

Using the Archiving Lab: Values, Impacts, and Discourses

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Abstract:

New library and archives initiatives increasingly bring DIY digital conversion and personal digital archiving practices into public spaces, to support patrons as they organize, store, and preserve digital possessions in their personal lives. In order to study the values and impacts of such services and the discourses they activate, this study draws on semi-structured interviews with 13 library staff and patrons about their experiences with personal digital archiving resources at a large urban public library. Interviewees emphasized values and impacts such as access to resources and the library's role in supporting digital literacy, as well as obstacles to participation including the difficulty of learning new skills and technologies. Personal stories about memory interweave with narratives about the meaning of public libraries. A critical discourse analysis of these interviews reveals additional discourses at play: personal digital archiving at the public library can be valued as a resource for managing (having power over) change, a means of re-situating identity, and a vehicle for (re)imagining the future. This research contributes to our understanding of the narratives and attitudes that shape emerging personal digital archiving practices.

About the Author:

Amy Wickner is the the electronic records archivist at the University of Maryland Libraries, and a PhD student in the University of Maryland iSchool. As a researcher, she focuses on personal digital archiving, born-digital archives, and digital preservation ethics and praxis.