

Using the Archiving Lab: Values, Impacts, and Discourses

Amy Wickner • University of Maryland • College Park

Personal digital archiving in public libraries

Personal Digital Archiving

How individuals accumulate, organize, store, and preserve digital material as part of their personal lives (Kim, 2013)

A process through which digital possessions are extensions of individual identity (Cushing, 2013)

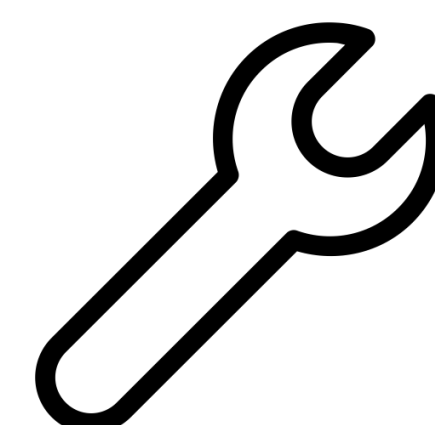
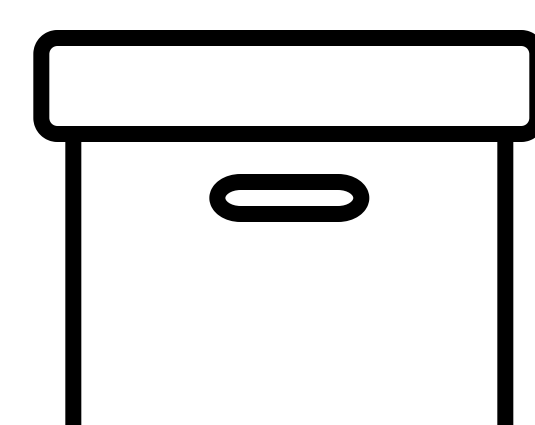
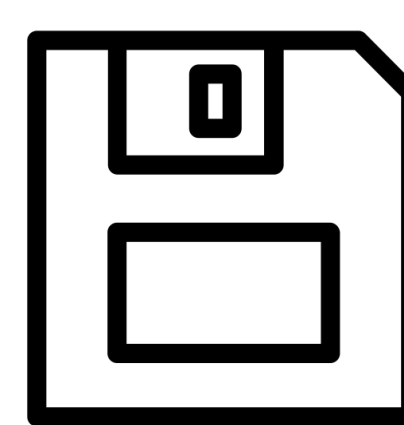
Involves saving, remembering, losing, and sharing:

- From everyday maintenance to “digital hoarding” (Chen, 2014)
- Online memorials & social media curation (Acker & Brubaker, 2014; Sinn & Syn, 2014)
- Catastrophic data loss, deliberate forgetting, benign neglect (Marshall, 2011)

... at Public Libraries

New library and archives initiatives increasingly bring do-it-yourself (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.

digital preservation ✕ personal archives ✕ Makerspaces



Data & methods

Research site: DIY digital conversion / personal digital archiving workstation at the central branch of a large urban public library

Semi-structured interviews (5 patrons, 8 library staff)

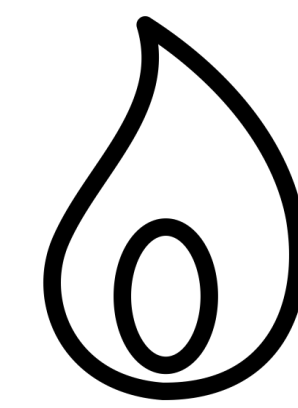
- Experiences with personal digital archiving in and out of the public library
- Experiences using and working at the library
- Relationships between archiving lab and library in general

Data: Notes, interview memos, interview transcripts (by researcher), and support material (e.g. handouts)

What are the values and impacts of personal digital archiving resources in public libraries?

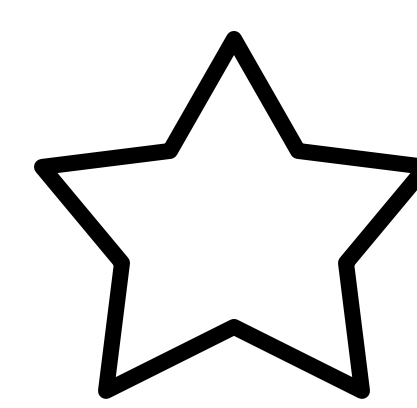
Analysis: qualitative coding (all materials) via these major themes:

Motivations



What brings you here?

Values



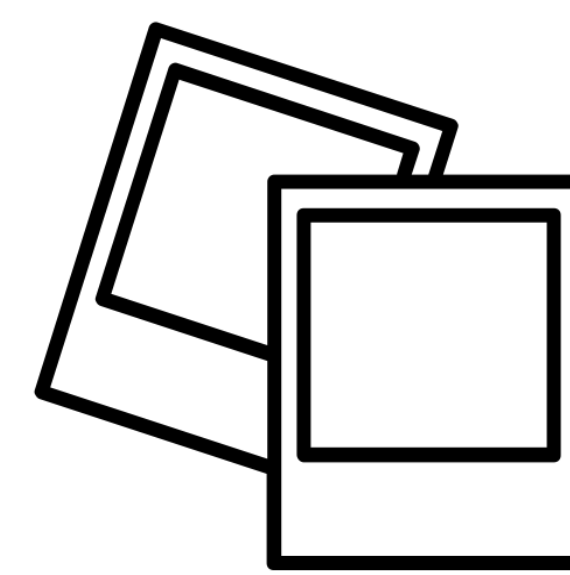
Why does this opportunity matter?

Impacts



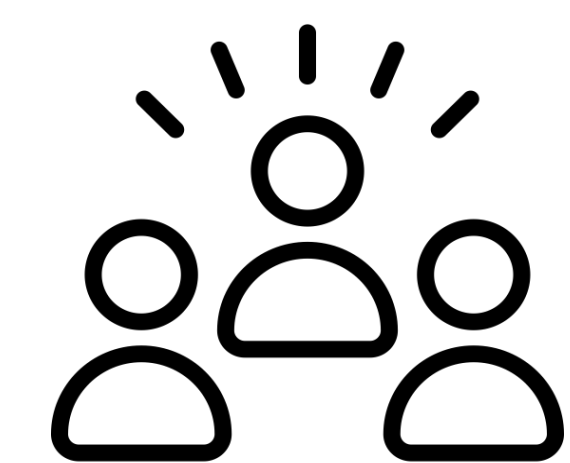
How has it affected your life?

Findings



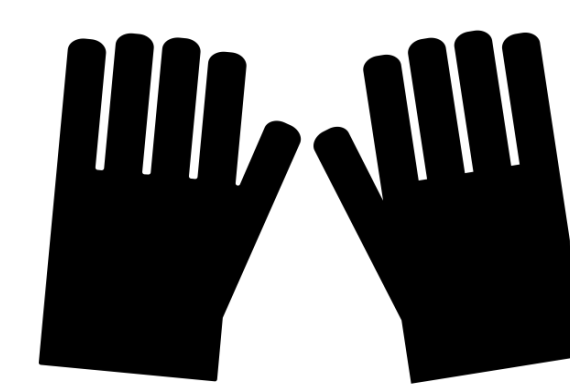
Memory work is personal, tied to loss

For sharing with a close circle
Preserving ties to aging or deceased via obsolescent media
Special projects, not everyday maintenance



Personal digital archiving is a natural fit with library mission

Access to information lifecycle
Responding to community needs
Preserving local history



Pros and cons of DIY setup

Promoting autonomy and independence
Limited time to improvise and play
Difficult to develop expertise, learn standards for digital archiving

References

Acker, A., & Brubaker, J. R. (2014). Death, memorialization, and social media: A platform perspective for personal archives. *Archivaria*, 77, 1-24; Chen, A. (2014). Disorder: Vocabularies of hoarding in personal digital archiving practices. *Archivaria*, 78, 115-134; Cushing, A. L. (2013). “It’s stuff that speaks to me”: Exploring the characteristics of digital possessions. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 64(8), 1723–1734; Gee, J. P. (1999). An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method. London: Routledge; Kim, S. (2013). Landscape of personal digital archiving activities and research. In D. T. Hawkins (Ed.), *Personal archiving: Preserving our digital heritage* (pp. 153-185). Medford, MA: Information Today; Marshall, C. C. (2011). Challenges and opportunities for personal digital archiving. In C. A. Lee (Ed.), *I, digital: Personal collections in the digital era* (pp. 90–114). Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists; Sinn, D., & Syn, S. Y. (2014). Personal documentation on a social network site: Facebook, a collection of moments from your life? *Archival Science*, 14(2), 95-124.

How does personal digital archiving activate discourses about the values and impacts of public libraries?

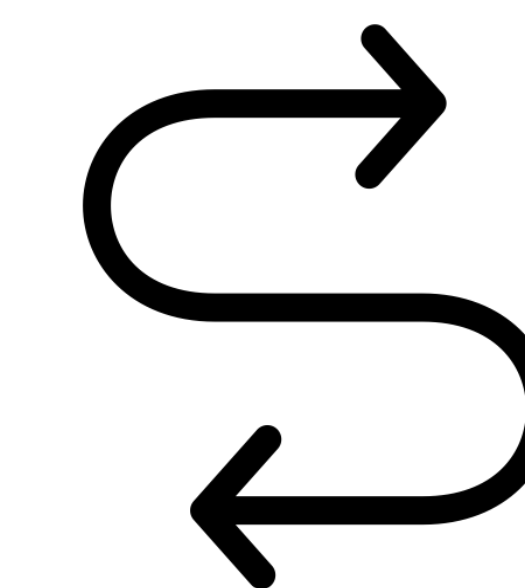
Analysis: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Gee, 1999)

- Can personal digital archiving in public libraries shift power relations between institutions and individuals?
- “Language-in-use is everywhere and always political” Gee, 1999)
- How do participants negotiate social change by interweaving different discourses to recount their experiences?

Code interview transcripts to identify “building tasks”: how language is used to build different kinds of meaning (Gee, 1999)

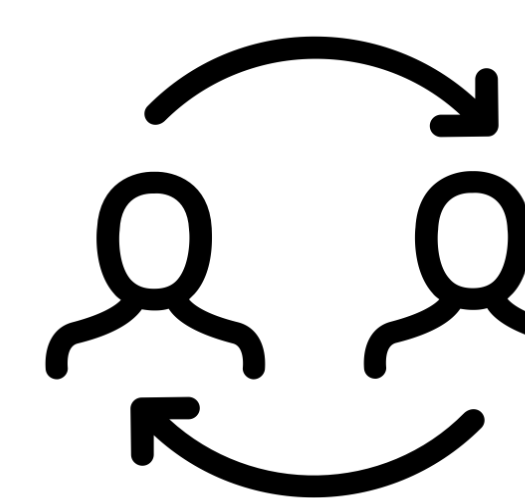
- **Significance building** – How is language used to foreground, background, and otherwise assign significance?
- **Identity building** – What identities are relevant?
- **Political building** – What social goods are involved?
- **Connection building** – What connections between people, things, and ideas are made relevant or irrelevant?

Findings



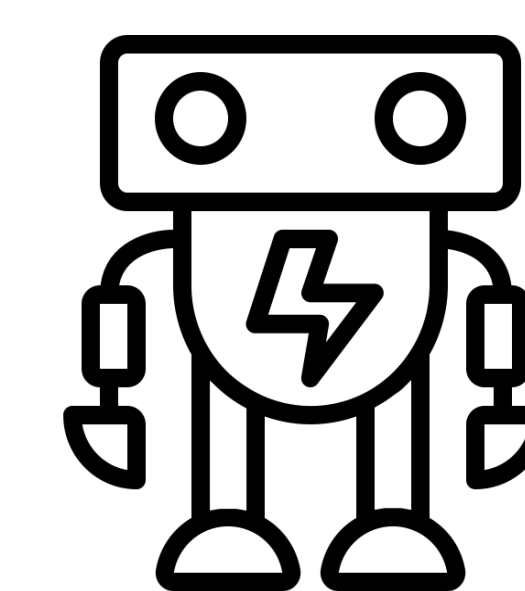
Managing (power over) change

Libraries have power to counteract systemic disadvantages
Libraries can share power with individuals



Re-situating identity

“Changing people” from analog/resistant to digital/open
Recontextualizing preservation (professional to personal) to rethink practices



(Re)imagining the future

Multiple discourses about technology: materiality, progress, affect, obsolescence, loss, remediation, resistance