KULA
Knowledge Creation, Dissemination, and Preservation Studies

Paying It Forward
The Prefigurative Politics of Record Creation

Anna Robinson-Sweet (iD) and Michelle Caswell (iD)

Cite this article

Article abstract

Through analysis of data from interviews with people who shared their stories with two community archives, Texas After Violence Project (TAVP) and South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), this article examines how records creators imagine future use and users. Our findings reveal that people create records with concrete ideas of who might access their record and how they might use it. In keeping with community archives research that troubles the sharp delineation between record creator and user, we find that community archives creators are motivated by the need for representational belonging, radical empathy for their communities, and reciprocal archival imaginaries. Many of the participants in our research also describe their story's potential use as a tool for activism and advocacy. Sharing their stories with these uses in mind, participants in our research engaged in what we call prefigurative record creation, a term we use to describe how participants enacted the future they imagine for their communities by sharing their story in the present. Prefigurative record creation constitutes a political act in opposition to the misrepresentation, erasure, and violence that marginalized communities encounter in society. Recognition of prefigurative records creation as such is crucial to helping community archives understand and meet the expectations of their donors.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Paying It Forward: The Prefigurative Politics of Record Creation

Anna Robinson-Sweet

UCLA

Michelle Caswell

UCLA

Through analysis of data from interviews with people who shared their stories with two community archives, Texas After Violence Project (TAVP) and South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), this article examines how records creators imagine future use and users. Our findings reveal that people create records with concrete ideas of who might access their record and how they might use it. In keeping with community archives research that troubles the sharp delineation between record creator and user, we find that community archives creators are motivated by the need for representational belonging, radical empathy for their communities, and reciprocal archival imaginaries. Many of the participants in our research also describe their story's potential use as a tool for activism and advocacy. Sharing their stories with these uses in mind, participants in our research engaged in what we call *prefigurative record creation*, a term we use to describe how participants enacted the future they imagine for their communities by sharing their story in the present. Prefigurative record creation constitutes a political act in opposition to the misrepresentation, erasure, and violence that marginalized communities encounter in society. Recognition of prefigurative records creation as such is crucial to helping community archives understand and meet the expectations of their donors.

Introduction

> Within archives, crip anticipation connects multiple pasts, presents, and futures: researchers . . . bring their past experiences into the present archival moment as a method of preparing for encountering the past. While witnessing the violence against disabled people in combination with each researchers' past experiences—of ableism, racism, sexism, homophobia, fatphobia, classism, colonialism, and therefore of social and archival erasure—anticipation allows them to prepare and guard themselves against harms while also having hope for different futures of archival research.
>
> - Gracen Brilmyer (2022, 168–69)

In the above quote, Gracen Brilmyer describes how the disabled archival researchers they interviewed imagined encountering disability in archives based on past experiences of erasure, misrepresentation, and violence. This imagining, which Brilmyer terms *crip anticipation,* prepares these users for future harm but also allows them to envision a different, more humane archive. In this article, we similarly consider how imagined futures influence present interactions with archives from the perspective of those who create records. The connections that emerge between archives creation and use contribute to our understanding of the intentions that motivate records creation, offering a conceptualization of record creation as a means of prefiguring a more liberatory future.

Over the past few decades, dominant Western archival theory has moved away from its insistence on impartiality to future use as a key characteristic of archival nature, but the field has yet to thoroughly consider the connection between records creators and users. Community archives have troubled the sharp delineation between record creator and user because many community archives records creators are users of the collections to which they contribute. The research that has been done in this area reveals how community archives users, particularly those from marginalized communities, look to archives for self-representation in the face of symbolic annihilation and as a tool for activism and advocacy. Some, like those in Brilmyer's study, engage with archives as a way of imagining better futures. Our research builds upon these conceptions of archival use by presenting qualitative data on how records creators themselves envision the future use and users of their records. Such research is crucial to helping community archivists understand and meet the expectations of their donors, which is particularly important for those community archives that serve marginalized communities that have been excluded from dominant archives.

By analyzing empirical data gathered from those who shared their stories with two community archives, this article helps build an understanding of how records creators anticipate their stories being used. The questions driving this research are: Do record creators think about the future users of their stories, and if so, how? How does this imagined future user and use influence their decision to contribute to the archives? The answers to these questions come from our interviews with participants who told their stories to two different BIPOC-centered community archives: the Texas After Violence Project (TAVP) and the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA).

TAVP is a public memory archive that fosters deeper understandings of the impacts of state violence on individuals, families, and communities. Their community partners are majority BIPOC people who are directly impacted by state violence and the criminal punishment system. Because poor and working-class communities of color are disproportionately impacted by state violence, TAVP ensures these communities are decision makers in their projects at every stage. The majority of participants in our research from TAVP shared their stories as part of the Visions After Violence Community Fellowship program, a nine-month fellowship in which those directly impacted by state violence design oral history projects, conduct and record interviews with people from their community, and creatively activate their work for the public. Other participants shared their stories with TAVP staff members and fellows from the Sheltering Justice program, a documentation initiative to responsibly and ethically archive the stories of people impacted by the intersection of COVID-19 and mass incarceration.

The South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA) collects, preserves, and shares stories of South Asian Americans, and through its post-custodial digital archives, participatory storytelling initiatives, and educational outreach, shapes public understanding about the more than 5.4 million people in the US who identify as South Asian American. Participants in our research who shared their stories with SAADA were interviewed by SAADA's Archival Creators Fellows. The Archival Creators Fellowship supports community members in becoming active participants in proposing, designing, appraising, curating, and creating archival collections that reflect the histories and perspectives of the most marginalized groups within the South Asian American community. The participants include community members who are working class, undocumented, LGBTQ+, Dalit, Indo-Caribbean, and from other groups that have been traditionally excluded from dominant narratives. Because there is a lack of pre-existing accurate documentation of these communities, many Archival Creators projects feature oral histories.

Working together, a team from TAVP, SAADA, and UCLA Community Archives Lab developed *Virtual Belonging: Assessing the Affective Impact of Digital Records Creation in Community Archives*, a community-led participatory action research project to study the impact of programs like the Archival Creators Fellowship and Visions After Violence Fellowship. This article is one of several to emerge from this project, and it reports on initial data about how those who shared their stories with TAVP or SAADA imagine the future users and use of their stories. Our findings show TAVP and SAADA's records creators shared their stories as a means of enacting the future that they envision for their communities. Drawing on the concept of prefigurative politics, which describes how social movements implement desired conditions in the present, we call this *prefigurative record creation*. We hope this theorization will help archivists better understand and meet the expectations of those from marginalized backgrounds who decide to create records by narrating their own oral histories for inclusion in archives.

Literature Review

Community Archives

In recent years, ideas emerging from community archives have challenged dominant Western archival theory by instantiating new ways of thinking about how and why we archive. Community archives have introduced

participatory practices that resist prevailing archival ideas around custodianship, description, and access. Early attempts to define community archives cast a wide net, describing the term as applicable to any group coming together to document themselves on their own terms (Flinn et al. 2009, 73). Recently, scholars have narrowed the breadth of this definition. For example, Jarrett M. Drake (2018) writes that under such metrics, almost any repository could claim the mantle of community archives. Drake instead urges a focus on liberatory versus oppressive archives. Others have similarly distinguished the grassroots, autonomous memory work done by marginalized communities. In her book *Urgent Archives,* Michelle Caswell writes of "marginalized identity-based community archives" (2021, 21), arguing that this more specific terminology is needed to distinguish between "those that represent and serve dominant communities, such as historical societies that are often invested in white supremacist histories as a way to maintain or increase local property values, and those that represent and serve under-represented, marginalized, and/or oppressed communities" (2021, 16).

The stakes for marginalized identity-based community archives are made clear by Gabriel Daniel Solís, the executive director of TAVP. Solís describes the work of TAVP and other community memory projects that document state violence as "archives of survival" because of how they "promote transformative justice and prevent and address violence without resorting to counter-violence" (2018, 9). In another move to distinguish between types of community archives, Moore and Pell (2010) describe "autonomous archives" as community archives constituted by "emergent publics." Emergent publics, they explain, are "nascent communities without (as yet) solidified group cohesion, loci of identification, or external recognition" that arise in moments of collective action in response to particular issues (Moore and Pell 2010, 257). Autonomous archives become a means for marginalized groups to construct counter-publics, "collective identities and discourses apart from dominating groups" (Moore and Pell 2010, 256). The role of community archives in group identity formation is echoed in the concept of *reciprocal archival imaginaries*, which denotes the ways in which community archives help groups imagine the past, present, and future of their communities (Brilmyer et al. 2019). Our article builds upon this concept, investigating the role of record creation in reciprocal archival imaginaries.

Autonomy is a common thread that unites definitions of community archives. As Caswell writes in *Urgent Archives,* autonomy over archival practices is what distinguishes community archives from dominant repositories that collect material from marginalized communities (2021, 17). Community archives invert the hierarchies of such archives in favor of autonomy and participation: "User participation in practices such as appraisal, description and access provides autonomy for community members who are able to manage archival collections on their own terms. This autonomy provides a platform for community members to reflect the values and needs of their communities" (Zavala et al. 2017, 212–13). Allowing users to engage in descriptive work is one of the ways that community archives blur distinctions between donor, user, and archivist (Caswell et al. 2018; Sutherland and Purcell 2021). Another example is the way that community archives engage with donors in long-term relationships of mutual care rather than simply in one-off transactions of custody (Caswell 2021, 17). An article reporting on the findings of interviews with community archives volunteers notes that many of these archives practice post-custodial and/or community ownership, "in which organisations are seen to steward materials on behalf of communities, rather than a simple transfer of custody" (Zavala et al. 2017, 209).

These practices, modeled by community archives like SAADA and TAVP, have impacted university archives as well. As Nancy Liliana Godoy (2021) writes, Arizona State University Library's Community-Driven Archives Initiative seeks shared custodianship and stewardship over donated materials. As community archives continue to challenge transactional approaches to donor relationships, more research is needed on how those who share their stories or materials with community archives view their contributions. Such research must attend to how community archives contributors view the potential use and impact of their stories.

Impartiality/Intentionality

While community archives have helped move dominant Western archival practice away from a long-held commitment to the impartiality of records (Cook 2013), this concept persists in the field's literature and pedagogy. According to the Society of American Archivists (n.d.), impartiality is one of the characteristics that contribute to a record's *archival nature*. Records, in this line of thinking, are archival owing to their impartiality, created "as a means for carrying out activities they document," and their naturalness, "accumulate[d] out of a routine process" (Society of American Archivists n.d.). In an article that traces the centrality of impartiality in American archival theory, Paige Hohmann explains that archival records have been considered "agents of routine, [which] do not have an agenda beyond the fulfillment of a transaction. . . . Because of this impartiality, they are able to communicate certain objective data about the contexts and facts of their creation that other information artifacts cannot" (2016, 16). The implication of these definitions is that when records are created for reasons other than carrying out an activity (for example, as

an end unto itself) or accumulated in a process that cannot be described as routine, the archival nature of that record and therefore its ability to serve as evidence of past actions is compromised.

In the twenty-first century, these notions of archival nature began to be challenged by archivists and scholars influenced by postmodern and critical theory (Wiker 2020). Verne Harris (2002) has been a prominent contributor to this discourse, using his own experience as an archivist in post-apartheid South Africa to argue that archives represent a sliver of social memory shaped by those in power rather than existing as impartial repositories of evidence. Indeed, as archival studies scholars Anthony W. Dunbar (2006) and Mario H. Ramirez (2015) have argued, claims to impartiality and neutrality have long served as a cover for normative whiteness and a lack of diversity within the field.[1] Harris, Dunbar, Ramirez, and others writing in this vein focus primarily on the role of the archivist in constructing the archival record. Others have critiqued the one-to-one relationship between activity and record that lies at the heart of archival nature. Geoffrey Yeo's (2010) definition of archival records as *representations* of events draws attention to the agency of the record creator, pointing out that records cannot be assumed to be impartial accounts. Going a step further, scholars of colonial archives such as Jeannette Allis Bastian (2005) and J. J. Ghaddar (2016) reveal how colonial authorities create records and assemble archives as a means of silencing their subjects and exercising power. Similarly, Drake (2014, 2018) has examined the role of records creation and manipulation in white supremacist state violence.

Such scholars, as Heather MacNeil writes, "have troubled the metaphor of records as evidence by positioning historical sources as constituent agents in reconstructing a particular conception of the past rather than as the unselfconscious remains of that past" (2020, 88–89). Most of the archival studies writing on this topic examines archival records within context to demonstrate the representational choices exercised by their creators. Ciaran B. Trace (2002) is one of the few scholars to have conducted qualitative research on records creators' intentions and how such intentions influence the record that is produced. In Trace's examination of the factors that influence law enforcement record creation, she reveals how personnel are socialized to create records in a certain way to result in desired outcomes. Based on this research, Trace argues for a framework that distinguishes between the *use* and *purpose* of the record. Whereas *use* refers to the immediate use of the record in the course of routine transactions, *purpose* "acknowledges that records are created in anticipation of future as well as current uses (both within and outside of the organization) and that these other uses are (or will be) more than the purely technical" (Trace 2002, 153). In other words, while a record's use may be to document a transaction, its purpose might be different, such as to prove a bureaucrat was performing their duties. As with Yeo's definition of records as representations, however, Trace's framework continues to insist on record creation as an act performed alongside another transaction or event. What about those cases in which people record their story solely so that it can be accessed in an archive by future users?

In the archival discourse, oral history has been caught in the crosshairs of disciplinary debates over neutrality and impartiality. As Jamie A. Lee (2019) writes, oral history's non-transactional, subjective, and interpretive nature has led some to dismiss the medium as non-archival. More capacious definitions of the archival clearly admit oral history, and archival practice reflects this acceptance. Even within the narrow view of records as evidence of transactions, Caswell and Samip Mallick (2014) argue that oral histories can be seen as records of a community's efforts to document its own history. The need to justify the archival nature of oral history stems largely from the Western predilection for written records, and the supposed "fixity" of such records. In critiquing the white supremacist colonial ideology that undergirds this preference, Tonia Sutherland argues for not just oral history but other "embodied experiences" such as performance, rituals, and oral tradition to be considered archival records (2020, 241). Lee similarly counters ideas of fixity, writing that oral histories are records precisely because, and not in spite of, their qualities of being "stable and unstable, consistent and inconsistent, complementary and contradictory" (2019, 169). In short, oral history practice broadens previously tight definitional bounds of the record, opening the possibility for a more complex understanding of archival subjects. This complexity necessarily entails recognition of records creators' agency and perspective. Our research aims to contribute to this recognition by demonstrating how oral history record creation can be an empowering act, particularly for creators who have been historically excluded from archives.

Archival Use and Users

Archival use has been a dedicated topic of study since the 1980s, a decade that saw a burst of research and writing on the subject. These early articles called out previous inattention to archival use and suggested

---

[1] While Ramirez uses both *impartiality* and *neutrality* to refer to archivists' positioning of themselves vis-à-vis their work, and Dunbar uses the word neutrality in a similar sense, we use *impartiality* throughout this article to refer to the archival record and *neutrality* to refer to the position of the person interacting with that record, whether it be the record creator or archivist.

frameworks for a systematic approach to analyzing use and users (Dearstyne 1987). As Hea Lim Rhee (2015) details in their literature review of archival user studies, there has not been consistent scholarship on the topic since the 1980s, especially when compared with the steady output of research on library use. Rhee argues that this comparative lack of literature on use in archives could be due both to a lack of resources within archives to conduct user studies and to archives' traditional prioritization of material preservation over archival use.

While lack of resources continues to be problem faced by archives and libraries alike, there has arguably been a disciplinary shift toward deeper consideration of the people who create and use archives. As Terry Cook argues in his much-cited article on the evolving paradigms of archival practice, the contemporary community archives movement has called for more participatory engagement between even mainstream archives and the communities they represent and serve (2013, 115).

This is evident in a number of studies conducted in recent years on users of community archives. Many of these studies focus on users of digital community archives. For example, Krystyna Matusiak (2022) conducted a mixed-methods evaluation of users of an unnamed digital archive focused on a rural community in the western United States, with findings related to the website's interface design, content of collections, and information organization. In an article on digital preservation for the Ontario Jewish Archives, Nathan Moles (2022) discussed the challenges of applying Open Archival Information System (OAIS) standards in a community archives context because the types of use and user are more diverse than they are for a university or government digital archival repository. Authors of a poster paper on the Documenting Ferguson online community archive borrowed methods from the field of Human Computer Interaction (HCI) to study what motivated people to contribute to the archive (Freeland and Atiso 2015). In one of the few studies focused on users of physical community archives, focus groups with users at five community archives sites revealed how members of marginalized communities imagine the physical spaces of community archives (Caswell et al. 2018). Three themes emerged from this work: community archives as a physical symbol of representation, as a home away from home, and as a potential site of political activism.

As discussed above, community archives users are also often donors and even volunteer archivists themselves. This blurring of roles calls for an approach to users advocated for by Caswell and Marika Cifor (2016) in their article on radical empathy in archival practice. In this article, Caswell and Cifor argue for a departure from legal-based accountability frameworks that view the archivist and user as "autonomous individual subjects" (2016, 27) and toward an approach guided by feminist ethics that views archivist, user, donor, and record subject as enmeshed in a web of affective responsibilities with each other. The affective responsibility archivists have to users is evidenced in Gracen Brilmyer's (2022) work on disabled archives users and representations of disability in archives. In their interviews with these users, Brilmyer describes how encounters with archival misrepresentation in the past translate into present feelings of harm, which lead these users to anticipate further archival misrepresentation and absence.

In that same article, Brilmyer engages with the concept of *archival imaginaries*, a term coined by Caswell to describe "the dynamic way in which communities creatively and collectively re-envision the future through archival interventions in representations of the shared past" (2013, 49). While the term archival imaginaries was first applied to the concept of imagined records (Gilliland and Caswell 2016), later research explored the idea of imagined users in community archives (Brilmyer et al. 2019). In focus groups with community archives users, Brilmyer et al. (2019) asked how marginalized communities conceive of their communities through consideration of imagined future users. The article introduces the concept of reciprocal archival imaginaries to describe the "ever-evolving ways in which archives produce imaginaries regarding what and who constitutes communities but also . . . the ways such imaginaries, in turn, influence community-based archives" (Brilmyer et al. 2019, 44). In other words, the ways those involved in community archives imagine future users of their archives help them determine the community at the heart of their work, which then influences who those future users will indeed be. Jessica M. Lapp (2023) also considers the interplay between archival imaginaries and records creation: in discussing two digital collections of feminist materials, Lapp argues that their creation is an act of imagining new worlds, which she calls "provenancial fabulation."

Lapp's article proposing provenancial fabulation notably acknowledges the intent and agency of records creators. As Jennifer Douglas (2018) writes, despite the centrality of provenance in archival arrangement and description, archival creatorship overall is an undertheorized aspect of archival studies. And while Douglas, Lapp, and others have offered crucial theorizations of provenance that move the field away from the presumed neutral sole creator, this scholarship mainly deals with the implications of expanded provenance for the purposes of archival description. We build upon this work by looking at the interplay between archival creation and imagined use.

Representation in Archives

One of the few studies to look at peoples' motivations for contributing to archives found that many people felt their contributions helped forge connection with their community. In an analysis of oral histories recorded in conjunction with donations to the Mass. Memories Road Show, Ana Roeschley and Jeonghyun Kim write that contributing to the archive gave donors a sense of belonging and helped them to "bridge personal and communal pasts" (2019, 46). Bastian (2003) describes this interrelationship between archive and community as a *community of records*, arguing that records help constitute the community and vice versa. When a community loses access to their records, they lose the ability to write their own history and form collective memory.

There is also a personal affective impact to not seeing oneself or one's community represented in archives. Caswell (2014) introduced the term *symbolic annihilation* to the archives field to describe how marginalized communities feel in the face of absences or misrepresentations of themselves in archives. Writing further about this concept, Caswell, Cifor, and Ramirez (2016) describe how in interviews with SAADA board members, many interviewees expressed feeling symbolically annihilated by dominant archives. In contrast, the interviews surfaced how community archives like SAADA engender a feeling of *representational belonging*. The authors use this term to describe the impact for marginalized communities of seeing their experiences documented in archives, especially after previous experiences of symbolic annihilation.

In a follow-up to the first article on representational belonging, Zavala et al. (2017) studied the impact of community archives for founders, volunteers, and staff at these archives. The authors built upon the model of impact introduced in prior work, explaining the three levels at which representational belonging in community archives affects people from marginalized communities: ontological, epistemological, and social. Ontological impact refers to how seeing their experience accurately represented in archives changes how community members exist in the world. The epistemological impact results from having proof of your community's existence. And social impact describes how community archives help forge a sense of community.

While representational belonging is found to have a positive affective impact in the two studies described above, further research complicates this idea by investigating how marginalized communities might also refrain from self-representation as a tactic of survival. In interviews with users of community-based archives in Southern California and with LGBTQ+ Asian Americans in Texas, researchers found a tension between a desire for representational belonging and a need to protect one's community from the violence of white supremacy (Gabiola et al. 2022). For example, in communities that have experienced trauma, younger generations might be hesitant to ask older generations to relive those experiences, both out of a sense of honor to their elders and out of respect for privacy and cultural values (Gabiola et al. 2022, 73). The authors coined the term *representational subversion* to describe how marginalized communities balance both representation and absence in archives.

Solís (2018) explores how symbolic annihilation is tied to bodily annihilation. In his article on records produced by the criminal legal system, Solís writes that police reports, court records, and media narratives "reveal a foundational logic in dominant ideas of justice: killing conceptually makes it much easier to kill actually or justify a killing in the aftermath" (2018, 2). Archives holding such material further symbolic annihilation because the trauma of the violence they inflict produces silences that allow their own narratives to dominate. To combat this symbolic and bodily annihilation, Solís advocates for the importance of liberatory community memory projects such as TAVP.

Just as symbolic annihilation is often intertwined with bodily annihilation, so too can representation in archives be important in liberation and social change. While scholarship on representational belonging points to the social impact of community archives, there has not been much research to show how a desire for representation and social change motivates people from marginalized communities to share their stories with community archives, often overcoming fears about the kind of violence experienced by communities engaged in "representational subversion" (Gabiola et al. 2022).

Archives and Activism

Recognition of the myriad ways that archives are used beyond historical scholarship or genealogical research has led to greater appreciation for the social justice impact of archives. In 2013, Duff et al. were the first to try and establish a framework for understanding this impact; then, in 2020, Wallace et al. published an edited volume on the topic, which presented essays on the meaning of social justice, new approaches for measuring impact, and eight case studies demonstrating archives' social justice impact. These case studies describe how communities are using records and archives to achieve justice in the form of the return of stolen land rights, legal accountability for violence, changes to recordkeeping practices, archival access, personal agency, and resistance.

Researchers in the United Kingdom studying the impact of archives from an activist perspective have also found that traditional frameworks for examining archival impact are inadequate to activist archival use because they tend to focus on the informational use of archives rather than the affective and creative incorporation of archives into activist projects (Buchanan and Bastian 2015). The authors propose an alternative framework for activist archival impact that considers how activists emotionally engage in archival research, using their findings to develop complex understandings of time, space, and progress. And while this article and many of the case studies on social justice impact focus on activist uses of government archives, there has also been exciting work on the creation and implementation of archives by social movements. For example, Joel A. Blanco-Rivera (2020) writes about activists in Chile creating their own alternative archives in response to the state's efforts to withhold records from the brutal dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Similarly, Beverley Butler (2020) describes how Palestinians "act back" against their erasure and objectification in Zionist archives by creating their own online archives of the Nakba.

As these examples demonstrate, activists often create archives as a means of collecting evidence and correcting absences or misrepresentations of historical events found in dominant archives. In a community in South London that has been targeted by the government for redevelopment, housing activists created their own archives containing movement materials and documents obtained from the government through freedom of information requests. In describing how these archives empower activists, Elena Carter writes that, "by forming an archive, these activist groups are . . . more able to take control over their histories and take back the power inherent in the archive and ensure that their memories and perspectives are captured in the historical record" (2017, 32). Housing activists in this case created archives to contest government and media narratives that painted their communities as slums that would benefit from redevelopment.

Archives created by social movements for social movements can be described as *activist archives*. Interference Archive, a community-based repository of social movement material, situates activist archives as a type of community-based archives that "not only honor specific communities but also forge new relationships between parallel histories, reshape and reinterpret dominant narratives, and challenge conceptions of the archive itself" (Sellie et al. 2015, 454). As this definition of activist archives suggests, activist archives often challenge dominant archival practice by enacting participatory and non-hierarchical processes. Susan Pell (2015) further argues that because of how activist archives exist as sites of autonomy and self-representation, they are good spaces for investigating the politics of archives. Activist archives provide a model for archives of all kinds to enact participatory, experimental practices that are "oriented toward a community of users" (Pell 2015, 56). Similarly, in their introduction to a volume of interviews with activists, Jen Hoyer and Nora Almeida (2021) urge archivists to pay attention to how these activists imagine their materials being archived and used, noting that the disconnects between these imagined archives and reality can offer inspiration to reimagine archival work.

Many of the texts cited above point to how activist use of archives disrupts the concept of linear time presented by dominant archival theory, one in which archives are used to construct better understandings of the past in order to demonstrate the progress seen in the present, which will continue into the future. In *Urgent Archives*, Caswell critiques this as the "white temporal imaginary" (2021, 20). In contrast, identity-based community archives enact understandings of time that link past injustices to present struggles. Caswell explains that such archives are ripe for social movement activation because they hold "corollary records," evidence of "reoccurring moments in time in which the same or similar oppressions get repeated" (2021, 53). Similarly, Buchanan and Bastian write that archival research allows activists to draw parallels across time and space to see similarities between past and present conditions (2015, 443). Activists also use archives to imagine a more hopeful future, what Carter calls the "future-past" (2017, 36). Sometimes, creating an archive can be a means for enacting this future, serving as what some call a "prefigurative space" (Sellie et al. 2015, 467; Lobo 2019). A group of volunteers for Interference Archive, for example, write about how this activist archive is prefigurative because it puts into practice social relations that the volunteers aspire to see in society at large (Sellie et al. 2015). Through a critical examination of archival practice, non-profit funding, and organizational structures, Interference Archive's volunteers enact alternatives that align with their social justice goals. In this way, the archives become a space for bringing the future into the present.

In thinking about the various ways that activist use of archives disrupts linear models of time, we might also consider how use, typically seen as coming after the creation and preservation of a record, might come first, before the record is even made. While archivists often engage with imagined use when making decisions about appraisal, arrangement, and description, there has not been thorough consideration of how records creators themselves anticipate use and incorporate that imagined future activation into the material or story they share with the archives. Just as activist archival use has compelled the creation of new models of archival impact, so too might it generate new understandings of record creation and the motivations for those who share their stories with archives.

Methodology

This article reports on some of the findings from a community-led participatory action research (PAR) project. PAR is an iterative process in which communities play leading roles in every aspect of research design and implementation, from formulating research questions to analyzing data (Buckles and Chevalier 2019). Community-led PAR has been used within archival studies by several teams of researchers who simultaneously design research inquiries and create or maintain archival projects alongside community members (Rolan et al. 2019). Working within the context of Indigenous communities in Australia, Shannon Faulkhead (2017) uses the term "negotiated methodologies" to describe formulating a research design that meets the needs of marginalized communities and fully reflects their own autonomous epistemologies and research methodologies.

In this case, the research questions, project design, and implementation emerged from equal partnerships between UCLA Community Archives Lab, TAVP, SAADA, and community members who participated in TAVP and SAADA programs. Our overarching research questions, interview protocol, and method of data collection were collaboratively designed, and our findings have been reported back to staff and stakeholders at each organization via both private and public presentations at meetings and community events. The design of this research strives to meet the nine principles for building mutually beneficial relationships between academic researchers and community archivists outlined by the Reciprocity in Researching Records Collaborative: relational consent, mutual benefit, investment, humility, accountability, transparency, equity, reparation, and amplification (Douglas et al. 2021).

Participants in this research were recruited by TAVP and SAADA staff after they told their stories as part of either TAVP's Visions After Violence (VAV) Community Fellowship or Sheltering Justice Program (for people directly impacted by state violence) or SAADA's Archival Creators' Fellowship Projects (for South Asian Americans from further minoritized communities.) We used in-depth one-on-one semi-structured interviews as well as focus groups as specific methods of data collection. (See Appendix A for the semi-structured interview protocol.) We followed the seven stages of the interview process recommended by Alison Jane Pickard (2007): thematizing, designing, interviewing, recording, transcribing, analyzing, and verifying. Between April and June 2022, the first author of this paper conducted in-depth one-on-one semi-structured interviews over Zoom with twenty-one people who had previously participated in oral history projects at TAVP or SAADA. In June 2022, she conducted two focus groups (one for each organization) with an additional eight participants, for a total of twenty-nine research subjects. Each participant received a one-hundred-dollar stipend for their participation. Interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed, with the permission of each interview subject, and coded for themes using NVIVO software.

This research fits squarely within an interpretivist research paradigm that presupposes reality to be socially constructed. In an interpretivist research paradigm, it is critical for researchers to acknowledge their positionality, as positionality influences what research questions can be asked, what data is collected, and how that data is interpreted. The first author of this paper is a white woman from a middle-class background who has worked as an archivist, oral historian, and community organizer. The second author of this paper is a white woman originally from a working-class background who is in the first generation of her family to graduate from high school. She co-founded SAADA and has been actively engaged in research about SAADA and other community archives sites for the past fifteen years. While both researchers are in continuous conversation with staff at each site, we, as white women who have not been incarcerated, are outsiders to both communities represented and served by the organizations. Our positionalities limited the data we were able to collect and the lens through which we interpret it.

While TAVP and SAADA both share a commitment to participatory archiving for marginalized communities, we are also attentive to the differences between TAVP and SAADA and the distinct communities they serve. In the papers we have authored on this research, this one included, we highlight the commonalities that emerged across participants at both organizations, as well as the important differences that emerged between them.

Findings

In our interviews with people who shared their stories with TAVP and SAADA, we asked participants to reflect on who they might want to listen to their stories in the archives. Some responded that this was the first time they were considering the future users of their archived story, but others described their aspirations for ways that their stories might be useful to their communities. Analysis of our interview data reveals that participants broadly imagined two groups of users: those within their community and outsiders who might be influenced in ways that are beneficial to the participants' communities.

While some participants did reflect on how their stories might be useful to others, it is important to note that for some this imagined future use was not the primary reason they chose to create a record of their story. As reported in our previous research (Caswell and Robinson-Sweet 2023), across both organizations some people described telling and recording their stories for themselves, for their own internal, emotional benefit rather than only for some imagined future audience. In another article written from this data (Caswell and Robinson-Sweet 2024), we discuss how some participants considered the "afterlives" of their recorded interviews, understanding that their stories may be used by those who do not share the community's vision and values. Despite these concerns, most felt that the presence of their story in the archives would offer their communities hope, solidarity, representation, and a sense of their own history. In what follows, we focus on three types of imagined future users described by participants: community members with shared identities and experiences; power brokers, or those who have the power to make changes affecting the participants' communities; and activists and historians of activism.

Imagined User Group #1: Community Members with Shared Identities and Experiences

Across both organizations, participants hoped that people from their community would listen to their stories and benefit from hearing an experience like theirs represented in the archives. The future user these participants imagined was someone like them.

For those who shared their stories with SAADA, this community often referred to those who shared the participants' intersecting identities. One participant, an Afghan American woman who preferred to remain anonymous, explained:

> I want . . . young Afghan girls in particular [to listen to my story] who kind of feel lost or kind of feel like they have been following in somebody else's footsteps or have been required to do exactly as everyone in their family has. . . . Because my story is I didn't end up marrying an Afghan guy, I didn't end up following the traditional rules, I broke free from all of that . . . and that's very unheard of within our culture, at least from the girls' side. . . . So, I think it's important . . . because before me, I didn't hear of anyone who had done that, I didn't know what to expect, I was scared . . . I wish I would have heard of another Afghan girl who had broken free from the stigma. (interview with author, April 27, 2022)

In describing who they would like the future user of their archived story to be, this participant reflected on how they believe hearing the stories of those with a shared cultural background can help to "break free from stigma." They attributed their own past feelings of fear and insecurity to themself not being able to access stories they could relate to when they were growing up.

Many of the participants discussed how they hoped their stories would help those with shared identities feel less isolated. For example, Kamala Kiem, who shared her story with SAADA Fellow Michael A. Henry for his project on the experiences of Indo-Jamaicans, said that she was happy that her story would be accessible on SAADA's website:

> I think it's awesome to be able to capture my story and have it sort of live on however long this continues. . . . I do hope that it does help people like, you know, I can imagine someone who's listening to this who might be queer or Indian feeling like they're not alone. So, I hope that it does pay that forward. (interview with author, May 31, 2022)

In talking about "paying it forward," Kiem stated her aspiration for her story to be used by future generations of queer Indian people to help them feel less alone.

Participants who shared their story with TAVP similarly imagined a future user from within their community. For the most part, this community centered around a shared experience with the criminal punishment system. Rabia Qutab, who shared her story with VAV Fellow Alexa Garza, hoped that other formerly incarcerated Pakistani women would listen to her story:

> I speak upon my culture but that's one thing that I am a little saddened about, that oftentimes we're in these spaces, and you don't see those voices. . . . If there are any Pakistani women formerly incarcerated and they will listen to my story, that would be amazing because I miss having that kind of connection with somebody or understanding because . . . it's a taboo, right, talking about those things in our culture. And that's also another stigma that needs to be changed and yeah, so I hope it makes a difference. (interview with author, April 20, 2022)

For Qutab, the ideal imagined future user shares both her identity as a Pakistani woman and her experience of being formerly incarcerated. Like the Afghan American woman who shared her story with SAADA, Qutab spoke about the potential power of her story to overcome cultural stigmas, in this case the stigma around incarceration. Qutab hopes that her story will provide an opportunity for connection with others who share these identities and experiences and will, therefore, benefit not only others but herself. For Qutab, sharing her story is one step toward engendering community between herself and others like her who might currently feel isolated due to their interlocking cultural and incarceration experiences.

Others who shared their stories with TAVP talked about their aspiration that their stories will help others feel understood. Katelyn Smith, who shared her story with VAV Fellow Lovinah Igbani-Perkins, explained:

> I just feel like there's somebody out there that needs to [hear my story]. And I don't know them . . . I don't know who they are. But I know that there's somebody out there that is going to need it and that alone makes me extremely grateful because I feel like somebody was in the same boat that I was in and they were scared to tell their story, and they were scared to talk about their story, but will now know that somebody else understands what they're going through. And sometimes that feeling is more powerful than anything else, is just knowing that you're not alone in something. And so, I hope for that one person out there, that they're the ones that hear it. (interview with author, May 6, 2022)

Smith emphasized that even if her story reaches just one person with a shared experience, that will be enough. She talked about how this person might be someone who is scared to tell their story because they feel like no one else understands their struggle. In this way, Smith linked the imagined listener's experience of hearing her story to the ability to endure their own struggle, and perhaps even go on to share their own story.

Many of the TAVP participants spoke about the challenges they have faced surrounding their incarceration and re-entry and hoped that by sharing how they have dealt with these challenges, they might provide a model for other formerly incarcerated people or those with loved ones who are in prison. Qutab talked about how her story may offer hope for this community:

> I do hope that it [my story] makes somebody realize that they're beautiful, they're empowering, they're powerful. Even if they're out one month from incarceration, two months, you can do this. Because I've only been out since 2020 and it's been a year and let's say six months already and . . . so many things have happened in my life. So, look at it as a blessing to a second chance and look at it as a freedom, and you know, you're free to do whatever you want. (interview with author, May 20, 2022)

By telling her story of post-incarceration success, Qutab hopes to serve as a model for those who are feeling discouraged and disempowered upon re-entry from prison. Shuntay Weston, who also shared her story with Alexa Garza, said that she hoped her story gave formerly incarcerated women hope: "I truly believe your struggle is not for you, it's for somebody else. When people see that you've gone through what they're going through right now, then it gives them hope" (interview with author, May 24, 2024). By sharing her story, Weston is able to transform her struggles into a source of hope for others.

Many of the TAVP participants spoke about the fear of sharing their stories of incarceration. As Smith said, many are "scared to tell their story." Kirsten Ricketts, who spoke with Murphy Anne Carter as part of TAVP's Sheltering Justice program, talked about the power of her story fighting her husband's medical neglect while incarcerated:

> That's why I agreed to do the video in the first place is because we so desperately need changes within our criminal justice system for those who are currently incarcerated, especially in the state of Texas, this is a horrible place to be incarcerated. And so, I just wanted to be as open, honest, and transparent as I could to make sure that you know, people might be drawn to stand up and do something for their loved ones as well. (interview with author, June 15, 2022)

Ricketts hopes that by sharing her story she might encourage others in a similar position to come forward. In speaking out against the atrocities occurring in Texas prisons, Ricketts is providing a model of strength for others to follow. In this way, sharing her story is an advocacy tool that encourages other family members of incarcerated people to speak out against the conditions their loved ones face inside.

Imagined User Group # 2: Power Brokers (TAVP)

Many of those who shared their stories with TAVP talked about the potential advocacy impact of sharing their stories. While they imagined the affective impact of their stories for users who had experienced incarceration, they also imagined another group of users who were outside of this community—those who have the power to make changes within the carceral system. Kirsten Ricketts explained the impact stories like hers might have on those in positions of power:

> I think, for me, it would be really nice if some of our representatives and state senators would take a closer look at what's motivating people like us to go into advocacy. And so, with these video archives what it does is it gives the background picture that they don't have. You know, this is why we're doing what we're doing, not because we're some free lunatics running around, "criminal justice reform, somebody's got to fix it," you know, no. There are real, serious issues that affect us personally and that have made us get up and be the voice for people who can't speak for themselves. . . . And so for me, I would love for them to go back and take a look at those videos, at why we're doing what we're doing, and then they know our heart's behind this. (interview with author, June 15, 2022)

As an experienced advocate for criminal justice reform, Ricketts alludes to the obstacles that people like her face in speaking with politicians. She believes that stories like hers can help bridge the gap by providing those in power with an understanding of what motivates advocates and activists. Lauren Byrd-Moreno, an activist whose boyfriend is formerly incarcerated, also shared her story with Carter. Byrd-Moreno spoke about the impact of storytelling:

> I believe that . . . when you're out there trying to change policy, you're also changing hearts and minds. And so, in order to begin to change those hearts and minds what better way to frame it than your own personal experience? We can give them data, I can tell people, and it's true that rehabilitation or advocacy and criminal justice reform make safer communities, but until I give them something personal to hold on to and to connect to, numbers are numbers, and numbers aren't sexy and numbers don't invoke emotion, but stories do. (focus group with author, June 15, 2022)

Speaking from her own experience, Byrd-Moreno believes in the power of storytelling as a tool for advocacy. As an activist, Byrd-Moreno was motivated to share her story with TAVP because she believes that it will move policymakers in a way that other forms of information cannot. In imagining the impact of their stories on politicians and policymakers, these participants envision a future user that sits outside of their community but has the power to materially improve the lives of people within their community of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals.

Those who shared their stories with TAVP also talked about the way that their stories offer a counter to public perceptions of formerly incarcerated people. Amite Dominick, an advocate whose husband is incarcerated and who shared her story with Carter, said, "Nobody believes the inmates, right, they're just all liars anyways according to the public. So, getting these stories out and letting people know exactly, making it real to people, you know. I think it's extremely important" (interview with author, June 22, 2022). Dominick feels that if users who have not experienced incarceration listen to their stories, it will help build empathy.

Other participants talked about the inaccurate portrayals of the prison experience on television shows like *Orange Is the New Black*, which paints an overly rosy picture of life inside (Mandi Zapata, interview with author, April 22, 2022). As Kristin Parker said, "It was very refreshing to be able to . . . have my answers recorded and . . . just letting people really know what happens because it's not like you sit there, you don't eat bonbons . . . it's not a fun environment to be in" (interview with author, April 19, 2022). Parker is "refreshed" by imagining a user who has a skewed perception of life in prison hearing her story and gaining an understanding of the reality of the experience. Weston also feels that stories are important to changing public perception:

> So that's the impact that I want to make, if this interview . . . helps somebody that's incarcerated who needs hope . . . know that people like me are out here saying, "Hey, it's not all gravy in there. This is what we need to do to help these people, or my people, my sisters in white." Then my duty is done. (interview with author, May 24, 2024)

Weston feels that sharing the reality of incarceration, a reality that reveals "it's not all gravy" in prison, helps those inside feel that their voices are being heard. She sees this as her duty to her "sisters in white," those who are still incarcerated and required to wear the Texas Department of Criminal Justice's white prison

uniform.

The TAVP participants explained that changing public perception is important not only because it helps advance advocacy efforts to improve conditions for current and formerly incarcerated people but also because it could help people get free. Many spoke about their experiences appearing before parole boards that are predisposed against prisoners' petitions for freedom. Parker talked about how the parole board rarely hears success stories of formerly incarcerated people and instead bases their judgements on dehumanizing prison identification photographs and prison records, which fail to tell the whole story (interview with author, April 19, 2022). James Figueroa, who shared his story with Igbani-Perkins, expressed a similar sentiment in response to our question about who he would like to listen to his story:

> Number one, I would love for doctors . . . psychiatrists, judges, DAs [to listen to my story]. All the ones that are in the judicial system, because I always hear, you know, somebody's out on bond, and they just murdered somebody else. I was let out on bond and it changed my life forever and I feel like our stories are overshadowed by the bad ones. So, I just want them to hear like, we didn't ask for this. It just happened. And now we're trying to do something about it. (interview with author, April 22, 2022)

James would like those in positions of power within the criminal punishment system to listen to his story as a counterweight to those that saturate the media about people released from prison who commit violence. He feels that his successes in overcoming incarceration are "overshadowed" by these negative stories.

In these interviews, participants from TAVP described how they imagine future users from outside their community being impacted by listening to their stories. Yet, while their contributions were partially motivated by these potential users, it is important to note that these outsiders are only significant to participants insofar as they can effect change for those who are inside the community of people impacted by the carceral system.

Imagined User Group #3: Activists and Historians of Activism (SAADA)

Some participants who shared their story with SAADA imagine a group of future users who will carry on their organizing and activism. In some cases, they envision users outside of the community who will write the history of the participants' own activism. As with TAVP participants, this outsider use is imagined only to the extent it is seen as benefiting those within the participants' own community of South Asian activists. Radhika Balakrishnan, who shared her story of being a South Asian HIV/AIDS activist with SAADA Fellow Nikhil Patel, discussed the potential future user of her story:

> You know who else needs to know this history? [It] is the people who are writing about activism on HIV/AIDS. I just read Sarah Schulman's book, which is the history of ACT UP. She knows none of what happened here. It's like the story she kind of tells is a very white, gay male, maybe some lesbian, but the kind of stuff that we all did, it's not in that archive, it's not part of that story of HIV activism in the 1990s. And we participated in the marches to get medicine. And we were part of that, part of ACT UP, but this part is never told. (interview with author, June 21, 2022)

Balakrishnan sees the contributions of South Asian activists being left out of the histories written about HIV/AIDS activist groups like ACT UP. By telling her story and having it preserved in SAADA's archive, Balakrishnan hopes that future scholars will access it and recognize the contributions of South Asians in this social movement.

Similarly, Yalini Dream, a Tamil feminist activist, discussed how future users of their story might use it to understand the development of the social movements they are a part of. Dream, who shared their story with SAADA Fellow Kartik Amarnath, explained:

> I think similarly with Ilankai Tamil feminism, with some of these different intersecting conversations, with having a vision of liberation beyond ethnonationalism, I think right now that's still confusing to folks because it's not something that many people have been introduced to and also don't know how to orient within the dominant left ecosystem . . . because I think the American Left hasn't really engaged with ethnonationalism. But the Global South has, and . . . Africa and South Asia have. So, my hope and ideal is that in twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, a hundred years . . . that engagement with these conversations will have grown and there will be greater interest in how these ideas percolated during a time when they were very unpopular. (interview with author, May 16, 2022)

For Dream, their story documents Tamil feminism at a time when consciousness of this movement is not widely recognized or understood by other people in the political left. They imagine a future user listening to their story at a time when the kind of organizing they are doing now has gained more visibility. In this future moment, someone might be able to use Dream's story to understand the history of this social movement.

While both Balakrishnan and Dream imagine a user that might be an outsider to their community listening to their story, they ultimately hope that the broader historical understanding of their activism benefits their own community of South Asian activists. Dream explained:

> This interview could be mentorship access for younger generations so they don't have to feel like they're creating the wheel from scratch, that they can actually take things from where we've got them to, at least to a certain place. And then dissect it, critique it, challenge it, evolve it and be able—just so we're not like getting stuck in the same place over and over again because of lack of access to information and ideas that have already been . . . fought hard to already be part of the public discourse. (interview with author, May 16, 2022)

Ultimately Dream hopes that whether the future user is a Tamil feminist or not, their story helps future generations of this community build on the work that Dream and their contemporaries have already done.

For these people who shared their story with SAADA, they imagine the possibility of a user who is not from their own community, but, as with the TAVP participants, their consideration of this future user is couched within their commitment to their own community. As Balakrishnan, Dream, and others articulate, the use of their stories by others is important only insofar as it will benefit or harm their community.

Discussion

These findings demonstrate that those who shared their story with TAVP and SAADA did so with their communities in mind, with the aspiration that the presence of their story in the archives would have a positive impact on others with shared identities or experiences. Participants from both TAVP and SAADA described this in terms of a responsibility to their communities: Shuntay Weston talked about her "duty" to other incarcerated women, and Kamala Kiem said she felt that by sharing her story she was "paying it forward" to future generations of queer South Asian Americans. Imagining the future users of their archived stories, many participants discussed the lack of representation they had encountered in archives and the media, placing themselves in the position of the user. As James Figueroa said, "I feel like our stories are overshadowed by the bad ones" (interview with author, April 22, 2022). In contrast to their own experiences of symbolic annihilation, participants hoped future users of their recorded stories would find representation, inspiration, and hope. By finding that there exists a strong affective link between creator and user, this research broadens our understanding of radical empathy. While Cifor and Caswell (2016) explain radical empathy in archives as radiating outward from the archivist, our findings reveal that creators' radical empathy toward the user was a driving force for record creation.

Elucidating the relationship of care between archival record creator and future user, our findings further invalidate impartiality as a core characteristic of archival nature by demonstrating the significant role that imagined future use plays in record creation. Records creators think and care about future users, and they create archival records with specific envisioned uses. This is obvious in quotes from participants like Lauren Byrd-Moreno and Yalini Dream, who discussed the use of their stories for advocacy and activism. As Byrd-Moreno explained, she shared her story with TAVP so that it could be used as an advocacy tool for influencing policymakers on issues of criminal justice reform. And not only did participants create records with a future use and user in mind, what Trace would call the record's *purpose*, but they often did so against the odds of present-day routines that operate against those from marginalized communities archiving their experiences.

The ways participants described the future users and uses of their stories call for a conception of archival nature that accounts for record creation that is done outside of, and indeed in opposition to, routine transaction, as a means of allowing for a future use and user that might otherwise not be possible. For an alternative we look to the literature on activist archives, which collapses the neat temporal distinction between record creation and use. For example, Carter's (2017, 36) description of the "future-past" of the activist archive resonates with Dream's explanation of how future generations of activists might use their story to build upon the work of the past. And Byrd-Moreno's aspiration that her story be used for legislative advocacy exemplifies what Caswell defines as archival urgency. Indeed, most if not all of the participants quoted in our findings hoped the use of their story would benefit their communities in the present rather than in some far-off distant future. This envisioned use is reminiscent of how volunteers at Interference Archive describe the archive

as a "prefigurative space," or a means of enacting the future space they want to experience in the present (Sellie et al. 2015, 468). At Interference Archive, this approach means dispensing with oppressive archiving practices, implementing non-hierarchical organizational structures, and exercising transparency in funding decisions. In our findings, participants describe creating records for a future in which South Asian American youth have access to stories like theirs, historians account for the significant contributions of South Asian American activists, incarcerated people are represented rather than annihilated in media reports, and policy-makers, judges, and parole boards consider the humanity of people who are impacted by the criminal punishment system. For many participants, creating a record of their story is a means of bringing these aspirations to fruition or "paying it forward," as Kamala Kiem put it. In sharp contrast to exercising neutrality about the future use of their record, participants in our research practice what we term *prefigurative record creation.*

Prefigurative record creation is the act of making an archival record as a means of enacting the future that creators envision for their communities. In short, it is the implementation of a prefigurative politics through record creation. As a concept within social movement studies, prefigurative politics is described as "the deliberate experimental implementation of desired future social relations and practices in the here-and-now" (Raekstad and Gradin 2020, 10). Rather than waiting for a future in which desired conditions exist, prefigurative politics puts these conditions into place in the present as a means of working toward that future. In our research, participants described how their own experiences of symbolic annihilation motivated them to share their story so that others would not have the same experience. Instead of waiting for a future in which their communities were accurately represented by the media, scholars, and politicians, participants created a record of their story as a means of bringing this future into being in the present. In this way, prefigurative record creation is demonstrative of "reciprocal archival imaginaries" (Brilmyer et al. 2019), or the ways that a community's vision of itself are both shaped by and shape the archive. Participants in our research actively engaged this imaginary, contributing to archives as a means of activating the future vision they have for their communities. Coming from marginalized backgrounds, this participation constitutes a political act; participants shared their stories in opposition to stigma, erasure, and dehumanization. This kind of record creation is anything but routine.

Our research finds that many community archives creators, particularly those from communities that have been under-represented or misrepresented in archives, are hardly neutral when it comes to future use of their record. While archival theory has moved away from impartiality as a foundational principle, it has yet to consider how creators' intentions for future use can be accounted for in the lifecycle of the record. We argue that archivists must shift their approach to empathetically engage with creators and donors as invested parties in the future use of their records. In the context of prefigurative records creation archivists have a responsibility to help steward not only that record but the future use and user that creator envisioned. Questions to consider might include: How can description and arrangement help encourage access for imagined future users? Can digitization help satisfy the intentions of creators? Can accessibility be increased to ensure that those who should be able to use these records can? Community archives often take such questions into consideration, but so too should archives of all kinds. By centering creators' imagined future use in all stages of archival work, archivists become prefigurative collaborators.

Conclusion

The findings of our research demonstrate that records creators thoughtfully consider the future users and uses of their records, and that this consideration helps them overcome fears and uncertainties about sharing their stories. The participants in our research shared their aspirations for a future in which marginalized peers feel a sense of belonging, their communities have the support they need to heal from trauma, people in power listen to the voices of those most impacted by their actions, and activists continually build on the successes and failures of past generations. By sharing their stories, participants engage in prefigurative record creation, bringing their desired future into the present and creating the conditions for their aspirations to become realities. Prefigurative record creation is a political act, asserting the validity and importance of one's own story in a society rife with symbolic annihilation and the bodily annihilation of state violence. Archivists should recognize this as a powerful type of record creation. While not all record creation is or will be prefigurative, embracing creators' intentions opens fertile ground for researching the myriad ways that creators imagine their materials being used. And in instances of record creation that *can* be described as prefigurative, archivists' engagement with the political vision of their donors will serve to strengthen the archive's prefigurative power.

Acknowledgements

Gabriel Daniel Solís, Jane Field, Murphy Anne Carter, Hannah Whelan, Samip Mallick, and Sreedevi Sripathy, as well as all of the fellows and participants from both the Texas After Violence Project and the South Asian American Digital Archive. Working in partnership with them has been a joy.

Competing Interests
The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Ethics
This research was approved by UCLA's Institutional Review Board number 21-001744.

References

Bastian, Jeannette A. 2003. *Owning Memory: How a Caribbean Community Lost Its Archives and Found Its History*. Contributions in Librarianship and Information Science, no. 99. Libraries Unlimited.

Bastian, Jeannette Allis. 2005. "Whispers in the Archives: Finding the Voices of the Colonized in the Records of the Colonizer." In *Political Pressure and the Archival Record*, edited by Margaret Procter, Michael G. Cook, and Caroline Williams. Society of American Archivists.

Blanco-Rivera, Joel A. 2020. "Social Justice and Historical Accountability in Latin America: Access to the Records of the Truth Commissions in Chile." In *Archives, Recordkeeping, and Social Justice*. Routledge.

Brilmyer, Gracen, Joyce Gabiola, Jimmy Zavala, and Michelle Caswell. 2019. "Reciprocal Archival Imaginaries: The Shifting Boundaries of 'Community' in Community Archives." *Archivaria* 88: 6–48. https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13695.

Brilmyer, Gracen Mikus. 2022. "'I'm Also Prepared to Not Find Me. It's Great When I Do, but It Doesn't Hurt If I Don't': Crip Time and Anticipatory Erasure for Disabled Archival Users." *Archival Science* 22 (2): 167–88. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-021-09372-1.

Buchanan, Alexandrina, and Michelle Bastian. 2015. "Activating the Archive: Rethinking the Role of Traditional Archives for Local Activist Projects." *Archival Science* 15 (4): 429–51. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-015-9247-3.

Buckles, Daniel, and Jacques M. Chevalier. 2019. *Participatory Action Research: Theory and Methods for Engaged Inquiry*. 2nd ed. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351033268. .

Butler, Beverley. 2020. "Archives 'Act Back': Re-Configuring Palestinian Archival Constellations and Visions of Social Justice." In *Archives, Recordkeeping, and Social Justice*, edited by David A. Wallace, Wendy M. Duff, Renée Saucier, and Andrew Flinn. Routledge.

Carter, Elena. 2017. "'Setting the Record Straight': The Creation and Curation of Archives by Activist Communities. A Case Study of Activist Responses to the Regeneration of Elephant and Castle, South London." *Archives and Records* 38 (1): 27–44. https://doi.org/10.1080/23257962.2016.1260532.

Caswell, Michelle. 2013. "Inventing New Archival Imaginaries: Theoretical Foundations for Identity-Based Community Archives." In *Identity Palimpsests: Archiving Ethnicity in the U.S. and Canada*, edited by Dominique Daniel and Amalia Levi. Litwin Books.

Caswell, Michelle. 2014. "Seeing Yourself in History: Community Archives and the Fight Against Symbolic Annihilation." *The Public Historian* 36 (4): 26–37. https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2014.36.4.26.

Caswell, Michelle. 2021. *Urgent Archives: Enacting Liberatory Memory Work*. 1st ed. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003001355.

Caswell, Michelle, and Samip Mallick. 2014. "Collecting the Easily Missed Stories: Digital Participatory Microhistory and the South Asian American Digital Archive." *Archives and Manuscripts* 42 (1): 73–86. https://doi.org/10.1080/01576895.2014.880931.

Caswell, Michelle, and Marika Cifor. 2016. "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives." *Archivaria* 81: 23–43. https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13557.

Caswell, Michelle, Marika Cifor, and Mario H. Ramirez. 2016. "'To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing': Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives." *The American Archivist* 79 (1): 56–81. https://doi.org/10.17723/0360-9081.79.1.56.

Caswell, Michelle, Joyce Gabiola, Jimmy Zavala, Gracen Brilmyer, and Marika Cifor. 2018. "Imagining Transformative Spaces: The Personal–Political Sites of Community Archives." *Archival Science* 18 (1): 73–93. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-018-9286-7.

Caswell, Michelle, and Anna Robinson-Sweet. 2023. "'It Was as Much for Me As for Anybody Else': The Creation of Self-Validating Records." *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* 10. https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol10/iss1/10.

Caswell, Michelle, and Anna Robinson-Sweet. 2024. "'We Bounce Off Each Other's Vibe': The Importance of Symmetrical Intersubjectivity between Interviewer and Narrator." *The Oral History Review* 51 (1): 179–202. https://doi.org/10.1080/00940798.2024.2316904.

Cook, Terry. 2013. "Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community: Four Shifting Archival Paradigms." *Archival Science* 13 (2–3): 95–120. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-012-9180-7.

Dearstyne, Bruce. 1987. "What Is the *Use* of Archives? A Challenge for the Profession." *The American Archivist* 50 (1): 76–87. https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.50.1.572q383767657258.

Douglas, Jennifer. 2018. "A Call to Rethink Archival Creation: Exploring Types of Creation in Personal Archives." *Archival Science* 18 (1): 29–49. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-018-9285-8.

Douglas, Jennifer, June Chow, Rachael Bradshaw, Samip Mallick, Nivetha Karthikeyan, Bergis Jules, Gabriel Solis, Jane Field, Morris Robinson, Patrisia Gonzales, Kathryn Rodriguez, Joel A. Saldaña Perez, Anna Robinson-Sweet, and Michelle Caswell. 2021. "'Come Correct or Don't Come at All:' Building More Equitable Relationships Between Archival Studies Scholars and Community Archives." The University of British Columbia. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7v00k2qz.

Drake, Jarrett. 2015. "Off the Record: The Production of Evidence in 19th Century NJ." *New Jersey Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1 (1): 104–25. https://doi.org/10.14713/njs.v1i1.16.

Drake, Jarrett M. 2014. "Insurgent Citizens: The Manufacture of Police Records in Post-Katrina New Orleans and Its Implications for Human Rights." *Archival Science* 14 (3–4): 365–80. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-014-9224-2.

Drake, Jarrett M. 2018. "Seismic Shifts: On Archival Fact and Fictions." *Sustainable Futures* (blog). August 20, 2018. https://medium.com/community-archives/seismic-shifts-on-archival-fact-and-fictions-6db4d5c655ae. Archived at: https://perma.cc/BC5J-A4AJ.

Duff, Wendy M., Andrew Flinn, Karen Emily Suurtamm, and David A. Wallace. 2013. "Social Justice Impact of Archives: A Preliminary Investigation." *Archival Science* 13 (4): 317–48. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-012-9198-x.

Dunbar, Anthony W. 2006. "Introducing Critical Race Theory to Archival Discourse: Getting the Conversation Started." *Archival Science* 6 (1): 109–29. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-006-9022-6.

Faulkhead, Shannon. 2017. "Negotiated Methodologies: Designing Research Respectful of Academic and Indigenous Traditions." In *Research in the Archival Multiverse*, edited by Anne J. Gilliland, Sue McKemmish, and Andrew J. Lau. Monash University Publishing. https://research.monash.edu/en/publications/negotiated-methodologies-designing-research-respectful-of-academi.

Flinn, Andrew, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd. 2009. "Whose Memories, Whose Archives? Independent Community Archives, Autonomy and the Mainstream." *Archival Science* 9 (1–2): 71–86. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-009-9105-2.

Freeland, Chris, and Kodjo Atiso. 2015. "Determining Users' Motivations to Participate in Online Community Archives: A Preliminary Study of Documenting Ferguson." *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 52 (1): 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1002/pra2.2015.1450520100106.

Gabiola, Joyce, Gracen Brilmyer, Michelle Caswell, and Jimmy Zavala. 2022. "'It's a Trap': Complicating Representation in Community-Based Archives." *The American Archivist* 85 (1): 60–87. https://doi.org/10.17723/2327-9702-85.1.60.

Ghaddar, J. J. 2016. "The Spectre in the Archive: Truth, Reconciliation, and Indigenous Archival Memory." *Archivaria* 82: 3–26. https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13579.

Gilliland, Anne J., and Michelle Caswell. 2016. "Records and Their Imaginaries: Imagining the Impossible, Making Possible the Imagined." *Archival Science* 16 (1): 53–75. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-015-9259-z.

Godoy, Nancy Liliana. 2021. "Community-Driven Archives: Conocimiento, Healing, and Justice." *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 3 (2). https://doi.org/10.24242/jclis.v3i2.136.

Harris, Verne. 2002. "The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa." *Archival Science* 2 (1–2): 63–86. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435631.

Hohmann, Paige. 2016. "On Impartiality and Interrelatedness: Reactions to Jenkinsonian Appraisal in the Twentieth Century." *The American Archivist* 79 (1): 14–25. https://doi.org/10.17723/0360-9081.79.1.14.

Hoyer, Jen, and Nora Almeida. 2021. *The Social Movement Archive*. Litwin Books.

Lapp, Jessica M. 2023. "'The Only Way We Knew How:' Provenancial Fabulation in Archives of Feminist Materials." *Archival Science* 23 (1): 117–36. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-021-09376-x.

Lee, Jamie A. 2019. "In Critical Condition: (Un)Becoming Bodies in Archival Acts of Truth Telling." *Archivaria* 88: 162–95. https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13703.

Lobo, Rachel. 2019. "Archive as Prefigurative Space: Our Lives and Black Feminism in Canada." *Archivaria* 87: 68–86. https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13667.

MacNeil, Heather. 2020. "Records as Evidence, Text, and Narrative: Framing the Ethical Dimensions of Integrity." In *Defining a Discipline: Archival Research and Practice in the Twenty-First Century: Essays in Honor of Richard J. Cox*, edited by Jeannette A. Bastian and Elizabeth Yakel. Society of American Archivists.

Matusiak, Krystyna K. 2022. "Evaluating a Digital Community Archive from the User Perspective: The Case of Formative Multifaceted Evaluation." *Library & Information Science Research* 44 (3): 101159. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2022.101159.

Moles, Nathan. 2022. "Preservation for Diverse Users: Digital Preservation and the 'Designated Community' at the Ontario Jewish Archives." *Journal of Documentation* 78 (3): 613–30. https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-02-2021-0041.

Moore, Shaunna, and Susan Pell. 2010. "Autonomous Archives." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16 (4–5): 255–68. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527251003775513.

Pell, Susan. 2015. "Radicalizing the Politics of the Archive: An Ethnographic Reading of an Activist Archive." *Archivaria* 80:33–57. https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13543.

Pickard, Alison Jane. 2007. *Research Methods in Information*. Facet.

Raekstad, Paul, and Sofa Saio Gradin. 2020. *Prefigurative Politics: Building Tomorrow Today*. Polity Press.

Ramirez, Mario H. 2015. "Being Assumed Not to Be: A Critique of Whiteness as an Archival Imperative." *The American Archivist* 78 (2): 339–56. https://doi.org/10.17723/0360-9081.78.2.339.

Rhee, Hea Lim. 2015. "Reflections on Archival User Studies." *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 54 (4): 29. https://doi.org/10.5860/rusq.54n4.29.

Roeschley, Ana, and Jeonghyun Kim. 2019. "'Something That Feels Like a Community': The Role of Personal Stories in Building Community-Based Participatory Archives." *Archival Science* 19 (1): 27–49. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-019-09302-2.

Rolan, Gregory, Joanne Evans, Rhiannon Abeling, Aedan Brittain, Elizabeth Constable, Matthew Kelemen, and Ella Roberts. 2019. "Voice, Agency, and Equity: Deep Community Collaboration in Record-Keeping Research." In *Proceedings of RAILS - Research Applications Information and Library Studies, 2018, Faculty of Information Technology, Monash University, 28-30 November 2018. Information Research: An International Electronic Journal* 24 (3). http://informationr.net/ir/24-3/rails/rails1803.html.

Sellie, Alycia, Jesse Goldstein, Molly Fair, and Jennifer Hoyer. 2015. "Interference Archive: A Free Space for Social Movement Culture." *Archival Science* 15 (4): 453–72. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-015-9245-5.

Society of American Archivists. n.d. "Archival Nature." Dictionary of Archives Terminology. Accessed May 23, 2024. https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/archival-nature.html. Archived at: https://perma.cc/W2FW-A42U.

Solis, Gabriel Daniel. 2018. "Documenting State Violence: (Symbolic) Annihilation & Archives of Survival." *KULA: Knowledge Creation, Dissemination, and Preservation Studies* 2 (1):7. https://doi.org/10.5334/kula.28.

Sutherland, Tonia. 2020. "Where There's a Will: On Heir Property, African American Land Stories, and the Value of Oral Records in American Archives." In *Defining a Discipline: Archival Research and Practice in the Twenty-First Century: Essays in Honor of Richard J. Cox*, edited by Jeannette A. Bastian and Elizabeth Yakel. Society of American Archivists.

Sutherland, Tonia, and Alyssa Purcell. 2021. "A Weapon and a Tool: Decolonizing Description and Embracing Redescription as Liberatory Archival Praxis." *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion* 5 (1): 60–78. https://doi.org/10.33137/ijidi.v5i1.34669.

Trace, Ciaran B. 2002. "What Is Recorded Is Never Simply 'What Happened': Record Keeping in Modern Organizational Culture." *Archival Science* 2 (1–2): 137–59. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435634.

Wallace, David A., Wendy M. Duff, Renée Saucier, and Andrew Flinn, eds. 2020. *Archives, Recordkeeping, and Social Justice*. Routledge.Wiker, Julia. 2020. "From Indisputable Reality to Conscious Contention: Moving Beyond Modernist Conceptions of Evidence to a Post-Postmodern Conception of Archival Evidence." University of North Carolina. https://doi.org/10.17615/4a07-ag31.

Yeo, Geoffrey. 2010. "Representing the Act: Records and Speech Act Theory." *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 31 (2): 95–117. https://doi.org/10.1080/00379816.2010.506782.

Zavala, Jimmy, Alda Allina Migoni, Michelle Caswell, Noah Geraci, and Marika Cifor. 2017. "'A Process Where We're All at the Table': Community Archives Challenging Dominant Modes of Archival Practice." *Archives and Manuscripts* 45 (3): 202–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/01576895.2017.1377088.

Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

1. Please introduce yourself. How did you get involved in telling your story to TAVP/ SAADA?
2. Have you listened to other stories in TAVP/SAADA? If so, whose stories did you listen to? How did these stories make you feel?
3. Had you ever shared your story in a similar way before?
4. Can you tell us about the process of telling your story?

   - How did you meet your interviewer?
   - Were you given the questions in advance?
   - How was the consent process?
   - Did you tell your story over Zoom or in person?
   - How did you prepare yourself for telling your story?
   - How long did it take you tell your story?

5. How did it feel to tell your story? What emotions did it bring out? How did you feel after the interview was done?
6. Did you feel supported in dealing with these emotions during and after the interview? What resources were offered to you to help you with these emotions?
7. What was the relationship like with your interviewer? Can you describe the rapport during the interview?
8. If your story was told via Zoom, what impact do you think that mode of interaction had? Do you think it mattered if your story was told via Zoom or in person?
9. Was your story recorded? Is it included in archives? If so, who do you think might listen to your story in the future? Who would you want to listen to your story? Does it matter to you that your interview is accessible freely online? What might you want listeners to think or do after listening to your story?
10. Did telling your story change in you in any way? If so, how?
11. Why did you want to tell your story? What motivated you to participate? Did you have any reservations or concerns about telling your story?
12. What kinds of programs would you like TAVP/ SAADA to run to enable people to tell their stories online?
13. Is there anything we haven't asked you that you would like to share with us?

OPEN ACCESS