

# Knowledge Organization as Knowledge Creation: Surfacing Community Participation in Archival Arrangement and Description

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**Abstract:** Remix or bricolage is recognized as a primary mode of knowledge creation in contemporary digital culture. Archival arrangement represents a form of bricolage that archivists have been practicing for years. By organizing records according to provenance, archivists engage in knowledge creation. Archival theory holds that records are created as an output from social and bureaucratic processes. Archival description, then, could serve as a form of archival record, bearing evidence of the processes of archival arrangement. Current participatory and community-based approaches to archival description urgently require an evidential record of their processes of community consultation and professional mediation. This paper examines two Canadian community-based, participatory archival projects. Project Naming, at Library and Archives Canada, draws upon Inuit community contributions to augment the often sparse and sometimes offensive descriptions of historic photos of arctic peoples. The Sex Work Database at the University of Manitoba, works with sex work activists to create and apply

a tagging folksonomy to a collection of websites, organizational records and news media. Analysis of these diverse, community-based projects reveals how current approaches to description make it difficult to distinguish between professional and community contributions to arrangement and description, and proposes ways to make such contributions more apparent.

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## 1.0 Introduction

Remix or bricolage is a primary mode of information creation in digital cultures today (Deuze 2006; Markham 2017). Archivists have practiced bricolage as a mode of information creation for a very long time, putting records into aggregations that are made meaningful through the application of archival principles of provenance, *respect des fonds* and original order (Douglas 2017; Cook 1992). Archivists understand that aggregations of records not based on provenance may also be meaningful, including aggregations based on subject, location or genre, but it is considered good practice to manage records according to provenance (Bak 2012; McLuhan-Meyers 2012). In the half-century since Scott's seminal critique of singular, hierarchical provenance (Scott 1966), archivists have articulated and elaborated theories of multiple provenance (Barr 1987; Cook 1992; Hurley 1994; 2005a, 2005b) and societal provenance (Nesmith 2006a; Piggott 2012; Hurley 2013).

Archival description is the means by which archival arrangement is expressed and explained and is now understood to be a creative process. The roots of archival description lie in nineteenth and early twentieth century manuals of archival practice, in which arrangement and description is implicitly characterized as a simple and straightforward expression of the alleged underlying reality of original order, likened to a paleontologist re-creating and describing the skeleton of a prehistoric animal (Muller, Feith and Fruin 1940; Jenkinson 1937). In the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, this view has given way to work that surfaced the subjectivity and biases within arrangement and description (Duff and Harris 2002; Light and Hyry 2002; MacNeil 2009), which MacNeil (2005, 2008) likened to the work of a literary critic assembling the "best text" out of a series of variants, and which Yakel (2003) characterized as "archival representation." At the same time, archival description has been understood to be an act of creation—creation not only of a representation, but also of new entities, including the archival series, *fonds* or record group (Cook 1992; Hurley 1994; Yeo 2012) and even of archival records themselves, which Hurley (1998) and McKemmish (2005) both argue do not exist until documents are placed into their provenancial context through description.

McKemmish (2005) observes that documents become archival records "when they are stored by recordkeeping and archiving processes in ways which preserve their content and structure, link them to related documents, and recorded information about related social and organizational activities. Through these processes records come into being, and acquire their quality as evidence, both recording and shaping related events." Documents become archival records when they get linked to other documents

and contextualized through recordkeeping practices. This articulation of the transition from document to record points to the importance of archival description—including both metadata capture from systems of origin as well as metadata creation by archivists—as key to this metamorphosis. Integral to this shift from document to record is the creation of additional documentation that captures the relationship, content and structure of interrelated records within particular fonds and archival institutions. Such documentation often follows a descriptive content standard like Canada's *Rules for Archival Description* (Canadian Committee for Archival Description 2008) and might be characterized as finding aids, index cards, file registries or entries in an archival management system. Yeo (2017) provides an overview of the history of how archivists have understood arrangement and description, the two concepts so interwoven that they are often discussed as a single function.

While recordkeepers have long argued that the line between content (the records themselves) and context (how records are organized and described) is often blurred, particularly within electronic systems, we argue here that, more than this, descriptive data are themselves records, because they articulate the relationship among archival records within a particular aggregation (be it a fonds or even an archival institution). This argument is elaborated by Bak (2016a, 3) who suggests "archival records, imagined to be distinct from metadata used to manage them, can be re-conceptualized to recognize the archival nature of what we call metadata." Bak argues that within electronic systems in particular, there is no rupture between data and metadata. Instead metadata is integral to understand records by preserving and articulating interrelationships between individual records and among the various data points that are assembled to create the "document" that is experienced by the computer user.

Records "are only definable in terms of their multiple and dynamic documentary and contextual relationships" (McKemmish 2005, 15). The earliest of these relationships may be established by record creators in a system of origin, but are ultimately reinforced, entrenched and maintained by archivists and other "describers," who may bring the records into other contexts, or deploy them for other uses, and so establish new forms of interrelationship. It is this work that archival description accounts for. These relationships are central to articulating the meaning and value of archival records, indeed archives themselves. In other words, integral to the ordering and aggregation of records, archival descriptions articulate the archival bond(s) specifying how records relate to each other and, we will argue, the community of users to whom they are relevant and who have been instrumental in their creation.

In this paper, we elaborate on Bak's argument to suggest that archival descriptions capture the relationships among records within an archive and among the variety of creators who have contributed to their development. In particular, in the context of community and participatory archiving, the development of descriptive records and metadata is a reflection of activities and interactions among stakeholders and within specific archival systems. Thinking about description through this lens emphasizes our responsibility to articulate the processes by which we create archival descriptions. Indeed, we come to understand the meaning and significance of descriptive records and metadata by understanding the processes that created them. "Archives are not natural, but are created and managed by people to achieve specific socially, historically, and culturally contingent ends" (Bak 2016a, 3). Positioning description as record reveals intentions and relationships among users, describers (professional or non-professional) and records, charting out what Bastian (2003) calls a "community of records."

Recognition of subjectivity and bias within arrangement and description has led to calls for archivists to identify themselves within archival descriptions as a measure of transparency and accountability (e.g., Light and Hyry 2002; Douglas 2016; MacNeil 2009) as well as questions about whether archivists possess the necessary knowledge to conduct arrangement and description without the guiding advice of non-archivists (e.g., Duff and Harris 2002; Shilton and Srinivasan 2007; Huvila 2008). The rise of community archiving theory in the early 2000s (Bastian 2003; Flinn 2007; Bastian and Alexander 2009), characterized by Cook (2013) as a paradigm shift, has coincided with calls for participatory arrangement and description that would bring community and specialist knowledges to bear upon this work (Huvila 2008; Shilton and Srinivasan 2007; Johnson 2017).

These trends towards recognizing the constructed nature of archival descriptions mirror current trends occurring in information science more broadly, particularly with respect to knowledge organization and its work in bibliographic classification and subject description. While explorations of provenance are not present in the knowledge organization domain, nonetheless, a growing body of work examines the subjectivity and bias of classification and subject description schemes and the need to make these subjectivities visible (Olson 1998; Drabinski 2013; Adler 2017; Dudley 2017; Guimaraes 2017). As with work in archival studies calling for a recognition of the colonial harms that archives and archival records perpetuate, so too has recent work in knowledge organization sought to acknowledge the harm that oppressive knowledge structures create (Adler and Tennis 2013; Fox 2016). Responding to critiques of presumed universalist paradigms in classification, a growing number of specialized and contextu-

alized controlled vocabularies and social tagging systems are being designed to meet the needs of specific communities (Fox and Reece 2013). Of note are the Brian Deer Classification System and A Woman's Thesaurus (Capek 1987). This work directly intersects with archival description through projects such as the Association for Manitoba Archives' efforts to decolonize and Indigenize the Manitoba Archival Information Network by implementing a modified version of the *Library of Congress Subject Headings*, in which the names that Indigenous communities use for themselves replace the Library of Congress's authorized subject headings (Bone and Loughheed 2018).

Although this work in KO recognizes the need to take into account community perspectives in order to "renovate the master's house to make space for the voices of excluded others" (Olson 2001, 660), we are unaware of work that strives to identify, articulate and clarify the roles of all participants in devising new classification and subject description schemes, embedding this articulation within the scheme itself. There is, however, increasing pressure on institutions such as Library of Congress and their *Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)* to be more transparent in their decision-making processes around the selection of subject headings. This paper presents an archival exploration of related issues.

## 1.1 Method

Understanding arrangement to be a creative act of bricolage and archival description to be a creative act of representation, and writing in light of the development of community and participatory approaches to arrangement and description, we examine two Canadian participatory archives projects, Project Naming at Library and Archives Canada (LAC) and the Sex Work Database (SWD) at the University of Manitoba, to determine whether the descriptions created through these projects adequately account for the various institutional and community inputs into the arrangement and description of the archives. Since we acknowledge knowledge organization to be a form of knowledge creation, we posit that archival description, which could be said to arise out of the encounter between the describers and the records being described, might be made to serve itself as a form of archival record that can later serve as evidence of an encounter between records and describers, whether the describers are archival staff or community members. Proposing that archival description can be understood as a form of archival record, we ask whether it can be understood to be a sufficient form of archival record, one that adequately describes the context of creation of the description itself, as well as the relationship between the descriptive record and related documents and records that further clarify the descriptive process.

We focused our research not on identifying the particular processes of community participation in archival description; nor did we seek to evaluate how effective these processes are at meeting the stated goals of these projects. Instead, we sought to explore the idea of archival description as a form of archival record—as a record of the various contributions made by institutional staff and by community members. We sought to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the institutional contributions (Library and Archives Canada for Project Naming; Mamawipawin at the University of Manitoba for the Sex Work Database) and of the community contributions (Inuit peoples for Project Naming; sex workers and sex work activists for Sex Work Database). We then asked whether the various institutional and community contributions to the resulting descriptions were adequately identified in the resulting archival descriptions, such that it would be apparent to the archival user how the description was created, and which information came from which source. We conclude by making some recommendations for how, going forward, participatory description projects can be more transparent and accountable around their various institutional and community inputs.

The authors of this paper have been involved with the intuitions behind these projects. Prior to 2011, Bak worked for Library and Archives Canada, though he was not involved with Project Naming, and did not work closely with anyone who was. Allard and Ferris both work directly on the Sex Work Database project. Their involvement is described below.

## 2.0 Project Naming

### 2.1 Overview and history

Initiated in 2002, Project Naming is a photographic identification project developed in partnership between the Inuit college program Nunavut Sivuniksavut, Library and Archives Canada (LAC) and Government of Nunavut's Department of Culture and Heritage. Nunavut is an Inuit territory located in Canada's arctic. Its population is 85% Inuit and it follows Inuit principles in its government. Inuit, along with First Nations and Metis, are recognized in the Canadian constitution as Indigenous peoples of Canada.

Project Naming was originally conceived to share digitized photos from Library and Archives Canada collections, from the 1920s-1970s, with Inuit community members. For Nunavut Sivuniksavut, and for the Government of Nunavut's then-Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth, this was an opportunity to promote intergenerational knowledge exchange, and to keep Inuit languages and traditional knowledge in use, by having youth from

Nunavut Sivuniksavut sit down with elders in the community, and use the digitized photographs to prompt recollections and serve as a focus for discussion. For Library and Archives Canada, this was an opportunity to have photographs, most of which were taken by non-Indigenous photographers, often working in the service of Canadian colonization of the north, circulated into Inuit communities as a form of knowledge repatriation, a means of serving Indigenous peoples, who are identified as an underserved population (Library and Archives Canada 2012). Equally, the collaboration was viewed by Library and Archives Canada as an opportunity to improve and decolonize the descriptions of the records, which named settler subjects in the photos but often failed to name Inuit subjects, and sometimes included offensive terminology (Greenhorn 2013). Payne (2006) suggests that photographs such as these “reveal the dominant model of national identity ... that typically reduced the First Peoples of the North as one of the Canadian nation's ‘Others.’”

In an article on the history of Project Naming, Greenhorn (2013), Library and Archives Canada's manager in charge of the program, states Project Naming was initiated by Nunavut Sivuniksavut because instructors at the college identified a significant lack of information about Inuit people in LAC's photographic descriptions. LAC's contribution to the project initially consisted of selecting and digitizing photographs from their collections. In the project's early days, digitized photos were put on CD-ROM and taken to the Inuit communities of Igloodik, Kugluktuk, Padlei and Taloyak by Nunavut Sivuniksavut students, to be shared and discussed with elders so as to identify unnamed Inuit in the photos. The project has since grown substantially, expanding to many more collections and gathering information on people, places, events and traditions. LAC has digitized 10,000 photos for Project Naming and has created a website in English, French and Inuktituk (an Inuit language) in addition to using social networking services such as Facebook, Twitter and Flickr to reach a broader public (Library and Archives Canada 2018). As noted by Greenhorn (2013) “the project has evolved into a broader community engagement initiative, providing a virtual space for Inuit to reconnect with their history, and to share memories and stories re-kindled by the photographs.”

Much has been written about the project, including within the professional library and archival literature (e.g., Smith 2008; Greenhorn 2005, 2013), the academic literature (e.g., Lett 2017; Payne 2006) and particularly within the news media (e.g., Cameron 2015; Murphy 2016; Neary 2018). These discussions have been strongly positive. Articles often focus on the reciprocal and community nature of the project (Greenhorn 2013; Neary 2018), the intervention in dominant representations of Inuit people and

the reclamation through the project of Aboriginal subjectivities (Payne 2006) and the delight by Inuit people in identifying photos that they did not know existed and that depict their loved ones (Cameron 2015; Murphy 2016; Neary 2018). In general, the project is considered a success by Inuit, Library and Archives Canada and settler researchers and writers.

The literature provides a detailed view of the participatory process and its outcome, referred to by Carol Payne as “visual repatriation” (2006). As described by Payne, visual repatriation is initiated by Indigenous groups or is done in close collaboration with them and works “to find a new agency for photographs and ... uncover the voice of the people posed before the camera.” (Payne and Thomas 2002, 113). Through Project Naming, Payne (2006) argues that Inuit communities challenge dominant representations of themselves as “anonymous cultural types.” When they are named and claimed by their communities, Inuit in the photographs are humanized and located within community and culture. Payne further suggests that bringing youth and elders together through sharing the photos strengthens Inuit culture and identity and deepens youth’s understanding of Inuit history.

Greenhorn (2013, 21) makes similar claims about the participatory nature of the project, noting,

From its inception, this has been a reciprocal project. The goals are to reconnect Inuit with their past through photographs held at LAC, to promote dialogue between Inuit youth and elders, to identify the people and events portrayed in the photographs, and to share the names and knowledges gained by the participation of the different generations of Inuit with the archival community and members of the public.

This literature elaborates the importance of Inuit community participation in Project Naming. It articulates the benefits for Inuit communities of their participation, specifically as community members encounter digitized photos as part of visits to Inuit communities by Nunavut Sivuniksavut students, as part of Inuit community member visits to Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa, and through public engagement with website and social networking services used by Project Naming. These community engagement processes are well documented and are a critically important piece of the project in their own right.

Absent from the various literatures, and the website and social network presences of Project Naming, is a clear documentation of precisely how information shared by Inuit community members is transformed into archival description. Project Naming relies upon Nunavut Sivuniksavut to coordinate the student volunteers that create descriptive metadata while visiting Inuit communities in the north, but

relies on professional staff to review, evaluate and manually transfer this metadata into the project database, and to do the same for metadata gathered through visits by Inuit community members to Library and Archives Canada facilities in the National Capital Region, the Project Naming website and on social networking systems. It is not clear how metadata processing and decision making occur, including the degree to which community knowledge is assumed to be authoritative within this process. We also do not know to what extent communities have been consulted in the particulars of this process, or indeed whether, in the context of discussions enjoined by Nunavut Sivuniksavut students, community members specifically wished to participate in generating better descriptive metadata for Library and Archives Canada in the first place.

The remainder of this discussion works from what we, interested academics without inside knowledge of Project Naming practices, know about Project Naming’s descriptive practices from the published literature and from the published descriptions available through the Project Naming website, as we think through how community and institutional contributions to describing archival records do, indeed should, shape understandings of archival records and the collections to which they belong. We then consider how this process might be augmented and improved in the service of creating descriptions that better acknowledge the context of their creation.

## 2.2 Community contributions to Project Naming

This project would not be possible without the contributions of the Inuit community members who play the critically important role of identifying people, places, events and Inuit cultural practices in the photos and contributing metadata to the photo collections. Inuit community members possess the unique and irreplaceable expert and specialist knowledge of their community essential to this task. Inuit community members, then, are more similar to the specialist academic researchers considered by Huvila (2008), than they are to the generic, de-skilled labour accessed through some crowdsourcing projects (e.g., D’Arcy 2014). More than this, Inuit communities have a claim over, and relationship to, Project Naming photos that extends well beyond academic discussions of expertise.

The Project Naming website provides a form, entitled the “Project Naming Photograph Information Form,” which is used to collect data about the photos and which is similar to the script that is used to collect information by youth from elders (Payne 2006). The form asks: “Can you name the person(s) in the photograph? Do you know where the photograph was taken? Can you describe what is happening in the photograph? What is your name? Community?” (Library and Archives Canada 2009). Payne (2006)

notes that the Inuit organizations working with Library and Archives Canada on Project Naming made a deliberate choice to prioritize the identification of people in the photos over storytelling or the collection of other types of information. Community input is also solicited from the Project Naming website, Facebook page and Twitter feed, where photos are shared and the public is asked to name the people and places within those photos. We presume that most community members do not have expertise in the European-derived tradition of archiving practiced by Library and Archives Canada, and that they are not paid for their time or attention to the project.

It is reasonable to think that much more information is shared than ends up in the revised archival descriptions produced by Project Naming. News articles for example include interesting and important stories about the photographs (e.g., Cameron 2015; Murphy 2016; Neary 2018) that go far beyond the identification of people, places and events that are the focus of Library and Archives Canada's data collection. Similarly, information provided by users on the Project Naming Facebook page tell us rich and detailed stories triggered by or associated with many of the photos, often characterizing the moment of discovery of a never-before-seen photograph as profoundly important and deeply personal for community members. While some loss of context, information and affect is inevitable in processes of archival description, this loss is not acknowledged in the literature on Project Naming, the various Project Naming interfaces or the published descriptions of the archival records.

We have decided to consider Nunavut Sivuniksavut and the government of Nunavut as community contributors to Project Naming. This is because both of these institutions are embedded within the Inuit community. We recognize that, like all institutions, not all community members will feel represented by these institutions, and some may feel that these institutions are not truly of their community. Nonetheless, in this we are guided by the United Nations' (2007) *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the First Archivist Circle's (2007) *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*, which direct non-Indigenous peoples to build respectful relationships with Indigenous communities by working with and taking direction from Indigenous governments and institutions.

The extent of the contributions made by Nunavut Sivuniksavut and the Nunavut government to the project are not clear in the archival descriptions or in the published literature. It is noted that Nunavut Sivuniksavut recruits the youth who bring the records north to the elders. It is not clear how elders are recruited to the project, or for the visits south to the Library and Archives Canada facilities in the National Capital Region, but we assume that Nunavut Sivuniksavut and the Nunavut government are involved in this.

Drawbacks of the community participatory process employed through Project Naming include a lack of budget to remunerate community members who participate on the project. This creates an obvious asymmetry between the specialist, unique and essential knowledge possessed by community members, access to which is not remunerated, and the professional knowledge brought by Library and Archives Canada staff, which is fully remunerated. As we will show below, individual community members are not publicly credited with their contributions to Project Naming, either. Whatever value is brought to this project by individual Inuit community members is unremunerated and uncredited.

Another drawback is that Project Naming appears to have no capacity to allow for differential access to personal, community and traditional Inuit knowledge. This means that, like the records themselves, all community contributions to Project Naming are made fully public. Archives routinely provide differential access to collections, even those that are declared to be open and in the public domain (e.g., Jelinski 2017). It is not stated in the published literature or on the Project Naming website whether Library and Archives Canada would restrict access to photographs or archival descriptions at the request of Inuit community members. It is possible that this lack of overt statement might affect the nature of the input provided by community members. Moreover, in the absence of personal remuneration or acknowledgements, and without appropriate access controls for sensitive information, it is unclear why a traditional knowledge keeper would contribute their specialist knowledge to the archives of a government that has exploited Inuit traditional knowledge in the past many times over.

### 2.3 Library and Archives Canada's contributions to Project Naming

The relationship between archival institutions and Indigenous communities is fraught and must be considered very carefully (McKemmish et al. 2011; Ghaddar 2016; Fraser and Todd 2016). Acknowledging that Indigenous communities may not want to work with government archives for many important reasons must be the starting point of this conversation, particularly in light of the history of archives as tools of colonization (Stoler 2002, 2010). We note too that Library and Archives Canada has been very successful in partnering with Inuit organizations, specifically Nunavut Sivuniksavut, and with the government of Nunavut.

Library and Archives Canada's contributions to Project Naming start with its deep historic collections. The vast majority of these collections were created by settlers and others who are outsiders to Inuit culture. LAC has been keeping these collections without significant Inuit input

into appraisal, preservation or access protocols and practices. This means that misrepresentations of Inuit culture and communities are part of the records and their management (McKemmish et al. 2011; Hagan 1978; Christen 2011), and that many Inuit have never before seen these records, which are now being circulated into Inuit communities during an era of Inuit cultural resurgence (Karetak et al. 2017). These collections are sufficiently deep that LAC has now digitized more than 10,000 photographs and has not exhausted its holdings.

Beyond its collections, Library and Archives Canada has an established mandate, funding and infrastructure for the acquisition, preservation, description and making available of these records. Despite being a colonial institution, LAC's mandate and resources mean that it has been able to preserve many records that might otherwise have been damaged, lost or scattered, severed from their provenance and, therefore, of questionable authenticity. Bak (2016b) observes that "trust" is not a binary or homogeneous property when applied to archival institutions, staff and holdings. In this case, Inuit may trust the authenticity of archival records held by LAC without endorsing the trustworthiness of the Canadian government or LAC as the official archives of the Canadian government. Moreover, Canada's national archives were established in 1872, and this long history means that it has a demonstrated ability to preserve those records and archival descriptions that they have deemed worthy of preservation over the long term.

Library and Archives Canada's stable funding within government means that among its chief contributions are its knowledgeable, experienced and appropriately remunerated staff. LAC staff are educated and trained in European-derived archival theory and practice. Most staff are hired on a permanent basis, and many staff work for decades at the institution. On the one hand, this large and experienced workforce can sometimes slow the ability of the institution to change course, for example to incorporate principles of archival decolonization and community archives into its standard approaches and practices. On the other hand, the deep knowledge possessed by LAC staff of archival theory, practices and standards allows them to receive community inputs and integrate them into the traditional practices of European-derived archives.

To these advantages, we add some cautions. Payne uses the term "visual repatriation" to refer to the symbolic claiming of Inuit persons depicted in the Library and Archives Canada photos by Inuit communities. How does Project Naming account for the actual claiming and management of data produced through the project and as part of the encounters between communities and photographs, both in person and online?

Indigenous peoples in Canada, and elsewhere, are increasingly concerned to assert their ownership of their tra-

ditional knowledge, culture and cultural expressions, as well as for data derived from their communities, and taken from individuals during anthropological, scientific and medical study. These concerns have recently been discussed under the title of data sovereignty (e.g., Kukutai and Taylor 2016), but this concept of enduring ownership is also present in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations 2007). Article 11, for example, maintains that Indigenous peoples have "the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures" and requires "redress through effective mechanisms" when "their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property [was] taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs." In Canada, the First Nations Information Governance Centre's *First Nations Principles of OCAP®* (FNIGC 2019), which have emerged as a key means of separating into distinct concepts ownership, control, access and possession, can be traced back to 1998 (Schnarch 2004) and are now embedded within The Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al. 2014), a mandatory set of protocols for all academic research and data gathering in Canada, administered by the three major granting councils. *OCAP®* recognizes that, due to colonialism, Indigenous traditional knowledge, cultural expressions and community and personal data has been removed from Indigenous communities and preserved in government data banks and records. While government institutions such as Library and Archives Canada may possess the records that capture and express this traditional knowledge and personal and community data (such as the photographs digitized in Project Naming), ownership of this data has never passed from the Indigenous peoples to whom it belongs now, in the past and for all time, as per United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and First Nations Principles of *OCAP®*. Among the Inuit of Nunavut, similar concepts are incorporated into the Inuit principles of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (Karetak et al. 2017) and into Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami's *National Inuit Strategy on Research* (2018).

While it is clear that the original photographic records held by Library and Archives Canada are not possessed or controlled by Inuit communities, what of their ownership? United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and First Nations Principles of *OCAP®* consider ownership of traditional knowledge, as well as other forms of Indigenous information such as the personal information of community members, to be separate from legal possession of objects and records. This notion should be applied both to the original photographs as well as the descriptive records created through community collaborations such as Project Naming. Such precise notions of

ownership as distinct from possession are further complicated by Library and Archives Canada's use of third-party proprietary data services such as Facebook, Flickr and Twitter to provide access to and gather information about the photos. Who owns this data? Through its use of social media, Project Naming may have further complicated this already complex situation.

Project Naming benefits Inuit communities through what Payne (2006) calls visual repatriation, making available digitized, historic photographs that are circulated into Inuit communities by working with students from Nunavut Sivuniksavut, by working with the Nunavut Department of Culture and Heritage to create opportunities for community members to visit the National Capital Region, and by posting the photos onto the Project Naming website and through social networking services. The photographs are used to spark intergenerational knowledge exchange and knowledge repatriation among the Inuit, while LAC is able to receive from Nunavut Sivuniksavut volunteers, from its website and from social media community-derived metadata that can be used by LAC staff in revising LAC's archival descriptions of the photographs.

It is not clear whether the participatory nature of the project extends into archiving practices and processes. It is not clear, for example, how stories told between generations or posted onto social media get translated into descriptive metadata by Library and Archives Canada staff, and how decisions about this transformation are made. Moreover, while LAC does provide digital and paper copies of the photos to Inuit community members, possession of the archival records themselves and their corresponding descriptions stays within Library and Archives Canada and are ultimately managed and controlled by LAC. That these records physically remain at LAC may well align with the wishes of the community. Publicly funded archives like LAC often possess staff resources, infrastructure and capacity to preserve and manage archival collections over the long term, while communities may lack the infrastructure and professional expertise to do so. Nonetheless, as with the transformation of stories into descriptive metadata, it is not apparent from the Project Naming website or from the published literature whether there is conversation around this issue, including what might be at stake for community members whose records remain controlled and possessed by LAC. Library and Archives Canada research is not funded by Canada's three major granting councils, and LAC staff are not subject to the policies that govern academic research in Canada (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al. 2014); nor do the available sources on Project Naming discuss the program in light of the ownership of Indigenous knowledge as per UNDRIP (United Nations 2007) or *OCAP*® (FNIGC 2019).

## 2.4 Documenting the description process in Project Naming

Douglas (2016, 43) observes that “shapings” always take place through archival arrangement and description and that “Honest description requires that archivists acknowledge the different types of shaping that form an archives over time,” including those of record creators, non-archival custodians (such as families and organizations) and archival staff. In Project Naming, the shapers of archival arrangement and description include Inuit community members who have contributed important information to a particular description.

In the resulting archival descriptions, community-derived information about the photographs is included in the “title” field. It is also sometimes included elsewhere in the archival description, particularly the “place” and “additional information” fields. Library and Archives Canada does not completely replace original photo titles with the titles created through Project Naming. Instead, the original title is retained, while community information is added to the end of the title, encapsulated in square brackets. This practice ensures that the original colonial history and descriptive practices of Library and Archives Canada are not erased or obscured even as LAC strives to decolonize the colonial and often offensive descriptions that LAC staff and in some cases the original photographers, or other non-archival custodians of the records, had assigned to the photos in the first place. This use of square brackets is intended to account for and acknowledge community input and to signal those places that communities have contributed to the record, as is made apparent in the archival descriptions themselves.

The following examples of Project Naming records highlight the presentation of community-derived information in the “title” and “additional information” fields from two records:<sup>1</sup>

### Example 1:

Title: Young Inuit woman [Margaret Uyauperk Aniksak, Arviat, Nunavut]

Additional information: Other spellings of her name include: Margaret Uyaupiq Aniksak and Margaret Uyaupix Aniksak. She is now deceased, but has many descendants still living in Arviat. Margaret Uyauperk Aniksak is the grandmother of Jessie Kaludjak and Joy Suluk and great-grandmother of Lois Suluk-Locke, who is named after her. Lois Suluk-Locke was given the earrings that her great-grandmother wears in this photograph.

Title of the photograph in square brackets is based on information provided by Project Naming. This project brings Youth and Elders in Nunavut to work together

to identify and record the names of people in photographs held at Library and Archives Canada.  
(R9314-0-5-E) (Library and Archives Canada 2019b)

#### Example 2:

Title: Inuit girl beside dock. [Maryann Tattuinee. This photograph was probably taken at Coral Harbour, Southampton Island. Ms. Tattuinee now lives in Rankin Inlet.] ca. 1945-1946.

Additional information: Title of the photograph in square brackets is based on information provided by Project Naming. This project brings Youth and Elders in Nunavut to work together to identify and record the names of people in photographs held at Library and Archives Canada.

(R848-0-4-E)(Library and Archives Canada 2019a)

Archival descriptions modified through Project Naming specifically identify that additional information about the photo was collected through Project Naming, thus making apparent the collaborative aspects of the descriptive process. In both examples, community information is included in the title field while the process of collaboration is briefly characterized in the “additional information” field.

While all descriptive information gathered through Project Naming—whether by Nunavut Sivuniksavut students, through the web form or on social media—is provided by named individuals, Library and Archives Canada provides the names of people in the photographs, and not of the community members who identified the people in the photographs. This is consistent with LAC’s practice of not providing the names of staff who write descriptions of any records, whether they pertain to Indigenous peoples or not. This is still standard archival practice, though some archives are beginning to identify authors of archival descriptions (see, for example, archival descriptions created by the University of Manitoba Archives or the University of Winnipeg Archives on the Manitoba Archival Information Network). While the personal nature of the information provided in Example 1 above strongly suggests that the descendants of Margaret Uyauperk Aniksak were involved in providing the “additional information,” nowhere is this stated in the description. Nor is it evident whether Library and Archives Canada maintains internal records to keep track of the identities of community members who contributed this information. Some but not all identifying information about community member engagement with the photos are included within the records themselves.

## 2.5 Summary

Through Inuit participation in Project Naming, Library and Archives Canada is able to access specialist local knowledge

and traditional knowledge from Inuit communities in Canada’s north. This has resulted in improved descriptions, which include personal and community information that is submitted to LAC through various channels. Project Naming strives to make visible the participatory nature of archival descriptions modified through Project Naming, precisely because they recognize that knowing where descriptive information originates increases our understanding of the descriptions and the records they describe. What we cannot understand from the description is how decisions within this participatory description process were made and what factors were taken into consideration within both the participatory process itself and in the description of individual photos. Though it is obvious that community knowledge has been integrated into the descriptions, the process by which this happens remains opaque, at least to us as academic researchers unaffiliated with LAC, and not in contact with Project Naming partner communities, Nunavut Sivuniksavut or the Nunavut government. Archival descriptions made through Project Naming may well serve as primary archival records of these processes of participatory description, but they are not sufficient records on their own to fully articulate the complex context of their creation.

Thus, the Indigenous “ownership” of the traditional knowledge and personal information recorded in the photographs, despite “possession” of the photographs by Library and Archives Canada, can be understood as an instance of multiple provenance. In other words, Indigenous rights to and knowledge of Project Naming records significantly informs how they should be contextualized and understood. However, the complexity of this multiple provenance is not addressed or even signalled in the description, the interface or the larger Project Naming website. Finally, the use of proprietary social networking services in circulating these records and in collecting community-derived descriptive information introduces a new possessor of this information. This could create a new set of concerns around the further reduction of the control of Indigenous communities over their traditional knowledge and the personal information of community members. On the other hand, the stories collected by these social networking sites provide rich and personal understandings of the records, not captured through LAC’s “official” finding aid.

## 3.0 Sex Work Database

### 3.1 Overview and history

The Sex Work Database (SWD) began as part of the Digital Archives and Marginalized Communities (DAMC) project, a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada funded collaboration that ran from 2013 to 2017. This project investigated the application of community ar-

articulated frameworks and anti-violence activist methodologies to digital systems design, organization and the creation of digital community-approved and created records. The Sex Work Database contains sex work activist histories and records that have been identified and described by researchers and archivists in collaboration with researchers and archivists. Along with SWD, the Post Apology Residential School Database and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Database were included in the original Digital Archives and Marginalized Communities research project. Shawna Ferris and Kiera Ladner were the principal investigators on the project. Danielle Allard acted as both research assistant and archivist for the project (Allard and Ferris 2015; Ferris et al 2018). Of note, Allard and Ferris are authors of this paper and, therefore, bring to it particular “insider knowledge” as well as an understanding of the project’s intentions. This kind of knowledge is not present in our analysis of Project Naming. Since our objective in writing this article is not to assess the effectiveness of any particular strategies for participatory description, but rather to assess how well the chosen strategies are and can be represented in the final descriptions of the records associated with participatory archival projects, our “insider knowledge” provides us with a different opportunity than in Project Naming. Our analysis of Project Naming was limited to published information about the project, and we were not able to discern whether this published information accurately represented the intentions and objectives of the project. Since Allard and Ferris are co-authors of this paper, we have a complete understanding of the objectives and processes of the Sex Work Database, and can discuss with more confidence the extent to which the description of the records within the database accurately represent the objectives and processes of the larger project.

The Sex Work Database originated out of Ferris’ doctoral dissertation research about sex work activism when she noted that important documents and online postings about sex work activism were changing and disappearing from the activist websites of sex worker groups across the country. Ferris recognized the importance of this erasure because, due to ongoing violence directed at sex workers and the very real stigma associated with sex work, the internet is one of the few relatively safe spaces from which sex workers might organize (Ferris 2015). The loss of this material thus represents a significant and ongoing deletion of the documentary record and history of this movement (Allard and Ferris 2015, 362):

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 grass-

roots organizations struggling to foreground the concerns of Indigenous women in their anti-violence, anti-poverty, and feminist work.

Ferris contacted Allard, a then-Phd student of library and information studies at the University of Toronto, and Ladner, Cree scholar in Indigenous politics and governance and director of Mamawipawin, an Indigenous Governance and Community Based Research Centre at the University of Manitoba, both of whom were eager to participate in a project that harvested and preserved the websites of sex work activist groups, collected relevant news media on the topic and agreed to preserve institutional documentation on behalf of sex work activist organizations.

The participatory nature of the Digital Archives and Marginalized Communities project shifted over the course of the initial research grant, though the Sex Work Database was always designed to first and foremost serve the interests of sex work activists. The database was originally imagined to be a site that sex workers and sex work activists could use and to which they could add their organizational records if so desired. It very quickly became obvious that there was no way to design or create a meaningful database without the ongoing participation of sex work activist community members. Ferris and Allard (2016; Allard and Ferris 2015) describe how participatory methodologies came to be fundamental to the growth and development of SWD. They also provide an overview of the community-led participatory methodology of the project.

At consultations with communities of sex work activists in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, many sex work activist groups indicated that they would like the Sex Work Database to include more than just records of their activist websites. Many groups wanted to include additional materials created by their own and other activist organizations, including pamphlets, workbooks, publications, photos and posters. In order to more expansively pursue the co-creation of sex work activist histories, through the Sex Work Database and in other forms, additional research funding was pursued and secured from 2018-2022 by Ferris, Allard and sex work activist Lebovitch in the form of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Insight Grant. Significantly, Lebovitch is named as a paid community consultant/liason in the grant application, ensuring that a sex work community perspective is represented on the project at all times, and is embedded in the project management team, participating equally in project design, decision making and implementation.

While the Sex Work Database has become increasingly participatory, it continues to struggle to enact participatory processes in the face of a number of obstacles, such as funding concerns (there is never enough money to do everything, particularly since all primary community consulta-

tions take place in person to ensure firm trusting relationships are built and/or maintained as precious records are shared between participants and the SWD research team), as well as the time and energy of sex work activists to commit to the project, particularly in the face of the critically important and challenging work that they already do.

As part of the larger Digital Archives and Marginalized Communities project, the Sex Work Database operates out of Mamawipawin, at the University of Manitoba. The Sex Work Database is not significantly focused on Indigenous materials. Though there is some representation of Indigenous people among the activist groups that participate in the database, Indigenist protocols and frameworks are not applicable. That said, the larger Digital Archives and Marginalized Communities research project includes two Indigenous databases, namely the Post Apology Residential School Database and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Database. All researchers and archivists on this larger project, including those working on the Sex Work Database, are guided by Indigenist methodologies of reciprocity, relationality and a deeply held belief that communities know their own materials best, including how these materials should be described (Ferris et al. 2018). One commonality between the activist concerns of sex workers and Indigenous communities is the need to tell stories about themselves that humanize and resist both the literal and symbolic violence perpetuated against them (Allard and Ferris 2015; Ferris et al. 2018). Control over their own records is critically important for groups whose words are routinely used against them in the public sphere and in research. Communities are the experts of all of this knowledge. Their political orientation to the project and insistence on its value as well as how it should be framed is at the heart of the Sex Work Database project.

### 3.2 Community contributions to the Sex Work Database

Sex work activists who work on the Sex Work Database make the project possible. Sex work activists possess specialist knowledge of sex work issues that is essential to many aspects of the work on the project, including the archival description of the resources in SWD. Sex work activists have come to play multiple important roles in the development and management of the collection. These collaborative roles include work to develop a tagging folksonomy used to organize and integrate all collections; to select, organize and digitize records for inclusion; to develop practices and procedures governing which individual records and collections will be made public and which will remain private; to consider what constitutes “activism” and how or who might be invited to contribute to SWD in the future.

A critical component of the participatory descriptive process in the Sex Work Database is the ongoing development of a tagging folksonomy used to describe all of the records within SWD, including records created by sex work activists, as well as those created by others such as news media, government and the courts. SWD is not presently publicly available, though based on input from sex work activists, some aspects of it will become public in Fall 2019. SWD uses student research assistants (many of whom are archival studies students) and project researchers to create basic bibliographic entries in the SWD database for each item. Through a participatory descriptive process, these basic entries are augmented with input from researchers, student employees and community members, to develop a tagging folksonomy which is then applied by project research assistants to individual SWD entries. Community members are paid for all work that they perform on the project.

As part of the community-led participatory method of SWD, the project traveled to Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver to conduct regional consultations. At these consultations, SWD team members met with representatives from activist groups that, having received some introductory information about the project prior to the meeting, had expressed interest in engaging in further discussions about the project, in order to consider whether they wanted to join the project. During the consultations, representatives from thirteen community groups were provided with more in-depth information about the project, invited to contribute their own perspectives and visions for what the project might become as it continued to evolve, and invited to join as partner groups/organizations going forward. Consultations also involved discussions regarding models for shared oversight and management of individual group records, as well as SWD collections overall. In addition to these group consultation events, the project hired and has been working closely for years with individual sex work activists, particularly Amy Lebovitch, Executive Director of Sex Professionals of Canada (SPOC). On their blog “The Whore and the Feminist,” Lebovitch and Ferris outline the many ways Lebovitch’s participation in various aspects of SWD has been invaluable (2018). As they note (Lebovitch and Ferris 2018) about SWD consultations in particular,

The success of these consults is due to Amy’s involvement. She managed communications to set up the consultations, attended each consult, participated where she saw fit, and helped with the administration of the consultations. For example, participants answered ultimately to her regarding their consent to participate at all. They also received their pay for participating directly from her. Additionally, Amy arranged for all additional travel expenses to be paid to all participants up front so that nobody needed to

give a credit card when they checked into a hotel. She also transcribed the consults, so no information went outside of the consult “circle.”

Lebovitch has been integrally involved in the development of the SWD tag list. Tags are used to describe all records within the Sex Work Database. SWD researchers and associates have argued that tags can work to illustrate, mediate and recast relationships among records. Tags are not only metadata or record descriptors, but are themselves dynamic, community-produced records, both creating and disrupting complex relationships among archival records in a given archives (Allard et al. 2015). In the case of the Sex Work Database, tags both frame sex work activist records and reframe the often dehumanizing and stigmatizing news records exactly because they use and affirm sex work activist community language and perspectives. Tags are thus an integral part of each record, evidence of communities’ work to interpret and name the records in their collections and to engage in destigmatizing and humanizing forms of meaning-making. This perspective aligns with the argument being made within this paper, that archival descriptions do not just represent knowledge; indeed, they create knowledge. A select list of SWD tags is included below in Table 1.

As part of the development of the project’s tagging system, those working on the Sex Work Database have developed an extensive tag list that includes both the tags themselves and scope notes, or brief instructions that both define individual tags and describe how to apply them to individual SWD records. To develop the tag list, tags were proposed by the project researchers, archivists and student research assis-

tants using a literary warrant approach (Chan, Richmond and Svenonius 1985) to draw directly from the language and concepts used in sex work activist materials, such as the activist websites, to be tagged. These proposed tags were then refined in a series of consultations with sex work activist community members. This process involved meeting with one or more community member(s), at different points in time, to share with them the developing tag list and the rationale for developing specific tags. Feedback was sought about both the tag itself and the ways it might be applied in SWD. This feedback was used to either confirm or refine tags. Tags continued to be revised until they were satisfactory to all parties. The project has kept track of the development and refinement process of creating tags. At present, this documentation exists separate from the tag list, as a series of spreadsheets and meeting minute notes that document the decision-making process with respect to individual tag development. These complex histories and decision-making moments are not reflected in the tags themselves and are not documented in the published literature on SWD. Also not captured in the SWD tag list is disagreement among community members about the terms used or selected. Similarly absent is the lengthy process used to decide how to prioritize some concepts and terms over others, as well as how to identify and name what matters in a given record, and in the collection as a whole.

In summary, members of the sex work activist community influence the contents of the Sex Work Database, descriptions of the resources in SWD, processes of validation and quality assurance at all levels of the project, and decision making about what resources and descriptions should be made public, if any. SWD staff work to remove

Sex Work Database Tag	Scope note
advice about speaking to the police	Use when item provides suggestions about what to do if you have been asked to speak to the police.
bad date list	Use when mentioned or discussed in an item. There are different terms to refer to bad dates and bad date lists, such as “aggressors” or “aggressor list,” and “bad client” or “bad client list.” Bad date sheets act as a warning system for sex workers. They are lists of descriptions of “bad dates” or dangerous individuals who have harmed sex workers, or those who have robbed and/or refused to pay sex workers for their services. The bad date sheet is circulated among sex workers so that they can avoid individuals who fit the descriptions on the list. The list includes details about the violent person, such as their phone number and vehicle description (if available), and a description of the violent incident provided by the sex worker who had the encounter. There is disagreement about whether or not bad date lists should be publicly available and circulated, and groups take different stances on this issue.
whore	Use when word appears in item. Tag in conjunction with “reclaiming identity” when sex workers reclaim or take back this word.

Table 1. Selected list of SWD tags.

any downside to community participation on the project by remunerating all contributions and by ensuring that sex work activists have the final say on all issues of representation and all policies around access, with regard to SWD.

While community participation is woven into all levels of this project and the information management work the project requires, one particular drawback of the digital infrastructure in use is that it does not allow Sex Work Database users to know specifically who applied which tag to a description, or who selected a particular record for inclusion in SWD. Moreover, as noted above, sex work activists may not always have the resources or specialized knowledge of library and archival practices to participate in SWD processes to the extent that they might like.

### 3.3 Institutional contributions to the Sex Work Database

As described above, SWD originated through a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded research project, responding to Ferris's observation of the erasure of sex work activist records from the internet. In creating a resource for sex work activists, SWD staff started their collections by combing the news media for items about sex work and by identifying relevant activist web pages to be harvested. This is a resource that is being created in the present; hence there are few items in it of an historic nature.

The initial research funding provided SWD with considerable freedom to develop the database in response to the needs of sex work activists. On the one hand, this meant that without the institutional stakeholder of a sponsoring institution to answer to, SWD could develop solely as a community archives. On the other hand, this means that the Sex Work Database does not have the dedicated funding and infrastructure that an established archives usually has. This extends to staffing. As SWD has been funded under the auspices of an external research grant, there are no contingencies for long term, continuous staffing, though the funding is sufficient to hire archival expertise, particularly LIS and archival studies students for the duration of the research project. This grant funding allows academic researchers and student research assistants to be paid at appropriate rates. This provides them the time and mental space to contribute to SWD in a thoughtful and expansive way. Additionally, their professional training and experiences working on similar or unrelated projects have provided them with a knowledge of community-based research, participatory and community archives, and conventional archival descriptive theory and practice, all of which are very useful for this work.

Because the Sex Work Database is a fully digital collection, all non-digital original records remain in the physical

custody of their creators. Born digital and made digital records, and their archival descriptions, are presently housed on the Mamawipawin server at the University of Manitoba campus. SWD is in the process of creating stewardship agreements to govern the ownership and management of digital materials kept in the possession of SWD but owned by the sex work activist groups that created the original materials. Stewardship agreements will be customized to meet the needs of each group but will state that sex work activist groups have full ownership and control over all their records that are housed in the Sex Work Database. Moreover, records will not be made public without their consent.

While located on campus, the Mamawipawin servers, like the Mamawipawin physical space, are operated independently of other digital infrastructure on campus. Housing the Sex Work Database at Mamawipawin is a deliberate decision to provide as much autonomy and control of the collections as possible to community groups. It provides SWD the opportunity to flexibly implement community archiving practices, without the need to conform to campus wide systems and standards. Still, members of SWD are engaged in ongoing conversations about where else SWD might be housed to offer as much control to community members as possible. This freedom comes with a cost. SWD is not housed within an established preservation facility with the infrastructure, dedicated systems, preservation policies, funding, staff resources and mandate to preserve Sex Work Database records over the long term.

Being part of the Digital Archives Marginalized Communities research project and located on a university campus does bring other strengths, including the ability to access technical advice on issues as diverse as running a RAID array and customizing the open source Heretrix web crawler, as well as infrastructure support around the provision of power, heating and cooling and the physical maintenance of staff work spaces.

The institutional supports of the Sex Work Database are of a particular sort. SWD is a future-facing activist project that is located on a university campus, but not within the university's established archives. The intention of SWD is to support political action in the present, and to ensure that information resources created today are not lost to posterity. As SWD is presently building its collections, it cannot offer deep historic collections to support its activist goals or to demonstrate historical continuities in the sex work community—its collections, assembled in the present, are still young. Perhaps the most important effect of this model of institutional support, however, is that it allows SWD staff to take their direction exclusively from the sex work activist community, rather than having to balance community input against institutional or sponsor demands. SWD exists to serve the community, to share knowledge within the community, and to build capacity for sex work activism.

### 3.4 Documenting the description process in the Sex Work Database

The process of applying the tags to item level records is complicated and time consuming. Drawing from the tag list (both the terms and related scope notes), tags are applied to records by student research assistants. Sex work activist groups whose records have been tagged have indicated varying levels of interest or ability to participate in the process of reviewing the tags that have been applied to their records and/or proposing new or alternate ones to their records. Some groups, for many reasons, simply do not have the time or resources to invest in reviewing the tags that student assistants have applied to their records. Other groups wish to participate in all steps of the tagging process, including reviewing all of the tags applied to their collections by student assistants and proposing new tags for their records and to the tag list more generally. Conversations within the Sex Work Database project are taking place about how best to register these processes within the metadata, but they are not presently indicated in the descriptive entries themselves. Because SWD will be accessed by sex work activists from many organizations, it is important to indicate the level of involvement of any given sex work activist organization, including the extent to which they reviewed and validated the work of SWD staff. In this way, sex work activists can immediately understand whether a particular tag was applied by SWD staff or by another activist; and if applied by SWD staff, whether it was validated by another activist.

Light and Hyry (2002, 221) argue that professional descriptive standards mask the subjectivity and influence of the archivist in creating meaning among archival records. Douglas (2016) notes that access tools such as finding aids often hide archivists' mediating role on collections. Within the Sex Work Database, the participatory tagging process itself has primarily been designed by researchers and archivists on the project. Sex work activists participating in SWD engage in the process because trusting relationships have been developed between researchers and activists over many years, indeed in some cases predating SWD. Equally as important, sex work activists are often focused on their activist work, and understandably deem it more important than creating or reviewing tags.

Beyond this tagging process, descriptive records for news stories in SWD are comprised of a bare-bones bibliographic entry. Descriptive records for websites and for organizational records from sex work activist organizations follow basic archival description in capturing information about the record and its creating organization.

The following is an example of a Sex Work Database record describing a web page of the Sex Professionals of Canada (SPOC).

Item type: Web page

Title: Feb 28 2011- Bad client list- Sex Professionals of Canada

Author: Sex Professionals of Canada (SPOC)

Website title: Sex Professionals of Canada

Website type: screenshot

URL: <http://www.spoc.ca/pebhb.html>

Language: English

Added: 2015-07-30

Added by: MH

Organizational names: SPOC; Sex Professionals of Canada

Tags: bad date list, clients or johns, sex worker, sexual assault, SPOC – Sex Professionals of Canada, Stella

These descriptive records are created by SWD staff and subject to review by activists as necessary. The tagging folksonomy, including the keywords and their scope notes, has been developed with deep community participation. Applying the terms to the SWD records is done in the first instance by SWD staff. As we note above, this tagging is then reviewed, validated and in some cases augmented or changed by sex work activists working on the project. Efforts have been made to describe the mechanisms of and opportunities for community participation on SWD in the articles published about the project. Nonetheless, even in this broader view, the specific processes of assigning and reviewing tags are not presented in great detail. Moreover, a sex work activist accessing the Sex Work Database would not be able to understand at present, simply by looking at a record, whether and how the tagging was reviewed and validated by a member of the group who created the record.

### 3.5 Summary

When the Sex Work Database is made public it will make its tagging folksonomy publicly available on its website. SWD could also publish documents explaining the participatory consultation process and policies. Much of this documentation already exists as internal policies and procedures, but it would take some effort to make them outward-facing. This supplementary documentation could include the tag lists and related scope notes describing how tags are applied, as well as the already developed spreadsheets that describe the evolution of particular tags. These documents together would allow users of the database to understand the participatory descriptive processes used in the project, and by extension, the records themselves. Making these documents available can contribute to the feminist, community articulated frameworks and anti-violence activist methodologies of SWD, designed to shift mainstream ideas and discussions around sex work and sex

work activism. Discussions about posting these documents are ongoing within the project. Such approaches would align with Nesmith's proposal to augment descriptive records. He suggests (2006b, 271) that, "[t]here could be, as a general overlay to any descriptive system, a series of essays on the approach taken to description by the system/archives and the nature of the contextual information found in it." This proposal links descriptive records to a series of in-depth texts about the process of description in order to provide unstructured space in which archives might discuss their classification systems, arrangement structures and concepts of creatorship.

As with Project Naming, the archival descriptions created on the Sex Work Database are not sufficient records on their own to fully articulate the complex context of their creation. As a form of archival description, SWD tags themselves cannot tell the entire story of their creation. Nonetheless, locating and connecting them to a broader constellation of related documentation, as well as tracing their application to particular records (who added them? when were they added?) could substantially augment our understanding of how they were created, why they matter and what they can tell us about the records they describe. Additional documentation that would allow insight into the scope and scale of the larger project could be made available by making selected project documentation available as well.

The question remains whether even with this additional documentation, the descriptive apparatus around the records would be sufficient to tell the whole story of the records creation; and for what audience. Lemieux (2014, 62-4) discusses trade-offs between parsimoniousness or minimal detail and expressiveness or abundant detail in systems of archival representation. She notes that richly expressive detail does not suit every user or descriptive system, and could become a barrier to some users if it prevents them from meeting their information needs in a timely or straightforward manner. The system described here combines expressiveness and parsimoniousness in a way that could serve the needs of multiple types of users. By having the additional documentation available through the larger Sex Work Database website, the needs of users who require detailed information about the project could be satisfied while the essential parsimoniousness of the bare-bones descriptions within the database would allow all users easily to navigate the records quickly and easily. Indeed, this discussion also raises questions about whose interests are being served in executing either parsimonious or expressive approaches. In the case of SWD, serving sex work activist creators and users is the primary priority and ultimately drives decision making on these matters.

#### 4.0 Discussion of the case studies and recommendations for future practice

Project Naming and the Sex Work Database provide two highly distinct case studies of community and participatory archiving practice that have allowed us to consider community and institutional contributions to participatory archiving projects in some interesting and unusual ways. The two projects have distinct and perhaps even incommensurate institutional settings. The location of Project Naming at Library and Archives Canada exerts a gravitational pull towards institutional concerns while the location of the Sex Work Database in Mamawipawin at the University of Manitoba allows it to be completely committed to allowing the community to determine the path forward from all significant questions of acquisition, description and access. On the other hand, even though it is an institution that has played a significant role in Canadian colonialism, Library and Archives Canada has the history, mandate, funding, infrastructure and staff to reassure its users that it has been around for almost 150 years and will be around for the next 150 years. While researchers like Payne (2006) may view LAC as an irredeemably colonial institution, many of the Inuit people that she spoke with did not view records from LAC's collections, such as the photos within Project Naming, as inauthentic or tainted. For many Inuit community members, the Project Naming photos, which were and are deeply personally and culturally significant, are authentic (if partial) representations of loved family and community members and of aspects of traditional Inuit culture.

In terms of community participation, Project Naming does not remunerate individual Inuit community members who participate on the project; nor does it acknowledge them individually in the archival descriptions that result. Library and Archives Canada staff perform a mediating role in integrating community input into archival descriptions, and they have not disclosed the decision-making processes around how this work is done. It is not entirely clear how LAC seeks to motivate participation on Project Naming, but they have developed institutional community partners who apparently promote community input for their own reasons of education, intergenerational knowledge exchange and knowledge repatriation and preservation.

All community participation on the Sex Work Database is remunerated, but it is not clear how SWD will secure the resources, infrastructure and staffing to keep the collection available to the sex work activist community in decades to come. Indeed, an ongoing conversation among researchers, archivists and community members at SWD is whether or not the Sex Work Database should remain at the University of Manitoba, even in an arms-length centre such as Mamawipawin. This conversation emerges out of signifi-

cant concerns that SWD collections remain community controlled at all times.

In both Project Naming and the Sex Work Database, communities each contribute integral information to the project's archival descriptions. Project Naming accounts for this in the body of Library and Archives Canada descriptions by encapsulating community input in square brackets and clearly stating that the information was contributed as part of Project Naming. It does not however identify individual contributors. SWD creates descriptive tags in collaboration with sex work activists and sex work activist groups. More than this, sex work activists are part of the research team and their involvement makes all aspects of the project possible. However, it is not clear within SWD's descriptive records how tags have been created or whether they have been applied by SWD staff or sex work activists. In the case of SWD, sex work activists often do not want to be identified individually by name as contributing to records' description in order to retain their anonymity and because sometimes they are not publicly "out" as sex workers. Although this conversation is yet to be had, in the case of SWD we suspect that community members would prefer to be identified by their organizations in any public facing documentation. Regardless, by adding some simple additional contextualizing information about who (either individuals or groups) contributed to the development of descriptive records, both projects could better articulate the participatory nature of the descriptive process. This also raises questions about the potential value for both projects of providing differential access to records and metadata. Protecting the anonymity of sex work activists or keeping certain aspects of Indigenous traditional knowledge within the community are each reasons for providing differential access to records and metadata, perhaps along the lines of the Mukurtu approach to differential access (Christen 2011; Christen et al. 2017).

A more significant limitation in terms of understanding the participatory descriptive process at Project Naming is the lack of written documentation or policies associated with the project. We simply do not know how project decision-making happens and how processes unfold. The Sex Work Database is not yet public but does carefully document project decision-making and policies around tagging and around description, more generally. These documents were designed to support internal work processes, but if revised to be outward-facing could provide a more fulsome picture of participatory practices on the project. Similarly, there are numerous stories in the news, academic literature, podcasts and on social media, that describe Inuit community members' encounters with Library and Archives Canada photographs that provide a much richer picture of the encounter between community members and photos than is provided in the Project Naming descriptive records. How

might these stories be included or appended to LAC descriptions? What are the consequences, in terms of data sovereignty and in terms of "honest description" (Douglas 2016), of leaving these stories to exist only on proprietary social networking services such as Facebook, Flickr and Twitter?

As the Sex Work Database project moves towards making some records and metadata available on the World Wide Web, it is well positioned to supplement its bare-bones descriptive records with policy and process documentation that could allow users to understand, at a general level, the participatory and collaborative processes that were used to appraise, select and describe the records in the database. Linking from the Sex Work Database website to such documentation is fundamentally similar to the overlapping contextual essays envisioned by Nesmith (2006b), or to the "colophons and annotations" envisioned by Light and Hyry (2002). Indeed, we suggest that there are numerous creative approaches that might be implemented by other participatory or collaborative projects.

Given the complexity of the conditions in which participatory descriptive processes inevitably occur, we argue that improved descriptive practices would build upon the strengths that each party involved in the process is bringing to the table, while also making visible the inevitable limitations within such partnerships, and within the apparatus of representation available in conventional archival descriptive systems. By disclosing limitations, documenting processes, and making apparent decision-making around acts of description/representation, archival descriptions would appropriately reflect the context of their creation, and acknowledge the knowledge that is created as through participatory processes to describe archival records.

To achieve this, we propose that community based and participatory archival projects endeavor to answer the following questions as they consider how they might develop their own approaches to better representing participatory practices. They might ask:

1. Is community contributed content included in archival descriptions?
2. Has the information that has been contributed been attributed to the community from where it comes? How could it be?
3. Have specific community members contributed this information; and if so, have they been acknowledged? Should they be? How could they be?
4. Has the decision-making process around community-based description practices been developed with participation from the community? Can documentation of this decision-making be made public? Should it be? Where is it accounted for? Where should it be included?

5. What other records might tell the story of participatory decision making? How might they be attached, appended or referenced in descriptive records?
6. Are the rights (for example ownership, access, control or possession (FNIGC 2019)) and/or relationships of community groups towards particular records accounted for in descriptive records? Should they be? How might they be? Where else within an archives is this information provided?
7. How might the interests, strengths, limitations (and so on) of the various community and institutional contributors to description be documented and made available as relevant context to archival descriptions?

Rather than being prescriptive, this list of questions seeks to guide those interested in participatory and collaborative description to consider how they might be, as Douglas (2016) argues, more “honest” about collaborative and/or community-based descriptive practices and projects.

### 5.0 Conclusion: archival description as archival record

Cook (2009) describes how, in an older model of archiving, researchers and archivists were both invested in maintaining a polite fiction that archivists and archives were neutral conduits of impartial evidence from the past. This fiction allowed historians and other researchers to maintain that, through the archives, they had unmediated access to the past: “Archivists work diligently, but quietly, behind the scenes, vacuuming and cleaning, storing and retrieving, but disturbing these natural orders and organic residues as little as possible” (516). Archival description was made to serve this vision of archiving. Douglas (2016) maintains that the careful, “impartial” language typically used by archivists when writing descriptions was intended to contribute to this erasure of the archivist’s mediating role. Such archival description serves as a record of the aspirations of the archivists and of the needs of archival users to have an archivist who is dry, objective and barely there.

This perspective aligns with past work in knowledge organization more generally that has operated under the assumption that subject description and classification schemes were neutral, universally applicable, and that the processes of their development did not require significant justification to the external world. Although recent work in knowledge organization recognizes the need for participatory descriptive and classification approaches, it is not known to what extent this work strives to identify or clarify the roles of all participants in devising such systems. Indeed, we hope that this insight in particular, might be usefully applied to knowledge organization work and research.

Today we have a different conception of the archivist’s role, and of the role of the archives. Archives today strive for relevance to a whole kaleidoscope of communities. Working with community members helps to connect archives with the communities documented within archival holdings, but it also helps archivists to create collections that are of more use to the communities.

Archivists need to reinvent archival description to meet the needs of this new era. Archivists no longer aspire to objectivity, impartiality and erasure. Now archivists seek to demonstrate self-awareness, including an awareness of the place of archives in colonial processes, including the subjugation and elimination of Indigenous peoples. Why, then, do archivists continue to follow precepts and conventions of past models of archival description, in which the identity, and even the presence, of the subjectivity that arranged and described the records is effaced and obscured?

For archival description to function as an archival record in this new era we require techniques of description that will signal to readers of the description the presence and perspectives of those who would arrange and describe the records. If arrangement can be understood as bricolage, a form of knowledge creation through knowledge organization, then archival description must become a form of archival representation in which archivists, and their community partners, disclose precisely how collections have been shaped, mediated and created.

### Note

1. From Library and Archives Canada: “Inuit Girl Beside Dock. [Maryann Tattuinee. This Photograph was probably Taken at Coral Harbour, Southampton Island. Ms. Tattuinee now Lives in Rankin Inlet.] ca 1945-1946.” [http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam\\_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec\\_nbr=3198759](http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3198759); “Young Inuit Woman [Margaret Uyauperk Aniksak, Arviat, Nunavut]” [http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam\\_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec\\_nbr=3580437](http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3580437)

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