

# Personal Digital Archiving at the Public Library



COLLEGE OF  
INFORMATION  
STUDIES

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## BACKGROUND *Mapping the research space.*

### 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

Acker, A., & Brubaker, J. R. (2014). Death, memorialization, and social media: A platform perspective for personal archives. *Archivaria* 77, 1-24; Chen, A. (2014). Disorder: Vocabularies of hoarding in personal digital archiving practices. *Archivaria*, 78, 115-134; Cushing, A. L. (2013). “It’s stuff that speaks to me”: Exploring the characteristics of digital possessions. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 64(8), 1723-1734; Kim, S. (2013). Landscape of personal digital archiving activities and research. In D. T. Hawkins (Ed.), *Personal archiving: Preserving our digital heritage* (pp. 153-185). Medford, MA: Information Today; Lenstra, N. (2014). “You know you from Champaign-Urbana”: An ethnography of localized African-American archiving initiatives. In D. Daniel & A. Levi (Eds.), *Identity Palimpsests: Archiving Ethnicity in the U.S. and Canada* (pp. 35-55). Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books; Lindley, S. E., Marshall, C. C., Banks, R., Sellen, A., & Regan, T. (2013). Rethinking the web as a personal archive. In *Proceedings of the 22nd international conference on World Wide Web* (pp. 749-760). New York: ACM; Marshall, C. C. (2011). Challenges and opportunities for personal digital archiving. In Christopher A. Lee (Ed.), *I, digital: Personal collections in the digital era* (pp. 90-114). Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists; Sas, C., & Whittaker, S. (2013). Design for forgetting: Disposing of digital possessions after a breakup. In *Proceedings of CHI ’13* (pp. 1823-1832). New York: ACM.

### Values & impacts

Assessing and demonstrating value ↔ managerialism

How are values and impacts expressed in storytelling?

Incorporating library and user perspectives

#### 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?*

Barniskis, S. C. (2016). Deconstructing the mission: A critical content analysis of public library mission statements. *The Library Quarterly*, 86(2), 135-152.; Bertot, J. C., McClure, C. R., & Jaeger, P. T. (2008). The impacts of free public internet access on public library patrons and communities. *The Library Quarterly*, 78(3), 285-301; Matthews, J. R. (2004). *Measuring for results: The dimensions of public library effectiveness*. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited; Town, J. S. (2011). Value, impact, and the transcendent library: Progress and pressures in performance measurement and evaluation. *The Library Quarterly*, 81(1), 111-125.

### Public memory

#### Memory of publics

*How real and imagined memories and communities influence one another*

#### Publicness of memory

*How memory appears, happens, is experienced in public*

Phillips, K. R. (2004). *Framing public memory*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

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

### 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](http://libguides.dclibrary.org/memorylab)



Labs @ DCPL group of maker spaces

Developed through the IMLS-funded National Digital Stewardship Residency, 2015-2016

### Data & methods

7 hours participant observation

- Digital Commons, Memory Lab, Home Movie Day 2016

Semi-structured interviews

- 60 min, 5 patrons, 8 library staff
- Background
- Experiences with the Memory Lab, personal digital archiving resources
- Other ways of using the library
- Memory Lab’s perceived fit within DCPL

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

### Analysis

Coding along major and emerging themes:

- Personal digital archiving at DCPL
- Personal digital archiving beyond DCPL
- Other library uses
- Expressions of motivations, values, and impacts
- Public memory frames
- Other (emerging themes)

## FINDINGS *Motivations, values, and 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 v. everyday management

“I don’t know that anyone else would care”

“I have no other record of her speaking”

### Natural fit with library mission

Digital literacy  
Access to information lifecycle  
Responding to community needs  
Preserving local history

“Topical, D.C.-area stories”

### Autonomy and independence

Memory Lab as learning space  
Experiential aspects of using the Memory Lab  
Obstacles to / supports for do-it-yourself  
Digital archiving & conversion as domain of experts  
Measuring participation against received standards  
Downplaying improvised methods

“Technical gibberish”

“messing with all the knobs on the different devices”

“get people who have been left behind to get back in the saddle”

“Unfortunately, there is only one lab”

### NEW QUESTIONS

How do participants draw on discourses of **Maker culture**, **digital literacy**, and the **public library as space & place**?