Conceptualizing Records: Community Archives Describing Themselves

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ABSTRACT

The concept of records is foundational to archival studies, yet empirical research on how members and volunteers of community and grassroots archives conceptualize records remains limited. To understand how members and volunteers of community archives conceptualize records, this study asks how members and volunteers of the Black Bottom Archives (BBA), the Detroit Sound Conservancy (DSC), the Faulkner Morgan Archive (FMA), the Hula Preservation Society (HPS), and The History Project (THP) conceptualize records and how these conceptualizations inform their programs and practices. Based on ten semistructured interviews with five archives in the United States, this research reveals that members and volunteers view records as multifaceted and contingent on ongoing negotiation, borrowing, and intervention for larger goals rather than strictly being tied to abstract, institutional, or professional notions of records. Such a view also points to a recursive and generative relationship between records, programs, and practices and keeping track of power and legitimacy.

KEY WORDS
Archival power, Archival records, Archival theory and practices,
Community archives, Grassroots archives, Writings about archives

This study examines how organizers of community and grassroots archives conceptualize records and how these conceptualizations inform their archival programs and practices. The concept of records is foundational to archival studies, yet empirical research on how members and volunteers of community archives conceptualize records remains limited. This research aims to answer the questions: How do the members and volunteers of the Black Bottom Archives (BBA), the Detroit Sound Conservancy (DSC), the Faulkner Morgan Archive (FMA), the Hula Preservation Society (HPS), and The History Project (THP) conceptualize records, and how do these conceptualizations inform archival programs and practices? In answering these questions, this study moves toward a better understanding of the needs of community and grassroots archives, produces empirical data about how records are conceptualized, and contributes to the conceptual richness of a foundational concept in the discipline.

While the concept of records is dynamic and contested, most definitions of records require materiality and physicality tied to notions of information or evidence and rely on some method of fixing, recording, and transcribing so that an archivist can acquire, arrange, describe, preserve, and provide access to those records within an organizational and work context.[1] A few scholars have addressed the records that defy these definitions. In theorizing event-based records, or what American archival studies scholar Jeannette Allis Bastian coins "cultural archives," Bastian writes:

> [The paradigm of cultural archives] theorizes that if an annual celebration can be considered as a longitudinal and complex cultural community expression, then it also can be seen dynamically as a living archive where the many events within the celebration constitute the numerous records comprising this expression. While some of these records may be the traditional fixed variety, others may be mobile, transient, ephemeral—dances, oral performances, costumes, folklore—but all belong, have a place and may be completely comprehended within a coherent past and present understanding of the social dynamic in which the celebration resides. The celebration and the community are one.[2]

Even though Bastian opens a portal through which to explore the multiple and conflicting ways to conceptualize records (e.g., event-based records and cultural archives), few studies have directly addressed how such events can be understood or function as records, let alone how communities themselves might conceptualize records. This gap, coupled with the recent push to recognize the value of community voices within the archival discipline, presents both a critical intervention and a learning opportunity in considering how members and volunteers conceptualize records outside the purview of mainstream institutions.[3] It is left to studies like this one to enter the portal and explore the numerous notions of records, particularly within the context of community and grassroots archives.

Defining Community Archives

Definitions of community archives are contextual and shifting. British archival studies scholars Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd define community as "any manner of people who come together and present themselves as such, and a 'community archive' is the product of their attempts to document the history of their commonality."[4] Community archives can form around physical locations, gender and sexual orientation, economic status, religious identities, and ethnic identities.[5]

Within the US context, scholars have expressed community archives as alternatives to mainstream repositories "through which communities can make collective decisions about what is of enduring value to them, shape collective memory of their own pasts, and control the means through which stories about their past are constructed."[6] US scholars have also emphasized power, politics, and identity, thereby defining community archives as "the collection of materials of marginalized groups, such as those that deal with political, ethnic, racial, geographic or gender and sexual identities, by those marginalized groups themselves."[7]

Among South African scholars, Kathy Eales emphasizes that "in a community archive, community members are more prominent in deciding what materials or artefacts are pertinent to reclaiming the spaces in their social memory."[8] Similarly, Verne Harris underscores them as "an important space, arguably an increasing space, in the arena of social memory."[9]

In attempting to identify a coherent community archives movement in the Australian context, Australian archival studies scholar Leisa Gibbons interrogated who was talking about them and why. She notes the voices of marginalized and oppressed groups, including the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, are largely absent from and not associated with a community archives movement in the Australian context. Instead, the voices largely arise from discussions between people involved in public history and community museum disciplines. Such a context raises questions about why it is important to articulate a community archives movement, which Gibbons, in part, answers by suggesting that "those who wield power over the community memory . . . play a role [in] how memory is manifest and sustained."[10]

This article defines community archives as autonomous and grassroots efforts to document histories and perform memory work outside mainstream archival institutions. Here, it is important to note that these definitions are largely external impositions that do not necessarily reflect how communities define themselves. Mainstream archival institutions are bureaucratic and hierarchical archival organizations that largely adhere to the Western historical and empirical projects of collecting, holding, and preserving historical and institutional documents tied to the activities of a larger entity (e.g., academic, corporate, or state). In a sense, all archival

institutions reflect particular communities, whether academic, corporate, state, and so on.[11] Nonetheless, this article will use community and grassroots archives interchangeably in contrast to predominant mainstream institutional archives.

Sites

I chose Black Bottom Archives, Detroit Sound Conservancy, Faulkner Morgan Archive, Hula Preservation Society, and The History Project as sites for this study because they are grassroots efforts that document community histories and perform memory work outside traditional archival institutions. The sites were also chosen because of ease of access, consent, convenience, proximity, and the groups' willingness to participate in the research.

Black Bottom Archives (BBA) is a "community-driven media platform dedicated to centering and amplifying the voices, experiences, and perspectives of Black Detroiters through digital storytelling, journalism, art, and community organizing with a focus on preserving local Black history & archiving our present."[12] The archives was founded in 2014 by Camille Johnson and Paige Watkins and made public in January 2015. It was initially an online magazine centering content written by Black Detroiters. Over the past six years, the archives has added podcasts, a Black business directory, and a community calendar to promote Detroit's art and cultural events.

BBA is a space for nuanced and complex Black Detroit experiences and stories as an alternative to often hegemonic, oppressive, and dominant narratives and representations about the city of Detroit and Black Detroit. Its official mission is to "cultivate and support the development and preservation of media created by Black Detroiters for the sake of amplifying our voices, documenting our present realities, and transforming the dominant narratives about our city."[13] Inspired by the radical lineage of community archives, BBA is committed to collecting, preserving, and documenting Black Detroit histories outside of mainstream institutions and platforms.

Detroit Sound Conservancy (DSC) is a "nonprofit community-based music archive documenting Detroit's collective history through preservation, education, performance, and place-keeping."[14] The initial board was established in 2012. The initial archives was established in 2013. Over the past nine years, DSC has started an oral history archive, organized the yearly "Michigan Sound Conference," and held seasonal events like "Archive Fever," which highlight some of the ongoing work at the archives.

Located in Lexington, Kentucky, Faulkner Morgan Archive (FMA) was founded in 2014 by Robert Morgan and Dr. Jonathan Coleman to collect, preserve, and promote the LGBTQ history of Kentucky. In addition to being dedicated to

telling Kentucky's LGBTQ story, the archives houses more than 15,000 items and more than 250 hours of recorded interviews.[15]

Hula Preservation Society (HPS), inspired by lifelong teacher Kumu Hula Nona Kapuailohia Desha Beamer, preserves and shares the unique spirits, authentic voices, and historical records of esteemed elders via digital technologies. HPS also aims to make the records available to Hawaiian people, hula practitioners, and students around the world. HPS was founded in 2000 during a conversation between Beamer and Maile Loo, a student of the Beamer hula style.[16] The archives is located in Kaneohe, Hawaii.

The History Project (THP), based in Boston, Massachusetts, focuses "exclusively on documenting and preserving the history of New England's LGBTQ communities and sharing that history with LGBTQ individuals, organizations, allies, and the public."[17] The archives include more than 150 collections and more than a million documents. The collections contain the records of early Gay Liberation, photographs of pre-Stonewall Boston, and objects such as T-shirts and buttons documenting the marriage equality movement. The History Project was founded in 1980 when a group of activists, historians, archivists, and writers were awarded a grant of $300 from the city of Boston to document Boston's gay and lesbian history in tandem with the city's 350th anniversary.

Literature Review

The literature on the concepts of a record is uncertain, dynamic, and contested. Archival scholars and practitioners have largely asserted a relationship between records and representation, evidence, memory, becoming, and agency. Much of the scholarship is mainly conceptual, theoretical, narrowly constructed, and somewhat limited to institutional record-making and record-keeping practices. Few studies exist on how people outside traditional institutions and organizations conceptualize records and how this informs their archival programs and practices. This section establishes a baseline for understanding these various existing concepts of a record by reviewing the Western and Anglophone scholarship in information studies and archival studies to explore different notions of a record. I organized the literature review under broad conceptual categories: records and institutions, representation, evidence, memory, becoming, and agency. Reviewing the literature reveals the dearth of voices from those working or volunteering at community archives and identifies connections and repositories that shed light on the concepts of the archival record.

Records and Institutions

Several institutional definitions center on the relationship between records and evidence, information, documents, memory, and accountability. The International Council of Archives (ICA) Multilingual Archival Terminology glossary defines records as "information created, received, and maintained as evidence and information by an organization or person to pursue legal obligations or business transactions."[18]

The Society of American Archivists glossary notes a few definitions of a record.[19] The first two definitions revolve around the idea of evidence. The first includes the traditional notion of records as written or printed work that may be used as evidence or proof; a document. The second is data or information in a fixed form created or received in individual or institutional activity and preserved as evidence for future reference. The third definition, data or information that has been fixed on some medium, revolves around ideas of memory and accountability. This definition promotes three different characteristics of a record:

1. Fixed content, or text, data, symbols, numerals, images, sound, graphics, and other information that make up the substance of the record
2. Fixity, or the quality of the record in terms of its stability and resistance to change
3. Context, or the organizational, functional, and operational circumstances of a record's creation, receipt, storage, or use

The glossary also wisely notes that "to the extent that records are defined in terms of their function rather than their characteristics, the definition is stretched to include many materials not normally understood to be a record; an artifact may function as a record, even though it falls outside the vernacular understanding of the definition." ICA and SAA largely adhere to records requiring fixity, externalization, stability, and an organizational context tied to larger juridical and legal structures. While the SAA glossary notes that the definition of records can expand, it fails to acknowledge or address how those outside traditional settings may be defining records.

Records and Representation

In the past two decades, a growing body of literature has begun expanding the concepts of the record. British archival studies scholar Geoffrey Yeo's article "Concepts of Record (1): Evidence, Information, and Persistent Representations" provides a good entry point for exploring this literature. Noting that it is legitimate to view records in different ways, he proposes records as "persistent representations of activities, created by participants or observers of those activities or by their authorized proxies."[20]

Within archival theory, Yeo notes that although the relationship between records and representation is so infrequent as to be new within English archival theory, the idea that records are representations is not unfamiliar in Italian archival theory. He goes on to flesh out the different parts of his proposed definition. First, he notes that persistent representation can endure beyond the immediate circumstance that led to a record's creation. The first part suggests a temporal and spatial dimension where a record's characteristics can be shared and passed across time and space. Second, he notes that records are a representation of activities. He mentions statues, road signs, and calendars as examples of persistent representations but not necessarily records representing activities. Third, he suggests that participants and observers have firsthand knowledge of the activity concerned. The participants and observers may not be neutral or impartial witnesses to the activity, but they have a level of knowledge unavailable to those who did not experience it. In that sense, representations produced by other parties are generally not records of the activities they describe (e.g., scholarship by historians or other scholars).

The view of records as persistent representations largely complements the established view that records are primary sources, documents, or a mirror of past events. The definition also complements the perspectives of those who insist that many aspects of the past are irrecoverable. If we take this to its logical conclusion, that means representation itself is never perfect. Inescapably, the activities that records represent are gone. We can argue that records will allow a picture of those activities, but we must admit it will be imperfect. This argument provides room to move beyond positivist notions of verifiable facts or absolute truths. This argument also emphasizes the extent to which record systems themselves determine the construction of the past. If representation is not perfect, it might lead to a discrediting of the concept, but that is outside the purview of this review.

Records and Evidence

Before establishing records as persistent representations, Yeo touches on records as information and evidence. He notes that we might consider information and evidence as affordances or goods that records provide to users. Other mentioned goods are memory, accountability, the legitimization of power, a sense of personal or social identity and continuity, aesthetic qualities, tangibility, or a symbolic connection with particular individuals, organizations, places, or events.[21]

Underlying this insight is the stance that information and evidence are, to some degree, not contained in a record, but rather that records can supply users with information and evidence. As Yeo notes, the degree to which records contain information and evidence or the degree to which records can provide users with evidence and information remain debatable.

The relationship between records and evidence has historically been synonymous in the archival discipline and profession. Yeo notes the various formulations:

- Records as evidence
- Records as a kind of evidence
- Records providing evidence
- Evidence being obtained using records

Early archival theorists, including the British archival theorist Hilary Jenkinson and the American archival theorist Theodore Schellenberg, emphasized the evidential role of records.[22] This focus continues into the present, permeating many aspects of archival scholarship, practice, and work.

Some scholarship attempts to push against this synonymous relationship between records and evidence.[23] Deploying the term "recordation," Canadian archival studies scholar Brien Brothman defines records "as tokens involved in an ongoing social exchange process, one involving unending mutual cultural negotiation of meaning between people and objects."[24] This definition emerges from Brothman's articulation of three hypotheses concerning notions of record and evidence. The first is that significant temporal differences exist between the concepts. The second is that archivists' attempts to bridge these temporal differences have resulted in theoretical and methodological incoherence. The final hypothesis suggests that archivists' actions to reinforce professional identity and settle the nature of the archivists' social responsibilities underlie attempts to establish the two concepts' semantic value and relationship. In other words, archivists' efforts to give meaning to the relationship between records and evidence and the forces of institutionalization and professionalization shape one another. This effort also reflects an intricate play of knowledge and power. In this light, evidence and records are always contextual, always involving negotiation between people at various times.

Building on Brothman, American archival studies scholar Kimberly Anderson analyzes the sociocultural dimensions of the concepts of record and evidence, noting that they arise from a particular view of time linked to colonial, empirical, and scientific projects. In response, she reconceptualizes a record as "an intentional, stable, and semantic structure that moves in time."[25] In light of this reconceptualization, Anderson outlines three types of records. The first is documentary records, which are identical to traditional documentary forms of archival records and include audiovisual materials and actions in a physically captured form. The second is oral records. She astutely notes that oral records occur in many contexts and coexist with documentary recordkeeping within communities. The third is kinetic records, which include dance, ritual, craft, and sport—each with historical lineages and semantically stable ways of being performed.[26]

Anderson places oral records and kinetic records under the broader category of event-oriented records. Event-oriented records call for a shared space-time between a creator and a perceiver for transmission. These records require channeling an

ongoing succession of movements where time is not fixed. These remain the most difficult for Western and English-speaking archivists to recognize as records, as they are the furthest removed from captured forms and linear conceptions of time. More research remains to be done in this area.

Anderson also reveals some of the shortfalls in Yeo's definition. She notes that his definition entails linear time in which the past and present are differentiated and "temporal endings" are possible. She also notes the unavoidable idea of "pastness" necessary in his definition that records are created by people or their proxies who either engaged in or observed the documented activity. In turn, his formulation forfeits room for an enduring present existing outside of the conceptual break between past and future, though he comments that records can be created while the activity is in progress. Consequently, his description fails to bypass the implicit requirements for fixity and externalization present in many definitions of a record. Such requirements, among others, restrict the archival worldview to a linear passage of time in which evidence relies on pastness for assessment.[27]

In light of Anderson's article, American archival studies scholar Tonia Sutherland implicitly takes up the call to seriously engage with a form of kinetic records that she coins "gestural records." She points to the Katherine Dunham Technique[28] as an example of gestural records. Conceptualizing the gestural record as a codified, culturally informed, and embodied record, Sutherland argues, opens archives to modes of cultural expression that existing Western archival practices might otherwise silence or render invisible. She notes that the gestural record can communicate meaning and satisfies the record characteristics of content, context, and structure, as well as representing the past. Sutherland also notes that gestural records can maintain and preserve cultural context and represent a culturally informed African diasporic past. Through enlarging archival conceptions of records, we craft capacity to conceive the archives of the African diaspora: "embodied records held in concert with other tangible records (e.g., Sutherland analyzes the Katherine Dunham archives in tandem with the Dunham technique) described in culturally affirming terms and cared for—with dignity and trust—by the people and communities who created them."[29]

Records and Memory

Like Anderson, Koorie archival studies scholar Shannon Faulkhead explores the sociocultural dimensions of the concept of a record but more fully centers it in relationship to memory. She enters the discussion suggesting that an appropriate definition of a record is "any account regardless of form, that preserves 'memory or knowledge of facts and events.' A record can be a document, an individual's memory, an image, or a recording. It can also be an actual person, a community, or the land itself."[30] The defining characteristics of a record here are knowledge and

memory, not evidence. Centering the relationship between people, communities (non-Indigenous and Indigenous), and records, she notes that records are essential sources of knowledge that interact with individuals and communities on various levels through time and space. Records are not just pieces of paper, recordings, images, or multimedia materials. This expansive conception of records acknowledges that records flow from one form and cultural perspective to another (e.g., the oral and written). It also reveals that the concept of records is messier than represented within Western archival processes.

Bastian's notion of an alternative cultural archive further reveals the messiness of records and represents a radical departure from mainstream Western archival processes. She proposes Carnival in the US Virgin Islands as an example of an alternative archive where one can find some aspects of cultural archives, including cultural performances and events, that do not conform to traditional notions of records.[31] This is similar to Anderson's notion of event-oriented records. Like Sutherland, Bastian suggests that cultural archives can fit within the three established elements of records: structure, content, and context, and work from that framework. She concludes that she has barely scratched the surface in terms of imagining the possibilities of records within the context of cultural archives. More work remains to flesh out the possibilities, including understanding how the communities themselves conceptualize records.

South African archival studies scholar Verne Harris reflects further on memory. He does not necessarily muse on the relationship between memory and records, but rather memory and archives. Still, his formulation proves helpful next to Faulkhead's formulation of records as a springboard for memory and Bastian's conception of cultural archives. Harris notes that his understanding of "archives" is defined by three fundamental movements or attributes: one, a trace on, or in a surface; two, a surface with the quality of exteriority; and three, an act of deeming such a trace to be worthy of protection, preservation, and the other interventions that are called archival.[32] This understanding of archives is more tied to mainstream Western archival processes than Faulkhead's notion of a record and Bastian's notion of a cultural archive. Unlike Anderson, Harris maintains externalization as a definitional quality.

Records and Becoming

In the article "Modelling the continuum as paradigm shift in recordkeeping and archiving processes, and beyond," Australian archival studies scholar Frank Upward provides a personal reflection on records and the records continuum.[33] He argues that the continuum is a fully fledged paradigm shift that replaces the life-cycle worldview—the essential difference between the two worldviews centers around the relationship between time and space. Whereas the life-cycle worldview views

notions of time and space as different, the continuum worldview views space-time as a continuum. Hence, Upward sees the records continuum model as a tool for perceiving and analyzing complexity, providing multidimensional views of recordkeeping and archiving, at the point of creation, within groups, and at organizational and interorganizational levels.[34] Within this multidimensional, concentric, and iterative framework, records are in a constant state of becoming.

As Australian archival studies scholar Susan McKemmish further elaborates, continuum thinking views the creation of records "in the context of social and organizational activity (proto record-as-trace), their capture into record systems (record-as-evidence), organization within the framework of a personal, [academic], or corporate archive (record-as-personal/corporate memory), and pluralization as collective archives (record-as-collective memory)."[35] Alluding to the dynamic nature of the model, she continues, "while a record's content and structure can be seen as fixed, in terms of its contextualization, a record is 'always in a process of becoming'."[36] Through this perspective, the creation of records and archives is a constantly shifting process of recontextualization.

Dutch archival studies scholar Eric Ketelaar provides a parallel interpretation of records and their creation as a constantly shifting process of recontextualization. Referencing Cook's idea that the record is a "mediated and everchanging construction," Ketelaar notes that the record is "open yet enclosed, it is 'membranic,' the membrane allowing the infusing and exhaling of values which are embedded in each and every activation."[37] He goes on to note that "every activation of the archive not only adds a branch . . . or the semantic genealogy of the record and the archive. Every activation also changes the significance of earlier activations."[38] Mobilizing the record includes various actions undertaken by the creator, user, and archivist, including interacting, intervening, interrogating, and interpreting the record. All those actions that reflect the activation of the record leave a fingerprint "affect[ing] retrospectively all earlier meanings, or to put it differently: we can no longer read the record as our predecessors have read that record."[39]

Records and Agency

More recent work in archival studies has begun exploring the relationship between records and agency. This relationship tracks how records affect what users do and impact and transform how reality discloses itself to users. As agents, records contain the capacity and power to affect users positively and negatively. Records can fill gaps, help move toward a decolonizing or liberatory praxis, or refuse to do either, remaining opaque. Records can also expose the ongoing, and at times oppressive, realities out of which they emerge. By reconceptualizing records as agents, it is possible to expand conceptualizations of records beyond evidence or information,

displace institutional, top-down, and narrowly constructed definitions, and center how members and volunteers of community archives conceptualize records.

American archival studies scholars Jessica Tai, Jimmy Zavala, Joyce Gabiola, Gracen Brilmyer, and Michelle Caswell, for instance, have introduced the notion of records "as dynamic, sentient, and generative agents, capable of inciting spectral presence and moving people into new ways of being."[40] Their conceptualization of records as agents emerged from focus group research with members of community archives in Southern California. The authors note that two themes consistently appeared in the focus group data. The first is community members conceive of records as having lives of their own. This notion of records centers users of community archives, whereas several other definitions of records are institution-centric and center notions of evidence and information. As agents, records are saturated with a self-governing sense of purpose and will. They embody the voices of past lives, which users can activate for several purposes, including triggering the emergence of hidden narratives and new meanings, generating affect and emotions with members of communities, and inciting critical connections within communities that collapse or move beyond the past, present, and future. The second theme is that members talk about records as haunted presences that reflect the symbolic annihilation and silences in mainstream historical narratives. The authors conclude by noting that more work remains to fully understand how members of community archives talk about the agency of records.

Most of the existing literature develops concepts of records through conceptual, theoretical, or narrowly constructed approaches that lean toward institution-centricity. This focus results in a lack of attention to how a broad swath of record-makers and record-keepers, including members and volunteers of community and grassroots archives, conceptualize records and how such conceptualizations align or misalign with existing definitions. In light of this review of the scholarship, what follows are the next steps. That is, looking more closely at the social contexts of how records are conceptualized and bringing grassroots and community archives into the fold.

Research Design

Author Positionality

Before outlining the methodology, I will touch on how I arrived at this research. My research emerges from several years of thinking with scholars who have written about archives, power, silences, and records. The scholars include Michel Rolph-Trouillot, who argues that archives play a critical role in unequal power structures that create and reinforce historical narratives; Rodney Carter, who examines the relationship between archives and silences; Michelle Caswell, who considers

community archives as central tools for combating such silences and what she coins "symbolic annihilation"; Verne Harris, who writes on the archival record as a sliver of a sliver of a window into the archival process; and Ricky Punzalan and Michelle Caswell who call for critical approaches in the archival discipline.[41]

A constellation of events has also run parallel and converged with these research interests. I'll mention one moment when I was a librarian, archivist, and curator at the University of Virginia Library. In 2020, I worked with a donor who donated several items related to the Madison County Grand United Order of Odd Fellows Lodge, which was part of the first Black fraternal and social order in the United States of America. While Nancy Garnett-Williams, the donor, blessed the library with some items, she retained other parts of the collection. This move begged many questions, including a few about community, grassroots, and Black archival practice. What possibilities are opened and foreclosed for such practices when donating items to predominately white supremacist and settler institutions? What does Black archival theory and practice look like? What do community and grassroots theory and archival practice look like? Who are the unofficial archivists and record-keepers? I didn't have the answers to these questions, but I consider this research project as a beginning attempt at answering some of them.

As I am currently a PhD student at the University of Michigan, it makes sense to answer these questions and dig where I study and live. I am therefore exploring how community and grassroots archives in the United States conceptualize records and how these conceptualizations inform archival programs and practices. I choose records as my object of observation and analysis within the context of community and grassroots archives for several reasons. The first is their conceptual richness, which points to a healthy and vigorous archival discipline. The merging of such a rich concept with another timely topic within the discipline, community and grassroots archives, helps to continue the move toward renewing the discipline. The second interrelated reason is that by placing the concept of records in the community space, my object of study emerges: how concepts of records are largely contingent on larger social projects and require tracking broader configurations of power.

As I proceed with this research, I am mindful that I am not just a researcher. I am also a manifestation of many other relations/relationships, including being Black, male, US-educated, heterosexual, cisgender, nondisabled, and the son of Haitians from Gonaives, Haiti. I am sensitive to approaching these community archives as more than just an intellectual exercise and remain mindful of the complexities of my positionality in relation to them.

Methods

From August 2021 to October 2021, I interviewed ten members and volunteers at five grassroots and community archives. The University of Michigan Institutional Review Board approved the study prior to initial data collection. Two sites are in Detroit, Michigan; one site is in Kaneohe, Hawaii; another is in Boston, Massachusetts; and one site is in Lexington, Kentucky. I conducted these interviews via Zoom. I sought the permission of the interviewees to be recorded and used Otter.ai to transcribe these audio recordings. Using NVivo, I analyzed emerging themes using the constant comparative method and procedures developed in grounded theory.

Gaining access to the sites proved an ongoing, negotiated, and dynamic process, which I slowly achieved in several interrelated ways. The first was through existing contacts, relationships, and social networks. The second was by approaching the communities with their existing needs and wants in mind. The third was by contacting key contacts and gatekeepers. Some of the contacted sites did not reply or declined to participate in the study. All five of the sites in this study eventually decided to interview and collaborate by the end of August 2021.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with members and volunteers who serve formal roles at the sites. I developed the interview questions in consultation with one of my advisors, with a focus on tracking interviewee thoughts on two core elements. The first is their conceptualization of records. The second is how their conceptualizations inform archival programs and practices. I asked interviewees about their thoughts on what materials their archives collects and preserves, the word "records," some of the themes in the literature (e.g., memory), and the relationship between "records" and the themes.[42] I also asked about the relationship between collecting and preserving materials and how those inform archival programs and practices. I ended the interview by giving interviewees the opportunity to ask questions or express their thoughts on topics that may not have been covered in the discussion. This approach allowed me to gain detailed understandings of interviewees' thoughts from their points of view using their own words.[43]

Findings

The findings reveal that members' and volunteers' conceptualization of records and how these conceptualizations inform archival programs and practices are varied; require a conceptual shift around the relationship between records, programs, and practices; and require tracking power and legitimacy.[44] The interviewees formulated diverse relationships between records and documentation, evidence, memory, representation, becoming, and agency, which are subject to larger interventions and build, challenge, and confirm existing definitions.

The findings also trouble the notion that the concept of records determines archival programs and practices unidirectionally. Instead, interviewees described relationships between concepts of record and archival programs and practices as not necessarily linear but recursive, with records, programs, and practices informing and generating one another. In this section, I elaborated upon members' and volunteers' multifaceted conceptualizations of records; how such views point to a looping relationship between records, programs, and practices; and the influence of power and legitimacy on conceptualizing records, programs, and practices.

Finding 1: Conceptualizing Records

Members and volunteers formulated a rich set of articulations around the concept throughout the research sites. They formed conceptions of records that challenge and confirm existing notions of records with an eye toward a larger set of ongoing negotiations and interventions, of which their archives and archival work play a part. For example, Interviewee 3 (I3), reflecting on their work with the Black Bottom Archives, complicates the relationship between records and evidence:

> . . . there is a kind of requirement or an implicit assumption that the records are evidence that something happened. Whereas my perspective, personally, is very much that the evidence might not be found in a paper or a particular document. The evidence is the fact that Black people have existed here for a while and that in and of itself is evidence enough that this history is important and deserves to be archived and preserved. There is no need to provide evidence for its validity, or like its importance. People's memories are evidence enough like I interviewed an elder who kept a program from one of her church performances, right, like, that's evidence enough. It doesn't need any other things. Just knowing that exists is enough. (I3)

In the larger goal and mission to preserve the stories of former Black Bottom residents, I3's statement presents an ongoing effort to trouble the relationship between records and evidence. In turn, moving away from evidence, they center memory. Pushing back against a synonymous relationship between records and evidence, I3 notes that BBA works to center, archive, and preserve the memories of former Black Bottom residents. This rejection of an interchangeable relationship between records and evidence points to I3's articulation of a Black archival practice, or in other words, a relationship to memory and evidence that asserts the intricacies of how Black life is lived, documented, and remembered. In turn, I3 constructs records as any account that preserves memory that keeps visible the presence and experiences of Black Bottom residents that would have been otherwise forgotten or neglected. This conceptualization also points to BBA's embeddedness within the larger project of "Black memory work" to keep visible the existence and experiences of Black people that might have been otherwise erased or ignored.

Another interviewee (I6), working at the Hula Preservation Society, similarly centers memory:

> [Hula Preservation Society's] work is in memory. Our work is in experiences that these elders have had in their lives, the knowledge they have accumulated, and the teachings that they have passed on. And so, memory is a key component of passing on cultural practices and traditions and story and history, especially through dance. You cannot be a master dancer unless you have memorization because there are certain things you must . . . in Hawaiian, in hula, there is traditional hula, which we call *hula kahiko*. Those are things many of our elders believe should not be changed. They have been passed down the way they that they have to . . . they have not changed very much in very many generations. They are the same thing passed down. And in that involves memorization, memory, and remembering what the understanding behind the reason for that dance or the story is that's being told, the historical content and context. (I6)

In the larger goal to preserve the experiences, life stories, knowledge, insights, and historical materials of elders, I6 conceptualizes records as any account that preserves memory and knowledge of cultural practices and traditions. Through different yet inseparable experiences and histories, both I3 and I6 conceive two different formulations of records centering on memory.

Several other interviewees articulated concepts of records that hold close to existing definitions. One interviewee (I4) from the Faulkner Morgan Archive notes that the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about records is "dusty papers, yellow and brittle" and "shelves . . . [of] aligned boxes of archival records." An interviewee (I1) from the Black Bottom Archives notes, "records is something being preserved." In addition, Interviewee 9 from the Detroit Sound Conservancy notes "records as documents." Interviewee 10 from the Detroit Sound Conservancy notes that records made them "think of documentation. It also made [them] think of vinyl records. But [they] like using the word 'record' instead of 'documentation.' It seems to encompass more. And that it is definitely a central focus of the Detroit Sound Conservancy."

Members and volunteers also formulated varied views on the relationship between records, becoming, representation, and agency. Interviewee 2, working at the Detroit Sound Conservancy, initially notes that a record is "some bit of history or material or artifact that is given enough context both kind of within a broader collection, but also within history, that it can kind of go from being just a thing to a record, something that you can look up and find, and kind of make sense of in a broader context." In further thinking about the relationship between records, shifting contexts, and becoming, I2 uses Detroit musician Roy Brooks as a departure point:

> . . . in the moment of him being a musician, every performance was a new act of becoming what he was as an artist, and as kind of a person and as a musician. And as a creative. Anybody who saw him play in those moments was impacted in a certain

way, and they would have memories of said performance. Maybe people snap some photographs, or some people recorded cassette tapes of the performances. And those each became records of their own kind for whatever personal collections. But I think of in the moment. And this is kind of maybe like a romantic way of seeing kind of music and art, but I think the beautiful thing of music and art is that it's a constant act of becoming. Every new kind of sound or representation of creativity is an act of becoming, but it's very ephemeral. It's there and then it's gone. In some ways the act of becoming vis a vis a more kind of professional record—and by professional, I mean records as created by and overseen by archivists—is a formalization of that becoming. (I2)

I2's statements reflect a creative and expansive understanding of records as processual and both existing before actually being fixed for entry into an archives and existing as fixed content in a repository. I2 also goes on to formulate a relationship between records and representation:

Well, I guess in some ways, record is also just a representation. It's potentially a representation of a memory. Detroit Sound Conservancy's work is about representing the music and the history of the music from the perspective of the people involved and the people kind of connected to it. It's kind of representation in that way and saying, you know, what these records or these artifacts, like these are kind of a representation of this history and this moment, and this music and this culture. I think probably coming back to the community-based archiveness of what we do, I think it's like who, I guess when creating a record, it's the question of who created this record? And who or what were they representing when they created said record? (I2)

Interviewee 8, who also works at the Detroit Sound Conservancy, describes records as agents that can reveal answers to user inquiries:

So, agency is one of those cornerstones of a repository period. And so, the records give the questioner a voice . . . it's the voice . . . the agency is the actual carrying out of the answer to the query that a human being would have about the music or the musicians, their lives, or how they responded with the art to what society was doing or being. So, the agency is actually the power. It's the power in motion. Agency is the records working. It's the records speaking. So, agency gives you that power to accomplish something. It's the greasy fries and potatoes. It makes things go. So, agency is very important. And the records provide that agency to the lives and contributions of the people who made these records. So, I really love the idea of Detroit Sound Conservancy providing this agency to people who are trying to grow the human being, who tried to grow the community, who tried to grow the history books, and tried to grow the reality and understanding of that reality. Agency is very important. (I8)

The breadth of conceptualizations found within this small sample of members and volunteers suggests that many other members and volunteers at these and other community archives are also formulating varied conceptualizations of records. I2 notes, "records are not just there for preservation, they are there for all of these other

things. They are there for representation, they are there for claiming evidence. They are there for folks to create agency or become agents of X thing." I3 notes,

> The reality is that folks have all types of conceptualizations about what records are and how they are collected. Can we think about all the informal ways that these things are actively being preserved, that memory is being kept in our physical bodies, in our energetic bodies, in our homes, in our lives, in our relationships, that are outside of the confines of these more traditional structures that we want to think about like this is a record. And this is what it means to keep it and this is how you preserve it. (I3)

While these articulations largely align with existing definitions within the literature, they demonstrate that members and volunteers do not define records in one way and are conceptualizing records for larger purposes, including documenting the experiences, perspectives, and voices of residents in a formerly Black neighborhood, sharing and passing on cultural knowledge and memory, or preserving LGBTQ stories. As Interviewee 5 from The History Project notes, "if you want to learn about the past and the queer community, you can't just rely on what might typically be defined as a record by a mainstream archival institution."

Finding 2: Records, Programs, and Practices

The second finding reveals that programs, practices, and conceptualizations of records are co-constitutive and part of an iterative process. In other words, archival programs and practices generate the records. Records generate the archival programs and practices. And sometimes, the records, programs, and practices are one and the same. I3 from the Black Bottom Archives notes:

> . . . how we work is deeply tied to how we conceptualize our work and the importance of our work. And kind of the theory behind what we want to do. And it just means that we are imperfect and that things are changing. We see ourselves in a very itera-tive process of developing this archive, where it's like here's the thing now. In a year, it's going to look different. It's going to be different. We're going to be in a different place. In five years, it's going to look different, it's going to be different, we're going to be in a different place. And just continuing to like move through that without feeling like we have to reach a destination or have a particular thing in order for us to be successful as an archive. (I3)

Interviewee 3 goes on to note the importance of remaining accountable to community throughout what is an ongoing and evolving process:

> I think one other way that comes to mind around the relationship between how we conceptualize records and how we do our work is the importance of being account-able to community, my relationship to the city, and my family's relationship to the city. It means making and taking great care to ensure that I am directly accountable to advisors and elders who are Black Bottom residents or have family who are Black Bottom residents. I'm constantly getting feedback and looking for feedback from

community about how [the archive] needs to look. Before we launched our website, we did a few months of intentional community listening and feedback sessions about what should be on the site. Who should we talk to? How can we make sure that folks can access it? How do you want to access it? We wanted to make sure we're accountable to all the range of users and people who want to access our site and continue to do that. (I3)

Several other members and volunteers also spoke at length about accountability to community when speaking to the fluid and dynamic boundaries between records, programs, and practices. Interviewee 6 from the Hula Preservation Society notes:

. . . the main driving force when we're making practices, programs, and processes is that the items are cultural heritage materials. We have to pay attention to who gave us the material and what do they want us to do with it? What is the best way to not only preserve them, but to present them? And the materials are going to inform us how we should begin to tell the story of an elder. Because see, we don't just put the material up and say, this is a drum from 1930. No. We use the people that gave us that drum to tell the story. We use the drum and other items to tell the life story of this person, and to string along all of these items in order to share the life of this person. So, it's always tied back to that elder and their life and what they gave to the Hawaiian community to help preserve hula. (I6)

In addition to cultural context, interviewees also referenced the influence of finances, funding, and sustainability when it comes to the shifting connections between records, programs, and practices. Interviewee 7 from the Detroit Sound Conservancy notes:

Everything has to get used. For example, we rebuilt the Blue Bird stage and made it into a mobile programming. We don't just use it as a static object. We made it so that it can be played on, performed on, and used. So, I think part of our programming is that we don't have the money to just sit around and put things behind velvet ropes. Everything's got to work. That Club Heaven sound system better turn on at some point. We can't have objects d'art, you know, sitting around. Things got to move. The Blue Bird stage can move. We can perform on it. Different artists can perform on it. Hopefully, some days it goes back to the neighborhood. But in the meantime, it's there to tell a story. (I7)

Interviewee 7 notes that the Blue Bird stage is a mobile programming site for DSC, but then in the next breath acknowledges the stage as also a dynamic object and record that evokes an evolving and ongoing story. As both record and programming site, the stage serves the multipronged goals of documenting Detroit's music history through preservation, education, performance, and place-keeping. Interviewee 2 from the Detroit Sound Conservancy, reinforcing the archives' resourceful blending of records, programs, and practices, notes:

The Blue Bird stage and the Heaven Sound system are all intended to be used and utilized. It's not just this thing behind a museum case. Or look at this thing kind of

through a finding aid, but it's playing your records on the sound system and doing a performance on the stage or having your community meeting in the Blue Bird Inn. It's taking something historic and saying how do we use it now? And how can it be kind of used now beyond where I guess it's breaking the wall of like thinking that kind of archiving and history is not only preservation of the past but also making it active in the present. (I2)

In further thinking about the relationship between records, programs, and practices, I2's articulation around actively using the stage and Heaven Sound System for performances, community meetings, and other forms of programs and practices reveals a shift from simply preserving or providing access to the stage, sound system, or other records under DSC's stewardship through a finding aid toward activating them for larger goals not only of preserving the past, but of educating, performing, and place-keeping. I2's formulation centers presentness more so than pastness, proactivity rather than passivity, and it requires a dynamic and open view of how records, programs, and practices are co-constitutive.

Another angle from which these community archives fuse records, programs, and practices is through real-time archiving and the transformation of place. Interviewee 4 from the Faulkner Morgan Archive, speaking on visual records of Kentucky's LGBTQ history, notes:

One of the programs we're working on now and this one's taking forever, thanks to COVID, is a huge history mural. We have the design and the artist who is doing it. It's going to look like a series of building blocks in a way with each block having the name of a person, a site, or an event. Eventually, folks will be able to scan a QR code and go to our website and will be able to read a little about each of those folks. So that's one of the programming things that we're doing. (I4)

Interviewee 7 notes, "I think the best [Detroit Sound Conservancy] program would be the Blue Bird Inn, would be the full archive at the Blue Bird Inn. A living, breathing, community repository that people could see every day. That people could experience as their own and could be amongst the stacks." These excerpts illustrate several points at which records, programs, and practices generate each other for larger purposes of community accountability, sustainability, real-time archiving, and place-keeping.

Finding 3: Power and Legitimacy

Another theme that emerged as members and volunteers conceptualized connections between records, practices, and programs was power and legitimacy. In simple terms, power is the ability to make things happen with access to the means of doing so. The simplest means for human beings to do so is through our body and reach. Other means are language, writing, technology, and so on, which lead to the

ability to reach beyond our bodies and physical locations. So, in a sense, the human world is infused with power and the expression of power.[45]

Furthermore, power is positive and negative. Power can enable and disenable (e.g., colonialism, racism, sexism, etc.). All of this extends to the world of archives and records. While questions of power and legitimacy run through the other two findings, it's still worth observing it more clearly. Within the context of a study examining the relationship between records, programs, and practices, several members and volunteers spoke to the influence and impact of power as both an opening and a closing, both enabling and disenabling. Interviewee 3 from the Black Bottom Archives notes:

> I think in this world that we live in, this capitalist, imperialist hellscape, we don't actually have as much agency as we think we do. The reality is that because we are oppressed people, we're marginalized folks who are working towards our liberation in a lot of ways. I think in my work with Black Bottom Archives and this work of recording history and trying to keep track of what folks want to amplify and preserve. To me, it's about giving agency without trying to legitimize or perform a certain type of record-keeping, but to be like, yeah, this is how we want to do it. This is what you want to share. And how much can I open up a little bit more room for them to have agency in how this story gets told. (I3)

While I3 points to disenabling systems of power like capitalism and imperialism, they also point to how BBA enables and gives agency to former Black Bottom residents. Interviewee 1 from the Black Bottom Archive reiterates BBA's dimensions of empowerment, adding:

> BBA is an agent of change. I think we're an agent of positivity, power, and light. There are different words I can come up with, but BBA and any organizations out there that's doing this kind of work are agents of defense against what we're fighting against. And I don't know how much I can say, but I can say an agent of defense against white supremacy and pretty much any type of oppression on the Black community. (I1)

Interviewee 6 from the Hula Preservation Society also speaks to how power has been used to disenable Native Hawaiian culture and how, in turn, the archive enables the culture:

> . . . see hula was banned at one point. We almost lost the entire Hawaiian culture. Language was banned. Hula was banned. A lot of public, you know, practices were banned. And so, without these people, we wouldn't have any of that nowadays, we wouldn't have anything to look to of our pasts in our culture now. So, we are . . . at HPS it's more about those people and their lives and how they contributed to hula in Hawaii than it is about the single item that they gave or whatnot. (I6)

Speaking to the strategic use of words like "artifact" to describe materials to gain legitimacy, I4 from the Faulkner Morgan Archive also emphasizes the archive as an enabling act for LGBTQ history in Kentucky:

. . . language is power, who gets to access these institutions, and who gets written out of these institutions, that is a form of power. And so, the archive in and of itself, part of our goal is to legitimize the story. And that's one reason I think we have had so much success at the Faulkner Morgan is because we're legitimizing the story that shouldn't exist in a couple of ways . . . we have a social relevance and a social impact that we are trying to perform. And archiving can be an immensely powerful tool to progress. (I4)

These few excerpts illustrate the role power and legitimacy play when members and volunteers think about archives, records, programs, and practices. As this and other findings demonstrate, members' and volunteers' conceptualizations of records, programs, and practices are multifaceted and require viewing the relationship between records, programs, and practices as generative and recursive. Such conceptualizations also demand tracing the conditions that facilitate or impede members' and volunteers' ability to make things happen with the resources to do so.

Discussion

As the first finding demonstrates, members and volunteers of community, grassroots, and nontraditional archives view records as multifaceted and subject to borrowing, negotiation, and intervention for larger concerns, goals, and missions rather than strictly tied to abstract, institutional, or professional notions. Through conceptualizing records in various ways, members and volunteers build, challenge, and confirm existing definitions. Interviewees from different sites note varying relationships that require further examination. For example, interviewees at the Black Bottom Archives articulate a relationship between records and memory that points to members and volunteers theorizing around records and archives to meet the needs, demands, and values of community members rather than to meet preexisting definitions in the archival discipline. Such theorizing reflects "Black archival practice," which is a relationship to memory and evidence that recognizes the complexity of living, documenting, and remembering Black life and "Black memory work," which I define as the production of archives and records that keep visible the presence and experiences of Black peoples that would have been otherwise destroyed or disregarded.[46]

A deeper exploration of such theorizing could galvanize the discipline and field. Interviewees at the Hula Preservation Society also articulated a relationship between records and memory that highlights the archival discipline's still largely disciplinary prejudice toward Western and English-speaking notions of records. This points to the need to develop ideas (e.g., "cultural archives") further to push against such power imbalances.[47] Additionally, HPS interviewees' articulations around records, memory, and hula also point to the analytical power of Anderson's definition of "a record" as "an intentional, stable, and semantic structure that moves in time." This

definition moves beyond the need for records to be fixed and frozen within a linear movement of time, which opens space to acknowledge kinetic records like hula that are ongoingly channeled through a continuing series of moments.[48] Last, the varying conceptualizations of records also point to much-needed research on how records are created and used within multiple contexts, as evidenced by, for instance, members and volunteers working at the intersection of community archives and music archives like the Detroit Sound Conservancy.[49]

The second finding also challenges the separation of records from archival programs and practices. Such a challenge denaturalizes archival theory (e.g., the concept of record) and practice and reveals them both as intertwined social practices that generate each other. More research remains to be done to examine further how records, programs, and practices are co-constituted in community and grassroots archives—two strains of thinking within the archival discipline support this finding. The first reveals the chaos of archival theory and archival practice in real life through a mix of social theory, ethnography, and other social science methods.[50] These works have explored record-making and record-keeping practices in a diverse set of contexts. Common themes across these studies are that archival practice is constituted by a set of uncodified rules, it encompasses a sociocultural dimension, and it is a site of active decision-making that blends theory and practice. The second is a strain of thinking influenced by postmodern theory, highlighting archival theory and practice as interwoven social constructions of realities expressing dominant relations of power.[51] This line of thinking comes into piercing focus in a piece by Schwartz and Cook:

> The practice of archives is the ritualized implementation of theory, the acting out of the script that archivists have set for themselves. Yet the script acted out daily by "line" archivists is rarely derived from a detailed understanding of archival theory, let alone abstract philosophizing, for it is strongly suspected that few practicing archivists read such work. Rather, it is a script formed by the "social magic" of now unquestioned, "naturalized norms." These norms are themselves generalized from past performances (practices) that archivists have collectively anticipated, over generations, would confer on them appropriate legitimacy, authority, and approval.[52]

The third finding points to the need to fully track and flesh out the dimensions and sources of power and legitimacy that inform the archives in the study. More research is needed to examine how power and legitimacy influence members and volunteers and vice versa. Within the context of community archival scholarship, for instance, future work could use the survivor-centered approach to records' theoretical framework to examine the role of power more deeply, in conjunction with the framework's other five principles around participation, shared stewardship, multiplicity, activism, and reflexivity.[53]

There are some limitations to this study. First, given that the interviewees are involved in five community archives in the United States, I did not seek to make generalized claims about how members and volunteers of nontraditional, grassroots,

and community archives conceptualize records and how such conceptualizations inform programs and practices. Moreover, I conducted interviews with specific members of BBA, DSC, FMA, HPS, and THP. I cannot claim that they represent all BBA, DSC, FMA, HPS, and THP members and volunteers, let alone users. Additional research, for instance, will be necessary to investigate how other members and volunteers (e.g., community elders, youths, etc.) understand records and whether their understanding aligns with how records have been kept. While interviews provide rich data, other studies and research designs that include photo-elicitation, focus groups, creating diaries, and ethnography could also unearth the relationship between records, programs, and practices. These other studies would also allow a further enriching, deepening, or troubling of the results from this study.

Conclusion

Throughout this article, we have seen how members and volunteers do not formulate records uniformly but in multifaceted ways tied to larger interventions, such as documenting the experiences, perspectives, and voices of residents in a formerly Black neighborhood; sharing and passing on cultural knowledge and memory; or preserving LGBTQ stories. Such varied views indicate a recursive and generative relationship between archival records, programs, and practices and the need to trace power and legitimacy.

More research through a variety of methods, including semistructured interviews, diary studies, ethnography, focus groups, and photo-elicitation, is needed to bring more members and volunteers into the fold to further expand or trouble the findings in this paper. Additionally, future research areas include more deeply exploring how members and volunteers are theorizing around records and archives to meet the needs, demands, and values of their communities; examining how records, programs, and practices are co-constituted in community and grassroots archives; and investigating the role power and legitimacy play in opening or constraining members' and volunteers' capacity to meet their aims. By examining how volunteers and members conceptualize records, programs, and practices, more possibilities are opened for practitioners and scholars in the archival field to better meet their larger social, ethical, and political obligations.

Appendix: Interview Protocol

Conceptualizing Records: Black Bottom Archives and Detroit Sound Conservancy

Semi-structured Interview Guide

Overarching question: how do members and volunteers of Black Bottom Archives (BBA), Detroit Sound Conservancy (DSC), Faulkner Morgan Archive, Hula Preservation Society, and The History Project conceptualize records, and how do these conceptualizations inform archival programs and practices?

Key areas:

Materials: Laptop and IRB
Total Interview Time: 60 to 90 minutes

Participant Name:
Interviewer Name:
Date:
Time:
Location:

General Introduction
Hi, my name is Sony Prosper. I am a PhD student at the University of Michigan School of Information. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. Today, we will explore how you conceptualize archival records and how this informs the [insert archive]'s archival programs and practices.

This interview will take about 60 to 90 minutes, during which time we'll go through some questions.

It is important to note that your comments will be confidential. Your comments will be combined with other interviews, my observations, and if you are quoted in the final paper, you will not be identified. This interview is entirely voluntary on your part. We can stop at any time you see fit, so please let me know if you at any time want to do so. We can end the interview at that point with no repercussions for you of any kind.

What are your questions, comments, or concerns?

Okay, let's proceed.

Questions

Interviewee Identification

What is your name?

What is your title or role at the archive?

Why did you decide to involve yourself and/or work at the archive?

Conceptualizing Records

What does your archive collect and preserve?

Can you describe the materials that your archive collects and preserves?

- Possible follow-up: How would you describe the materials of this archive to a newcomer?
- Possible follow-up: How do you describe the materials of this archive to other members and volunteers?

What do you call these materials that you have been collecting and preserving?

Share and show a list of words one at a time: record, memory, evidence, representation, becoming, and agency.

- The guiding question for each word: what thoughts does this word evoke?

Share and show a list of all the words.

- Do these words reflect the work you're doing in the archive? If so, how?
- What other words would you use to describe the work at the archive?

Archival Programs and Practices

Could you describe the archive's archival programs and practices?

How do the materials the archive collects and preserves inform archival programs and practices?

- Possible follow-up: What archival programs and practices do you think would best reflect what your archive collects and preserves?
- Possible follow-up: To what extent do you think the materials you collect and preserve inform archival programs and practices?

What informs the archive's archival programs and practices?

Conclusion

What are your concluding comments, questions, or concerns you wish to make about how records are conceptualized and how it informs archival programs and practices, or anything else?

Notes

1. Theo Thomassen, "A First Introduction to Archival Science," *Archival Science* 1 (2001): 373–85, https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02438903.

2. Jeannette Bastian, "The Records of Memory, the Archives of Identity: Celebrations, Texts and Archival Sensibilities," *Archival Science* 13 (2013): 121–31, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-012-9184-3.

3. Mainstream archival institutions refer to institutions primarily practicing and following the Western historical and empirical projects of collecting, holding, and preserving documents tied to the activities of a larger entity (e.g., academic, corporate, state).

4. Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd, "Whose Memories, Whose Archives? Independent Community Archives, Autonomy, and the Mainstream," *Archival Science* 9 (2009): 71–86.

5. Flinn et al., "Whose Memories?"; Rebecka Sheffield, "Community Archives," in *Currents of Archival Thinking,* ed. Heather MacNeil and Terry Eastwood (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2017), 351–76; Elisabeth Kaplan, "We Are What We Collect, We Collect What We Are: Archives and the Construction of Identity," *American Archivist* 63, no.1 (2000): 126–51, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.63.1.h554377531233l05; Dominique Daniel, "Documenting the Immigrant and Ethnic Experience in American Archives," *American Archivist* 73, no. 1 (2010): 82–104, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.73.1.k2837h27wv1201hv; Michelle Caswell, "Seeing Yourself in History: Community Archives in the Fight Against Symbolic Annihilation, *Public Historian* 36, no. 4 (2014): 26–37, https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2014.36.4.26.

6. Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario Ramirez, "'To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing': Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives," *American Archivist* 79, no.1 (2016): 56–81, http://dx.doi.org/10.17723/0360-9081.79.1.56.

7. Michelle Caswell, Alda Allina Migoni, Noah Geraci, and Marika Cifor, "'To Be Able to Imagine Otherwise': Community Archives and the Importance of Representation," *Archives and Records* 38 (2017): 5–26, https://doi.org/10.1080/23257962.2016.1260445; Jimmy Zavala, Alda Allina Migoni, Michelle Caswell, Noah Geraci, and Marika Cifor,"'A Process Where We're All at the Table': Community Archives Challenging Dominant Modes of Archival Practice," *Archives and Manuscripts* 45, no. 3 (2017): 202–15, https://doi.org/10.1080/01576895.2017.1377088.

8. Kathy Eales, "Community Archives: Introduction," *South African Archives Journal* 40 (1998): 11.

9. Verne Harris, "Some Thoughts on the Relationship between the National Archives and Community Archives," *South African Archives Journal* 40 (1998): 36–37.

10. Leisa Gibbons, "Community Archives in Australia: A Preliminary Investigation," *Journal of the Australian Library and Information Association* 69, no. 4 (2020): 451–72, https://doi.org/10.1080/24750158.2020.1831900.

11. Jarrett Drake, "Seismic Shifts: On Archival Facts and Fictions," Medium, August 20, 2018, https://medium.com/community-archives/seismic-shifts-on-archival-fact-and-fictions-6db4d5c655ae, captured at https://perma.cc/Z64R-V6DC.

12. "About the Archives," Black Bottom Archives, http://www.blackbottomarchives.com, captured at https://perma.cc/5L69-BJA9.

13. "About the Archives," Black Bottom Archives.

14. "Vision, Mission, and Goals," Detroit Sound Conservancy, https://detroitsound.org/mission, captured at https://perma.cc/G6ZT-PMKP.

15. "Save the Seeds, Children!," Faulkner Morgan Archive, https://www.faulknermorgan.org/the-archive, captured at https://perma.cc/C828-H56Z.

16. "History," Hula Preservation Society, https://hulapreservation.org/about-hps/history, captured at https://perma.cc/3KB2-X28L.

17. "About," The History Project, https://www.historyproject.org/about, captured at https://perma.cc/3J8J-VM5W.

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19. Richard Pearce-Moses, *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2015).

20 Geoffrey Yeo, "Concepts of Record (1): Evidence, Information, and Persistent Representation," *American Archivist* 70, no. 2 (2007): 315–43, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.70.2.u327764v1036756q.

21 Yeo, "Concepts of Record (1)."

22 Hilary Jenkinson, "British Archives and the War," *American Archivist* 7, no. 1 (1944): 1–17, doi: https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.7.1.k6t126j728mh8405; Theodore Schellenberg, *Modern Archives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

23 British information studies scholar Jonathan Furner implicitly notes that records are not evidence in themselves when defining a record as an artifact that may potentially serve as the source of grounds for believing that a particular event happened. Instead, the emphasis is on potentiality, or in Furner's words, on records "as sources of potentially evidentiary ideas" (2004, 259). Jonathan Furner, "Conceptual Analysis: A Method for Understanding Information as Evidence, and Evidence as Information," *Archival Science* 4 (2004): 233-265, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-005-2594-8. Records can serve as evidence supporting claims or ideas about the past by a wide range of users. This definition also ties in nicely with the notion that evidence is one of a record's affordances. See also Michelle Caswell, "'The Archive' Is Not An Archives: Acknowledging the Intellectual Contributions of Archival Studies," Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture 16, no. 1 (2016).

24 Brien Brothman, "Afterglow: Conceptions of Record and Evidence in Archival Discourse," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 311–42, https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435627.

25 For Anderson, intentionality indicates a record is intended to pass through time and therefore serves as evidence of intention. This is not intentionality in the sense of remembering for posterity, but rather intentionality to make available in the future. Stability refers to semantic stability, where a set of relationships between sign and meaning can be processed, accessed, and interpreted at times in the future. Semantic stability does not correspond to the fixity of physical form. An example is decaying paper, whose texts still have a "fixed" semantic arrangement. The "semantic" in semantic stability refers to a system of signs, indicators, or symbols combined or placed in ways to communicate meaning or purpose. Structure in the definition refers to relationships between parts. The arrangement or order of the parts may change, changing the overall form, but the connections remain between the individual components. Therefore, the relationships are the core of a structure. If the relationships do change, then a new structure is created. Kimberly Anderson, "The Footprint and the Stepping Foot: Archival Records, Evidence, and Time," *Archival Science* 13 (2013): 363.

26 Anderson, "The Footprint and the Stepping Foot," 349–71.

27 Anderson, "The Footprint and the Stepping Foot," 349–71.

28 For a description of the Katherine Dunham Technique—an African and Caribbean style of movement developed by modern dance scholar Katherine Dunham—see https://webpages.scu.edu/ftp/aadh/dpopalisky/winter07/perf6/schloupek_winter07/contributions.htm, captured at https://perma.cc/UBW5-LUKA.

29 Tonia Sutherland, "Reading Gesture: Katherine Dunham, the Dunham Technique, and the Vocabulary of Dance as Decolonizing Archival Praxis," *Archival Science* 19 (2019): 167–83, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-019-09308-w.

30 Shannon Faulkhead, "Connecting through Records: Narratives of Koorie Victoria," *Archives and Manuscripts* 37, no. 2 (2010): 60–88, https://publications.archivists.org.au/index.php/asa/article/view/10037.

31 Jeannette Bastian, "'Play Mas': Carnival in the Archives and the Archives in Carnival: Records and Community Identity in the US Virgin Islands," *Archival Science* 9 (2009): 113–25, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-009-9101-6.

32 Verne Harris, "The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 63–86, https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435631.

33 Frank Upward, "Modelling the continuum as paradigm shift in recordkeeping and archiving processes and beyond," *Records Management Journal* 10, no. 3 (2000): 115–39, http://dx.doi.org/10.4225/03/5805600604f3f.

34 Upward, "Modelling the Continuum."

35 Sue McKemmish, "Placing Records Continuum Theory and Practice," *Archival Science* 1 (2001): 333–59, https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02438901.

36 McKemmish, "Placing Records Continuum Theory and Practice."

37   Eric Ketelaar, "Tacit Narratives: The Meaning of Archives," *Archival Science* 1, no. 2 (2001): 131–41, http://hdl.handle.net/2027.42/41812.

38   Ketelaar, "Tacit Narratives."

39   Ketelaar, "Tacit Narratives."

40   Jessica Tai, Jimmy Zavala, Joyce Gabiola, Joyce, Gracen Brilmyer, and Michelle Caswell, "Summoning the Ghosts: Records as Agents in Community Archives," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* 6 (2019): 1–20, https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol6/iss1/18.

41   Rodney Carter, "Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence," *Archivaria* 61 (2006): 215–33, https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/12541; Caswell, "Seeing Yourself in History, 26–37; Harris, "The Archival Sliver, 63–86; Ricardo L. Punzalan and Michelle Caswell, "Critical Directions for Archival Approaches to Social Justice," *The Library Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (2016): 25–42, https://doi.org/10.1086/684145; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

42   Please see "Appendix: Interview Protocols" at the end of the paper for more detail.

43   Alison Pickard, *Research Methods in Information* (London: Facet Publishing, 2013). I followed the seven stages of the interview process recommended by Alison Pickard: thematizing, designing, interviewing, recording, transcribing, analyzing, and verifying. In the thematizing phase, I decided the central theme to explore was the concept of a record. In the design phase, I created a series of questions related to the concept and how its conceptualization informs archival programs and practice. I decided to interview members, volunteers, and others actively dedicated to the archives being examined. Using NVivo, I analyzed for emerging themes using the constant comparative method and procedures developed in grounded theory.

44   By tracking power, I mean to follow or trace the broader (e.g., systemic, structural, institutional, interpersonal) conditions, context, and dynamics that enable or disenable community members and volunteers of community and grassroots archives to make things happen with access to the means of doing so.

45   Lewis Gordon, "Re-Imagining Liberations," *International Journal of Critical Diversity Studies* 1, no.1 (2018): 11–29, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.13169/intercritdivestud.1.1.0011.

46   See also Tonia Sutherland and Zakiya Collier, "Introduction: The Promise and Possibility of Black Archival Practice," *The Black Scholar* 52, no. 2 (2022):1–6. https://doi.org 10.1080/00064246 .2022.2043722; Sony Prosper, "Interview: Black Bottom Archives Director PG Watkins," *The Black Scholar* 52, no. 2 (2022): 27-42. https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.2022.2042766; and Stacie Williams's articulation of "memory work" in Taylor Moore, "How Will History Museums Remember This Moment," Chicago Magazine, July 1, 2020, https://www.chicagomag.com/arts-culture/july-2020/covid-19-protests-history-museums/.

47   Anderson, "The Footprint and the Stepping Foot," 349–71; Bastian, "'Play Mas,'" 113–25; Bastian, "The Records of Memory," 121–31; Faulkhead, "Connecting through Records," 60–88; Sutherland, "Reading Gesture," 167–83.

48   See Michelle Caswell, "Urgent Archives: Enacting Liberatory Memory Work" (London, UK: Routledge, 2021) for recent work articulating a relationship between conceptualizations of records and time. Caswell specifically explores how white temporal imaginaries are entrenched in dominant Western conceptualizations of records.

49   Verne Harris, *Archives and Justice: A South African Perspective* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2007); Andrew Lau, *Collecting Experiences* (PhD thesis, University of California Los Angeles, 2013).

50   Kalpana Shankar, "Recordkeeping in the Production of Scientific Knowledge: An Ethnographic Study," *Archival Science* 4, nos. 3–4 (2004): 367–82; Victoria Lemieux, "Let the Ghosts Speak: An Empirical Exploration of the 'Nature' of the Record," *Archivaria* 51 (2001): 81–111, https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/12795; Elizabeth Yakel, "The Social Construction of Accountability: Radiologists and Their Record-keeping Practices," *The Information Society* 17, no. 4 (2001): 233–45, https://doi.org/10.1080/019722401753330832; Karen F. Gracy, "Documenting Communities of Practice: Making the Case for Archival Ethnography," *Archival Science* 4, nos. 3–4, (2004): 335–65, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-005-2599-3.

51   Brothman, "Afterglow," 311–42; Ketelaar, "Tacit Narratives," 131–41; Harris, *Archives and Justice*.

52 Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz, "Archives, Records, and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 171–85, https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435620.

53 Michelle Caswell, "Toward a Survivor-Centered Approach to Records Documenting Human Rights Abuse: Lessons from Community Archives," *Archival Science* 14 (2014b): 307–22, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-014-9220-6.

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Sony Prosper is a PhD student at the University of Michigan School of Information. His interests are broadly the social, cultural, and historical contexts of archival and recordkeeping practices, museum practices, intangible cultural heritage, and technology use, particularly in the United States and the Caribbean. His research has concerned archival return and repatriation, how members and volunteers of community and grassroots archives conceptualize records, and how their conceptualizations inform archival programs and practices. He holds an MLIS with a concentration in archives management from Simmons University (formerly known as Simmons College).