Reciprocal Archival Imaginaries

The Shifting Boundaries of "Community" in Community Archives

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ABSTRACT Drawing on data collected from focus groups composed of users of five different community-based archives sites in Southern California, and using Benedict Anderson's book *Imagined Communities* as a conceptual foundation, this article examines community archives users' imaginations, anxieties, and affect regarding other archival users and the shifting boundaries of their community. This article asks, How do members of marginalized groups imagine fluctuating boundaries of their community by specifically conceptualizing other archival users? Community-based archives users, through this research, demonstrate their imaginaries about how their community is defined – not only by community members but also by outside forces. Our data shows a wide range of affective responses to users' imaginaries; some see themselves as drawing on a community history that they are a part of and solidifying the scope of their community, while others are anxious about new "members" or outsiders who narrow or expand the bounds of a community. This article proposes the term *reciprocal archival imaginaries* – the circular, continually entangled relationships between archival users, their imaginaries, and community-based archives. Given the unique relationships between community-based archives and users – who also hold other roles as volunteers, donors, and board members and influence archival practice – reciprocal archival imaginaries reflect the ways in which users' imaginaries and archives inform one another. Not only do community-based archives contribute to the formation of imaginaries, but imaginaries also inform

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archival processes and decision-making. This research, located alongside other archival scholarship that explores community archives and affect, emphasizes the importance and influence of community imaginations on the archives that form them.

RÉSUMÉ Partant des données recueillies auprès de groupes de discussion composés d'usagers de cinq différentes archives communautaires du sud de la Californie, et utilisant le livre *Imagined Communities* de Benedict Anderson comme base conceptuelle, cet article explore les imaginations, les craintes et l'affect des utilisateurs des archives communautaires par rapport aux autres utilisateurs de ces archives et aux frontières mouvantes de leur communauté. Cet article pose la question suivante: comment les membres de groupes marginalisés imaginent les frontières changeantes de leur communauté en se représentant les autres utilisateurs des archives? Les utilisateurs des archives communautaires, à travers cette recherche, nous font part de leurs imaginaires et de la façon dont leur communauté est définie, non seulement par les membres de cette dernière, mais également par des pressions extérieures. Nos données démontrent une large gamme de réponses affectives aux imaginaires des utilisateurs; certains se perçoivent comme puisant dans l'histoire d'une communauté dont ils font partie et consolidant les limites de leur communauté, tandis que d'autres sont inquiets de voir de nouveaux « membres » ou des étrangers élargir ou restreindre les frontières d'une communauté. Cet article propose le terme *imaginaires archivistiques réciproques* : la relation circulaire, continuellement entremêlée, entre les utilisateurs des archives, leurs imaginaires et les archives communautaires. Étant donné la singularité des relations entre les archives communautaires et les usagers – qui y tiennent également d'autres rôles en tant que bénévoles, donateurs, membres des conseils d'administration, et ainsi influencent les pratiques archivistiques – les imaginaires archivistiques réciproques sont un reflet de la façon dont les imaginaires des usagers et les archives se nourrissent mutuellement. Non seulement est-ce que les archives communautaires contribuent à façonner les imaginaires, mais les imaginaires nourrissent également les processus et les décisions archivistiques. Cette recherche, sise en parallèle d'autres recherches en archivistique qui se penchent sur les archives communautaires et l'affect, met l'accent sur l'importance et l'influence des imaginaires de la communauté sur les archives qui les façonnent.

So I think this is what I've learned. This organization [the Little Tokyo Historic Society archives], now people are turning to us to ask for our advice, our views, our position on it, so, you know, we'll fight the battles where we need to and preserve the history here. In the Japanese culture there's a saying, Kodomo no tame ni, *which is, "for the sake of the children." So everything from the immigrants, it was all done for the sake of their children, and their children, grandchildren, everything – and it's still very powerful today. So, we don't want to lose the image of Little Tokyo, but we need to move forward. We can look in the past, but we need to use it for reaching out into the future and honouring everything that was built by them and founded by them.*[2]

Introduction

How do community-based archives affect the ways in which communities imagine themselves? And how does this perception subsequently influence community-based archives? Communities are constantly being shaped and reshaped, as members negotiate the boundaries of similarities and difference within their communities. Andrew Flinn notes the inherent complexity in defining a community:

> Definitions of what a "community" might be are of course particularly complex and fluid and capable of multiple interpretations. . . . An awareness of these complexities is essential if we are to examine what community archives and memory might contribute to community identity or cohesion. . . . I prefer to be both broader and more explicit by referring to a community as a group who define *themselves* on the basis of locality, culture, faith, background, or other shared identity or interest.[3]

The definition of a community is also temporally situated: community boundaries change over time, informed by what a community has been in the past, and are continually being redefined for the future. These temporal aspects (what

2 Michael Okamura (Little Tokyo Historical Society), interview with Michelle Caswell, Joyce Gabiola, and Jimmy Zavala, 7 January 2017.

3 Andrew Flinn, "Community Histories, Community Archives: Some Opportunities and Challenges," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 28, no. 2 (2007): 153 (emphasis in original).

has been, what is, and what might be) are continuously (co)constructed by community members through not only what they witness but also what they imagine.[4] Specifically, through interacting with archives, community members form what Michelle Caswell terms *archival imaginaries*: "the dynamic way in which communities creatively and collectively re-envision the future through archival interventions in representations of the shared past."[5] Like communities, archival imaginaries are constantly and collectively being formed, reshaped, and redefined by different members; and thus a shared understanding of the past and a collective vision of a future are produced specifically through members' interactions with archives. Caswell tells us, "Through the archival imaginary, the past becomes a lens to the future; the future is rooted in that which preceded it. Through the archival imaginary, the future can be conceived through kernels of what was possible in the past."[6] Community-based archives help shape community imaginaries; however, little is known about how community-based archives inform or are informed by such imaginaries.

Benedict Anderson, in his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, examines the concept of *community* through kinship, power, and boundaries enacted by individual members as well as collective forces. Conceptualizing the formation of communities through national identity and nationalism, Anderson states that a nation's community "is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."[7] He discusses many ways through which communities imagine themselves: through geographies and spaces, language and linguistic traditions, as well as documents and other materials – all of which form and inform what is remembered and what is forgotten about a community. He emphasizes that communities not only define themselves by who (and where) they are, but also are defined by outside forces – who they are not. This

4 For a literary tracing of the term *imaginary*, see Anne J. Gilliland and Michelle Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries: Imagining the Impossible, Making Possible the Imagined," *Archival Science* 16, no. 1 (2016): 53–75.

5 Michelle Caswell, "Inventing New Archival Imaginaries: Theoretical Foundations for Identity-Based Community Archives," in *Identity Palimpsests: Archiving Ethnicity in the U.S. and Canada*, ed. Dominique Daniel and Amalia S. Levi (Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books, 2014), 35–55.

6 Ibid.

7 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2016), 6.

work, juxtaposed with archival literature that discusses communities' relationships with archives and imagination, provides multiple avenues for reflecting on the shifting boundaries of communities as well as on the ways imaginaries form and influence archives.

Drawing on data collected from focus groups consisting of users of five different community archives sites in Southern California and using Anderson's *Imagined Communities* as a conceptual foundation, this article examines community archives users' imaginations, anxieties, and affects regarding other archival users and the shifting boundaries of their communities. Using grounded theory as a method of inquiry, we noticed prominent themes emerging from the data that related to the ways participants imagined their communities. After recognizing these themes, we also saw parallels between our data and Anderson's book. Anderson's conceptualization of how nations are imagined, as we will discuss below, provides a critical touchstone for thinking through how communities form imaginaries around the archives that represent them. Although we are inspired by Anderson's frameworks, we are simultaneously troubled by applying a nationalist framework to the experiences of diverse communities, not all of which are associated with particular national identities or use archives as such. Anderson's framework, however, does provide a conceptual scaffolding for this article's examination of users' imaginaries and the ways imaginaries can be at play on both smaller- and larger-than-national scales. We therefore utilize aspects of Anderson's book as springboards to understanding how communities are imagined by their members, but we also expand outward from his framework to allow the empirical data we have collected to represent more nuanced understandings of communities and to illustrate *how* understandings of community are variegated, varying, and fluctuating.

The communities in our study ranged in scale. Some community-based archives define their communities broadly; for example, the Southeast Asian Archive at the University of California, Irvine, represents multiple communities from different countries – Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos – who came to the United States as immigrants and refugees. And some, such as the Los Angeles–based Little Tokyo Historical Society, define their communities more narrowly, focusing on "the historical resources, stories, and connections of sites, buildings, and events related to Little Tokyo as an ethnic heritage neighbor-

hood."[8] Thinking through meanings of community is a valuable endeavour as identity-based community archives – unlike mainstream archives, which often purport to represent many communities and cultures and to serve a general audience – scope their collecting policies and materials, and thus draw meaningful boundaries, according to specific communities.

This article asks, How do members of communities marginalized in the US imagine the shifting boundaries of their communities by specifically conceptualizing other users of their community-based archives? Through existing literature, we first illustrate communities' relationships to both mainstream and community-based archives and the ways they form imaginaries around and because of archival material. Next, we describe our research sites and methods, and then discuss our findings. We show three key findings that emerged from our data: (1) the ways in which community members create and define their communities through shared ideologies, parallel experiences, and political solidarity in contrast to dominant culture; (2) the ways in which the spatial, linguistic, and material facets of an archive facilitate the formation of imaginaries; and (3) the two affective responses to the ways in which users imagine the shifting boundaries of their communities – feelings of responsibility and anxiety. Finally, we discuss these findings in relation to Anderson's theoretical work on imaginaries to show not only how community-based archives facilitate the formation of imaginaries but also how community imaginaries inform archives and archival processes. This research, located alongside other archival scholarship that explores community archives and affect, expands our understanding of the ways in which *community* is continually defined and redefined not only by archival material, but also by community imaginaries, which in turn influence archives.

Literature Review: Community, Archives, Imaginaries

In mainstream archives, marginalized communities are often represented by those in power, although, as Terry Cook emphasizes, a significant shift has occurred in the role of archivists, who have gone from being passive curators of collections to become community facilitators who are accountable to the

8 "About Us," Little Tokyo Historical Society, accessed 27 July 2018, http://www.littletokyohs.org/about-us.html.

communities they serve.[9] Jeannette A. Bastian illustrates the complex international history regarding the ways people in the Caribbean have used records in their collective memory[10] as well as the multiple ways in which colonized people are affected by archival power.[11] And Ricardo L. Punzalan locates narratives hidden in colonial leprosy archives in order to articulate the value of archives in being held accountable to communities. Punzalan highlights the value of records to community-centred work, "not only because they evoked memory, but also because, to . . . quote . . . one doctor, they were used as tangible representations of 'all the things we cannot articulate about our past, about our need to heal in the present and about our desire to foresee a great future.'"[12] Notably, Anne Gilliland has addressed a plethora of ways in which communities engage with archives and community members can use records in support of human rights. Utilizing storytelling methods, she investigates the limits and possibilities of recordkeeping in the years during and after the Yugoslav Wars. By centring on community experiences of records, Gilliland suggests that bureaucratic records "are also part of a web, not only of activities and of the documentation generated thereby, but of differently constructed, and perhaps more importantly, differently experienced recordkeeping realities that all need to be taken into account."[13] This array of works demonstrates the vastness of communities marginalized, represented, and affected by the power of archives, whose stories, memories, and needs have been brought to light through recent archival scholarship.

A recently developed subset of archival studies investigates community-based archives in contrast to mainstream archives – specifically, how they are formed,

9 Terry Cook, "Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community: Four Shifting Archival Paradigms," *Archival Science* 13, no. 2–3 (2013): 95–120.

10 Jeannette Allis Bastian, *Owning Memory: How a Caribbean Community Lost Its Archives and Found Its History* (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2003).

11 Jeannette Allis Bastian, "Whispers in the Archives: Finding the Voices of the Colonized in the Records of the Colonizer," in *Political Pressure and the Archival Record*, ed. Margaret Procter, Michael Cook, and Caroline M. Williams (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2006), 25–43; Jeannette Allis Bastian, "Reading Colonial Records through an Archival Lens: The Provenance of Place, Space and Creation," Archival Science 6, no. 3–4 (2006): 267–84.

12 Ricardo L. Punzalan, "'All the Things We Cannot Articulate': Colonial Leprosy Archives and Community Commemoration," in *Community Archives: The Shaping of Memory*, ed. Jeannette Allis Bastian and Ben Alexander (London: Facet Publishing, 2009), 197–219.

13 Anne J. Gilliland, "Moving Past: Probing the Agency and Affect of Recordkeeping in Individual and Community Lives in Post-Conflict Croatia," *Archival Science* 14, no. 3–4 (2014): 249–74.

used, and perceived. Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd define community-based archives as "collections of material gathered primarily by members of a given community and over whose use community members exercise some level of control."[14] They elaborate, adding that "the defining characteristic of community archives is the active participation of a community in documenting and making accessible the history of their particular group and/or locality *on their own terms*."[15] Building on this, Jarrett Drake critically points out that notions such as *local* and *community-based* can "offer diminishing analytic (and consequently, actionable) value," because "by any metric of the definition of 'community,' one is compelled to characterize literally every archive as a 'community archive.'"[16] He argues, then, that "the field and laborers of 'community archives' should radically reframe its orientation to the work and make clear their political projects" as centring the politics of marginalized communities and the liberatory aims of their archives.[17] He argues that just because an archives is participatory and community based does not necessarily make it liberatory. And, as Elizabeth Crooke notes, "Community and heritage are not only malleable concepts; they are also highly emotive, closely guarded and are used to stake control and define authority."[18]

Thus, community-based archives have been investigated not only as sites where people can see themselves represented in diverse ways in history and in ways that are significant to themselves and their communities but also as sites that have their own forms of presence and absence. For example, Marika Cifor has looked at the affect and embodiment of bodily traces and absences in trans archives,[19] while Diana Kiyo Wakimoto, Christine S. Bruce, and Helen L. Partridge have focused on the role of activism for archivists at queer community

14 Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd, "Whose Memories, Whose Archives? Independent Community Archives, Autonomy and the Mainstream," *Archival Science* 9, no. 1–2 (2009): 71.

15 Ibid., 73 (emphasis in original).

16 Jarrett M. Drake, "Seismic Shifts: On Archival Fact and Fictions," Sustainable Futures (blog), 20 August 2018, accessed 4 December 2018. https://medium.com/community-archives/seismic-shifts-on-archival-fact-and-fictions-6db4d5c655ae.

17 Ibid.

18 Elizabeth Crooke, "The Politics of Community Heritage: Motivations, Authority and Control," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16, no. 1–2 (2010): 27.

19 Marika Cifor, "Presence, Absence, and Victoria's Hair: Examining Affect and Embodiment in Trans Archives," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (2015): 645–49.

archives.[20] As Michelle Caswell, Alda Allina Migoni, Noah Geraci, and Marika Cifor demonstrate, community-based archives have power to radically alter people's perceptions of their identities through more accurate and diverse representation.[21] However, they also have their own ways of excluding or erasing identity. For example, Cheryl Dunye's 1996 film *The Watermelon Woman* shows that community-based archives have the potential to ignore black, queer women as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) archives lack racial and ethnic diversity and African-American cinema archives lack gender and sexuality diversity.[22]

Caswell, Migoni, Geraci, and Cifor have located the ontological, epistemological, and social impact of community-based archives. They state that "by empowering members of communities that have been ignored or misrepresented by mainstream media and archives to realize 'I am here,' 'We were here,' and 'We belong here,' community archives have a profound impact on those individuals and communities whose histories they document."[23] Michelle Caswell, Joyce Gabiola, Jimmy Zavala, Gracen Brilmyer, and Marika Cifor conceptualize the ways community members conceive of community archive spaces and uncover the ways community-based archives act as symbols of representation, as homes away from home, and as politically generative spaces for community members.[24] As Flinn notes, community-based archives and other local historical records, "give voice to those usually unheard, illuminate what happened in the workplace beyond the statistics of wages and production, shed light on the life and experiences in communities rarely mentioned in the official record, and open up family life in ways *impossible to imagine* using conventional sources."[25] As this recent work shows, emerging scholarship is just beginning to locate the myriad ways these archives counter dominant archival narratives, complicate histories,

20 Diana K. Wakimoto, Christine Bruce, and Helen Partridge, "Archivist as Activist: Lessons from Three Queer Community Archives in California," *Archival Science* 13, no. 4 (2013): 293–316.

21 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, no. 1 (2016): 5–26.

22 Cheryl Dunye, *The Watermelon Woman*, directed by Cheryl Dunye (New York: First Run Features, 1997).

23 Caswell et al., "'To Be Able to Imagine Otherwise'," 16.

24 Michelle Caswell, Joyce Gabiola, Jimmy Zavala, Gracen Brilmyer, and Marika Cifor, "Imagining Transformative Spaces: The Personal–Political Sites of Community Archives," *Archival Science* 18, no. 1 (2018): 1–21.

25 Flinn, "Community Histories, Community Archives," 160 (emphasis added).

and profoundly and affectively influence marginalized groups, often toward liberatory ends.

Imaginaries are important affective components of archival material as archives and their contents are imagined in all sorts of ways. As stated earlier, Caswell's definition of archival imaginaries includes the dynamic relationship between past, present, and future.[26] The imaginary allows for a temporal expansion around archival records, encompassing the past, while aiming toward the future. Gilliland and Caswell, working with human rights issues within "communities disenfranchised by the extant record"[27] and building on Caswell's notion of archival imaginaries, propose two new terms: *impossible archival imaginaries* and *imagined records* – archives and records that are marked by their very absence and failure to exist in reality. They give the example of "the lack of photographic evidence"[28] of the killing of Michael Brown by police officer Darren Wilson – and the failure of a grand jury to indict based on this absence. Gilliland and Caswell describe Brown's parents becoming advocates for police body cameras, imagining that such footage would have influenced the outcome of the jury:

> Brown's grieving parents had created an imagined record – footage from Darren Wilson's nonexistent body camera – and imbued that imagined record with the capability to establish irrefutable evidence of the truth of their son's murder. If the police were wearing body cameras, if photographic records had been created, we are also led to imagine, the grand jury would have indicted Wilson, and justice would have been served.[29]

The imaginary serves not only to enable thinking through what could have been but also to incite action regarding what should be. Brown's mother, because of the failure of the legal system that relies on particular forms of evidence, is described by Gilliland and Caswell as mobilizing her imaginary to call for more police body cameras.

26 Caswell, "Inventing New Archival Imaginaries."

27 Gilliland and Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries," 73.

28 Ibid., 66.

29 Ibid.

Hariz Halilovich evokes Gilliland and Caswell's notion of imagined records to look at loss, grief, and genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the ways in which "these ethnographies can be regarded not as finished stories or fixed archives, but as privileged insights into the everyday intimacy of personal 'archives in formation' that get reimaged, re-imagined and recreated on a daily basis."[30] Through these case studies, Halilovich notes that "when there is a lack or a complete absence of any material belonging to victims with which to identify them, the survivors use their own imagination to fill the gaps and integrate the imaginary into their memories of the perished relatives."[31] Switching their focus from imagined records to the physical spaces of community-based archives, Caswell, Gabiola, Zavala, Brilmyer, and Cifor explore the spaces of community archives as spaces that are themselves imagined by users, stating, "That many of the participants imagined community archives as sites where such collective political transformation is possible is a testament to their potential and is perhaps an important indicator of the role they might take in the future."[32] This work demonstrates the complexity of how community archives users, both inside and outside of the community, perceive and imagine archives and their contents. Moreover, through examining imaginaries, this body of work elevates the importance of the affects and effects of archives on communities.

Benedict Anderson, centring on national identity, illustrates how members of a nation form the boundaries of their community by imagining aspects of community that are similar to or different from those they witness.[33] Anderson's work has been taken up by scholars who examine imagination as one of the ways individuals organize the world and as a part of world-building. Arjun Appadurai has extended Anderson's work to address "diasporic public spheres" as fluid, fluctuating, and overlapping sites of goods, finances, and populations and to examine the ways they support the reimagining of transnational communities.[34] Appadurai elaborates:

30 Hariz Halilovich, "Re-Imaging and Re-Imagining the Past after 'Memoricide': Intimate Archives as Inscribed Memories of the Missing," *Archival Science* 16, no. 1 (2016): 81.

31 Ibid., 86.

32 Caswell et al., "Imagining Transformative Spaces," 18.

33 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

34 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

> The image, the imagined, the imaginary – these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: *the imagination as a social practice*. . . . the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility.[35]

Appadurai illustrates not only that there is a division between what people imagine and what social life will permit, but also that the social imaginary functions on both individual and global levels, mediated through and transcending national space.

Within archival studies, Terry Cook, attending to the role of archivists and their responsibilities to communities, utilizes Anderson's work to explore the imagined community of archivists to "better understand and thus enrich our own sense of being a community of archivists." He notes, "If archivy [people in the archival profession] is an 'imagined community,' in Benedict Anderson's sense, it is one that, in its diversity, now is more fractured than pluralistic, more prescriptive than holistic in conception."[36] On the other side, Angela L. DiVeglia cites Anderson in relation to the ways LGBT communities and their community-based archives are formed and used. She states the importance of a sense of affinity and belonging within the role of social learning in developing "a concept of a larger 'imagined community,'" which "can be especially important for young people or people who are just joining the LGBT community."[37] Nefissa Naguib, illustrating the displacement of Armenians through massacres and deportation, shows how a collection of photographs "remakes an imagined community that includes people who are unrelated, who lived in completely different epochs and places, belong to different social classes, or have no connection whatsoever. Still, they are on some level part of the same story."[38] Imaginaries function to link people together, to unite people across time and place, and to give people a sense of connection within a community.

35 Ibid., 31 (emphasis in original).

36 Cook, "Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community," 112.

37 Angela DiVeglia, "Accessibility, Accountability, and Activism: Models for LGBT Archives," in *Make Your Own History: Documenting Feminist and Queer Activism in the 21st Century*, ed. Kelly Wooten and Lyz Bly (Los Angeles, CA: Litwin Books, 2012), 74.

38 Nefissa Naguib, "Storytelling: Armenian Family Albums in the Diaspora," *Visual Anthropology* 21, no. 3 (2008): 239.

Although this literature touches upon the concept of imagined community, little work has been done on the impact of imaginaries on community-based archives users or on the ways community-based archives influence and respond to their communities' imaginaries. In order to think through the ways communities continually define themselves, this article uses Anderson's notion of imagined communities to examine community archives users' imaginations, anxieties, and affect around other archival users and the shifting boundaries of community. We use flexible definitions of the concepts of *imagination* and *imagining*, building on much of this literature to encompass the ways both materials and interactions can work as evidence about what a community is, what it has been, and what it might be.

Sites

From November 2016 to May 2017, the UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) Community Archives Lab[39] research team conducted 10 focus groups with 54 community members at five different community archives sites in Southern California. The five sites – Lambda Archives; the Southeast Asian Archive at University of California, Irvine; the Little Tokyo Historical Society; La Historia Historical Society in El Monte; and the Studio for Southern California History – are described below.

Lambda Archives, based in San Diego, California, focuses its collections and service on LGBTQ+ history and culture, primarily from San Diego County and northern Baja California. The Archives' holdings, including photographs, personal documents and other print materials, and audio and video records, were collected from and primarily serve community members. The Archives' users include members of the LGBTQ+ community, local high school- and college-level classes, and researchers worldwide.

Established in 2006 by the members of the Little Tokyo community in downtown Los Angeles, the Little Tokyo Historical Society aims to preserve the history and contributions of Japanese and Japanese-American people in Little Tokyo. The Little Tokyo Historical Society, now a non-profit relying on volunteers, serves the Japanese-American community in Los Angeles and nationwide by documenting the history of the community as well as the Little Tokyo neighbourhood.

39 To learn more about the UCLA Community Archives Lab, visit communityarchiveslab.ucla.edu.

Located in El Monte, California, La Historia Society was founded in 1998 in order to preserve the history of El Monte and South El Monte, two communities historically composed of Mexican-American farm labourers. La Historia Society aims to counteract the lack of Latino representation in California history through its collections as well as through its own museum that features photographs of the city's nine barrios (neighbourhoods).

Founded in 1987, the Southeast Asian Archive aims to document the immigration and refugee experiences of people from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam as well as the diverse experiences of their lives in the United States. Located at the University of California, Irvine (UCI), the Southeast Asian Archive serves many members of the Southeast Asian community, not limited to those countries, and works closely with communities to describe, collect, and display the materials that represent them.

The Studio for Southern California History, founded by Sharon Sekhon, a local public historian, sponsors the LA History Archives, an online archive dedicated to documenting the social history of Los Angeles and Southern California. The Archives serves as a resource to educators, students, and the general public, who not only use their collections but also produce the Archives' illustrated timelines, lesson plans, interactive maps, and community art projects.

These five sites were selected as they reflect a wide array of communities and community archives in Southern California. Although their community demographics, user identities, and locations vary greatly, they demonstrate themes that occur across sites. The users of the sites differ widely as well. As we initially aimed to study community archives users who were also members of the community (or shared those axes of identity), we quickly discovered that the focus group participants blurred lines between users, volunteers, board members, and donors.

Methodology

Taking an interpretivist approach to ethnographic research, we recognized not only that researchers cannot be objective but also that reality is co-constructed between researchers and subjects.[40] Rather than creating a hypothesis and therefore generating causal explanations, we utilized grounded theory in order

40 Alison Jane Pickard, *Research Methods in Information*, 2nd rev. ed. (Chicago: ALA Neal-Schuman, 2013).

to continually reflect on social life throughout the research process.[41] Grounded theory is well-suited for exploratory research that aims to probe into qualitative aspects of life.[42]

With this framework, the research team conducted 10 semi-structured focus group discussions, each ranging from 60 to 120 minutes long, with international review board approval for each team member.[43] Participants were recruited through flyers at each of the sites as well as through recommendations from archivists at each site. Each site received a $500 stipend, and participants in the focus groups were compensated with $15 Amazon gift cards.

With the consent of each of the 54 participants, each focus group was recorded so that we could attribute quotations and intellectual contributions. Of the 54 participants, 52 agreed to be identified by name, and thus this article attributes quotations directly to participants accordingly. After the focus group recordings were transcribed, the transcripts underwent three rounds of coding, which utilized constant comparative analysis and coding procedures developed in grounded theory, such as open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.[44] Throughout the coding process, common concepts were identified across sites and then consolidated and verified by the research team using a consensus-based process to ensure they were exhaustive and mutually exclusive. A second round of analysis was performed on the transcripts using the revised codebook, and then one team member analyzed and recoded all the transcripts in order to ensure accuracy, consistency, and quality.

The concepts of *imagination* and *imagined users* arose organically from the data through our analysis. Using inductive reasoning, we applied the specific examples from the focus group discussions to theorize around the imaginaries of the focus group participants and draw out generalized conclusions.[45] After

41 Kathy Charmaz, "Grounded Theory," *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* (n.p.: Wiley Online Library, 2007), 30, accessed 4 December 2018, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosg070.pub2.

42 Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009).

43 Focus group discussions were organized around a common set of questions, but they were semi-structured to allow us to pursue additional questions and to allow the conversation to expand around issues the users wanted to express.

44 Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*, 2nd ed. (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1990).

45 Anne J. Gilliland, "Archival and Recordkeeping Traditions in the Multiverse and Their Importance for Researching

noticing these themes emerging from our data, we observed parallels between the data and Anderson's concept of imagined communities. Therefore, after analyzing the data, we also extended the analysis inductively by drawing comparisons to Anderson's work and theorizing around the archival implications for *Imagined Communities* that Anderson does not necessarily articulate. Both the data and Anderson's theories coalesced to allow us to further conceptualize the imaginaries of archive users and the complex affective impacts of community-based archives. However, we note that the variety of individual responses are not generalizable but are reflective of the diverse responses and imaginaries among community-based archive users.

Within this interpretivist paradigm, we also acknowledged our own positionality and the ways in which it influenced the data we collected. At some sites, team members were insiders within the communities, sharing axes of marginalized identities; in other cases, the researchers were outsiders in relation to the communities of the archives site.[46] The first author of this article identifies as a white, disabled, gender-nonconforming queer person from a middle-class background. The second author identifies as a queer, Filipinx American with a middle-class background. The third author identifies as a Chicano from a working-class background and is a first-generation college student. The fourth author identifies as a white, straight, cisgender woman who grew up working class and is in the first generation of her family to graduate from high school. Coming from different backgrounds and identities and bringing different insider/outsider perspectives, we were collectively able to reflect on our differences and varying observations as we interpreted the data. Additionally, the data was collected in the months following the election of the 45th president of the United States, where the current political climate palpably influenced the focus group participants and their responses.

Situations and Situating Research," in *Research in the Archival Multiverse*, ed. Anne J. Gilliland, Sue McKemmish, and Andrew J. Lau (Clayton, VIC: Monash University Publishing, 2017), 31–73.

46 Joyce Gabiola and Michelle Caswell, "'Are You a Spy?': Methodological Challenges to Studying Community Archives," Peer-reviewed paper presented at the Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting Research Forum, Portland, OR, 25 July 2017, accessed 2 February 2019, https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/2017_SAAproceedings_GabiolaCaswell_revised.pdf.

Findings

Our data demonstrates the ways in which archives provide avenues for community members to imagine their communities by maintaining spaces for them to witness other members, discover traces of diverse stories, and recognize themselves reflected in the archives. Centring on the experiences of community members as discussed through the focus group data, this section demonstrates how community-based archives users are affectively impacted by and conceptualize their communities through three key findings, which will be discussed as follows. First, we will illustrate (1) how community members create and define their communities. Then, we will discuss two additional key findings regarding the relationship between community imaginaries' and archives: (2) the spatial, linguistic, and material aspects of community-based archives that help users form imaginaries about their community and (3) the specific affective reactions of users in response to their archive-informed imaginaries. Although these themes were exhibited in all of the research sites, the data from each research site reflected the specific culture and unique histories of the site and its respective community.

Finding 1: Conceptions and Conceptualizations of Community

Our data demonstrates that conceptions and conceptualizations of community are constantly changing and encompass not only shared identities but also shared ideologies. As discussed above, the community archives studied in this research are identity based, through sexuality and gender, race, ethnicity, and/or geographic location. Throughout the five research sites, community members illustrated their understanding(s) of community around their identity-specific histories. Their communities were formed not only around their identities, but also through political issues and shared ideologies that created kinship (familial or chosen) within their communities. For example, Kevin Duc Pham, a student who works with the collections of the Southeast Asian Archive, highlights the evolving kinship that he has realized through working in the Archive:

> I'm seeing in a lot of newer generations of Asian-Americans, thinking more broadly. The way we view our own identities, at least in terms of the Asian side of it, is very complicated, and is very nuanced, because a lot of us . . . I won't say that there's conflict, but there is a stark

> difference when we say, "Oh, we're Asian," versus saying, "Oh, we're Cambodian, we're Vietnamese," so on and so forth. It seems like we more broadly – with at least the younger generations – we more broadly identify with the more pan-Asian identity just because, solidarity, and because we grew up not knowing a lot of other Asians, let alone not knowing a lot of other people of our own actual ethnicity. So, I find that that's very complicated, trying to find the difference, or the vision, but at the same time, the unity among all of those identities, and all of those groups, 'cause all those people, their own history is very important. It is very integral for those people, so it does need to be addressed.[47]

Pham's statement reflects the way his relationship with the Asian-American community identity has shifted and is not simply based in familial heritage but also encompasses a solidarity across broader pan-Asian identities that are united through shared experiences in the United States. Chuck Kaminski similarly notes how Lambda Archives users unite across differences to create diverse narratives in the Archives' collections:

> There was an Asian Pacific Islanders group . . . So you had the queer kinda mantle, then you had your ethnic identity mantle, and you had your religious mantle, and there's some of that history in there, and that's the part that I call the undiscovered part that all those . . . all those identities: I'd love for them to come in here and find out their history.[48]

Through shared ideologies, parallel experiences, and connected solidarity, these communities have come together under a broadly defined concept of community that acknowledges difference and similarities between subgroups.

However, the boundaries of communities are defined not only by commonalities within groups, but also in response to difference from others. Many participants from the Lambda Archives, for example, demonstrated how their community is often defined in terms of what it is not; many participants talked about LGBTQ+ history in relation to dominant (read, straight) culture. Mike

47 Kevin Duc Pham, Southeast Asian Archive focus group, interview with Michelle Caswell, Joyce Gabiola, and Gracen Brilmyer, 3 February 2017.

48 Chuck Kaminski, Lambda Archives focus group, interview with Michelle Caswell, Joyce Gabiola, and Gracen Brilmyer, 5 February 2017.

Passante, for example, discusses organizing events for the local LGBTQ+ billiards league in non-LGBTQ+ spaces, stating that the local LGBTQ+ pool league "is supposed to be an organization for meeting, developing friendships and, you know, relationships and having fun, 'cause even though we play in straight bars and they're all nice, the campiness and the hugging and the kissing doesn't really go on as much, you know. You're a little bit more tame in a straight bar, you know."[49] Operating in straight spaces, although possible, can marginalize those who do not share identities and fosters a delineation between groups, especially among those who have different levels of privilege. Dorothy Fujita-Rony, at the Southeast Asian Archive, thinks through the ways Southeast Asian countries are defined and fluctuating in relation to global powers. She states,

> I think how "Southeast-Asian-American" has been used since the '90s and to the present is actually different from . . . [other] configuration[s]. . . . One of my concerns is that Southeast Asia, as it's presently constituted, is often about the Vietnam War, when . . . the larger picture is actually about US relations . . . [with] Southeast Asia [as a whole]. And that's been going on [for a long time]. . . . I mean, the first formal colony was in the Philippines. So, there's a sustained story [of militarism]. . . . I think the Southeast Asian Archives can also be a place where we consider, What are our connections to other people? What are our associations with other groups? What does it mean to be Southeast-Asian-American? And how is Southeast-Asian-American a political construct?[50]

For many community archives, marginalization from a straight, white, cis, male, Western norm means that communities are often defined in relation to dominant culture – what they are not. Interacting with other communities, especially those with more power and privilege, can further highlight differences and politics through which members can perceive and define the boundaries of their communities. Our first finding reflects the ways the multiple

49 Mike Passante, Lambda Archives focus group, interview with Michelle Caswell, Joyce Gabiola, and Gracen Brilmyer, 5 February 2017.

50 Dorothy Fujita-Rony, Southeast Asian Archive focus group, interview with Michelle Caswell, Joyce Gabiola, and Gracen Brilmyer, 3 February 2017.

communities represented at the community-based archives have defined their communion through shared ideologies, parallel experiences, and political solidarity in contrast to dominant culture, which formed and continues to form boundaries for each community.

Finding 2: Aspects of Community Archives that Inform Imaginaries

As communities are shaped by identity and solidarity, community-based archives can play a crucial role in facilitating individual members' interpolations of the boundaries of their communities. As our data demonstrates, community archives offer multiple ways for community members to understand and imagine their communities – through the spatial, linguistic, and material facets of archives. These three facets form three prominent sub-themes of this finding, as each demonstrates ways that members use community-based archives and thus understand and imagine their communities and their members. What is more, these sub-themes are not mutually exclusive within an archive. Spatial, linguistic, and material aspects of community-based archives inform one another: language is reproduced and preserved through materials; materials are housed in spaces; and spaces are physical locations where materials and languages are enacted. However, although multiple themes may be demonstrated simultaneously in this section, we aim to highlight each of these themes as they surfaced in our data.

Sub-Theme 1: Spatial Aspects of Community

The spatial interactions of members are crucial to both the formation of a community as well as the ways it is imagined. Community archives spaces, as noted by our focus group participants, are physically and symbolically valuable because of the ways they see and imagine different user groups. For example, the archives' spaces serve as symbols of complex representation. Frank Nobiletti speaks of the profound impact the Lambda Archives has had in enabling him to continually uncover new community stories:

> Meeting Jess Jessop [a founding member of the Archives] and interviewing him and other people from that time was an amazing experience, and of course got me to give it to the Archives and get stuff transcribed and stuff like that – and then seeing things in people's garages and realizing how easily things can just wash away, so to speak. But I think one of the most profound experiences that I have had in the

> Archives is, for every year that I've been here, . . . I never ceased finding new things and being amazed by that, you know. You'd think after 20 years, you wouldn't find something you hadn't seen before.[51]

The physicality of community spaces and community archives determine what people and stories one encounters and therefore how one imagines others. As Nobiletti articulates, many spaces – not just the physical spaces of the archives – impact the ways people understand their own communities and other communities. And in recognizing "how easily things can just wash away," he imagines all of the other materials and stories that may not have made it into the archives. Chuck Kaminski similarly highlights the value of meeting spaces for queer communities:

> The house [a former meeting space for LGBTQ activists] was demolished, but it became an interesting aspect because some in the community – and if you know our community, we don't really, we didn't really have centres, we didn't have places to go, so where did we meet? We met in apartments, we met at bars, we met outside, and so some of the comment or the pushback on the destruction was, "Well, it was one or two meetings. It wasn't really important." But to me it was important because it was a place where ideas were formulating, where activism would occur. . . . It may have not happened over 50 consistent weeks, but it was in the beginning, when people started talking about "We needed a place to provide those social services." So that to me became an important historic development in our community.[52]

Nobiletti and Kaminski's remarks show how archives spaces are connected to assemblages of other spaces – garages, basements, bars, and other social spaces used for organizing events and memorials – which can create and house ephemera that is later stored in an archive. And these physical locations are places where individuals witness other community members while simultaneously forming their imaginaries of what might have been lost, who is not there, and who is not part of the community.

51 Frank Nobiletti, Lambda Archives focus group, interview with Michelle Caswell, Joyce Gabiola, and Gracen Brilmyer, 5 February 2017.

52 Kaminski interview.

Such spaces are not only grounded in the witnessing of community members but are also symbolic of communities. Individual and personal memories, experiences, and traditions associated with spaces can have a profound impact on members' abilities to relate to their communities. Along these lines, Dolores Haro at La Historia Society notes,

> When people do come in [to the space], and even though, you know, their family is not on the walls, they could relate to the photos [displayed at the archives] as well because of their family history, and then they remember their family pictures and that, to realize that each of us has a strong history, whether we have a photo of it or not. But we have, you know, our parents, our grandparents, and there is such a history behind that that I think when people walk in here, they kind of think about that and become more aware of it and appreciate it more.[53]

Haro articulates how the physical space of the archives opens a way to connect to her community: she imagines community members imagining themselves within this history. By providing a space that shows a community's history, La Historia Society allows those who share identity to relate to their community, to imagine themselves within the stories represented, and to imagine others doing the same. Rosa Peña echoes the value of this space in telling her community's stories: "And these are stories that you share. You can learn about this at the museum, like, not only from *you*, but if you come to the museum you can learn about these other stories about people. I mean, that's what I tell people, like, [they ask,] 'Why do you always go to the museum?' And I'm like, because there is so much history here, it's like, amazing."[54] Marissa Friedman at the Studio for Southern California reflects on the impact of this place-based archives, where she is an outsider:

> I think when you do place-based history, it becomes more or less meaningful for people who have [a connection to that place].

53 Dolores Haro, La Historia Society focus group, interview with Michelle Caswell, Joyce Gabiola, and Gracen Brilmyer, 18 February 2017.

54 Rosa Peña, La Historia Society focus group, interview with Michelle Caswell, Joyce Gabiola, and Gracen Brilmyer, 18 February 2017.

> Like, I'm not an LA native, and I don't know the city that well, and so for me, I would have a different relationship, I think, with this archive than somebody who is intimately acquainted with the city, which is, I mean, that happens with every place-based project. So just, I don't know, it's something to think about.[55]

Again, other users are imagined to have varying relationships with an archives and its contents.

Sub-Theme 2: Language and Linguistic Aspects of Community

Language dramatically influences (and has influenced) the ways in which communities are formed by signalling place, time, and shared vernacular. Many focus group participants highlighted a linguistic aspect of their communities. For example, La Historia Society participant Dolores Haro reflects on speaking Spanish – a way in which she communicated with her family and other community members – and how this was met by outsiders. Haro states that, while teaching high school, "I could speak English, I could write, and I was helping the other students with their math in Spanish and going back and forth and trying to pay attention." However, growing up, "my personal experience in the school is, we were not able to speak Spanish and [if we spoke Spanish], they would put tape over our mouths." She continues:

> We were only in second and third grade. So those are things that I experienced and what I share with my students now. . . . I let the parents know, speak to your child in Spanish and have them speak back to you, because I understand Spanish, but I don't speak it because I feel like it was taken away from me. So that's something I share, like on a daily basis; it's always on my mind of how brave we are now.[56]

Language has not only a logistical function, as a way of communicating with other community members, but also a symbolic function, as a way of signalling who is included in or excluded from a community. Moreover, the ways in which language is used, enacted, and controlled has lasting effects on commu-

55 Marissa Friedman, Studio for Southern California focus group, interview with Michelle Caswell, Joyce Gabiola, and Gracen Brilmyer, 7 and 18 February 2017.

56 Haro interview.

nities over time and differs generationally; participants also spoke about some younger community members who did not speak the language of their elders. Along these lines, community archives – by preserving and storing materials that document language as well as reflecting the vernacular in their spaces – use language to reflect their communities, and this facilitates the formation of community imaginaries. Furthermore, in contrast to Haro's description of an experience which may be understood as violence and erasure, Friedman articulates a concern about language also functioning as a barrier, imagining those who do not possess particular terminology and could therefore be excluded as potential community members:

> I also think non-scholars have a harder time understanding what that [an archive] really is. Like, if I were to talk to my family about archives, I think about them in a very different way, I think. So if you're trying to make it a community, like a really community-based thing, I think that playing with that terminology and kind of breaking down those boundaries that that word can sometimes create. Whether it's like . . . gatekeeping, elitism, whatever the case may be.[57]

These very different sentiments demonstrate the politics of language and the ways linguistic aspects of a community or an archive can include or exclude members, both explicitly and violently and more subtly. As our data exemplifies, linguistic aspects of community-based archives – used both in their materials and more broadly in their community – can influence the ways members identify each other and imagine others inside or outside their community.

Sub-Theme 3: Material Aspects of Community

Along with the spatial and linguistic facets of community-based archives, materiality is crucial in the formation of community imaginaries. Records, the physical material representing a community, can reflect the ways thoughts and ideas are organized, prioritized, and persist. And community-based archives, centred on locating, collecting, and preserving community materials, do just this: they give evidence of the past – specifically from the community's perspective – which help imaginaries develop.

57 Friedman interview.

Lucy Vera, who is involved with La Historia Society and also works in a school, says,

> I'm a librarian, so I supply the media to all of the students. Shortly after I was employed there, I remember getting a notice that all Spanish books were to be discarded, but I've been there long enough to see that, now with the immigration of the Chinese, the school is also supplying classrooms for weekend school for them, and I say to myself, "What happened here?"[58]

Cultural materials, whether in an archive or in community spaces, are crucial to a community's feeling of being represented or erased.

Imaginaries around *what might be* are also shaped by the absence of narratives: archival materials not only represent a diverse array of narratives, which are of great importance to community members, but they also allow community members to imagine other narratives that they do not necessarily witness. Tram Le at the Southeast Asian Archive states,

> For me, it's the diversity of our community. I mean, you know it 'cause you live it, but you don't *know it* know it. You realize, and you sometimes, you buy into this paradigm of like, either you're really successful or you're really suffering and struggling. But there's all this stuff in between, and it's not just, I realize too, as we were doing our books and all these other things, that sometimes it's great to see not just photographs, but documents that . . . And sometimes we couldn't find a photo, and that was the thing, because many Vietnamese had to burn all their photos to come over here, and documents and all that. So we don't have a lot to . . . Photographs were expensive back then to develop, so there's not gonna be a lot of it. What we have are flyers of an event, so that would have some photos and so we were able to use some of these flyers in our book or documents that show very clearly the process.[59]

58 Lucy Vera, La Historia Society focus group, interview with Michelle Caswell, Joyce Gabiola, and Gracen Brilmyer, 18 February 2017.

59 Tram Le, Southeast Asian Archive focus group, interview with Michelle Caswell, Joyce Gabiola, and Gracen Brilmyer, 3 February 2017.

Le reflects on the varying experiences in her community that might combat oversimplified narratives and on the potential absence of narratives in the archives. Imaginaries function by enabling people to think through the diversity of experiences represented and silenced in the materials – to fill in the gaps by asking what might not be there.

Materials also spawn imaginaries about what work *could* be done – what members of the community have yet to interact with the archives. At La Historia Society, Dolores Haro describes her imagining through materials:

> It's beautiful because every picture has a story to it, and I just wish more people would come to the museum to share those stories because they could say, that's my grandmother or, you know, that's my aunt, and they could tell us more about the photo. We look at a photo, and it's beautiful and it's interesting. But who are the people, and what's the history behind it, and how did they come to be in El Monte, and how was their life, you know, during the segregation and at different times, not being able to go to certain schools? And that's another reason why they became so close is because they were all together; they grew up together, not only in the barrios, but in the schooling as well. So it's like every single picture is a tremendous, beautiful story. So I feel when I walk in it's very, I don't even have the word for it, it's just very, not just historical but just so important to continue their legacy.[60]

For Haro, community members are connected to and through the materials. And unknown stories as well as the potential work to uncover those narratives are imagined through the photographs. The materiality of community-based archives influences the formation of imaginaries by representing a wide range of experiences and changes in a community or community space, allowing users to imagine how their community has been shaped, who is part of it, and how others might interact with archival materials.

In summary, space, language, and materiality have been shown to be influential in the formation of community members' identities and the ways in which they imagine their community. Of course, different communities have different traditions, memberships, languages, and histories, which (in)form community

60 Haro interview.

boundaries on different levels. And these sub-themes function differently in each community. The gender- and sexuality-specific community of Lambda Archives; the racial, ethnic, and spatial delineations of the Southeast Asian Archive, Little Tokyo Historic Society, and La Historia Society; and the location-specific archives of the Studio for Southern California History all function differently in forming community-specific imaginaries. Yet the spatial, linguistic, and material aspects of community-based archives inform users' imaginations of the histories of their communities (past), the current definitions of their communities (present), and the multiple possibilities within their communities and the archives that represent them (future).

Moreover, our data demonstrates that "community" is conceptualized differently by different individuals as well as across time. Community boundaries are constantly in flux, as these three themes show. There are changes in the ways in which community spaces move and close, as Chuck Kaminski and Mike Passante demonstrate through describing LGBTQ+ spaces closing or involving straight communities; in the ways linguistic differences are treated over time, as Dolores Haro illustrates in sharing her personal experience of exclusion through language in school; and in material representations of change, as Tram Le shows in discussing the ways people were unable to document themselves because of temporally situated technological or political aspects that have since shifted. As the political climate in the US evolves, the boundaries around who is included or excluded in a community will continue to unfold. And this – the fluid boundaries of a community, how communities have changed and will continue to evolve – influences the ways community archives users imagine each other and understand the archives.

Finding 3: Responses to Shifting Boundaries

In considering the spatial, linguistic, and material aspects of community archives and their influence on community imaginaries, we also found that our data demonstrated two prominent affective responses to the ways in which users imagine the shifting boundaries of their communities. In this section, we will highlight two sub-themes: first, the ways in which the potential evolution of community propels a user's feeling of responsibility toward future community members and, second, how those imagined changes also spur anxiety around an evolving community. Some see themselves as drawing on a community history that they are a part of and solidifying those aspects that constitute the

community, while others are anxious about new "members" or outsiders, who might narrow or expand the bounds of a community.

Sub-Theme 1: Responsibility for Future Community Members

Shifting boundaries can incite a feeling of solidarity and responsibility for future generations of community members, who may not mirror the current community demographics. Reflecting on how the community boundaries have changed over time, Jazmin de la Cruz at La Historia Society states her position in the evolution of her community:

> I feel like, as me being, I guess, a younger generation, I can see how it changed. Like I said, I can see pictures, and I can hear about it, but this is our history in the making of El Monte. You don't know where El Monte is going to be in the future. You don't. And that's the thing that scares me because I've lived here all my life and I'm not sure if I'm going to live here for several years more. And to see it change, and especially now, it's becoming very, like, a drastic change, and for those who are younger, they're going to hear about it, but to come here and see it, that's something really moving, and that's why it's so important for them to find about it now because *it's history in the making, we're history in the making. This here, history in the making*.[61]

La Cruz notes that the changes she has witnessed in her community indicate that it will continue to change and spark a feeling of responsibility for the ways those changes might impact future generations. And Dorothy Fujita-Rony at the Southeast Asian Archive similarly notes, "I had these conversations with [founding librarian] Anne Frank because 'Southeast Asian' [has a wider constituency than that defined by the Archive]. . . . I think it's incredible what the Archive has done, and I think it's very strategic to focus on particular groups. I guess what I just want to encourage is . . . [the recognition] that Southeast Asia is a contested category."[62] Fujita-Rony, noting the changes in the community, also describes the lines of the community as blurry, continually changing, and

61 Jazmin de la Cruz, La Historia Society focus group, interview with Michelle Caswell, Joyce Gabiola, and Gracen Brilmyer, 18 February 2017.

62 Fujita-Rony interview.

transforming in relation to global powers. As such, she encourages the Archive to centre these changing and contested aspects of community in anticipation of future transformations.

Bill Watanabe contemplates Little Tokyo Historical Society's responsibility to younger generations. As the community expands in the ways in which it interacts with place, he advocates for building new spaces:

> You know, the building up of memories, that's one of the main reasons that we're trying to build this gymnasium, because young people, they basically told us in focus groups, we might come to Little Tokyo once a year to eat, or we might go to the museum, but if there was a gym, we would be here every week to play. And then, that makes the connection. Hopefully, the next generation will see Little Tokyo as their home, their place, the power of the place in their lives and identity. I tell people the building of the gym is really historic preservation.[63]

Watanabe imagines that anticipating the needs of the next generation might lead them to "see Little Tokyo as their home, their place, the power of the place in their lives and identity." Similarly, Frank Nobiletti speaks to the imagined potential of the Lambda Archives collections. He states, "There's all kinds of things that we're gonna learn about – people with . . . the new digital age."[64] And Jazmin de la Cruz at La Historia Society, when asked if the museum makes her think about her own life as part of history, responds,

> Honestly, yeah. Because the things I plan to do here one day, I plan to come here for a long time, volunteer and be a member for a very long time. And one day, it's going to be like, you see those people up there? I grew up next to them. The history is going to change, and these photos are going to change. Everything on this wall, you know, it's going to have its original value. . . . We'll bring it for back exhibits, you know, this and that, this is all valuable to me even though . . . it

63 Bill Watanabe, Little Tokyo Historical Society focus group, interview with Michelle Caswell, Joyce Gabiola, and Gracen Brilmyer, 7 February 2017.

64 Nobiletti interview.

> may be lost and forgotten for other people. But you know, that's their loss because I'm going to be here, you know. I'm learning every day.[65]

For her, the change that is inherent in the community will be reflected in changes in La Historia Society. Imagining how the community has developed and therefore will continue to change, like Watanabe and Nobiletti, she echoes many participants' desire to maintain archives' material and spaces in anticipation of the future of their communities: they imagine changes, want to adapt to those changes, and feel a sense of accountability to future imagined community members so that new community members can feel at home, new stories can be uncovered, and history can be remembered.

Sub-Theme 2: Anxiety around the Future

The moving boundaries of communities can also cause anxiety around the future, particularly around community spaces and events. Many users of the Lambda Archives, for example, demonstrated a particular anxiety around changes in their community and how younger generations of the LGBTQ+ community are more widely organizing. One member, Frank Nobiletti, noted the increase of straight people at LGBTQ+-specific events:

> You know, that's what happened to the queer water polo team. You know, so many nice, straight people joined it because they loved the atmosphere – the campy thing, you know, the kidding around with martinis at half-time and stuff – and they love the relaxedness of us all. And so more and more straight people joined until then some of the gay people couldn't be as free and, you know, it lost its queer character. And you know, that's just fine; it's just what happens. It's part of the integration, the meeting, the changes that are coming to the world where we're not these outcasts. But it's very unnerving.[66]

For Nobiletti, past changes in the demographics in community-centred spaces propel an anxiety around the future of community events. Mike Passante, also at Lambda, similarly worries about younger generations meeting in spaces that

65 La Cruz interview.

66 Nobiletti interview.

are not explicitly LGBTQ+: "That's vanishing, and we got boards [for the pool league] that could care less about the gay community. Just like we're [a] not-for-profit organization. Who the hell cares?" Passante continues,

> For a lot of younger LGBTQ community people, I know within the pool league and with other organizations, they don't have big interest in the history. They really don't. They're all in their little kumbaya things, and they're going to the bars that . . . You know, you used to be able to call up a bar and say, "What kind of bar is this?" and they'd say, "A leather bar, dyke bar, a cowboy . . . ," you know. And now: "Oh, we're a people bar." And so, you know, they're into all of that. You'll find them sitting out in front of straight bars with their friends drinking and what-not and all that other stuff, so I don't know how much, uh, unless it's for something like the history of the pool league, when it turns 100 maybe some of the board members will come here and dig up some information.[67]

Similarly, Lisa Lamont reflects, "Maybe they're just not old enough to look back and think that maybe history is important yet, but they mostly don't know about this space. They mostly don't know about what's here. So I think that's why it's so important that we get things digitized because if they don't get it on their phone, it doesn't exist."[68] The evolving ways in which people identify as queer, and the ways in which younger generations are imagined to not "have big interest in the history" and to intermingle in straight spaces prompt caution around future imagined change and seem to threaten the preservation of the community's history. Yet, Nobiletti, like Lamont, reflects that "if used correctly, it [the Archives] is one of the most profound educational experiences that young people *could* have in this type of history."[69]

The transformation of demographics in the areas where many of the archives are located also elicit some anxiety for community archives users. Members of the Little Tokyo Historical Society, for example, reflected heavily on current issues of gentrification in the area. In regard to new businesses coming in,

67 Passante interview.

68 Lisa Lamont, Lambda Archives focus group, interview with Michelle Caswell, Joyce Gabiola, and Gracen Brilmyer, 5 February 2017.

69 Nobiletti interview.

Jeffrey Chop notes,

> I think they should be aware that there's something more happening here that makes it possible for those two kinds of businesses to even co-exist, which I think is one of the hardest things to deal with in terms of gentrification stuff. It's like, how do you bring in businesses that are relevant to the community but at the same time doesn't displace, you know, culturally, what has always existed?[70]

Anxieties around fluctuating boundaries also influence the ways in which action is taken; for community archive users, anxiety is often entangled with feelings of responsibility toward decisions made for the archives and their communities. Nobiletti emphasizes the importance of "young people getting the students in – I mean, that's a priceless thing. I don't think we take advantage of it enough."[71] A teacher, he says he has invited hundreds of students to use the Archives: "I also have used the Archives extensively for my students – integrated my students and their work into the Archives, which is kind of the reason why I came – my purpose – such an important aspect of it."[72] Michael Okamura, at Little Tokyo Historical Society, expresses unease about the spaces changing and therefore an obligation to preserve materials for remembering the past. He states, "The neighbourhood is changing rapidly. It's going through another evolution stage, so I'm glad that this organization exists, and it's important that we continue to have this preservation and share the history of Little Tokyo because, from what I understand, it is the second-oldest neighbourhood in the city."[73] Bill Watanabe raises concern about decision-making in the preservation of community spaces, stating, "We have to preserve these buildings, not everywhere, but I mean there has to be conscious thinking and strategizing about how we preserve our stories. So the power of place, I think, for me is like a huge motivation because once it's gone, it's hard to get it back."[74]

70 Jeffrey Chop, Little Tokyo Historical Society focus group, interview with Michelle Caswell, Joyce Gabiola, and Gracen Brilmyer, 7 January 2017.

71 Nobiletti interview.

72 Ibid.

73 Okamura interview.

74 Watanabe interview.

Many members of Little Tokyo Historical Society reflected on the value of the archives in representing their histories so that other generations can learn about the past, especially through political changes. Kristen Hayashi explains:

> It's been a lot of inaccurate, irresponsible, and, you know, just ignorant comments that have been made by people around the president-elect, and I never thought my research would have a lot of relevance today, but it shows that they're not using historical truth. They're not looking at archives, they're not reading a lot of things. So to say that there is a precedent for a Muslim registry, or a, you know, incarceration again, that it's been done in the past; maybe we can look to that for future reference, it's just shocking to me. So I think if people who are saying these things actually looked at archives, if they saw letters of people standing up for Japanese Americans about how wrong this was, if they saw photographs of the conditions inside the camps, if they actually took some time to do research before making these comments or setting policy, things would be a lot different. So archives are extremely important to set the truth.[75]

The gentrification of Little Tokyo produces caution around accountability to the community and making the right decisions – how to balance embracing change with preserving history. Moreover, the anticipated change in communities and the currently evolving political climate produce imaginaries around a great potential: if people "actually looked at archives," they could better understand history and therefore the present moment. The concern felt toward real and imagined change points to the affective importance of community-based archives in reflecting diverse histories from the perspective of community members.

Overall, community archives users not only envision ways that archival materials and spaces in the present might influence users in the future; but also, through their perceived and imagined variations of users, they feel a sense of responsibility and anxiety around changes in their communities, community spaces, and community archives. The two affects both operate independently and inform one another.

75 Kristen Hayashi, Little Tokyo Historical Society focus group, interview with Michelle Caswell, Joyce Gabiola, and Gracen Brilmyer, 7 January 2017.

Discussion

This section highlights parallels between the data and concepts put forth by Anderson and, using an inductive method, both confirms Anderson's theories and builds on them by illustrating ways that community members specifically imagine their communities and the boundaries thereof through the presence of archives. Moreover, the data pushes these frameworks to expose not only the complexity of archival users' imaginaries, but also the ways their relationship to archives and the archives' relationship to their users are reciprocally informed.

Our data shows that imaginaries function in expansive ways: users form imaginaries based not only on what they encounter but also on their reflections on material or people they may never personally witness or meet. As Anderson points out, they "will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them," yet still they imagine their communion.[76] Similarly, community members working at community-based archives interact with only a subset of their community. Their conceptions of community membership and imaginaries are influenced both by the people with whom they interact and by absences, which Gilliland and Caswell articulate through the concept of impossible archival imaginaries: people imagine opportunities and circumstances that may not be possible currently.[77] Our data further highlights the ways imaginaries are deeply tied to both the presence and absence of materials, people, and narratives.

Anderson notes that the boundaries of a community are established both through notions of kinship and through religion,[78] and writes that "the nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations,"[79] and these elastic boundaries transform over time. During the past eras of which Anderson writes, changing communities were confronted with the pluralism of evolving religions and other ontological systems that differed from their own. We found parallels to Anderson's ideas in the cross-identity solidarity and kinship described by people from marginalized communities. As Kevin Duc Pham noted, the ways in which Asian-Americans unite over shared experiences in the US are

76 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

77 Gilliland and Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries."

78 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 5.

79 Ibid., 7.

not necessarily based on a granular ethnic identity. And Chuck Kaminski spoke about the ways different members of the LGBTQ+ community – who have other intersecting identities – come together. In both cases, community boundaries are established through shared ideologies and collective solidarity. Participants also echoed Anderson's understanding of community boundaries as elastic; for example, Dorothy Fujita-Rony described changes in both the definition of her community and how it is (and has been) defined in relation to dominant Western culture, which also shifts. This finding is not necessarily new, but as the ways in which communities form and are conceived is an integral aspect to the founding and functioning of community-based archives, it is important to note the ways in which identity is constructed around and within community-based archives.

Anderson's book traces the through lines connecting the ways communities are understood by members, specifically according to the geographies, languages, and materiality of cultures that inform community, identity, and memory. He shows that spatial, linguistic, and material aspects of communities are not mutually exclusive; instead, they co-create one another. For example, the history of print culture – what gets recorded – is deeply embedded in language, literacy, and class; and physical spaces such as museums produce print materials in their documentation.[80] Similarly, our community-based archives sites (with the exception of one digital archive site) have physical locations; use language to communicate ideas and signal community; and hold, collect, and produce materials in documenting their respective communities.

Caswell, Gabiola, Zavala, Brilmyer, and Cifor state, "We found that people from marginalized communities imagine community archives spaces to be symbols of survival, homes and extensions of homes, and politically generative spaces, where there is a possibility for personal, affective responses to representation to be transformed into collective political action."[81] Along these lines, Anderson illustrates the ways in which space and place affect the formation of communities. He gives the salient example of monuments such as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, where no specific person or narrative is identified or defined. He states that "the public ceremonial reverence accorded these monuments" is "precisely *because* they are either deliberately empty or no one

80 Ibid., 45.

81 Caswell et al., "Imagining Transformative Spaces," 18.

knows who lies inside them."[82] Like the photographs described by Dolores Haro at La Historia Society, tombs and monuments can have cultural significance because, as Anderson writes, "we are all aware of the contingency and ineluctability of our particular genetic heritage, our gender, our life-era, our physical capabilities, our mother-tongue, and so forth."[83] In other words, the value of archival spaces, like monuments, can have little to do with the specifics of what is memorialized and more to do with individual experience, memory, grief, and associations. Like a monument or museum, the physical spaces of community-based archives can unlock an imaginary of other people's history without necessarily referencing an exact narrative, and it can do so even more effectively by representing community spaces that symbolize their existence.

Anderson notes that "old sacred languages were gradually fragmented, pluralized, and territorialized,"[84] and describes the way communities shifted due to such linguistic changes. He also notes that

> Print-languages laid the basis for national consciousnesses. . . . they created unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars. . . .
> . . . print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation. . . . the printed book kept a permanent form, capable of virtually infinite reproduction, temporally and spatially.[85]

The community archives users agreed about the importance of linguistic aspects of their communities, such as the use of Spanish within aspects of La Historia Society as well as the ways in which language signals community and is embedded within material culture. Tying Anderson's work to that of archives draws out the deeply intertwined nature of language and material within an archive and the way those materials and languages help signal community boundaries.

Anderson traces materials such as print documents – which embody languages, are reproducible across time and space, and signal value to be preserved – and

82 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 9.

83 Ibid., 10.

84 Ibid., 19.

85 Ibid., 44–45.

describes imaginaries as grounded in the materials produced by communities. Anderson points to three institutions – the census, the map, and the museum – and notes that the materials of these institutions shape cultural understandings of communion.[86] Counter to these dominant forms of documentation and preservation, yet similar in the ways they produce imaginaries, community-based archives allow the nuances of communities to be represented and allow people to imagine other community members through their documentation in material culture. As in Dolores Haro's example, community members are brought together through materials – through people telling their stories about photos – and imaginaries are unlocked through the expansive ways in which materials *could* be used to further uncover narratives. Community archives, through their documentation, shape and reshape people's understanding of the past as well as their perception of change.

By examining the ways imaginaries form around community-based archives, we found that archival imaginaries – tied to space, language, and materials – are formed through the events, people, and materials that participants witness as well as through the gaps, silences, and absences they notice. Moreover, reinforcing Caswell's notion, where "the past becomes a lens to the future,"[87] these imaginaries coalesce around concepts of change: what was perceived to have happened in the past – whether witnessed or imagined – strongly informed users' imaginaries of future changes. As communities continue to evolve (for example, through changing definitions of terms such as *Southeast Asia*) and community spaces experience transitions in attendance or closures (because of issues such as a lack of funding or shifting neighbourhood demographics), users utilize their imaginaries in materializing affective responses – feelings of responsibility for representing the past and of unease regarding change – and these affects incite action within the archives themselves.

Community-based archives, unlike mainstream institutions, work closely with communities to serve community needs. They are, at their core, "collections of material gathered primarily by members of a given community and over whose use community members exercise some level of control";[88] they are centred on

86 Ibid., 164.

87 Caswell, "Inventing New Archival Imaginaries."

88 Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd, "Whose Memories, Whose Archives?," 73.

"*community participation, control* and *ownership of the project*."[89] Moreover, the category of "users" in community archives "complicate[s] common assumptions about clear distinctions between users, donors of materials, volunteers, and staff,"[90] as community members are often involved in different capacities within the archive itself. In other words, community-based archives and their users are both invested in the maintenance and needs of one another. This close relationship between communities and the archives that represent them demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between users and archives, where archives aim to serve their communities, and community members, through their roles in archives, participate in archival decision-making processes.

By centring the affective responses of archives users, we expand upon current concepts of archival imaginaries to point to the interdependent and circular nature of the relationship between users' imaginaries and community-based archives' priority to meet community needs. In the aforementioned archival literature, DiVeglia illustrates the sense of belonging an archive can produce through an imagined community, or the ways in which community members can imagine their community *through* archives and records.[91] And Caswell describes the dynamic, temporal aspects of archives as central to imaginary formation.[92] Moreover, as Gilliland and Caswell stress, imaginaries are also formed through the use of existing records as the basis for imagining those that are absent in reality.[93] By teasing out the ways that specific aspects of community-based archives help form imaginaries and by foregrounding change as both central to (and continual in) affective responses to users' imaginaries, we highlight the influence of archives on communities and, equally importantly, vice versa.

Not only do community archives inform and produce archival imaginaries, but also, unlike mainstream archives, community-based archives – founded on and responding to community needs – are deeply influenced by users' imaginaries. Our data shows that archival users' feelings of accountability and anxiety about the future (and the past) may influence decisions in the archives themselves due to the multiple roles played by community members – as users, staff, volunteers,

89 Flinn, "Community Histories, Community Archives," 153 (emphasis added).

90 Caswell et al., "Imagining Transformative Spaces," 78.

91 DiVeglia, "Accessibility, Accountability, and Activism."

92 Caswell, "Inventing New Archival Imaginaries."

93 Gilliland and Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries."

board members, and/or donors. For example, Bill Watanabe, imagining future change in the Little Tokyo community, is involved in building new community spaces. Informed by the change he has witnessed with younger generations, his conversations with them, and his imagining of future change, he is actively participating in shaping new community spaces. Jazmin de la Cruz, reflecting on changes in the city of El Monte as well as in the archives, "plan[s] to come here [to La Historia Society] for a long time, volunteer and be a member for a very long time."[94] La Cruz not only imagines her community – how it has and will continue to change – but also demonstrates that her archival imaginaries inspire a responsibility for preserving materials in anticipation of the future and incite her to participate and volunteer with the archives and actively influence the organization.

Given the influential role of archival imaginaries on community-based archives, we propose the term *reciprocal archival imaginaries* to focus not only on the ever-evolving ways in which archives produce imaginaries regarding what and who constitutes communities but also on the ways such imaginaries, in turn, influence community-based archives. As archival imaginaries link pasts, presents, and futures, *reciprocal archival imaginaries* – like double hermeneutics[95] – centre users' affective responses to their imaginaries and highlight the ongoing mutual influences of archives and users, which are rooted in, influenced by, and prompt temporal changes.

What is more, reciprocal archival imaginaries highlight the *value* of the imaginary within community-based archives: consideration of *imagined* realities alongside documented aspects is essential in the context of community-based archives. For example, Frank Nobiletti, imaging all the untapped potential of the Lambda Archives, brings hundreds of students to the Archives to use materials. And Lisa Lamont, who imagines that "if they [young people] don't get it on their phone, it doesn't exist," has been motivated to work on digitization of Lambda materials. Nobiletti and Lamont's imaginaries of younger generations' knowledge and use of materials – whether or not those use cases are ever actualized – have spurred them to take action to shape archival uses and processes of the Lambda collections and to make changes that they think will increase

94 La Cruz interview.

95 Anthony Giddens, *New Rules of Sociological Method: A Positive Critique of Interpretative Sociologies* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2013).

exposure. In other words, although changes, uses, and community members may be imagined rather than directly witnessed, their very image can still shape archival decisions as community-based archives consider, and respond to, and are inseparable from the imaginaries that they make possible. The unique relationships of communities and users to community-based archives as well as the ways in which community-based archives form imaginaries mean that reciprocal archival imaginaries reflect the complex entanglements among all aspects of community-based archives, users' imaginaries, and the ways in which they inform one another.

Conclusion

As an exploratory and theory-building endeavour, this article aims to tease out themes that arose through focus group discussions conducted at five different community archives sites and then parallels Anderson's notion of imagined community as a conceptual touchstone. Through witnessed interactions and interpretations of both representations and absences, members will imagine what their community entails. Our data demonstrates that spatial, linguistic, and material aspects of community-based archives reflect as well as influence the ways communities are understood by community members. Archival imaginaries form not only through the physical presence of these aspects but also through their absences: by encountering members and documentation of their community in community spaces, community archives users establish imaginaries of the community and imagine what might not be. Further, through linguistic traditions, erasures, and the ways language is embedded in records, members form imaginaries around their community and how it has been treated by others. Lastly, through the physical materiality of a community archive and the materials it contains, users form deep understandings of their communities, imagine narratives that might not be represented, and envision their potential uses.

These aspects of community archives help structure archival users' imaginaries of the temporal changes in a community: what their community is, has been, and will be. Through our data, we found that many users of community-based archives, in response to the shifting boundaries of community, felt a deep sense of responsibility to their community's archive – to preserve materials and histories both in the face of change and in anticipation of the ways in which they imagined

other users would use it in the future. Entangled in this affect was an anxiety both about changes within communities – as younger generations change traditions, establish new norms, and invite others into spaces and events – and about changes to physical spaces through outside forces such as gentrification. Overall, our research has found that community archives users form and utilize their imaginaries both to continually define their communities, by negotiating and imagining elastic boundaries, and to anticipate future shifts in the boundaries of their communities.

Not only do users produce notions of community through the ways in which they interact with archives, but they are also prompted, through their responses to these imaginaries, to push for adjustments in the archives themselves. Reciprocal archival imaginaries – the circular and continually entangled relationships among archival users, their imaginaries, and community-based archives – demonstrate the importance of recognizing imagination as a force of change in community-based archives. As community-based archives prioritize the needs of their communities to collect and organize materials "*on their own terms*"[96] and maintain close, multifaceted relationships with users (who also may be staff, volunteers, board members, or donors), these findings may have future implications for archival practice both inside and outside of community-based archives. Future research questions could include, How have users' imaginaries made significant transformations in archival work toward social change? How might the prioritization of reciprocal archival imaginaries benefit the archives sites that participated in our study (or community-based archives in general)? And how might the unique reciprocal relationships between communities and their archives be translated in order for mainstream archives to open flexible, affective, and nuanced spaces through which to hear and implement user needs? As community-based archives are deeply intertwined within the communities they represent, these unique and complex findings may just begin to uncover the ways in which community archives influence and are influenced by the limitless bounds of their communities' imaginations.

96 Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd, "Whose Memories, Whose Archives?," 73 (emphasis in original).

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