Using the Memory Lab: Values, Impacts, and Discourses

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

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

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

RQ2. 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

Re-situating identity
"Changing people" from analog/resistant to digital/open
Recontextualize preservation to rethink practices

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

Data & methods

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Personal digital archiving

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

Values & Impacts

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<tr>
<th>Motivations</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Impacts</th>
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<td>What brings you here? What do you hope to do?</td>
<td>Why does this opportunity matter? How has this experience affected your life?</td>
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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

Labs @ DCPL group of maker spaces

IMLS funding:
- 2015-2016 National Digital Stewardship Residency: develop the Memory Lab

Natural fit with library mission
Access to information lifecycle
Responding to community needs
Preserving local history

"Topical, D.C.-area stories"
"Libraries are...figuring out where they are now"
"Just another way to provide digital literacy"
"I have no other record of her speaking"
"I don't know that anyone else would care"

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

"Unfortunately, there is only one lab"
"get people who have been left behind to get back in the saddle"
"Technical gibberish"
"messing with all the knobs on the different devices"

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