Interview

Negotiating Online Access: Perspectives on Ethical Issues in Digital Collections[1]

Cristela Garcia-Spitz and Noah Geraci

ABSTRACT

How do we act as responsible stewards of archival collections in the digital realm, with a reflective eye toward issues of privacy, ethics, and cultural sensitivity, while working with technological infrastructures that tend not to share these priorities? What strategies can be used to work within and around the limitations of existing systems, especially regarding the nuances of privacy and access, and to advocate for further development that treats these concerns as core requirements rather than special cases?

This paper provides practical considerations around the real-world work of building ethical digital collections. Framed as an asynchronous, semi-structured interview between two archivists working in academic libraries with digital collections management and culturally sensitive materials, we draw examples from work with anthropological archives and academic-community archives partnerships. How do we do this work within our existing systems for digital asset management and aggregation, and how can we improve them?

[1] This interview was conducted in early 2019. Portions of this interview were edited for clarity and some content was updated in the editing process.

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INTRODUCTION

Existing digital library infrastructures can present challenges to the preservation of marginalized histories. From challenging assumptions about access to contending with Unicode errors, digital library and archive workers seeking to ethically steward collections that fall outside of the "(in)visible default of western, white, straight and male"[2] must frequently strategize, troubleshoot, create workarounds, and advocate for tools, time, and resources to appropriately serve such collections.

In recent years, discussions of social justice, diversity, and inclusion have found a more prominent place in professional cultures of digital librarianship. One illustrative example of this emerging emphasis on social justice is the evolving mission of the Digital Library Federation (DLF), a prominent US-based consortium in the digital library field. Until late 2012, DLF described the organization on its website as "a consortium of libraries and related agencies that are pioneering the use of electronic-information technologies to extend collections and services."[3] After multiple shifts in wording between 2012 and 2016, the description of DLF was changed to refer to itself as "networked member institutions and a robust community of practice advancing research, learning, social justice, & the public good through digital library technologies."[4] The change in focus for DLF appears to reflect that social justice and community engagement has become a more visible focus for many academic libraries. In addition, digitization and digital collection building are often a significant part of these libraries' efforts to engage with historically marginalized community groups.[5]

Yet many repository systems tasked with managing and publishing these valuable digital collections are, like the internet itself, descended from genealogies of military-funded computer science research, not from community-based principles or design processes. For example, the Fedora architecture, which forms a layer of the current

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[2] Elvia Arroyo- Ramírez, "Invisible Defaults and Perceived Limitations: Processing the Juan Gelman Files," *Medium*, October 31, 2016, https://medium.com/on-archivy/invisible-defaults-and-perceived-limitations-processing-the-juan-gelman-files-4187fdd36759.

[3] "DLF » About," Digital Library Federation, November 23, 2012, https://web.archive.org/web/20121123001307/http://www.diglib.org:80/about/.

[4] "About the Digital Library Federation," Digital Library Federation, March 16, 2016, https://web.archive.org/web/20160316222547/https://www.diglib.org/about/.

[5] Many examples of such projects can be found in the list of grants awarded under the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR)'s Digitizing Hidden Collections program, which has been running in its current form since 2015 and funded the Sherman Indian Museum digitization project discussed in this interview. See "Funded Projects," Council on Library and Information Resources, accessed July 8, 2021, https://www.clir.org/hiddencollections/funded-projects/.

Samvera and Islandora digital repository frameworks, was first described in a paper based on research funded by the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA), an agency of the United States Department of Defense.[6]

Working within these contradictions—particularly in the complex hierarchical organizations in which many digital repositories reside—presents myriad challenges and opportunities requiring extensive, often ongoing, technological and interpersonal work. Broad calls to action such as "listen to the community" or "center marginalized voices" form starting points to be interpreted into context-specific strategies and tactics, not fully-fledged answers in themselves.

This conversation between two archivists, both of whom work with digital collections in University of California (UC) libraries and have worked with materials considered culturally sensitive, seeks to explore connections between wide-reaching concepts of empathy and social justice, and hands-on decision-making in digital collections and repository design.

THE INTERVIEW

How did you first start thinking about issues of privacy and cultural sensitivity with digital collections?

Garcia-Spitz: I first started thinking about issues of privacy and cultural sensitivity in 2009 when I started in the role of Project Manager for a project to digitize photographs from three collections within the Melanesian Archive at the UC San Diego (UCSD) Library. Two of the collections were from anthropologists' papers, and the third was a doctor who had traveled around the Pacific. The donor from one of the anthropologists' papers asked that certain images be restricted from being displayed online. Fortunately, we were designing our first public access system for our digital collections website in 2009–2010, so we were able to design with some of these considerations in mind. But as we move from a locally developed system into an open-source community developed Samvera-based system, these "special requirements" have been additional work to maintain.

Geraci: Similarly, it was issues around access in a specific digitization project that brought this to the fore for me: in my case, a collaboration between UC Riverside (UCR) Library and the Sherman Indian Museum, a local museum of Native American history. Though I

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[6] Sandra Payette and Carl Lagoze, "Flexible and Extensible Digital Object and Repository Architecture (FEDORA)," in *Research and Advanced Technology for Digital Libraries*, ed. Christos Nikolaou and Constantine Stephanidis, Lecture Notes in Computer Science (Berlin, Heidelberg, Germany: Springer, 1998), 41-59, https://doi.org/10.1007/3-540-49653-X_4.

entered the archives field with an activist, community-oriented bent, it wasn't until moving into my current, more technical role, that I started thinking specifically about the challenges posed by current library and archives technologies in meeting community needs. In this case, our existing systems and workflows in the library were oriented around publishing all digital collections to the web in full, for unmediated public access. Meeting the museum and its communities' needs around retaining privacy for particular materials is something we're committed to but accomplishing that in our current systems was challenging.

It's exciting that the timing lined up with the project you were working on and the initial public access system design. What did it look like to design those considerations in mind and what have been the challenges in maintaining those design choices?

Garcia-Spitz: There were a couple of different conditions that arose from these collections. There were images that the anthropologist did not want to display for a period of fifty years for privacy considerations of individuals and images that were not to be displayed online at all because they depicted certain rituals. Research practices of anthropologists, who have "primary ethical obligations to the people they study and to the people with whom they work" [7] require considering issues of privacy and confidentiality.

There were also images with restrictions imposed by curators, in recognition of cultural sensitivities of the communities and individuals (or their descendants); some images had frontal nudity and the curator did not want for the images to be taken out of context, especially in cases where the society had converted to Christianity and the norm shifted to wearing more modest clothing. There were also images of deceased people that could potentially be offensive or cause distress to their descendants. Rather than restrict these images, we designed a click-through warning to avoid inadvertently exposing the images to viewers who may need notice to decide whether to view them. We attempted to balance this with what may be made available to scholars who need access to these images for research purposes.

The solution was to implement more granular metadata to establish access reflective of cultural sensitivities, donor-imposed restrictions, and curatorial decisions. We rethought how we captured rights statements and access restrictions in the object's metadata, so that we could be more explicit about when an object should be restricted, for how long, and why and when there should be additional conditions like taking the action of having a restricted note or click-through agreement and displaying the terms of the click-through agreement. However, as we moved from a locally designed system to a Samvera community-developed system, it required more programming to maintain this

[7] "Principles of Professional Responsibility," American Anthropological Association Ethics Forum, November 1, 2012, http://ethics.americananthro.org/category/statement/.

granular metadata and to make it actionable so that the digital objects are displayed appropriately as either restricted or with a click-through agreement.

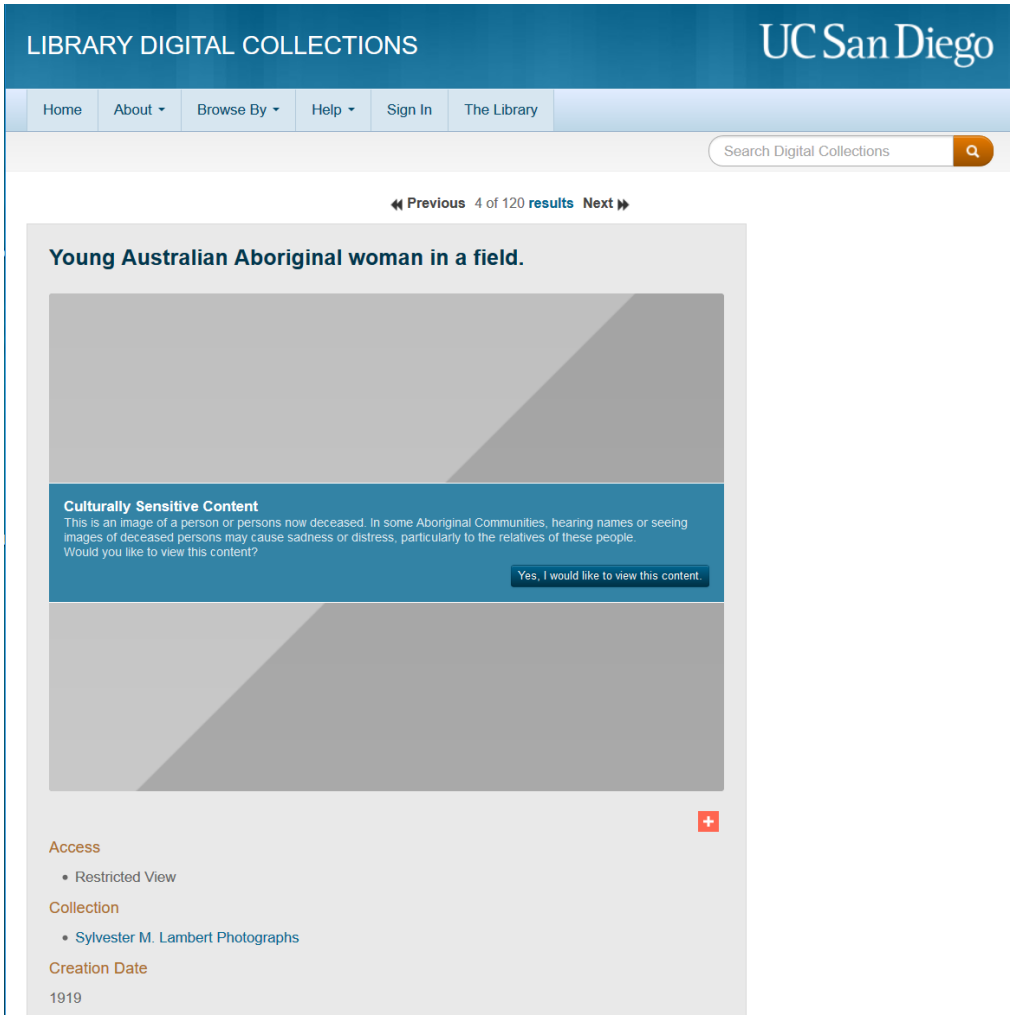

Figure 1. Screenshot of an object with a restricted view and click-through agreement in the UC San Diego Library Digital Collections website.

We have a great team working on it and I'm thankful for their efforts. Digital libraries operate through collaborative effort by different groups across the organization, especially at the UC San Diego Library. Collectively, our Digital Library Development

Program, Special Collections & Archives, Metadata Services, Information Technology Services, Research Data Curation Program, and collection curators work together to ensure the creation, management, delivery, and preservation of our digital assets. It's a big team of folks, perhaps too numerous to name individually, but each person plays an important role.

Geraci: I really like the way access restrictions are handled in UCSD's digital collections, especially that it's not a binary of public/restricted, but that the click-through option is also available, which provides both an additional level of nuance and demonstrates respect for people using the collections. Those three options for levels of access would meet the needs of most communities and collections I've worked with so far.

At UCR, the primary challenge is that we don't have a locally managed public access layer for digital collections. Instead, we rely on an aggregator service to publish collections. In our case, that's Calisphere, run by the California Digital Library (CDL). Calisphere and our CDL colleagues are wonderful. But aggregators by their nature are public-facing websites designed to promote and disseminate the broadest possible access to materials. Their guidelines are often explicit in requiring all contributed materials to be fully available to the public: for example, Calisphere's contributor guidelines state that all objects "must be digital (i.e., not metadata-only records)," and "must be publicly available."[8] Likewise, the Collection Development Guidelines for the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA), a national aggregator service, states, "Bibliographic records, records that do not resolve to a digital resource that is freely and openly available on the web, are out of DPLA's collecting scope."[9]

Additionally, aggregator services often have hundreds or thousands of contributing institutions, so the focus is interoperability and finding solutions that will work in most cases, not doing custom development to meet particular local needs. This makes sense. The challenge comes when organizations that lack resources to develop a digital collections platform locally rely on an aggregator as the only online access point for digital collections. In my experience, these organizations with limited resources may be more likely to have community- or collection-specific needs around privacy that aggregators inherently aren't designed to meet.

To share a bit more background about our partnership with a local museum, the Sherman Indian Museum is a small museum here in Riverside located on the campus of Sherman Indian High School, which is a boarding school that first opened in 1892 and is operated by the Federal Bureau of Indian Education. Many non-Native people may not realize that there are a handful of off-reservation boarding schools still operating today,

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[8] "Calisphere: For Contributors," accessed July 8, 2021, https://calisphere.org/contribute/.

[9] "Collection Development Guidelines," Digital Public Library of America, accessed July 8, 2021. https://pro.dp.la/hubs/collection-development-guidelines.

and Sherman is one of them. The museum opened in 1970 and holds the school's archives. The recent Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) Hidden Collections grant project was a two-year (2017–2019) collaboration between the museum and UCR Library with the purpose of digitizing the museum's archives.

While the museum is happy to make the majority of those holdings available online, there are a few different reasons museum curators and staff wish not to provide full online access to some materials, even when access is available to those materials on-site at the museum. There are some images, such as images of rock art, that the museum has chosen not to publish for reasons of cultural sensitivity. In other cases, there are issues of personal privacy regarding student records. There is also a particular issue with some records that list individuals' "Percent of Indian Blood." Project advisors, many of whom are part of local Native American communities, had concerns that publishing such data online could play a harmful role in current community politics around tribal membership and disenrollment.[10]

The work of incorporating these restricted materials appropriately into the larger digital collection was complex. We experimented with a number of different workarounds and settled on putting main content files in an area of our digital asset management system (DAMS) called "Extra Files" that doesn't get indexed by Calisphere, and putting a dummy file in the place where a primary display file usually goes. Luckily, our colleagues at CDL/Calisphere were very understanding about why this is important for the museum and have continued exploration of use cases for different kinds of mediated and restricted access.

I'd also like to mention that there was a pretty fantastic group of people involved in the project, including the museum director Lorene Sisquoc; Dr. Clifford Trafzer, who's a faculty member in American Indian history here at UCR; Amanda Wixon, the museum's assistant curator and a history Ph.D. student; Charlotte Dominguez, who coordinated digitization and description on-site at the museum; and Eric Milenkiewicz, who wrote the grant and managed the project as a whole.

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[10] For more on issues of tribal enrollment, disenrollment, and "Degree of Indian Blood", see Paul Spruhan, "CDIB: The Role of the Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood in Defining Native American Legal Identity," *American Indian Law Journal* 6, no. 2 (May 11, 2018), https://digitalcommons.law.seattleu.edu/ailj/vol6/iss2/4, and David E. Wilkins and Shelly Hulse Wilkins, *Dismembered: Native Disenrollment and the Battle for Human Rights* (Seattle, WA; London, UK: University of Washington Press, 2017), https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvcwnnrw.

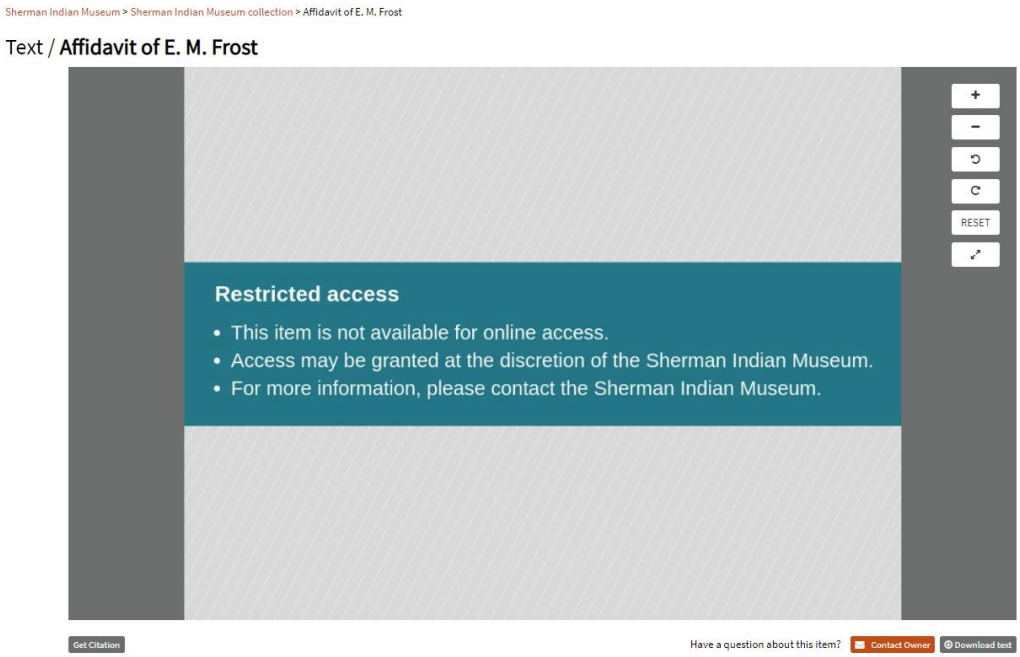

Figure 2. Screenshot of an object from the Sherman Indian Museum with a restricted view in Calisphere.

Garcia-Spitz: Our collections are also harvested by Calisphere and DPLA and similarly we are unable to display restricted items in these systems. It is an added layer to consider interoperability between systems and how the representation of digital objects can vary from context to context. And there are broader implications when these sorts of items are seen as "special cases."

Geraci: The word "special" can be frustrating in this context. I understand why these kinds of requirements may be complex to implement from a software development perspective, but being able to provide different kinds or levels of access to different materials doesn't feel like it should be considered a particularly obscure use case for a digital collections system.

Garcia-Spitz: One challenge in my context has been the built-in thinking that access is the priority, and that if something can't be made publicly accessible, we shouldn't devote as many resources to it. There are consequences to prioritizing items out of copyright or requiring that items must be publicly available on the web, in that if we do not engage in this work now, we will only be preserving and making accessible certain types of content

for scholarly research and use. Often the restricted materials have concrete evidentiary value. And more broadly, we are not always able to take the time and resources to engage with particular communities within project timelines to do the work to determine what can be made available publicly or should be restricted based on community evaluation.

Geraci: I've encountered the same thing. I think the prioritization of access can really skew the contents of what is selected to digitize: we have so many digital collections of visually appealing "cool images" like postcards that don't present any privacy concerns or directly relate to any particular community. Archival collections that could potentially be more meaningful to provide digital access to, but would require more community engagement and strategizing about privacy and access issues, get deprioritized or considered too troublesome.

I really appreciate Kim Christen's work around problematizing "openness" in the context of Indigenous knowledge.[11] She's been one of the most prominent voices challenging the idea that we should be striving for full public access to all information. I'd love to see more in-depth engagement with her work in our field and in the design of "mainstream" digital repositories, beyond just mentioning that Mukurtu is cool and important (which it is)! There's also an article by developers who worked on Mukurtu that does a nice job contextualizing these issues for a developer audience,[12] which I think is something we need more of.

I agree that when our time and resources are stretched very thin and we have little capacity for sustained community engagement, it can sometimes be more ethical to not do the project at all, rather than to do it in a more haphazard and potentially harmful way. But declining to pursue a project can also perpetuate bias and invisibility in digital collections.

Garcia-Spitz: I'm actually trying to find that balance right now in my work with the Melanesian Archive materials. The CLIR Recording at Risk grant we're applying for would enable us to digitize a huge chunk of audio in the Melanesian Archive, but I won't have time to do in-depth community engagement within the one-year timeline of the grant. I'm hoping to be able to get the content digitized and in our system, and then slowly work with the communities to make the content available accordingly.

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[11] Kimberly Christen, "Does Information Really Want to Be Free? Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the Question of Openness," *International Journal of Communication* 6 (January 2012): 2870-2893.

[12] Craig Dietrich and John Bell, "Representing Culture via Agile Collaboration," in *Handbook of Research on Technologies and Cultural Heritage: Applications and Environments* (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2011), 207-222, https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-60960-044-0.ch010.

The collections are sound recordings containing field interviews, oral histories, and music from the Melanesian Archive. Some of it can be quite sensitive, because the interviews were conducted by anthropologists and were never really intended for wide distribution. It's also in eight different languages which I am not able to speak or understand and so it is challenging and requires community engagement to determine appropriate protocols for working with the recordings.[13]

It's rich content that contains the history and knowledge of these communities. It's vital that the communities are able to listen to these recordings. We must improve access to what was previously limited to researchers that were able to physically visit the archive and could afford to have reproductions made, as well as to safeguard against the deterioration of the physical materials. It would take many years for us to try and reformat these recordings in house and our equipment may not withstand long enough to reformat it all, so I don't want to miss the opportunity to apply for a large amount of funding that makes it possible to digitize it in one year. I believe the approach of digitizing first and community engagement after will work in this case because having the audio recordings in digital form will facilitate the process of working with the community, but in other cases consulting with the communities first to determine the appropriate protocols and handling of the materials may take precedence.

Geraci: I like the approach that the digitization itself doesn't have to be so tightly coupled, timewise, with making the contents available.

Garcia-Spitz: Yes, the grant does not require that the content be made accessible, but the metadata must be made available. Thankfully, we can do that with our system, which took time to develop and takes time to maintain.

Vendors can often digitize materials so quickly, but the quality control and descriptive work, not to mention thinking, contextualizing and community engagement, is where we need time and resources. We've got a large backlog of digital projects that need additional time, attention, and specialized knowledge to do the description.

Geraci: It can be challenging to advocate for the kinds of work that can't be "solved" technically, that really do require individual attention and care.

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[13] The CLIR Recording at Risk grant was awarded to the UC San Diego Library in the fifth cycle, May 2019. The grant proposal is available under Singsings and Storytelling: Sounds of Oceania Audio Reformatting Project at https://www.clir.org/recordings-at-risk/applicant-resources/. See also: Cristela Garcia-Spitz, Tommy Esau, and David Akin, "Digitizing Field Recordings: Boosting the Feedback Loop" PARADESIC at 100 Symposium, February 19, 2021, https://youtu.be/NTrKpXzIzxI.

Garcia-Spitz: And it is difficult to formally account for individual attention and care when doing project management. Many of our projects have become "phased" so that it can be open-ended when we are working with donors who are volunteering to do the description. A few years ago, we saw an opportunity to use the media management system JSTOR Forum as a tool to collaborate with the donors of collections to contribute to the descriptive work. JSTOR Forum had the features which allowed for us to have multiple editors and to design a simple form for donors to use. For example, when anthropologist Joan Larcom and photographer Ann Skinner-Jones were donating their photographs to the Melanesian Archive, we knew the images had little accompanying detail. We asked them if they were willing to contribute by providing descriptions and dates for the images when known. In a photograph depicting a man and a child, Larcom and Skinner-Jones identified the man as the father of the child and provided his name as well as further background on the role of fathers during that particular time period.[14] There are also themes that overlap between collections that has become more apparent as I worked with the creators to better understand the materials and the context. These are valuable partnerships that cannot be rushed, especially when creators are contributing their own time to the project. Collections and their meanings are enhanced the more we can build in-roads with the creators and communities. This is definitely one of the main reasons it is so important to be more engaged with creators and communities and have a respectful approach as we make collections available online.

What do we mean by ethics? What is the difference between ethical practice and practice informed by a feminist ethics of care? What does a feminist ethics of care look and feel like?

Geraci: When I say "ethics," I mean the overarching concept of working to do the right thing, and repair or improve the world around me. Is that a tautology? I try to lead an ethical life by thinking deeply about both my own actions and the systems I engage with and acting in ways that I think will maximize benefit and minimize harm to other people and to the planet.

My understanding of feminist ethics of care is that it's a way of approaching ethics that centers interpersonal relationships and empathy.

Garcia-Spitz: That is a clear and useful way of defining it. How do you think feminist ethic of care filter into the workplace?

[14] Proud Papa, Summer 1981, Ann Skinner-Jones and Joan Larcom Photographs, UC San Diego Library Digital Collections, https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb4987853m.

Geraci: One layer to acknowledge that in many workplaces, we work with and for people who hold a wide variety of political beliefs. Talking about feminist theory is pretty normal and uncontroversial if you're a student or faculty member, at least in many fields. But at many jobs, even when we work on a campus, it can be more complicated than that. That's compounded by the fact that as librarians in the University of California system, academic freedom is a thorny issue that has been the subject of recent bargaining by our union, UC-AFT.[15] Sometimes even saying "ethics" is touchy because people can interpret that word in more of a legalistic compliance framework.

So even where my own thinking is informed by feminist ethics, I often take the tactic of presenting an idea in more generic workplace terms like "best practices" or "meeting stakeholder needs." I think this is generally useful in service of getting things done, but I also try to be cautious of how generic terms may be restrictive of my own imagination or depth of thought.

I also think that in the digital collections realm specifically, delineating between practices of a more general conception of ethics and a feminist ethics of care can be a bit slippery. From my understanding, the idea of feminist ethics of care comes out of articulating the ways in which more generic understanding of ethics have not appropriately accounted for women's experiences and perspectives.[16] In Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor's work that popularized feminist ethics of care within archival studies, it's framed as an alternative to the legalistic, rights-based framework assumed by work in the field of human rights archives.[17] In the digital library world, I'm not sure if we have a well-established generalized concept of ethics to refine or react against. Current discussions around feminist ethics in particular have seemed to be simultaneous with discussions of social justice and ethics in general.[18]

Garcia-Spitz: It's also been very useful to have these types of conversations and debates in public forums through our professional organizations and at conferences. I've taken

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[15] UC-AFT Unit 17 Librarians fought for academic freedom for all non-teaching academic employees during the bargaining process in 2018-2019, *UC-AFT Librarians Blog*, https://ucaftlibrarians.wordpress.com/; Lindsay Ellis, "Do College Librarians Have Academic Freedom? Amid Push, California's 'Will Not Be Silent,'" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 27, 2018, https://www.chronicle.com/article/Do-College-Librarians-Have/244377.

[16] See Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

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

[18] Bethany Nowviskie, "On Capacity and Care," Bethany Nowviskie, October 4, 2015, http://nowviskie.org/2015/on-capacity-and-care/.

heart from recent keynotes and sessions at DLF and there is a rise in publications pushing this front in academic literature.[19]

There are examples of change. The Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) has taken steps to build a more inclusive program by changing its guidelines for grants in ways such as removing the short-term staffing recommendations in order to address contingent labor practices, revising their requirements to design appropriate outreach for the specific user communities, and incentivizing collaborations.[20] As the digital library community becomes more engaged in discussions of social justice and ethics, we can improve the work and our approaches.

How does a feminist ethics of care inform your decision-making as you navigate technological infrastructures where care has historically only been an afterthought, if a thought at all?

Garcia-Spitz: In *Feminist Perspectives on Ethics*, Elisabeth Porter lists interrogating meanings and proposing alternatives as central features of feminist ethics. She also states, "perspectives that assume either-or options provoke inclusionary-exclusionary responses."[21] Our systems are often built on either-or thinking. Keeping that in mind, it's important that we actively:

1. Question social roles and the systems that reinforce inequalities;
2. Call attention to underrepresentation of marginalized communities;
3. Fight against binary thinking that reinforce stereotypes; and ultimately
4. Change the systems, standards, and practices.

Regrettably, these aren't always easy to do. One of our recent projects consists of materials from Ambae Island in the nation of Vanuatu in the Pacific Islands. The Library of Congress Subject Heading lists the preferred name as Aoba,[22] which is the name of the island before Vanuatu's independence from the British and the French. "Aoba" is a name

[19] Several of the past DLF Forum Keynotes have addressed social justice issues including Safiya U. Noble's "Power, Privilege, and the Imperative to Act" in 2015, Stacie Williams' "Implications of Archival Labor" in 2016, and Anasuya Sengupta's "Decolonizing Knowledge, Decolonizing the Internet: An Agenda for Collective Action" in 2018. "Past DLF Forums," Digital Library Federation, accessed July 8, 2021, https://www.diglib.org/dlf-events/past/.

[20] "Toward a More Inclusive Grant Program," Council on Library and Information Resources, March 15, 2019, https://www.clir.org/2019/03/toward-a-more-inclusive-grant-program/.

[21] Elisabeth J. Porter, *Feminist Perspectives on Ethics* (London, UK: Longman, 1999).

[22] Library of Congress, "Aoba (Vanuatu)," LC Linked Data Service: Authorities and Vocabularies, accessed July 8, 2021, http://id.loc.gov/authorities/subjects/sh89005298.html.

with strong associations to colonialism. The materials from the collection document the time during and after independence, and so it is problematic to use this term continuously, especially in the post-independence time period. We did submit a subject heading revision proposal to Library of Congress to change the authorized form Aoba (Vanuatu) to Ambae (Vanuatu). However, since US Board on Geographic Names identifies Aoba (Vanuatu) as the preferred name of this island, Library of Congress will not change the subject heading. We are looking into changing our system so that we can display it correctly while still linking to the authorized LCSH term, however this will take time to implement and cannot be done in our catalog. In this case, there is still work to do to figure out how to appropriately describe and present these materials. It is an example of some of the long-term work to address biases in our categorization systems.

Geraci: Absolutely. A lot of my work involves metadata, so I have a laundry list of LCSH complaints and probably could have spent this whole piece talking about description and categorization ("Indians of North America" is one of the most frustrating LC headings; in our digital collections, I use "Indigenous peoples" as suggested by Christine Bone and Brett Lougheed).[23] When an LC term doesn't reflect current or community-preferred usage, I usually store both the preferred label and the LC URI in our digital asset management system (DAMS), and mark the term source as "local." This means the locally preferred term gets displayed publicly, but is associated with an identifier for a Library of Congress heading in the administrative interface. However, this is quite specific to the system I work in: I know some linked data-based systems don't actually store labels at all and just pull them in dynamically from external sources, which makes this more complicated. In theory, linked data should be making use of alternate terms easier, but so far, I've often seen it increase centralization of controlled vocabularies. I sometimes get frustrated that issues of bias in LCSH have been acknowledged in librarianship for many years, but still seem so difficult to make headway on.

When I think about care, I often think in terms of time and attention. I used to work as a caregiver and personal attendant, working with older people and people with disabilities; that was my primary context for "care" before encountering "ethics of care" in an academic setting. Caring for a person typically involves spending a lot of time with them, getting to know them, focusing your attention on meeting their needs, and advocating for them within larger systems. I can see some parallels to my current work caring for files and data (though any analogy to the literal work of caregiving should be

[23] Christine Bone and Brett Lougheed, "Library of Congress Subject Headings Related to Indigenous Peoples: Changing LCSH for Use in a Canadian Archival Context," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 83-95, https://doi.org/10.1080/01639374.2017.1382641.

qualified by saying that most care work is much harder work and pays less than most archives work).

For example, I recently worked with a collection of Arabic-language manuscript leaves that have been digitized. Much of the metadata is in Arabic, so I had to pay careful attention during data processing and ingest to ensure proper Unicode handling so that the Arabic script isn't being garbled by software treating US-ASCII as the default. The level of attention compelled by the ethical imperative to accurately represent the Arabic language can feel like a form of care at times: checking up on the metadata to make sure they're okay, getting to know their encoding needs, anticipating potential challenges, advocating for the necessary time. My thinking here has been significantly informed by Elvia Arroyo-Ramírez's work on challenges posed by existing systems to properly stewarding digital collections in languages other than English.[24]

On seeing garbled Arabic text on public display, computer scientist Ramsey Nasser has written, "It is better to display nothing than to butcher Arabic like this. Seeing this kind of mistake in public so often is hurtful: It's a reminder that not only is most software biased against scripts like Arabic, but also that no one involved…cared enough to check their work."[25] So I make an effort to care enough: care, both in the sense of knowing that something is important, and in the sense of focusing time and attention on it.

Representing a language accurately seems like it should be a baseline for any person or piece of software whose job involves words, but based on Nasser's observations of computer-garbled Arabic everywhere from airport signage to major motion pictures, it's clearly not at this point.[26] I wouldn't call my work here radical—it's certainly not getting at the root of any of the problems involved—but care feels accurate enough.

Garcia-Spitz: So much of what we do involves care from providing access to information, teaching, classification, and collection development, and even how the data is processed becomes a form of social action. *Librarianship and Human Rights* by Toni Samek is a guide that has a section on specific forms of social action used in library and information work towards social change.[27]

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[24] Arroyo-Ramírez, "Invisible Defaults and Perceived Limitations."

[25] Ramsey Nasser, "Unplain Text," *Increment* 5 (April 2018), https://increment.com/programming-languages/unplain-text-primer-on-non-latin/.

[26] Nasser maintains a blog at https://nopenotarabic.tumblr.com/ that documents examples of garbled Arabic.

[27] Toni Samek, *Librarianship and Human Rights: A Twenty-First Century Guide* (Oxford, UK: Chandos, 2007).

What are other disciplines, fields, communities, experiences, that you have learned (or hope to learn) from around these issues?

Garcia-Spitz: When anthropologists first go into the field, there's a time of adjustment to learn about the place and the people, and a conscious effort is made to understand the intent behind actions, words, and practices. Similarly, we need a period of research and reflection as we work with communities and collections. The notion of "thick description" in anthropology refers to this act of going beyond to understand the cultural context or layers of meaning and significance.[28] We need more methods and best practices for taking the time to build relationships, learn the context and significance when engaging with communities, and we need to provide tools and frameworks that allow communities to contribute context and rich descriptions from their perspective. As I mentioned earlier, currently we are using the tool JSTOR Forum to work with donors on creating description and I'm hoping we'll be able to expand the model to do more with communities in the future. It takes a period of time to determine the best way to communicate, provide guidance on using the tools and creating the description, and to build trust to work together. We usually do a few in-person meetings or conference calls sharing screens in the beginning and then periodic check-ins throughout the duration of the project. It can be challenging and lengthen the timeline of the project, but it greatly enhances the quality of the digital collection.

Geraci: I like that. I've heard the term "thick description" in passing but want to read and think more about this. Did you have a previous background in anthropology?

Garcia-Spitz: Yeah, I did my undergrad in anthropology and I have found that it shapes my approach to working with communities and collections. The knowledge and understanding of core concepts in anthropology helped prepare me for working with ethnographic materials, and also gave me the analytical skills and perspectives on the social dimensions of the work. I like to think that it has given me a more human-centric or community-minded approach to working in libraries and archives.

Geraci: My undergrad degree is in literature. I'm sure all the reading and critical thinking didn't hurt, but I don't know that I find myself drawing directly from it in my current work. Lately I've been interested in computer scientist Jean Yang's work on privacy and security, particularly about how we might prioritize privacy and user control of data in the design of programming languages themselves, making privacy less prone to being compromised

[28] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).

by human error.[29] I think there's also a lot we can learn from technologists and organizations working at the intersection of information security and human rights, like WITNESS and Freedom of the Press Foundation. If we're serious about building trustworthy digital repositories for use by marginalized or vulnerable communities, I think our field needs to learn a lot more about digital security, and learn from those who specialize in security for those communities, rather than from the practices of mainstream private sector companies, which often put members of those communities at greater risk. While this isn't specific to digital collections, my approach to collaborative community projects at work have also been influenced by my involvement with activism and community organizing in my personal life. That's taken many forms throughout my life: I'm especially proud of work I've done supporting human rights documentation, both on the Mexico/US border and with police violence in the US Currently, I volunteer with a harm reduction group here in Riverside that provides nonjudgmental health support to people who use drugs.

These experiences have shown me what institutional-community relationships can look and feel like from the community perspective, which shapes the way I interact with people in my work role. I would encourage more archivists and librarians who are interested in community collaborations in their professional life to participate in some sort of community organizing outside of work. Especially if one comes from a more privileged background, it can be a valuable experience in learning how to be a person outside of an academic/professional context, and getting a better feel for when involvement by an academic or other large institution in community affairs is useful and when it's not.

Garcia-Spitz: There is something unique about the library and archives profession that it lends itself so nicely to bringing in knowledge from our different roles and other disciplines into the practice.

CONCLUSION

Applying feminist ethics of care in the practice of digital library and archives work is an ongoing challenge requiring continual attention, maintenance, and care of both a technical and interpersonal nature. Both the technical systems and social organizations in which we work as digital library practitioners in large US academic institutions are largely not designed to facilitate effective social justice work or equitable collaboration with marginalized communities. Yet as practitioners, we have access to systems and points of

[29] Jean Yang, "Building Privacy Right into Software Code," *The Conversation*, February 20, 2017, https://theconversation.com/building-privacy-right-into-software-code-67623.

concrete decision-making that shape how digital collections are organized, published, and preserved. When combining critical reflection and technical familiarity, practitioners are well-positioned to creatively bend and ultimately change these systems to better meet community needs and be more ethical.

Several particular areas that call for such attention include more granular approaches to access and privacy in digital repository systems and improving access to systems with such support for small organizations; addressing ongoing metadata issues in regard to colonial or otherwise inappropriate terminology in widely used controlled vocabularies; and ensuring accurate rendering of text in non-English languages.

As practitioners, we play a significant role in shaping digital libraries, and must look closely at ourselves and the collective responsibility we have in the work that we do. Ultimately, it will require ongoing dialogue, hands-on decision-making, and consistent thoughtfulness in the form of advocacy in order to design systems that center more voices and perspectives and further address ethical issues in digital collections.

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