

William Petrie Graduate Student Library Scholarship 2022 Recipient  
By Chris Aino Pihlak, Faculty of Humanities  
Award-winning Essay

Special Collections, Remarkable Quality

Through Special Collections I produced an acclaimed research paper, while deepening my sense of belonging to the trans community. As a trans woman studying gender history, I was excited to access the university's Transgender Archives for my thesis. However, I discovered the true depth of quality in the library's collections when working on my paper for HISTR 519: Special Topics in LGBTQ History. The vast archival material stored in Special Collections, enabled me to write an excellent research paper on transfeminine erotica.

Scholars Sophie Pezzutto and Lynn Comella have persuasively argued that mainstream transfeminine pornography was an essential element shaping mid-century American cultural understandings of transness.<sup>1</sup> Despite this representational importance, scholarship on transfeminine erotica remains a niche subject within the already modest field of trans history. Thanks to the innovative and extensive archival materials housed in Special Collections, this gap has been partially rectified. My paper undertook a longitudinal analysis of eighty-six issues across thirteen transfeminine erotica publications housed in the library's archives. Special Collections Director Lara Wilson further supported me through advice on locating potential research materials. Through her help and that of the staff of Special Collections, I was able to demonstrate the contradictory framing of transfeminine erotica as both a medium of lurid transgression, while closely adhering to normative conventions of beauty. My successful analysis would not have been possible without the University of Victoria Library.

Partially through the success of my research paper, I attained the highest mark in the seminar. Across my coursework, I achieved an A+ average. Beyond academic success, my time in Special Collections has paid wider scholastic dividends.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sophie Pezzutto, and Lynn Comella, "Trans Pornography: Mapping an Emerging Field," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (2020): 154.

I have spoken on my research at academic conferences hosted by both the University of Victoria and Concordia. Furthermore, my paper will appear in a forthcoming issue of the University of Victoria's *Graduate History Review*. While only entering the second year of my masters, the presentation and publication credits generated from my work with Special Collections has already given me a foundation for further scholastic achievement.

Finally, the vast fonds of Special Collections were not just of scholastic utility. As a trans woman, they provided a sense of emotive kinship to my community's ancestors. These records granted me a feeling of profound connection to those who paved the way for me. Beyond any academic benefit, that has truly been the greatest gift of my time working in Special Collections.

Bibliography

Pezzutto, Sophie, and Lynn Comella. "Trans Pornography: Mapping an Emerging Field." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (2020): 152- 171.