

## Article

# The 60 Years of Queer and Trans Activism and Care Project: Learning to Conduct Archival Research and Write Dramatic Verbatim Monologues

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**Abstract:** This reflective essay describes a research course which provided undergraduate students with an opportunity to conduct archival research on six decades of queer, trans, Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (QTBIPOC) activism and care that have challenged heteronormativity, cis-normativity, and racism in Canada. While there are many ways to share the findings of archival research, we chose to teach our students how to create dramatic verbatim monologues as the arts-based research method of verbatim theatre required students to use the words of activists themselves to explain why a particular moment of activism and care was needed. Students attended three different workshops during the full-year course from September 2022 to March 2023: a workshop in conducting archival research, a workshop about centring themselves and their communities in their research, and a workshop in verbatim monologue writing. Here, we reflect upon what these workshops taught us about archival research, working with Indigenous archival material, and rupturing systems of oppression in our own bodies. At the end of the course, students reported their take-aways from the course. This included a new understanding that it was possible to conduct research on topics they felt passionate about and that theatre-based research provided them with a way to express the findings of their research in forms other than writing essays. This new-found freedom was life-changing.



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## 1. Introduction

In this piece, we discuss an exciting full-year undergraduate research course which provided students an opportunity to conduct archival research on six decades of queer, trans, Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (QTBIPOC) activism and care that have challenged heteronormativity, cis-normativity, and racism in Canada.<sup>1</sup> The 10-week course was offered between September 2022 and March 2023. Each class was two hours long.

For many years, LGBTQ2S+ and queer of colour researchers have been writing about the overrepresentation of White and middle-class perspectives in LGBTQ2S+ research and have called for more research with and about folks who identify as QTBIPOC (see, for example, Goldstein 2021; Moore and Brainer 2013; Owis 2022; Owis and Goldstein 2021). The goal of the course was to uncover unknown or lesser-known histories of QTBIPOC activism and care works to (1) challenge the overrepresentation of White middle-class perspectives in LGBTQ2S+ research and (2) create a space for our students to witness and tell stories from histories which were significant to them because they shed light on their own contemporary experiences of oppression, activism, and care.

While there are many ways to share the findings of archival research, we chose to teach our students how to create dramatic verbatim monologues from the material they uncovered. Verbatim theatre has been described as theatre that is created by interviewing people about their everyday lives or about an event that has happened in their community

(Brown and Wake 2010; Goldstein 2019). In verbatim theatre, the words of real people (in this case, the words of QTBIPOC activists found in archival material) are edited, arranged, and/or recontextualized to form a dramatic monologue or play script, which can be performed on stage by actors who take on the characters of the real individuals whose words are being used (Hammond and Stewart 2008). There are several reasons why we chose to teach our students how to share their research through verbatim theatre. First, we were drawn to the way verbatim theatre allows researchers and writers to share information about past moments of activism and care by using the words of the activists themselves to describe these moments. Second, we were excited about the ways verbatim monologues allow the words of activists to explain why a particular moment of activism and care was needed. Third, because of these possibilities of verbatim theatre, we ourselves had already written a verbatim playscript to share archival research on queer and trans activism. Our work on *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays* (Goldstein et al. 2023, forthcoming) taught us important skills around conducting archival research and sharing our findings through verbatim monologues and dialogues.<sup>2</sup> We wanted to share our skills with our students.

## 2. Student Recruitment

To find undergraduate students who were interested in learning how to conduct archival research about QTBIPOC activism and care between the 1970s and 2020s, we worked with the University of Toronto's Research Opportunity Program (ROP), which provides undergraduate students academic credit for their work on a university research team. The maximum number of students we were allowed to invite to work on the project was nine. When a tenth student asked to join the project as a volunteer, we added them to the team.

We recruited students through a promotional flyer and a video of Goldstein introducing the research project to interested students. The flyers and videos were shared with colleagues in the History Department at the university. Twenty students applied for the nine available ROP positions on the research team. One of the applicants was not eligible for the ROP and withdrew their application. To choose the nine students, we reviewed the applicants' reasons for wanting to join the research team. Successful applicants had an interest in queer and trans archival research, an interest in finding out what impact verbatim theatre might have in education, and a desire to bring a historically underrepresented perspective to their research at the University of Toronto.

## 3. Positionality

Of the ten students on the team (nine who were gaining course credit for their work and one who was volunteering), seven identified as QTBIPOC and three as queer and non-binary BIPOC allies. Goldstein and Salisbury identify as White cisgender allies. Goldstein identifies as lesbian, and Salisbury identifies as straight.

Salisbury also identifies as a theatre artist and community-based theatre researcher, while Goldstein identifies as a performed ethnographer and a playwright. For the last five years, we have been writing and producing verbatim theatre scripts based on our research with LGBTQ2S+ communities. Our verbatim theatre projects *Out at School* (Goldstein et al. 2021) and *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays* (Goldstein et al. 2023, forthcoming) brought us into academic and theatre conversations about ethical considerations in the creation of verbatim theatre. Our interest in working with QTBIPOC undergraduate researchers to uncover and share stories of QTBIPOC activism and care came about because of our engagement in these conversations, particularly conversations about how verbatim theatre is often understood to be a way of "giving a voice to the voiceless" (Summerskill 2020, p. 61). As Clare Summerskill writes,

[t]he so-called 'voiceless' are, of course, not without a voice ... their voices have often been sidelined by the mainstream sectors of a society ... if verbatim theatre were to provide a means to give a voice to the voiceless, the narrators or storytellers would be the producers and performers. (Summerskill 2020, p. 61)

Our archival verbatim project provided ten undergraduate researchers a chance to be the producers of stories that were important to them. Further discussion of the ethical conversations our team engaged in appears below.

#### 4. Research Lenses

##### 4.1. Intersectionality

We asked the students to work with an intersectional lens that would examine the intersections of heteronormativity and cis-normativity with other forms of structural discrimination, such as anti-Asian racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, and settler colonialism. Each student designed their own archival research project by creating a research question for their project and choosing an activist whose work and practice of care could answer that question. Students then worked on a research report (due half-way through the course) that shared their findings to their research question. In their report, students were also asked to name a particular moment in their subject's activism and care work that they would like to share in their verbatim monologue. We secured all our students' consent to have their research reports and monologues shared in this article, and all ten students approved of the way their work has been discussed in this paper.

##### 4.2. Centring Queer and Trans Concepts of Community Care

For several years now, our research on queer and trans activism (discussed above) has been centred on concepts of community care. While care is often conceptualized as a feminine practice with roots in cis-heteronormative understandings of the nuclear family (Malatino 2020; Chatzidakis et al. 2020), queer and trans activism has often featured practices of care that are community-based (Malatino 2020; Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018). Our previous archival research also showed that queer and trans activism in the 1970s and 1980s was characterized and fueled by "webs of care" (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018) by queer and trans people of colour (Goldstein et al. 2023, forthcoming).

Care webs—which provide people with a way to find care without shame or judgement—are a response to the realities of gendered, raced, and classed dynamics that are embedded within LGBTQ2S+ communities (Owis 2022; Owis and Goldstein 2021; Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018). Care webs operate in lieu of systemic and institutional support for queer and trans people of colour (Fink 2021) and provide queer and trans people of colour with a network of interlocking communities that position them as experts in the care they need (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018).

The theoretical model of care webs is rooted in the care work of women of colour writers and BIPOC communities (e.g., Hooks 2000, 2018; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981; Lorde 1988), whose activist work has always sought to restore the care often systemically withheld from QTBIPOC people (Rose 2021). Adopting a focus on activism embedded in care meant our archival research has worked to uncover historical moments of queer and trans activism rooted in an ethic of community care. In doing so, we hope to demonstrate the importance and power of care in creating moments of resistance and mobilization throughout LGBTQ2S+ history. As Bishop Owis has argued (Owis 2022), care practices work to ensure survival (Malatino 2020), enhance joy (Noddings 2013), and have paved the way for queer thrival (Greteman 2016, 2018). Queer thrival involves moving beyond a place of survival to a place of abundance (Greteman 2016) and futurity (Muñoz 2009).

Similarly, Indigenous and Black scholars have written on the concept of "thrivance" (Baumann 2019, 2023; Medina 2021; Thomas 2016). Thomas (2016) writes, "thrivance is a measure of the sustainable, perpetual strengthening and evolution of a historically oppressed people whose cultural identity and capacity to thrive are not solely typified by or formed by their oppression" (p. 9). Baumann (2019, 2023) explains that thrivance builds on the work of Anishinaabe scholar, Gerald Vizenor (1994, 1998, 2008), who wrote extensively about Indigenous survivance. According to Vizenor (1998), survivance is "more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active presence. . . an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (p. 15).

Baumann (2019) argues the notion of thriving proclaims “we are productive, vibrant, and contributors to today’s (sic) world” (p. 19).

By uncovering historical moments of queer and trans activism that are rooted in an ethic of community care, thriving, and thriving, our archival research works to demonstrate the importance and power of care in creating moments of resistance and mobilization throughout LGBTQ2S+ history.

## 5. Learning How to Uncover Histories of QTBIPOC Activism and Care through Archival Research

To prepare students for their research projects, we provided them with a variety of readings and three different workshops: a workshop in conducting archival research, a workshop about centring themselves and their communities in their research, and a workshop in verbatim monologue writing. A reflection on what we learned from the readings and workshops follows. Both the readings and the workshops considerably enriched our understanding of how archival QTBIPOC research on activism and care might be designed and carried out.

The course began with an introductory reading assignment that provided students with an overview of the steps involved in conducting archival research. We selected the 2022 Archival Research Guide from the City University of New York (CUNY) Mina Rees Library (CUNY Graduate Centre Mina Rees Library 2022) because it provided helpful information on how to work with primary sources and how to use archival finding aids that are available in community and library archives. The students then participated in two archival research workshops led by the University of Toronto History Professor and community archival researcher Elspeth Brown and community archivist Raegan Swanson. Both Brown and Swanson work at The ArQuives, which is the largest independent LGBTQ2S+ Archives in the world. Brown is a Co-Founder of The ArQuives, and Swanson is its current Executive Director. Located in Toronto, The ArQuives’ mandate is to “preserve, organize and give public access to information and materials in any medium by and about LGBTQ2S+ people, primarily produced in or concerning Canada” (<https://arquives.ca/about>, accessed on 17 September 2022). Research at The ArQuives can be undertaken digitally and in person in The ArQuives’ physical space. Some of the students relied on material that was available online, while others visited The ArQuives in person and worked with material that was there.

### 5.1. Archival Research and Individualized Storytelling

The first workshop, led by Elspeth Brown, was designed to introduce students to The ArQuives website. However, before sharing some practical tips about how to navigate The ArQuives database, Brown engaged the students in a discussion of an article they had asked them to read before the workshop. The article, written by Brown and their colleague Myrl Beam, discussed the challenges of undertaking archival research about QTBIPOC activism in the current context of increased queer and trans visibility. Here is an excerpt from the article that describes these challenges.

Trans oral history is having a moment. In the wake of what *Time* [magazine] dubbed, in 2014, the “transgender tipping,” current interest in trans oral history is unfolding in the context of increased trans visibility and today’s sharp increase in violence against trans and gender nonconforming people, especially women of color. This new mainstream visibility of trans people in media and culture stems from a narrow vision of trans embodiment, a provisional acceptance that is predicated on a logic of medicalized identity, furthered by a style of narrative storytelling that individualizes and depoliticizes trans identity. (Brown and Beam 2022, p. 29)

Brown and Beam’s argument that trans oral history and trans storytelling can individualize and depoliticize trans identity was an important argument for our students to discuss. Our 60 Years of Queer and Trans Activism and Care course was based on the

premise that uncovering unknown or lesser-known stories of QTBIPOC activism and care could help us better understand and challenge ongoing oppression and systemic violence perpetuated against queer and trans BIPOC communities today. Following trans scholar Hil Malatino, we designed the 60 Years of QTBIPOC Activism and Care project believing that “when the milieu you inhabit feels hostile, it’s deeply comforting to turn to text and image from another time” (Malatino 2020, p. 51). We also believed that sharing queer and trans histories of activism and care could be “another roadmap for being” (Malatino 2020, p. 51) if we resisted sharing the kind of individualized narrative stories Brown and Beam wrote about. To conduct research that would provide our communities with what Brown and Beam (2022) called “a usable past” (p. 29), we needed to uncover and share moments of QTBIPOC activism and care that named and challenged institutional and structural practices of cis-heteronormativity and other forms of discrimination.

A good example of a student project that challenged individualized storytelling by focusing on systemic discrimination is Mia Jakobsen’s research on trans activist Rupert Raj. Raj’s work of activism embedded in care in the 1970s and 1980s responded to institutional cis-normativity in the Canadian health sector. In her research report, Mia wrote that Raj identifies as a pansexual transgender man of East Indian and Polish descent who transitioned in 1971. His work throughout Canada from the 1970s to the 1990s was indispensable to the trans community; as a psychotherapist, he provided transgender people, their significant others, and the Canadian medical and health communities with research, education, and counselling. Raj was the founder of several trans organizations in Canada, including the Foundation for the Advancement of Canadian Transsexuals (FACT), the Metamorphosis Medical Research Foundation (MMRF), which operated from December 1981 to May 1988, and the Gender Worker (later renamed to Gender Consultants in 1989), which ran from 1987 to 1990. In June 1999, he co-founded a peer support group for transgender men and women at the 519 Community Centre in Toronto. Mia’s guiding research question for her project was: How did Raj show activism and care for other trans people through his writing? She answered her research question in the following way.

Rupert Raj used writing to support his fellow trans friends by disseminating valuable information through three established trans publications. The first, *Gender Review: the FACTual Journal*, ran from 1978 to 1981 in Calgary and Toronto. The subsequent journal, *Metamorphosis*, ran from 1982 to 1988 in Toronto. It was a bi-monthly newsletter for transgender men that promised information regarding clinical research, hormones, surgery, tips to effectively passing as male in public, and legal reform for trans people. The third, *Gender NetWorker*, published two issues in Toronto in 1988, directing trans individuals to helpful professionals and resource providers. Raj stated that he wanted to facilitate a communication network between professional and lay providers, to bring together trans people and the medical and health professionals who worked with trans populations. From his work, Raj provided critical support to and for other trans men, essentially serving as an information broker between the medical/psychological community and trans individuals and their loved ones. Rupert Raj’s advocacy was done through a method of care, which, in turn, fostered a community among trans Canadians. (Jakobsen 2022)

In addition to his journal writing, Raj also answered personal letters from people looking for advice and support around gender transitioning. To answer their questions, Raj wrote to doctors and clinics in Europe, the United States, Singapore, and Brazil. He then shared the information he received with fellow activists, friends, as well as people who wrote requesting information. The detailed information Raj requested from doctors and clinics included the success rate of procedures, patient satisfaction, cost, and available medical insurance coverage.

To create her verbatim monologue about Rupert Raj’s activism and care, Mia focused on the letters written to Raj in 1984 by a young person named David Liebman. She also focused on the subsequent letters Raj received in early 1985 from David’s family and friends



after his death. Mia says she focused on the letter writing between Raj and David because “it stood out from all the letters [she had] read” and because it “encapsulated Raj’s work of activism and care toward trans people” (Jakobsen 2022, p. 7). Throughout 1984, Liebman wrote Raj six letters. Although the letters were often about updating Raj about his life, Mia writes that Liebman’s letters indicate that he wanted to make more trans and gay friends. Liebman mentioned he wanted to be added to a trans newsletter in Florida, stating that “it would be nice to have a friend like [himself] in the same state as [he was]” (Jakobsen 2022, p. 7). Later that year, Liebman wrote Raj, thanking him after a fellow trans man in Florida who he was planning to meet up with mentioned learning about him through Raj. Liebman signed off his letters to Raj with the complementary close “Your brother,” an indication of how much Liebman cherished Raj’s friendship (Jakobsen 2022, p. 8).

In January 1985, both Liebman’s sister and mother wrote to Raj to tell him of David’s suicide. David’s sister said she was grateful for Raj’s help. David’s mother thanked Raj for reaching out to David. She said Raj’s friendship meant a great deal to him. Three of Raj’s friends additionally reached out to Raj to mourn Liebman. For Mia, the letters to Raj from David Liebman and his family and friends demonstrate the importance of care and community amongst trans people in the 1980s. The care and community received from Raj challenged the isolation David experienced.

In reflecting on Mia’s monologue entitled “Your Brother, David” (which was how David signed his letters to Raj), we note that the monologue is a community story that resists the typical tropes of individual storytelling. So often, we want to tell stories with happy endings. This story does not have a happy ending. While David was connected to the community and experienced some hope through his letter writing to Raj, in the end, he did not survive.

Verbatim theatre can resist individualized storytelling by resisting the structure of what is often thought of as a well-made play with a beginning, middle, and end. It resists the structure of a premise, inciting incident, climax, and denouement. Verbatim work comes into the middle of messy lives and does not tell a story that neatly resolves conflicts.

### 5.2. Working with Indigenous Archival Material

Knowing that some of our students might be interested in working with Indigenous archival material, we asked archivist Raegan Swanson to lead a second workshop about how students might use the Indigenous archival material they found in The ArQuives. Swanson has worked as an archivist at the Library and Archives Canada, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, and the Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute. They have also worked as the Archival Advisor for the Council of Archives New Brunswick and are currently working on a doctoral thesis that focuses on the creation of community archives in Indigenous communities. To prepare for Raegan’s workshop, the students read the following two important documents.

1. The Steering Committee on Canada’s Archives’ *Response to the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Taskforce* (The Steering Committee on Canada’s Archives 2022b).
2. The Steering Committee on Canada’s Archives’ *Reconciliation Framework: The Response to the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Taskforce* (The Steering Committee on Canada’s Archives 2022a).

Understanding how these two documents came into being and how they are relevant to our students’ archival research work requires an understanding of some Canadian history. In June 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada issued 94 Calls to Action to the Canadian government and its citizens in the hope that the wrongs that had been done and continue to be done to the Indigenous Peoples of Canada would be addressed. Call to Action #70 specifically called upon the Canadian Association of Archivists to undertake, in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples, a national review of archival policies and practices to (1) ensure that the truth of what happened in residential schools was uncovered and (2) provide recommendations for how the truth might be uncovered.

In her talk with us, Raegan Swanson explained that while no Canadian Association of Archivists exists, in September 2015, a “Steering Committee on Canada’s Archives” was established with representatives from a variety of Canadian archival associations to create a Response to the Truth and Reconciliation Task Force<sup>3</sup> ([The Steering Committee on Canada’s Archives 2022b](#)). The mandate of the Steering Committee was to address Call #70 specifically but also to address the additional 93 Calls in spirit.

With a small grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Steering Committee spent the next five years engaged in extensive research to better understand how archival practices have continued to perpetuate colonial ideas and restrict access to information in archives across the country. Relegating the small amount of funding they received to pay for a report writer, editor, and designer, the Steering Committee spent their lunch hours and hours after work conducting research and compiling the report. The findings of their research are included in the first report Raegan asked us to read, *Response to the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Taskforce*. The Steering Committee’s recommendations for action are included in the second report: *Reconciliation Framework: The Response to the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Taskforce*.

In her talk with the students, Swanson discussed the framework as a road map that sets out a vision, a set of foundational principles, and a path forward for the Archives profession in Canada. The broad objectives point to areas of archival practice that immediately need change, and the action-oriented strategies describe the kind of practices that support respectful relationship-building initiatives, embrace the intellectual sovereignty of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples over records created by or about them, and encourage the reconceptualization of mainstream archival theory and practice.

The students spent a good deal of our time with Swanson discussing the first objective articulated in the framework: Creating relationships of respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility when engaging with Indigenous archival research materials and Indigenous communities wanting access to archival research materials. Addressing the students as researchers who were about to begin a new archival research project, Raegan posed a set of questions students needed to ask themselves before they started their research.

3. How am I coming into my research work? How do I fit in? For example, if I am a non-Indigenous researcher doing research with or about Indigenous people, why am I doing this work? Have I been invited to do this work by an Indigenous community? If not, have I created a relationship with the Indigenous people I want to work with to ensure I have their support to take on this research?
4. What is the relevance of my research work? Is my research work relevant to the Indigenous people/community I want to work with? How? To whom in particular?
5. What responsibility do I need to take in my research work? How do I respect the people I’m working with? ([Swanson 2022](#)).

While some researchers might argue that these questions are basic to conducting good research and did not need to be articulated in the framework document, Swanson told us why the Steering Committee felt the following questions needed to be included.

While people should be approaching relationships with any community with respect, it needed to be written, it needed to be said, because so many people are so unfamiliar about working with communities outside their own sphere. This is especially true for university researchers. We see a lot of people parachuting in, doing their research, and parachuting out again. If we’re talking about what our role is and creating these relationships, we need to think about the coming in and leaving. ([Swanson 2022](#))

In our discussion about the framework, student Chika Duru told us that the statement about researchers having access to archives and knowledge really stood out to her. “At university,” she said, “students have access to many archives. Having this access means showing respect for the materials we have access to and access knowledge we are gaining.”

Other students agreed, acknowledging that a researcher's access to knowledge is a gift, not an entitlement.

Mia Jakobsen, whose work was discussed earlier, said that the part of the framework that stood out to her was the need to reimagine the foundations of mainstream archival theory, practice, and research to reflect First Nations, Inuit, and Métis knowledge systems and world views. "This goes beyond being nice," Mia said. "[It means] involving people in research, making sure people are involved in the process of research." Goldstein agreed with Mia, noting that the word "reimagine" points to the depth of the responsibility that the document is calling for. A few weeks after our discussion with Swanson, Mia returned to one of the ideas that came out of our discussion of the framework. In her research report, she returned to the idea of needing to break "archival silences" (Jakobsen 2022, p. 3). Thinking about what knowledge has been documented and presented to the world and what knowledge has not, was one of the reasons Mia chose to research the activist work of Rupert Raj.

## 6. Learning to Centre Ourselves and Our Communities in Our Research

### 6.1. *Rupturing Systems of Oppressions in Our Own Bodies*

As mentioned earlier, one of the goals of the course was to create a space for students to uncover and tell stories from histories that could shed light on their own contemporary experiences of oppression, activism, and care. In our third workshop, theatre interventionist and critical autoethnographer d'bi.young anitafrika encouraged students to choose a research topic that had some connection to their own lives. anitafrika told students,

... research and performance means fighting to belong to ourselves, defending a space that belongs to us ... [and] rupturing systems of oppression in our own bodies so we can speak from experiential knowledge. (anitafrika 2022)

anitafrika describes herself as a queer nonbinary African-Xamacan-Tkarontonian dub poet and monodramatist who is committed to creating and embodying liberatory art practices that challenge oppressions that have been inflicted upon people and the planet (anitafrika 2024). They are also an arts-based researcher and academic currently completing a doctoral thesis that develops the Anitafrika Method, which has emerged out of the dub theory of Anita Stewart (anitafrika's mother).

anitafrika's call to centre oneself and one's communities in research was a call that all the students took to heart. To illustrate, student Shakira Willems chose to examine the activist work of Two-Spirit activist, writer, theatre artist, and filmmaker Alec Butler for her research project. Butler's work, Willems wrote in her research report, presents "a raw view of trans/gender, class, and violence" and carries a strong sense of urgency to bear witness to and share queer/trans histories and stories of struggle, resistance, and resilience (Willems 2022, p. 2). Choosing Butler as a research subject allowed Willems to create a deep connection between her research and lived experience.

As a young Black and Indigenous woman, who identifies as Two-Spirit I've learnt how my own experiences and passions have led me along a journey of exploration. I've always understood [the connection between] my passions and the work I envision myself doing ... I see myself getting into law school with a focus on political and Indigenous affairs ... as someone who will do great work and create solid change for BIPOC communities. I've always understood [BIPOC] struggles as I have lived them myself and seen others experience them ... Butler's activism, which opposes the colonial system that has made sure to eradicate countless QTBIPOC, is something I genuinely respect ... Indigenous queers and non-binary people want to be heard and will be heard. Many people will continue this, just as I shall, in the spirit with which Butler has committed his life's work. (Willems 2022)

While Shakira Willems chose to research a QTBIPOC activist she identified with in several ways, not all students chose a QTBIPOC activist to research. Four of the ten students



chose to research White activists who identified as queer, nonbinary, or trans because their activist work and practices of care were relevant to their professional interests. For example, student Mitzi Badlis, who identifies as a bisexual person of colour, chose to research White activists Patty Barclay, Vanessa Russell, and Steven Solomon, who established Toronto's Triangle Program in the mid-1990s. The Triangle Program is the only LGBTQ2S+ high school program in Canada. In her research report, Badlis says her research was guided by one main question: What kind of activism and care was needed for the development of the Triangle Program in support of Toronto's QTBIPOC youth? Badlis was interested in answering this question because it allowed her to explore how Solomon, a social worker, and Barclay and Russell, teachers, used their positions to protect and improve the lives of their students.

As an aspiring educator whose philosophy of education is deeply tied to valuing diversity and safety of students, I truly see the work of my chosen activists as guidelines for the practices I aim to implement in my own teaching someday. Additionally, their acts of activism and care are strongly related to my personal interest in equity studies and the ways in which education systems, curricula, and practices should be revised in order to better meet the needs of marginalized students. I aspire to be like them because I know, personally, how important their work is. I chose these activists, not because I am currently like them, but because they represent the values I aim to uphold in my own practice. (Badlis 2022, p. 2)

Beyond Mitzi's interests in school-based activism, she told us that her own relationship to queerness and interest in LGBTQ2S+ inclusivity within schools was a significant driving factor in why she chose to study the Triangle Program.

## 6.2. *New Ways of Thinking about Academic and Artistic Success*

In addition to encouraging the students to centre their own experiential knowledge in their research, anitafrika also spoke about finding new ways of thinking about academic and professional success. Speaking about their work as a dub poet and the work of their independent theatre company Watah Theatre, anitafrika has explained,

... coming from where I come from, maybe I'm not going to get a million YouTube hits, let's be real. It's not my priority. Maybe I'm not going to get a million books sold and get all the awards that are given to whomever they're given to ... for me it becomes important to celebrate and document the work created by us who are at the centre of ourselves, which means, having a publishing house that publishes the work of the artist-in-residence at the Watah Theatre. And, letting them learn how to centre themselves ...

... Now, also, I believe in globally connecting ... I have tried in my own career in very simple ways, without much machinery like [a] manager and all that stuff, to go to places, to talk with people, through poetry. So, it's not glamorous, but rather, old-school nomadic, you know, travel to the next place and talk to people and then they learn about you and you learn about them. And that's how I've approached my own career, again, thinking of how do you get out, you know, how do you get out? I think there are many ways to get out where you can circumvent this sort of capitalist game of having to be "out there". (Room Magazine 2016, p. 3)

anitafrika's description of an academic and artistic career that is based on travelling to different places and talking to people was very meaningful to both of us as research-based theatre practitioners, teachers, and academics. In addition to being the instructors of the 60 Years of Queer and Trans Activism and Care course, we are also Co-Artistic Directors of Gailey Road Productions, an independent Toronto-based theatre company where "research meets theatre and theatre meets research" (Gailey Road Productions 2024). Goldstein founded Gailey Road in 2007 and, like anitafrika, her work centres on her life experiences and the experiences of the communities she's part of. For example, in 2005, Goldstein

wrote a historical drama about antisemitism in Toronto in 1933 called *Lost Daughter*.<sup>4</sup> More recently, as mentioned earlier, Goldstein, Salisbury, and Gailey Road have produced verbatim performances about queer and trans issues for queer and trans communities and their allies. Like anitafrika's performance work, Goldstein, Salisbury, and their colleague Pam Baer's verbatim audio-play *Out at School* (Goldstein et al. 2021) is not going to get a million hits on Apple Podcasts. Likewise, Goldstein's most recent play, *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays* (Goldstein et al. 2023), is not likely to be performed in any of Toronto's mainstream theatres. But what both theatre projects have been able to do is document and share some of the issues queer and trans communities have faced and the ways acts of activism and care have made a difference in responding and addressing those issues. Like anitafrika, we have travelled as "old-school nomadics" to a queer community arts festival in the United Kingdom called The L Fest, where we had a chance to perform and talk about our queer and trans activist work and learn about others' work. Similarly, our students' presentations at several theatre and research conferences, described below, can also be seen as nomadic work—work that challenges the typically stationary, immovable, sometimes inaccessible nature of conducting archival research in libraries. A nomadic approach to archival studies allows the histories of activism and care our students researched to travel and become visible to a variety of audiences gathered in different kinds of spaces. Our archival verbatim monologue project holds possibilities for expanding the reach of archival research projects.

## 7. Learning to Write Dramatic Verbatim Monologues

To prepare the students for verbatim monologue writing, theatre artist and arts-based researcher Salisbury conducted a verbatim theatre workshop to demonstrate how the students might share the moments of activism and care they researched in the form of a verbatim monologue. Resources for the students to consult as they began to create their monologues included a video about the steps involved in creating a verbatim theatre piece produced by the National Theatre in the United Kingdom (National Theatre 2014), a short article on tips for writing dramatic monologues (MasterClass 2021), and Clare's Summerskill's book *Creating Verbatim Theatre from Oral Histories* (Summerskill 2020). Summerskill's writing on ethical considerations in verbatim theatre is complemented by our learnings from Raegan Swanson's workshop on working with Indigenous archival material. As a research team working towards designing a project based on respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility (Wilson 2008) we needed to ensure individuals and communities represented in the students' monologues had a say in how their stories were being narrated. When our students chose to write monologues featuring activists who were still living, we asked them to contact these activists and send them their monologues for approval before publishing them online.

To show the students how to write a dramatic verbatim monologue, Salisbury used an example of our work from our play *Out at School*. She showed students how we created a monologue from the words from an interview with parent Victoria Mason (a pseudonym). In her interview, Victoria talked about the work her daughter's school was doing and not doing to create a welcoming space for LGBTQ2S+ families. The monologue is called "Putting Lipstick on a Pig." The verbatim title came from Victoria's assessment of the limited benefits of putting up "safe space" posters on the wall of her daughter's classroom. Safe space posters alone, she argued, are not enough to create a safer and more welcoming classroom. In schools where there is a culture of cis-heteronormativity and bullying against students and families who do not identify as cisgender or heterosexual, putting posters up on the wall is like "putting lipstick on a pig." After analyzing the ways Salisbury and Goldstein worked with Victoria's interview to create a verbatim monologue based on her words, each student wrote their verbatim monologue based on the findings of their archival research. First drafts of each monologue were shared in the course and each student received feedback on their first draft. When the students' monologues had been revised and polished, we asked them to work in groups of three or four to arrange their

monologues into a play script. Each group presented their arrangement and explained how their arrangement of each scene layered the meaning of the previous scene and the next scene. The students then discussed the possibilities of each arrangement, learning the skill of developing a larger playscript from a set of monologues. Finally, the students discussed how all ten monologues might be arranged to create a verbatim playscript that could be made publicly available on the Gailey Road website after receiving permission from those activists who are still living. An electronic collection of all the students' monologues is available on the Gailey Road website at <https://gaileyyroad.com/10-moments-of-queer-and-trans-activism-and-care-in-canada/>, accessed on 17 September 2022.

## 8. Conclusions

To conclude our reflection on what we learned from our 60 Years of QTBIPOC Activism and Care project, we want to describe the ways our students have begun to share their work. We also want to share some of the challenges we faced during the course and our students' take-aways from the course.

Three students, Chika, Shakira, and Julia Chapman, presented their monologues at the Festival of Original Theatre (FOOT) at the University of Toronto in February 2023. Four students, Julia, Giovanna El-Warrak, Anya Shen, and Vivian Wang, presented a poster of all the students' research projects at the University of Toronto's Research Opportunity Program Research Fair in March 2023. The poster presented at the Research Fair is also available on the Gailey Road website. Mitzi, Anya, and Vivian presented their monologues at Congress, the annual national conference of Social Science and Humanities research in Canada, in May 2023.

Turning now to some of the challenges we experienced in the course, two seem particularly important. The first involved questions of language and legitimacy. How does one define "activist"? Who counts? Does a person have to identify personally as an activist, or can a researcher bestow that title on someone else? Does a person have to have a lifetime of activism, or is a single moment of public work enough? Does activism have to be public facing? We encountered this struggle with terms and categories throughout our work, not only with "activist" and "activism" but also "care", "history", "community", and "justice." Each of these terms is broad and can incorporate many differing examples. Our team often found ourselves discussing these questions and how different answers might influence our work.

The second challenge we faced will be familiar to anyone who works within research-based theatre research, verbatim theatre specifically, and that is the question of ethical representation. Specifically, when someone takes on the role of "playwright" and begins to craft and edit words into a speech assigned to a living person, where are the lines of appropriation, misappropriation, and misrepresentation? There are no hard and fast rules in verbatim theatre and often no ethics board to guide a theatrical research project. Working with the readings and discussions discussed above, we became an ethics community for one another. Each person on the team brought their thinking, their choices, and their concerns to our classes, and we pushed each other to look at our editing and citation practices with a critical eye. We questioned together what the possible harms and benefits were connected to each students' monologue project.

To encourage this process during the team's work with the verbatim monologue "Putting Lipstick on a Pig" described earlier, Jenny showed the students the original interview, the transcript, and the resulting monologue. We discussed the choices and practices that the *Out at School* team made, the moments of erasure, the moments of clarity, and how a monologue can both capture and miss original source material. This conversation helped the students, most of whom were writing verbatim monologues for the first time, to shift their effort from striving for "correct" or "perfect" to "strong", "clear", and "persuasive." However, the challenge of getting it right, of serving our interview subjects with respect and care continues to be the most important challenge and commitment in creating verbatim theatre.

On the last day of the course, we asked our students what they were taking away from the work we had done together. Shakira said that she's taking away the idea that she can research things she feels passionate about. She also said our work to uncover histories of activism and care and share them through verbatim theatre will inform her future scholarship in political science. Mitzi told us that she had a great time and that she felt proud of how her project had developed since the beginning of the course. Like Shakira, Mitzi said what she learned about conducting research from Elspeth, Raegan, and d'bi will impact her research in other courses. "The course changed my life", she told us. For Giovanna, finding freedom to express herself in forms other than writing essays was also life-changing.

Vivian told us she appreciated learning how to approach research in ethical ways. She also appreciated the solidarity that had developed among the students in the course. Anya learned how treating people with love and care is a form of radical power which can be integrated into academia. Mia also talked about learning how the practice of care was important not only to the activists we researched but to their communities as well.

Like Shakira, Julia said she now feels empowered to pursue research she deeply cares about. For Jialu Lulu Li, learning how to support herself and others in completing a research project was very important. She now feels confident about applying to graduate school. Like Lulu, Chika also mentioned the pleasure of working on a project as part of a research community. Research, she noted, does not have to be a solitary practice.

While the small number of students involved in the course makes it impossible to draw general conclusions about the success or possibilities of the course and archival verbatim research, we believe the project can be replicated by other researchers and practitioners. In particular, the idea that research does not have to be a solitary practice, that it can be taken up in community, within relationships that are respectful, and through commitments of relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility are ideas we believe are worthy of being shared with undergraduate students. They are ideas that will continue to ground our own future research practices and ideas, which we hope will continue to ground the research our students will engage in over their careers.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> "Heteronormativity" describes beliefs and practices which assume heterosexuality to be the only natural, normal, and acceptable sexual orientation. "Cis-normativity" describes beliefs and practices which assume a cisgender identity is the only natural, normal, and acceptable gender identity. A person who identifies as cisgender is a person whose gender identity is the same as their sex assigned at birth. A person who identifies as transgender is a person whose gender identity is not the same as their sex assigned at birth. When speaking about both heteronormativity and cis-normativity, scholars often use the term "cis-heteronormativity".
- <sup>2</sup> *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays* (Goldstein et al. 2023) is a set of seven short plays that share stories of a variety of queer lives and queer activism in the 1970s and early 1980s. The title play, *The Love Booth*, tells the story of how two lesbian activists and one masked gay psychiatrist pushed the American Psychology Association to take homosexuality off its Diagnostic Statistical Manual in 1973 so that homosexuality was no longer considered an illness that needed to be cured. Gailey Road presented the play at the Toronto Pride Festival in June 2023.
- <sup>3</sup> These representatives include members from the Canadian Council of Archives, the Association of Canadian Archivists, Library and Archives Canada, l'Association des archivists de Québec, and the Council of Provincial and Territorial Archivists.
- <sup>4</sup> *Lost Daughter* is a historical drama written by Tara Goldstein that unfolds in the summer of 1933, a summer of intense heat, wide-spread unemployment, and swastika badges in Toronto's parks and beaches. It is also the summer Christie Pits riot, which



occurred on 16 August 1933 at the Christie Pits playground when a homemade Swastika Flag was unfurled at a baseball game between two community teams—one Jewish, one Gentile. The play features characters who were at the game and contextualizes the riot within the history of Toronto’s Great Depression, its resentment of “foreigners” in Toronto, and the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis in Germany. The play won the Canadian Jewish Playwriting Award in 2005 and was performed at the Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre at the 2008 Toronto Fringe Festival. The play has been published in an anthology of Goldstein’s plays called *Zero Tolerance and Other Plays* and is available through amazon.ca.

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