Using the Memory Lab: Values, Impacts, and Discourses

Amy Wickner ⚶ UMD Libraries Research & Innovative Practice Forum ⚶ June 8, 2017

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Personal digital archiving

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

Digital possessions are extensions of individual identity

Saving, remembering, losing, sharing
- From everyday management to "digital hoarding"
- Online memorials, social media curation, community archives
- Catastrophic data loss, deliberate forgetting, benign neglect

Values & impacts

Motivations
What brings you here? What do you hope to do?

Values
Why does this opportunity matter?

Impacts
How has this experience affected your life?

Memory Lab @ DCPL

DIY digital conversion workstation at Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial Library (D.C. Public Library central branch)

Online resources, zines
libguides.dclibrary.org/memorylab

The Labs DC public library

Labs @ DCPL group of maker spaces

IMLS funding:
- 2015-2016 National Digital Stewardship Residency: develop the Memory Lab
- 2017-2019 National Leadership Grant: disseminate and support digital preservation training across US public libraries

Data & methods

Semi-structured interviews (5 patrons, 8 library staff)
- Experiences with the Memory Lab, personal digital archiving
- Other ways of using the library
- How does the Memory Lab fit within DCPL?

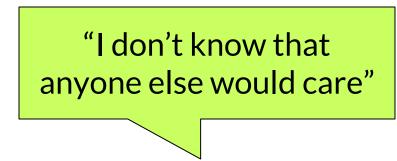Notes, transcripts, and support material (e.g. handouts)

Qualitative coding (all materials)
Critical discourse analysis (1 transcript)

RQ1. What are the values and impacts of personal digital archiving resources in public libraries?

Qualitative codes: personal digital archiving, library use(s), motivations, values, impacts

Memory work is personal, tied to loss

Sharing with a close circle of family and friends
Preserving ties to the aging or deceased, obsolescent media
Special-occasion projects, not everyday management

> "I don't know that anyone else would care"

> "I have no other record of her speaking"
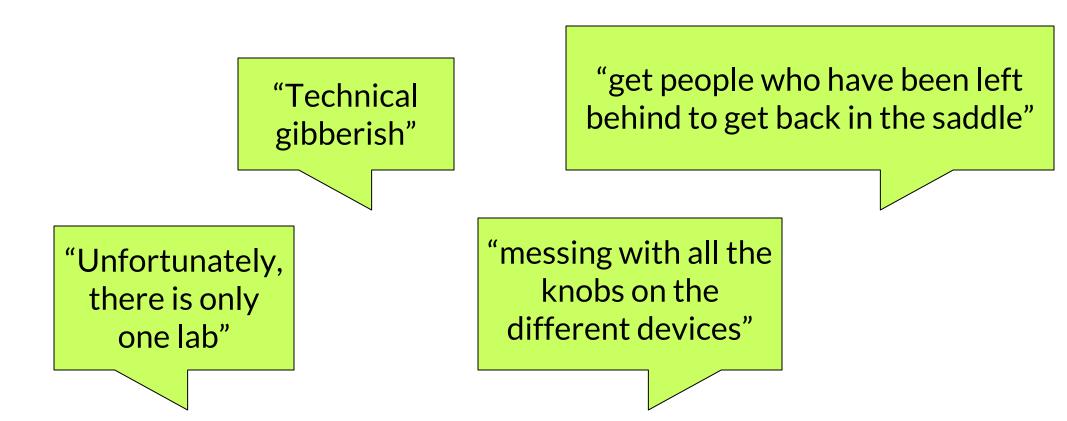
Natural fit with library mission

Access to information lifecycle
Responding to community needs
Preserving local history

> "Topical, D.C.-area stories"

> "Just another way to provide digital literacy"

> "Libraries are … figuring out where they are now"

Promoting autonomy and independence

Pros and cons of do-it-yourself
Expertise and standards in digital archiving & conversion
Downplaying improvisation

> "Technical gibberish"

> "get people who have been left behind to get back in the saddle"

> "Unfortunately, there is only one lab"

> "messing with all the knobs on the different devices"

RQ 2. How does personal digital archiving activate *discourses about* the values and impacts of public libraries?

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): How does language build significance, identity, social goods, and connections?

CDA themes: power relations, discourse as situated identity, recognition work, intertextuality

Managing (power over) change

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

> 1 But so it's nice to provide the kind of service
> 2 To be able to help those who have been left behind
> 3 Because of completely different reason //

Re-situating identity

"Changing people" from *analog/resistant* to *digital/open*
Recontextualize preservation to rethink practices

> 1 I think that's the most important part of the digital preservation
> 2 Is getting people to feel comfortable to say
> 3 Yes we want to learn //

(Re)imagining the future

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

> 1 Nothing is going to disappear completely
> 2 Because people like to still create ..
> 3 Figure out things on their own and do things

> 1 We have to move with technology as well
> 2 Because our whole world is turning into a big technology ball there
> 3 So we need to ..
> 4 We can't resist very long //