Seeking an Identity: The Portrayal of Archivists in Film

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Seeking an Identity: The Portrayal of Archivists in Film

Amanda Oliver & Anne Daniel
Western University Archives

ARCHIVES SOCIETY OF ALBERTA CONFERENCE
MAY 2014
Outline of Presentation

- Research Questions
- Literature Review
- Methodology
- Findings
- Discussion of Findings
- Threats and opportunities
- Conclusion
Research Questions

- How are archivists portrayed in film?
- Can specific stereotypes be identified?
- Is there a lack of distinction between archivists and other information professionals in film?
Literature Review

- Librarians in pop culture
  - Walker & Lawson (1993) and Acerro (2001)
- Archivists in pop culture
- Archivists and identity
- Is there a clear stereotype presented in the literature?
Methodology

Identify film titles

Compile a list of 77 potential films
Establish Criteria

Apply criteria to list of films
Definition of Terms: Archivist

- The Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA) defines archivists as, “... work[ing] as part of government, corporations, museums, libraries, historical societies and many other groups to control and preserve the recorded memory of these organizations.”

- Tasks associated with archivists include appraisal, arrangement and description, preservation, reference, and outreach, among others. For the purposes of this study, emphasis was placed on the tasks of archivists rather than their job title in identifying reel archivists.
Definition of Terms: Archives

- The Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA) definition of archives is: “An archives works to acquire, preserve, and make available material collected under the terms of a particular mandate.”
- There are many types of archives and they may contain records in a variety of formats.
Methodology

Remove films that do not meet criteria

Create film checklist
Obtain copies of and view films

Collect data via film checklist
Methodology

Enter data into data analysis spreadsheet
Methodology

- Analyze the data
- Identify trends
Findings

- Name
- Job title
- Screen Time
- Security Measures
- Tasks Performed
- Physical Space
Findings: Name

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name Given</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Title as Name</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11%</td>
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Findings: Job Title

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archivist</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other title</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unidentified</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26%</td>
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### Findings: Screen Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Screen Time Totals</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5 minutes</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 minutes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 minutes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 minutes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 20 minutes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings: Security Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Security Guard</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed Stacks</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Findings: Security Measures

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Adhere to Security Measures</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Findings: Tasks Performed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks Performed</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accession</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquisition</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrangement and description</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retrieval</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Findings: Physical Space

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Space</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bright</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dusty</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unorganized</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underground/basement</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Discussion of Findings

- Fortress of Solitude
- Restrictions, Restrictions, Restrictions
- Liars, and Vandals and Flirts, oh my!
- All Knowing Archivist
Discussion of Findings: Fortress of Solitude

- Physical isolation
  - Archivist
  - Facility
- Inaccessible records
Isolation: Blade (1998)
Isolation: The Age of Stupid (2009)
Restrictions, Restrictions, Restrictions

- Star Wars II Attack of the Clones (2002)
- The Nasty Girl (1990)
Star Wars II: Attack of the Clones (2002)
The Nasty Girl (1990)
Mama (2013)
Discussion of Findings: Liars, and Vandals and Flirts, oh my!

- **Liars**
  - *In the Name of the Father* (1993) and *The Nasty Girl* (1990)
- **Vandals**
  - *Watermelon Woman* (1996) and *Rollerball* (1975)
- **Flirts**
Flirts: Just Cause (1995)
Discussion of Findings: All Knowing Archivist

- Research times
  - Limited time spent in archives
- All knowing archivists
  - Scream 3 (2000)
  - Red (2010)
Threats

- Archives are inaccessible
  - Physically and intellectually (secretive)
  - Disconnect between archivist and researcher
- Misconceptions about archival research
  - Screen time
  - All-knowing archivist
- Ambiguity about archival profession
  - Lack of consistent image
  - Lack of understanding could lead to lack of funding and attracting donors, researchers and future archivists
Turning Threats into Opportunities

- Generate discussion
- Foster a culture of transparency
- Engage in outreach
- Discuss professional identity
Conclusion

- Although it is positive that archives and archivists are portrayed in a variety of films, the lack of consistent image suggests a lack of professional identity
Thank you!

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