

- Tanya Domi: Hi. This is Tanya Domi. Welcome to The Thought Project recorded at The Graduate Center of The City University of New York, fostering groundbreaking research and scholarship in the arts, social sciences and sciences. In this space, we talk with faculty and doctoral students about the big thinking and big ideas generating cutting edge research, informing New Yorkers and the world.
- Tanya Domi: During June pride month and the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots that took place in New York City in 1969, kicking off the modern LGBTQ civil rights movement, The Thought Project podcast will host guests who will share their stories. Today, we host three librarians from the graduate center. Polly [Thistlethwaite 00:00:54], Emily [Drabinski 00:00:54] and Shawn(ta) Smith Cruz who identify as queer and lesbian individually and also in their work.
- Tanya Domi: Polly Thistlethwaite is the chief librarian at the graduate center at CUNY Mina Rees Library. She joined CUNY as a reference librarian at Hunter College in 1990 through 1996. During evenings and weekends she joined the lesbian herstory archives, the theater called Wow Café, and with Act Up the AIDs activist group.
- Tanya Domi: Emily Drabinski is the critical pedagogy, librarian at the Mina Rees Library at the graduate center. Emily is dogged by the problem of needing to fix queer identity in place on library shelves in library catalogs and in digital information systems when queer identity is by definition always changing.
- Tanya Domi: Shawn(ta) Smith Cruz is the reference librarian at the graduate center. She is also a collective member and co-coordinator of the lesbian herstory archives, which is based in Brooklyn. At the archives she processes lesbian of color archival collections and speaks internationally on black lesbian archival narrative. She co-chairs the board of directors of the Center for LGBTQ studies, also known as CLAGS at the graduate center.
- Tanya Domi: Welcome to the Thought Project, Polly, Emily, and Shawn(ta).
- Polly T: Hi.
- Emily D: Thanks for having us.
- Shawn(ta) S: I'm thrilled to be in the basement with you.
- Tanya Domi: Excellent, so not only is June pride month, but 2019 marks the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots, which is recognized as the beginning of the modern LGBT civil rights movement. I'd like to hear what everybody has to say about your thoughts on this incredible 50th anniversary, the entire world is coming here, they expect more than four million people to visit New York City.
- Shawn(ta) S: I think six million.

Tanya Domi: Oh it's up to six million?

Shawn(ta) S: Coming to our reference desks.

Tanya Domi: And they will be flooding exhibits, films, operas, libraries where you all spend your time. So I'd like to hear your thoughts, Polly.

Polly T: About Stonewall 50? I always think librarianship was the first professional organization that I know of to have a queer subsection. The gay taskforce was founded in I think it was '71, Barbara Gittings was one of the founders of that. She wasn't a librarian, Barbara, but she was an activist. Activist in the homophile movement, pre-Stonewall and then on the streets after Stonewall as well.

Polly T: But when I was a youngster, back in central Illinois thinking about what the heck am I going to do with my queer hide for a job? I thought of librarianship because you could dress butch at least in academic libraries and get away with it. And there was space, there was a professional group, the gay taskforce, the gay and lesbian taskforce now it's got a broader, inclusive name. But it was there then, and that signaled that we could go-

Tanya Domi: You would be accepted.

Polly T: Yeah.

Tanya Domi: And you could be in that space.

Polly T: Yeah, I could be a librarian.

Emily D: I like hearing your origin story, Polly. I didn't think I knew that.

Polly T: About the?

Emily D: About why you became a librarian, that it was as a result of Barbara Gittings work.

Polly T: So because ... Yeah, also so I could wear my leather jacket to work.

Emily D: Very important.

Polly T: It was, it was a deal.

Tanya Domi: And that was when? 1980?

Polly T: No, I wasn't a librarian until, golly, '83, '84.

Tanya Domi: I was off a few years.

Emily D: It is like a drag profession, though, right? Because when I started I would, I remember what I used to wear, these long, pleated black skirts and a tight shirt with a high collar and my hair in a very severe set of buns.

Tanya Domi: Emily, really?

Emily D: Yeah.

Tanya Domi: The goth cut.

Emily D: But very, you know, there's so many stereotypes, there's something kind of drag about it.

Tanya Domi: And now it's the sweaters, let's just say.

Shawn(ta) S: The cardigans.

Polly T: Cardigans.

Emily D: Yeah.

Tanya Domi: Okay. That's all new to me, I didn't do any of that. That's something I've learned.

Shawn(ta) S: And now you want to hear mine?

Tanya Domi: Yeah.

Shawn(ta) S: Well you know, my origin story does stem from I guess the gay herstory because I became a librarian when I learned that Audre Lorde was a librarian.

Tanya Domi: Yes.

Shawn(ta) S: That was what put it on the map for me. I was like, oh this is what black women do when they're adults. They get, because in my world as Jamaicans you're either a nurse or a teacher and I didn't want to be either of those two things. Although if I had to choose I would choose teacher, but it wasn't quite the thing that I wanted. And then I learned of Audre Lorde and she was a librarian at CUNY and I went, okay.

Polly T: Well she was a prof at CUNY.

Shawn(ta) S: She was a prof at CUNY and she was a public librarian.

Polly T: She was a public librarian before she got-

Shawn(ta) S: Before she came to CUNY.

Tanya Domi: I did not know that about Audre Lorde.

Polly T: She was.

Tanya Domi: She was a librarian.

Polly T: Yes.

Shawn(ta) S: Yeah, she has a library degree anyway.

Tanya Domi: So don't you think that was kind of like the outlaw places that women could go in their careers? I mean, teacher, secretary-

Polly T: Yeah.

Tanya Domi: You know, nurse.

Polly T: Librarianship was one of the professions open to single women.

Tanya Domi: Single women.

Polly T: In the 18-whatevers, there's teaching, nursing-

Tanya Domi: The 19th century.

Polly T: Prostitution or librarianship. And you could pick one of those things and librarianship seems to be a pretty decent option.

Tanya Domi: It also seems that there's a lot of intellectuals where people have a lot of their knowledge, their archiving knowledge and they have to be knowledgeable about the archives. So they're relatively very smart people and at CUNY, not necessarily at other universities, but clearly at CUNY you're a professor, you have-

Polly T: You have faculty status.

Tanya Domi: You're faculty status here.

Emily D: It's true.

Tanya Domi: Which is very, when Polly told me that when I first met her, I thought that is really cool because it's not the case at every university.

Polly T: No, the faculty status is sort of, it kind of came up with the large public systems CUNY in California. So the California library system and the CUNY library systems

were among the first to have faculty status, to have the institute faculty status for librarians.

Tanya Domi: That's really interesting.

Polly T: But yeah it's also the profession came up with these ideals, these post war ideals about free expression and valuing inquiry and anti-censorship. So it was a very attractive profession for free thinkers.

Tanya Domi: People probably on the margins politically, right?

Emily D: Yeah, I mean you do a lot of invisible work, right? You build the infrastructures that make knowledge making possible. So that's totally critical to anybody's scholarly project, right? And yeah, you've got to be pretty smart to do it. But you're also invisible, which has its challenges. Nobody thinks you matter, nobody notices you're there, but you can do a lot when nobody knows you're around.

Polly T: You mean if you're organizing things?

Emily D: Yeah, yeah.

Polly T: That's invisible labor?

Emily D: I think so, they don't see you. How many people are like, "oh I just Googled it" and they don't understand that the information was purchased, organized, preserved, made accessible.

Tanya Domi: As someone who teaches at Columbia and will be teaching at Hunter in the fall, I love librarians. They're important. When you're a faculty member, they are very important to you. One of the first things I do with my students is I take them through the human rights archives at the Columbia library so they can be exposed to those for primary research. But anyway, I appreciate all of you, that's why you're here today.

Emily D: Thank you.

Tanya Domi: We were having a pre-recording discussion about the connections between queerness and librarianship. Do you want to start with that, Shawn(ta)?

Shawn(ta) S: Sure.

Tanya Domi: Maybe talk about your take on it? We were talking about, in your case we were talking about intersectionality.

Shawn(ta) S: we were.

Tanya Domi: Yes.

Shawn(ta) S: And in fact I wanted to pull the L words, because even though we're talking about queerness I think lesbian is more fun to say.

Polly T: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Perhaps more applicable here.

Shawn(ta) S: To this space.

Tanya Domi: Why is it more fun, in your view?

Shawn(ta) S: Well I think that what happens with language and naming, and we can talk about classifications, but within the queer umbrella, lesbian gets erased. It becomes an invisible identity, similar to librarians and faculty status. So you're constantly coming out as a librarian, as faculty to other faculty. And you're constantly coming out as a lesbian if you're not masculine presenting or it's not obvious to everyone who sees you.

Tanya Domi: Oh the traditional stereotypes.

Shawn(ta) S: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tanya Domi: Yeah.

Shawn(ta) S: So that was just something that came to me as we were talking about faculty status.

Polly T: Always this, always the struggle.

Tanya Domi: Let's talk about this connection.

Polly T: Nobody sees me.

Shawn(ta) S: It's true. But in terms of intersectionality, I think that librarianship is embracing intersectionality. So you know that Kimberley Crenshaw formulated the identity with the critical race theory-

Tanya Domi: Yes.

Shawn(ta) S: In the early 90s, so now she's the mother of that term, but it's existed obviously prior to her. Specifically I'm thinking of post-Stonewall experiences with black, lesbian feminists of womanists who wanted to overlay identities of race and gender and sexual orientation into the work that we're doing.

Tanya Domi: Into who they were, that's right, who they are in the world.

- Polly T: So those are really old conversations in our circles, in our communities. Lesbian communities.
- Shawn(ta) S: Exactly, and I think when we think of the critical elements that Emily was mentioning, who I think you could speak for critical pedagogies in a different way, I don't see how queerness can be pulled out of it. If you think about intersectionality, there's always these overlapping principles that interrelate. So any time we're thinking about scholarship, we have to be thinking about queerness, we have to be thinking about race, and other things.
- Tanya Domi: It's part, you probably see it as part of your responsibility to make sure it is, correct?
- Shawn(ta) S: Oh yeah, it's impossible not to.
- Tanya Domi: Yes.
- Shawn(ta) S: And it should be that way for everyone, but I think it takes some learning or some unlearning to make in an obvious responsibility for everyone. Whereas librarians, I think we're sort of already there because we're critical and we're critiquing how the university functions all the time.
- Polly T: Anytime somebody can't just walk into the library and find something on their own, often we come into conversation with them, right? It's so frequent that people can't punch something in and find it or you can't find the richness that you expect. So it's essential to be in conversation not just with the library staff, but also with the classification system itself. Trying to figure out how a scholar approaches something with depth and criticality, it's essential we're having this kind of frame breaking conversation, you have to think outside the box. And that is what, just to reiterate what Shawn(ta) was saying, I think that in itself is queer.
- Polly T: So almost you can think about any reference interaction as a little bit queer because you're trying to get around how this place, how this behemoth is organized and figure out strains of thought that maybe you understand and maybe you're interlocutor understands and maybe you're going to discover together. That is a magnificent process of creating something, or creating some kind of discoveries you haven't had before and that is, it's a queer process we bring to research.
- Emily D: Yeah I also think there's a lot of power there, right? I'm 21 and I'm a lesbian and I had some girlfriends, but then I fell in love, right? I'm like, oh this is what I am. And then we broke up because she was just a snake and a cheater, whatever. Whatever-
- Shawn(ta) S: I hope she's listening to this right now.

Emily D: I'm sure she's listening to this right now. Then a couple years later comes out as trans and I'm like oh, so my identity which I thought was pretty firmly lesbian, now my attractions are to people who have different sorts of identities, so maybe my identity is co-constructed by who I'm sleeping with. I was like, oh this is a relational identity, maybe I'm queer. So I think Shawn(ta) and I are different in that way that I really have a queer identity that that changes.

Emily D: Then you look at the classification system and everything has to live in one spot. So it can't change.

Tanya Domi: You can't be in two spots at once.

Emily D: It can't be in two spots, it's like the library is where the rubber hits the road, you know? The book's got to be in one spot on the shelf.

Tanya Domi: So yeah, talk about, because we were having a conversation about classification and cataloging and the challenges that-

Polly T: This is it.

Tanya Domi: This is it.

Emily D: Yeah.

Tanya Domi: So let's expound on that.

Shawn(ta) S: Is it a problem then, that things can't change? Is that what you're ... Are you problematizing this static nature of the catalog?

Emily D: Yeah, but I can't, it just is that way.

Polly T: We can't ever find two spots for one thing, right?

Emily D: You'd have to buy two copies, I guess you could do that.

Polly T: Oh yeah, then you could have just the whole library filled with one title.

Emily D: But what's our budget, like 10 dollars? [crosstalk 00:15:19]

Shawn(ta) S: I'm thinking about Christine Jorgensen's book, her autobiography is classified in the RCs, I think it's a psychology.

Tanya Domi: Science? Psychology.

Shawn(ta) S: Yeah, because transness is a psychological problem.

Tanya Domi: So that's why it's classified RC.

Shawn(ta) S: Yeah, I think it's RC or RS.

Polly T: It's arbitrary.

Tanya Domi: That's where all the psych ... Okay.

Shawn(ta) S: Yeah but then you know, 40 years later a book about Christine Jorgensen is not over there, it's in the HQs.

Tanya Domi: HQ, which is history right? Biography?

Shawn(ta) S: It's social science, it's social problems. So now trans sexuality is moved from an individualized psychological problem to a social disorder. So you can see in the classification you can trace how people thought about it.

Tanya Domi: Now you guys got me. Now you got me.

Shawn(ta) S: You know what I mean?

Polly T: And a novel, an American novel with the trans subject might be placed in the PSs?

Shawn(ta) S: PSs, PR, PQ, somewhere over there.

Emily D: Somewhere in the PS.

Shawn(ta) S: Depending on the author's last name.

Tanya Domi: Well this new generation of millennials and post-millennials, there's going to be a public science project that is going to roll out, study of six major cities in the United States and there's over 6,000 respondents and they're going to blow up the whole thing about identities. They actually call themselves over 300 different types of identities and that's going to blow up the stacks. Right?

Shawn(ta) S: I love the queer half life, right? I'm only 43, but it's unrecognizable the language that kids today use to talk about themselves.

Tanya Domi: Yeah.

Shawn(ta) S: I don't know.

Polly T: But there's really, the thing about blowing up the stacks is that yeah, you can do that, and we could put copies everywhere and we could have guerrilla treasure hunt and we can take the copies from the RCs and throw them in the HQs and

we can do that kind of thing. Or we can reclassify our library differently according to every new structure that comes along. Or, there's just a time element. Do you want to spend your time and effort doing that? But no.

Shawn(ta) S: Books are heavy, they're dusty. It's a material problem.

Emily D: Right. And soon it won't be, libraries won't be material places.

Shawn(ta) S: Don't say that. Really?

Tanya Domi: They'll be hybrid places.

Shawn(ta) S: Do you believe that? [crosstalk 00:17:53]

Emily D: Primarily electronic. So things are going to be found via keyword anyhow, so the classification won't necessarily matter as much.

Shawn(ta) S: I've been thinking about that, yeah. It still structures the physical space.

Emily D: Yes.

Shawn(ta) S: So I think it structures how you walk through the library.

Emily D: If the space has books. Some libraries-

Tanya Domi: How you pass your body through and how your body discovers the books is always going to be important.

Emily D: Well I see the idea of intersectionality relating to the space as well as the content that is in the space, so if we think about the reference desk and the power that exists within that interaction, there's the librarian who has the knowledge, the patron who needs the knowledge, and there's an exchange that happens. So librarianship is beyond the material, but it's also the service that we provide and how we provide it and when we are interacting with students, how do we ensure they don't feel this power imbalance as much as it does exist in their minds or in the institution.

Emily D: So I think it's our job to dispel that and I think that intersectionality and queerness allows for that to happen.

Tanya Domi: And to share criticality, for all these different points that we enter at, right?

Emily D: Let's say the student comes to the reference desk, or rather let's say the reference desk comes to the student. Even those two possibilities, we do do that sort of thing in librarianship. Let's say when the two bodies meet it's an unknown conversation that we have to consider. It's not an automatic "how

may I help you? Are you finding everything that you need?" There's something rote about those questions that may not serve what the library's purpose is or we should really reconsider it.

Shawn(ta) S: I was thinking about that question we ask at the end, where we say "did I answer your question?" And how it's not actually what we're saying. What we're saying is I'm kind of pretty done talking to you. You know? How it's a performative language thing.

Emily D: "Is there anything else that you need? Is there anything else? Are you done?"

Shawn(ta) S: Are you done?

Emily D: Instead of, right, maybe we could be more authentic at the reference desk. I don't know.

Shawn(ta) S: I do like that we connect people ... I think the classification structure reflects lots of other shit, right? When lesbianism is represented as a social problem that's true in the world actually for real. It's so easy to explain it by looking at the shelf and seeing where it is. You don't have to do a lot of convincing of people. It's really plain.

Tanya Domi: I have a question. Is it the Library of Congress that sets the classification standards? Is there a certain standard on classifications?

Shawn(ta) S: Yeah, totally.

Tanya Domi: It's the Library of Congress does that?

Emily D: Yes.

Shawn(ta) S: Yeah, you have to go through the Library of Congress to make any changes.

Tanya Domi: Ah-ha.

Polly T: But you can classify your library however you want. If you want to go off the rails or off the system, then you can. But then next time you get copy two of that thing you have to remember what you did with copy one.

Tanya Domi: I see.

Polly T: So on and so forth.

Shawn(ta) S: There are advantages to standardization. It makes it possible to communicate across-

Tanya Domi: For sure, for sure.

Shawn(ta) S: You know, yeah.

Tanya Domi: Okay. So have you answered this discussion about the connection between queerness and librarianship?

Polly T: I want Emily to talk a little bit about-

Tanya Domi: Okay. I was going to ask Emily what is a pedagogy librarian? What do you do?

Shawn(ta) S: Yeah, right? I don't know.

Tanya Domi: Explain that to our listeners.

Emily D: Sure, so my job is to teach people how to use the library. And I think we can do that in really interesting and critical ways. I do think librarians are the only people maybe at the university that understand knowledge is a commodity like everything else, that it is also structured under capitalism and white supremacy and all those -isms. Heteronormativity. So critical pedagogy librarian from the way I'm thinking of it today, although we come to know things by doing them and iterating, right? But what I see it as today is helping people see those structures that underlie the knowledge that they're able to make inside the library, you know?

Emily D: We know how information is produced, we know how it's organized. We know why you find what you find and why you don't find what you don't find. And that's true with the catalog, it's also true with electronic resources and Google. We have some critical sense of how those things are working. So I sort of see that as the job is to help people understand how knowledge in their domain is constructed.

Tanya Domi: Okay.

Polly T: That allows us to help navigate our imperfect, never fixable classification system.

Emily D: Unfixable. Because what if I fixed it? There's often this push to fix it and make it right and put all the gays in the right place, and I'm like in 100 years people are going to look at us and be like what? I can't even believe they thought that. What a bunch of narrow minded, backwards, blah blah blah.

Polly T: Their minds were in prisons.

Emily D: We are also produced through ideology, you know. Me also. Yeah.

Emily D: But I think we've got this really great teaching tool, which is the infrastructures of knowledge we've built that I think we can do a lot with in the classroom. We'll see. Ask me again in the fall.

Tanya Domi: Okay, I will. I want to ask, I do want to ask about open access, though. Because I know that's one of your big things and that's also about protection of knowledge and having access-

Emily D: Definitely, total transformation of that.

Tanya Domi: Having access to it. As somebody who is a scholar, personally I just published a book chapter and I have to pay for the PDF.

Emily D: You have to buy the book?

Tanya Domi: No, they gave me the book. They gave me the book, that's nice of them.

Polly T: You can put it on a shelf somewhere.

Tanya Domi: That's right. And I have to pay 30 dollars for my chapter, to get it in a PDF format.

Polly T: No.

Emily D: To put it on reserve for your class?

Shawn(ta) S: Yeah, scan it.

Emily D: Will you donate that book to the library?

Tanya Domi: I was thinking about scanning it, yeah. [crosstalk 00:23:53] Just the principle of it, the principle of it.

Emily D: Oh yeah.

Tanya Domi: Anyway, so open access. This is intersectional.

Polly T: There's a story I tell about it.

Tanya Domi: Please, please.

Polly T: When I was a librarian in the 80s and early 90s at New York University I spent half my time sneaking my comrades my activist and researcher friends into the library-

Tanya Domi: Right.

Polly T: Because it was before the internet and the medical literature wasn't at the New York Public Library, there was the New York Academy of Medicine, but it didn't have everything.

Tanya Domi: Wasn't this too during the AIDs crisis, you had mentioned that to me.

Polly T: Yes. They were a couple of us who just had streams of people coming in and out and you had to stand in from of the med line terminals, so you had to guard the person while they were going to do their research about where their clinical trial was or what the impacts of this drug.

Tanya Domi: Exactly.

Polly T: That, having to do that work as part of a survival strategy for communities of people was incredibly influential. Then we started with the Reagan era, capitalistic digitization of scholarly literature. Started thinking, I remember thinking pretty soon all these articles are going to be so cheap and we're going to, it's going to be so ... But no. Instead, the library budgets over my career have been increasingly spent on electronic resources. And they're still behind a paywall. I still have to sneak my friends if not physically into the library, but give them a password and a log in to get into them.

Polly T: And forget about it. If my friends here, and my cushy conditions are pretty well healed with academic resources, it's not the case across the globe. And it's not the case with the people who I want to read my research. So anyhow, all of this sort of has led up to me and others, me joining the movement to try to make all of the academic articles free. They should just be free. And in order to do that, we have to make them free. It's not like the companies are going to come along and say "you know what? Forget those profits, those 33% profits that we're making." We have to start doing it ourselves.

Polly T: So when you write your next book chapter, Tanya, what you need to do is put in your contract that you're going to make this sucker open access and you're going to put it on the institutional repository that the Google's going to be able to discover, and anybody with an internet connection who is in New York City or in Taiwan can connect to it-

Tanya Domi: Can connect to it.

Polly T: And download it.

Tanya Domi: Right.

Polly T: For free without a 30 dollar payment or without you having to risk arrest by putting your PDF up in an open, unpaywalled space.

Tanya Domi: It's just incredible, it's really an incredible thing when you think about it. I mean, JSTOR. I mean, all of it. It's just ...

Shawn(ta) S: Elsevier, which is one of the biggest scientific publishers used to be Reed Elsevier. And the "Reed" part was one of the other big profit making companies that you could, industries that you could be in. Weapons manufacturing, arms sales. So arms sales, big big profits. Scholarly publishing, equally big big profits. I think people don't realize that, how much money is in the game.

Polly T: I know, those companies are into the surveillance structures. Monitoring, data collection, monitoring. It's a shady business. Librarians have no place-

Tanya Domi: Right. Librarians are also, have played a major role in protecting people from surveillance and compromising their personal identities, have they not?

Polly T: We have these professional ethics that are born of the post war outrage against brainwashing and censorship. But we've seen the rise of academic IT come over my career. Librarians would never tell the police without a warrant, without probably resisting the warrant who checked out what book for how long and when, the IT departments are going to respond to a voyeur request to dish up your emails, right Tanya?

Tanya Domi: Yeah, that's true. I'm familiar with that.

Polly T: So we've had the library professional ethic-

Tanya Domi: That's intersectional too, yeah.

Polly T: Has been supplanted by the IT-

Tanya Domi: IT systems, yeah.

Polly T: Professional ethics which are not as well defined or surveillance resistant as library ethics.

Tanya Domi: So since you're all faculty members, Shawn(ta) I'm going to start with you and ask you about your scholarship, what you're working on.

Shawn(ta) S: I will tell you what I'm working on. I was just thinking about privacy, but now reroute.

Tanya Domi: Oh.

Shawn(ta) S: No, no. We'll talk about what I'm working on.

Tanya Domi: Okay, let's talk about what you're doing.

Shawn(ta) S: Let's see, the CUNY system of the POC CUNY Union, what is it? Professional-

Tanya Domi: Professional staff congress.

Shawn(ta) S: Staff congress. They supply a grant, a university grant to faculty, so everybody should get one POC CUNY grant if you're listening and you haven't applied. So this year, I got funded to promote a lesbian organization. I'm so used to doing the acronym. So this group is called Salsa Soul Sisters and they are the first lesbian of color organization in the country and they donated their collection to the lesbian herstory archives and I'm working with the processing, but also with the exhibition of the collection. It's been a long road.

Shawn(ta) S: I mean, a lot of the work is important because if you think about what happened post-Stonewall and in fact 10 years ago, well nine years ago at CLAGS at the graduate center there was a conference called lesbians in the 70s. So most of what's happened post-Stonewall started in the 70s as the result of it being 1969. So not much happened, there were things that happened the next few months, but afterwards it was the 70s. So, during the creation of this conference, there was a committee of lesbians who were around in the 70s that were gathered. So we put out a call and I was the staff person at CLAGS at the time, so we put out a call and said "anyone who was around, just come and participate in the planning of this conference. We want it to be community led."

Shawn(ta) S: So we brought, maybe let's just say 70 women who were around during the 70s responded. We created a Google group and the Google group was just considered a roomful of ex-girlfriends. There was a lot of tension-

Tanya Domi: That happens a lot.

Shawn(ta) S: A lot of back and forth, long essays about who was where and when and which groups should be around and if WOW was 70s and 80s and it was all kinds of back and forth. We decided instead of meeting online we would meet in person, which meant a lot of the people who were around the country couldn't attend. So there were mainly New Yorkers who met at the graduate center at the C-level on one night to plan this conference. And we decided we should have a spring series and a fall festival, so there would be one event every month for the spring and then a fall conference and that's how we could break up what we would cover.

Shawn(ta) S: And eventually it came around to race and there was a question, "well we have to include women of color." Now, mind you, most everyone in the room was white except for two women, one of whom was me and the other was also not around during the 70s. The other was a student, she was a doctoral student. So we weren't there, we're just in awe of these legendary women who were around during post-Stonewall and doing all the work. And one CUNY scholar said "you know, there were no black lesbians in the 70s."

Polly T: What?

Emily D: Oh my gosh.

Shawn(ta) S: I know, that's how I felt.

Emily D: Oh my gosh.

Shawn(ta) S: And everyone just went, "well yeah, you're right. They weren't there, there was nothing going on." And then they said "well, we could include Cheryl Clark and we could have her come and talk." "Yeah, yeah I guess we'll ask Cheryl to come." And that was sort of the person that they had designated as the person that could represent-

Tanya Domi: Representative.

Shawn(ta) S: Exactly.

Tanya Domi: Wow.

Shawn(ta) S: Since there was nothing happening. So as the other black person and the only staff person in the room I was sort of said okay, fine, I will contact Cheryl Clark. So that was my charge and it was something that's stuck with me as a problem. And I was almost like maybe they're wrong. So I went to the lesbian herstory archives and I checked the collections and they have a folder called the African ancestral lesbians subject file, so I just went there and looked for anything that would be dated in the 70s. And of course there were folders and folders and boxes and it was just so many materials, there was so much material that I thought, okay this is insane. I can't believe this misunderstanding.

Shawn(ta) S: But it had been a misunderstanding that I'd heard my entire life. Black women were not at the table, they didn't exist, et cetera. So most of the material that came in were from the Salsa Soul Sisters. It turns out they had a newsletter and the newsletter was called the Salsa Soul Gayzette. And there was just so much material and in fact the editor-in-chief of the Salsa Soul Gayzette happens to be the current first lady of New York, Chirlane McCray.

Emily D: Oh my God.

Tanya Domi: Wow.

Emily D: I love that.

Shawn(ta) S: I know. And so she actually came to, that's sort of the long story. I did two events in 2010 and then, up until now it's been me following up with that conversation. I think I might be done.

Tanya Domi: Oh you think you're done?

Shawn(ta) S: I think I might be done once this grant dries up and I'm finished. Now there's been a resurgence, people have been coming to a lot of events. We had hundreds of women donating material, responding to the call to bring their material to the forefront and say we were there, we were at the table, and stop erasing us. So it's been a long journey of me with women who are in their 60s and 70s and meeting them and some of them passing in the process.

Shawn(ta) S: So that's what my work is on.

Tanya Domi: That sounds really wonderful.

Shawn(ta) S: Yeah, it's fun.

Tanya Domi: Have you gotten any students to write dissertations on it?

Shawn(ta) S: Well we have to put the stuff ... So right now, managing a couple of interns who are processing, still processing the collection because it's pretty big. And then once it's available, then people can really-

Tanya Domi: Do research.

Shawn(ta) S: You know, dive in. Yeah. It'll be good.

Tanya Domi: Yeah. That's great. What about you, Emily? Are you working on anything?

Emily D: Yeah, so I'm interested in classification cataloging as an expression of power.

Tanya Domi: Wow.

Emily D: I'm interested in looking at how it's, at the Philippines in particular as how have US knowledge organizations structured knowledge making in former US colonies. So, stemming from a trip I took to the Philippines where I walked into the library at the University of the Philippines, Baguio which is in this high mountain town, six hours away from Manila by bus. I walk in and it looks like a US library, it has an info commons, a sign that says info commons hanging down and how to spot fake news flyer pinned to the wall. Everything is arranged by Library of Congress section heading and then in the middle of the room, there's a bunch of bookshelves marked Filipiniana, books by Filipino writers or about the Philippines but I'm standing in the Philippines. So how has the extension of US knowledge organization schemes structured the library in the Philippines such that people would see their own work as othered in the library?

Tanya Domi: Within the library that's in-

Emily D: Right? It would be like having a US collection here. It just didn't make sense. Yeah, so I've been doing a little reading around that and learning about how when the US takes over control of the Philippines from the Spanish, it rounds up a group of people it decides are going to be the university librarians and sends them to Wisconsin, Madison to get their degrees. Imagining what that must have been like to have been sent to Wisconsin to learn how to run the library. Knowledge organization structures are super invisible as just normalized structures that don't matter very much. So I think they're actually a pretty rich text for understanding how power has been transmitted. Globally.

Tanya Domi: That's another aspect to US/Philippine relations. I actually spent a lot of time there when I was in the army.

Emily D: Oh yeah?

Tanya Domi: I was on a special study there.

Emily D: Oh wow, what part?

Tanya Domi: In 1980, it was all over the country. But it was a joint combined team and I was there during a coup attempt when [inaudible 00:37:41] was president.

Emily D: Wow.

Tanya Domi: And the Philippine officer that was the head of their side of the team was involved in the logistics of the coup attempt. So I had an eye opening experience in the Philippines. So that doesn't surprise me, what you just told me.

Emily D: It's an incredible place.

Tanya Domi: Yeah, it is.

Emily D: Yeah.

Tanya Domi: That's very interesting.

Emily D: It has an armed left, and I have to say it makes the left more interesting.

Tanya Domi: True.

Emily D: More powerful.

Tanya Domi: Mindanao right? You're talking about in Mindanao.

Emily D: All over the country.

Tanya Domi: Yeah.

Emily D: Yeah.

Tanya Domi: But there's some-

Emily D: Anyway.

Tanya Domi: Yeah, very interesting.

Emily D: Longer conversation.

Tanya Domi: That's cool. And Polly, you've published a couple of books now?

Polly T: Yeah, I worked with my colleague the sociologist Jesse Daniels to publish a book called Being a Scholar in the Digital Era a couple of years ago. And I got to say that, what I just said about open access and it was part of the Ford Foundation grant we had at the grad center, called the-

Tanya Domi: JustPublics.

Polly T: JustPublics@365.

Tanya Domi: Yeah. [inaudible 00:38:49]

Polly T: It came out of that where we were, we had this thing called media camp where we were teaching faculty and grad students to blog and tweet and-

Tanya Domi: Write op eds.

Polly T: And write op eds. You worked-

Tanya Domi: Yeah, I was involved in that too.

Polly T: To do on camera interviews, to do podcasts. Yes, yes. It was all an effort to try to say hey, we're one of the leading public universities in the world, let's support our scholars to be public.

Tanya Domi: Right, to be public intellectuals, yeah. To share knowledge publicly.

Polly T: That's what the grant was about, and that's what our efforts were about, and that's what I wrote about.

Tanya Domi: Yeah.

Polly T: I've been doing this other-

Tanya Domi: You have this other project going on.

Shawn(ta) S: I was waiting to hear about the other one.

Tanya Domi: The theater-

Polly T: All of us, I was looking at you guys-

Tanya Domi: The queer theater project.

Polly T: As CVs and the thing about being a librarian is that you can do one thing and we do it deeply. We're not dilatants but then you can do another thing. We are hopelessly cross relational and-

Shawn(ta) S: Peripatetic, is that?

Polly T: Yeah.

Tanya Domi: That's a great word.

Polly T: Yeah? I've got to look that up.

Tanya Domi: That's a good word.

Polly T: I got a PSC CUNY grant a long time ago, I went to Berlin to look at queer archives there and that was really fun, it has a very rich, queer archival landscape there. But I became interested in Charlotte von Mahlsdorf who is this furniture collector, she had just died, I think she died in 2002. I got there much later. She created this furniture museum of furniture that was out of fashion in the east. But anyway, she lived openly as a queer person, as a transvestite, she called herself transvestite in the Magnus Hirschfeldian sense of the word.

Polly T: So there's an American play by Dough Wright called I Am My Own Wife that turned on the drama Charlotte von Mahlsdorf was a Mata Hari figure, a traitor, a betrayer. And that is not at all the story I heard about Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, or the story people from her native Berlin tell about her. So I thought I kind of set about to investigate how did this rich, biographical portrait get turned into this trope that we've heard again and again that's in every Marlene Dietrich film. How did that happen?

Polly T: So what I did, instead of publishing it because I've got tenure and I'm full professor, I thought well I'm going to experiment with form. So I made this lecture performance this year based on the research and I pulled my beloved partner of 20 years, Liz Snyder into the performance with me. So I present my research in a bunch of different ways. It's multimedia, but the media is vintage

in great part. So Liz is there flipping transparencies and trying to keep up and she's embodying the overwhelm, let's just say, of the archives.

Polly T: Anyway, it's this complicated thing. People say we have our relationship on stage right there when we do it. It's very stressful, kind of tense thing. I can hardly think about doing it again. But anyhow, we've been experimenting with form.

Tanya Domi: So this is performance, right?

Polly T: Yeah, it was in the Segal Theater.

Tanya Domi: Theater, theater.

Polly T: The Segal Theater. I worked with Frank Hentschker and the Segal Theater, and Amir Farjoun, and Mara Valderrama two grad students who really helped me dramaturge that thing to a better place than it was when it started, I'll tell you. Yeah so it was really great.

Tanya Domi: From librarianship to performance.

Polly T: It's not such a leap once you think about it, is it Shan?

Shawn(ta) S: No. I've dabbled in performance environs as well.

Tanya Domi: I just want to say, I mean when you look at the calendar for this month in New York City it is unbelievable.

Polly T: Well Stonewall, how much you see Shawn(ta) Smith Cruz on the calendar, on the Stonewall calendar.

Tanya Domi: Really, the Stonewall calendar.

Polly T: Every time I turn around, there she is.

Tanya Domi: Stonewall Opera, Gay USA film has been restored.

Shawn(ta) S: The exhibitions, the New York Historical Society.

Tanya Domi: Yeah, BAM, New York Public Library.

Polly T: Brooklyn Historical has a waterfront exhibition.

Shawn(ta) S: Yes.

Polly T: Sailors. Yeah, New York Public has one that features the queer press, the gay press, gay and lesbian press.

Emily D: So does this mean we won?

Shawn(ta) S: And they always have the lesbian archives exhibit.

Tanya Domi: So I was just going to say there's going to be a lot of archives to actually-

Shawn(ta) S: So much more shit to process.

Tanya Domi: Yes.

Shawn(ta) S: Wow.

Tanya Domi: It's going to be a lot.

Polly T: These things are pulling on the archives that have really been valued in the last, since Stonewall. Really. Were there queer archives in mainstream settings pre-Stonewall? I don't think so.

Shawn(ta) S: No.

Polly T: When do the lesbian herstory archives start?

Shawn(ta) S: The lesbian herstory archives started in 1974 and it was the first lesbian archive. So that-

Polly T: In the country.

Shawn(ta) S: In the country, and then one could assume the world.

Tanya Domi: It's true.

Shawn(ta) S: I've never been told-

Tanya Domi: Contradicted?

Shawn(ta) S: Yeah.

Tanya Domi: So, this has been quite a journey. Librarianship, queerness and librarianship. I think you all three of you-

Shawn(ta) S: We're infinitely queer.

Tanya Domi: You present it, you live it, you imbibe it. I want to thank all of you for being here today.

Shawn(ta) S: Thank you, it was so much fun.

Tanya Domi: Happy pride.

Emily D: Happy pride, Tanya.

Polly T: Happy pride, everybody.

Tanya Domi: To each of you, and really a new welcome to you Emily, to the graduate center.

Emily D: Oh, thank you. I can't wait to be really gay here.

Tanya Domi: Yeah. This is the gayest university around.

Emily D: Ever.

Tanya Domi: It is very gay and very queer.

Emily D: Hopefully that will punch-

Shawn(ta) S: [inaudible 00:45:00] to the new president.

Tanya Domi: Okay, so with that, thanks a lot for being here today. Thanks for tuning into the Thought Project and thanks to today's guests, librarians Polly Thistleweight, Emily Jabinski, and Shawn(ta) Smith Cruz of The Graduate Center, CUNY.

Tanya Domi: The Thought Project is brought to you with production, engineering, and technical assistance by Sara Fishman. I'm Tanya Domey, tune in next week.