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BLACK FOLK MAGIC: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF DIGITALLY ARCHIVING BLACK MILLENNIALHOOD

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Black Folk Magic: An Autoethnography of Digitally Archiving Black Millennialhood

Camille Thomas

Introduction

This chapter will serve as an outline for guidance on how information professionals can empower their communities to conduct personal digital archiving. It is part autoethnography, part how-to, and part environmental scan. I used the qualitative research approach of autoethnography to explore the wider cultural understandings that can be drawn from individual reflection. I did not want to speak for others; rather, I wanted to speak for myself in a way that may resonate with others.

I will start by discussing the mindful creation of personal records, explore how personal records can be transformative for identity and community, and end on practical applications through a cultural lens. My hope is that this chapter will open the door for further research, perspectives, and projects on the topic. I will discuss theories and experiences in order to highlight disparities in the records, collections, and services information professionals manage. If these topics are not discussed and acted upon, consequences could include incomplete collections, weak relationships with communities, underserved users, and imbalanced historical evidence.

Our Records, Our Selves

In a global community, it is especially important for individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds to make a habit of personal archiving. Now that it is easier than ever to make and preserve digital content, curating a personal collection can give much deeper insight into

ancestry and history for the next generations. I will use some of my personal experiences to demonstrate the type and depth of insights to which I'm referring.

Once I had to tag along with my mom to the county courthouse. Bored out of my mind, I went around curiously looking in file cabinets. I realized we were in the department where birth and death certificates were kept. So naturally, a librarian in the making, I found birth and death certificates for my grandparents, aunts and uncles -- anyone I could think of who was from the county. My mom erupted with a mix of surprise and joy. She asked the attendant at the desk to make copies of any records she did not have already. I made the connection at that time that in order to find records, they must be kept.

I learned to think about preservation from my mother and my home state of Florida. Flood and fire are very real threats. I can only imagine the many personal records that were taken from families in New Orleans after Katrina and other disasters in many other places where damage to personal histories were irrevocable. My mother kept a fireproof box, backed up copies in other locations and later would enlist a small conversion business in town to copy all our important VHS and 8mm home movies onto DVDs.

My mother often took an interest in our family history. Both sides of my family have annual family reunions where I am often lost in a sea of almost-familiar faces. These days we are flung far and wide, but have been concentrated for many generations in the Southern United States. Through these events, I would hear oral accounts of our family history. One year they passed out packets with old photos of my mother's ancestors I had never seen before. Some had the stern expressions of the rarely photographed and others were outside of shack houses. Seeing their faces and what kind of lives they led made me feel connected to them. Like many African Americans, I treasure what information I can find, however real or legendary, because there just

isn't much evidence to go on. There are usually no coats of arms, no castles in Europe you can trace back to and often you are lucky to find the right records at all. Frankly, record keepers were in areas with low literacy and just didn't care if they got them right for black people.¹ Many more tools for African-American and genealogical research exist now.² Looking through my history, I sometimes find more through personal journey than if it was presented to me by someone else (e.g. in the television series Finding Your Roots or Genealogy Roadshow, some found out their great grandparents passed for white or changed their name after the war to stay overseas). Black experience, image, and legacy still impacts how we see ourselves in the present and future. It shapes how the world sees us and how much we are still connected to America's history.

African-Americans are deeply influential in the digital sphere.³ Black people consume more media on average – for example, 52% read magazines compared to the 22% general population, and they listen to 12 hours of radio compared to 6 hours of listening by the general population, according to a survey by Nielsen and ESSENCE. The results showed that 81% of African Americans own smartphones, whereas the number decreases to 74% when looking at the general population. On a monthly basis, blacks spend close to 56 hours using apps or mobile Internet browsers on their smartphones and about two and a half hours watching videos on their smartphones. Additionally, 81% of African-Americans are more likely to show support for a favorite company or brand using social media, and 76% are more likely to share opinions by

¹ Jimerson, Randall C. "Archives for All: Professional Responsibility and Social Justice." *The American Archivist* 70, no. 2 (2007): 252-81.

² Haile, Geraldine. "Resources for African American Research". *National Conference of African American Librarians*. St. Louis, Missouri. August 6, 2015.

³ Boschma, Janie. "Black Consumers Have 'Unprecedented Impact' in 2015." *The Atlantic*. February 02, 2016. Accessed March 02, 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/02/black-consumers-have-unprecedented-impact-in-2015/433725/>.

posting reviews and ratings online. Young African Americans set trends for what content or topics get buzz.⁴

While there are many people from generations preceding Millennials who are interested in archiving digital artifacts, many from Gen X and Gen Y are not thinking about it. While it is common to archive items that illustrate slavery or rights movements, there isn't much about the rich, multifaceted everyday lives of black people. Millennials, in particular, are multitasking, consuming and creating multimedia interactive content.^{5,6} They are idealistic and proactive, participating in how information about communities are disseminated. They have grown up in a world that is more diverse, digital, educated, and exploratory.⁷ Less than 28 percent of adults aged 18 to 29 are loyal to their news sources, the lowest of any age group, and are more likely than other age groups to sense media bias.⁸ Many align with the framework of scholarship as conversation that reflects the gray, often narrative-based areas millennials encounter with information, rather than the black and white traditions of compliance, which we see in history, journalism, and social media.⁹ People like me are creating, traveling, investing, achieving and

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"Multifaceted Connections: African-American Media Usage Outpaces Across Platforms." Multifaceted Connections: African-American Media Usage Outpaces Across Platforms. February 3, 2015. Accessed March 02, 2017. <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2015/multifaceted-connections-african-american-media-usage-outpaces-across-platforms.html>. , Ibid. Boshma.

⁵ Harrison, Sarah. "Y@ Our library: What do millennials want." *Access* 11, no. 2 (2005): 21-23.

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Lippincott, Joan K. "Information commons: Meeting millennials' needs." *Journal of Library Administration* 52, no. 6-7 (2012): 538-548.

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Harris, Alexa Astrid. "The Diary of a Black Female Millennial Blogger: A Discourse Analysis of Theybf.Com." Order No. 3460672, Howard University, 2011.

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/878545845?accountid=7098>.

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Mitchell, Amy, Jeffrey Gottfried, Michael Barthel, and Elisa Shearer. "The Modern News Consumer." Pew Research Centers Journalism Project RSS. 2016.

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Carroll, Alexander J., and Robin Dasler. "'Scholarship is a Conversation': Discourse, Attribution, and Twitter's Role in Information Literacy Instruction." *Journal of Creative Library Practice* (2015).

giving back in a way like never before, which colors why Black Lives Matter arose--to protect the pursuit of happiness and healing, to create evidence, and to provide witnessing we may not find outside our communities.¹⁰

Identity and Individualization

Starting with my personal experience, I will explore how examining the digital self through a cultural lens plays a role in constructing identity. I will also discuss how fluid environments can foster intersectionality, active role discourse, and the development of values that were limited in static environments of the past.

My first memory of being on the computer was playing around on Microsoft Paint after school to pass time in my dad's office. There were dismantled computer parts everywhere. I also remember my brothers and sisters in Atlanta would make banners of their names using the word processors of the mid-90s and put them up on their walls. They knew how to make CDs and CD-ROMs work. This was Atlanta in the 90s, often referred to as a "Black Mecca" in its prime of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Martin, Living Single, TLC, and Outkast, among many other icons of the time. I was enthralled by my siblings and my community. I had only associated computers with Microsoft Paint, Jumpstart first grade, and later for Oregon Trail and Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing.

Though I began relying on the internet for schoolwork, it was primarily my friends that influenced me to truly explore the online environment. AOL Instant Messenger (AIM) was my entry to interpersonal communication among friends. I also began to take an active role in

¹⁰ Cullors, Patrisse., Tometi, Opal., and Garza, Alicia. "Black Lives Matter". *Black Lives Matter*. (2013). Accessed: Feb. 27, 2017. Blacklivesmatter.com

creating and sharing content. I used to keep a video diary and a diary in notepad before I had a word processor or a blog. I had a Geocities free webpage. I began to use MySpace, LiveJournal, Facebook, and Black Planet, an African-American social networking site. I learned a bit of HTML and Java coding to manipulate profile designs and typography on my MySpace page. I went to fan site chat rooms (e.g. R&B boy bands like Lil' Bow Wow, Lil' Romeo, and B2K). I am a little embarrassed to admit this, but it was common at the time.¹¹ The freedom of designing a page and sharing information in the fluid “wild west” of the web helped to construct a sense of self.¹² These platforms were created with adults in mind, but we used them as teenagers. I was learning and trying on hats, as adolescents do.

I didn't realize how important these seemingly ephemeral mediums and “fads” were to my adolescence until looking back.¹³ At times when I was feeling alone or marginalized, I could simply find things and people related to my interests. I could be judged on the content of my character in a world where no one could see the color of my skin. That being said, even online, I developed a deeper appreciation of the many facets of blackness because it was so much more than skin deep. I could form my own identity, instead of limiting it to how others perceived me. It also laid a foundation for connecting with others in my library science and information studies program, using Skype, and doing remote work. I'm not the only one. Our entanglement with digital and IRL (in real life) identities spans celebrity memoir, TED talks, and scholarship alike. Writer, producer, and actor Issa Rae discusses similar experiences in her book *Misadventures of*

¹¹ Thiel, Shayla Marie. *Instant Identity: Adolescent Girls and the World of Instant Messaging*. Peter Lang, 2007.

¹² Poole, Christopher. Christopher'moot'Poole: The Case for Anonymity Online. *Speech. TED Talks*. (2010).

¹³ Mazzarella, Sharon R. *Girl Wide Web 2.0: Revisiting Girls, the Internet, and the Negotiation of Identity*. Peter Lang, 2010.

Awkward Black Girl.¹⁴ Alexa Astrid Harris' *The Diary of a Black Female Millennial Blogger* examines digital components of personal identity as black women.¹⁵

Let's consider how access to technology influences the opportunity to construct one's identity. The digital turn is the growing power and influence of networked software, database logic and deep remixability, technological cultural analytics, and neurosciences. The digital turn can be a great tool for construction of the self. It can also be an obstacle for those who are not able to gain access. The digital turn begat the digital divide, as it's referred to by the library science and information profession. The digital divide is defined as where external power dynamics are reproduced, often in retrogressive ways that focus on re-inscription rather than regeneration.¹⁶ In other words, those with access to the latest technology can continue to uphold existing structures and values. However, those who do not have access are not able to create structures for other values or experiences. Scholars such as Sowande and McPhail are reexamining these theoretical approaches to how this affects black rhetoric as well as the Afrofuturist movement, which examines the black experience in conjunction with the metaphysical and technological. Rhetoric scholars believe there still remains much to be seen about how these movements will capture or shift the digital historic moment. They show confidence in Banks' concept of the digital griot, which I'll discuss more in the next section.¹⁷

Actively creating content, networks, and narrative not only shapes our own experiences but also how those experiences are portrayed in mainstream media. Last year, almost a quarter of

¹⁴ Rae, Issa. *The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl*. New York: 37 Ink/Atria, 2015.

¹⁵ Harris, *The Diary of a Black Female Blogger*.

¹⁶ Anderson, Reynaldo. Niles Goins, Marnel., Howard, Sheena. "Liberalism and its discontents: Black Rhetoric and the Cultural Transformation of Rhetorical Studies in the Twentieth Century." edited by Gehrke, Pat J., and William M. Keith. *A Century of Communication Studies: the Unfinished Conversation*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

¹⁷ Ibid., Anderson, et. al.

teens used the now-defunct Vine. Of those surveyed, 31 percent identified as black (non-Hispanic) and 24 percent as Hispanic. These teens lamented the announcement given by Vine's parent company, Twitter, that there were plans to close the platform.¹⁸ The closure wasn't nearly as superfluous as preceding generations may perceive it to be; it became how many map their place in the world. Now we see corporate entities profiting on the creative influence of black teenagers.¹⁹ The most common praise I've seen for media like Issa Rae's *Insecure*, Donald Glover's *Atlanta*, and *Dear White People* are how well they capture the current shared experiences of black millennials. There hasn't been much media with multiple black characters that document different personalities, styles, and character development since the 90s. It's what Boschma calls "The Shonda Rhimes Effect" where media isn't just diversified, but normalizes complex narratives featuring people of color.²⁰ In other words, the everyday black folk magic we get to experience in our daily lives is reflected back to us.

Identity is a cornerstone for collective memory. This is evident, for example, in scholarly literature about leaving out historical information that can be considered objective or perspectives that add context in managing cultural heritage objects.²¹ Rhetoric is also a point of access. The details, organization, syntax, and formality one uses in speaking or writing is a rhetorical act. Rhetorical acts within and outside academia limit the scope and development of

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Chow, Kat. "A Moment Of Silence For The Black And Brown Talent That Grew On Vine." Code Switch: NPR. npr.org. National Public Radio. October 28, 2016.

¹⁹ St. Felix, Doreen "Black Teens Are Breaking The Internet And Seeing None Of The Profits." The FADER. December 03, 2015. Accessed October 29, 2016.

²⁰ Boschma, "Black Consumers have Unprecedented Impact".

²¹Grahn, Wera. "Intersectionality and the Construction of Cultural Heritage Management." *Archaeologies* 7.1 (2011): 222–250. Web. 6 May 2014.

study concerning marginalized people.^{22,23} As we've discussed, digital environments present the opportunity to highlight nuances of diverse experiences. Through these experiences, both myself and others like me learned new ways of belonging and having an active voice in the world around us. In cultural institutions, such as archives, there is a fallacy of objectivity. Inaction to provide the degree of detail which reflects diverse experiences, in fact, supports the bias of dominant culture.²⁴ Personal digital archiving (PDA) can create partnerships that celebrate the values and identities of our cultural institutions' members on their own terms.

Community

Now that I've discussed the self and its audience, we'll take a look at community. Community means different things to different people and can encompass multiple spheres. The family may be a private cornerstone of a community, yet a church, an organization, or a museum can be a public cornerstone. In every sphere, there are those who take on leadership roles or act as a kind of historian. In black cultures, that person is the griot, a traveling class of storytellers, musicians and poets who maintain a tradition of oral history. Cultural institutions can be influential in the development of potential leaders or potential griots in their communities. By equipping individuals with the tools to archive their personal digital records, using their own value judgments, information professionals can enrich the legacies of their communities.

This doesn't have to be a burden only for the individual. On March 24, 2016, the website was down for Dream Defenders, an organization grown out of an uprising of communities in struggle and shifting culture through transformational organizing made up of black and brown

²² Anderson et. al., "Liberalism and its Discontents"

²³ Gumbs, Alexis Pauline. "Seek the roots: An immersive and interactive archive of black feminist practice." *Feminist Collections: A Quarterly of Women's Studies Resources* 32, no. 1 (2011): 17-20.

²⁴ Ettarh, "Intersectional Librarianship".

people based in Florida.²⁵ Foul play was suspected for the site crashing suddenly and past blog posts being lost. I promptly contacted some of the members I knew and told them about Internet Archive, linking to past versions of the site.²⁶ I often have conversations with activist friends about the intersections of social justice and cultural institutions. I feel this connection is not as collaborative as it could be, though I know many are working on fostering it.

Modern day griots (e.g. preachers, DJs, and stand-up comics), when in the context of a digital, global community, help draw important connections.^{27, 28} Weaving performance, oral storytelling, writing, and multimedia together becomes especially prudent as academic institutions pioneers into digital scholarship. In digital scholarship we begin to make decisions about how and with whom artifacts created, collected, evaluated and shared. St. Felix poses the questions, “What things come to those who innovate? And who can be called an innovator?”²⁹ Although several digital humanities groups have subdivisions dedicated to the inclusion of local and diverse culture, language, and geographical regions in digital scholarship, it certainly has not caught up with other media in terms of being normalized.³⁰ It is in the best interest of cultural institutions providing resources for personal digital archiving to consider seeking target audiences and incorporating cultural considerations in order to achieve the optimal “pre-

²⁵ "Dream Defenders." Dream Defenders. Accessed October 29, 2016. <http://www.dreamdefenders.org/>.

²⁶ "Internet Archive." Internet Archive: About IA. Accessed March 02, 2017. <https://archive.org/about/>.

²⁷ Banks, Adam J. *Digital Griots: African American Rhetoric in a Multimedia Age*. SIU Press, 2011.

²⁸ Lisabeth, Laura. "Review: Digital Griots: African American Rhetoric in a Digital Age by Adam Banks." HASTAC. November 27, 2012. Accessed November 02, 2016. <https://www.hastac.org/blogs/lauralissju/2012/11/27/review-digital-griots-african-american-rhetoric-digital-age-adam-banks>.

²⁹ St. Felix, "Black Teens are Breaking the Internet".

³⁰ Risam, Roopika, "Navigating the Global Digital Humanities: Insights from Black Feminism" (2016). *English Faculty Publications*. Paper 5. http://digitalcommons.salemstate.edu/english_facpub/5

custodial activities [which] are the principal sites of archival provenances".^{31,32} However, digital humanities is still a radically open field and does not have the conflicting discourse or institutional expectations of established fields. The same can be said about personal digital archiving.

Institutions are archiving artifacts like Black Lives Matter tweets for their historical significance without engaging those communities. Cultural institutions have meeting spaces, expertise, and a love of community, even in crisis situations, which we have seen in Ferguson and Baltimore.³³ However, those communities are also managing information in their own right without engaging with cultural institutions. The goal is to create a richer relationships with our communities by reconsidering western notions of ownership and use in order to address the histories of our varied world. If institutions do not engage with communities, large groups or even generations of influential users may not become partners. Members of communities may see professionals as gatekeeping misers rather than conduits, resulting in incomplete collections and imbalanced accounts of history. Furthermore, if community members are alienated by being underserved, notions that librarians and archivists are obsolete could become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Below are examples of community-centered projects from which information professionals can draw inspiration to localize in their community. In these examples, prominence is treated like it exists in the everyday lives of people, not that records of our lives should be collected if we are prominent:

³¹ Hughes-Watkins, Lae'l. "Filling in the Gaps: Using Outreach to Acquire Documentation of the Black Campus Movement, 1965-1972." In *Archival Issues: Journal of the Midwest Archives Conference*, vol. 36, no. 1. 2014.

³² Bass, "Getting Personal".

³³ Cottrell, Megan. "Libraries Respond to Community Needs in Times of Crisis." *American Libraries*, May 15, 2015.

- Archivists at the National Archives and Records Administration perform grassroots initiatives to collect experiences from the Washington, D.C. community.³⁴
- *Diversifying the Digital Historical Record: Integrating Community Archives in National Strategies for Access to Digital Cultural Heritage* is a substantive series of forums organized by the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, in collaboration with the Shorefront Legacy Center, the South Asian American Digital Archive, Mukurtu, and the Inland Empire Memories Project of the University of California, Riverside.³⁵ The forums are held on social media in order to be available to the public.
- Approaches like archivist Jarrett M. Drake's #ArchivesforBlackLives have taken the extra step to create *A People's Archive of Police Violence in Cleveland*, which makes consideration for how language and location (in physical and accessible terms) creates barriers for the creators of content that is archived.³⁶ A People's Archive begins by addressing the biases in our practices concerning barriers with community members.
- Documenting Ferguson is a freely available digital repository that seeks to preserve and make accessible community- and media-generated, original content

³⁴ "National Archives Explores Revolutionary Movements: Black Power and Black Lives Matter." National Archives and Records Administration. <https://www.archives.gov/press/press-releases/2017/nr17-03>.

³⁵ "Diversifying The Digital." *Diversifying The Digital*. October 21, 2016. Accessed March 02, 2017. <http://diversifyingthedigital.org/index.html>.

³⁶ Drake, Jarrett M. "#ArchivesForBlackLives: Building a Community Archives of Police Violence in Cleveland – On Archivy." *Medium*. April 22, 2016. Accessed March 02, 2017. <https://medium.com/on-archivy/archivesforblacklives-building-a-community-archives-of-police-violence-in-cleveland-93615d777289#.wom2p5920>

that was captured and created following the killing of 18-year-old Michael Brown by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9, 2014.³⁷ The project is driven by participants, which is significant because it is set apart from what is provided by media outlets. All the content is digital-born and publically available.³⁸

- StoryCorps, created in 2003, is another interesting initiative that seeks bring the archive to the people through oral history interviews in order to engage and preserve culture.³⁹ StoryCorps' permanent physical recording stations are in New York, Chicago, Atlanta, and San Francisco, as well as a Mobile Booth and an app. Their records are housed in the Library of Congress. The StoryCorps Griot project is the largest collection of African American stories collected in history.

Compliance and sole authorship are large parts of Western culture but the principles behind licenses like Creative Commons are much more in alignment with other cultural and contemporary notions of use.⁴⁰ Cultural sharing is ancient and framing the web as a wild west where attribution and richness are inherently lost is a convenient amnesia.⁴¹ Black people did not have input in copyright law in the past which led to widespread imitation in order to transform a work into an unattributable idea. Entities like YouTube sometimes remove videos and accounts due to copyright infringement without consulting the artists, who are often glad for promotion

³⁷ "Documenting Ferguson." Documenting Ferguson. 2015. Accessed March 07, 2017. <http://digital.wustl.edu/ferguson/>.

³⁸ Blog, OAH. "Documenting Ferguson." Process: a blog for american history. October 22, 2015. Accessed March 07, 2017. <http://www.processhistory.org/documenting-ferguson/>.

³⁹ "StoryCorps." StoryCorps. <https://storycorps.org/about/>.

⁴⁰ Caroll and Dasler, "Scholarship is a Conversation".

⁴¹ St. Felix, "Black Teenagers are Breaking the Internet"

among peers.⁴²

Personal digital archiving plays a role to avoid taking things out of context, or inversely, trying to place black rhetorical context into multimedia or records without giving attention to the traditions from which they emerge.⁴³ Black folklore and oral traditions (especially those concerning technology like Shine and the Titanic, Stagolee, John Henry, etc.) are often examined by scholars, but usually without the richness they add because they have disrupted linear narratives by nature. We do not regard them in the same way we do poets, faith leaders, or political activists, especially in selective acquisition.⁴⁴ Portable composition is the ability to compose media and contribute to participatory channels indicated a permanent shift in practices and relationships. This is something that deserves significance because it demonstrates the networks to which a person belongs. Rhetoric scholars also believe it is important not to cut ties from cultural discourse in instruction in order to avoid alienation from one's culture and identity.⁴⁵

It is crucial to not only recognize how race and technology are intertwined, but to influence the production, consumption and uses of technology in the present.⁴⁶ In libraries we often discuss openness, remixing and reuse by experts who are usually often Anglo-American. However, we can do more to framing these initiatives toward community leaders who have been powerful vanguards in recontextualizing media. Users all have the potential to become a digital griot in their own narrative and the rhetoric of their communities. Cultural institutions have the opportunity to facilitate this.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Banks, "Digital Griot", 20.

⁴⁴ Bass, "Getting Personal".

⁴⁵ Banks, "Digital Griot", 20.

⁴⁶ Banks, "Digital Griot", Risam "Global Digital Humanities".

Practice: The Personal is Political, Professional, and Transformative

So, how do we capture and draw meaning from our digital lives on our own terms? It's easy to get caught up in the workflow processes and skills needed to cultivate information. Much like my physical personal archives, my digital personal archives are basically semi-organized memory boxes backed up to the cloud (Dropbox, Google Drive, etc.). Initially, these were the things that came to mind when deciding how to best discuss PDA.

As I create this autoethnography, I have to admit there is a certain intimacy and validation in digging through the ephemeral and personal. There is an embodied experience for readers and authors as they perform "self" to an audience.⁴⁷ I am not excluded from this. I also have to admit, I feel a little relieved that personal digital archiving is not highly regarded in archival theory. For one thing, my practices and knowledge of theory is much closer to that of a user. Also, it makes me feel removed from the institutional notions of value and an inflated ego as an "expert". I realize I don't always share these values, which I now see as a benefit more than a concern.

Diversity is not abstract or academic.⁴⁸ It is personal and has local context. The literature encourages us to build tools in their local contexts; otherwise, practice becomes rooted in elitism and exclusivity.⁴⁹ Just as working papers are now more accessible and accounted for in the development of scholarship, new frameworks allow us to share traces of un-actualized projects, out-of-print masterpieces, and forgotten victories.⁵⁰ A great example of the historical implications of archiving the personal is Audre Lorde's personal diary. Access is not something

⁴⁷ Bass, "Getting Personal".

⁴⁸ Ettarh, "Intersectional Librarianship".

⁴⁹ Jimerson, "Archives for All"

⁵⁰ Gumbs, "Seek the Roots".

to be acquired or achieved, but is instead a complex 'practice'.⁵¹

The second tenet of second-wave feminist theory asserts the personal is political.⁵² It is possible to consider personal digital archiving an act of self-care and self-preservation on one's own terms and therefore a radical act. An archivist interviewed caretakers (therapists, social workers, medical professionals, etc.) after seeing the impact personal history had on patrons. Many people expressed their interest due to traumas such as illness, loss, non-biological families, and lack of evidence of personal milestones. She found that a person's feeling of lost identity can have consequences which affect their psychological well-being and that reparation of conflict can ease anxiety.⁵³ Healing oneself can mean healing the wounds that may move down through generations.

From Perspective to Practice

Since working backwards is often the best way to be kind to our future selves, I want to borrow from scholars offering best practices for inclusivity and intersectionality in the digital humanities. Many digital scholarship projects draw from archived material, so trying to save records as best we can to pave the way for future creative remixes and connections. Some goals were borrowed from successful projects listed in previous sections; others I created based on synthesizing the literature and personal experience. Although this chapter considers different perspectives, the ultimate purpose is to enable information professionals to provide their users

⁵¹ Banks, "Digital Griot", 20.

⁵² Mccann, Carole; Seung-Kyung Kim. "The great trust of radical feminist writing has been directed to the documentation of the slogan 'the personal is political.'" (2013). *Feminist theory reader: Local and global perspectives*. London: Routledge. p. 191.

⁵³ Etherton, Judith. "The Role of Archives in the Perception of Self." *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 27, no. 2 (2006): 227-46.

with a sense of agency for their personal records. So, I'll discuss principles to keep in mind and provide a guided lesson plan in order to walk colleagues through what that process might look like in a workshop format.

Holistic Cultural Principles for PDA	
Bias	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Acknowledge any and all privilege, bias and elitism exists in individual perspectives and institutional perspectives 2. Use intersectional content (work by diverse authors, collective biographies) to highlight intersectionality in the coding and invisible work of digital archiving 3. Create structures for intersectional analysis by making technology and materials accessible 4. Use multimedia and digital content in instruction
Value	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Observe demonstrated worth through how often an artifact is replicated 2. Observe creative effort invested in the artifact 3. Observe any provenance (from where and how it originated) 4. Utilize active learning to facilitate self-assessment of values
Curation/ Editorial	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encourage members to privilege certain life events over others 2. Have patrons list what they believe they have done to create a legacy 3. Have patrons then list what they have done to preserve or curate their legacy 4. Don't put off value judgements 5. Avoid spontaneous clean up

	6. Don't rely on periodic loss to limit collection of digital items
Technical Criteria	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Routine curation (e.g. virus checks and updates) 2. Communal activities (e.g. add metadata) 3. File naming 4. Storage 5. Privacy and encryption 6. Copyright and sharing 7. File types
Routine/ Lifecycle	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Curation of active content is ongoing 2. Preservation of curated content is ongoing 3. Create a plan or schedule for incorporating PDA into a personal routine 4. Add to a project of cultural institution if it fits goals or prepare to do so in the future 5. Cultural institutions as a resource for ongoing PDA

We do not need to throw out archival principles; instead, we can take a holistic approach. A study compared and contrasted personal digital archival literature to archival theory in order to highlight how they might inform each other.⁵⁴ Archival literature emphasizes materials of institutional value and common practice of acquisition near the end of an individual's life. Instances of archival partnership with community members to perform personal digital archiving revealed that guidance from skilled archivists was much needed. Some examples of this are the Digital Life and PARADIGM projects. It should also be noted that the PDA literature examined was outside of the gallery, library, archive and museum (GLAM) industry sector. Among the

⁵⁴ Cushing, Amber L. "Highlighting the archives perspective in the personal digital archiving discussion." *Library Hi Tech* 28, no. 2 (2010): 301-312.

overlapping challenges such as long term access and distributed storage, curation and appraisal were prominent.

As discussed, the values of marginalized groups vary from those of institutions and an individual may have insightful demonstrations of value in how they construct the narrative of their life. Graciously considering values of community members is the best way to encourage agency. Successful projects like *Documenting Ferguson* and *A People's Archive of Police Violence in Cleveland* designed their projects with an acknowledgment of bias, creating accessible materials and location for learning, as well as facilitation of technical practices rather than curatorial judgements. We should focus on demonstrating how one curates rather than making judgments on what to curate. Like StoryCorps, we still want to provide guidance on curation, but not on designating what should or should not be prominent. It may be helpful to think of it like a facilitating a folksonomy, rather than creating a controlled vocabulary. This is not only a matter of tools but also one of method. As Isabel Galina has noted, "Methods that have worked effectively in one cultural setting may fail spectacularly in another (and vice versa) and certain reasoning of how things should work does not apply similarly in other frameworks".⁵⁵

Moreover, local cultural contexts influence practices; despite a general predisposition in the United States to the idea that information wants to be free, not all communities want their cultural heritage digitized, whether because of cultural expectations for how knowledge should be transmitted, as in many indigenous communities, or for matters of safety, as among trans* communities.⁵⁶ So, when considering designing with a cultural lens, we should try to make the

⁵⁵ Risam, Roopika, "Beyond the Margins: Intersectionality and the Digital Humanities" (2015). *English Faculty Publications*. Paper 4. http://digitalcommons.salemstate.edu/english_facpub/4

⁵⁶ Ibid.

application as local and contextual as possible.

Let's draw from diverse digital scholarship practices in order to design our application with reuse in mind. Most developed digital humanities projects are centered on the media of "dead white men" who are unlikely to be forgotten even without being included in new mediums. Although this can be attributed to the availability of works in the public domain and the use of institutionally approved prolific subjects in order to gain legitimacy from academia as a form of scholarship, it may end up omitting the works of marginalized people. This is one reason it is important to make cultural considerations, as domination is often "routinized and multilayered".⁵⁷ For examples, Risam cites the book *Technicolor: Race, Technology and Everyday Life*, Afrofuturism, and Earhart's project *The Diverse History of Digital Humanities* in which she archives and recovers early work by diverse practitioners. We must prioritize these viewpoints to ensure that they are included in our curatorial approaches routinely and strategically, rather than being an afterthought.⁵⁸ These principles, just like digital content or pre-custodial accession, must be thoughtfully woven into the design of our outreach and workflows.

Technical considerations can be drawn from existing best practices in personal digital archiving. Tools such as ResCarta may create a threshold concept for an individual scanning documents or creating metadata, Internet Archive may be helpful for someone archiving a website, and Dropbox might be a tool for someone looking to store family photos.^{59, 60, 61} Also,

⁵⁷ Risam, "Global Digital Humanities"

⁵⁸ Cushing, "Highlighting the Archives Perspective"

⁵⁹ "The ResCarta Toolkit." The ResCarta Foundation. Accessed March 07, 2017.

<http://www.rescarta.org/index.php>.

⁶⁰ "Internet Archive".

⁶¹ "Dropbox." Dropbox. Accessed March 07, 2017. <https://www.dropbox.com/>.

when looking through a cultural lens, we want to consider the differences for those who may want to share (e.g. students, family members) and those who may not (e.g., activists, trans folk). Instructing on security basics and risk assessment can help expose someone to a new insight rather than static information.⁶² We may also want to discuss the ongoing routine of curation and preservation as archival steps by taking the digital curation lifecycle approach for technical best practices.⁶³

In order to demonstrate learning outcomes for holistic cultural principles, I mapped two instructional design frameworks with the common threads from the literature we are discussing. I drew from Understanding by Design (Ubd)⁶⁴ and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.⁶⁵

Holistic Cultural Principles	ACRL Frames	Ubd Types of Understanding
Bias	Authority is Constructed and Contextual; Information	Empathy; Perspective

⁶² Mitchell, Matt, Cooper Quintin, Martin Shelton, and Rachel Weidinger. "Digital Security training resources for security trainers, Winter 2017 Edition." Medium. November 18, 2016. <https://medium.com/@geminiimatt/security-training-resources-for-security-trainers-winter-2016-edition-4d10670ef8d3#.okhup1jy6>.

⁶³ Higgins, Sarah. "The DCC curation lifecycle model." *International Journal of Digital Curation* 3, no. 1 (2008): 134-140.

⁶⁴ Dickson, Ellie, Kate Dohe, Lisa Hinchliffe, Elizabeth Joan Kelly, and Chelcie Juliet Rowell. "Digital Library Pedagogy Incubator: A Workshop to Design Instruction with Digital Collections." Digital Library Federation Forum 2016. November 7, 2016. <https://dlforum2016.sched.com/event/8LGH/m3e-digital-library-pedagogy-incubator-a-workshop-to-design-instruction-with-digital-collections>.

⁶⁵ "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education." Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL). September 23, 2016. Accessed March 07, 2017. <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>.

	Creation is a Process	
Value	Information has Value	Interpretation; Self-Knowledge
Curation	Research as Inquiry; Searching as Strategic Exploration	Self-Knowledge; Application
Technical Criteria	Information Creation is a Process; Scholarship as Conversation	Application; Interpretation
Routine/Lifecycle	Information Creation is a Process; Scholarship as Conversation	Application; Interpretation

Let's put it all together in a workshop lesson plan.^{66,67} This is just an example for concrete application. Learning assessment and evaluation are intentionally left blank in case individuals are encouraged to use the information on their own or if the workshops are ongoing. The assessment may depend on how you customize your approach; many different applications could be tested.

⁶⁶ Dickson, et. al. "Digital Pedagogy Incubator".

⁶⁷ Oakleaf, Megan. "Library Workshop Lesson Plan: Presentations." Megan Oakleaf. 2008. Accessed March 07, 2017. <http://meganoakleaf.info/presentations>.

Lesson Plan

Place, Date, Time	Face-to-face or online
Librarian/ Archivist	
Instructional Partner(s)	
Curricular Context	
Learners	Community Members/ Users (e.g. Black Millennials)
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible location • Prepare learner materials • Prepare examples and cases • Prepare handout of main points in lesson (optional)
Digital Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Images • Social media • Born-digital text (emails, SMS text message, blog posts) • Digitized print content
Instructor Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of community archive projects • Examples of digital content • Cases of value (e.g. family genealogy, activism, professional)

Learner Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blank matrix template (Excel sheet or print worksheet) 	
Learning Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners will consider and evaluate culturally diverse examples and cases of value for archiving personal records • Learners will self-assess value (curation/ appraisal) criteria • Learners will compare and contrast technical needs • Learners will create a plan for lifecycle curation and routine technical management of personal records 	
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Code of Conduct • Acknowledgement of biases, diverse values and intersectional identities • Provide overview of workshop 	<i>Time</i> 5 min.
Teaching Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show examples and cases to demonstrate value of personal digital archiving • Provide sample questions for curation self-assessment <p>Note: Use intersectional content (work by diverse authors,</p>	<i>Time</i> 10 min.

	<p>collective biographies) to highlight intersectionality in the coding and invisible work of digital archiving. Create structures for intersectional analysis by making technology and materials accessible.</p>	
<p>Comprehension Check</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each person to create a matrix for their own categories of personal value 	<p><i>Time</i></p> <p>20 min.</p>
<p>Teaching Strategy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss multiple scenarios for technical considerations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Encryption and privacy ○ Copyright ○ Sharing ○ Active vs. inactive content ○ Storage and preservation ○ File naming, metadata, file types <p>Note: multiple scenarios can take the form of personas (e.g. a student, an activist, a parent, a genealogy information seeker)</p>	<p><i>Time</i></p> <p>15 min.</p>
<p>Comprehension Check</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optional: participants can record resource information or notes in a reminder mechanism of their choosing at this time (e.g. smartphone, email, bookmark, notes) 	<p><i>Time</i></p> <p>5 min.</p>

Teaching Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discuss tools and practices used in routine curation and preservation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Internet Archive ○ Photo album tools ○ Backing up copies ○ How to archive tweets ○ ResCarta toolkit ○ Library/ archive resources ○ Dropbox <p>Note: The digital curation lifecycle approach may be a good way to emphasize an ongoing routine.</p>	<i>Time</i> 10 min.
Comprehension Check	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Each person creates an outline for a plan and schedule for curation and preservation of items 	<i>Time</i> 10 min.
Closing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Question and answer 	<i>Time</i> 5 min.
Wrap Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Closing remarks 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact information • Distribute handout of resources and workshop main points 	
Student Learning Assessment		
Lesson Evaluation		

Conclusion

There is still a lot to learn about cultural institutions’ relationships to our community members. Through examining the literature and my own experiences with personal artifacts, I hope to have demonstrated the great value in exploring ways to support our individual community members in order to form stronger communities. Hopefully, readers and the diverse communities they work with will take away the following messages for mindful practices:

- The process of personal information management (PIM) or personal digital archiving

(PDA) can be a transformative act that means self and community care, especially for those who have not historically been able to participate in record creation.

- If you encourage your users to take care in creating, curating, managing and preserving records, evidence of their life has a better chance at existing in the future. Share with them the importance of this contribution for historical or cultural meaning in external spheres (family, community, public, etc.).
- Finally, it's mainly important to get started and keep going than to do it perfectly. Strive toward quality, but mostly strive.

The outline I've presented for how you might apply these ideas is not necessarily perfect: I am just one voice with only my own experience. It is important that these projects are not few and far between. Please continue to share your own experiences in this space.

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