Situating Community Archives Along the Continuum of Community-Engaged Archival Praxis: Autonomy, Independence, and the Archival Impulse

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ABSTRACT: *Community archives* is a widely used concept in both archival scholarship and the archival profession, yet, to date the concept lacks a clear and consistent definition. In attempts to increase inclusivity in the community archives paradigm, scholars have refused to offer a strict definition for the term, resulting in the conflation of community archives and community-based archival practices occurring in institutional repositories. This article reviews the definitions offered in the growing body of community archives literature and offers a reframing of the umbrella concept of community archives through the lens of community engagement. In applying the principles of Arstein's Ladder, a framework that describes the level of citizen engagement in public planning projects, the authors offer the Continuum of Community-Engaged Archival Praxis that articulates the distinction between community archives and other archival practices that fall on a spectrum of community-based archival projects. Returning to earlier definitions of community archives that center on the autonomy of the community, they ground community archives in the concept of the *archival impulse* as a means for identifying the impetus of a community-engaged archival project and the directionality of the control over the archives. The continuum and impulse provide a means for disambiguating the myriad concepts that fall under the moniker of "community" and for more clearly defining the relationship between institutional repositories and the communities that they seek to engage.

Introduction

In the 2013 special issue of *Archival Science* "Memory, Identity and the Archival Paradigm," Terry Cook describes four significant shifts in archival thought ending with "community" as the fourth archival paradigm. This seminal piece suggests that the community paradigm is "on the horizon" with the advent of networked communications technologies. Cook articulates technology as an affordance for archivists to document society as a whole, while enabling communities to share in archival practice with professionals.[1] The section heading for this paradigm, "Community: participatory archiving—the activist-archivist mentors collaborative evidence—and memory-making," demonstrates a blurring of concepts and methodologies, including postcustodial models afforded by digital technologies, participatory archiving practices, and autonomous community archives. Reflecting on postmodern critiques of archival praxis, Cook recognizes the power, authority, and control of institutional archives over history and memory, along with the harm this has caused marginalized communities

and cultures. In this new paradigm, archivists become "mentors, facilitators, coaches, who work in the community to encourage archiving as a participatory process shared with many in society, rather than necessarily acquiring all the archival products in our established archives."[2] Cook's community-based archiving paradigm is one of shared responsibility, custody, and practice that aims to move toward a "total archive" representing the plurality of voices within the archival multiverse, describing a "more democratic, inclusive, holistic archives."[3] However, in this framing, the professional archivist continues to play a central role in this paradigm. In this most recent shift, Cook describes professionals "empowering communities" to care for their records by serving as liaisons and partners in archival endeavors while facilitating the use of digital tools to preserve and provide access to community-based projects, rather than recognizing the autonomy of communities to employ archival methodologies to tell their histories and stories or to critique institutional archival praxis.

The archival discourse that precedes and follows Cook's reflections continues to conflate community archives with community-based practices that necessitate a role for professional archivists rather than acknowledging a broader continuum of community-engaged archival practices. The breadth of vocabulary associated with the concept of *community archives* results in a weakening of the terminology that describes a range of disparate contexts from autonomous community settings to traditional institutional repositories. At risk in both scholarship and practice is the decreased engagement with notions of power, legacies of historical oppression, and acknowledgment of community needs and capability. This article reviews the current scholarship related to community archives and offers a reconceptualization of the term through the lens of community engagement. This reframing situates community archival practices within their historical contexts and along a continuum of engagement between communities and the archival profession.

Shifting into the Fourth Paradigm

Community Archives: The Shaping of Memory, the first edited volume focused on community archives, appeared just a few years before Cook's 2013 article. Now over a decade old, this scholarship serves as a marker of the shift in archival thought. Cook's themes of identity and community resonate throughout the chapters focusing on the significance of record-keeping to communities, broadly conceptualized. Like Cook, the authors contributing to this volume fail to adequately define "community archives," though they are the subject of study. The contributors explore the various types of communities that mainstream archival institutions and theories have historically harmed or disregarded, including case studies of Indigenous and Aboriginal archives, LGBTQ collections, and records produced by other underrepresented and historically marginalized groups. Collectively, the authors consider the impact of archival thought and theory on communities of people focusing on issues of identity, collective memory, and social justice. This work marks a significant conceptual movement in archival scholarship, following postmodern critiques of the archive that explore the power of state and institutional archival praxis and the impact on community memory, history,

and culture. Few of the pieces in the volume use the term "community archives," but all describe the relationship between communities and archival practice.[4]

The exception in this volume is the opening chapter by UK scholars Andrew Flinn and Mary Stevens.[5] Their work is among the most cited from this volume, providing a definitional framework for "independent and community archives." The authors cite Flinn's previous scholarship, defining community archives as "the (often) grassroots activities of creating and collecting, processing and curating, preserving and making accessible collections relating to a particular community or specified subject."[6] The chapter focuses on three UK-based case studies: the George Padmore Institute, the Institute of Race Relations, and the Black Cultural Archives. It is important to note that these case studies are particular to the community archives movement in the United Kingdom. Flinn's work traces the movement through initiatives such as the Community Access to Archives Project (CAAP), led by the National Archives, and the Community Archive Development Group (CADG), now an extension of the Archives and Records Association. Both groups provided funding and infrastructural support for the development of community archives and history projects. This distinction is a reminder that Flinn's work in the United Kingdom, undertaken in a particular place and time, has not been replicated in other contexts. This is critical to acknowledge because, in this set of case studies, the funding and infrastructure of the projects have been supported by the state.

While Flinn's voice permeates the community archives discourse, a close reading of Flinn's scholarship reveals a reticence to define community archives firmly. In his earliest piece on community archives, Flinn writes, "defining and establishing a common understanding of the terms employed in this area is important but also quite difficult. Definitions of what a community might be, or what a community archives is and what it might be taken to include are not necessarily clear or fixed."[7] Flinn articulates an early aversion to providing a bounded definition of community archiving as a practice but acknowledges the grassroots nature of the community archives and heritage realms. He also asserts that communities must participate and have control or ownership of the archival project. Flinn's article establishes the idea that community archives and oral history projects are a means for diversifying and democratizing history by challenging and adding to the dominant narratives of the past at both the local and national levels.

Continuing his publication of scholarship on community archives in the United Kingdom, in 2010 Flinn examined the role of technology in community archiving for the creation of community-generated content. Challenging the problematic assertion from some archival professionals that community archives subvert the archivists' role as "expert," Flinn situated community practices within a lineage of efforts to document history from below.[8] Contradicting his observations in the earlier work, Flinn introduced the notion that community archives *do not* have to be community inspired but might be sponsored or initiated by mainstream heritage organizations and infrastructure. His focus on the role of the Internet and digital technologies

for cultivating community-generated content shifts the focus from independent, community-driven efforts to participatory models of community engagement from institutional repositories and collecting institutions.

The blurring of community-driven and community-engaged practices continues throughout Flinn's coauthored publications. In 2009, Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd argued that the primary feature of community archives is the engaged participation of community members in the preservation and accessibility of their history on their own terms.[9] Again, focused on the United Kingdom and community archiving initiatives in London specifically, the authors outlined the guiding questions of their two-year research funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council. Their central aim was to uncover the impact of community-based practices that challenge dominant historical narratives and archival practice, exposing the relationship between mainstream repositories and community archives. Employing an ethnographic methodology, the authors utilized participant observation to gain a bottom-up perspective of community archives. The authors observed that community archives collect a wide diversity of materials melding the traditional collecting scope of archives and museums. They also acknowledged that personal and even individual dimensions of community archiving can lead to issues of stamina and sustainability, often requiring the intervention of institutional repositories. The primary tensions of community archiving according to the preliminary observations concern custody and ownership and the distrust of mainstream heritage organizations that communities often exhibit. Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd concluded that community archives play an integral role in allowing communities to maintain power over what is preserved and what is destroyed.[10] Subsequent scholarship reflects how the findings from this article have come to serve as the de facto definition of community archives by framing the conversation that follows in the archival discourse.[11]

Attempting to remain inclusive, Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd[12] codified an understanding of community archives that provides little distinction between independent community archives and community-engaged practices offered by archival institutions. As an umbrella term, "community archives" are described as a means for harnessing the power of controlling representation of community history often marginalized in the mainstream archives. As Rebecka Sheffield observed in 2017, the concept is "used as a shorthand for the myriad community-based archival initiatives that come together outside of formal heritage networks."[13] Community archives are framed within the postmodern critiques of institutional archival practices that examine the biases of institutions that have privileged dominant historical narratives and become a means of archival activism that embraces social justice and plurality. Yet, as Sheffield notes, community archives are still framed within the practices of institutional repositories as a way for professional archivists "to reinvigorate their profession with new methodological approaches to documenting cultural heritage and making this material accessible to a broader public."[14] Throughout the discourse, the distinctions between the independent community archives described in Flinn's earliest work and participatory, community-engaged practices blur.

Despite the broadening of the concept evidenced in the scholarship of Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd, their work has served as the foundation for others studying community archives. Michelle Caswell, like Flinn, has emerged as a dominant voice in the field based on her work in Southern California. The scholarship produced by Caswell and graduate students at UCLA is similarly geographically situated and builds from the result of research at a set of 12 community-based archives in Los Angeles and the surrounding area.[15] Exploring the significance of the representational frameworks offered by archival collections, the community spaces where the archives are maintained, and the practices developed at these sites, this work is integral to the development of scholarship in this area. However, as with Flinn's, Caswell's work is grounded in a limited number of case studies. The geographical focus on California is replicated by the queer community case studies offered by Wakimoto et al. who explore three repositories in the state.[16]

Despite the growth of community archives research over the past decade, the number of case studies remains limited. Outside of the UK context, community endeavors from the US coasts dominate the literature. The Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York City, as an example, is one of the most popular case studies.[17] Other California-based LGBTQ archives, such as ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives; the Lavender Library, Archives, and Cultural Exchange (LLACE); and the GLBT Historical Society, appear in multiple articles and chapters.[18] However, these cases are situated in large metropolitan areas on the coasts of the United States, offering little diversity in terms of the communities, practices, and organizational frameworks that are represented. Further, all build on the earlier work of Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd,[19] citing the broadest possible understanding of what constitutes a community archives.

Despite the reluctance to formally define "community archives," the work of Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd has become the cornerstone for others studying community-based archiving endeavors.[20] Zavala et al. open their literature review by citing this earlier work:

> Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens and Elizabeth Shepherd define community as "any manner of people who come together and present themselves as such, and a 'community archive' is the product of their attempts to document the history of their commonality," with the resulting "collections of material gathered primarily by members of a given community and over whose use community members exercise some level of control."[21]

Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd's 2009 *Archival Science* article provides the broadest possible definitions of both "community" and "community archives," serving as the framework by which future case studies have been selected.[22] Scholars acknowledge the absence of boundaries around the terminology, noting that "a clear general definition of *community archives* is difficult to delineate."[23] And, while the growing body of literature critically engages various dimensions of community collections—exploring affect, representation, identity, archival space, advocacy, social justice, and issues of plurality in the archives—the definition of "community archives" has not been further bounded or developed.

Community Archives as a Continuum of Community-Engaged Practices

In his 2015 entry to the *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science*, Andrew Flinn observed, "the term community archives has not been precisely defined or even deemed capable of precise definition," despite the continued use of the terminology.[24] In an attempt to draw boundaries around the concept, Flinn first grappled with the idea of community, noting "in some countries the term is used mainly to describe local, geographically located communities and archives, elsewhere instead of or in addition to place, the term refers to communities self-identifying by race, ethnicity, faith, nationality, gender, sexuality, disability, class, occupation, shared interest, or a combination of the above."[25] Flinn then addressed the breadth of practices evoked by the term:

> Community archives do not sit easily inside professional silos. The activities frequently described as community-based or community-led archiving shares many attributes with other related endeavors such as community history, oral history, community-based museums and heritage groups, radical archiving, resource centers, and autonomous archive.[26]

"Community" rightly remains a loosely defined term from the perspective of the archivist, allowing the community to self-define from within. The activity-based definition of community archives, on the other hand, does little to draw distinctions between collecting practices initiated by the community and those originating from professional archives. All historical or heritage-oriented practices that engage the community in some way are drawn under this expanding umbrella term.

As we have argued, Flinn's observations in this brief encyclopedia entry reflect those of the broader literature. In an attempt to be as inclusionary as possible, the field has refused to concisely define "community archives."[3] However, this reluctance has resulted in a body of literature that fails to fully engage the distinct nature of community archives and the complexity of the ownership, control, and power situated in these sites. The failure to set clear boundaries prevents archival scholars from demarcating the distinctions between community-based archival endeavors adhering to participatory models and those that originate from within the community. The range of terminology employed to describe the relationship between institutional repositories and community members further illustrates the breadth of projects and practices described as community archives. Modifiers such as "engagement," "local," and "participatory" signify the involvement of community members in archival practice and represent different methodologies for professional archivists to engage communities in building more inclusive collections.[27] While scholars acknowledge the utility of the range of methodologies deployed in these practices, few connect this work to the spectrum of community engagement practices described in higher education and other areas of public scholarship.

Janet Ceja Alcalá and Desiree Alaniz are among the few in the archival discourse who acknowledge the need to situate the range of community-engaged practices along

a continuum that describes the relationship between communities and institutional repositories. They define community-engaged archiving "as those [organizations] who consciously work alongside and partner with communities to give voice to their collection, whether the collections are in heritage organizations or in autonomous environments."[28] Ceja Alcalá and Alaniz frame the "Community Engaged Archiving Continuum" around a series of case studies. Community engagement is described along three levels of practice, ranked according to the level of activity between the community and institutional repository (see Figure 1). The bottom tier represents the participatory archiving models described in the archival discourse. In this level of engagement, archival access is of primary focus. The authors describe practices that include community members in the development of finding aids, archival description, and arrangement of collections. In the center tier, Ceja Alcalá and Alaniz describe projects embedded in the community. These case studies feature two-way communication between the community and archival professionals exemplified through service-learning projects. The continuum peaks at "complete collaboration," suggesting an equal partnership between community and archivist in the implementation of archival projects.[29]
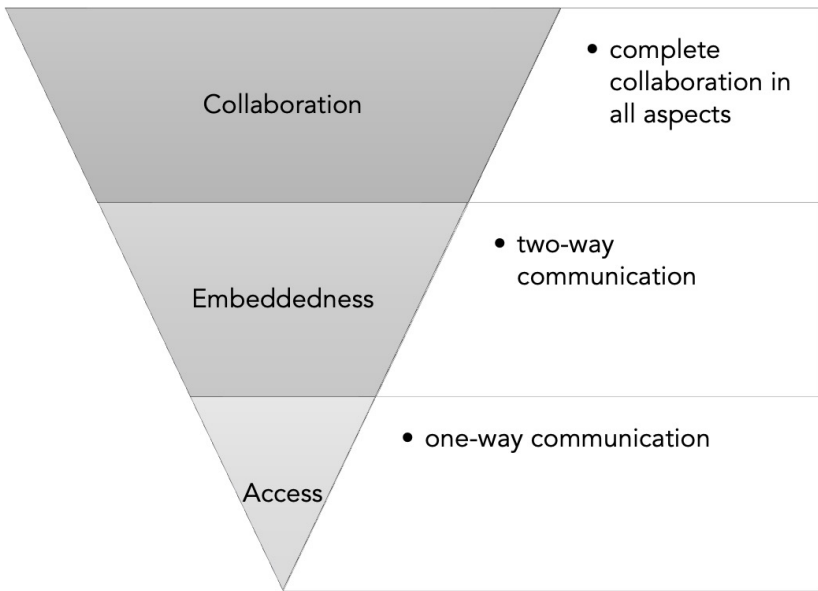

Figure 1: Ceja Alcalá and Alaniz's Community Engaged Archiving Continuum

Ceja Alcalá and Alaniz's Community Engaged Archiving Continuum begins to draw distinctions between the practices described in the community archives literature by acknowledging the position of the community within archival praxis. Definitions of community archives have similarly situated the community's relationship to institutional archives. In 2007, Flinn centralized the role of community engagement, arguing,

"[c]ommunity histories or community archives are the grassroots activities of documenting, recording and exploring community heritage *in which community participation, control and ownership of the project is essential*."[30] He further noted, "this activity might or might not happen in association with formal heritage organisations *but the impetus and direction* should come from within the community itself."[31] While the definition blurs the boundaries between archives and other historically oriented projects, Flinn clearly asserts that these projects should originate from within the community and that the community should retain control. Elsewhere, Flinn has used the term "independent community archives" to stress the autonomy of these sites.[32] However, as Flinn's work developed, the concept weakened. The definition crafted by Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd frequently used to frame studies of community archives softens this language defining community archives as "collections of material gathered *primarily* by members of a given community and over whose use community members exercise *some level* of control."[33] While the differences are subtle, these definitions move the concept of community archives down the continuum proposed by Ceja Alcalá and Alaniz, asserting more space for institutional and professional archives and archivists and less autonomy for community collectors.

This shift is further evidenced in the archival discourse, as modifiers such as "community-led" or "community-based" enter the archival vernacular. The phrase "community archives" then serves as "a matter of convenience to draw together what is in reality an incredibly diverse group of archival organizations."[34] The primary distinction between community archives and other institutional collecting efforts has thus become some level of engagement with a self-defined community. The qualifiers used to describe sites of study range from notions of locality ("local history archives"), size ("small community archives"), site ("church archives," "school archives," "home-based archives"), methodology ("oral history project," "DIY," "participatory"), mission ("radical," "feminist," "activist," "social-justice-oriented"), and identity ("ethnic," "identity-based," "interest group"). While this wide range of terminology captures the complexity of the relationship between archives/archival praxis and society, the discourse has done little to establish the distinctions between community archives and other archival endeavors that engage identity, community, and underrepresented histories. Rather than defining community archives through these other characteristics, Simionica suggests, "community archives are defined as a collection of tangible heritage or an action of self-dedication to preserve the intangible heritage of a community of which community engagement amongst its

members in such processes is the most important feature,"[35] thus defining community archives by the level of community engagement.

As noted, the archival discourse has yet to turn to the community-engagement literature to draw definitional boundaries around archival practices. Many community-engagement models describe a range of practices similar to those described by Ceja Alcalá and Alaniz that stretch across a spectrum from outreach/informing, consultation, involvement, and collaboration, to empowerment or shared leadership at the top tier of engagement.[36] The movement across this spectrum hinges on the ability of community members to make decisions and derive benefits from the relationship. It also reflects *when* the community becomes involved with an engaged project, whether at the end of a project to serve as the audience for something created by an institution or in the beginning stages as the project is being designed.

The Community-Engaged Research (CEnR) Continuum defines a six-tiered typology that describes an increasing level of engagement among members of a community involved in a research project (see Figure 2).[37] Published by the US Environmental Protection Agency's National Center for Environmental Research to inform grant-funded projects engaging the public, the CEnR Continuum builds from the community-engaged research in public health and allied fields. In this model, outreach describes the lowest level of engagement, representing a unidirectional flow of information from the researchers to the community members. At this level, the results of a study may be shared with a community, but the community members have no input in the design of the research. With consultation, community members may provide some means of feedback to inform the research project, but projects falling within this level of engagement do not engage the community in the initial stages of project design. Involvement includes projects that may engage the community from the beginning stages of design and the formulation of the questions. Shared leadership/participation is one step up from involvement, recognizing community members as equals in the research design project. Community-driven projects are defined as those in which the project is both community owned and led.
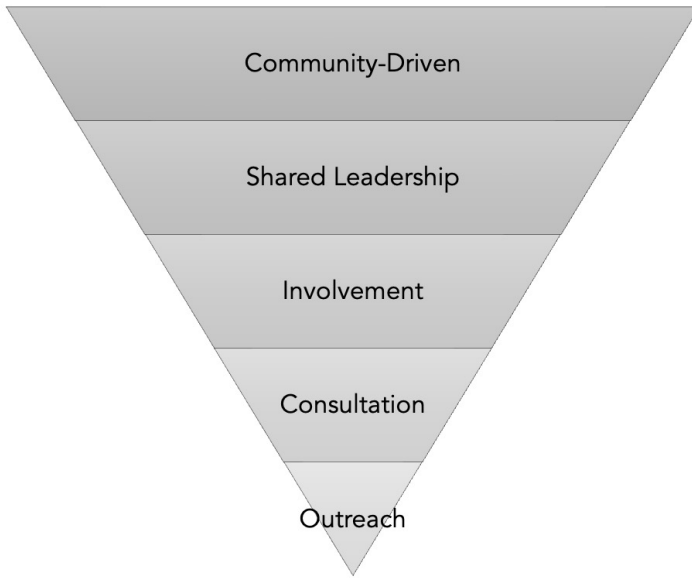
Figure 2: Community-Engaged Research Continuum adapted from CEnR (2013)

The CEnR Continuum illustrates the tensions of power often discussed in the community archives discourse. As community involvement increases, so do trust and communication between community members and researchers. This framework asks researchers to examine the design and methodology of the project. Whose voice is the loudest? Who has the ultimate control over the design of the project? Whose needs are prioritized? When does the community become involved? Mirroring Ceja Alcalá and Alaniz, the CEnR Continuum carefully examines the means of community participation and engagement, providing clearer definition of the boundaries of community participation.

Sherry Arnstein's "Ladder of Citizen Participation" provides more nuance to the models described, offering eight "rungs" along a typology that describes citizen participation in social programs, planning projects, and democratic public participation (see Figure 3).[38] Though first proposed in 1969, the typology continues to inform community-engaged research in planning and public policy and to serve as a means of assessment for community-oriented projects.[39] Arnstein frames participation as the measure of power and "juxtaposes powerless citizens with the powerful in order to highlight the fundamental divisions between them."[40] Along the eight rungs of the ladder, the level of citizen participation and power moves from "non-participation" at the bottom rung to "citizen control" at the top.
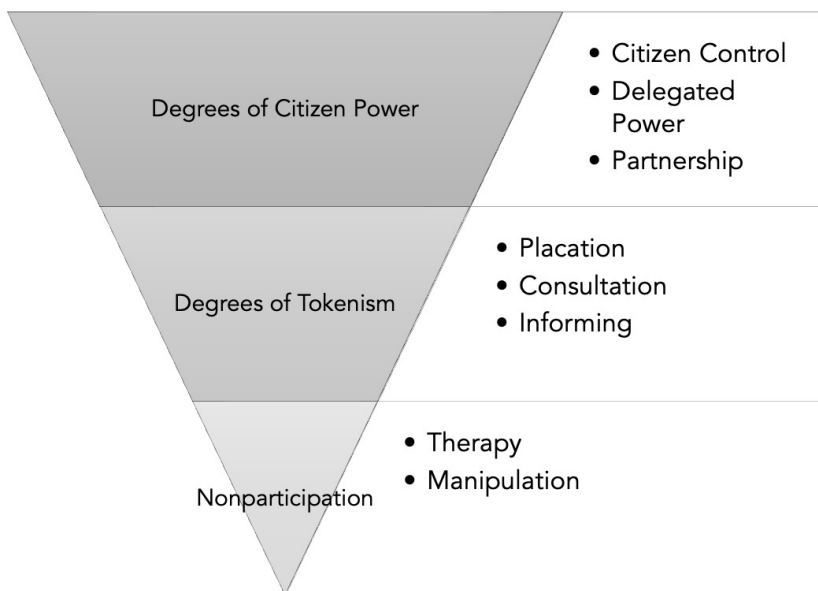
Figure 3: Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation, adapted from Arnstein (2019)

The lower rungs of the ladder describe methods of nonparticipation. Here, Arnstein describes advisory committees that offer citizens little voice and the illusion of participation. In these projects, citizens may be consulted, but only as "information gathering" exercises. Such projects seek community support rather than true involvement of community participation and serve as mechanisms for public relations.[41] The middle rungs of the framework risk tokenizing members of the community. Mirroring the CEnR Continuum, these methods offer additional community input and control, but citizens are brought into the project after it has been designed by those outside of the community. Tokenism is not inherent in these relationships, but Arnstein's language describes the risk of allowing the researcher's voice to overpower that of the community.[42] At the top of the ladder, Arnstein describes greater "Degrees of Citizen Power." Partnership, delegated power, and citizen control describe relationships between researchers and communities that increase the level of community voice and input in the design and implementation of community-engaged projects.[43]

Arnstein's language emphasizes the risks involved as researchers outside of communities design projects intended to engage a particular community and the need to carefully consider the positionality of power and authority in community-engaged projects. Figure 4 places Arnstein's Ladder in conversation with the CEnR Continuum and Ceja Alcalá and Alaniz's model. This comparison demonstrates the limitations of the models, capturing only part of the ladder.

Ceja Alcalá and Alaniz (2018)	CEnR (2015)	Arnstein (2019)
	Community-Driven *Community control over project*	Citizen Control *Community governance*
		Delegated Power *Control over a particular domain*
Complete Collaboration *equal partnership*	Participatory *Equally shared leadership*	Partnership *Shared-responsibility*
Embeddedness *two-way communication*	Involvement *Bi-directional communication*	Placation *Increased control*
	Consultation *Community feedback*	Consultation *Inviting feedback*
Access *one-way communication*	Outreach *Provides community with information*	Informing *One-way communication*
		Therapy *Masked participation*
		Manipulation *Information gathering, project support*

Figure 4: Comparison of all three frameworks

Arnstein provides a more nuanced framework for analyzing the extent of community power within a community-engaged project. Neither the CEnR Continuum nor Ceja Alcalá and Alaniz's model extends downward to examine projects in which communities have little to no power and may be tokenized. As both models presume the involvement of a researcher or an archivist, neither extend fully upward to complete citizen control. However, all three models demonstrate the importance of clearly understanding where community-engaged work falls along a continuum of practice. While "community archives" is broadly used to recognize projects along a similar continuum, like Ceja Alcalá and Alaniz, we argue for more nuanced language that recognizes and acknowledges the positionality of institutional archives within the community-engaged practices described under this umbrella term. It is not that these models are absent from the archival literature, rather, the issue is that the emerging case studies building on the theory of community archives have not fully examined this level of engagement. As Arnstein's Ladder demonstrates, the subtle distinction between outreach and consultation provides nuance to describing the amount of community input and informs how the level of community involvement may affect the reception or engagement of the target audience. Similarly, the distinction between a true shared partnership and consultation, and further, between partnership and community control, significantly shifts the involvement of the community along the spectrum. We argue for a new model in the "Continuum of Community-Engaged Archival Praxis" that recognizes these distinctions between

community power and control, offering a continuum of terms that fully describes the positionality of the researchers, the partitioners, and the communities that they engage, thus fully articulating where the power is situated in community-engaged archival practices and methodologies.
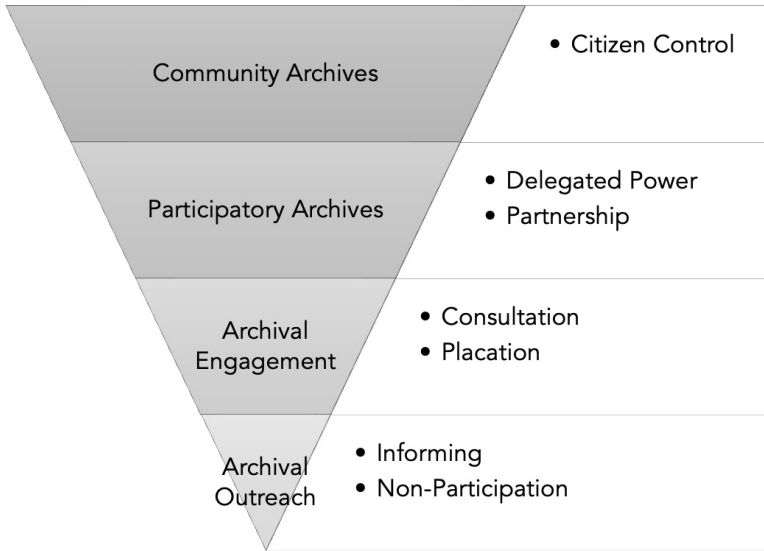

Figure 5: The Continuum of Community-Engaged Archival Praxis

Figure 5 imposes commonly used archival terminology on Arnstein's Ladder. In this model, outreach describes modes of engagement in which communities have little to no input. Traditional forms of outreach such as exhibits and educational efforts may fall under this bottom tier of practice if communities do not have input from the beginning of the project or have little influence over the design. Some projects labeled as "participatory" may also fall into this category, such as social tagging activities that allow limited community engagement with archival collections. Outreach practices describe community-based projects that speak to the community, setting up practices that community members may engage with, but giving them little to no control over how the project develops. Archival engagement refers to archival activities in which communities might provide some deeper level of consultation, informing the implementation of a project. Within this level of the continuum, the origin of the project lies outside of the community, but the community may inform how the project develops. These first two tiers describe a large part of the "participatory archives" literature, equally fraught by a lack of clear boundaries on what practices compass the terminology.[44] Many "participatory" projects describe efforts to incorporate digital and web-based technologies that engage communities outside of the archives to participate through these tools. This literature focuses on accessibility, use, and the affordances of digital tools to engage broader

audiences.[45] Many projects labeled "participatory" ask communities to work within the boundaries of archival praxis and would fall within archival engagement on our framework rather than describing a true collaborative partnership. Reframed through the lens of community-engagement, true participatory archives would suggest an equal partnership between institutional repositories and community groups. Such projects are defined by shared leadership and control. Allard and Ferris describe their work with the Digital Archives of Marginalized Communities Project (DAMC) as "community-led participatory archiving," employing a methodology that engaged community members throughout the project.[46] While in the earlier stages of the project the researchers from the University of Manitoba consulted with community members, the methodology of DAMC evolved as the archives developed, allowing the members of the community to serve as partners in its design and implementation. Many projects currently described as community archives rarely fall within the top tier of our framework. In the Continuum of Community-Engaged Archival Praxis, projects in which communities initiate and have full control over a project are designated as community archives. Perhaps one of the most cited examples is the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA).[47] Founded in the 1970s by Joan Nestle, Deborah Edel, and women from the Gay Academic Union, the LHA remains community led by a group of dedicated volunteers in a Brooklyn brownstone and is often cited for its alternative approaches to collections organization and access. The Gerber/Hart Library and Archives in Chicago,[48] San Francisco's GLBT Historical Society,[49] and Evanston's Shorefront Legacy Center,[50] like LHA, were founded by community members as what Flinn and others would describe as "independent-community archives," spaces where the communities are in complete control over the collections.

Redefining Community Archives

By placing community archives at the top of the continuum, we argue for a reassertion of Flinn's earlier definition and a tightening of the concept's boundaries, offering a multifaceted definition that recognizes the power and authority of the community in the establishment and control of community archives: 1) the archival impulse originates from within the community, 2) the community retains ownership of the archives, and 3) the community maintains control over the preservation, access, and management of the collection. Partnerships and collaborations with institutional archives and community archives are akin to collaborations between archival repositories, which may include events and programming, shared community outreach, and sharing of knowledge and resources around archival practice. In this sense, community archives remain autonomous, but community archivists become colleagues in the profession.

The archival impulse refers to a community's desire to build an archives and preserve the history and memory of a self-defined group. With this concept, we return to Flinn's understanding that "the impetus and direction" of community archives should originate within the community.[51] However, the archival impulse is also situated within the historical contexts that have led to the formation of the community and in which the community identifies as integral to its shared memory and archival praxis. The archival impulse resituates the study of community archives, shifting the emphasis from the

contemporary practices of community archives to the history of these sites and the individuals who constructed and shaped them. Community and identity are not static but deeply rooted in the conditions that brought together groups of individuals who share common interests, cultures, histories, and practices. Community boundaries and identities shift over time in response to historical conditions that are both external and internal to these groups. Few scholars have firmly rooted their studies of community archives in a historical analysis of the communities building the archives and of the shifts in the mission and practice within those collections over time. Focusing on the contemporary practices of these archives, archival scholarship nods to the historical longevity of these archival spaces yet fails to interrogate the social, cultural, and political contexts that motivated community members to build and maintain an archives.

While case studies often engage brief histories of identity terms and organizational timelines, few engage the history of the archives or the historical conditions under which archival collections were founded.[52] To provide one example, Caswell engaged with the history of community identity and terminology, writing from her position as the cofounder of the South Asian American Digital Archives (SAADA). Formed in 2008 as an "independent online-only community-based repository," Caswell explains why the term "South Asian American" was selected to represent a broad diasporic community: "in SAADA's case, we have strategically employed the constructed category of 'South Asian American' in order to build connections between diverse groups, while at the same time documenting differences between those groups that ultimately denaturalizes South Asian American as a category."[53] The complexities of this terminology in connection to Western notions of geography and the colonial history of British rule complicate present-day social connections and understandings of shared history. In the case of SAADA, identity terminology is deployed as a tool for archival growth and contemporary affinity building for South Asian American immigrants and their descendants. In this example, community is constructed through the archives and not as a historical precursor to archive-building. Integral to the archival impulse and the historical analysis of community archives is that the drive for building an archives comes from within a self-defined community.

Besides discussions of identity through a historical lens, archival scholars include the history of community archives as short introductions to case studies concerned with contemporary best practices. Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge study three queer community archives in California utilizing these case studies to articulate the need for social justice in the archival profession more broadly.[54] To introduce the GLBT History Society; the Lavender Library, Archives, and Cultural Exchange of Sacramento Inc.; and ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives in their article, Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge provide a brief timeline of each organization, at which point the historical engagement with each archives ends. The purpose of their work is to assert that through understanding the motivations behind queer community archives building, professional archivists can develop increasingly reflexive archival practice that leads to heightened inclusion of marginalized communities within institutional repositories through outreach and collaboration. Disengaging with the historical context of each archives' emergence

allows scholars to skirt the political nature of community archives as grassroots activist projects that necessitate autonomy.

The archival impulse centers the early visions and imaginations of the archives before these projects come to fruition through an engagement with the desires of the founders in their social, cultural, and political contexts. Situating community archives in the historical conditions of their establishment provides the opportunity to study the archival collections preserved by the community to understand how community visions of a shared memory are enacted through its collecting policies. In this light, the practices of community archives necessitate a historical investigation to examine the change in practices and policies over the lifetime of an archives to its present-day manifestation. A historical approach to community archives affords researchers the ability to engage the ways in which communities define themselves and their history over time. "Community" suggests that no single person acts alone. Therefore, the archival impulse that initiates a community archives also shifts over the lifespan of an archives as the people in the role of community archivist change and continue to build and expand their archives. Our recent case study on the history of the Gerber/Hart Library and Archives in Chicago, Illinois, demonstrates the implementation of a methodology centered on the archival impulse.[55] To unpack the history of Gerber/Hart since its founding in 1981, we utilized historical analysis to read the archival collections of key founders and archivists involved in its establishment and early years. This analysis situates Gerber/Hart within the gay liberation movement that preceded its founding and sheds light on the growing professional network of lesbian and gay librarians and archivists engaged with preserving history in community contexts across North America. Case studies that engage the history of queer community archives across the country have overlooked this burgeoning network of lesbian and gay professionals simultaneously engaging their local communities in developing historical visibility and legitimacy in response to long-standing exclusionary institutional collection policies.

Grounding the archival impulse in the origins of the archives exposes the power dynamics embedded in community archival practices. The archival literature notes the suspicions that community archivists often have of institutional archives and partnerships with traditional archival spaces, based on the historical imbalance of power between communities and institutional repositories. These reflections on power extend from the postmodern critiques of archival practice that acknowledge the power of the archives as an extension of the power of the state that marginalizes specific communities and their histories.[56] The community archives discourse has positioned itself in this fourth paradigm shift, accepting the turn toward community as an acknowledgment and repair of the colonial power dynamics within institutional repositories. Yet, community archives are described as operating at a deficit, without funding, resources, and broader community support. Flinn and Stevens note, "questions of independence, sustaining resources, keeping archives open, achieving organizational aspirations and navigating the possible compromises required in partnership with formal heritage organizations are common to many independent archives all over the world," further arguing that these partnerships are inevitable for many community archives.[57] Community archivist Dino Robinson

of the Shorefront Legacy Center in Evanston, Illinois, reflected on the imbalance of power, noting, "often, when big institutions attempt to partner with community-based organizations, the relationship isn't equitable and the archives—which end up being stored in the big institution—become less accessible to the public. . . . It's usually the community entity that has to follow the rules of the bigger one."[58]

In recognition of the historical and contemporary power dynamics, the archival impulse is only one facet of our community archives definition. Community archives are not only initiated and desired by community members, they are also owned and maintained by the community itself. The archival impulse reveals the "reasons that communities seek to build collections, to claim ownership of their history, preserve materials, celebrate their history, pass on knowledge to future generations, and seek to shift archival practices that have excluded or marginalized their history."[59] The second and third facets of our definition set additional boundaries on the concept of *community archives*, acknowledging that community archives are not solely defined by the founding moment, they become part of the histories of the communities that sustain the practice. Like Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd,[60] we recognize that community participation is a defining characteristic of community archives, but reflecting the frameworks offered by the community engagement discourse, we argue that to fall within the definition of community archives at the top of the community-engaged archives continuum, the community must retain ownership of the archives and control over the preservation, access, and management of the collections. Ownership and control of archival materials and spaces demonstrate that community archives are not strictly about a desire for preserving memory but about the continued control of the narratives and materials that they hold. Caswell reflects on these principles in the context of SAADA: "We felt a real need for these materials to remain under community control and not be subsumed under larger institutional repositories, where they could be undervalued, get lost in the shuffle, or misrepresented."[61] While the archival literature acknowledges the need for new modes of engagement with community history to repair a colonial past and pluralize archival collections, as we have noted, these modes of praxis are described under the larger umbrella of "community archives," further blurring the distinctions between autonomous projects in which the community retains power and control and those in which the community has little voice to influence praxis.

Returning to earlier definitions of community archives that center on control and grounding the definition in the archival impulse allows us to easily begin to disambiguate projects that fall along the continuum and situate the center of power across these practices. Using these boundaries, community-engaged projects that seek to decolonize collections and better represent marginalized histories in institutional repositories are distinct from projects initiated by the community. The risk of representing all community-focused or -based practices as community archives is losing sight of the power and control that have been assigned to these sites. The archival discourse continues to note this power dynamic but is reluctant to acknowledge how the failure to classify community archives as autonomous and to appropriately describe the engagement of institutional archives with community partners risk tokenizing these relationships. The power of community archives and community-engaged practices is not just

in the aggregation of materials documenting underrepresented people, it is in the community's power to continue to control and influence that mode of representation. In reconceptualizing the relationship of communities to their archives and recognizing the autonomy of this practice, we argue that the engagement of institutional archives with these sites must be situated along a continuum of clearly defined methodologies.

By using Arnstein's Ladder to reframe the practices that fall under the continuum of community-engaged archival praxis, we return to earlier work that attempted to draw similar boundaries on practice. Recognizing the need for engagement between archives and communities, Stevens, Flinn, and Shepherd explored the relationship between mainstream institutional repositories and community archives in the United Kingdom.[62] Utilizing ethnographic methods, their study reports on the engagement models employed in partnerships between publicly funded archival institutions and independent community archives. The study identifies five primary modes of practice that mainstream archives use to engage community archives: custody, collection, curation and dissemination, advice, and consultancy. According to Stevens et al., "the most successful allow communities to combine the retention of control over their material with provision for its long-term preservation. Where once community-based groups were under pressure to hand over their archives, now the emphasis is on the handing on of knowledge to future generations and the sharing of expertise between organisations."[63] The authors similarly recognize the significance of the level of community-engagement across the highlighted case studies. Practices that involved "handing over" would fall at the bottom tiers of the community-engaged archival continuum as archivists take custody of community-based archival materials to fill gaps in mainstream collections. The methods of curation and dissemination, advice, and consultancy described by the authors as "handing on" involved a shift in the power dynamic and more community control, thus moving up the continuum. However, the framing still privileges the institutional archives, presuming that the community members are experts on the community and professional archivists are the experts on archival praxis, thus the case studies do not describe the community-driven practices at the top of the continuum falling under participatory or community practices.

Our definition of "community archives" is similarly centered on the directionality of engagement between community and institution. In the archival literature, community-engagement frameworks are driven by the institution, regardless of when the community becomes involved in the partnership. Archival advocacy, social justice, and discussions of plurality have opened a conversation that acknowledges a need for archival institutions to recognize the biases in archival praxis and build more inclusive collections that better represent the diversity of society. Participatory and collaborative approaches to custody, appraisal, and representation begin to correct these inequities by involving the community in the development of institutional collections, policies, and practices, but these remain at the levels of archival engagement and outreach. Our definition works in the opposite direction. Starting at the top of the continuum, we situate community archives within the context of community-driven and community-led practices. Community archives are first and foremost archival projects that originate within the community. As they evolve, the community retains ownership and control of the archives and the management of

the collections. As Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd and others have observed, community archives may not always be capable of maintaining their independence from institutional repositories. The continuum, likewise, recognizes these shifts as community archives move across the spectrum toward participatory archives when the community no longer has the capacity or desire to maintain an autonomous archives. This framework reframes this evolution of community archives, shifting the narrative from participatory practices employed by institutional repositories to engage marginalized communities, to an approach that privileges community control and ownership as community archives are enfolded into institutional archival collections.

Conclusion

Cook's paradigms aptly contextualize the history of archival thought as praxis has shifted over time. The most recent paradigm has turned attention toward community, but just as the archival profession cannot fully contextualize our contemporary practices without understanding the rich history of archival thought, the complexity of community archives cannot be over simplified.[64] As a growing area of scholarship, many questions remain to be addressed, but to move forward and continue to theorize these projects, archival scholars must have a firm understanding of the subject of study. The framework proposed here seeks to illustrate the distinctions between projects that are initiated by the community, those which involve partnerships, and those that emerge organically and independently from within a community. Drawing these clear boundaries around the terminology will only further help to clarify how archives can engage communities and how communities engage in archival praxis.

We, like many others, grounded our work in the scholarship produced by Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd.[65] Their earlier works point toward an understanding of community archives as independent sites, but, over time, this language has been diluted in attempts to increase inclusivity in institutional repositories and address the colonial legacy of archives. As the profession shifts toward the community-based paradigm, it is integral to operate with a clear definition the practices utilized to engage communities in archival praxis. The limited number of available case studies demonstrates the newness of this literature, necessitating an expansion of research. Definitive boundaries on professional collaboration with community groups and community archives along a spectrum of engagement aid in the process of creating mutually beneficial relationships between institutional repositories and community partners. In arguing for precise definitions of the terminology that the profession employs to identify community archives, the Continuum of Community-Engaged Archival Praxis also calls for a new methodological approach to understanding these sites.

The archival impulse situates community archives historically, requiring a reading of community archival collections and their broader historical context. By directing attention to the founding of the archives, the archival impulse examines the way that the community was and continues to be defined, and how the archives aids in the formation of community by shaping community identity. A contextualized understanding

of individual community archives demands a close examination of the relationship between the archives and the community as well as the archives and the broader profession. Further, historicization of community archives provides a lens for engaging the contemporary practices and politics of these spaces. Recognizing community archives as social, cultural, and political projects pushes scholarship away from deficit models that critique community archives for resources they do not have and instead affirms the spaces for what they do and the purposes they serve. This shift is integral for studying community archives, especially when their purpose differs from the mission of institutional repositories.

Our goal in clearly defining the boundaries of community archives and professional collaboration is *not* to exclude practices or diminish the importance of community engagement, but to better define the relationship between archivists working in institutional contexts and those archives built by communities outside of these institutions. We do not intend to draw distinctions between professional and amateur, but instead to acknowledge the political and cultural reasonings for the development of spaces and practices that preserve, protect, and perpetuate community history and knowledge outside of institutionalized archival collections. Unlike institutional repositories that represent the archival mandate within organizations, the archival impulse originates within a self-defined community as an expression of the community's ability to control and preserve its history. To remain within this definition of community archives, the community must retain ownership and control over the collections and their management. All other modes of collaboration between institutional archives and community archives fall outside of these boundaries, representing other methods of community engagement. We recognize that not all communities that have the archival impulse desire to maintain and control their own archives; donating their materials to an institutional archives is precisely how they want to preserve their history. This raises a call for more case studies along the community-engaged archival continuum that employ a firm definition of the concept of community archives. Our work provides a framework for archival scholars to identify sites and establish historical case studies that will inform future studies of community archives, and it challenges the profession to form ethically minded relationships with these sites.

Acknowledgments

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