

Book Reviews

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Gracen Brilmyer and Lydia Tang, eds. *Preserving Disability: Disability and the Archival Profession*. Library Juice Press, 2024. Paperback, 728p. \$75. (ISBN: 978-1-63400-149-6).

“What does it mean to engage with—and participate in—the archives and other institutions that have sought to simultaneously scrutinize and erase sick people,” writes Alexandra Pucciarelli in her article “Seeing Sickness: Archival and Embodied Encounters with the Medical Panopticon”(101). How do you exist in a world that sweeps away your living and leaves behind only the dust of your bones and not the fruits of your being? Pucciarelli’s quote is what makes books like *Preserving Disability: Disability and the Archival Profession* so important.

This book is divided into three sections: Using Archives and Witnessing Oneself; Navigating Employment; and Doing the Work. Each section contains several stories, whether they be told through autoethnography or case studies; they all highlight what it means for disability to be represented within the archival institution.

The first section, “Using Archives and Witnessing Oneself” recounts various experiences of searching for oneself within the archival institution, as well as the process of doing so, mostly from the perspectives of non-archivists themselves. This section touches on a variety of topics including, but not limited to, the experience of using online collections and their lack of compatibility with assistive technology, and the archival gaze’s neutrality resulting in a medical model bias when collecting stories of those with disabilities.

“Navigating Employment” asks many questions such as: “Is my job ad ableist?” “How has the hiring process created a barrier to people with disabilities?” “Should I disclose my disability when I apply or after I’m hired? Should I disclose at all?” and “how do I advocate for myself while employed?” This section primarily highlights how ableism shows within the employment process and offers some alternatives on how to fix and/or improve these problems.

The third and final section highlights how archivists have worked to make the archive a home for people with disabilities, particularly highlighting the importance of having archivists with disabilities do this work. This section details the process of collection development, maintaining the collections and space both physically and digitally, as well as the process of choosing and accepting oneself as a disabled individual within this field. Each one of these sections provides experiences that are important to understand how to make the field more inclusive for disabled individuals, both as workers and for collection development.

To discuss the strengths of this work, I must first mention what this book has done for me. I am a Black queer woman who, according to the voluntary self-IDing disability forms included as part of job applications, has a few invisible disabilities. While I initially would not have agreed with this assessment—as I do not feel that what I experience affects my daily life much—this book not only provided language for me to understand where I fit within the disability community but also showed me other individuals who have similar experiences to my own. While I still do not completely feel comfortable claiming the label “disabled”, learning about the complex embodiment model from this book has given me words to explain this feeling, and what that means for me and where I fit within the archival field. Hearing from other intersectional authors in this book has also given me more to think about within my own understanding of myself and how my different marginalizations affect each other. This is more than simply a strength of this book; it makes this book an ally and a companion.

The book has other strengths as well. For example, the collection includes many different voices from the disabled community. These voices represent a wide variety of disabilities, including but not limited to visual impairment, severe eczema and allergies, autism, POTS syndrome (section 1), ADHD, autoimmune diseases, scoliosis (section 2), epilepsy, obsessive compulsive disorder, and anxiety (section 3). The amount of representation that this book provides, while not a complete list, is in its own right, paramount. To add to the representation, the book is intersectional; there are queer and racially diverse authors also represented, sharing their own stories in this collection of writings.

Another strength of the book overall is the solutions that the various chapters

provide. Many of the authors in this book give examples on how to make the environment, materials, and the field in general more inclusive for individuals with disabilities. For example, in section 1, authors Hilary Stace, Susan Martin, and Martin Sullivan suggest giving more public access to the records that include representation of disabled individuals and providing free reproductions of the materials to the families of the individuals represented in the collections. Authors Julia Pelaez and Jen Hoyer suggest creating a social narrative guide and asking professors before class what accommodations their students would need.

If the book has weaknesses, then they are less overt gaps and more a matter of areas that I would like to see included, or to have expanded upon, in another iteration. For instance, outreach was not a focus of this collection and the book did not include much about bringing entire groups of people with disabilities to the archives. What is it like to do outreach to group homes? What is it like for individuals living in these spaces to visit archives? While this book focuses more on the role of archivists in preserving disability narratives and the importance of inclusivity within the field, improving access to, and use of, collections outside of just the academic field are also important aspects of the work. In addition, I would like to see more representation from other countries. There are some articles that included non-American focused collections, as mentioned earlier in this review, but I want to know what it is like for archivists in Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe. What is disability preservation like in other countries, and what can we learn from each other? Collaboration and communication with other countries, while possibly a bit more difficult to coordinate, could possibly result in more equity and accessibility overall.

Overall, I think this book is rated “E for Everyone” in the archival and library field. Many marginalized groups have had their existence erased, assumed, or their stories only captured through the trauma of their people. “Access is a right: every single person should have the right to go to their local archive and not feel othered by the institution” (Pelaez & Hoyer, 198); this includes in the market, on the job, and in the collections. This book recognizes and shares both the pain and solutions on how to cope with the scars that have been left behind by the archival silence. The authors themselves lead by example, not only through their work in their respective fields, but also by making the articles in this book accessible to those who do not have a background in disability studies, allowing a broader application of its ideas.

Preserving Disability: Disability in the Archival Profession is a reference point, an elegy to the records and people we have lost as systematic oppression has trampled them, and an ode to the people we have discovered and can retrieve. This book is not just a guide, but a memoir of people’s stories, lives, and experiences, including the case studies—the collected data. This book is a valuable resource and introduction to

those who are wondering how disability intersects with the archival field, as well as a friend and a testimonial connection to those who have lived the experiences within it. — *Matrice Young, University of Iowa*

Andi Gustavson and Charlotte Nunes, eds. *Transforming the Authority of the Archive: Undergraduate Pedagogy and Critical Digital Archives*. Lever Press, 2023. Print/Open access. (ISBN: 978-1-64315-051-2/978-1-64315-052-9)

Andi Gustavson and Charlotte Nunes' collection, *Transforming the Authority of the Archive: Undergraduate Pedagogy and Critical Digital Archives*, is an instructive tool for any librarian or faculty member seeking to strengthen collaborative, critical archival work using digital platforms. While that may be expected from the title, the collection's structure and wide focus also offers insights into the nature of working across and beyond university structures to offer campus and community members meaningful experiences with primary sources. As Gustavson and Nunes note in their introduction, theirs is the first study to date that "provides a comprehensive study of how critical digital archives and archives-based pedagogy interact, inform each other, and even determine new contours in each of these respective fields" (10–11). The collection is ambitious; it offers a constellation of projects and perspectives that approach critical digital archives from many vantage points and centers many different archival collections. Organized into three parts: "Archives and Trauma," "Confronting Institutional Power," and "Beyond the Campus," each chapter offers an overview of the significant theoretical or critical frameworks that inform the project team's work, as well as information about the institutional context in which the projects are—or are not—situated before moving into specific case studies.

Part 1, "Archives and Trauma," situates the work of critical archival studies in the classroom by acknowledging the realities of working with archival materials that are violent and harmful. Its first chapter (Alpert-Abrams and Gustavson) considers the classroom as a site of "radical empathy," providing tools and steps for instructors to frame archival processes and materials so students can feel empowered to grapple with difficult ethical questions about access, absence, and digitization—a theme that continues throughout the collection. The second chapter (Gianluca De Fazio) reflects on archival amnesty and the *Racial Terror: Lynching in Virginia* project at James Madison University and serves as a testament to the power of how challenging the gaps and silences in archives can transform not just the archives, but state policy (73).

The second section, "Confronting Institutional Power," retains a focus on archival silences, gaps, and opportunities. Here, each of the five chapters (as well as the first and second chapters of the third section) feature reflections from individuals who worked on critical digital archives projects as undergraduate students. Former student