

Apparitional Representations: Disability History, Reparative Descriptions, And Ethical Failings in a Special Research Collection

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Current Reparative Descriptive Work

- Block (2007)—Disability History Museum
- Rinn (2018)—P. T. Barnum Collection
- Malley (2021)—Western Pennsylvania Disability History and Action Consortium framework
- Joliceur (2022)—Charles Eisenmann “Freak” Photographs
- Wright (2019)—Find & Connect Web Portal

Affective Experiences in Research

- Koford (2014)
 - 9 disability studies scholars
 - Most reported negative affective experience using Library of Congress Subject Headings related to disabilities
- Brilmyer (2020 & 2021)
 - 10 disability studies scholars with disabilities
 - All reported negative affective experiences
 - All reported seeing themselves in their research

Theoretical Literature

- Radical Empathy:
 - Caswell and Cifor (2016)
 - “A learned process of direct and deep connection between the self and another that emphasizes human commonality” by imagining “our body in the place of another” (p. 30).
- Complex Embodiment Theory:
 - *Siebers (2008)*
 - It “give disabled people greater knowledge of and control over their bodies in situations where increased knowledge and control are possible” (p. 27).
 - White (2012)
 - “Disability as a form of human variation” (White, 2012, p. 117)
 - Compliments provenance.
 - Allows the accessioning of collections that reflect a donor’s life and their relationship with their disability.

Brilmyer's Disability Frameworks

- Assemblage (2018)
 - Original french “agencement” from Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) meaning “a construction, an arrangement, or a layout”
 - Disability as assemblage emphasizes multiplicity of identities defined through interactions with society and institutions throughout one’s life, known as the process of *becoming*
 - Disability is an identity *in flux*
- Sickness (2020)
 - Sickness recognizes that disability is an ongoing negotiation as not all disabled persons identify as disabled, not all disabled persons identify as sick, and not all sick persons identify as disabled
 - *Conceptualizing archives and archival silence around disability history*
- Crip Provenance
 - “a method of resisting rehabilitative orientation to fonds—trying to reconstruct a straightforward ‘clean’ archive—by instead meeting archival materials where they are at” (p. 3).

Methods

- Western History Collections:
 - Trans-Mississippi West and Native American cultures
 - 2,000 manuscript collections
 - 800 photograph collections
 - University of Oklahoma Archives (UA)
 - Digitizing Finding Aids on ArchivesSpace
- Remediated 8 item descriptions
 - Identified in study on types of problematic terminology related to disability in Western History Collections' finding aids

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Hauntings, Ghosts, and Translation

- Gordon (2008)—*Ghostly Matters*
 - “To write stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities is to write ghost stories” (p. 17).
 - “Following ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a counter-memory, for the future” (p. 22).
- Cline (2022)—Archivist are Translators
- Mandell (2017): “the challenge and delight of translation: the translator engages in a sort of inner struggle between hopeless despair and optimistic industriousness in turning the text into Something Else but Still the Same” (para. 3).

Research Question

- How does an archivist describe (name) ethically?
 - How do archivists work with ghosts?
 - What do I, or other archivists, do when the descriptions, archival documents, and metadata we have all fail to provide the necessary information to even begin to find historical information?
 - Is it possible to fully decolonize, decentralize, and democratize archives?
Can the ghosts of the archive speak?

Guiding Tenets

- Brilmyer (2022):
 - “instead meeting archival materials where they are at” (p. 3).
- Mandell (2017):
 - “Something Else but Still the Same” (para. 3).

Alice Marriott Manuscript Collection: Box 75, Folder 11

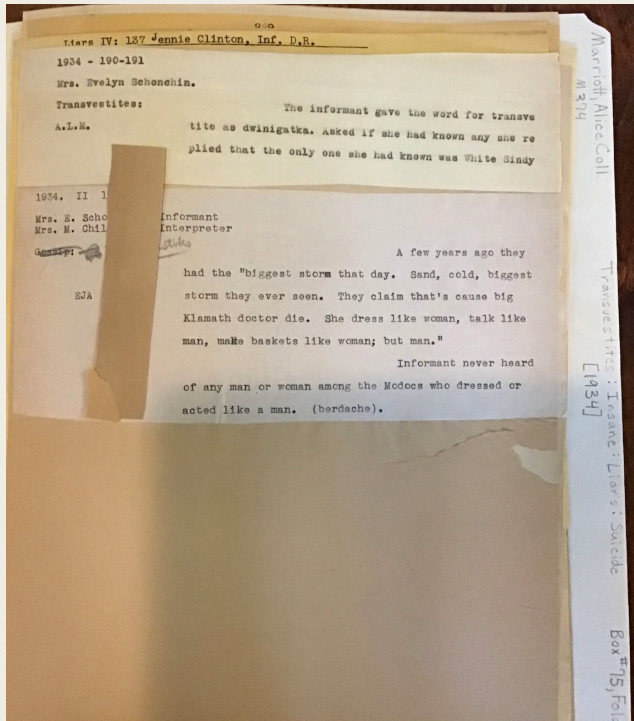


Figure. Contents of Marriott Collection, Box 75, Folder 11.

Original Description:

“Transvestites: Insane: Liars: Suicide, 1934.”

Remediated Folder Description:

“Gender Minorities: Disabilities: Liars: Suicide, 1934.”

Remediated Finding Aid Description:

Marriott’s collection of notes about Modoc peoples’ views of gender minorities, people who lie, blind people, people with a physical or mental disability, and members of the tribe who committed suicide.

Elizabeth Rosenthal Photograph Collection: Image #290

Original Description:

“Sept-Oct. 1933. Rebuilt by Indian family after disastrous flood. Logs moved from creek bottom to higher ground. No assistance from US Indian Department or other agencies. Family of 8—Father crippled.”



Elizabeth Rosenthal Photograph Collection: Image #290

Remediated Finding Aid Description:

Black and white photograph of a Native American (tribe unspecified) family's home that was rebuilt on higher ground after a flood sometime between September and October, 1933. The family (not pictured) included 8 members; the father had a physical disability. Writing on the back of the photograph says: "Sept-Oct. 1933. Rebuilt by Indian family after disastrous flood. Logs moved from creek bottom to higher ground. No assistance from US Indian Department or other agencies. Family of 8—Father crippled."



Where Do We Go From Here?

- Axioms:
 - Brilmyer (2022): “meeting archival materials where they are at” (p. 3)
 - Mandell (2017): “Something Else but Still the Same” (para. 3)
- Archivists and users both transform and locate ghosts in the archive
- Time and information loss impact remediation work
- Recommendations for WHC:
 - Use other descriptive fields in ArchivesSpace
 - Add scope and content notes for all collections
 - Collaborate with other departments and staff to create workflows and guidelines for remediation work

What Is the Purpose of Telling a Failed Ghost Story?

- Gordon (2008):

- Because ultimately haunting is about how to transform a shadow of life into an undiminished life whose shadows touch softly in the spirit of a peaceful reconciliation. In this necessarily collective undertaking, the end, which is not an ending at all, belongs to everyone (Gordon, 2008, p. 208).

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