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'A process where we're all at the table': community archives challenging dominant modes of archival practice

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ABSTRACT

Community archives have compelled shifts in dominant archival management practices to reflect community agency and values. To analyse these shifts, we ask: In what ways do community archives and their staff challenge traditional archival modes of practice? Do community archives work within or against dominant frameworks for institutional sustainability? Do community archives challenge or replicate dominant custody practices? Based on semi-structured interviews with 17 founders, staff and volunteers at 12 Southern California community archives, this research examines the diverse models of practice utilised by community archives practitioners that diverge from and challenge standard practices in the field. By addressing these questions, our research uncovers a variety of models of practice employed by communities in Southern California to autonomously create and sustain their archives.

Introduction

On a recent visit to the Southern California Library, a community archives in Los Angeles, the first author of this article noticed the distinct practices employed by the organisation in contrast to more mainstream archival institutions like university and government repositories. The Southern California Library encouraged the participation of users in appraisal and description practices, and described the community, not the archive, as the owner of the material they possess. These practices represent shifts in dominant archival management practices spurred by community archives. To analyse these shifts, we ask: In what ways do community archives and their staff challenge traditional archival modes of practice? Do community archives work within or against dominant frameworks for institutional sustainability? Do community archives challenge or replicate dominant custody practices? By addressing these questions, our research uncovers a variety of models of practice employed by communities in Southern California to autonomously create and sustain their archives. Through semi-structured interviews with 17 founders, staff and volunteers at 12 Southern

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California community archives, this research found diverse models of practice utilised by community archives practitioners that diverge from and challenge standard practices in the field.

This article will report on our findings, including the ways in which some community archives collaborate with mainstream institutions to achieve their goals, how they develop trust and engagement with community members to receive donations of records and funding, and how they establish themselves as formal sites of recordkeeping, with volunteers or staff dedicated to the success of the archive, even within various space and financial constraints. By examining the stories behind their creation and the strategies these archives employ to combat the marginalisation of their communities, this article provides a context for understanding community archives through their differing modes of practice regarding acquisition, appraisal, description and preservation. Furthermore, this work examines community archives as sites of both resistance to dominant archival practices and community empowerment.

Literature review

There is now a growing body of community archives literature addressing specific organisations, contexts and concerns. Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens and Elizabeth Shepherd define community as 'any manner of people who come together and present themselves as such, and a "community archive" is the product of their attempts to document the history of their commonality', with the resulting 'collections of material gathered primarily by members of a given community and over whose use community members exercise some level of control'.[1] Community archives, both in and outside of the USA, have been formed around ethnic, racial and religious identity,[2] gender and sexual identity,[3] economic class[4] and geographic location.[5] Community archival endeavours are framed as ways for people and communities to gain control of decision-making surrounding issues of shared history, memory, narrative, preservation and power.[6] Verne Harris argues that mainstream archives only represent a small section of society in their holdings, and these records are then further narrowed in scope and access.[7] This selective nature of collecting leads to marginalisation of voices in archives, as funds and space restrictions continuously frame collection decisions. These power dynamics necessitate the creation of community archives to give space to marginalised communities that have not been represented in mainstream repositories. In their work, Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor and Mario H Ramirez express that community archives can be alternatives to mainstream repositories 'through which communities can make collective decisions about what is of enduring value to them, shape collective memory of their own pasts, and control the means through which stories about their past are constructed'.[8]

The VIA (Voice, Identity, Activism) framework proposed by Anne Gilliland incorporates lessons across community archives projects to define a values-based structure for approaching these endeavours holistically. Gilliland asserts that a community-based approach to archival practice is characterised by centring the interests, needs and well-being of a community; respecting and acknowledging that community records and materials are respected and understood in the context of their creation, rather than being seen by mainstream institutions as collectibles, 'salvage' projects, or tools for institutional diversification; and shifting community dynamics, including honouring diverse 'interests, epistemologies, demographics and emotions'.[9] Joanne Evans, Sue McKemmish, Elizabeth Daniels and Gavan McCarthy

have also contributed to scholarship centred on models of practice currently used in community archives to challenge dominant archival models. Evans et al. use an Australian case study to posit that self-determination and autonomy of communities within the archive can in fact lead to recovery, redress and accountability for those communities that have experienced trauma and/or human rights abuses.[10]

In the last decade, there has also been a call for decentralising curation and placing management decision-making back in the hands of those most greatly impacted by archival holdings, the community members, as exemplified in the work of Isto Huvila, and Katie Shilton and Ramesh Srinivasan.[11] There is currently emerging scholarship concerning the 'participatory turn' in archives, as referred to by Patricia Garcia, and the ways in which communities practice stewardship and management in archives.[12] Huvila and Shilton and Srinivasan emphasise shifting responsibility between archivist and user, harnessing community knowledge to reposition archives as sites of empowerment and solidarity, reflecting community needs. Mary Stevens, Andrew Flinn and Elizabeth Shepherd position community archives as institutions where community members 'exercise some level of control', and argue for community-based archivists as mediators between 'professional heritage services' and communities.[13] This mediation shifts priorities by archives to observe and respect the needs articulated by communities.

In the early 1990s, Terry Cook's critical evaluation of the concept of the archival fonds through a post-custodial lens dug deeper into the particularities of emerging digital challenges to traditional archival practice and addressed the broader significance of a post-custodial shift for archives and information management, most notably articulating a turn from 'archives' as collection or location to 'archiving as practice'.[14] This approach is exemplified by Mary Stevens, Andrew Flinn and Elizabeth Shepherd's articulation of 'handing on' of knowledge as opposed to 'handing over' of collections, based in ethnographic study of the relationships between independent community archives and mainstream archival repositories in the UK. They argue that for community members, the most beneficial arrangements allow communities to retain control over their materials when partnering with larger organisations to ensure long-term access.[15] In the USA. a prominent example of this kind of practice has been the University of Texas Libraries Human Rights Documentation Initiative, which partners internationally with a number of human rights organisations to preserve their records under a non-custodial model.[16]

The current article furthers this work by representing a larger number and range of community archives within the Southern California area. This work will shift the focus to the community-based archives founded, organised or primarily supported by community members and the collaborations between shifting communities, their archives and outside organisations when necessary. Finally, this research will focus on community archives' post-custodial practices and their community engagement in response to community needs, values and ethics.

Methodology

From October 2015 to January 2016, the research team interviewed 17 community archives founders, volunteers and staff at 12 sites in Southern California (Table 1) using a semi-structured interview protocol. Interviews were recorded by the researchers and then transcribed using a third-party transcription service. Team members were granted Institutional Review Board

Table 1. Sites, identities and number of interview subjects.[a]

Community archives site	Identity upon which community archive is formed[b]	Location	Number of interview subjects at site
The Compton 125 Historical Society	Geographic	Compton, CA	3
The Little Tokyo Historical Society	Geographic, Ethnic	Los Angeles, CA	1
The Center for the Study of Political Graphics	Political, Ethnic, Racial	Los Angeles, CA	3
Korean American Digital Archive	Ethnic	Los Angeles, CA	1
Documenting the Now	Racial	Riverside, CA	1
Chinese Historical Society of Southern California	Ethnic	Los Angeles, CA	1
Lambda Archives	Sexual, Geographic	San Diego, CA	1
UC-Irvine Southeast Asian Archives	Ethnic	Irvine, CA	1
ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives at USC	Sexual	Los Angeles, CA	1
La Historia Society Museum and Archive	Ethnic, Geographic	El Monte, CA	2
Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC)	Ethnic, Geographic, Political	Venice Beach, Los Angeles, CA	1
Transgender Living Archives	Gender	Los Angeles, CA	1

[a] There was an additional interview subject not listed in this table whose anonymity we are protecting owing to immigration status.

We recognise that identities are intersectional and have named here only the primary identity upon which the community archive has been formed.

approval prior to initial contact and data collection. The research team then chose the participating sites as fitting within the scope of community archives whose collections consisted of materials of marginalised communities documented by those communities themselves. For the purposes of this research, the team then set parameters for marginalised identities to research as those that deal with minoritarian political, ethnic, racial, or gender and sexual identities.[17]

Sites considered for inclusion were limited to the Southern California area for practical reasons, so that the researchers would be able to conduct interviews in person as much as possible; they also did not have funds to travel outside of Southern California. The sites were chosen because they typify the range of identities (LGBTQ, Latino/a, African American and Asian American) represented by community archives in Southern California and varying degrees of independence from mainstream repositories. By choosing a range of organisations that cross ethnic, geographic and sexual identities, this research will gain an understanding of the impact of such archives on marginalised communities on Southern California writ large. Furthermore, although Southern California is a region made up of diverse communities, many communities in Southern California are excluded from mainstream archival institutions. As a result, community archives have popped up throughout the region as counter-narratives to the official history of Southern California that excludes these groups. For this reason, Southern California provides fertile ground for a research study such as this one to be carried out as marginalised communities attempt to tell their own stories.

The research team first recruited participants through informal conversations with community archives staff and volunteers at the 2015 Archives Bazaar. Hosted by 'L.A. as Subject', an organisation of libraries, museums, and other archival and cultural organisations, the annual Archives Bazaar is a daylong event at the University of Southern California dedicated to the

preservation of archival material relating to Los Angeles history.[18] The team then used their personal and professional networks and knowledge of Southern California community archives to recruit the remaining participants. The research team chose to include (in addition to established independent organisations) community archives in their initial stages of development, digital-only projects, and archives housed at academic institutions if they defined themselves as community archives and retained close ties to their target community. The goal was to define community archives as broadly as possible and to be as inclusive as possible. This allowed for breadth of organisational structure and provided depth to the varied models of practice we hoped to interrogate. Of the sites first contacted, three declined to participate in the research; the remaining sites were interviewed and collaborated in this research.

This article attributes quotations from interview subjects by name, with their consent, as a way of assuring that intellectual credit is given to those interviewed and by extension the community archives themselves. Quotations from our interviewers have not been edited or shortened, so that the voices of the participants remain within context and are understood as intended. Although 16 of the 17 participants agreed to be identified by name, we chose to use a pseudonym for one other participant who is an undocumented immigrant to not jeopardise her well-being. Participants were given the initial transcripts of the interviews for their own archival purposes, as well as an earlier draft of this article for comment, and each participant identified by name gave final approval for their quotes to be attributed.

The interview script included initial questions on employment or volunteer positions within the archive, community connections and collaborations, and models of practice in the archive, including scope, acquisitions and processing. Transcripts underwent three rounds of coding within the team. Researchers did a preliminary round of coding on transcripts of the interviews they conducted in order to develop overarching themes and subcategories. The identified themes were then consolidated and verified by the research team using a consensus-based decision-making process to ensure they were exhaustive and mutually exclusive. The final codebook includes five overarching themes: 'archival strategies, practices and models', 'activism', 'symbolic annihilation, identity, representation', 'affect' and 'social death'.[19] Within each theme, the research team also identified a set of narrower codes as subcategories to help interrogate the major themes further. Members of the team then performed a second round of analysis on their own transcripts using the revised codebook. Finally, one member of the team analysed and re-coded all transcripts in order to ensure accuracy, consistency and quality of independent coders. This article focuses on the theme of 'archival strategies, practices and models' employed by community archives in Southern California to meet the needs and values of the communities they represent and how the models of practice they have developed challenge traditional archival practices.

The authors feel it is necessary to acknowledge their own positionality and identities given the interpretivist paradigm in which this research was conducted. The first author identifies as a Chicano with a working-class background and is a first-generation college student.[20] The second author identifies as a Latina woman with a working-class background. She is a first-generation college student, with a transnational family, and identifies as being closely tied to the Mexican–American borderlands. The third author of this article identifies as a white, straight, cisgendered woman who grew up working class and is in the first generation of her family to graduate from high school. The fourth author of this article is a white, queer man from a middle-class background in Southern California, who first became involved in community organising in his early teens. He has been a community

archives volunteer (though not at an archives represented in this article), and is a current Master's student who plans to work as an archivist. The fifth author of this article identifies as a white, queer woman with a middle-class background. She has worked as an archivist and has done research independent of this project at a number of the community archives represented in this article.

Analysis

Post-custodial practices

Interviewees at seven of the twelve sites described some degree of post-custodial practice in their organisation's approaches, prioritising community ownership, access and trust-building over assumptions of custody and control. None of the interviewees explicitly used the term 'post-custodial' to describe their work, but many engaged in such practices and viewed such approaches as being well suited to their organisations' values and goals. While some interviewees are likely aware of larger conversations around post-custodial theory and practice in archives, most seemed to employ post-custodial strategies in their work without any of the trepidation or angst that has sometimes characterised these conversations in the archival profession and in published archival studies literature.

Thuy Vo Dang of the Southeast Asian American Archives at UC Irvine described taking a consulting approach in her work with Hmong American communities, which are larger in the Midwestern USA. and in the California's Central Valley than in her institution's local area:

> They're doing a lot in terms of doing their own collecting, much more grassroots efforts. I want to think about how we can partner with them to help with best practices consulting, not necessarily to bring everything back to us here physically, but to make sure we're on the same page about how we can preserve this for the community, for their use.

Dang, who spends significant time on outreach work in her role as archivist, also describes addressing the audience in her public presentations by encouraging them to actively archive and preserve their own records, stating, 'It's up to you, everybody should be empowered to do this at home. Here are ways that you can scan, and store, and preserve.'

Kelly Besser of the Transgender Living Archives describes plans to take a similar approach with individuals archiving personal documents in their homes, potentially combining a physical gathering space – in Besser's words, a 'house of memory' – with a network of collections that span far beyond the space itself, remaining with the organisations that created them to maximise community control over records.

The significance of collections remaining in local contexts rather than being handed over to larger institutions was a topic of discussion brought up by several of the interviewees. One specific post-custodial practice described by interviewees is receiving loaned materials from community members which are digitised for the archives' collection and then returned to their donors. As Dolores Gonzalez Haro of La Historia Society succinctly describes, 'A lot of these photos that people bring us … what we do here is scan them and get them right back to the people'.

Annie Tang of the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California expressed ambivalence about mainstream institutions taking custody of materials first collected by community archives:

> Professionally, I agree and disagree with [stewardship of community collections by outside institutions]. I agree in that, yes, you can get a lot more access to people [in a mainstream archive]. And more obviously, there will be a lot of professional practices implemented on that collection … If it's a big institution, it has to be an institution that really has a collecting area in that, in Chinese history, or Asian-American history [for example]. So, that there are people; curators, archivists, are well aware that this is a collection that needs to be nurtured among such researchers. However, if it's just an institution that just wants brownie points for tokenism … And just wants to kind of be subsumed amongst the thousands and thousands of other linear footage of holdings. Then I would be remiss to recommend that.

Tang underscores the necessity of community and cultural competency by those who staff archives with collections created by people of colour; a competency which may not be valued by mainstream institutions.

Kenneth Klein, of the University of Southern California's Korean American Digital Archive, expressed that his organisation initially took a traditional custodial approach, but had difficulties securing collections from donors until adopting a post-custodial digitisation strategy:

> It took us a while to come up with the idea that … we really don't have to own the materials. It would be enough to borrow the materials, scan them and return them to the family or the organization. Once we started that, we came across some really significant collections that the owners were willing to loan to us.

Klein describes this practice as requiring a period of trust-building, particularly as a project affiliated with a university rather than a community organisation. Over time, the organisation built a reputation in the community for trustworthiness as the project continued to return materials to donors unharmed. This approach has allowed them to collect digitised copies of important materials they would likely otherwise not been entrusted with.

The breadth of post-custodial approaches found within this small sample of community archives suggest that many other community organisations and projects are also likely adopting thoughtful and innovative practices to work through tensions between community ownership, public access, preservation and traditional archival notions of custody. These approaches demonstrate that post-custodialism is not defined by any one approach or set of practices, but by reimagining traditional archival orientations to support current realities of records and communities.

Community ownership, collaborations and autonomy

The community archives studied here reflect a range of organisational governance structures and structures of affiliation, from total independence to being part of a larger university repository. However, across these structures we found that a deep community involvement extends to decision-making processes, with community archives forging innovative collaborative practices for getting community input. Even community-based archives within academic settings have taken up participatory governance practices. For example, Thuy Vo Dang described the formation of an advisory board including Southeast Asian faculty and staff on campus and people from the community that has shaped the mission of the archives and its work from its early days through the present. Dang articulated how their position as a community archive within a university offers 'the strength in terms of the institutional support … infrastructure, staff … We have expertise for processing, but we still are very invested in making sure that we work closely with the community.' As part of this latter goal she serves on a number of community nonprofit boards and reports to spending between 30%–40% of her time each week engaged directly with the community.

As a whole, all of the interviewees mentioned the importance of reflecting community-centred values in their archival practice. Interview subjects repeatedly referred to a relationship of stewardship in which organisations are seen to steward materials on behalf of communities, rather than a simple transfer of custody.[21] Participants defined community stewardship in various ways, including the post-custodial models referenced above, as well as ongoing collaborations between archive and community in processing records.

Kelly Besser echoed the need for community stewardship:

> I think the control over the description and access to the records, being in the hands of community members that understand who we are and what we need is essential... We also imagined having the records remain with the organizations that we were speaking with too.

Besser put forth multiple frameworks for participation, including participatory appraisal, arrangement and description. This would allow for a:

> process where we're all at the table. People that are invested in [the collection] are shaping it … I think that idea of a sort of anti-fixity model or imagining that, works so well with our community because we are not fixed in any sort of way. [The community and its identities are] always in a state of flux.

In establishing collaborative practices, the archives enables the community to have agency while simultaneously challenging traditional modes of governance found in mainstream archival institutions.

Sustainability

Despite participatory governance structures, we found that community archives are facing significant challenges in terms of short- and long-term sustainability. Our interviewees had significant concerns about access to adequate resources to accomplish their current work, to grow and to adequately preserve archival material in their care. Funding, personnel, space and access to other resources were limited across organisations, constraining their work, and present perhaps the most significant challenge to their long-term sustainability. Many of the archives including, for example, the Little Tokyo Historical Society, rely entirely on volunteers, limiting their capacity to engage in the large-scale projects they envision. Even community-based archives with a small paid staff, such as the Center for Political Graphics (CSPG), still rely heavily on unpaid volunteers and interns. As Luz at CSPG stated, her primary goal is to create 'more of a structure for volunteers and interns', to ensure that they have a well-rounded archival introduction. She continued, 'and that would help us too because our capacity right now is small … because right now we're just in this little archive space and hopefully in the future we are able to be[come] a little more accessible'.

The part-time and precarious financial situations of volunteers and staff can also prevent community archives from moving forward at all. The fledgling Transgender Living Archives has not actually been able to start collecting materials, while its founder, Kelly Besser, has been moving from one contract archivist position to another. This unstable employment has prevented Besser from devoting the time required to:

> actually pull together a board of directors like we had envisioned, and do the work that needs to happen. The records are there, we've met with a bunch of the organisations and leaders, and there's a need and a desire to see those records live somewhere and be accessible.

The concern with funding, space, personnel and other resources has motivated many of the community archives to consider collaborations or partnerships on various scales with larger institutions.

These community archivists are navigating complex social, economic and political concerns and in the process are developing models of archival practice that offer promising potential for enacting social change through archives. Gentrification, the multifaceted processes that create economic and social flux in urban areas thereby shifting the population, commerce and physical attributes of an urban area from those owned by and serving a predominately working-class population, to those serving people of middle- and upper-class statuses, is a major concern for some of the community archives staff and volunteers we interviewed. Many of our research sites are contending with gentrification in Los Angeles' rapidly shifting neighbourhoods. Gentrification efforts have already resulted in the mass displacement of communities, particularly lower-income people and communities of colour, across the city. For community archives, particularly those formed around geographic locations, the physical movements and changing demographics of neighbourhoods are vital to consider in their collecting practices and engagements with community autonomy and values. Bill Watanabe of the Little Tokyo Historical Society explicitly describes the gentrification taking place in Downtown Los Angeles and its impact on the archive he founded:

> Little Tokyo has been here for about 135 years... There's a lot of gentrification, a lot of change going on in Downtown, so part of the Historical Society is to try to preserve this neighborhood and the history of it so that it doesn't get lost. Part of the motivation is [that] there used to be a Little Italy here … but most people, even people who have lived here a long time, they don't know that it was ever here because it's gone. And there's hardly any vestige of it at all. So we don't want that to happen to Little Tokyo. We want people to know that the Asian-American community has been here. We didn't all just get off the boat, not that that's a bad thing. But we've contributed to this society … the [Little Tokyo] Historical Society … plays a role to try to keep that, the buildings, the stories, the culture alive.

As Watanabe's comments illustrate, some community archives are at the forefront of critical responses to rampant gentrification. This is gentrification that is both actively incorporated into public policy and that is the clear by-product of contemporary neoliberal urban development policies intent only on attracting investment capital. Community archives are vital to sustaining diverse communities and histories. Watanabe sees the archives as working to keep Little Tokyo as a 'functioning neighborhood, [and an] ethnic neighborhood'. Gentrification presents challenges that can be turned into fruitful spaces for community-building. Watanabe describes the dramatic shifts in the ethnic, racial and class backgrounds of Little Tokyo's new residents and how they are changing the very 'personality' of the neighbourhood. He is not adverse to such changes. Rather, he hopes through the Little Tokyo Historical Society to show these newcomers how Little Tokyo is 'not like any other place', making sure they 'can appreciate the history of the place and get involved … And they don't have to be ethnic [Japanese] to do that.' Through such outreach Watanabe seeks to maintain the neighbourhood's character and history 'despite all of the possible changes taking place' and promises to engage in the struggle needed to achieve 'balance'.

For community archives, changing demographics can meaningfully affect the community values and identities, and in turn these changes affect the sustainability of the organisation. For the Compton 125 Historical Society, long-term demographic changes in the city of Compton have led to a sense of community, one that is bound by race as well as geographic

location. Compton has been subject to rampant misrepresentation through racialised stereotypes about poverty and violence. As Board Member Pauline Brown described it, the Historical Society's mission is to:

> break it all down, lift all of those layers, remove those curtains that's hiding the beauty of the city; the agriculture, the fruit that's here, the people, the sweetness of the land, and let people know that Compton was not founded in the 1970s; it was founded in 1888, and so there's history from there until now that needs to be told, which a lot of our people, and children, is growing up not knowing that first part of our history, for the first 125 years, but they know a lot about the 1960s later on, or 1970s, '80s, '90s.

Knowing their history, Brown believes, is 'imperative':

> [so] that the generations that [are] coming up start to realise that there's more to their city and more to the story of where they come from, thus giving them a more greater appreciation for where they come from, where they live.

The Compton 125 Historical Society contests damaging narratives about their community by showcasing its complex and multifaceted history in order to empower community members with that knowledge.

Kenneth Klein of the Korean American Digital Archive also discussed the impact of demographic shifts on their collecting practices, descriptive strategies and community relationships. The early Korean American community in the United States in the period before the Korean War was quite small. For that early period, the archive was able to maintain a name database that attempts to list every community member, a task that would be impossible for the current population. Demographic shifts thus led to new collecting strategies that focus 'on organizations, prominent people, and people who happen to be known for one reason or another'. The growth in the community also means, according to Klein, that:

> we're not going to have the same connection with the community as large. You can't have as much of a personal collection... [or] a connection to a community that numbers in the hundreds of thousands as you can with a few thousand.

The community archivists we interviewed are also navigating complex challenges owing to shifts in communities and their identities across generations. Engaging community members across generational lines was a high priority for many of our interviewees. Developing models for building intergenerational engagement is vital to the long-term survival of community-based archives. In describing his collaborative work with a local gymnasium in Little Tokyo, Watanabe describes how this program successfully engages young people. He says,

> And once they have that connection [to the neighbourhood] then they'll care about it. They'll care about the place. So this is actually a strategy for historic conservation. We want young people to feel that Little Tokyo is their place, and along with that comes a history and the culture.

Annie Tang also addressed intergenerational involvement with the Chinese Historical Society, where she is a volunteer. Tang offered an anecdote about how a number of young people she knows got involved with the Chinese Historical Society thinking 'this is just going to be a part-time job, … I'm not going to get much out of it, except for the little bit of a job experience and money'. Ultimately, many of these same people have become its leaders, finding their 'purpose by looking back at their own cultural history'. Dolores Gonzalez Haro, of the La Historia Society, mentioned the interest of transmitting family memory as her main motivation to do archival work. She says it is

important for any family history, [that] their story be told and shared. And we do that in our own families and when you go to somebody's house and you're having coffee or tea, or it's somebody's birthday, everybody talks about 'Oh, remember when we did this', or there's always stories that the elders share. And so there's many stories from my family, and once I made the connection with La Historia, I thought, 'No, I need to be part of this in order... My family is very big, so in order to be at least one person from my family to be part of the organization to contribute, as well as preserve our family history.

Haro's colleague, Rosa Peña, echoed her sentiment, discussing the importance of space in connection to transmitting family and community knowledge, values and memories across generations:

I wanted to continue the history, 'Okay, this is like the '40s and the '50s and the '60s, okay, what about the '70s, the '80s and the '90s' to try to keep it going, so that it doesn't die off, and then people have more of a connection to their history.

She used a particular site, the Peach Pit in El Monte, a corner pastrami stand, to illustrate the significance of such memory transmission:

So it's like 'Yes, this is my grandfather's history, but where is my history?' When he was here it might have been called the Pit, but now this is called the Peach Pit, and this is where the kids hung out, and these are their memories, so it's kind of trying to just get them in the mode of, 'Your history's important too.'

Haro chimed in:

you drive by, and I remember when that used to be the Pit. And I tell that to my kids, too, 'Mom, you say that every time we drive by!' 'I know, I'm telling you what I remember! One day, I won't be here to tell you that, and you could tell your grandkids, or the kids... 'My mom used to say that used to be the Pit!'

Our interviews illustrated the potential of archives for connecting communities with their histories, with geographical spaces, and with each other across generations.

Discussion

As our empirical data demonstrates, community-based archives have compelled shifts in dominant models of practice to reflect community values and agency in archival management, particularly regarding custody and governance. Through post-custodial practices that prioritise community ownership, community archives effectively challenge the custody approach dominant in archives by empowering communities to have control over their material. Interviewees from the different sites described the application of post-custodial strategies in their work, including communities maintaining control over their material in a physical space or community members allowing their material to be borrowed for digitisation and then given back to them, allowing the sites to have a copy of the material without having to take custody of the original material. The latter strategy has resulted in a relationship of trust to emerge between community members and the sites. This is in large part due to the sites applying post-custodial strategies that meet the specific needs, demands and values of community members.

Community archives also challenge hierarchical structures of governance found in mainstream archival institutions. User participation in practices such as appraisal, description and access provides autonomy for community members who are able to manage archival collections on their own terms. This autonomy provides a platform for community

members to reflect the values and needs of their communities. This is also evident in the community-based archives that have partnered with academic institutions in which community members are able to have input. Through these collaborations, not only are traditional archival forms of governance being challenged, new forms of archival practice are created where community members from under-represented communities may engage with mainstream archival institutions and may provide feedback on how to describe collections, something that in the past has not been accessible to them outside of these larger archival institutions.

The models of practice employed by community archives are vital for their sustainability. Community archives face an uphill battle to sustain themselves owing to lack of resources and forces like gentrification. The practices that community archives have developed ensure that their stories and community values remain intact despite the struggles they face to survive. Through these distinct models of practice rooted within local community values, community archives are shifting traditional practices to empower communities who are often marginalised in mainstream archival institutions.

Conclusion

Our research raised many questions about best practices, resource-sharing and the value of independence that we hope to explore further. We also found that much of what we learned about community archives practices can help inform mainstream archives as they seek to engage marginalised communities and diversify their collections. Indeed, there is no reason why government or university archives could not engender post-custodial practice, foster community autonomy and promote shared governance, if only they are willing to share power and authority with the communities they have historically left out. In this regard, more work needs to be done concerning the application of the models of practice which community archives in Southern California have developed to mainstream archival institutions. While our research indicates that community archives practices can be adapted in mainstream archival institutions that are willing to collaborate with marginalised communities, can this be done on a larger level in other mainstream archival institutions? Furthermore, given that this research was limited to Southern California, an important question to ask is whether or not community archives outside of Southern California employ similar models of practice that challenge traditional archival practices. These questions can help address the applicability of the models of practice which community archives in Southern California have developed outside of the region and in mainstream archival institutions.

Endnotes

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17. The authors would like to acknowledge intersectionality of identity and understand any and all of the participating archives and their corresponding communities are not limited to one of the aforementioned identities. However, the most prominent identity upon which the community archive was founded is included in Table 1.
18. L.A. as Subject, 'Archives Bazaar', 17 October 2015, available at <*https://www.laassubject.org/index.php/archives_bazaar*>.
19. This research has also led to two other publications in *Archives and Records* and *The Public Historian.* See Michelle Caswell, Alda Allina Migoni, Noah Geraci and Marika Cifor, '"To Be Able to Imagine Otherwise": Community Archives and the Importance of Representation', *Archives and Records*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2017, pp. 5–26; Marika Cifor, Michelle Caswell, Alda Allina Migoni and Noah Geraci (under review), 'Being an Activist Aligns Well with Being an Archivist: The Politics of Community Archives', *The Public Historian*.
20. Chicano is a term used by Mexican Americans to describe people of Mexican origin living in the United States. Initially, Chicano was used as a pejorative term towards Mexican Americans of lower social standing. The term was re-appropriated by Mexican Americans during the Chicano Movement in the 1960s and 1970s to express pride in a shared cultural, ethnic and community identity. For more, see Carlos Munoz Jr, *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement; Revised and Expanded Edition*, Verso Books, London, 2007; Ernesto Chavez, *Mi Raza Primero (My People First!): Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966–1978*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 2002; George Mariscal, *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun: Lessons from the Chicano Movement, 1965–1975*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 2005.
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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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