

How an Ethics of Care Approach to Archives Can Transform Community-Based Archives' Non-Traditional Practices into Innovative Practices within Mainstream Archival Institutions

Leslie A. Walbolt

University of South Florida

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Dr. Jinfang Niu

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The tension between preservation and use governs archivists' dual archival responsibility (Hunter, 2020). Mere use of archival materials leads to potential deterioration, yet preservation of these unique materials prevents at least some use and access. This is exponentially true for marginalized communities who traditionally have not had the power to possess and control records (Punzalan & Caswell, 2016). Going deeper than social justice theory's general rights-based framework, the feminist ethics of care model allows archivists to approach archival policies, procedures, and services through interconnected relationships (Punzalan & Caswell, 2016). Community-based archives are grounded in this feminist framework and regularly challenge traditional archival modes of practice in the areas of custody democratization of the archival process, and collaboration (Punzalan & Caswell, 2016; Zavala et al., 2017). These non-traditional methods can and should be extended as applicable into mainstream archival institutions as archives configure Web 2.0 technologies and seek to serve and empower marginalized communities outside their typical user populations.

Archives are inherently not neutral; by attempting neutrality the systematic status quo is preserved in favor of the powerful and at the expense of the other (Punzalan & Caswell, 2016). Social justice stands up for values of equity, freedom, and respect, and sides with those populations who have historically been pushed aside in institutions and systems of power (Caswell & Cifor, 2016; Punzalan & Caswell, 2016). Caswell & Cifor (2006) state that use of

a social justice agenda in archives requires undertaking critical analyses of power, its operation, distribution, and abuses; working toward equity in the distribution of resources and opportunities; building and maintaining cross-cultural collaboration and dialogue; advocating the inclusion of and promoting the agency of marginalized

individuals and communities in the archives; and reinterpreting archival concepts to challenge dominant power structures in support of social justice principles and goals. (p. 27)

This rights-based framework focuses on legal issues like keeping archivists and users separate entities or applying universal codes of ethics to both archivists and users despite their inclusion in the record (Caswell & Cifor, 2016). While sufficient for discerning major human rights issues, it proves inadequate for going deeper into unspecified forms of oppression and how they show up in archival work (Caswell & Cifor, 2016; Punzalan & Caswell, 2016).

As the archival professional landscape has shifted from 67% male and 33% female in 1956 to 35% male and 65% female in 2005 (A*CENSUS, 2006), it makes sense that archival approaches can similarly move from a social justice model towards a feminist one.

A feminist-based ethics of care approach envisions archivists as caregivers who connect to individuals and communities through “webs of responsibilities” (Caswell & Cifor, 2016, p. 28). Utilizing women’s socialization into its caregiving role and moral decision-making, it charges archivists to focus care-based questions at the heart of their justice approach (Caswell & Cifor, 2016). Here, justice emphasizes radical empathy, trust, support, and inclusion as they relate to culture and context (Caswell & Cifor, 2016; Poole, 2020; Punzalan & Caswell, 2016).

The ethics of care centers marginalized communities at every step of the archival process from appraisal to access, generating a user-oriented and welcoming community (Caswell & Cifor, 2016). This model shifts affective responsibilities in the archives in four ways: each between archivist and record creator, subject of records, user, and the larger community (Caswell & Cifor, 2016). Specifically, the third and fourth responsibilities to users and the community build outreach and access to underrepresented and unrepresented groups by

focusing on untraditional users without typical archive authority as well as those unforeseen users in the larger, marginalized community who may utilize the archives in the future (Caswell & Cifor, 2016). Mainstream archival institutions often cannot say who comprises their current users (30% of users marked *other* on a user-identifying major archives survey) (Hunter, 2020), thus making this inclusive outreach even more imperative today (Caswell & Cifor, 2016).

Community-based archives' rise as a countermeasure to mainstream traditional archives' power structures created a safe space for marginalized communities where they collect, describe, and provide access to community materials using their own policies (Poole, 2020; Zavala et al., 2017). Communities stem from any group of people coming together as a self-determined bloc; these include ethnic, gender, economic, religious, sexual, or geographic reasons (Zavala et al., 2017). Community-based archives have re-usurped their history, memory, narrative, and preservation power that was never really addressed in mainstream archives, which generally have narrow scopes and access (Zavala et al., 2017).

Moreover, community archives employ novel practices that emphasize community members' participation in both management and decentralized curation (Zavala et al., 2017). These take the form of post-custodial practices, democratization of the archival process, and increased reliance on collaborations with community members and outside institutions. Flexible post-custodial practices' range includes a community archive borrowing records from an individual, making copies for the archives and then returning the records back to the owner, shared arrangements of records between the community archives and other institutions, and full custody of archival records (Poole, 2020; Zavala et al., 2017). This adaptability "prioriti[zes] community ownership, access, and trust-building over assumptions of custody and control"

(Zavala et al., 2017, p. 207). Communities feel empowered in sharing their knowledge, but also in retaining their records ownership.

The democratization of the archival process inherent in community archives drives their collection development and appraisal work because community members take on archivist duties, participating in appraisal, arrangement, and description of the collections (Zavala et al., 2017). For example, the community-based Freedom Archives' internship program empowers students without prior archives training to work directly with archival audio/visual records, digitizing, describing, and preserving materials for community use (Moore, 2016). This enriches the collective memory of the population, preserving their truth, and can be repeatedly seen in community-based archives across the country. In addition to reconfiguring archival principles and practices, collaborations between community-based archives and mainstream archival institutions have led to community agency in archives governance; community-centered values are at the forefront of the archives process and innovative participation leads the way (Zavala et al., 2017). For instance, a university archives in California uses its expertise for processing collections, but intentionally engages with its local community to ensure their input is included (Zavala et al., 2017). This preserves the records and history of a marginalized community that previously was left out of the conversation; it takes communication and innovative thinking, but is possible.

With the advent of increasing digitization and expansive online access more records of marginalized communities and Indigenous groups are becoming available (Punzalan & Caswell, 2016). This remains something to think about as these non-traditional archival practices are expanded into mainstream archives. Web 2.0 tools are grounded in "democratic, collaborative,

active, dynamic, and interactive” methods of connecting users to content (Franks, 2018, p. 35).

These engagement systems dominate the Internet today, and when combined with digital technology require a necessary opening up of records in the public archives tradition.

Traditional archives must adapt or face obscurity, and incorporating post-custodial practices, enabling community control, and promoting shared governance (Zavala et al., 2017) as exemplified in community archives should be part of that vision of change.

In fact, mainstream archives are already becoming more participatory in the archives process as part of their preparations for success in the digital age. The U.S. National Archives views its archivists as community managers, nurturing users in line with the ethics of care model and forming links to help each other through both the research and appraisal processes (Wright, 2015). Digitization at the National Archives has allowed online users to find the needle in the haystack using collaborative efforts of community partners to grow their catalogue through scanning, description, and transcription (Wright, 2015). Further collaborations with other government archives have created an amplified response to public inquiries; external standards have replaced internal ones to allow partnerships with other institutions; and the National Archives’ social media presence has grown to connect to new users (Wright, 2015).

Other mainstream archives are likely also following suit in inclusionary, participatory practices meant to provide greater access and use of archivable materials. This disrupts historical notions of archives preservation, but is imperative for the continued relevance of archives today. More research is needed to discern how mainstream archives can implement community-based archives’ non-traditional archival practices like post-custodial methods, democratization of the archives process, and collaboration, and probable pushback will occur

from the mainstream archivist profession on this. However, our increased connectivity and collaboration is not disappearing, and archives must find innovative methods to incorporate these changes.

This incorporation cannot come at the expense of marginalized communities; mainstream archives must share their power with communities previously omitted from the conversation or else the collective history and memory of the archives is rendered incomplete and incorrect (Zavala et al., 2017). Moreover, it remains important to continue to do the work lifting up these voices without “further promoting [] uneven power dynamic[s]” inherent in mainstream archives (Punzalan & Caswell, 2016, p. 34). Participation in archival practices and governance shares responsibility with individuals and the community, thus giving ownership to all involved. By shifting the archival conversation and then creating change within the archives making them more inclusive and diverse, the field can fulfill its equity imperatives and strengthen its institutions.

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