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# Antiviolence and Marginalized Communities: Knowledge Creation, Community Mobilization, and Social Justice through a Participatory Archiving Approach

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## ABSTRACT

The Digital Archives and Marginalized Communities Project (DAMC), at the University of Manitoba, is an interdisciplinary collaboration to design and develop three separate but related digital archives using a participatory archiving approach with stakeholder community groups. Working titles for these collections are the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Database (MMIWD), the Sex Work Database (SWD), and the Post-Apology Residential School Database (PARSD). This article discusses research and development from the project's inception in 2012 through the end of 2014, reflecting on the practical and theoretical considerations that arise for researchers and practitioners in the information science professions as a result of engaging with anticolonial and antiviolence feminist methodologies. These methodological perspectives place the experiences and knowledge of Indigenous and sex worker communities at the center of decolonizing processes, foregrounding the need for archival processes that not only captures but also uses these knowledge(s) as the organizational scaffolding upon which to build socially just and representative archives for specific marginalized communities. Using examples drawn from all three archives, this article demonstrates how the goals, intentions, and knowledges of marginalized communities might be built into digital archives projects through a participatory archiving approach. This discussion is followed by an examination of how fostering and maintaining respectful relationships between all members involved with DAMC collaborations is fundamentally connected to both participatory archiving processes and broader social justice objectives.

## INTRODUCTION

The Digital Archives and Marginalized Communities Project (DAMC), at the University of Manitoba, in Winnipeg, Canada, is an interdisciplinary collaboration to design and develop three separate but related activist digital archives using a participatory archiving approach with stakeholder community groups. Working titles for these collections are the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Database (MMIWD), the Sex Work Database (SWD), and the Post-Apology Residential School Database (PARSD). This article discusses research and development from the project's inception in 2012 through the end of 2014, reflecting on the practical and theoretical considerations that arise for researchers and practitioners in the information science professions as a result of engaging with anticolonial and antiviolence feminist methodologies. These methodological perspectives place the experiences and knowledge of Indigenous and sex worker communities at the center of decolonizing processes, foregrounding the need for archival processes that not only captures but also uses these knowledge(s) as the organizational scaffolding upon which to build socially just and representative archives for specific marginalized communities. This article demonstrates how the goals, intentions, and knowledge of marginalized communities might be built into digital archives projects through the DAMC's community-led participatory archiving approach.

The DAMC project investigates how communities can adopt digital information platforms and systems that are reflective of community-derived epistemologies, ontologies, and social justice objectives. Its overarching objectives are as follows:

- Creating and mobilizing, via multiple forms of digital media, knowledge that contests and re-envisioning conceptions of violence against certain people as normal
- Building bridges and dialogue between academic and nonacademic stakeholders using online and offline tools such as knowledge sharing, social media, online and "real world" conference participation, as well as the opportunity to curate digital exhibits together
- Creating community-based archives that preserve community-identified cultural heritage in a way that "resonates with community understandings and knowledge" (Shilton & Srinivasan, 2007, p. 96)

Individual objectives for the archives vary according to the interests of the groups involved; ongoing consultations continue to refine the objectives for each initiative. Currently, MMIWD and SWD exist to preserve the voices and work of advocates for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women<sup>1</sup> as well as those of politicized sex workers, to mobilize this knowledge by facilitating communication and resource-sharing to expand and enhance the work of these often quite divided groups, and thus to encour-

age much-needed critical engagement and information literacy skills concerning Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and sex work.

Collection development for both MMIWD and SWD is well underway. To date, both archives contain public records only, including online initiatives developed by advocates for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and by sex work activists (e.g., websites, blogs); print and online media and ephemera (e.g., pamphlets and posters); online and offline commemorative initiatives by advocates for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (e.g., web memorials, Facebook groups, information packets for families or police); image collections and digital video; as well as some academic research and published reports. Collection development and record appraisal are driven by priorities established in conjunction with community partners. As DAMC relationships with the communities involved with these collections develop, so, too, do the collections themselves.

Current objectives for PARSD include the collection of Indigenous<sup>2</sup> and non-Indigenous media representations of Indian Residential Schools (IRSs), as well as related academic, activist, and/or community-level initiatives, undertaken since the Canadian government's official apology for Indian Residential Schools on June 11, 2008.<sup>3</sup> Other goals currently include the examination of PARSD records to find links and track intergenerational effects of residential schools; the filling of a gap in the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission's mandate by making PARSD records available to it; and the encouragement of further critical engagement, healing, decolonization, and reconciliation. As the most recent addition to the project, to date PARSD includes only news media reports from dominant/mainstream as well as Indigenous and alternative news sources. As with MMIWD and SWD, additional material will be added to PARSD in accordance with priorities established by community partners.

The DAMC project developed as a result of practical and theoretical considerations that first emerged in 2002 when, through her dissertation research, coauthor Shawna Ferris began collecting materials related to representations of and responses to sex work in contemporary Canadian culture. She added to this collection in her subsequent years of postdoctoral work in antiviolence and decolonizing commemorative activism responding to the growing numbers across the Canadian West of missing and murdered First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and other women who trace at least part of their ancestry to Turtle Island/North America's First Peoples. As Ferris (2015) observes, web records provided evidence of politically active sex worker communities that have yet to receive the respect and academic analysis they deserve. The Internet also constitutes a key organizing and dissemination space for commemorations posted by grassroots organizations struggling to foreground the concerns of Indigenous women in their antiviolence, antipoverty, and feminist work.

Between 2002 and 2006, much of the collected evidence of marginalized grassroots community actions (for example, reports, promotional ephemera, and photographs) began disappearing from the World Wide Web as groups updated or revised web platforms and pages, and as organizations dissolved or evolved. Identifying as a significant loss the disappearance of these voices and records from one of the few public spaces in which they appear, Ferris approached coauthor Danielle Allard, at that time a PhD candidate in information studies with a background in women's and gender studies, to create a database to preserve these born-digital records. That conversation marked the beginning of a research collaboration that has since significantly evolved and expanded. In 2012, multiyear research funding was procured and an additional research partner, Kiera Ladner, joined the project. Ladner is Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Politics and Governance as well as director of Mamawipawin, an Indigenous governance and community-based research space and digital lab, at the University of Manitoba. Mamawipawin also provides the technological infrastructure to support DAMC, providing server and office space. With the addition of Ladner to the research collaboration, it was determined that the DAMC would simultaneously develop three archives: MMIWD, SWD, and PARSD.

Project investigators Ferris and Ladner have an established working relationship as a result of their concurrent research on violence, decolonization, and Indigenous knowledge. The MMIWD forms a thematic bridge between their respective research portfolios as well as between PARSD and SWD. Foregrounding this link brings into focus a myriad of connections between colonialism, both past and present, and the experiences of many contemporary Indigenous women and girls. Intergenerational effects of Indian Residential School violence are known to substantially impoverish and disenfranchise Indigenous women and girls (Amnesty International Canada, 2004, 2009; Anderson, 2000; Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2011; Deerchild, 2005; Jacobs & Williams, 2008; NWAC, 2010). Attempting to escape such a fate, women and girls often move from rural northern communities into southern urban contexts where, without adequate resources or cultural supports, many end up populating the poorest levels of the street-involved or survival sex trade (FAQNW, 2008; Peach & Ladner, 2010). As demonstrated by the alarming statistics regarding ongoing serial or mass murder cases across Canada (particularly in the west, where Indigenous populations are the highest), all too frequently theirs are the names that appear on the lists of more than eight hundred confirmed Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canada.<sup>4</sup> Despite some political differences, therefore, the interests of those who would record and address Indian Residential School violence, of advocates for Missing and Murdered Indigenous women, and of antiviolence sex work activists interlock.

The research described in this article is located at the intersection between Indigenous, anticolonial or decolonizing, feminist, anti-oppressive, and antiviolence methodologies. As a growing body of work makes clear, decolonization names the overarching process of which antiviolence initiatives form an integral part (Anderson, 2000, 2003; Amnesty International Canada, 2004, 2009; Smith, 2005). The patriarchy and misogyny of past and present genocidal and assimilationist efforts constitute perhaps *the* central means through which white settler societies across Turtle Island/North America have undermined Indigenous nations, upset Indigenous governments, and wrested traditional lands from their rightful stewards (Anderson, 2000, 2003; Peach & Ladner, 2010; Smith 2005). Thus the DAMC research collaboration uses digital information systems to highlight and interrogate the complex and related topics of colonialism in Canada, violence against Indigenous women and girls, and sex work.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The DAMC project draws into conversation disciplinary perspectives from the fields of information and archival studies, indigenous studies, political science, and feminist critical inquiry. Such inter/cross-disciplinarity fosters the construction of a more comprehensive framework through which to address ongoing violence against Indigenous and other racialized, poor, or sexually “transgressive” populations. The following literature review explores the relationship between cultural heritage, archival institutions and processes, and meaningful forms of social justice for Indigenous and sex worker populations, suggesting that digital archives have the potential to play a significant role in decolonization, dehegemonization, and antiviolence initiatives for Indigenous peoples (particularly women and girls) and sex worker communities.

### *Social Justice and Archives*

Within archival institutions and archival studies research, there is a growing awareness that archives have the power—indeed, the responsibility—to play a significant role in promoting social justice for specific marginalized populations (Harris, 2002; Jimerson, 2009; Flinn, 2011). Archival studies research emphasizes the power and importance of creating permanent representations of the voices of marginalized populations, as well as the ways in which the documentary legacies of marginalized people can be used to counterbalance mainstream narratives and publicize marginalized histories in the struggle for justice (Carter, 2006; Flinn, Stevens, & Shepherd, 2009; Harris, 2002; Jimerson, 2009; Stevens, Flinn, & Shepherd, 2010). This research further emphasizes that archives may be both personally and politically valuable to marginalized populations, contributing to the re-envisioning of personal identity, history, culture(s), and justice (Moore & Pell, 2010).

Archival literature focused on social justice outcomes often emphasizes archival models that privilege significant community involvement in archives development (Shilton & Srinivasan, 2007) or archives that are themselves created directly by communities, often called community or autonomous archives (Moore & Pell, 2010). For example, Shilton and Srinivasan introduce a suite of participatory appraisal and arrangement processes to be employed by mainstream archival institutions. Using these participatory tools, archival institutions can “broaden their traditional tools to actively engage marginalized communities in the preservation process [to] preserve local knowledge and create representative, empowered archives” (2007, p. 87). Similarly, independent community archives involve “the active participation of a community in documenting and making accessible the history of their particular group and/or locality *on their own terms*” (Flinn et al., 2009, p. 73; emphasis in original). While both models can work toward capturing and articulating grassroots, marginalized, and/or community voices, community archives originate within specific communities, while the participatory appraisal and arrangement tools described by Shilton and Srinivasan presume to engage communities from the outside (Allard, Bak, & Ferris, 2014). Archival theory and practice are beginning to take very seriously the integral involvement of communities in the conceptualization, design, and description of their cultural heritage in a sustained and ongoing way. As demonstrated, there continues to be fruitful and ongoing discussion about how best to achieve this integration.

The notion of the activist archives also emphasizes the deeply politicized nature of the archives and its potential for social justice. This conception suggests that archives are constructed spaces where struggles over meaning- and history-making take place. As described by Lile (2012), an activist archives includes a commitment to social justice that privileges marginalized perspectives and users; the building of collections focusing on under-represented and marginalized perspectives; and the privileging of particular community interests such that the archives is developed collaboratively. All of these conditions inform the process by which the DAMC project works to reach its activist goals. The specifics of this process are further elaborated upon in the body of this article.

As Flinn (2011) so eloquently puts it: “Perhaps the potential for empowerment does not apply to all community history and archive projects, just as it does not apply to all independent politically motivated archives, but the evidence suggests that the best of these, the most thoughtful, the most rigorous and critically reflexive, both local and class-based and those more obviously tied to an agenda of political transformation and anti-discrimination[,] are capable of profoundly influencing and changing the lives of those who are involved with them” (p. 9). Working with marginalized and activist communities, the DAMC strives to build activist archives that

intervene in mainstream colonial narratives, and, as Flinn suggests, it is hoped this has a significant and positive impact for the community groups with which the DAMC works.

*Social Justice in the Digital Sphere*

The Internet constitutes a good (and relatively safe) sphere for advocates of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Indian Residential School responders, and sex worker activists to develop political activities. It provides access to a large audience and allows for relatively direct communication between community members. Often these communities are widely geographically dispersed, making direct contact between their members difficult. Digital archives are also potentially powerful tools for marginalized communities. Not only do they offer broad access to dispersed populations, they also allow for complex and nuanced controls over record accessibility. Indeed, the collections in the DAMC are part of a growing trend toward more mediated and contextualized digital archives and new media projects (Brown, Clements, & Grundy, 2006). Information institutions, such as digital archives, therefore have a role to play in present and future digital subaltern counterpublics like these, as spaces that document, amplify, and bring together the voices of marginalized populations to preserve both born-digital and analog cultural memory.

However, it must also be recognized that colonial, classed, raced, and gendered systems of (dis)empowerment operate online and offline, in both technological and academic contexts. Contemporary research explores how race, ethnicity, and gender are articulated, invoked, and performed in cyberspace, and the implications of these articulations for both individual identity and systems of on- and offline power (Nakamura, 2002, 2007). The DAMC research project therefore builds on the platform of digital divide literature (Warschauer, 2003), suggesting that access must mean more than “knowing how to use.” Digital access must also be characterized by access to reflective, meaningful, and representative content that resonates with community ways of seeing and understanding the world. Thus it is through a deep embedding of community-based knowledge structures into the design of its digital archives that the DAMC works to provide meaningful access to the communities with which it engages.

In the DAMC’s work, popular usages of the term “fourth world” converge. In the context of Canadian Indigenous culture, the term has been used by many to denote internationally unrecognized nations, such as the Indigenous peoples of the Americas (Griggs, 1992). This term is further associated with substandard living conditions for these populations, such as is the case for many Indigenous Canadian Reserves and inner-city communities. Manuel Castells uses the term “fourth world” to represent communities that are bypassed by most forms of technology. Residing in both rural and urban areas, these communities are socially excluded from systems of mainstream capital and power inherent in the network society.

As Castells argues, “areas that are non-valuable from the perspective of informational capitalism, and that do not have significant political interest for the powers that be, are bypassed by flows of wealth and information, and ultimately deprived of the basic technological infrastructure that allows us to communicate, innovate, produce, consume, and even live in today’s world” (2000, p. 350). The purpose of this project is to intervene in the fourth-world status of some Canadian Indigenous populations both politically and technologically, using a participatory archival approach to create technologies that foster digital inclusion through the creation of decolonizing representations of Indigenous communities and knowledge.

### *Social Justice for Indigenous Peoples*

Social justice is obviously not a one-size-fits-all proposition. A clear conceptualization is therefore required, articulating social justice priorities related to archives and archiving for each of the communities with which the DAMC works. Below, key tenets of social justice practice are described for both Indigenous populations (with a focus on women and girls) and sex work communities.

The anticolonial approach that the DAMC employs begins with the acknowledgment that “colonial violence is woven into the fabric of Canadian history in an unbroken thread from past to present” (Regan, 2011, p. 6). Thus, for Indigenous peoples in Canada, indeed across Turtle Island/North America, social justice is inherently tied to decolonization and dehegemonization initiatives (Akena, 2012; Kendall, Sunderland, Barnett, Nalder, & Matthews, 2011; Smith, 2005). Moreover, as Smith (1999) notes, social justice in such contexts involves self-determination, which must then be the end-goal of any research project or agenda undertaken by or for Indigenous groups “because this concept simultaneously engages the processes of decolonization, transformation, healing, and mobilization” through which social justice may be realized for Indigenous peoples (Kendall et al., 2011, p. 1725).

Researchers and activists identify the ongoing violation and degradation of Indigenous women and girls as one of the most devastatingly obvious and far-reaching effects of colonization (Amnesty International Canada, 2004, 2009; Anderson, 2000; FAQNW, 2008; NWAC, 2010; Peach & Ladner, 2010; Smith, 2005). Social justice for Indigenous women and girls in particular, therefore, involves decolonization and dehegemonization processes that restore and affirm their sacredness and inherent value/humanity (Anderson, 2003; Green, 2007; Gunn Allen, 1992; Smith, 2005). The valuing of Indigenous knowledge—women’s knowledge in particular—is key to social justice work on behalf of Indigenous women and girls. Such valuing requires women’s leadership in the present moment, as well as recognition and/or reinstitution of the integral roles women played in many First Peoples’ precolonial political, economic, social, legal, and familial systems (Anderson & Lawrence, 2003; Monture, 2008; Settee, 2011; Smith, 2006).



Indigenous knowledges are bodies of knowledge possessed by certain social groups “associated with the long-term occupancy of a certain place” and built cumulatively by “social group[s] through both historical and current experience” (Dei, Hall, & Rosenberg, qtd. in Shahjahan, 2005, p. 213). Such knowledges constitute “a rich social depot, which can bring about social justice in a variety of cultural contexts” (Shahjahan 2005, p. 214). Indigenous elders, researchers, and critics around the world argue for dehegemonization. Specifically, they call for “legitimizing non-Western ways and cultures as a meaningful form of knowledge” (Kendall et al., 2011, p. 1722). Articulating and publicizing Indigenous knowledge is a critical strategy of decolonization and dehegemonization.

However, literature on Indigenous archiving suggests that information institutions, and the academy more generally, have failed to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing into their epistemological structures. According to McKemmish, Gilliland-Swetland, & Ketelaar, “there is a lack of recognition or acknowledgement in western archival science and practice of the legitimacy of local and indigenous forms of recordkeeping and memory preservation” (2005, p. 2). Embedding Indigenous knowledge into the structure and organization of its archives is also a fundamental starting point for the DAMC project.

Others suggest that archives are themselves a practice of colonialism. For example, Sassoon & Burrows argue that “the definition of the record itself excludes self-representation by those who are the subjects of the records, and whose memories are stored and transmitted in forms which are not retained by archival institutions” (2009, p. 2). Traditional archives have failed to include forms of Indigenous cultural heritage significant to Indigenous peoples. Indeed, the processes of identifying relevant cultural heritage and constructing it into “archival records” are highly political and have typically excluded Indigenous populations, even when the records in questions have been produced by and/or are about Indigenous peoples. Thus the DAMC seeks to include cultural heritage that is created by and for Indigenous populations. Often these records contradict mainstream depictions of Indigenous peoples.

In light of the serious allegations that Indigenous knowledge has been excluded from the structure and design of archival institutions as well as from meaningful and relevant content and records, some archivists and archival researchers are working to address these significant gaps and exclusions. To this end, the Protocols for Native American Archival Materials (First Archivists Circle, 2007) were developed to identify a number of issues related to archiving Indigenous materials. These include best professional practices for culturally responsive care and use of American Indian archival material held by nontribal organizations; the importance of consultation with and concurrence of tribal communities in decisions and policies; the need to recognize and provide special treatment for cultur-

ally sensitive materials; rethinking public accessibility and its implications for Indigenous cultural protocols; the role of intellectual and cultural property rights; the need to consider copying, sharing, and/or repatriation of certain materials; and reciprocal education and training (p. 2). In the context of a digital archives such as the DAMC, particularly in the case of MMIWD and PARSD, many of these issues have resonance and are further discussed below.

*Social Justice for Sex Workers in Canada*

There are significant overlaps between social justice concerns for sex workers and for Indigenous peoples. Indeed, an examination of Canada's colonial history provides many reasons why Indigenous women are over-represented in inner-city populations of women who trade sex for dollar amounts that barely provide sustenance. For this and other reasons, social justice objectives for the Sex Work Database are linked closely to the decolonizing and antiviolenence goals named in the other two archives that constitute the DAMC. Additionally, the sex work activist organizations with which the DAMC partners advocate for the decriminalization of sex work in Canada. Decriminalization, as defined by these activists themselves, is the removal of all laws and regulations that criminalize sex work and/or marginalize sex workers by perpetuating stigma and/or violence against them. In Canada, legislation and public policies relating to prostitution are currently in flux. In December 2013, sex work activists in Ontario won a case heard before the Supreme Court of Canada that overturned key segments of the Canadian Criminal Code on the basis that certain laws violate sex workers' rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. On November 6, 2014, new legislation was introduced that purports to criminalize the buying (rather than the sale) of sexual services. Decriminalization activists argue, however, that this legislation continues to perpetrate stigma and violence against sex workers. Additional related goals for these activists call for the inclusion of sex workers in any future policy and legal developments that affect them, as well as the acknowledgment of sex work as work, and not necessarily as a moral (or immoral) identity.

As with Indigenous populations, there is a dearth of archival material within North America that specifically relates to both violence against women and sex work. Timothy Gilfoyle (1994) describes how sexuality historians and archivists have been excavating mainstream archives for content related to sex work that has been used to construct new understandings of historical and contemporary sexuality in North America and Europe. Commonly used sources include court records, newspaper articles, police reports, and government documents. Gilfoyle points out that although archival data about sex work are commonly found in large archives across North America and Europe, the voices of the women and girls engaged in such work are almost always missing from these collec-

tions. Instead, court and police records have come to stand in for the voices of this constituency, so that sex workers have almost exclusively been “spoken for” in mainstream archives. This is also true for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, whose voices have literally been silenced.

## RESEARCH METHODS

As demonstrated above and elsewhere (see Allard & Ferris, 2014), the DAMC research methodology draws on Indigenous, feminist, and sex worker antiviolence, antipoverty, antiracism, and decolonizing research, resurgence, and social justice activism. Such inter/cross-disciplinarity fosters the construction of a comprehensive framework through which to address ongoing violence against Indigenous and other racialized, poor, or sexually “transgressive” populations. This framework puts Indigenous knowledge at the center of the antiviolence work to be done, suggesting that it is precisely these communities’ articulations of their ways of knowing and making sense that lead to decolonization and dehegemonization. Following Srinivasan, therefore, the DAMC “probe[s] into the possibilities for communities to serve as the content creators, interface designers, and, most importantly, information architects and ontology creators of their own systems” (2007, p. 725). It is through a deep embedding of knowledge structures into the design of digital archives that the DAMC begins to perceive how communities understand their worlds, how to build bridges between communities, and how to do the antiviolence research and social justice activism at the center of this project. The DAMC participatory archiving approach is described below.

### *Community-led Participatory Archiving*

The participatory method utilized by this project blends principles of participatory design with those of participatory archiving. Described by Spinuzzi as a way to “understand knowledge by doing” (2005, p. 163), participatory design engages with stakeholders throughout a given project, from the articulation of project goals, to product planning, prototyping, and implementation. In the context of the DAMC digital archives, a participatory design process means that community stakeholders not only will be engaged with typical archival processes such as collection development, appraisal, arrangement, and description but also will be involved in planning the digital archives itself, controlling all aspects of design, functionality, and appearance.

The DAMC has begun to engage formally in its participatory archiving process, what it calls community-led participatory archiving (Allard et al., 2014), though ongoing collaboration and relationship building between researchers and communities have been in development for years. Community-led participatory archiving takes its name from the integral role played by community participants within the archives, but also in recogni-

tion of the fact that the project was initiated by researchers (who are also activists); a complicated set of locations and relationships must therefore be identified and considered for the successful implementation of this approach. The strategy itself is quite broad, allowing for considerable flexibility in its applications. An important outcome of developing this strategy has been to earmark considerable funding, time, and resources to this participatory approach and to the development of working relationships with various community groups.

The DAMC community-led participatory archiving process includes a combination of participatory strategies. In addition to working with individual community members hired as consultants, the project will also organize and facilitate large-scale community discussions about key archives-related issues such as project goals and outcomes for each archives; how and what records to collect for each archives; how and what records will be made accessible to (what) individual users; and how to describe and tag records. To date, this has resulted in the hiring of community members, often associated with affiliated project partners, to act as consultants over the lifespan of each archives as well as to guide the larger consultation process. Though not yet underway, the DAMC will conduct a series of "town hall" style community meetings held at key points during the project's implementation. Representatives will travel to major cities across Canada several times over the course of the project to gain as broad an understanding as possible of a variety of community concerns. Community consultants for the project, identified through long-standing research relationships with project investigators, are integral to recruiting community members and facilitating the community meetings. Their role is to assist with the critical process of building trust between project investigators and community participants.

In addition to sketching out this fairly broad and flexible strategy for community engagement, the DAMC continues to focus its efforts on developing relationships with relevant community partners. Indeed, it is through this relationship-building process that the DAMC has come to realize that there is no one-size-fits-all model for developing participatory practices. Instead, the common thread that emerges is the importance of building and maintaining meaningful and reciprocal relationships with community partners. Privileging community relationships and prioritizing the needs and perspectives of community partners, in turn, form and shape the participatory process. For this reason, conversations about the terms of each partnership take place early on in the relationship-building process. These parameters are established through extensive discussions that clearly articulate the terms of the partnership, indicating what each stakeholder is bringing to the table and hopes to achieve from the relationship.

For non-Indigenous members of the project, the participatory process

requires that they “work as Indigenous allies to ‘restory’ the dominant-culture version of history; that is, they must make decolonizing space for Indigenous history . . . as told by Indigenous peoples themselves” (Regan, 2011, p. 6). While the DAMC’s community-led participatory archiving is based on the notion of collective ownership of the archiving processes and outcomes, non-Indigenous team members must actively resist the colonizing patriarchal impulse to appropriate, codify, and assert ownership over spaces, actions, and knowledge/ways of knowing that are not theirs (Dei, 2000). Sensitivity to and consideration of all participants’ social and political locations are required for successful implementation of the project.

### COMMUNITY-LED PARTICIPATORY ARCHIVING IN CONTEXT

To date, the DAMC has established partnerships with activists and academics in a number of urban centers in Canada. This section describes these relationships in greater detail, documenting how the DAMC’s participatory process is implemented in practice. Examples are drawn from each database to illustrate how specific community needs and concerns are woven into the participatory archiving process and, consequently, into individual archives design and implementation.

#### *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Database (MMIWD)*

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Database seeks to preserve the voices and work of advocates for these women in Canada. These advocate organizations are part of a growing global movement calling for investigation by the Canadian government into the country’s disproportionately high number of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. Within MMIWD, formal partnership development is ongoing, though, as with SWD, informal relationships between both Ferris and Ladner and grassroots organizations have been in development for years.

One of the most contentious issues to arise within the context of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Database is the problem of whether to collect dominant news media accounts of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. At present, the MMIWD is collecting both dominant and alternative news media. However, it is also simultaneously developing further and/or establishing new relationships with advocates for Missing and Murdered Indigenous women across the country to determine how they wish to speak back to dominant media’s largely problematic portrayals of those who have been kidnapped or murdered.

Feminists and Indigenous groups have critiqued the dominant Canadian news media’s standard representations of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women—when it covers these cases at all—for representing violence against these persons as unremarkable. They have also condemned dominant media for invoking street-involvement, prostitution, and illegal drug addictions in its coverage of these cases, even when the women in question were not involved in any of these activities (Jiwani &

Young, 2006; Ferris, 2007, 2015). Community-produced representations of the same women provide significantly more complex, nuanced, and mournful portraits of beloved mothers, daughters, sisters, aunties, grandmothers, friends, lovers, community activists, scholars, and much-missed community members (NWAC, 2010). In that many community-produced representations appear to “speak back” to dominant media accounts in order to cultivate public concern for loved ones, collecting and drawing together these disparate representations of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in MMIWD may be very useful for many audiences. However, because dominant narratives are backed by more than five hundred years of colonialism and patriarchy, community members have begun to question whether dominant representations should be archived at all. Meeting the needs of community advocates while maintaining larger project goals of information literacy, decolonization, and antiviolence work is a continuing process that requires thoughtful consideration and ongoing consultation with community advocates. Ultimately, however, the decision regarding whether mainstream news media items are collected and described in MMIWD will be determined by community advocates through the extensive consultation process described above.

#### *Sex Work Database (SWD)*

Currently, a number of researchers and transnationally connected grassroots organizations argue that sex workers—particularly those working in the lowest paid and most visible areas of the sex industry (the street-level or outdoor trade, for example)—deserve laws that protect rather than criminalize and fine them or that violate their civil and human rights (Shahmanesh, Patel, Mabey, & Cowan, 2008). Thus there is an active network of sex work activist organizations working toward decriminalization across Canada. The Sex Work Database works closely with community activists from these grassroots organizations to do participatory archiving. Ferris is also an active member of both the National Working Group on Sex Work Law and the Winnipeg Working Group on Sex Work. Her ongoing efforts and commitment to the decriminalization of sex work contribute to the development of trusting relationships with both partner organizations and individual consultants with the SWD.

SWD works closely with a number of community partners. As stated above, these consultants have been hired to assist with the identification of significant archival issues and concerns for SWD, including project goals and outcomes; how and what records to collect; how and what records will be made accessible to (what) individual users; and designing a system by which to describe and tag SWD records. Large-scale community discussions across Canada will be held to explore, clarify, and resolve considerations that arise for each archives in consultation with community partners/consultants.

An early and significant issue that has arisen in consultation with SWD

community partners hinges on complex conversations about what official records to include within the database. As stated earlier, to date most of the data in mainstream archival institutions about sex work are in the form of court records. Indeed, court records and documents can be illuminating, as both Gilfoyle (1994) and Carter (2006) argue, because, as the latter suggests, "it is often within records created through acts of repression that the voices, or traces of the voices, of the repressed remain" (p. 224). Similarly, in his 2009 paper describing the 1942 Edmonton arrests and trials of ten men charged with same-sex activities, Dick suggests that "preserving and making accessible archival court and police records is a critical step toward maintaining knowledge and awareness of past abuses, thereby making a tangible contribution toward safeguarding human rights and civil liberties in Canada" (p. 184). For these reasons, presently SWD consultants choose to include in the collection court records and documents related to sex work in Canada. In fact, given the overt and ongoing criticism of Canadian prostitution laws by sex workers, placing official records alongside first-hand accounts by sex workers of their experiences within the Canadian legal system reveals a very different picture of Canadian legal practice and its relationship to social justice. It is this contradiction that the DAMC is trying to make visible. In the case of SWD, partners agree that this is achieved through including both official and community-based representations.

A number of important archival design discussions about record access and privacy are also ongoing with community partners. For example, access—public or otherwise—to materials in each archives will be determined by stakeholder groups. In consultation with partners, a permissions process is being developed that provides organizations with options in terms of the public availability of anything they choose to have included in the archives. Options for participants/donors' records currently range from password protection/private access only to unrestricted public/open access. To further safeguard the privacy of community partners, the DAMC plans to include only items of public record. Unless invited to do otherwise, the DAMC will not, for example, archive organizations' minutes or other items that are not in the public record. Many of the activist groups whose work the DAMC wishes to archive are intensely scrutinized by police, the public, journalists, and politicians. The DAMC must respect and support the choices individuals have made in the details they choose to make public about themselves and their interests.

For example, photographs found on sex work activist websites are often sensitive materials, or become so over time. When sex workers leave the industry, they often do not want the public circulation of photographs of themselves participating in sex work activist events. SWD is therefore prepared to omit even public records from the archives when requested to do so by community members, and/or to keep aspects of the archives private

or community controlled. It is precisely because communities have the last word about what is included in the archives that they are willing to engage with the DAMC as it collects materials around these very sensitive areas.

*Post-Apology Residential School Database (PARSD)*

Post-Apology Residential School Database community partners advocate for decolonization, transformation, healing, and mobilization around the issue and legacy of Indian Residential Schools in Canada. As in all of the archives, community understandings of each of these processes must therefore be evident in all aspects of PARSD. Indeed, even as the archives collects records of extensive colonial violence as well as colonizer framing of the same (in dominant media and government reports, for example), it attempts to center Indigenous peoples' experiences to foreground their/our ways of framing past and present violence. Archival materials are organized so as to facilitate anticolonial critique, Indigenous resistance and perseverance in the face of extreme and ongoing colonial violence, resurgence of Indigenous knowledge/ways of knowing and being, and de-hegemonization. This delicate balance is achieved through a number of strategies, particularly through the use of tagging, whereby Indigenous terms, concepts, and languages are used as tags to frame and describe both dominant and community-derived records.

Controlled vocabularies—in this case simple, nonhierarchical, one-word tags—can put disparate perspectives, both mainstream and marginal, into conversation with each other by placing records retrieved by specific tags side by side, thus creating room for reflection, dialogue, and action. All archives within the DAMC, including PARSD, use this relatively simple technology, developed in conjunction with community partners, to impose alternative knowledge systems that reflect the perspectives of the communities with which they work across all records within the DAMC. Tags are thus used to organize and retrieve archival records in ways that highlight the distinctions between dominant and marginal ways of describing the world.

Issues that have also arisen in the context of PARSD community consultations include those related to considering the implications of Indigenous cultural protocols and intellectual and cultural property rights for public accessibility. As identified above, considering issues of accessibility is a matter on which the DAMC works closely with all partner organizations.

In summary, the formula for community-led participatory archiving is not prescriptive. Rather, it requires significant flexibility. It is embedded in building and maintaining ongoing and trusting relationships, engaging in lengthy, sometimes difficult, conversations, and being sensitive to the issues that matter for each community. Indeed, from these examples it is apparent that although related, each archives has distinct goals, priori-



ties, organizational considerations, and descriptive frameworks. Different amounts of time, resources, and consideration will thus be dedicated to a variety of issues dependent on community feedback and engagement with the project.

## DISCUSSION

Engaging in the DAMC's multidisciplinary, community-led participatory project are a constellation of actors characterized broadly as activists, archivists, community members, and academics, though these roles intersect and overlap in a variety of ways. At the heart of participatory archiving—indeed, of the DAMC project itself—are fundamental and critical questions about how best to partner and engage within and across political and social locations. In the context of the DAMC archives, community control of archival records and representation is sought out, valued, and enabled through an ongoing collaborative process that embeds relationships between actors in mutual goals of social activism and social justice objectives. Relationship-building practices and issues are discussed below.

### *Building Community Partnerships*

It goes without saying that a close working relationship between community members and researchers and archivists (who may or may not also be community members) is required to engage in DAMC participatory archiving practices. The relationships between researchers, archivists, and communities are complex, sometimes delicate, and require significant consideration of each player's role. As noted earlier, these roles are framed within the archival literature in terms of the distinctions drawn between community archives, which are community initiated and driven (Stevens et al., 2010), and participatory archives that are initiated and hosted by archival institutions but with considerable community input (Shilton & Srinivasan, 2007). In practice, however, as the DAMC tries to locate itself along this continuum, the roles played by both project researchers/archivists and community partners continue to shift. Indeed, the continuum appears to conflate as DAMC archivists and researchers engage more closely in activist-oriented activities with communities, and communities continue to define and refine the scope and priorities of the DAMC project. This is not to say that the DAMC does not recognize the privileged role of the archives and the power of researchers and archivists to shape and control community cultural heritage. Instead, considering how these relationships work and evolve in practice contributes an important dimension to the conversation about community and participatory archives, particularly those with specific social justice goals.

As noted above, to date the DAMC has established preliminary partnerships with activists and academics in cities across Canada. An important feature of these relationships is that they are defined and strength-

ened through their associations as activist allies, and their mutual goals shared as allies working toward common outcomes. For activist archives such as the DAMC, trusting relationships with communities emerge from practices that have very little to do with archiving. Instead, they develop through shared goals, mutually agreed upon benefits for all parties, and a demonstrated support of community activism.

Several examples of DAMC partnerships further illustrate this point. The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Database (MMIWD) recently established a relationship with the Indigenous-women-led initiative No More Silence (2014). It is clear that there is significant overlap between their objectives, and both are currently considering the terms for a mutually beneficial relationship. In order to foster this relationship, but more importantly to assist No More Silence with its very critical work, MMIWD is working with this group to support the development of its community database. MMIWD is also facilitating the development of relationships between No More Silence and local grassroots activists responding to violence against Indigenous women and girls in their home communities. Thus the goals in working with No More Silence are related both to MMIWD's own development as well as to activism and advocacy on behalf of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and girls. In particular, the work of documenting the lives of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women from the perspectives of their loved ones is a critical aspect of disseminating Indigenous knowledges, and therefore directly related to social justice goals of decolonization and dehegemonization.

Similarly, PARSD recently established a partnership with persons directing a grassroots Indigenous community initiative in Winnipeg, Canada, entitled "nindibaajimomin: a digital storytelling project for children of residential school survivors." As its website says, "The nindibaajimomin project brings forth the voices of intergenerational survivors of residential schools" (nindibaajimomin, 2014a). "First Nations women and men produced short videos, called digital stories, based on how they have been affected by the legacy of residential schools" (nindibaajimomin, 2014b). The objectives of the nindibaajimomin project align closely with those of PARSD. Again, an important purpose of building a relationship with this organization is to support the work of developing Indigenous digital cultural heritage, in particular capturing the stories of children whose parents went to Indian Residential Schools.

The DAMC finds that in order for its activist archives to function effectively, it must partner so closely with communities that the roles of archivist, researcher, activist, and community member overlap and/or are re-envisioned. For DAMC, the "participation" in participatory means engaging and supporting the communities with which it works outside of and beyond the archives. Partnership in this sense means creating mutually beneficial and supportive relationships that not only benefit all parties

but also extend the activist efforts of communities. Certainly, the point has been well made that archives are themselves sites of activism. As the DAMC works with community partners, its goal is to bring this awareness to partnerships, creating mutually supportive contexts for both creating and preserving community-produced cultural heritage and disseminating the practices and knowledges of Indigenous and sex worker communities.

*Working in Interdisciplinary Partnerships*

While developing trusting partnerships with community participants lies at the heart of the DAMC's participatory approach, so too do the interdisciplinary partnerships that inform this project's methodological framework. Thus this article concludes by briefly examining how collaboration between feminist anticolonial and antiviolenence scholarship and the information science professions might build bridges, expanding the scope of each discipline's reach and effectiveness in achieving social justice objectives.

Over the last three years this project has begun to explore the implications, for both anticolonial feminist and information studies scholarship, of engaging together in multidisciplinary collaborations. It is clear that there is much to be discovered from each other. Working together toward specific social justice goals (related to developing DAMC archives but also extending beyond this) has pushed project researchers to interrogate the blind spots in their respective fields and to problematize how to draw on the best characteristics of each discipline.

For coauthor Shawna Ferris, as an anticolonial feminist critic and activist and faculty member of the University of Manitoba's Women's and Gender Studies Program, collaborating with a growing array of archivists and information studies practitioners for the purposes of this project has resulted in a much deeper appreciation of the skills and tools they bring to the table, and a growing excitement about what these disciplines can do together in pursuing their social justice goals. As readers of this journal are perhaps aware, those working outside of the information studies field often assume that archival development is not research in and of itself. Instead, the process of collecting and organizing materials is viewed as a preliminary step before the "actual inquiry" begins. Objecting to this characterization, Kate Eichhorn argues that the archives "is precisely where our academic and feminist work converge. The creation of archives is part and parcel of how we produce and legitimize knowledge and make our voices audible in the public sphere" (2010, p. 625). Interdisciplinary partnerships with information scholars and institutions have been neglected and undervalued as a fruitful method by which to engage in feminist research. Using archival methodologies to collect, describe, and contextualize mainstream documents through the lens of anticolonial and antivio-

lence epistemologies is but one example of the powerful ways in which information tools might be employed in achieving feminist and socially just ends.

As a recent PhD graduate from the University of Toronto's Faculty of Information, coauthor Danielle Allard has been required by this project to think carefully through many of the foundation tenets upon which her information studies education has been based. Traditionally, information science researchers and practitioners have considered themselves to be only the architects, providing the structure through which particular pieces of information are accessed (Bates, 1999). More recent work has challenged this notion, suggesting that the lenses through which individuals see the world are necessarily built into the structure of information and classification systems (Bowker & Star, 2000). Indeed, when information professionals view their role as only that of categorizing knowledge, they exempt themselves from the responsibility to engage with fundamental questions about the relationship between methodological frameworks and how and what meaning(s) are created in this process.

Similarly, library and archives practitioners have thought of themselves as collaborators. Often, they do not consider themselves as the content experts; rather, they come to the table with the understanding and the tools to organize, represent, and retrieve information. While it goes without saying that these are invaluable skills, this project illustrates how these tools and technologies might be employed in more diverse, creative, and flexible ways. For example, Melanie Feinberg (2007) contends that the role classification schemes might play in information organizations has been limited by thinking of such schemes as an objective reflection of reality, specifically designed only for the purposes of information retrieval. She suggests that information professionals consider how and in what contexts they might extend their information toolbox for alternative ends. In the DAMC archives, for example, a tagging scheme has been developed that seeks to place politically diverse and contradictory items side by side to create a juxtaposition that is necessarily political, interrogating how the very tagging terms employed are created and used.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, it is a central objective of the DAMC to weave Indigenous knowledges, feminist praxis, and antioppressive practices into the information, institutions, and systems that will be created with communities by using a participatory archiving approach. In doing so, the project relies heavily on relationships with community stakeholders, prioritizes the cultivation of these respectful relationships, lends support to grassroots initiatives where possible, and works to be candid and honest about the skills, tools, and financial resources that can be dedicated to these and other

stakeholder projects. Partnerships with communities, as well as community control over the structure, indexing, and access to community-produced resources, are absolutely crucial at every stage of this collaborative project.

Through their involvement with the DAMC project, the authors of this article have learned that to be truly collaborative in doing social justice work, they must think of themselves as activists as well, embedding themselves in the communities with which they work and creating reciprocal relationships that form the bedrock on which to build activist and participatory archives. This ethical disposition is at the core of critical feminist work. To be successful in activist archives and social justice endeavors, information institutions and scholars would do well to move in this direction by incorporating feminist, antiviolenence, and anticolonialism methodologies into their archival methods.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our deepest thanks to our community partners on this project; without them, there are no archives, no activism, and nothing for this project to study. Many thanks to University of Manitoba faculty members Dr. Kiera Ladner (political studies), for her ongoing contributions to the DAMC, and Dr. Greg Bak (history and archival studies), for his support of the project. This research is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

### NOTES

1. The capitalization of the label "Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women" follows the trend in antiviolenence communities of which we are a part, and whose work we endeavor to support and disseminate with MMIWD.
2. The term "Indigenous" refers to members of North America/Turtle Island's First Peoples. In Canada, "Aboriginal" is a constitutionally recognized category that includes First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. Connecting First Peoples' identities to the legislative system of a colonial nation-state, however, is not always appropriate or respectful. The term "Indigenous" is therefore used to distance the DAMC project from and to signal awareness of the politically charged nature of the term "Aboriginal," as "Indigenous" may respectfully refer to all persons descended from First Peoples in spaces now known as Canada and the United States (as well as other nations around the globe). Moreover, in concert with persons' First National affiliations where available, "Indigenous" acknowledges the specificity of the experiences of colonized peoples in Canada as well as transnational connections between First Peoples and ongoing decolonization initiatives.
3. One of the most significant assimilationist initiatives within Canada, undertaken by the Canadian Federal government as part of the Indian Act, were the Indian Residential Schools (IRSs) that operated between 1863 and 1996. Under the IRS program, more than 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children were forced to attend residential schools, where many experienced neglect, abuse, and trauma associated with separation from their families and cultures. After the Canadian government's official apology for residential schools in 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was founded to learn the truth about life in these schools as well as to facilitate remembrance, healing, and reconciliation between First Peoples and white settler societies/governments in Canada.
4. In her 2013 dissertation, "An Awkward Silence," Maryanne Pearce analyzes a database of 3,329 missing and murdered women and girls, compiled from case records from the 1940s through mid-September 2013. According to Pearce, among those victims whose ethnicity could be determined, 824 (about 25 percent) were of "Aboriginal" origin.

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