

Realness for archivists:

*On authenticity, professionalization,
and ways of knowing*

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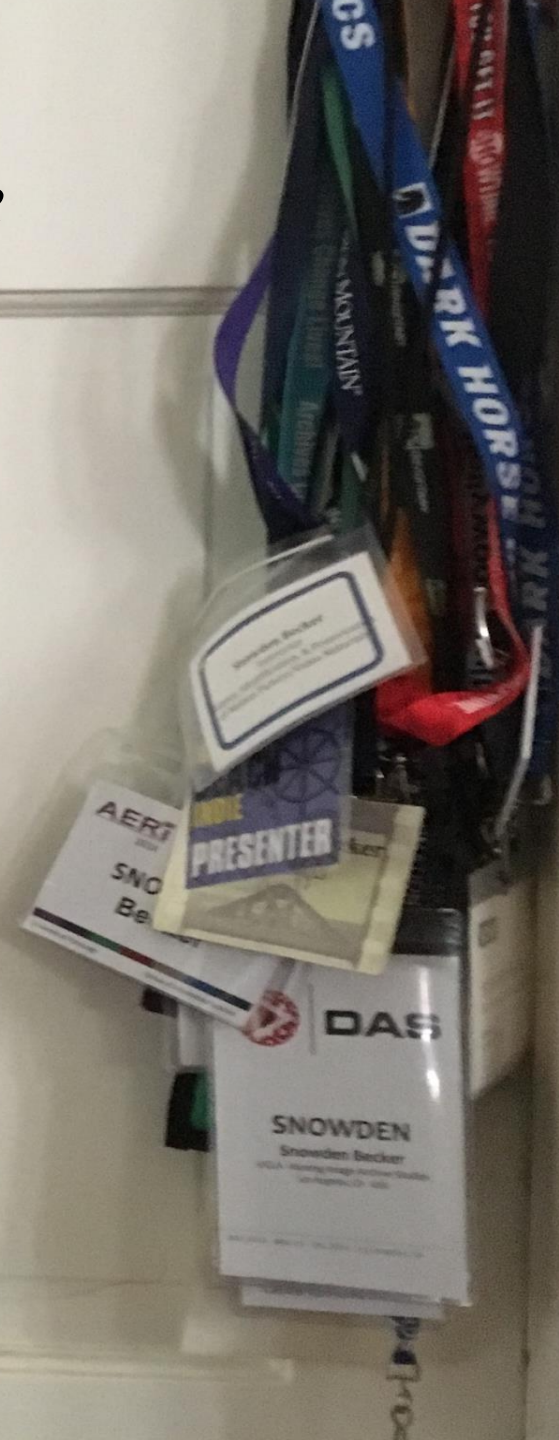
May 13, 2019

“my predecessor wasn’t a real archivist”

- Providing context
- Questioning the category
- MPWARA Syndrome: A symptomology
- Why this matters
- What we can do about it

the source material: personal experience

- Post-MLIS career
 - Digital and media archivist
 - Editor/applications analyst
 - Public access coordinator
 - Archival consultant
- 13 years of teaching
 - Moving Image Archive Studies
 - Information Studies
 - Public History
- Countless conferences and conversations



the experiences of others

- Current and former students
- 120+ Tea Break guests at UCLA
 - <https://is.gseis.ucla.edu/is-tea-breaks/>
- AERI Institutes (2009-2015)
- Planned “epidemiology”: fieldwide survey, semi-structured interviews

Past Tea Break guests

(** indicates program alumni)

2018-2019

**Susan Allen (PhD '96) Director, California Rare Book School

Peter Sachs Collopy, University Archivist and Head of Archives

**Teresa Soleau (MLIS '09) – Digital Preservation & Library Systems

Anthony Cunha, Founder and CEO, and Blake Blasingame, Founder

Howard Rootenberg, Owner, B & L Rootenberg Rare Books & Manuscripts

Cory Fisher, Rights Manager & Archivist, Krishnamurti Foundation

Maya Montanez Smukler, Manager, Archive Research & Study Center

**Natalie Auxier (MLIS '12), Archivist, 20th Century Fox

**Annie Tang (MLIS '14) – Coordinator, Special Collections & Archives

2017-2018

Anna Chen, Head Librarian, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library

** Parisa Samaie (MLIS '09), Library Department Chair, Los Angeles

** Jennifer Kishi (MLIS '13), Archivist, Sterling Ruby Studio

** Audra Eagle Yun (MLIS '08) Head of Special Collections and Archives

California, Irvine

** Rikke Ogawa (MLIS '98) Director, Louise M. Darling Biomedical

UCLA

**Tommy Keswick (MLIS '08) Digital Technology Development

Robert Williams, Canon for Community Relations at the Episcopal

Shira Peltzman, UCLA Library Digital Archivist

what makes us “real,” anyway?

“Does it happen all at once, like being wound up,” he asked, “or bit by bit?”

“It doesn't happen all at once,” said the Skin Horse. “You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby.”

Margery Williams Bianco

The Velveteen Rabbit

“You have butch queen up in drag realness, femme queen realness, school boy realness, thug realness, executive realness... Realness categories are about building confidence to the people who are walking this category.”

Lasseindra Ninja
Mother of the Paris Chapter of the House of Ninja

As quoted in [“To be able to blend”: Does “realness” still belong in ballroom?](#)

Madison Moore – *Out* – April 7, 2017

Realness =

generalist

paper/text records-based

“traditional”

custodial, hegemonic, non-critical

Part of the “archival establishment”



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What it's like to be an audiovisual archivist among *real* archivists.



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MPWARA Syndrome

- Loneliness; insecurity; unreadiness
- Lack of internal mentors (and/or presence of internal opposition)
- Precarity
- Need to make long-term moves from a short-term role
- Inherited problems
- Having two jobs – archivist and advocate
- Pressure to over-perform
- High potential for frustration and “failure”

why this matters

- Burnout (we can't go on eating our young)
- Expanding our opportunities means relaxing our boundaries
- Knowing there's a problem is the first step to fixing it

what we can do

- Accept that realness is a work in progress
- Challenge the definitions, especially when they're exclusionary
- Emphasize experiential learning and reflective practice
- Mentor, share, support, and learn from one another
- Push back when we get pushed too far

...other ideas??

Thank you!

- Slides will be available at snowdenbecker.com (Upcoming & Recent)
- I'll be presenting more on this (w/Tre Berney) at IASA in September
- I welcome your thoughts and comments! snowdenbecker@gmail.com