

Aging, Activism, and the Archive: Feminist Perspectives for the 21st Century



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RÉSUMÉ Cet article examine le processus d'une initiative collaborative et communautaire pour constituer les archives du Mouvement de soutien des grands-mères (GRAN), une organisation nationale canadienne. Se basant sur des documents d'archives, sur des entrevues avec des informateurs clés, ainsi que sur la participation même des auteures au processus, cet article fait ressortir deux contraintes importantes dans la littérature scientifique sur l'archivistique : (1) le manque d'écrits au sujet des relations intergénérationnelles qui sont formées à partir d'une approche collaborative en archivistique et de leur influence potentielle sur ce processus; et (2) le peu d'attention accordée à la façon dont sont présentées et documentées – ainsi que par qui et à quel effet – les vies de femmes plus âgées et les associations qui les représentent. D'un point de vue féministe, un examen des processus archivistiques du GRAN vient ajouter aux débats clés présents dans la littérature scientifique portant sur la praxis archivistique, troublant ainsi l'intégrité du concept binaire « alternatif / dominant » souvent soutenu dans ces écrits, et suggérant donc que les suppositions qui y sont associées sont trop simplistes. De manière plus significative, cet article révèle qu'à partir de l'action d'archiver, les membres du GRAN établissent leur pertinence comme acteurs contemporains de changement social – allant carrément à l'encontre des discours dominants affirmant la passivité des femmes plus âgées – leur permettant ainsi d'insister qu'on se souvienne d'elles pour leur engagement et leur activisme. Dans le contexte du vieillissement de la population qui s'avère être extensif, sans précédent et surtout féminin, ce travail d'archivage se veut le plaidoyer d'un changement marqué dans la façon de penser le vieillissement en lien avec les archives, allant au-delà de la perception des personnes âgées comme donateurs de documents d'archives à la fin de leur vie, pour reconnaître leur rôle important comme créateurs et utilisateurs d'archives.

ABSTRACT This article investigates the process of a collaborative, community-driven initiative to create an archives for the Grandmothers Advocacy Network (GRAN), a national Canadian organization. Based on records, key informant interviews, and the authors' participation in the process, the article points to two salient limitations in archival scholarship: (1) the existing gap in considering how intergenerational relationships might form around, and potentially shape, collaborative archives; and (2) the scarce attention given to how, by whom, and to what effect older women's lives and associations are being recorded and represented. From a feminist perspective, an examination of GRAN's archival process is brought to bear on key debates

within scholarship on critical archival praxis, troubling the integrity of the often upheld “alternative versus mainstream” binary, and suggesting that the associated assumptions are overly simplistic. Most significantly, the article reveals that, through archiving, GRAN members are actively staking out their relevance as contemporary social change actors, challenging dominant discourses about older women’s passivity, and insisting on being remembered for their engagement and activism. In the context of population aging that is pervasive, unprecedented, and feminized, their archival work also begs a salient shift in thinking about aging and the archives – moving beyond notions of older people as end-of-life “donors” of records to recognizing their important roles as archives creators and users.

Introduction

When members of the Grandmothers Advocacy Network (GRAN) first conceptualized their organization’s archives in mid-2009, their vision was, as their co-chair “Sam”¹ described, of “a collection of boxes neatly filed.” When they initially discussed it with two of us, May Chazan and Melissa Baldwin, in the fall of 2013, we, also unfamiliar with the nuances of archival work, shared their early vision. At best, we saw value in this budding national network of older women preserving their official documents and media clippings; when asked, we were certainly willing to help facilitate this process. Yet in 2013, we did not imagine just how swiftly or how entirely this modest image of “boxes neatly filed” would be, as Sam again expressed, “replaced by something so much more exciting and dynamic.” We did not imagine that our commitment to work together to build GRAN’s archives – a “living archive” that was to “tell the story of GRAN and the women who comprise it,” while attending to the multiplicity of “ideas, issues, tensions and experiences” that shape a movement – would develop into a mutually enlightening process of collective learning, intergenerational exchange, and collaborative investigation.² This nascent archival endeavour offers a unique snapshot of a collaborative, community-driven archives *in process* – an archives evolving. This growing archives provides a site for considering in tandem the relationships between archival theory and practice, the positions and roles of older women within archival work, and the contentious and under-examined polarity between “mainstream” and “alternative” archiving.³

- 1 Throughout the article, we use pseudonyms for the participants in our research. This is in line with the ethics protocols for the larger research initiative from which this article emanates.
- 2 Grandmothers Advocacy Network [hereafter GRAN], “Draft Policy Guidelines for GRAN Archives” (Toronto, 2015).
- 3 Throughout the article, we employ the term “archiving” – as a verb – in order to highlight the active processes involved in creating archives and to use language that offers more fluidity than “archival work” or other similar terms. We are fully aware of the multiple and diverse processes involved in archival work, including collecting and preserving records, organizing

To date, research on aging and archives is extremely scarce, with older people most often represented as passive, end-of-life “donors” of records within this scholarship,⁴ not as active creators and users of their own collections. Very little attention has been paid to who is doing the archiving and why, how old they are (or whether there are significant intergenerational dynamics at play), and what narratives are produced or reproduced through their processes. While there is a vibrant body of feminist archival analysis dealing with issues of power, resistance, agency, and subjectivity,⁵ there remains a dearth of scholarship bringing the emerging insights to bear on questions of aging and gender in the context of commemorative work. Given that GRAN is a movement of older women seeking to create and maintain their own archives, GRAN’s archival process thus raises a number of important and unanswered questions. What is motivating GRAN to undertake this commemorative work? How do GRAN members perceive and frame their growing archives? What might they be resisting, consolidating, or challenging through their process? What relationships might form around, or potentially shape, their archives, and with what implications? How does being a network of aging women figure into their archival work? What might GRAN’s process lend to thinking about the future of the archive more generally? These are some of the questions we consider in this article.

In a broader sense, GRAN’s nascent archives speaks to some of the most critical debates in contemporary archival scholarship and practice. Following the “archival turn,” over the past 15 years many academics and archivists have engaged in a process of transformative epistemological questioning: thinking about what constitutes credible archival knowledge, how such knowledge should be produced, preserved, and interpreted, and who should be imbued with such powers.⁶ They have drawn attention to – and supported resistance

and sorting materials, and providing access, and we in no way mean to collapse these diverse practices into something seemingly monolithic.

- 4 See Geoff Wexler and Linda Long, “Lifetimes and Legacies: Mortality, Immortality, and the Needs of Aging and Dying Donors,” *American Archivist* 72, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2009): 478–95; and Maryanne Dever, “Archiving Feminism: Papers, Politics, Posterity,” *Archivaria* 77 (Spring 2014): 25–42.
- 5 See, for example, Dever, “Archiving Feminism”; Kate Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013); Alexis P. Gumbs, “Seek the Roots: An Immersive and Interactive Archive of Black Feminist Practice,” *Feminist Collections: A Quarterly of Women’s Studies Resources* 32, no. 1 (2011): 17–20; Kate Eichhorn, “D.I.Y. Collectors, Archiving Scholars, and Activist Librarians: Legitimizing Feminist Knowledge and Cultural Production since 1990,” *Women’s Studies* 39, no. 6 (July 2010): 622–46; Lyz Bly and Kelly Wooten, eds., *Make Your Own History: Documenting Feminist and Queer Activism in the 21st Century* (Los Angeles: Litwin Books, 2012).
- 6 See, for example, Terry Cook, “Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts,” *Archival Science* 1 (2001): 3–24; Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural*

around – the often unbridled authority vested in certain archivists and state institutions. They have also challenged the objectivity and positivism entrenched in traditional archiving, bringing a much-needed critical focus to the archival *process*. As the late Terry Cook noted, one of the most predominant features of this turn has been the renewed emphasis on “process rather than product.” This signifies a move away from viewing the archive as some inert, finished product, limiting the role of the archivist to a passive, invisible presenter of static truths; instead, the archive is understood as always embodied and living, as a dynamic, unfinished collection of records (themselves active agents) being created by active mediators of social memory.⁸ This focus on process has been further described as a shift to “evoke more of archival life: as a particular kind of place where complex subjectivities, and working relations, are created through the act of researching the past.”⁹

In other words, moving beyond the archive as a “collection of boxes neatly filed,” these scholars and practitioners are interrogating the process of creating these boxes. Who is doing the collecting and filing and why, and how is this shaping the collection’s meanings? How are they being filed, in what context, and according to whose logic(s)? What might be added to these boxes? What has been omitted? Who will have access and under what conditions? And how will our readings of them change as our societal context transforms? Alongside our desire to extend analyses of aging within this literature, we take this critical turn as our launching point.

Following this turn, several “alternative” approaches to archiving have emerged. We use the term “alternative” to refer collectively to archival initiatives and approaches that have self-identified as “feminist,” “activist,” “community-based/grassroots,” “anti-colonial,” and “queer.”¹⁰ What these

Lives (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Thomas Osborne, “The Ordinarity of the Archive,” *History of the Human Sciences* 12, no. 2 (May 1999): 51–64; Tom Nesmith, “Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives,” *American Archivist* 65, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2002): 24–41; Marlene Manoff, “Theories of the Archive from across the Disciplines,” *Libraries and the Academy* 4, no. 1 (January 2004): 9–25; and Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism*.

7 Cook, “Archival Science and Postmodernism,” 3.

8 *Ibid.*, 4; Alison Bartlett, Maryanne Dever, and Margaret Henderson, “Notes Towards an Archive of Australian Feminist Activism,” *Outskirts* 16 (2007), accessed 10 September 2014, <http://www.outskirts.arts.uwa.edu.au/volumes/volume-16/bartlett>.

9 Hayden Lorimer, “Caught in the Nick of Time: Archives and Fieldwork,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Human Geography*, ed. D. DeLyser et al. (London: SAGE Publications, 2009), 248–73, quoted in Paul Ashmore, Ruth Craggs, and Hannah Neate, “Working-With: Talking and Sorting in Personal Archives,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 38, no. 1 (January 2012): 83.

10 For discussions of feminist archiving, see Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism*; and Adela C. Licona, “(B)orderlands’ Rhetorics and Representations: The Transformative Potential of Feminist Third-Space Scholarship and Zines,” *NWSA Journal* 17, no. 2 (July 2005): 104–29. For discussions of black feminist archiving, see Gumbs, “Seek the Roots”;

have in common is that they are about resisting both dominant historical narratives (and particularly the erasure of certain struggles within these narratives) and the authoritative powers that construct, consolidate, and disseminate such narratives. Often there is also, on the part of those who are the subject of archives, an element of taking control over how the archives is constructed, where it is housed, who retains ownership, and who is granted access.¹¹

Because such resistance implicitly questions the power vested in certain archivists and institutions, it has resulted in something of a bifurcation in the field: a growing polarization between “alternative” archives (presumed to shift the power historically associated with archiving, paying close attention to process, giving more control to those represented within the archives, and being housed outside of the reaches of the state) and “mainstream” archives (assumed to be relatively uncritical of power, process, and the implications of being housed within institutional collections). Yet very few scholars bring this assumed alternative–mainstream binary into conversation with the actual

and Elizabeth Stinson, “Means of Detection: A Critical Archiving of Black Feminism and Punk Performance,” *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 22, no. 2–3 (July 2012): 275–311. For discussions of activist archiving, see Kathleen Garay and Christl Verduyn, “Special Section on Taking a Stand! Activism in Canadian Cultural Archives: Notes from the Guest Editors,” *Archivaria* 67 (Spring 2009): 59–61; and Diane K. Wakimoto, Christine Bruce, and Helen Partridge, “Archivist as Activist: Lessons from Three Queer Community Archives in California,” *Archival Science* 13, no. 4 (December 2013): 293–316. For discussions of community-based/grassroots archiving, see Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd, “Whose Memories, Whose Archives? Independent Community Archives, Autonomy, and the Mainstream,” *Archival Science* 9, no. 1–2 (June 2009): 71–86; Michelle Caswell and Samip Mallick, “Collecting the Easily Missed Stories: Digital Participatory Microhistory and the South Asian American Digital Archive,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 42, no. 1 (January 2014): 73–86; Michelle Caswell, “Seeing Yourself in History: Community Archives and the Fight Against Symbolic Annihilation,” *Public Historian* 36, no. 4 (November 2014): 26–37; Mary Stevens, Andrew Flinn, and Elizabeth Shepherd, “New Frameworks for Community Engagement in the Archive Sector: From Handing Over to Handing On,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16, no. 1–2 (January 2010): 59–76; Jeannette Allis Bastian and Ben Alexander, eds., *Community Archives: The Shaping of Memory* (London: Facet Publishing, 2009). For a discussion of anti-colonial archiving, see David A. Wallace, Patricia Pasick, Zoe Berman, and Ella Weber, “Stories for Hope – Rwanda: A Psychological–Archival Collaboration to Promote Healing and Cultural Continuity Through Intergenerational Dialogue,” *Archival Science* 14, no. 3–4 (October 2014): 275–306. For discussions of queer activist archiving, see Alexandra Juhasz, “Video Remains: Nostalgia, Technology, and Queer Archive Activism,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12, no. 2 (2006): 319–28; and Ela Przybylo and Danielle Cooper, “Asexual Resonances: Tracing a Queerly Asexual Archive,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 20, no. 3 (January 2014): 297–318.

- 11 Caswell, “Seeing Yourself in History”; Flinn et al., “Whose Memories, Whose Archives?” For other prominent examples of such “alternative” initiatives, see Gumbs, “Seek the Roots”; Bly and Wooten, *Make Your Own History*; and Dominique Daniel and Amalia Levi, eds., *Identity Palimpsests: Ethnic Archiving in the U.S. and Canada* (Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books, 2014).

practices, perspectives, and processes of those involved in different forms of archival work, including those deemed alternative.¹² Thus, by detailing the motivations and processes of aging women, we also seek to investigate the integrity of this binary, asking whether its associated assumptions might be overly simplistic for understanding the complex ways groups envision, initiate, and engage in archival work. We pay particular attention to the following assumptions: that alternative archives must necessarily be housed outside of large institutions (and that any affiliation with a state or other large institution necessitates succumbing to authority, with limited agency or resistance);¹³ that alternative archives require independence from outside archivists or academics (or the imagined incompatibility between “being archived” as passive objects and “archiving” as active subjects);¹⁴ and that mainstream archives necessarily uphold dominant discourses and meta-narratives, while alternative ones always instead depict “the everyday” through a multiplicity of perspectives and “small stories.”¹⁵

By examining the process of GRAN’s archival initiative and our roles within it, then, in this article we aim to extend, from a feminist perspective,¹⁶

12 See Ashmore et al., “Working-With.”

13 See, for example, Caswell, “Seeing Yourself in History”; Flinn et al., “Whose Memories, Whose Archives?”; and Wakimoto et al., “Archivist as Activist.” Note also that the concepts of “agency” and “resistance” are used widely in feminist scholarship across disciplines. In this article, we draw on Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 5–16; and Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990; repr. New York: Routledge, 2008), xxiv. These scholars explain that norms are made (and unmade) through the repetition of certain actions: with each repetition, norms can be entrenched, stabilized, secured, challenged, re-appropriated, or re-signified. Agency (and resistance) is grounded in this openness, this possibility for change. In the context of GRAN’s archives, we take this to suggest that the archiving process itself (and specifically the various acts this entails, such as collecting records, making decisions about what to include and how, creating file plans, writing policy guidelines, forging collaborations, and so on) has the power to challenge or entrench norms about older women’s histories and roles within archives – their archiving is an assertion of agency with the possibility to resist norms.

14 Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism* and “D.I.Y. Collectors.”

15 Hayden Lorimer, “Telling Small Stories: Spaces of Knowledge and the Practice of Geography,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 28, no. 2 (June 2003): 197–217; Ashmore et al., “Working-With.”

16 We suggest that this article offers a “feminist” perspective for a number of reasons. Following the works of many prominent feminist scholars (such as Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Colour,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241–99; Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” *Multiculturalism* (1992): 30–36; and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), among others), we attend to intersecting systems of power, privilege, and oppression. The backdrop to our analysis is our recognition of the combined sexism and ageism women in Canada (and elsewhere around the world) face as they age; we also recognize that multiple other axes of difference, including race,

existing discussions among scholars and practitioners interested in alternative-archiving processes, gender, aging, and critical praxis. Ultimately, we ask what our reflection on GRAN's process might contribute to the evolving critical archival literature and, in turn, what a movement interested in developing its own archives, like GRAN, might learn from this scholarship. Our discussion offers two core insights: we expand existing understanding of aging and intergenerationality¹⁷ as they pertain to archival work, and we argue that examining GRAN's archival process leads to a blurring of the alternative-mainstream dualism implicit in much of this literature.

The Grandmothers Advocacy Network: Context and Methodology

The Grandmothers Advocacy Network formed as an independent Canadian organization in 2011. Prior to that, starting in 2007, it operated as the National Advocacy Committee (NAC) of the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign, an initiative launched in 2006 by the Toronto-based Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF). The Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign initially aimed to mobilize Canadian grandmothers in support of grandmother caregivers in sub-Saharan Africa who had lost their children to HIV/AIDS

class, sexuality, and ability, implicate how women experience aging, activism, and inclusion within social movements and society at large, and, likely, how women and their movements will (or will not) be remembered. At the same time, we align with the many feminist scholars who have argued that making women visible within archives is itself a feminist project because women have been obscured from the archive and from history for so long (see, for example, Rachel Moseley and Helen Wheatley, "Is Archiving a Feminist Issue? Historical Research and the Past, Present, and Future of Television Studies," *Cinema Journal* 47, no. 3 (2008): 152–58; Laura Mayhall, "Creating the 'Suffragette Spirit': British Feminism and the Historical Imagination," in *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, ed. Antoinette Burton (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), and we draw on and contribute to the growing literature on alternative archiving, much of which has been shaped by self-identified feminist scholars (including Eichhorn, Dever, and others). In addition, drawing on a feminist perspective makes sense in the context of the GRAN archives, as most of the GRAN members in our research self-identified as feminists, and Sam clearly articulated her excitement over building a feminist archive – referring to the literature we shared with her (including Dever, "Archiving Feminism," and Eichhorn, "D.I.Y. Collectors") and especially to the idea of feminist archiving as attentive to how power and resistance operate in and through commemorative processes.

- 17 In our discussions of intergenerationality, by which we mean interactions between members of different generations, we draw on a rich body of literature, including Jon Binnie and Christian Klesse, "The Politics of Age, Temporality and Intergenerationality in Transnational Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Activist Networks," *Sociology* 47, no. 3 (June 2012): 580–95; Vasu Reddy and Nadia Sanger, "Matters of Age: An Introduction to Ageing, Intergenerationality, and Gender in Africa," *Agenda* 26, no. 4 (December 2012): 3–14; Anna Tarrant, "Constructing a Social Geography of Grandparenthood: A New Focus for Intergenerationality," *Area* 42, no. 2 (June 2010): 190–97.

and were left to raise their grandchildren. While the SLF's campaign focuses on fundraising to support African community-based HIV/AIDS organizations, GRAN's mission is to "advocate in meaningful and strategic ways for the human rights of grandmothers, vulnerable children and youth of sub-Saharan Africa."¹⁸ Thus, GRAN's genesis as an independent network emerged from its separation from the SLF; its early affiliation and subsequent parting deeply inform how GRAN positions itself as an organization, the discourses it deploys, its vision and mandate, and its members' own personal narratives of engagement. In thinking about GRAN's emerging archives, this raises particularly salient questions around how GRAN's early history will be represented and documented and, in the context of this separation, whose stories will be incorporated, how, and with what level of detail.¹⁹

GRAN's three priority areas are listed in its 2014 strategic plan roughly as (1) working to reduce gender-based violence in sub-Saharan Africa, (2) advocating for access to education for girls and women, and (3) working to enable access to life-saving medicines for all.²⁰ Its membership draws from a sophisticated network of thousands of older women – most in their 60s and 70s – across Canada. Its leadership is provided by a rotation of two co-chairs, who are part of the Leadership Team (LT), which reports to a larger steering committee. Decisions are largely made by consensus.²¹ GRAN is an entirely virtual organization. With no physical headquarters and its members spread across Canada, it functions primarily through online teleconferencing and its interactive website. While GRAN does not explicitly call itself a "feminist" or "activist" organization (out of concern that such language might dissuade

18 Grandmothers Advocacy Network, "About Us: Resources," *The GRAN Strategic Plan 2014–2018*, accessed 24 July 2015, <http://grandmothersadvocacy.org/system/files/resources/GRAN%20STRATEGIC%20PLAN%20%202014-18%20with%20Hilary%27s%20edits.pdf> (November 2014), 4.

19 From our extensive conversations with GRAN leaders, for instance, it was evident that there were a number of issues and tensions surrounding the separation, most of which did not enter into the official correspondence circulated to explain the change to various affiliated members and groups; for example, GRAN archives, email correspondence (unprocessed), Andrea Beal, Marilyn Coolen, and Ilana Landsberg-Lewis, "A Letter from the Stephen Lewis Foundation and the National Advocacy Committee," November 2011; Stephen Lewis, "A Letter from Stephen Lewis to the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign Members," November 2011; and Andrea Beal and Marilyn Coolen, "A Letter of Clarification to GRAN Cluster Leaders," December 2011. As Sam explained, NAC members chose to omit any references to such tensions from official statements, keeping in mind the best interests of the organization and the broader movement. The separation was framed, then, solely as an exciting and "natural evolution" and a change that was mutually agreed upon and beneficial to all. We will revisit the implications of this for the archives in our subsequent discussions.

20 GRAN, *Strategic Plan*, 8. These priorities are based on a human rights framework, which is also clearly articulated in GRAN's strategic plan.

21 *Ibid.*, 4.

some potential members from getting involved), the majority of its leaders view GRAN as engaging in contemporary feminist struggles, and many personally identify as feminists.

Chazan's collaboration with GRAN (and previously with NAC and the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign) dates back to the start of this movement in 2006, when she undertook a detailed documentation of the launch and growth of the Canadian mobilization, including its implications and meanings for older women in South Africa.²² Currently, GRAN remains central to her ongoing research (2013–2018), entitled "Transnational Mobilizations and Older Women's Struggles for Social Justice," which aims to elucidate why and how older women across North America (i.e., including, but extending beyond, those involved in GRAN) are mobilizing for social change. Baldwin has been working with Chazan on the research since 2013. It was in the context of this long-standing research relationship that the collaborative archival project we discuss in this article came about in 2013.

In this article, we explicitly draw on three interrelated dimensions of our research surrounding GRAN's archives, all carried out between 2013 and 2015. First, since the start of this archival collaboration, Chazan and Baldwin have kept detailed research logs documenting reflections on the process: we draw on important issues, themes, and observations that have arisen through conversations with GRAN members about the archives and through the process of beginning to collect and organize GRAN's records. Second, we draw on the emerging (and still draft) archives policy guidelines written by GRAN members in early 2015, as well as on some of the archival materials themselves, especially correspondence pertaining to the separation of GRAN from the SLF. And third, we analyze a semi-formal interview between the first two authors and the two GRAN leaders responsible for the archives, Sam and "Sandra"; with their consent, we recorded this conversation, and we cite it throughout this article in order to capture their views and perspectives effectively. Working from within a critical, feminist, community-engaged methodological framework,²³ we have also engaged in an iterative process of writing and seeking feedback and input from GRAN through the drafting of this article.

22 See May Chazan, *The Grandmothers' Movement: Solidarity and Survival in the Time of AIDS* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015).

23 Pamela Sugiman, "Passing Time, Moving Memories: Interpreting Wartime Narratives of Japanese-Canadian Women," in *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History*, 6th ed., ed. Mona Gleeson, Tamara Myers, and Adele Perry (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2011); Audrey Kobayashi, "Negotiating the Personal and the Political in Critical Qualitative Research," in *Qualitative Methodologies for Geographers: Issues and Debates*, ed. Melanie Limb and Claire Dwyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Leslie Brown and Susan Strega, *Research as Resistance: Critical, Indigenous and Anti-Oppressive Approaches* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2005).

GRAN's Archives and Archiving Process

We turn now to the story of GRAN's archives in four parts: the early vision, the collaboration process, the draft policy guidelines, and future considerations. In so doing, we delve into the content and process of GRAN's archives. This then seeds our subsequent discussion of the implications of GRAN's archival process for (1) thinking about aging, gender, and intergenerationality, and (2) collapsing the assumed alternative–mainstream binary present in much critical archival scholarship.

A Vision Evolving: Considering the Archives' Collections and Collaborators

According to Sam, the discussion surrounding GRAN's archives first came about in late 2009 or early 2010, at which time GRAN was still organizing as the National Advocacy Committee of the SLF's Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign. "Claire," one of the NAC's co-founders, first initiated these discussions, and she approached Sam, who was not yet one of the co-chairs, to ask if she might take on the project. Sam saw value in this and agreed to lead the archiving endeavour.

However, what followed was a period of stasis in which the archiving project did not move forward; it was then the height of GRAN's largest campaign to date, the struggle to fix Canada's Access to Medicines Regime, and Sam (along with the other LT members) was highly involved. In 2013, when Sam became GRAN's co-chair, the archives project had not yet gained momentum. While she was committed to moving this forward, she, the other co-chair, and the other LT members were also faced with leading a movement that was no less busy and no less dynamic than it had been previously. Sam also explained that the archives at that time conjured the technical work of "boxes neatly filed somewhere in a library," which she felt was a worthwhile but not especially energizing or pressing task.

In mid-2013, when two of us, Chazan and Baldwin, met with Sam in her home to conduct a life history interview for our larger research project, the archives was still "in the idea phase," as Sam then described it. Over the course of our interview, a discussion about the pending archives emerged and Sam asked us for input. As one of us was a feminist geographer with no previous background in archiving and the other a research assistant then entirely new to research, we shared Sam's technical vision of archiving but did not have much professional wisdom to impart; however, following our commitment to community-engaged research, we described our limited expertise but extended an offer to assist in whatever way we could. Shortly thereafter, during a similar interview, Claire presented us with several large boxes of NAC's early archival material and likewise sought our guidance. These conversations sowed the seeds of our archival collaboration – a

collaboration that shifted our collective vision of GRAN's archives significantly.

Following these two meetings, we began delving into existing scholarship on community-based, feminist, and activist archives, and examined the technicalities of archival processes more generally. With the emerging themes paralleling many of the themes already present in our work – around power, resistance, agency, counter-narrative, and reminiscence – our reading propelled our interest and excitement over the pending project. As we researched, we shared select pieces of scholarship and key community initiatives with Sam.²⁴ We also began to consult with the third author, Laura Madokoro, a close friend, historian, and former archivist, who took an immediate interest and offered key input. This soon turned into a vibrant interdisciplinary, academic-community dialogue; moreover, with Chazan and Madokoro in their early 40s, Baldwin in her early 20s, and the GRAN members in their 70s, this was also a budding collaboration across generations.

In early 2014, we met with Sam to discuss the archives' file plan – what would be included and how it would be organized and presented (see the appendix, which contains the most recent file structure and gives a sense of the archives' organization and contents). By this time, our collective enthusiasm had grown tremendously and our discussions were increasingly theoretically engaged. Sam shared the draft file plan with the LT and asked another GRAN leader, Sandra, to assist with the project. Sandra's presence added energy and helped guide the evolving archives.

In 2014 (and at the time of writing, although still subject to change), the plan was for the archives to include standard organizational documents (such as annual reports, financial reports, official correspondence, annual general meeting minutes, policies, protocols, bylaws, and similar documents), personal context pieces from individual members about such documents, media coverage of GRAN's actions, life/activist histories of its leaders, records of on-the-ground organizing, records of social media activism, key correspondence, personal testimonies and reminiscences, among other records. It was also decided that most, if not all, of the most pertinent GRAN records were available electronically from the computers of two of the LT members (one in Toronto and one in Vancouver), making the collecting of these materials fairly straightforward. Baldwin took on the task of collecting and organizing

24 For example, one document that was particularly influential for the development of the first draft of the "Policy Guidelines for GRAN Archives" was Kitimat Museum & Archives, "Archives Policy and Procedures Manual" (Kitimat, BC, 29 January 1997), accessed 5 September 2014, http://www.kitimatmuseum.ca/sites/default/files/Kitimat_Museum_Archives_Policy_Procedure.pdf. Other shared pieces include Dever, "Archiving Feminism"; Eichhorn, "D.I.Y. Collectors"; and Wakimoto et al., "Archivist as Activist."

the files, which were transferred to her from the two LT members via USB memory sticks. She started with the most straightforward of the records: official documents, materials from meetings, and records that could be tracked chronologically. The intention was then to move into collecting biographical pieces and other materials; at the time of writing, this phase of the archiving had not yet taken place. In addition, while this phase was focused on collecting national records, it was recognized that a process of collecting regional documents and media coverage would eventually be required. Because of the decision to focus on creating digital archives, this cross-country work was not hindered by the fact that GRAN's membership is geographically dispersed. Moreover, given the process through which the GRAN archives was conceived, initiated, and produced, it is important to recognize the roles Sam, Sandra, the LT, and we the authors played (and are playing) as powerful interlocutors and mediators of GRAN's history – responsible for the initial selecting, distilling, and organizing of the records that comprise GRAN's archives.

Intergenerational Exchange: Opening up Complexities, Revealing Socialities

In 2015, Sam highlighted the importance of our collaboration for changing her vision of GRAN's archives, as well as for energizing, motivating, and propelling the project forward:

The collaboration adds to the urgency through the excitement. Having brought this project from files sitting in boxes to something dynamic, something exciting, something that can really provide a narrative, something that can capture some of the essence of this movement, our collaboration also added to the motivation, added to the urgency, because it's exciting in a way that it wasn't.

In this conversation, the idea also emerged that this archives had become a site of (indeed, an agent in generating) intergenerational relationships and knowledge exchange – an embodied, caring, and intellectually stimulating exchange that helped shift GRAN's vision from boxes filed to living archives.

The following excerpt²⁵ clearly reveals the importance of our intergenerational dynamic in GRAN's archival process:

25 In line with long-standing feminist writings on life narratives and other critical qualitative methodologies, we have opted to provide certain relatively lengthy excerpts from our research interviews, in order to reflect the context and intersubjectivity of these materials; see, for example, Marjorie Mbilinyi, "I'd Have Been a Man," in *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, ed. Joy Webster Barbre and Personal Narratives Group (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989).

SANDRA: Well, Melissa is the age of my eldest grandson so it really is intergenerational for me. I just see it as wonderful. I want people to see that you can have value when you're older and that young people keep us involved.... This is actually a wonderful example of what I hope the world coming sees more of, is a lot more intergenerational exchange because we all have something to teach and we all have something to learn in this. So I think it's wonderful. Even that is just something great to show the world, this archives is intergenerational, it makes it even richer.

CHAZAN: [Sam], did you want to reflect on that at all, the implications of this collaboration being intergenerational or what it's like to work across three generations in trying to sort out this project?

SAM: Well, it strikes me that if this were not an intergenerational project it would have taken on a very different life.... The perspective of opening up complexity, let me put it that way, which is not necessarily intergenerational, not necessarily by essence, but is much more likely, I think, to come from a generation that is younger than [Sandra] and I and our peers are. So it's opening up complexity and it's understanding how to do that, and that's been not just on the archives but from the beginning of GRAN's work with you.... I would say that that is partly intergenerational – you bring a particular perspective that we would not necessarily find if our collaboration was shrunk to just our peers.

SANDRA: Even the questions you ask [*laughs*] aren't the ones necessarily that we would ask. It really makes me think.

CHAZAN: One of the reasons that I've also been so hooked on this work is the richness of these intergenerational relationships, and the different questions they bring, the different perspectives, the wisdom.

BALDWIN: Certainly, it's been a huge learning for me because there are not very many instances where a 20-something person is put in an intergenerational context, right? There are actually very, very few possibilities for that, so it's bringing a huge visibility to me.

SAM: Well, and I think from the other side ... the process has been helpful in affirming the importance and value of our older women's perspectives. That's hugely important and I don't know that it could happen if it wasn't intergenerational. It just sort of takes us aback to think "Oh, this is of interest," these lives, our lives. It's hugely important.

SANDRA: It feels like a gift doesn't it, [Sam]?

SAM: Yeah.

CHAZAN: Well, mutual for sure. But it is interesting how the meaning behind what we do can change just as a result of having people of different ages in the same conversation, right?

SANDRA: Yeah.

SAM: Who would have thought that necessarily that would be the case? But the more we talk, and I'm seeing it more and more clearly as our conversation progresses ... it goes beyond that you bring knowledge and expertise and youthful perspective [to the archives]. It's really so much more than that.²⁶

Sam later reflected further on this conversation, elaborating:

I think aging women do understand complexity very well, but collaboration with the two of you has given us a ... language to speak about [it]. I have been familiar with multiple stories/narratives/perspectives, but have appreciated it more because of the emphasis given to this.... I think that is another contribution – deepening and at the same time broadening our understanding of our own perspective and the multiplicity of other perspectives/narratives and giving them more “validity.”²⁷

From our perspective, the process of our collaboration similarly allowed and required us to think in new, more complex, and more theoretically engaging ways about archives and archival work.

Moreover, this conversation revealed that GRAN's archival endeavour is not only a highly social and transformative process, but also a profoundly emotional one. Both Sam and Sandra reflected on a range of emotions – excitement, apprehension, nostalgia, urgency, and accomplishment – associated for them with the archival process. This reflects the work of Ashmore, Craggs, and Neate, who examine the “hidden collaborations and socialities” between archivists/academics and those being archived and suggest that the social and emotional qualities of collaborations can shape the context, content, and contours of the archives produced.²⁸

Thus, through the process of our collaboration across generations (as well as across disciplines and academic-community divides), our collective vision of GRAN's archives shifted from a static repository of documents to a dynamic intellectual, social, and emotional process, vested with a certain power to represent and illuminate a complex movement. The shift demonstrates the intrinsic socialities of the archives as well as some of the ways in which the archival process was an agent for transformative, intergenerational relationship building.

26 Sandra and Sam (GRAN archives co-chairs), in discussion with May Chazan and Melissa Baldwin, January 2015.

27 Ibid.

28 Ashmore et al., “Working-With,” 81.

Policy Guidelines: Articulating Archives as Living and Archiving as Agency

In early 2015, Sam and Sandra drafted a first iteration of “Policy Guidelines for GRAN Archives,” which was then circulated to the LT for feedback. As Sam reflected, the guidelines provided an opportunity to articulate in writing their changing view from “boxes neatly filed” to “living archives,” and to position GRAN members as the primary archivists deliberately undertaking to archive their own history as an assertion of their agency.

The guidelines record their vision as follows, again clearly depicting their resistance to positivist assumptions of archives as inert, static, neutral, and objective:²⁹

Our archives constructs the collective memory of GRAN. As such, it is more than a simple repository for organizational documents, it also tells the story of GRAN and the women who comprise it. It is envisioned as a *living* history, which implies attention to the ideas, issues, tensions and experiences that have shaped and continue to shape our movement.

We understand that the ongoing process of establishing, selecting and updating materials is not a simple reflection of “what happened” but, rather, an assessment of what is most important/relevant/meaningful to the many women, over time, who have and will have responsibility for the collection.³⁰

In addition, their view of the archives as agent³¹ – as *living* – is further articulated in the “Mission and Mandate.” Here, it is also evident that GRAN members see the archives not just as a record of the past, but also as imbued with possibility for altering the course of their present and future movement.³²

29 This vision of archives as more than repositories of records has been articulated elsewhere, including by Halberstam, who argues that “the archive is not simply a repository; it is also a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory, and a complex record of queer activity” (see Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 169–79). These ideas were shared with Sam and Sandra in some of our early exploration and exchange of the alterative archiving literature and its themes.

30 Sam (GRAN archives co-chair), email message to May Chazan and Melissa Baldwin, March 2015.

31 The archive has been framed as an agent by a number of scholars, including Ashmore et al., “Working-With,” and Garay and Verduyn, “Special Section on Taking a Stand!”

32 The theme of archiving for the future resonates with scholars such as Halberstam, who explores the temporalities of the archive (see Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*); Osborne, who argues that the archive is dialogically oriented toward the future (see Osborne, “The Ordinarity of the Archive”); and Juhasz, who contends that the archive not only looks to the past, but also represents “the possibility for an anticipated trace of the future” (see Juhasz, “Video Remains,” 326). See also Eichhorn, “D.I.Y. Collectors” and *The Archival Turn in Feminism*; and Dever, “Archiving Feminism.”

The reasons we are establishing GRAN archives are two-fold. We believe that members of other organizations/movements as well as academics may find the experiences and struggles of GRAN valuable in understanding the possibilities, obstacles and collective strength in pursuing change. We also anticipate that the archival process will deepen, and perhaps alter, our ongoing understanding and appreciation of our movement.³³

Furthermore, the theme of ownership and control is embedded centrally within these guidelines, depicting GRAN members asserting their agency through their archival processes.³⁴ This is especially evident in the following excerpt:

Ownership of our materials will rest with the Leadership Team (LT) and those to whom the LT may delegate responsibility for maintaining and updating the archives. Future documentation will highlight how GRAN will maintain or supervise control over the archives after the host organization is determined.³⁵

Sam further reflected this sentiment in our 2015 conversation:

The archives are an opportunity to be able to organize our story, our movement, our development in ways that are accessible to, as [Sandra] says so importantly, others. Because that has got to be, in a way, the primary motivation.³⁶

Thus, in 2015, Sam and Sandra committed to paper, in their own words and specific to their organization, their shifting – and increasingly complex – conceptualizations of what an archives is and can be. In so doing, they moved their initiative forward considerably, making explicit where they stand on a range of archival issues and on their archives’ underlying philosophical presuppositions.

Reflections and Future Considerations

Throughout our collaborations, we have asked Sam and Sandra to reflect on their archival processes and their concerns and considerations for their archives’ future. Several themes reverberated through these conversations. In moving toward our discussions of aging and intergenerationality and of the assumed polarization between alternative and mainstream archiving, these themes warrant further attention.

33 GRAN, “Draft Policy Guidelines.”

34 Osborne, Eichhorn, Caswell, Gumbs, and several others similarly emphasize archiving as agency, arguing that an important feature of community or alternative archiving has to do with groups creating their own archives in order to assert their historical relevance, craft their own narratives, and thereby resist invisibility, discrimination, and marginalization.

35 GRAN, “Draft Policy Guidelines.”

36 Sandra and Sam, discussion.

Our conversations indicated, for example, certain particularities to do with older women's lives being archived and older women archiving.³⁷ The following excerpt is illustrative, as it speaks not only to a sense of urgency among some older women to leave behind records of their stories and contributions, but also, and most importantly, to their capacity to be the creators and users of their own archives and the political motivations that underpin their archival endeavours:

SANDRA: Because we are a group of aging women, I think that we have the potential to have a very positive influence on our daughters and granddaughters, and to be role models for the women in our lives at work and at home who are watching. I think what we're saying is that your voice is important no matter what your age, and you can change things by working together. I'm not sure that women in their 40s and 50s see the potential that they will have for the next 30 years if they want it. So I want to be a role model for my daughters, and I also want to be a role model for my son and my grandsons so that they see that the women in their lives are their equals and have a voice ... and that their voices are important and should be valued, because for a long time women's voices haven't been valued equally. I think GRAN has such potential to be that influence.

SAM: Right, and I think the archiving project also sharpens and make us much more aware of that role.

SANDRA: Yes.

SAM: It provides a particular kind of opportunity to reflect and recollect.... So maybe that is very much a particularity about this archives for us as older women.... Also, leaving our story, having the story available, becomes more important than, as [Sandra] says, if we were a group of activists in our 30s and 40s doing much the same thing with the organization we were involved in. So I think that's very astute, [Sandra]. That's really important.³⁸

Other conversations concerning GRAN's vision for the archives specifically highlighted its importance for future generations, framing the archives as forward-looking, as was noted previously.³⁹ This is certainly evident in Sandra's vision as follows:

37 This resonates with the previously discussed distinction between being archived and actively archiving; see Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism*; Caswell, "Seeing Yourself in History"; and Flinn et al., "Whose Memories, Whose Archives?"

38 Sandra and Sam, discussion.

39 This has been a theme elsewhere in writings on alternative archiving; see, for example, Caswell, "Seeing Yourself in History"; Caswell and Mallick, "Collecting the Easily Missed Stories"; Dever, "Archiving Feminism"; Bartlett et al., "Notes Towards an Archive of Australian Feminist Activism"; and Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism* and "D.I.Y. Collectors."

I hope that [the GRAN archives] serves as an inspiration to other groups, other community-based groups or other individuals. I hope that it's inspiring to other people to read the story of how this group began. I want others to feel the richness of the friendship.... I want other people to be able to see that ordinary people can make something happen and they can start things and work together and see it become a reality. I hope they see that GRAN is one way of making the world smaller, that we have much in common with others, and that we can all work together, we all have something to contribute. I think that GRAN is a model of how we can do it.⁴⁰

On a practical level, many of these discussions focused on the issue of where, institutionally, GRAN would eventually seek to have its archives housed – a question which, at the time of writing, remained unanswered. From the beginning of our collaboration, GRAN members expressed that their first choice would be to have Library and Archives Canada – the state archiving institution – house the archives, in order to bolster its visibility and make it nationally accessible. Their second choice would be to have it in an appropriate collection within a major Canadian university. These preferences and leanings provide an interesting accompaniment to the articulation of “ownership” within the policy guidelines. Indeed, questions pertaining to institutional affiliation have often been raised in scholarship on community-based archiving: because archival institutions (state and academic) have a history of eclipsing the agency of community groups (by controlling what gets included in their archival collections and who is granted access), many scholars suggest that independence from such institutions – that is, groups maintaining control over their own compiling, curation, and housing of collections – is a central feature of community archives.⁴¹

A final theme to emerge from these conversations had to do with the challenges in capturing the multiplicity of existing stories surrounding GRAN's history without jeopardizing its future. As Sam explained, with the mutual “opening up of complexity” that came with our collective changing vision for the archives, there also came a desire for the archives to capture the productive tensions and multiple perspectives that shaped GRAN, rather than to present GRAN's history as one meta-narrative.⁴² In practice, however, both Sam and Sandra had questions about whether documenting such complexity could in some way harm the movement's future. This issue was raised especially with respect to GRAN's separation from the SLF, as noted previously. While there

40 Sandra and Sam, discussion.

41 See, for example, Caswell, “Seeing Yourself in History,” 18; Flinn et al., “Whose Memories, Whose Archives?”; Bartlett et al., “Notes Towards an Archive of Australian Feminist Activism”; and Caswell and Mallick, “Collecting the Easily Missed Stories.”

42 For similar discussions, see Bartlett et al., “Notes Towards an Archive of Australian Feminist Activism”; Osborne, “The Ordinarity of the Archive”; and Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism*.

were, as discussed earlier, a number of tensions surrounding the separation (and many challenges ahead for GRAN), these are not entirely evident in the SLF's (or GRAN's) "official" narrative of how GRAN gradually became its own organization.⁴³ Decisions to portray the separation in this way, focusing on the future and not dwelling on tensions, were likely made in the spirit of minimizing confusion and protecting the broader movement. And yet, this parting was foundational for GRAN: this is what gave GRAN autonomy and led it to different and more deliberate forms of governance, vision, mandate, and practice. Sam and Sandra felt strongly that the multiplicity of perspectives would need to be reflected in GRAN's archives; at the same time, they worried about creating unnecessary tensions in their relations with the SLF and/or confusing GRAN members, most of whom remained part of both the SLF's campaign and GRAN.⁴⁴

Thus, a number of questions and themes were revealed in Sam and Sandra's reflections on the GRAN archives and its future directions. Are (and how are) age, gender, and the life course implicated in GRAN's archival process? What does it mean for them – and what will it look like – to archive for future generations? Where should they seek to house their archives and what are the implications of their choices? How will the GRAN archives, in practice, capture productive tensions and a multiplicity of perspectives

43 See the official email correspondence circulated following the separation, in particular these in the (unprocessed) GRAN archives (see note 19): Beal, Coolen, and Landsberg-Lewis, "A Letter from the Stephen Lewis Foundation and the National Advocacy Committee"; Lewis, "A Letter from Stephen Lewis to the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign Members"; and Beal and Coolen, "A Letter of Clarification to GRAN Cluster Leaders."

44 These tensions speak to a wider theme within the archival literature: a movement to incorporate into archives the "small stories" or often omitted details, from a multiplicity of perspectives. For a similar discussion see, for example, Lorimer, "Telling Small Stories"; Osborne, "The Ordinarity of the Archive"; Moseley and Wheatley, "Is Archiving a Feminist Issue?"; and Honor R. Sachs, "Reconstructing a Life: The Archival Challenges of Women's History," *Library Trends* 56, no. 3 (February 2008): 650–66. These scholars have critiqued mainstream collections for the way they presumably uphold certain dominant stories as truth and for their tendency to leave out (or appropriate) certain lesser-recognized (or obscured) stories. Moseley and Wheatley, for instance, argue that the absence of "the domestic" or "the mundane" in archiving is not a passive ignorance but rather an active writing out of women's worlds, histories, and experiences from historical narratives; by excluding or obscuring "the everyday" from archival collections, they contend, women have been effectively written out of history (see Moseley and Wheatley, "Is Archiving a Feminist Issue?," 151). Osborne similarly suggests that the tradition of archiving is one of authority and power in the privileging of certain kinds of truth, while archiving the ordinary, the everyday, the small moments, and even banality, becomes a political act of resistance and a powerful subversion of the marginalizing status quo (pp. 60–61). Sachs, furthermore, suggests that everyday stories that "fill in silences and challenge basic narratives" can have (and have had) the power to change the landscapes of historical relevance and contemporary narratives (p. 650).

without jeopardizing their movement? We will now revisit some of these questions in our two-part discussion of aging and intergenerationality and the alternative–mainstream binary.

Aging and Intergenerationality

The significant themes of aging and intergenerationality have emerged throughout our conversations and collaborations with GRAN members and thus warrant further elaboration here, particularly in light of the limited engagement with these themes within the archival literature to date.⁴⁵ As noted previously, within this scarce literature there tends to be a focus on older women as “elderly donors,” recognizing some urgency in collecting and preserving their records and past contributions before they die, but rarely viewing them as creators or users of archives or seeking to document their contemporary contributions. While Bartlett, Dever, and Henderson are, for instance, among the few to consider issues of aging feminist activists and the importance of archives, their framing of these women emphasizes the precariousness of their lives and records: “There is a timeliness to our claim for the importance of rethinking what our feminist archives might look like... As our activist population ages and considers retirement and downsizing, extant materials that are privately held face an increasingly precarious future.”⁴⁶ Wexler and Long similarly discuss such archival work in the context of “aging, infirmity, and the end of life,” placing emphasis instead on capturing the “productivity” of younger years.⁴⁷ These remain focused on the *past* contributions of older women and, as such, tend to reinforce marginalizing narratives of older women as isolated, disengaged, unproductive, and frail.⁴⁸ The focus on older women as “donors” – or as people being archived – also eclipses the possibility of these women actively archiving, while little attention has been given to how intergenerational archival relationships might inform archival processes or archives themselves.

Three findings from our collaborations could thus extend this scholarship. First, GRAN members – in this case Sam and Sandra – were very clear about their vision of a “living archives” that reflects a vibrant, *contemporary*

45 Exceptions include Dever, “Archiving Feminism”; Wallace et al., “Stories for Hope – Rwanda”; and Wexler and Long, “Lifetimes and Legacies.”

46 Bartlett et al., “Notes Towards an Archive of Australian Feminist Activism.”

47 Wexler and Long, “Lifetimes and Legacies,” 478.

48 Maureen McHugh, “Aging, Agency, and Activism: Older Women as Social Change Agents,” *Women & Therapy* 35, no. 3–4 (2012): 279–95; Dana Sawchuk, “The Raging Grannies: Defying Stereotypes and Embracing Aging Through Activism,” *Journal of Women & Aging* 21, no. 3 (July 2009): 171–85; Amanda Grenier and Jill Hanley, “Older Women and ‘Frailty’: Aged, Gendered and Embodied Resistance,” *Current Sociology* 55, no. 2 (March 2007): 211–28.

movement of older women. This is a shift in thinking about older women – moving away from seeing them only as past contributors to society toward recognizing the important contributions they make throughout their lives, including in later life. Older people, in this case older women, are clearly creators of new records and new archives, preserving their contributions to contemporary social movements. For Sam and Sandra, this is very much tied to how they view their archives as oriented not only toward the past, but also toward the present and future.⁴⁹ The archives documents the life histories and past mobilizations of their members, so as not to lose these stories; however, it also reflects ongoing present-day contributions and informs a movement in progress, while it is simultaneously aimed at educating future generations about the potential for power, resistance, and influence in older age.

Second, connected to the notion of modelling to younger generations that older women can have influence within society and within social movements, the GRAN archives is in part aimed at subverting stereotypes about older women. This was especially reflected in Sandra's comments about wanting younger generations to know how she and her fellow GRAN members spend their time – “not baking cakes.” She felt strongly about challenging narratives of domesticity, disengagement, frailty, and invisibility. This sense of resistance was also explicit in the way that GRAN members did not position themselves as merely “donors” being archived, but instead as users and creators of their archives.

Finally, our collaboration with GRAN raised important questions around how archives may become sites and agents of knowledge exchange and relationship building across generations, as well as how these intergenerational relationships may in turn shape archives themselves. Sam, for instance, discussed her perspective that our collaboration likely had certain impacts on the archival process and the archives, in part because of its intergenerationality. While she believes that older women understand complexity very well, she felt that the process of working within these relationships opened up the GRAN archives to a type of complexity and fluidity of thinking – making it, perhaps, more “alternative” than it might otherwise have been – in a way that may not have happened had only she and her peers collaborated. She also felt that the intergenerationality of our collaboration produced a sense of validation, or a feeling that building the archives was worthwhile and that younger generations would be interested in accessing it, which was a motivator for pursuing and sustaining the project.

These themes, and especially their near absence from existing archival scholarship, are important considerations for the future of archives broadly, especially given ongoing demographic trends. Over the next 40 years, the

49 Osborne, “The Ordinarity of the Archive,” 56.

global population over the age of 60 is expected to triple, so that by 2050, for the first time in history, there will be more people worldwide who are over the age of 60 than who are under the age of 15. Life expectancy is higher for women than it is for men, with populations over 60 estimated to include two to five times as many women as men.⁵⁰ The emerging picture is that population aging is unprecedented, pervasive, and feminized; in Canada, this trend is indeed well underway.⁵¹ Meanwhile, there is evidence that social mobilization is growing around a number of social and environmental issues and that older women are integral to this growth.⁵² In considering the future of archival work, there is an obvious need for scholars and practitioners to think more deeply and more critically about the intersections of activist archiving, aging, and intergenerationality. This also means rethinking the conventional alternative–mainstream binary.

Beyond the Alternative–Mainstream Binary

GRAN's archival endeavour offers a number of insights for scholarship on alternative (feminist, activist, community-based, and so on) approaches to archiving. Specifically, bringing GRAN's archival process to bear on certain themes within this scholarship functions to blur assumptions that “alternative” and “mainstream” approaches are somehow diametrically opposed. In the opening of this article, we positioned alternative archiving, with its focus on process and its critique of the power vested in certain archivists and institutions, within the context of the “archival turn.” We noted the presumed polarization between alternative and mainstream archives, outlining three associated assumptions: the idea that alternative archives should be housed outside of the institutional authority of large institutions, the imagined incompatibility between “being archived” as passive objects and “archiving” as active subjects, and the notion that alternative archives commit to documenting “the everyday” through a multiplicity

50 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Ageing 2013*, ST/ESA/SER.A/348, accessed 30 September 2014, <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WorldPopulationAgeing2013.pdf> (New York, 2013).

51 Statistics Canada, “Part 1: National Portrait: The Number of Canadians Aged 65 and Over Is Up and Is Close to 5 Million,” in *The Canadian Population in 2011: Age and Sex*, catalogue no. 98-311-X2011001, accessed 15 September 2014, <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-311-x/98-311-x2011001-eng.pdf> (Ottawa, 2012), 4–5; Michèle Charpentier, Anne Quéniart, and Julie Jacques, “Activism among Older Women in Quebec, Canada: Changing the World after Age 65,” *Journal of Women & Aging* 20, no. 3–4 (August 2008): 343–60.

52 Renée L. Beard and John B. Williamson, “Social Policy and the Internal Dynamics of the Senior Rights Movement,” *Journal of Aging Studies* 25, no. 1 (January 2011): 22–33; McHugh, “Aging, Agency, and Activism.”

of perspectives and small stories. With these in mind, and recognizing that GRAN's archives certainly provides an example of archiving that is feminist, activist, and community based, our findings clearly extend such binary thinking. Here, too, three overarching findings are illustrative.

First, GRAN's archival process speaks to the idea of archiving itself as an assertion of agency.⁵³ GRAN members are actively constructing and maintaining control over their own stories, and they view their archiving as a resistance to marginalizing narratives of older women as disengaged and isolated. They are also deliberately crafting counter-narratives of vibrancy, contribution, and activism throughout their later years, as is evident in a number of records they are including in the archives, such as their activist/life histories and the media records of their activism. It is important, however, that while such records clearly reflect their activism, resistance, and political agency, their agency is not tied to some final product, inert record, or isolated action. Rather, it is enacted in the archiving *process*.⁵⁴ Such a focus on agency as asserted through the archival process further destabilizes associated assumptions that those being archived in mainstream archives surrender their agency and authority by being affiliated with larger institutions, while alternative archivists assert theirs by remaining independent from, and resistant to, such affiliation.⁵⁵ While GRAN members, as of the time of writing, were eager to have their archives housed within a state or academic institution in order to bolster its validity, reach, and potential audience, their sense of control and agency was certainly not weakened; regardless of its eventual institutional affiliation, their *process* of archiving was itself an enactment of their agency.

Second, our experiences with GRAN reflect the idea that archiving is social and emotional work.⁵⁶ It is evident that the GRAN archives has been fuelled by a conscientious and deeply-caring collaboration – our collective social, emotional, intellectual, and embodied investment and commitment. This reflects the work of Ashmore et al., who suggest that the social and

53 This clearly reflects the works of Osborne, Eichhorn, Caswell, and several others, who emphasize notions of archiving as agency. These scholars argue that an important feature of community or alternative archiving has to do with groups creating their own archives in order to assert their historical relevance, craft their own narratives, and thereby resist invisibility, discrimination, and marginalization. Gumbs and others likewise explain that the very act of undertaking this kind of archival initiative is itself an expression of agency, rooted in resistance to being omitted from, or falsely represented within, authoritative historical narratives. See Caswell, "Seeing Yourself in History"; Caswell and Mallick, "Collecting the Easily Missed Stories"; Osborne, "The Ordinarity of the Archive"; Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism*; and Flinn et al., "Whose Memories, Whose Archives?"

54 Cook, "Archival Science and Postmodernism"; Gumbs, "Seek the Roots"; Ashmore et al., "Working-With."

55 Flinn et al., "Whose Memories, Whose Archives?"; Caswell, "Seeing Yourself in History"; Wakimoto et al., "Archivist as Activist."

56 Ashmore et al., "Working-With"; Wexler and Long, "Lifetimes and Legacies."

emotional qualities of collaborations can shape the archives produced and offer the concept of “working-with” – by which they mean the physical, intellectual, social, and emotional dimensions and dynamics of archival collaboration – in order to try to move beyond divisive assumptions that mainstream projects involve groups being archived (by some distant, objective, neutral archivist) and alternative ones involve groups actively archiving their own lives and records.⁵⁷ This polarization, they suggest, diminishes the possibility of the archivist as collaborator *within* an alternative project.⁵⁸ In the case of GRAN, our “working-with”⁵⁹ is profoundly influencing how the archives is evolving and our collective ever-changing vision of what it could be. These transformative socialities emerge from the *process* of archiving together – across differences in training, social position, and generation. In turn, the archives has become a catalyst for knowledge exchange. As Sam and Sandra described, our mutually energizing and emotionally vibrant collaboration – and its influence on the shift from “boxes neatly filed” to “living archives” – challenges positivist notions of archives as inert and archivists as impartial and invisible, depicting instead the GRAN archives as an active agent in relationship building and our relationships (and perspectives) as co-archivists as ever present.⁶⁰ Our collaboration clearly unsettles divergent assumptions between being archived and archiving independently: GRAN members are both being archived (by us, as outside academics/archivists) and actively archiving themselves, while our collaboration and role in the archives is being archived as part of GRAN’s narrative and part of the “living archives.”

Finally, GRAN’s archival process reveals efforts to capture a multiplicity of small stories, differing perspectives, and the everyday,⁶¹ here too complicating certain binary assumptions. As a general principle, the archives maintains a consistent overall narrative of the evolution, work, and visions of GRAN; however, this grander picture is intentionally constructed, situated, and contextualized through telling the small stories and preserving the many distinct voices that make up GRAN’s leadership. Sam and Sandra recognize that overarching narratives are not expressions of solitary truths but

57 Flinn et al., “Whose Memories, Whose Archives?”; Caswell, “Seeing Yourself in History”; Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism*; Dayna McLeod, Jasmine Rault, and T.L. Cowan, “Speculative Praxis Towards a Queer Feminist Digital Archive: A Collaborative Research-Creation Project,” *ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media & Technology* 5 (July 2014), accessed 17 November 2014, <http://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-cowanetal/>.

58 See, for example, Bartlett et al., “Notes Towards an Archive of Australian Feminist Activism”; Wexler and Long, “Lifetimes and Legacies”; and Ashmore et al., “Working-With.”

59 Ashmore et al., “Working-With,” 81.

60 See Ashmore et al., “Working-With,” 82; Garay and Verduyn, “Special Section on Taking a Stand!,” 61; McLeod et al., “Speculative Praxis Towards a Queer Feminist Digital Archive.”

61 Osborne, “The Ordinarity of the Archive”; Moseley and Wheatley, “Is Archiving a Feminist Issue?”; Sachs; Caswell and Mallick, “Collecting the Easily Missed Stories.”

rather “partial knowledges” or incomplete pictures, which do not invalidate the experiences and personal truths of individuals.⁶² As such, they do not wish for the larger GRAN organizational narrative to eclipse the “quieter engagements” of their diverse membership, and they are actively considering how to incorporate tensions and contradictions, as well as multiple voices, histories, and experiences.⁶³ This deliberation was particularly obvious in conversations about how to record and depict their organization’s separation from the SLF. At the time of writing, their thinking was that, in the best interest of their movement, they will likely need to tread a fine line between upholding a certain meta-narrative, all the while unveiling some of the obscured small stories. Such an intricate weaving of meta-narratives and small stories blurs assumptions surrounding what is deemed mainstream and alternative practice.

Thus, in addition to extending existing understandings of aging and archives, our experiences with GRAN complicate what is often upheld as a dualism between archives that are entirely independent of institutional authority, outside input, and dominant meta-narratives, and those that are not. GRAN provides an example of a community-driven, collaborative archival initiative, where the very process of archiving reveals agency and resistance, and where its philosophical underpinnings and grounded practices certainly resonate with the “archival turn.” GRAN’s deliberations and ongoing decisions add nuance and sophistication to simplistic conceptualizations and polarizing assumptions.

Conclusion: Considerations for the Future of the Archives

A budding national network of older women advocates, in 2009 GRAN members initiated a project of creating their own archives – conceived of then as neatly filed boxes of presumably static records – in order to preserve their organization’s history and institutional memory. Four years later, their archival endeavour, ever more complex, dynamic, and embodied, was well underway. Through their archival processes, they were actively staking out their historical relevance as contemporary social change actors, seeking to illuminate the intricacies of an ever-changing, multi-vocal social movement. GRAN’s nascent archives, and our mutually enlightening partnership within it, provide important insights into the theory and practice of so-called alternative archiving, as well as certain key considerations for 21st-century archivists.

While existing critical scholarship has brought important visibility to how power operates within and through archives and archival processes, much of it still tends toward polarizing assumptions, pitting archives deemed alternative

62 Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 575–99.

63 Peter Merriman, “Creating an Archive of Geographical Engagement,” *Area* 43, no. 3 (September 2010): 387, cited in Ashmore et al., “Working-With,” 88.

in binary opposition to those deemed mainstream. GRAN's archival initiative, however, extends these discussions. Not only do our reflections depict this binary thinking as overly simplistic for understanding the complex ways groups engage in archival work, but they also expand what are conceptualized within the possibilities of "alternative" archives. For example, we suggested that where groups decide to house their archives (or whether they seek or avoid institutional affiliation) is not indicative of the extent to which their archives express their agency or resistance. Rather, regardless of where or by whom archives are housed, groups can exert agency through the *process of archiving itself* – as is clearly the case with GRAN. We also contended that assumed bifurcations between "being archived" and "archiving" are lacking in nuance; indeed, GRAN members were both the objects of their archival records and actively engaged in crafting the archives, while we (as collaborators) were not only assisting with the archives but also included in its records. Our "Working-With" illuminated the possibilities of archives as active agents in building intergenerational, academic–activist relationships through the very processes that lead to the creation, preservation, and accessibility of records. Furthermore, we called into question presumptions that mainstream archives uphold singularity and meta-narratives, while alternative ones record multiplicity and the everyday. As was evident in deliberations over the documenting of GRAN's history as an independent organization, GRAN members were striving to incorporate small moments, tensions, and differences in perspective, all the while carefully and strategically crafting certain meta-narratives.

Perhaps most significantly, GRAN's archival process raises pivotal questions for the future of archiving by pointing to two stark limitations within current archival scholarship: (1) the existing gap in considering how intergenerational relationships might form around, and potentially shape, collaborative archives; and (2) the scarce attention given to how older women's lives and associations are being recorded and represented. Here, our research suggested that intergenerationality may be a powerful and largely unconsidered dynamic within archival collaborations, which could transform the meanings, practices, and potentials of "archiving." Our work with GRAN demonstrates that intergenerational collaboration has the potential to energize, revolutionize, and amplify archival work. As Juhasz eloquently notes, "One generation's yearning could fuel another's learning, if we could look back together and foster an escape from melancholia through productive, communal nostalgia."⁶⁴ Our analysis also revealed that GRAN members are challenging dominant discourses about older women's passivity, insisting on being remembered for their vibrancy, engagement, and activism. Their archival work, moreover, begs a shift in thinking about aging and the archives – moving beyond notions

64 Juhasz, "Video Remains," 326.

of older people as end-of-life “donors” of records toward recognizing their important roles as archive creators and users. Indeed, GRAN’s archives are being created by older women, resisting ageist narratives that frame them as inconsequential and apolitical, and documenting their own contemporary contributions to society; this archival process moves well beyond efforts to compile older people’s life’s work and instead recognizes them as archivists who take power from, and understand the value in, preserving their present-day contributions. Clearly, in the context of our pervasive, unprecedented, and feminized aging population, it behoves 21st-century archivists to consider how intergenerational collaborations might implicate archives and archival processes, how the lives and organizations of older women are being recorded, and what narratives are being consolidated or challenged in the process.

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APPENDIX

Draft File Structure for GRAN Archives, 10 March 2015

Policies & Governance	AGMs	Year	Minutes	
			Annual Report	
			Nominations Report	
			Financial Report	
			Annual Treasury Report	
	Policies/Protocols			
	Bylaws			
Strategic Plans (2008–2012) (2014–2018)				
Job Descriptions				
Campaigns	Access to Medicines	CAMR	Bill 363	<i>Containing:</i>
			Bill 393	
			Bill 398	
			Senate Bills	
	TPP	National Actions		
			Global Fund	
			Medicines Patent Pool	
	Violence Against Women	In Conflict Areas	Media Coverage	
		Child, Early and Forced Marriage		
	Education	Global Partnership for Education	Partners	
Education for the Older Woman				

About GRAN (Identity)	Early Days/ NAC	A Story Evolving	
		Leaving the SLF	
	GRAN Emerges	Branding Documents	
		Surveys	
		Brochures	
	Fundraising Projects	Aeroplan Miles	
Website			
Monthly Communica- tions	Year	Month	Consent Agenda
			SC Minutes
			Update
			LT Minutes
People	GRAN Groups		(Sorted by region with info on location, formation, structure)
	Past Co-Chairs and LT Members		Interview transcripts
	Honorary GRAN recipients		Photos
	Supporters (individual or organization)		Bios
	Partners (formal and informal)		
National Gatherings	Hello Friends 2015		Program/minutes
	Hello Friends 2013		Materials
	Hello Friends 2010		
	GranAfriCan 2010		Materials
			Media