small number of the catalog records also included a photograph of the artifact it described (Figure 9). None of the items in any of the museum

collections available in the online archive were leather vests; however, many items were pins and patches that would be worn on a leather vest. Although I didn't find what I was looking for—a leather vest—some items helped to confirm that LA&M might be a space where sartorial fetish items were collected.



Figure 9. Black Star MC Patch.

I abandoned my plan to search only finding aids that might specifically contain leather vests and decided to explore the entire collection via the search bar. At this point, I did not expect to find any leather vests because the “collections” navigation tab noted that artifacts were not yet available online, but I wondered what a general search of the website would return since it was the primary way I searched the catalog records at TFC. A search with the word “vest” returned ten results. One was a library item, one a part of the vertical files, two were organizations, and six were related to archival collections. The organization entry for Spartan MC (motorcycle club) explains that patches in the collection are intended to be worn on the back of a leather vest. However, the

organization record for the Pocono Warriors was the first record that directly acknowledges that there are leather vests at LA&M. Under the section labeled “sources,” there is a note that reads: “Jeff Dunn vest and cover [hat] donor correspondence, Brian O.”¹⁰² Although there is no redirect or catalog record linked to this note, it references that a vest was donated to LA&M, which is likely a leather vest, as it is connected to a leather and motorcycle community. Of the six archival collections, four specifically mentioned leather vests, one mentions a rubber vest, and one did not contain the word vest in the finding aid.

In each of the archival collections where leather vests are mentioned, they are included as “removed items” or “related items.”¹⁰³ In the Dean Walradt Collection, for instance, one title vest and two vests (leathers collection) were removed.¹⁰⁴ Likewise, the Woody Bebout Collection, Thomas Raymond Dombkowski Collection, and Jack McGeorge Collection each lists a single leather vest as a removed or related item. The Mr. International Rubber (MIR) Collection also mentions a rubber vest was removed. Although none of these items appear in the finding aid’s description of the collection, nor are they part of the inventory, the removed and related sections help to let users know that these items, although not present in the online archives, are potentially available on-site at LA&M. These notes about removed and related items in the finding aids of archival collections work together with the explanation given at the outset of this search regarding artifact collections, along with many other visual cues to tell users that leather vests are likely present in the physical archive, even though they are unavailable in the online archive at this time.

Pathways and Barriers

TFC

After the searches on the TFC website did not locate any sartorial fetish items, I spent a while sifting through the 2,268 catalog records and found no sartorial fetish items in the online archive. I want to acknowledge that I was surprised that TFC didn't provide finding aids for their online archive. Because TFC is a traditional archive connected to a university, I expected that moving through their online archive would be closely associated with metadata best practices and archival science, similar to following a map as Pomerantz described.¹⁰⁵ However, what I found felt more like an internet browser search. Additionally, as someone who has studied archival science, I found the lack of finding aids disappointing because I frequently use them to cut down on the amount of time that I have to spend searching an archive. I recognize that visitors to this website might be more familiar with systems more closely associated with a library or with full-text searching methods akin to typing a query into an internet search engine, so many might not recognize this tool as "missing."

Some of these silences could be related to the items available in the online archive and how they are organized. Unlike most finding aids, which tend to specifically explain a single collection within an entire archive or museum, TFC's makeshift finding aid composed of the "overview" describes the online archive as a whole and provides avenues to explore based on titles and key terms in the catalog records.¹⁰⁶ As someone versed in archival science somewhat confusing. When I first encountered the online archive, I assumed that what was presented online was part of a single collection held

within TFC, since there were no other finding aids or similar documents available. However, upon further examination, I found that there are several “collections” represented in the online archive, either fully or partially, that do not have separate finding aids.¹⁰⁷ There are five collections mentioned, including the Dallas Museum of Fashion Collection, Carrie Marcus Neiman Foundation Collection of Fashion, Lilli Wolff Archive, Neiman Marcus Future Fashion Collection from 2007, and the Cotton Award Winners, each of which is of a collection that began outside the TFC and was later donated. As a result, the online archive of TFC seems to mostly be an unorganized selection of catalog records, representing a sampling of items from an array of collections within TFC but never representing all of any of these collections. Essentially, this means that the material presented is neither a cohesive collection nor a space where several complete collections are accessible to the public. In fact, only 408 items in the digital archive (of the 20,000 items the TFC houses) are even listed as being a part of one of the five distinct collections mentioned in the “explore holdings” section.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, searching by finding aid in the online archive, even if finding aids were available for the listed collections, would assist with less than 18 percent of the total catalog records available to users. This lack of archival protocol leads me to speculate that items were selected for convenience. Perhaps these items were already photographed or readily available? This seems more likely than them being selected because the TFC was systematically digitizing all of their items, partly because the TFC has only one full-time employee and one part-time staff member, and the online archive has not been updated since 2016.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, while TFC seeks to orient users towards some items in their

collection, they do so in a way that is fairly unorganized. Likewise, although TFC may have once intended to digitize their entire holdings and make them available to the public, they seem to have come to a complete halt and have not made headway since 2016. This leaves a tension between what TFC tells users (that they are currently digitizing) and what they are actually doing (no movement since 2016).¹¹⁰

This lack of update since 2016 also helps explain why no sartorial fetish items are in the online archive, as all of the sartorial fetish items were acquired no earlier than 2017. Therefore, any speculation regarding if TFC would or wouldn't have selected these to showcase in their online archive is moot. And the fact remains that although TFC is a traditional archive, located on a university campus and connected with a large and professional library system, there is a mismatch between what I expected to find, as far as metadata is concerned, and what I actually uncovered. This incongruence led me to question the strict binary I had been oriented towards when understanding how traditional archives and community archives functioned. Although I found no evidence of sartorial fetish items in the online archive, what I did find was that not all institutional archives strictly adhere to archival science, or in this case library cataloging, and instead opt for the most convenient method of organizing the items they have on hand. The detailed finding aids that Simmons, Roe, and Bennett suggest should be part of traditional archives are not present, with TFC opting to follow the path of least resistance in their searchable online archive.

LA&M

When I began this search, I approached LA&M with specific biases that shaped how I interacted with the archive initially, namely that its online archive would not conform to best practices of arrangement and description. This was partially because I was oriented by scholars to believe that sex and sexuality museums adhered to “unique organizational systems that implicitly critique[d] traditional descriptive systems.”¹¹¹ These organizational systems are frequently heralded as “queer” and can range from total dismissal of the concept of metadata and organization to simply using terms or including items that would not traditionally be included in an archive. I was unsure if LA&M’s online archive would be set up as Vaginal Davis’ visual and bodily archive was, where “everything bled into everything else”¹¹² by completely deterritorializing the items and eschewing archival conventions in both storage and metadata,¹¹³ or if it would find some middle ground like LHA, which embraces items such as finding aids but dismisses bigoted language in their descriptions, many times using their documentation as a way to protest such attitudes.¹¹⁴

I uncovered that LA&M fully embraced traditional metadata, which meant that I conducted searches in the same way that I would in a traditional archive that followed archival science best practices. Likewise, the metadata I encountered looked very much like standard documents that you might find at traditional archives, providing a wealth of information about the archives using structured collections, finding aids, and catalog records. To me, this acceptance of archival science as the method by which the online archive (and also the on-ground archive) is arranged and described seems like a

reclamation of space (and potentially power) for sex and sexuality in archives. These practices offer more context for the absence of the leather vest in the online archive: this item was unavailable not because of ideological reasons or because of informal archival structures but because the archive is new and the artifact collections are forthcoming.

Rather than re-creating the archive, LA&M chooses to accept that archives and museums have long collected items related to sex and sexuality and gives users the chance to think about these items as a part of traditional systems of arrangement and description, rather than apart from these systems. This is achieved by doing something that I call describing to prescribe—describing to prescribe queers archives by accepting standard arrangement and description, such as finding aids and catalog records, and using them to describe items regularly or historically marginalized in museums and archives. By doing so, items typically hidden, villainized, “othered,” or excluded claim space in the archive and its metadata, as well as in a society that values these institutions.

An example of this at LA&M comes from the Dom “Etienne” Orejudos Collection. This collection is described as “Personal papers, correspondence, original artwork, artwork copies and prints, and other material collected by or about Dom Orejudos.”¹¹⁵ This collection includes an illustration for *Moaning Becomes Electra* (Figure 10) drawn by Mr. Orejudos. Although the illustration includes a man with an erect penis wearing women’s clothing, the description of this item in the collection reads “Pen and ink. 7 3/4" x 11 1/2". A muscular man with a ‘Mom’ bicep tattoo wears a bra, corset, and garter belt, and poses with sheer fabric. Signed Etienne.”¹¹⁶ This item is never described as pornographic or illicit, nor is it relegated to a description of “other.” Rather,

Moaning Becomes Electra and this collection as a whole are described the same way that art and archival collections of personal papers would be categorized in any traditional archive. Jennifer Tyburczy discusses how this phenomenon of proscription and prescription in museum exhibits has shaped how Western societies view sex and sexuality, stating that museums “play a decisive though obscured role in determining not only if and how sexuality should be exhibited in the public sphere, but also what the ‘sexually illicit’ means.”¹¹⁷ Although she specifically mentions exhibits, the same can be said of how museums and archives create metadata and make it available to the public. Thus, when LA&M, a queer, community, sex and sexualities museum, uses traditional archival science to arrange and describe items in their public facing, online archive it can create a model for traditional archives struggling to describe items related to sex and sexuality in their own collection. By using standard metadata pathways, LA&M opens up a conversation about how museums and archives can expand access to items.

There are pitfalls to this method as well as benefits. Community archives, such as LHA have both structured themselves in ways that dismiss or deconstruct archival practice and advocated for the queering of any, and all, archives that house items relating to sex and sexuality. However, as Tyburczy tells us, “all museums are sex museums,” making the queering of archives a tremendous undertaking regardless of if you chose the completely dismantle archival science, or if you chose a less extreme route.¹¹⁸ Even if all archives recognize the gaps in how sartorial fetish items (or any items relating to sex and sexuality) have been described and choose to make changes, it is a tremendous

undertaking. Some of the considerations might include educating existing staff, training new staff, and auditing and correcting existing records.

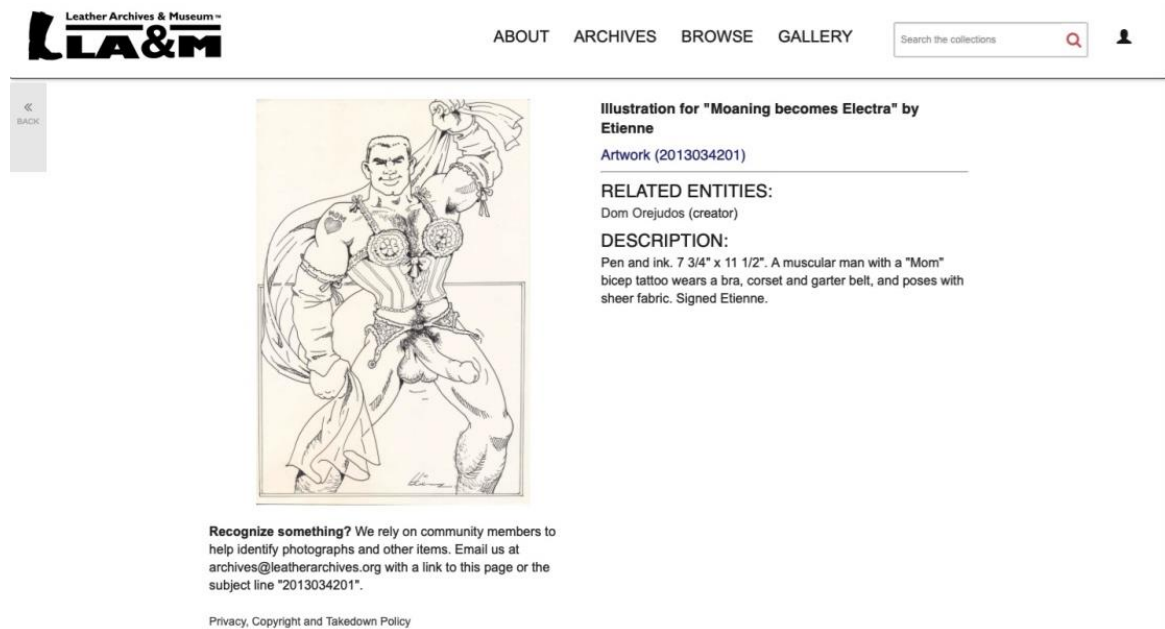


Figure 10. “Moaning Becomes Electra”.

This, like with any major change, will not happen overnight. However, using archival science as a tool, rather than working with more formal systems of metadata, like library cataloging, has many benefits. While library cataloging is particularly lacking in its descriptive methods, when dealing with topics such as gender, sex, and sexuality, archival science has enough flexibility that changes may be possible within existing systems. Jennifer Gilley explains that the “inadequacy of controlled vocabulary,” in library catalogs and other standardized metadata is one of the biggest hurdles for individuals searching for feminist materials.¹¹⁹ Like feminist materials, fetish items have suffered from the continued use of outdated systems of categorization that include biased language or no language at all that adequately describe these items. As such, many community archives, LA&M included, use standard archival metadata systems (catalogs,

finding aids, and catalog records) with titles and descriptions they have created specifically for their items rather than using standardized language. In LA&M's case, they catalog fetish items with the terms specifically used by the fetish community, instead of attempting to work around slow-to-change formal subject headings and titles or choosing to categorize these items as "other" or "miscellaneous."¹²⁰ By using preferred names and descriptions of fetish items, rather than relegating them under ill-fitting, bigoted, or general "other" headings, archives reaffirm the importance of these items and the communities associated with them instead of using archival systems as a way to pass judgement, either intentionally or as a matter of convenience. By doing so, LA&M orients users towards fetish items and communities differently than an archive that uses traditional subject heading or archival language, such as TFC, perhaps before users encounter sartorial fetish items in the archive or museum.

Breaking Down Barriers

When I set out to examine pathways and barriers to finding sartorial fetish items, I did not think that I would be facing a situation like the one that I did. I was unable to locate any items via the online archives of two cultural institutions where I knew these items existed. At the outset of this project, I was certain that I would find at least one leather vest at LA&M. I hoped that I would find an example of this sartorial fetish item at TFC because professional photos available in both the paper catalogs and the catalog used by the archive for their entire collection depicted vests as part of a few ensembles. Although I did not encounter any sartorial fetish items, I did find some interesting information, namely that these two online archives did not adhere to a strict binary in

which traditional archives follow archival or library science standards and community archives do not. In fact, it seems that in this case the roles were reversed, with TFC producing an archive that seemed to be based primarily on convenience and LA&M following archival best practices.

This reversal signals that the problem with accessing sartorial fetish items in the archives might be caused by more than the tools that were used (archival science or queer archival formats). If critics of archival science hold that traditional systems and spaces are rigid and bigoted, while traditionalists decry the disorganization of queer spaces, then barriers exist based on how these users are oriented towards the tools used to archive and how these tools orient users towards archived items. Barriers tend to be tied to two things: first, strict cataloging methods primarily used in libraries rather than archives, and second, human problems such as improper categorization and description. As such, it becomes vital to take a step back and recognize that archival science is a tool, and a flexible one at that, that can be adapted much more easily than some of its metadata counterparts.

Queering the archive, therefore, is more complicated than removing existing metadata tools. While I agree that we need to change how professionals archive items related to sex and sexuality, as they are frequently difficult to find for both visitor to the archive and professionals working in the space, I do not believe the most effective answer is to completely dismiss archival science, nor do I think it is to adhere entirely to the status quo. To create spaces where sartorial fetish items (and other items related to sex and sexuality) are accessible and adequately described does not require a complete

dismantling of the metadata frameworks (mission statements, finding aids, catalog records, etc.), but as I found at LA&M requires knowledgeable individuals willing to rethink how they interact with the tools and data available.

CHAPTER IV

SEEKING SEX IN THE ARCHIVE

When I look back at the four years of graduate research, and the two graduate programs I completed that brought me here, I am sometimes amazed at how simple the questions I am asking sometimes seem. How do we understand objects? What are the stories those objects tell? Who should tell those stories? Why are those stories or objects important, and how do they relate to each other? However, the more I reached for the answers to these and other questions, the more complicated those they seemed. Each of these questions, and many others that I have asked throughout this journey, returned me to the concept of orientation and the complex nature of the constantly evolving landscape of how we understand the relationships we have with the objects and their stories, which we encounter throughout our lives, and how other people and institutions might influence our understandings. Ahmed tells us that the relationship between objects and ourselves is far less simple than we imagine it to be, as orientation involves the culmination of our experiences and beliefs in each moment as we progress through our lives.¹²¹ As such, orientation is a fantastic site for queer examination or study because how we are oriented towards objects, and, consequently, ideas is a constantly moving target.

Because both archives I have considered in this thesis were actively changing their online offerings at the time that I was researching I was able to capture some ways in which the metadata they produced can shape the way that users understand what these

intuitions have to offer, and how these institutions understand what they offer the general public. This was particularly true for TFC's new mission statement in 2017, which reframed the purpose of the collection and created space for a more diverse array of items to enter the archive. However, beyond telling us what museum and archives have available to users, many of these documents (mission statements, catalog records, finding aids, etc.) play a part in shaping how we understand the objects and their stories based on how museum professionals chose to describe, catalog, or make those items available in both their digital and brick-and-mortar spaces. As such, orientations can bring us to the point where we encounter sartorial fetish items as they may be within our realm or perception. Likewise, orientations can shape the way we understand new items and stories when we encounter them in archives. However, institutions, such as museums and archives, can also change the way users are oriented towards those items through the metadata, which can potentially change the way users interact with sartorial fetish items (and other items) in the future, not only in the museum space but in society as a whole.

I first set out to understand this dynamic by looking at the mission statements of both archives. The mission statements at LA&M and TFC tell us what these archives believe to be important about themselves. Typically, missions do this by describing their goals, purpose, as well as intended audience; however, as is evident in the mission statement of LHA, museums and archives sometimes go beyond or entirely stray from those general best practices for a variety of reasons.¹²² That being said, this self-awareness found in museum mission statements goes beyond a general description an archive and includes how staff at those museums and archives understand the items and

stories they have to offer. Just as importantly, mission statements also show users how institutions value the items they have in custody. This is evident in how the language LA&M uses to name kink, BDSM, and other minority communities' values stories and objects unlikely to be highlighted at mainstream museums and archives. Likewise, the TFC specifically connects itself to UNT, making it clear that the university is an integral part of how TFC is managed. Although these are just two examples, all mission statements are a portrait of how museum staff value their holdings; their connections to other organizations, themes, or stories; and, many times, their audiences.

These brief manifestos offer a snapshot into the minds and priorities of those in charge of archives and museums. Although these statements are not always as accessible to the public, and visitors may never come across them while visiting a museum, they have become more readily available as more and more cultural institutions create websites. Digital spaces become important arenas where museums and archives can re-negotiate or re-assert their power as authorities on the objects they protect and interpret through their mission statements. Websites also give visitors the ability to interact with the metadata that archivists create and make public in ways they were previously unable to, most notably that individuals can access missions and make decisions about learning more without traveling to the on-ground sites. This can have positive and negative consequences, such as a wider audience outside of the local areas accessing the museums or archives or a decrease in visitors because of incomplete and/or inaccurate information, or interpretation on the websites. These differences in how museums interact with the public orient users differently towards museums and archives as a whole, and there are

potentially new opportunities for professionals to reach individuals they previously would never have had access to in the past. At the same time, virtual platforms also raise questions about how we interact with objects and if digital access offers the same opportunities as physical access.

While missions seek to orient individuals based on the perceived understanding of archives as a whole, online archives do so by examining the objects and collections themselves. It was disheartening to attempt to access sartorial fetish items, which I knew existed in both archives, on the websites of LA&M and TFC and come away with no objects to be found. However, other information existed that might lead users towards these items. While it was easier to find similar items or mentions of sartorial fetish items in LA&M's online archive, there were several reasons for this, including the scope of the museum, the timeline of when the online archives were last updated, and the structure of the online archives. Furthermore, the absence of leather vests belonging to sartorial fetish communities allowed me to also examine the metadata structures found in the online archives at both LA&M and TFC and compare and contrast them with archival best practices. I uncovered that neither archive function in a clearly defined way, as LA&M tended to follow SAA guidelines and best practices for archiving even though they are a community sex museum, and TFC was haphazard and unorganized even though the online archives are a part of the UNT library system, a decidedly traditional museum and archival space. This shifts the binary thought process that many academic studies repeat, namely that traditional museum spaces follow traditional practices, and community archives entirely eschew these practices.¹²³ This leads me to believe that other factors

such as staffing knowledge, time, and availability, as well as funding and other resources, play a key role in metadata structure.

The examination of metadata available on websites has applications across many disciplines and uses an interdisciplinary approach to understand the complex problem of how museums and archives orient users towards worn items with direct ties to sex and communities associated with sexual minorities, which is not widely discussed in the literature of any academic discipline. I drew from the fields of museum studies; women's, gender, sexuality, and queer studies; and fashion theory by using critical discourse analysis and new materialist arguments regarding orientation. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of this thesis, it revealed many opportunities for further study and investigation. This study invites museums and archives to examine the ways in which they catalog and make information about their collections available online and challenges them to take orientations (the personal orientations of the museum professionals, the official message of the museum, societal expectations, and the variable personal orientations of potential visitors) into consideration when creating metadata that is widely available to the public. This is because the words that we use matter greatly when we are telling the stories of objects associated with minority communities and have the ability to shape how users understand complex (or unknown) issues in the future.

In addition, I think the understanding of informal metadata available on the websites of museums is the most important area for further study. Although I was unable to discuss these metadata in detail in this study, I was intrigued by how much I learned from the information I gathered from these informal spaces, such as calendars and

staffing pages. It was particularly interesting that photographs, rather than a statement written on the website of LA&M, indicated that the space is not ADA accessible. I wonder what other knowledge can be gathered regarding how we are oriented towards both items in museums and the museum spaces themselves via the informal data available. For example, informal metadata may provide opportunities to study how other archives orient their visitors towards sartorial fetish items. This could certainly extend to a more thorough examination of how the museum or archival type (traditional vs. community) may or may not play a role in how we understand sartorial fetish items, or any items at all. Beyond the museum, there are questions in women's, gender, sexuality, and queer studies that might be explored, including when, where, and how items connected to minority communities should be displayed or archived. Finally, there is a call for the fashion world to explore the connection between subculture and popular dress and interrogate the hierarchy that exists between high fashion design and the kink and fetish community, despite their shared, or perhaps appropriated, design elements.

These questions and applications are likely more far reaching than I imagine, as studies specifically related to sartorial fetish items are not particularly common in any disciplines within academia. Likewise, in the spirit of queer realities and imaginaries, the information and culture surrounding these items is always changing, constantly progressing, and, I would say, queering how we are oriented towards sartorial fetish items, the communities who produce and wear them, and relationships they have with museums and archives that collect and exhibit them. Jane Bennett reminds us that even the things that we discard are ever changing and evolving, but this should also be true of

our relationships to objects.¹²⁴ As such, it is my hope that the information presented here leads others to think about how they are interacting with objects and what factors are mitigating those interactions. Perhaps what is shaping how you are oriented towards sartorial fetish items comes from power structures such as museums, schools, or places of worship, and how they have interpreted those items for you, personal relationships with others inside or outside those communities, or with creative communities and processes that govern the manufacturing of these items. But, regardless of how you have come to your personal understanding of these items, it is important to recognize that there are countless factors influencing people, and for those to change, individuals must be aware that they are present.

NOTES

- ¹ Lunning, *Fetish Style*, 52.
- ² Steele, *Fetish: Fashion, Sex and Power*, 26-27.
- ³ Rouse, *Engaged Surrender*.
- ⁴ Purvis, "Queer," 189.
- ⁵ Purvis, "Queer," 189.
- ⁶ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 14-16.
- ⁷ Butler, "Critically Queer," 19.
- ⁸ Warner, "Fear of a Queer Planet," 16.
- ⁹ Purvis, "Queer," 199.
- ¹⁰ Maurer, "Presenting the American Indian," 19.
- ¹¹ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 95.
- ¹² Wakimoto, et.al., "Archivist as Activist," 295.
- ¹³ Tyburczy, *Sex Museums*, 26-27.
- ¹⁴ Frost, "Secret Museums," 30-31.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 38.
- ¹⁶ Garret and Kettle, "Flying in the Face of Fashion," 84.
- ¹⁷ Steele, *Fetish: Fashion, Sex and Power*, 4.
- ¹⁸ Andrews, "Solange Wore a Lemonade Dress to the Met Gala as a Tribute to Beyoncé."
- ¹⁹ Kendrick, *The Secret Museum*, 126.
- ²⁰ Williams, "Porn Studies, Proliferating Pornographies On/Scene," 4.
- ²¹ Gilley, "Women's Studies Information-Seeking," 220-221.
- ²² Liddiard, "Changing Histories," 22-23.
- ²³ Ahmed, "Orientations Matter," 247.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 240.
- ²⁵ Cameron, "Moral Lessons and Reforming Agendas," 330.
- ²⁶ Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, 381.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 10.
- ²⁸ Tyburczy, *Sex Museums*, 2-3.
- ²⁹ Mills, "Theorizing the Queer Museum," 43.
- ³⁰ Smith-Cruz et al., "Getting from Then to Now," 214.
- ³¹ Ibid., 216.
- ³² Williams, "Porn Studies, Proliferating Pornographies On/Scene," 3.
- ³³ Liddiard, "Changing Histories," 15.
- ³⁴ Ibid., 25-26.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 23-24.
- ³⁶ Austin, et al., "When the Erotic Becomes Illicit," 188-189.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 191.
- ³⁸ Tyburczy, Kendrick, Austin et al., Frost, Liddiard, and Mills all mention the inclination of institutional museums, archives, collections, and libraries to use signs, or restrict access to adults 18 years of age or older, to warn individuals that upcoming exhibits or materials may be related to sex.

- ³⁹ Austin, et al., "When the Erotic Becomes Illicit," 194-196.
- ⁴⁰ Steele, *Fetish: Fashion, Sex and Power*, 3-5.
- ⁴¹ Lunning, *Fetish Style*, 2.
- ⁴² Needham, "Bringing out the Gimp," 153.
- ⁴³ A noted exception of this is Walter Van Bierndonck who frequently sells the masks he creates along with the remainder of the collection in sharp contrast to a majority of fashion houses and designers.
- ⁴⁴ Beins, "Making Place for Lesbian Life at the Lesbian Herstory Archives."
- ⁴⁵ Strub, "Indexing Desire."
- ⁴⁶ Tyburczy, *Sex Museums*.
- ⁴⁷ Szekely, "Do Archives Have a Future in the Digital Age," 1-2.
- ⁴⁸ Lord and Lord, *The Manual of Museum Management*, 2.
- ⁴⁹ "Developing a Mission Statement," 1.
- ⁵⁰ Simmons, *Things Great and Small*, 15.
- ⁵¹ Ahmed, "Orientations Matter," 234.
- ⁵² Prior to beginning this study completed an MA in Museum Studies and worked and interned at the Edgewater Historical Society in Chicago, IL.
- ⁵³ Intner and Weihs, *Standard Cataloging for School and Public Libraries*, 173-174.
- ⁵⁴ Bennett, "Basic Components of an Institutional Archive," 196.
- ⁵⁵ Society of American Archivists, "Introduction."
- ⁵⁶ Roe, *Arranging & Describing Archives & Manuscripts*, 39-40.
- ⁵⁷ Malaro and DeAngelis, *A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections*, 47-51.
- ⁵⁸ Leather Archives and Museum, <https://leatherarchives.org>
- ⁵⁹ Dallas Museum of Art, <https://www.dma.org>
- ⁶⁰ Ahmed, "Orientations Matter," 235.
- ⁶¹ Texas Fashion Collection, <https://tfc.unt.edu/about/history>
- ⁶² Texas Fashion Collection, <https://tfc.unt.edu/about/mission>
- ⁶³ Ahmed, "Orientations Matter," 234.
- ⁶⁴ Ensemble is a widely used term in fashion to describe an outfit or set of clothing.
- ⁶⁵ Liddiard, "Changing Histories."
- ⁶⁶ McLaughlin, "The Play of the Unmentionables."
- ⁶⁷ Tyburczy, *Sex Museums*.
- ⁶⁸ Rawson, "Archival Justice."
- ⁶⁹ Rubin, "The Leather Menace."
- ⁷⁰ Leather Archives and Museum, <https://leatherarchives.org>
- ⁷¹ Ahmed, "Orientations Matter," 252-253.
- ⁷² Texas Fashion Collection, <https://tfc.unt.edu/about/history>
- ⁷³ Kawamura, *Fashion-ology*, 85.
- ⁷⁴ Lunning, *Fetish Style*, 35.
- ⁷⁵ Ahmed, "Orientations Matter," 250.

⁷⁶ Although the general public is typically unable to assist in the physical preservation of objects in a museum or archive, they are able to indirectly contribute to the protection and preservation of such items through other types of support including donations or sponsorships.

⁷⁷ Ahmed, "Orientations Matter," 236.

⁷⁸ Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 8.

⁷⁹ Kendrick, *The Secret Museum*, 125-157.

⁸⁰ Frasier, "Museums—Drama, Ritual and Power," 297.

⁸¹ Ahmed, "Orientations Matter," 252-253.

⁸² Art Institute Chicago, <https://www.artic.edu/about-us/mission-and-history>

⁸³ Smith-Cruz et al., "Getting from Then to Now," 216.

⁸⁴ The LHA website calls this a "statement of purpose" and it is housed under a heading called "Our Mission and Principles" which also details seven principles the LHA seeks to follow.

⁸⁵ The Lesbian Herstory Archives, <http://www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org>

⁸⁶ Ahmed, "Orientations Matter," 245.

⁸⁷ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, loc. 130.

⁸⁸ Austin, et al., "When the Erotic Becomes Illicit," 187.

⁸⁹ Ibid., loc.130.

⁹⁰ Ahmed, "Orientations Matter," 234.

⁹¹ This is discussed by Rawson, Smith-Cruz et al., Wakimoto et al. Some call for changes ranging from the complete dismissal of archival science to a change in the language used in archives.

⁹² Simmons, *Things Great and Small*, 1.

⁹³ Ibid., 33-34.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 38.

⁹⁵ Frost, "Secret Museums," 35.

⁹⁶ Roe, *Arranging & Describing Archives & Manuscripts*, 86-87.

⁹⁷ Pomerantz, *Metadata*, 11.

⁹⁸ There is contradictory information about the number of items TFC houses found on the website. The finding aid, also called the overview, says TFC has 18,000 rather than 20,000 items in the collection. I am using the larger number, as the 18,000 estimate seems to correlate with materials that have not been updated since 2016.

⁹⁹ Texas Fashion Collection, <https://tfc.unt.edu/fashion-archives>

¹⁰⁰ When performing each search, I checked both the full-text and metadata (catalog record) options and each time they refunded the same results. Although different types of searches were allowed, I was unable to discern the difference between the full text and metadata (catalog record) search capabilities. What I found was that regardless of the word or set of words I searched, the same results were returned. I conjecture that the search logic and parameters for these two ways of searching the online archive are the same but tailored to different audiences.

¹⁰¹ Leather Archives and Museum,
<http://leatherarchives.org/ca/index.php/LoginReg/LoginForm>

¹⁰² Leather Archives and Museum,
<http://leatherarchives.org/ca/index.php/Detail/objects/36262>

¹⁰³ Although some users might read this and assume that “removed items” mean that LA&M no longer has the items listed. However, after speaking the Mel, the archivist, it was determined that all of the items listed were still housed at LA&M but were removed from the archival collections because of the inability to house them in paper files, or archival filing boxes.

¹⁰⁴ A title vest refers to a vest that is created for winners of leather competitions. These are typically custom pieces made of leather that might include custom patches, studs, chains, or pins that commemorate the winning of the title. One example of a title competition is the International Ms. Leather Competition held annually in San Jose, CA.

¹⁰⁵ Pomerantz, *Metadata*, 11.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁰⁷ Texas Fashion Collection, <https://tfc.unt.edu/fashion-archives>

¹⁰⁸ Texas Fashion Collection,
<https://digital.library.unt.edu/explore/collections/TXFC/>

¹⁰⁹ Texas Fashion Collection, <https://tfc.unt.edu/fashion-archives>

¹¹⁰ Texas Fashion Collection,
<https://digital.library.unt.edu/explore/collections/TXFC/stats/>

¹¹¹ Rawson, “Archival Justice,” 177.

¹¹² Summers, “Queer Archives, Queer Movements,” 49.

¹¹³ Vaginal Davis is a queer/trans visual and performance artist who lives and performs in her own archive, which has no metadata system or formal systems of organization. This archive is constantly growing and changing and frequently includes layers of art, objects, ephemera, paint, and photographs on the walls and in plies on the surfaces throughout the space.

¹¹⁴ Smith-Cruz et al., *Getting from Then to Now*, 216.

¹¹⁵ Leather Archives and Museum, <https://leatherarchives.org>

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Tyburczy, “All Museums are Sex Museums,” 201.

¹¹⁸ Tyburczy, *Sex Museums*, 1-38.

¹¹⁹ Gilley, “Women’s Studies Information-Seeking,” 220.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹²¹ Ahmed, “Orientations Matter,” 245.

¹²² “Developing a Mission Statement,” 1-2.

¹²³ Frost, “Secret Museums,” 30.

¹²⁴ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 6-7.

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