Games of Archiving Queerly: Artefact Collection and Defining Queer Romance in *Gone Home* and *Life Is Strange*

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Abstract: *The medium of video games often fails to depict queerness with positive representations. To combat the harmful stereotypes or optional queerness in the medium, I advocate for an application of queer archival methodologies to define and locate queerness in gaming. Queer archiving, with a focus on emotions, trauma, establishment of identity, and multimodality, pairs well with the digital nature of video games.* Gone Home *(2013)* and Life Is Strange *(2015), two video games with narratives reliant on the developing romantic relationships between teenage girls, grant us examples in which the inclusion of queerness is reliant on such archiving. Within each game, players gather artefacts to compile archives. In turn, these archives create irrefutable spaces in which queer content is included.*

Introduction

Video games have a fraught history with queer characters; mainstream games in particular ignore the unique, positive experiences of queerness. The infrequent representations in gaming have, in lieu of nuance, relied upon destructive stereotypes of gender and sexuality (Ruberg 198). In the wake of Gamergate, a 2014 online harassment campaign against women in the gaming industry, gaming culture has afforded more opportunities to locate and discuss both gender queerness. Though the number of queer characters has increased, utilising and meaningfully executing their sexualities as a player remains elusive in many games, especially those produced by big budget studios. While developers such as BioWare (*Dragon Age, Mass Effect*), Bethesda Game Studios (*Fallout* series, *Skyrim*) and Maxis (*The Sims*) have long incorporated queer romances, these romances primarily "focus on content, on same-gender sex, and queer couple or marriage plots in ways that are, by and large, still window dressing, as the games provide menu-driven identities and represent sexuality as a series of yes-or-no choices" (Chang 228). Simply put, while players may select a sexuality, the games rarely offer any differentiation between heteronormative or homosexual storylines and in-game conversations. Without dismissing the power many gamers may feel in seeing their relationships treated equivalently, queerness remains tolerated and optional in many games instead of being integrated. Further complicating the issue of optional queerness are games that do not include queerness within the game itself but do so in the supplementary material, such as comic books, related websites, or social media platforms belonging to game developers (Dale). There are, however, alternative methodologies to these discrete forms of queerness populating numerous franchises: these include archiving and collecting artefacts.

Archiving, according to Kate Eichhorn, is "a site and practice integral to knowledge making, cultural production, and activism" (3). Eichhorn, while not writing about games, makes an important connection between culture, knowledge production, and the archive. By exploring the creation of archives within certain video games, we can pinpoint where queer identities are and trace the ways they have developed. Based on a case study that examines two games critically and commercially well received for their queer representations, The Fullbright Company's *Gone Home* (2013) and Dontnod Entertainment's *Life Is Strange* (2015), I argue that specific archival features in each game provide definitive means of representing queerness and of connecting to an established history of queer archive building. In some circumstances, the queer relationships in each game do not follow patterns of visibility that would be expected of a visual medium, for example the queer character Sam's physical absence from *Gone Home*, or the death of a bisexual teenager and events that are erased due to time travel mechanics in *Life Is Strange*. We do not witness the girls of *Gone Home* fall in love; we discover accounts second-hand by organising journal entries and examining photographs. Similarly, the queer visibility of *Life Is Strange* is muted by situations in which characters go missing, are dead, or are erased from time before their identities and relationships are explored within queer contexts. Without the archival features in each game, there is little to no capacity for manifesting queerness in the narrative. Only by archiving, using queer methodologies, is queerness irrefutable. These seemingly innocuous yet critically important archival practices have not engendered much scholarly or popular interest. This article explores how players compile archives and perform artefact collection to create necessary and discernible storylines about queerness that must be acknowledged.

To pursue the argument that archiving is our primary means of exploring queerness in these games, I apply queer archival methodology to *Life Is Strange* and *Gone Home*. Through discussing both games, I demonstrate the vital necessity of archiving, as many of the games' queer identities cannot be established without them. Queer identities that are not reliant on archives benefit in other ways from archiving, as will be discussed. In engaging in this analysis, my objective is not to condemn either game for connecting queerness to archiving in lieu of more overt modes of queerness. Rather, by using queer archival history in the context of these games, I hope to advocate for the careful nuances and respect for queerness that each game presents. These are not games hiding queerness but enabling it in a way that requires constant interaction by the player. In this way, queerness cannot be ignored. Additionally, through exploring these case studies, I offer a brief analysis of the complex ways gaming couples with aspects of queer historic archival practices. In my conclusion, I contextualise archiving within a broader understanding of queerness in games.

Gone Home: A Game about Artefacts

Gone Home situates the player in the role of Katie Greenbriar, returning home from a year abroad in 1995. In place of a family reunion, Katie is confronted with an empty house. Navigating the family's domestic space, the player accomplishes two goals: understanding the family transformations that occurred while Katie was gone, and, of vital concern to the narrative, tracking the developing romance between her younger sister Sam and her female best friend Lonnie. To fulfil these objectives, the player examines items and rooms in the house, many of which prompt voiceovers from Sam, reflecting how they symbolise her and Lonnie at different stages of their relationship. Emphasising that *Gone Home* is truly Sam's story, the game concludes only when the player realises that Sam and Lonnie have eloped. The omnipresent voiceovers are carefully

crafted journal entries from Sam to her sister Katie, compiled into a book the player discovers as the credits start. Although she is arguably the true protagonist because of her character development and prominence in the story, Sam is never physically present on screen, and neither is Lonnie. This scenario leaves the player in control of collecting the artefacts of their relationship and recognising their queerness.

Gone Home was lauded upon its release in 2013. Press viewed the "coming out narrative as a sign of a maturing industry and of a medium ready to deal with more diverse themes and characters" (Pavlounis 580). Personal reflections, such as those of Samantha Allen and Meritt Kopas, demonstrated the necessity of queer characters like Sam. Critical conversations further complicated ideas of normativity in relation to the game, with notable pieces from Shira Chess and Gregory L. Bagnall. Despite such popularity, Dimitrios Pavlounis and Shane Snyder, among others, acknowledge that certain audiences condemned and questioned whether *Gone Home* can be classified as a game when the primary objective is to walk through the house. I reject this definition of *Gone Home* as a game about walking. It is a game of archiving queerly.

Archiving and rummaging are the entirety of gameplay in *Gone Home*. To complete the game and storyline, players are required to create an archive of collected artefacts, placed by Sam for Katie to discover. Controlling Katie, the player progresses through the house, picking up, dropping, and relocating various objects on a quest to determine what happened to Sam. Finding certain items prompts voiceovers; selecting an old invoice from a moving company starts the first chronological voiceover from Sam, recounting how she struggled because she missed Katie during the relocation from their old neighbourhood. Finding such a voiceover item (there are twenty-four in all, each assigned to a different object) creates a specialised archive in the menu section of the game. Within the menu, players can review the voiceovers, listening to them whenever desired. By collecting artefacts that Sam deemed valuable, players further develop their archive of Sam's experience. I posit that this collection is the true archive of the game, and it is the root of my analysis of queerness. Admittedly, players, outside of the game's narrative and at their discretion, may develop a secondary archive if they elect to move non-Sam-voiceover artefacts around. This process was detailed briefly by Pavlounis, who recounted the phenomenon of players displacing everything they could within the game. These displaced objects are not catalogued in a menu-based archive, however; they are stationed wherever dropped. By contrast, the voiceovers are the constant. The impermanence of these secondary artefacts emphasises the import of collecting and curating the voiceovers as artefacts. Sam's queer representation remains when nothing else can. It is the intentional voiceover archive, a sonic and temporal archive, that develops queer identity. Without the archival process of collecting Sam's artefacts, there is no *Gone Home*, nor queerness. Queerness is a concept we, as players, constantly interact with through archive cultivation and artefact gathering. As Eichhorn notes, "[t]he making of archives is frequently where knowledge production begins" (3). It is in the developing archive that queerness pairs with knowledge and produces the narrative of Sam.

I am not the first scholar to associate *Gone Home* with archival practices and queerness. Pavlounis's work in "Straightening Up the Archive: Queer Historiography, Queer Play, and the Archival Politics of *Gone Home*" acknowledges that the game "complicates any assumption that meaningful archives are simple repositories of official documents and unique objects. Instead, it stages the house as what Ann Cvetkovich … calls an 'archive of feeling'" (583), a concept I will discuss in greater detail shortly. In spite of Pavlounis's recognition of the archive, the predominant

conclusions one can draw from his work stem from his frustrations with the normative design conventions of both the game itself and the archive.

Further and echoing concerns of game designers Pavlounis considered, the mechanics of searching for queerness within the game have been subject to criticism separate from archival design. Sam's queerness develops with an easily followed narrative flow. Journal entries are automatically structured in chronological order when entering the player archive. The game positions the objects prompting voiceover archival materials neatly, for clarity's sake; the first journal discussing Lonnie is in an unlocked room and easily found. Comparatively, Sam's reflections about eloping with Lonnie, temporally set much later, are enclosed in hidden rooms only discovered after the player collects prior voiceovers. Arguments and discussions based upon the structure of the archive and game itself remain fascinating, but neglect to consider the queer methodologies that can be applied to Sam's narrative path.

Jean Bessette, citing Judith Halberstam, describes a "scavenger methodology" in her research on lesbian archives (5). Scavenger methodology, in Bessette and Halberstam's efforts, blends multiple methods to develop a functioning means of sharing information on neglected subjects. Quite literally, players are placed in the role of scavenger within *Gone Home*. This methodology arises from the multiple methods available to players for engaging the archive: audio, visual, and textual interfaces to find artefacts; digital gaming, coding, playing to engage, etc. Sam's sexuality itself is the neglected subject. Interaction with a folder in the dining room prompts Sam's recollection of a conversation with her parents about her queerness. She says, "And so here's the thing. I was prepared for them to be mad, or disappointed, or start crying or something. But they were just in denial. 'You're too young to know what you want,' 'you and Lonnie are just good friends,' 'you just haven't met the right boy...' 'It's a phase.' That's what I didn't see coming. That they wouldn't even respect me enough... to believe me." Sam's journaling, documents that prompt the voice overs, and other artefacts further this story of the way those around Sam neglected or denied her sexuality. Stories she made up about her fictional pseudonymous avatar, Captain Allegra, falling in love with her transgender female first mate, or the notes shared between her and Lonnie are evidence of her neglected sexuality. It is apparent through the house, yet ignored and denied. Barry Jason Mauer et al., in their commentary on online archives, note that "these features are created and mediated by professional staff who designed them for specific audiences" (173). The designers behind *Gone Home* developed an accessible and chronological interface, placing hyper-focused attention on the clarity of the queer love story they wished to tell. In doing so, they combined queer identification and archival methodology, creating a symbiotic relationship of equal dependency.

One final concept I want to frame in relation to *Gone Home* is Ann Cvetkovich's notion of an archive of feeling. This is a game of stuff, of a house filled with boxes and the detritus of life stacked high and spread across spaces. Gaming scholar Ian Bogost highlights the sheer volume of material to gather and interact with in the game: hidden clues, temporal context (music, tapes), and common domestic objects (highlighters in drawers, tissues, refrigerated food), most of which do little to prompt analysis. Other readers of these textual objects include Robin J. S. Sloan, who believes that *Gone Home*'s 1995 setting fits an established pattern of commodifying nostalgia. While the layout and organisation of artefacts is relatively linear in Sam's story, the manifold volume of material recognises that her queer relationship is simultaneously tying two separate people together through common interests and gifts, all of which are unearthed through the house,

and a queer archive of feeling. Like Pavlounis, I gravitate toward Cvetkovich's archive of feeling, which she defines as:

> Both material and immaterial, at once incorporating objects that might not ordinarily be considered archival, and at the same time, resisting documentation because sex and feelings are too personal or ephemeral to leave records. For this reason and others, the archive of feelings lives not just in museums, libraries, and other institutions but in more personal and intimate spaces, and significantly, also within cultural genres. (244)

I utilise the archive of feeling as the queer archival methodology within *Gone Home* because it couples the process of finding abnormal objects resistant to archival work and the game's intimate location within the home. A sampling of artefacts that prompt journal/archival entries from Sam include: a moving invoice, a flyer in a hidden compartment, a book on making friends, a hat, a college acceptance letter, a torn television listing, a note in a pocket, and a bottle of red hair dye. Traditional artefacts are defined here as objects that can independently help cultivate an identity without input from the subject matter or paper material frequently placed in archives. I define them this way to emphasise the typicality of their nature; we anticipate seeing letters and personal notes in archives. Alternate objects of feeling and emotion, such as the television listing, the hat in the garage, and the bottle of red hair dye, are seemingly disconnected from traditional archival expectations but are nevertheless vital for emotional resonance and understanding. Dyeing hair was the first instance of Lonnie calling her beautiful and an early intimate moment. The seemingly innocuous television listing starts Sam's reflection on her homophobic parents discovering her identity: "Katie, you know how mom and dad are. Not exactly... super open-minded. About things. It feels like every minute I don't spend with Lonnie, I spend worrying about them finding out about us." These personal revelations further the intimacy the players encounter, as we occupy the domestic spaces in which they occurred, furthering our archive of feelings and, subsequently, our engagement with queer representation.

Figure 1: The closing sequence of *Gone Home* (2013): Sam's journal. The Fullbright Company. Screenshot.

In the closing moments of *Gone Home*, players listen for Sam once more, saying her goodbyes and apologies to Katie. As the screen fades to black, the final object players witness is the journal Sam has been cultivating, the archive she is leaving behind for Katie. Despite collecting their own archive, the conclusion is dedicated to the queer character at the heart of the story, Sam, and her archive.

Life Is Strange: A Game about Trauma and Queerness

Echoing certain thematic concerns of *Gone Home*, such as coping with family conflict and questions of identity, *Life Is Strange* also highlights the strife of girls in love. Max, returning to her hometown after five years away, reunites with childhood friend Chloe. Chloe, in Max's absence, has fallen in love with Rachel Amber, who has gone missing at the story's start. Gaining miraculous powers to rewind time, Max repeatedly rescues Chloe from danger and alters the fabric of reality on a quest to find Rachel Amber and save their town. As players use Max's powers to create narrative outcomes they favour, for instance kissing Chloe or rejecting her, Max's journal reflects these choices and their impact on the narrative. The journal functions as a hub of activity: players track their actions, examine photos, inspect artefacts collected, and review notes about characters in the story. Due to the impermanence of storylines, Max's journal is the player's sole means of tracing Max's feelings and understanding her developing relationship with Chloe. The journal is important to establishing and emphasising Max's and Chloe's relationship, and, to an extent, Chloe's and Rachel Amber's, because time travel decisions can erase the queer relationships within *Life Is Strange*. Unlike *Gone Home*, *Life Is Strange* is not dependent on archival practices for the narrative to develop. Instead, players employ the archive for queer identity construction. From the onset of the game, Max, the avatar and compiler, openly invites analysis of her journal, the home of journal entries, text messages, random papers, and photographs, musing on reactions from readers. Max's highly stylised journal interface showcases doodles, drink stains, stickers, and random pieces of paper that caught Max's attention. This book is clearly *hers*, and thus the player's, to engage with. Resultingly, its sincerity and accuracy about Max's feelings is unquestionable.

Sexuality is in flux and dependent on player action in *Life Is Strange*. Chloe Price is romantically interested in girls, and her former love interest Rachel Amber is coded as bisexual due to a relationship a man. Max, controlled by the player, has the potential for either heterosexual or queer relationships and identifications if the player selects to date someone of either gender. Artefacts indicate an irrefutable queerness, however, specifically in the form of Max's additional archival journal entries that are discovered as the player progresses through the game.

Even when playing as a presumed heterosexual character, the archive inputs queerness into the story. At the midpoint of the narrative, Chloe dares Max to kiss her, and the player has the option to dismiss her request or indulge her. Refusal does not negate queer potential, however. In her journal, the archive Max creates, Max acknowledges, "I would have [kissed her], but I didn't like being dared like it was some big deal. Maybe I am scared. Of what? I think I'm too young for marriage." Recognising the journal archive is seemingly privately constructed for Max's eyes, we can read her feelings as legitimate. There was intent to kiss Chloe. She then juxtaposes the beginning of anything with Chloe with the act of marriage, a permanent union and commitment. These are not subtle lines requiring strenuous effort on behalf of the player to ferret out. They are located within a button click as the player opens the journal, the archive.

Considering that the plot is dependent on choices the player selects and the gaming industry's established pattern of making queer identification optional instead of fully engaged, it is worth noting that the archive places recognisable and permanent identification markers throughout the game. Upon returning from an alternate timeline in which Chloe is paralysed, Max writes, after not kissing Chloe, "I've never been so glad to see Chloe in my life. The second I saw her blue hair and that beautiful pissed-off face, I kind of regretted not kissing her when she double dared me. Maybe if she had double dog dared me...". Even if the player has opted out of the most overt chance to queer the relationship between Max and Chloe, this language ("kiss", "beautiful", "maybe") doggedly defines an archive of queer feeling, outlining the materials, images, and words Max gathers. Another reunion sees Max reflect, "I didn't care that this was the real end of the world... It just felt so good to hold her again after everything we'd been through. I thought about all the timelines I'd jumped through for her, and how much she's always meant to me..." and, again, "Our lives have always been entwined." I describe these examples to establish a queer methodological pattern, one generated by the research of Judith Halberstam. Writing on queer subcultures, she writes: "The archive is not simply a repository; it is also a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory, and a complex record of queer activity" (169–70). Max's journal follows this pattern. A queer teenage girl's journal, documenting flyers from parties and cultural references, is more than repository. The primary functions are performing collective memory and recording queer activity. The archive journal is of special interest in *Life Is Strange* as the sole artefact container that represents the true story. When Max rewinds time, only she, the archivist, and subsequently the player, remember. Only the archive has the potential to report the collective memory and record queer activity.
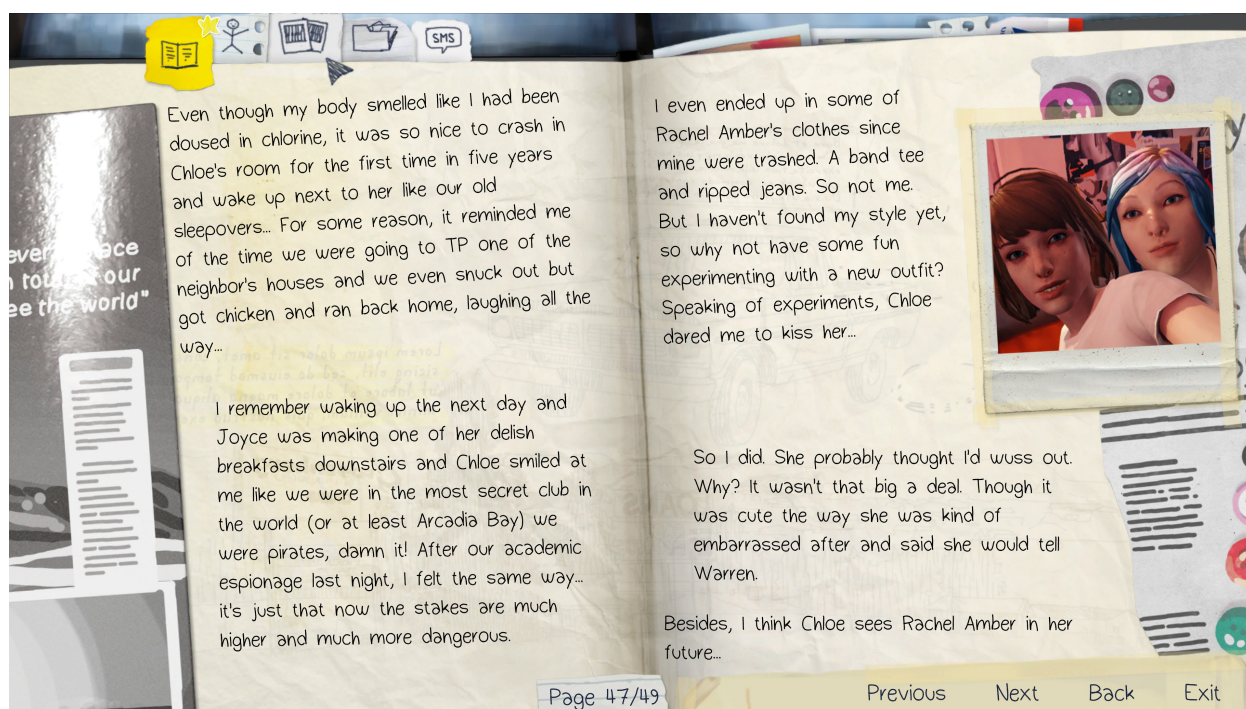

Figure 2: Max's Journal, on the subject of kissing Chloe and affirming the queerness of Chloe, Rachel, and herself, in *Life Is Strange* (2015). Dontnod Entertainment. Screenshot.

Another union of queer archival practice and *Life Is Strange* stems from trauma. It is through trauma that connections between queer archives and queer games are at their most apparent. Queer archives primarily memorialise both trauma and feelings of queerness and require complex methodologies and analysis to comprehend their rhetorical significance in preservation. In *An Archive of Feeling*, Cvetkovich writes:

> Understanding gay and lesbian archives as archives of emotion and trauma helps to explain some of their idiosyncrasies or, one might say, their "queerness." They address particular versions of the determination to "never forget" that gives archives of traumatic history their urgency. That gay and lesbian history even exists has been a contested fact, and the struggle to record and preserve it is exacerbated by the invisibility that often surrounds intimate life, especially sexuality (242).

I do not claim the fictional queer archives represent the same level of trauma or erasure as their historical, real counterparts. They do not. Instead, I believe *Life Is Strange*, a game of tragic queered girls, mirrors the traumatised archive, uniquely and urgently queer.

The exigency of numerous characters in their devotion to the missing Rachel Amber, a queer girl, links trauma to the premise of the game. By the game's conclusion, players find Rachel's corpse and realise she has been kidnapped, murdered, and potentially raped, shattering Chloe. Rachel, as the subject of a queer trauma archive, possesses a dual role of spectre and centrepiece. Haunting the archive, she is voiceless; details about her come second hand, and there are limited artefacts to compose her history. Players cannot fully understand her sexuality without the biased influence of Chloe, who is in love with her, or the prequel game, *Life Is Strange: Before the Storm*. It is also queer Chloe who preserves Rachel's memory and memorialises her. Chloe is the one who hangs wanted posters and artefacts the player later finds, continuing to record Rachel's missing status even as the police and Rachel's family have long stopped looking. By completing these acts of preservation, Chloe, lesbian, is ever urgent and pressed to find new details about Rachel and keep her alive. The archive of *Life Is Strange* affords numerous potential means of connecting queer archival practices and the queer identity within the series, fully realised only through the archive's role.

Queer Archival Scholarship

Through the case studies of *Life Is Strange* and *Gone Home*, I attend to my secondary goal: discussing the rationale for connecting queer archival methodology and digital game studies. Admittedly, game scholarship is intertwined with archival practices on multiple levels. Primarily, gaming culture itself expends effort analysing the best practices for archiving physical games themselves or creating localised archives through the world in a quest for preservation (Sköld). Other syntheses of archiving and gaming result in concepts like the LGBTQ Video Game Archive (2017–), a web-based database containing decades of representation of queerness in video games (Shaw). Certain scholars, such as Jaimie Baron and Pavlounis, have offered theories on in-text archiving practices but remain preoccupied with confronting linear expectations of archiving within gaming. In response to the available scholarship and interest in queer representation, I turned to queer and feminist rhetoricians and archivists for methodologies in archival studies. The following section defines the queer archive in greater detail, archives in gaming, and which elements of the queer archive lead me to advocate for the vitality of queer archival usage in gaming.

Jean Bessette notes in *Retroactivism in the Lesbian Archives*: "Collecting, compositing, and revisiting the past is not unique to queer cultures, of course, but it has been an important mode of activism and identity building in the twentieth century" (11). Extending the argument into the twenty-first century, and for my purposes, game scholarship, archival work continues to establish queer identities, not solely as proof of existence but also how they have developed over time. Archives, in Judith Halberstam's view, function interchangeably and concurrently as "a resource, a productive narrative, a set of representations, a history, a memorial, and a time capsule" (23). These varied terms are all necessary to define archiving within the gaming sphere, both in this study and more broadly in other genres and games.

Archives are not a required feature in all games, and their purposes remain dissimilar, varying wildly across the gaming landscape. Often, the archive functions solely as a space in the game to showcase collectable objects the player gathered or trophies players earned. Archives in this form are visual in nature and function as mere spectacle, serving no other purpose but proof of collection or success. Games such as the *Uncharted* series, however, utilise the archive as an in-game help section. Struggling to solve puzzles over an extensive time span will prompt the game to remind the player of the journal they can access, updated automatically with additional pages filled out as the player progresses. The *Uncharted* journal guides the player with hints or solutions but has no influence on the narrative or sexuality of the heterosexual protagonist, Nathan Drake. Rarer still are games like *Horizon Zero Dawn* or the *Resident Evil* franchise where collectable artefacts and the composed archive offer additional narrative details about the setting, plot, and characters. These archives may function as resource, history, or time capsule, per Halberstam, but do not embolden players to understand representation or narrative in terms of character development. Instead, the archive located within most genres of games, which have assumed/affirmed heterosexual characters, lacks the nuance and import of the queered archive.

Queer archiving in video games can offer possibilities for expanding representations of queerness in three distinct ways. First, queer archives utilise popular culture and visual media to draw attention to queer issues. By engaging with popular media genres and the screen, the scope of the archive reaches a wider populous. Second, the geographical limitations and missing objects associated with the stationary, physical queer archive can be circumvented by the technology and accessibility of the video game medium. Despite their fictional nature, queer archiving games nevertheless continue the trends and importance of their real-life counterparts. Third, the interactivity of the medium and fictionalised protagonists diversifies who stars in and who compiles archives, and thus can expand to include queer identities.

Cvetkovich, Halberstam, and Bessette, among countless others, have detailed specific historical cases of queer archives and their construction, discussing the influence of technology, multimodality, and popular culture. Exploring the use of documentaries as archival work by the curators of older lesbian archives, Cvetkovich writes: "Especially striking is their use of an archive of popular culture, one that is strongly visual in form" (244). The visuality of the archive is similarly important to other scholars. Bessette focuses on "the granular rhetorical strategies lesbian collectives have employed to construct and leverage certain versions of the past: the inventive *textual, visual, audio, and material* moves, and their effects on the collective and more general publics" (15; emphasis in the original). Though the documentaries function within a different medium, they demonstrate an archival awareness for a multimodal form (textual, visual, audio, etc.) to reach the audience. The documentaries' goals of archiving feeling and the past utilising a blend of modes is also present within video games. *Gone Home*, situated in 1995, is particularly

inspired by using the setting to create an archive of feeling, linking genres of games and music from the period to how their queer characters bonded. Players hear the music, read cheats from the game, and interact as spectators to the queerness in a constructed narrative as they would the documentaries, if not with more agency as potential curators themselves. Games can combine the popular culture that has furthered archival awareness with the visual, textual, audio, and, in many cases, material moves that curators of lesbian archives have long utilised.

To discuss the geographical limitations of queer archives, I turn again to Cvetkovich, who contends that a multimodal format and use of popular culture averts the risk of obscurity for certain narratives and documents. Her research explores "how documentary film and video extend the material and conceptual reach of the traditional archive, collating and making accessible documents that might otherwise remain obscure except to those doing specialized research" (244). This awareness of the conflict between accessibility and invisibility invites comparison to Joan Nestle, whom she cites. Nestle argues that archives hosted in academic spheres removed from the culture often limit or prevent women and queer figures from engaging with them. Notable for my purposes is the way that Nestle makes a rightful claim on the queer cultural archive in terms of space, pointing out that "[t]he archives should share the political and cultural world of its people and not be located in an isolated building that continues to exist while the community dies" (11). Comparatively, video games are a global medium accessed by anyone possessing technology or an Internet connection. It is in the prevalence and accessibility of the gaming medium that I see potential for queer archival and identity construction.

Previously, I made mention of the temporal motivation to reclaim lost figures and cultures whose existence might be doubted. Nestle believes "the archives will collect the prints of all our lives, not just preserve the records of the famous or the published" (11). Additionally, Halberstam remarked in a chapter on a murdered American rural queer teenager, Brandon Teena, that archiving him "is also a necessarily incomplete and ever-expanding record of how we select our heroes as well as how we commemorate our dead" (45). Queer archives demonstrate the existence of queer people; many are connected to trauma or loss, and the choice of figures represented is up to the discretion of the curator. Accounts of fictional queer teenagers in games can expand the diversity of who is discussed in relation to the archive but mitigates the real-world suffering, as the trauma is digital. Still, their age and suffering connect them to "a generation of community of the lost" that Halberstam later writes about (47).

Trauma archives, in Cvetkovich's research, raise the question of "how to present archival material in a way that doesn't simply overwhelm or numb the observer. Their work indicates that it is not enough simply to accumulate archival materials; great care must be taken with how they are exhibited and displayed" (271). Trauma archival practices apply to video games with queer characters. The trauma archive relates to the player as curator as well. Games are not encountered in vacuums. They are procedurally generated with algorithms and motivations of developers, studios, and larger gaming culture. Limitations such as how players can interact with artefacts are also worthy of consideration. These facts acknowledged, the act of curation is broadened to those unfamiliar or unaccustomed to queer suffering or archiving because of gaming, granting them experience in how trauma shapes queerness.

In brief summation, archiving queerly is a complex methodology grounded in decades of trauma research and combining multiple genres and modes to engage audiences. Though neither *Life Is Strange* nor *Gone Home* overtly claim to mimic the established practices of queer archiving,

their respective portrayals of queer females still situates them within the trends of multimodality, trauma, diverse representations, and others to be discussed.

Conclusion

Sexuality and gender are overt themes and concerns of both *Life Is Strange* and *Gone Home*. This undisguised attention to queer girls prevents audiences from misconstruing the representation either game offers. As Merritt Kopas remarks on *Gone Home*, "[t]he simple fact is that this is a video game about girls in love", an observation I extend to *Life Is Strange* (145). Yet the obviousness of girls in love hardly necessitates that the means by which queerness is situated can be regarded as simple. Artefact collection is complex. Archive curation even more so. Engaging archival work through a lens of queer rhetoric and historiography lends additional readings, feelings, and conversations. Only by applying queer archival theory in these games can queerness be found. I pose this as something to celebrate.

Contextualised with the problematic history of video game queerness, advocating for analysis and positive interpretations of games that require archives to demonstrate such queerness is understandably suspect. *Gone Home* illustrates Sam and Lonnie's relationship without either one appearing on-screen. Many queer girls are killed in *Life Is Strange*. Neither game is perfect in depiction; however, the complications of queer archives are vital to the respective games. Sam is *Gone Home*'s protagonist. The desire to locate her journal entries and love story is the driving force towards completing the game. *Gone Home* has no function without Sam's queerness. Despite relying on the deaths of queer girls to chronicle, the *Life Is Strange* universe equally hinges upon female devotion, from Chloe's attachment of Rachel to the healing relationship between Chloe and Max. Rhetoric and archival theory influence queer representation in gaming. Erin Rand believes that "[q]ueer critical rhetoric not only enables us to see an object in a new light, but also forces us to reconfigure the very theory that had shaped our view in the first place—that is often denied to queer work" (534). The purpose of queerness to grant storylines meaning is irrefutable, and we must view them as objects in new light. Equally irrefutable is how archives are uniquely posed to present such queerness. Players still discover queerness despite how little time is dedicated to the physical representations of relationships or these characters in either game. Utilising queer archive, we compile proof and histories of queerness. The procedures for accessing data and compiling artefacts are unique within each game but serve as sites for the introduction of queerness into the games, and that is a wonderful complication in representation.

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