Exploring the landscape of web oral history collections: A content analysis

by

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Abstract

Research problem: Digital oral history collections are increasingly being disseminated by heritage institutions via the Internet. Though the promises of networked access to oral history are great, they are not without perils. Contemporary discourse in the field includes discussions of how oral history can best be presented online, yet little quantitative research exists on current practices of web distribution. This exploratory research project investigated the ways in which oral history is being presented online by heritage organisations.

Methodology: The research had a quantitative weighting. A content analysis was conducted to investigate the characteristics of online oral history collections. Data were gathered from a sample of 40 websites providing direct access to oral history source material. Descriptive statistics identified patterns across the sample.

Results: A wide variety of heritage organisations worldwide are currently providing web access to oral history through searchable databases and via simple websites. Few sites were employing delivery systems that allow flexible, multi-modal access. Sites dedicated to oral history collections were more likely to provide clear copyright and ethical information, and medium-sized collections were better promoted. Many sites included secondary material to enhance digital oral history collections.

Implications: Communities of practice could be expanded to recognise the increasing involvement of community organisations in web delivery of oral history material. Some recommendations are made for improvements to web delivery for oral history.

Keywords: Oral history, digital heritage, Web 2.0, information systems, content analysis

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The digital revolution represents a critical development in the way information created by the cultural heritage sector is disseminated and accessed. The genesis of web-based repositories is one example of how heritage organisations have used digital technologies to share their collections with ever wider audiences. Like many other categories of heritage materials, oral history collections are increasingly finding their way onto the web. This inevitable meeting of technology and oral history has been described as the fourth paradigmatic transformation in the oral history field (Thomson, 2007).

The opportunities afforded by digital technologies for access to oral history are undoubtedly great. Primarily, digital technologies have provided the tools for wide access and use of oral history, furthering the democratising agenda of oral history as a research method (Gluck, 2014) and its potential to contribute to social inclusion and social justice by enabling greater community engagement, participation and collaboration with cultural heritage. Additionally, these tools have presented opportunities to honour the orality that is a defining feature of oral history, but which has often been stripped away by textual archival practices of transcription and abstracting (Boyd & Larson, 2014).

Yet the promises of web access to oral history are not without perils (Gluck, 2014). Ethical, legal, and political implications of delivering oral history on the Internet have been widely discussed. Much of the discourse around web-based oral history archives relates to the question of how organisations creating these repositories can mitigate potential ethical problems of providing unrestricted access to oral history interviews, such as privacy concerns, misuse and unintended use of the materials, and limitations of original recording agreements (Larson, 2013; Gluck, 2014; Bradley & Puri, 2016).

1.2 Research problem

In the cultural heritage sector globally, initiatives to digitise and provide web access to oral history collections are proliferating. An awareness and critical understanding of the opportunities and challenges of digital oral history is vital to the development of web-based oral history collections. Those involved in disseminating oral history via the Internet must carefully consider their practices and be sensitive to potential risks.

Currently, little empirical evidence exists about the ways in which oral history is being presented and made available on the web by cultural heritage institutions in New Zealand and abroad, or the ways in which these institutions are promoting their digital oral history collections and facilitating community engagement with the collections. Gaining an understanding of current practices will lay a foundation for shared knowledge about oral history on the web, and will be useful information for the future development of digital oral history collections.

1.3 Research objectives

This study aimed to:

1. Explore the current landscape of digital oral history collections: their organisation, contents and the modes of access available to users. This includes aspects such as information architecture, metadata, formats of oral history content, and use of digital technologies.

2. Examine the ways in which institutions providing access to digital oral history collections are enabling audiences to meaningfully engage with them, including opportunities for participation and collaboration.

3. Explore the strategies these institutions employ to promote their digital oral history collections.

4. Examine the ways in which cultural heritage institutions are addressing copyright and ethical issues related to the provision of oral history in their digital repositories.

1.4 Definitions

Oral history: refers "not only to the process of gathering data, but also to the result of that process" (Hutching, 1993, p.1). It is firstly "the interviewing of eye-witness participants in the events of the past for the purposes of historical reconstruction" (Grele, 1996, cited in Perks & Thomson, 2006, p.ix). Oral history is also "a record of information gathered in oral form. . .as the result of a planned interview" (Library of Congress, cited in Hutching, 1993, p.1).

Digital oral history collection: Following Feltham's (2014) definition of digital collections, a digital *oral history* collection is an online space, accessed through a web browser, such as an online exhibition, website, or database, where users can access and engage with digitised or born-digital oral history material, including audio interviews, transcripts, and/or abstracts.

Cultural heritage institution: for the purposes of this study, this refers to any organisation providing access to oral history material for the purpose of preserving cultural heritage. It includes libraries, archives, and museums, as well as historical societies, universities with heritage collections, or institutional archives that disseminate heritage resources.

2. Review of the Literature

Opening the doors to the oral history archive

For oral historians and archivists alike, web access to oral history is a "double-edged sword" (Sheftel & Zembrzycki, 2017, p.110). On one hand, web access is an opportunity for audiences to meaningfully and comprehensively engage with material that has previously been perceived as inaccessible and impractical to use. In the analogue archive, difficulties with usability and discoverability have impeded the use of oral history material. The labour involved in navigating through hours of cumbersome audio material mean that transcripts largely replace original recordings as the primary source used by researchers. Like other physical audiovisual resources, oral history has faced a constant threat of incompatibility and obsolescence, and of obscurity as it lies "dormant in the analog archive" (Boyd & Larson, 2014, p.4).

In the last twenty years the Internet has thrown open the doors of the archive, providing opportunities for access on a whole new level and empowering people to engage with oral history like never before (Boyd & Larson, 2014). Now, "oral history audio and video can. . . be placed in an environment in which rich annotation, cross-referencing codes, and other descriptive or analytic 'meta-data' can be linked to specific passages of audio-video content. By searching or sorting by means of these reference tools, the audio-video materials themselves - not the transcribed text version - can be searched, browsed, accessed, studied, and selected for use at a high level of specificity" (Frisch, 2006, p.103). For instance, the Oral History Metadata Synchroniser (OHMS), an open source application that connects a textual search of a transcript or index to the corresponding moment in the audio interview, is now being employed by numerous organisations to enhance access to online history interviews. One vital dimension of oral history opened up by these new modes of access is the *orality* of the sources by facilitating a return to the recorded voice as primary document, allowing the complex layers of meaning within oral history interviews that transcripts fail to capture to finally be unlocked (Zembrzycki, 2013).

Catalysing the democratic impulse

The Internet has helped to further the democratising potential of oral history by providing the tools for wide distribution and access (Gluck, 2014). As an historical method of inquiry, oral history is concerned with de-centering authority, empowering marginalised voices, and creating shared authority through a process of collaborative knowledge creation, and this "resistive dimension of sharing authority is. . . inextricably linked to ideas regarding democratic knowledge production" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006,

p.173). The potential for the Internet to catalyse the democratic impulse at the heart of oral history is being realised, with the web allowing anyone, anywhere to create and disseminate oral history to a worldwide audience in a non-hierarchical model of engagement (Boyd & Larson, 2014).

Oral history, digital humanities and digital GLAM

Values around collaborative, democratic knowledge creation, free scholarly inquiry, and social inclusion are common to oral historians, digital humanists and increasingly, the GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) and information management sectors. As evident in previous discussion of the digital revolution in the oral history field, the interface between oral history and digital humanities is strengthening, with more and more oral history practitioners and stewards of oral history collections "explor[ing] . . .[and] experiment[ing] with emerging frameworks in order to find more effective and meaningful ways to connect users/researchers to their powerful interviews" (Boyd & Larson, 2014, p.5). Hardy and Portelli's (1999) digital aural essay titled *I Can Almost See the Lights of Home: A Field Trip to Harlan County, Kentucky*, in which oral testimonies were counterpoised with reflexive dialogue between the researchers in a kind of aural montage, was a pioneering example of innovation in oral history and digital scholarship (Boyd & Larson, 2014). The early 2000s saw projects such as Bunt's (2001, cited in Arthur, 2007) interactive documentary *Halfeti – Only Fish Shall Visit,* which was structured around oral history interviews. Users navigated the documentary using a map interface, as if they were exploring the ancient Turkish town that was the subject of the documentary (Arthur, 2007). More recently, initiatives like the Quipu Project are using innovative means to record, preserve and share oral testimonies. Between late 2013 and early 2018, the Quipu project used a phone line to reach victims of a forced sterilisation programme in Peru in the 1990s and record their stories for the first time. The recordings were then uploaded to an interactive web site where visitors to the site can listen to the testimonies and record their own messages of solidarity (Quipu Project, n.d.; Cahill, 2018). While not all oral history projects are as experimental in their approach, there is no doubt that oral history projects nowadays are for the most part *digital* projects, and the line between oral history and digital humanities is largely disappearing. Boyd and Larson (2014, p.10) continue,

> "To those who have long had a foot in both worlds . . . the connections are clear and abundant. In fact, three of the tenets oral historians hold most dear—collaboration, a democratic impulse, and public scholarship—are also three of the leading concerns often cited by digital humanists. Add to this the interdisciplinary (or multidisciplinary) nature of both methodologies, together with the importance of contextualization/curation, and one finds that the two camps have more in common than they would have to separate them."

For the GLAM sector, the social dimension of digital cultural heritage repositories is becoming increasingly important, with "'[a]ccess'. . . being redefined to include the provision of opportunities for active public participation through co-creation, and the promotion of cultural diversity and inclusiveness" (Burgess & Klaebe, 2009). The ways in which cultural heritage institutions can harness technology to provide better access to their collections, how they manage these digital collections, and the strategic issues involved has been an enduring topic of discussion for GLAM and information professionals over the past twenty years. Now, that discourse is increasingly focused on the question of use and users: how digital tools, such as Web 2.0 technologies, narrative technology and virtual reality, can be used by cultural heritage institutions to enable more meaningful user engagement with collections, as well as how they can contribute to positive social outcomes such as greater social inclusion and increased social capital (Murzyn-Kupisz & Dzialek, 2013). Liew (2014, p.3) writes,

> "There is interest among the cultural heritage institutions in going beyond the traditional digital library model of merely providing access to information and moving towards models which support the provision of novel ways to allow users to engage with the material for intellectual work, as well as provide support for collaboration and facilitating communities of practice. . . A desired goal is to design and reconstruct digital libraries as interactive and in a socially-situated context."

Transforming cultural heritage institutions into more responsive, dynamic and fluid entities, designed around the practices, activities and needs of the community, is considered critical for their sustainability (Liew, 2014). Arts and cultural organisations are under constant pressure to be accountable for public funding and to demonstrate measurable, positive social impact; furthermore, diversification of the information environment means that heritage organisations must adapt to stay relevant. A 2013 report on the sustainability of digital libraries stated, "As the web only continues to grow and provide many alternative information sources for those who seek them, developing robust strategies not just for 'passive' discovery but for 'active' outreach may be called for" (in Green & Lampron, 2017, p.761).

One important element of success for any digital collection is promotion. As Arthur (2007, p.138) put it, ". . . there are wonderful new possibilities [for] history to engage in new ways with the public and to greatly expand its audiences. But underlying this good news there is still the basic challenge of enticing people to the point of entry". The oral history community are increasingly using online means to promote their collections and increase public awareness through the use of social media, video

platforms, blogs and other media. For instance, the British Library regularly posts articles related to its oral history collections to its sound and vision blog, and a Twitter feed dedicated to British Library Oral History is a lively and informal platform for promotion and discussion. Increasingly, multiple media are being used by a single project to disseminate oral history interviews to as wide an audience as possible. In the case of the Quipu Project, its output is not limited to the interactive documentary and archive, but also includes a short documentary film released by the Guardian, and a trailer for the project uploaded to YouTube.

Evaluating digital collections

The ways in which the interfaces for digital oral history collections, and digital collections in general are designed is fundamental to the discoverability of these collections, as well as their ability to meaningfully engage a wide audience, provide space for interaction and collaboration, be inclusive, and facilitate learning, teaching and scholarship. In order to understand how these aspects of digital collections are leveraged, systematic, evaluative research is required. A critical understanding of current practices will benefit the evolution of digital collections; as Hariri and Norouzi (2011, p.699) argue with regard to digital libraries (DLs), "[e]valuation is an essential requirement for answering the important questions "what is a good DL?" or "how can we make DLs better?"" In the digital library literature there are major gaps in evaluation research, and many evaluation studies are largely usability studies (Hariri & Norouzi, 2011).

When it comes to digital oral history, "the success of contemporary oral history projects is now regularly being measured by metrics pertaining to accessibility, discovery, engagement, usability, reuse, and a project's impact on both community and on scholarship" (Boyd & Larson, 2014, p.14). Discrete pieces of information exist on the ways individual projects have employed innovative digital technologies to increase access and engagement with oral testimonies, yet there is no overarching picture of the characteristics and general landscape of digital oral history collections worldwide. Consequently, there is little discourse on what exactly makes a good digital oral history collection, or how they can be improved. By investigating current practices in the presentation of oral history collections online, we can come to a better understanding of where we are, and where to go next.

Custodial responsibility and ethics

The seismic shift away from traditional modes of information access has profound implications for the power dynamic in the relationships between archive, document and user. Perks (2009, p.74) writes,

> "access to oral history data via the web completely transforms this guardianship relationship, which naturally makes us very uncomfortable as creators and curators, partly because we fear a marginalisation of our own role as conduit, explainer and interpreter. Online access to oral history interviews in their entirety sidesteps the archivist-gatekeeper and we now agonise about what we can do to reintroduce our presence through contextual information, site user agreements, copyright warnings, passworded access and other registration procedures."

In particular, the ethical and legal implications of networked access to oral history have been a subject of considerable critical reflection by practitioners in the field. The nature of oral history creates ethical challenges distinct from those relating to other types of archival material: ". . . oral testimony can pose ethical challenges that are perhaps more emotionally charged than other media – about whose voices are heard, the wide range of comment and reflection on the actions and characters of those described, and the perspectives that they present in the interviews" (Stewart and Brown, 2017, p.239).

Recording agreements signed by interviewees in the pre-Internet age can pose legal issues as they do not explicitly give consent for interviews to be uploaded to the web. In some cases, archivists have gone to great lengths to contact original chroniclers to ask their permission before making their testimonies available online (Perks, 2009, Larson, 2013). Organisations make themselves vulnerable to litigation by publishing sensitive oral history material online, and must be especially vigilant to avoid publishing material that contains defamatory or slanderous content. The ethical challenges are perhaps even more difficult to navigate. As Larson (2013, p.42) puts it,

> "The essential question is this: even if a program has clear copyright to an interview, does it have an ethical right to do anything it likes with that oral history, even if the chronicler could not have foreseen a particular possible use? From an ethical standpoint, what does it mean to put interviews online that were completed decades before the Web was even a twinkle in a Silicon Valley eye?"

Archivists and oral historians have also fretted about the potential for oral history to be misused or abused when it is "instantly accessible and easily manipulated" (Thomson, 2007, p.69), and even becoming the target of government surveillance or 'fishing expeditions' for personal data (Gluck, 2013; Perks, 2009), though "the general sense is that online researchers may be more likely to misappropriate oral histories out of ignorance than through any intent of malice" (Larson, 2013, p.45). Some repositories have attempted to mitigate such problems through interface design and content; for

example, instituting protective rights statements, mandatory site user agreements, and providing information about how the material can be used ethically.

These issues also have implications for the oral history discipline at a fundamental level. Technology is changing both the purpose and product of oral history, and perhaps also changing the way narrators speak with oral historians and remember their lives (Sheftel & Zembrzycki, 2017). For instance, "how does knowing that an interview may end up online affect what a narrator tells us?" (Sheftel & Zembrzycki, 2017, p.106) While the Internet may in some respects help to democratise information, "it might also, in a countervailing tendency, discourage frank and open exchanges in the interview itself" (Sheftel & Zembrzycki, 2017, p.106).

Existing surveys of online oral history

Only a handful of systematic, empirical studies have been conducted to gain a broad perspective of current practices in the provision of digital oral history. These studies indicate that there has previously been great variety in the way organisations provide access to oral history online. A survey by Brewster (2000) assessed 64 predominantly American oral history websites, finding a wide variety in the extent of oral history material provided by each site and how each site treated permissions and copyright issues. Very few sites included protective measures such as instructions on respectful use of the material or access provisions. A similar study in the UK found that few websites hosting oral history had full audio interviews or complete transcripts available. Only a third of the eighty-three sites providing direct access to oral history content had addressed issues of copyright and permissions in any way, and only four sites addressed ethical issues by controlling access to the material through either physical access controls or compulsory site user agreements (McIntyre, 2006)[1]. Neither of these studies addressed aspects of promotion, marketing or audience engagement. And technological innovation in the field of oral history is a moving frontier, where modes of accessing digital oral history resources are ever-changing (Frisch, 2006). Stewart (2010) has called for an update to these surveys to capture a snapshot of how oral histories are published on the web today.[2]

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[1] McIntyre, H. (2006). Web-based Oral History in the UK: A Study. Obtained through personal correspondence with Rob Perks, September 2018.

[2] Stewart, M. (2010). Unveiling the biography of the oral history archive. Unpublished paper presented to *16th International Oral History Conference* (Prague, 2010), and to *Oral History and the Sense of Legacy Conference,* organised by the Centre for Public History, Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology (Bengaluru, India, July 2011). Obtained through personal correspondence with Mary Stewart, August 2018.

Conclusions

In the words of Elinor Mazé (2014, p.155), "oral history is an enterprise of inestimable value" - for the alternative perspective it brings to our understandings of the past, as well as its power to bring communities together and create a sense of shared identity, promote social inclusion, and support democratic knowledge creation. In this digital age, the ways in which communities are able to access and interact with oral testimonies in a digital environment are key to fulfilling the potential of oral history. Evidently, the tools and technologies exist to exploit the full power of this medium. Yet we have little understanding of how oral history is faring online, or where improvements need to be made. The proposed research sought to explore questions like: what types of digital oral history collections are currently available? How are they making oral history material accessible to users? How are they encouraging users to meaningfully engage with oral history collections? How are they getting across issues of copyright and ethical use of oral history to their users?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

The study used directed content analysis to systematically examine the content and features of web oral history collections. This involved collecting both quantitative and qualitative data from a sample of websites. Content analysis is "a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1954, cited in Bryman, 2016, p.284). As modes of communication, "websites and web pages lend themselves prima facie to content analysis" and the method is commonly used in web analysis (Herring, 2010, p.234). Other advantages include its flexibility, ability to generate rich data from a small sample, and ability to generate quantitative as well as qualitative data (Berg, 2009; Leedy & Ormrod, 2012). In addition, practical considerations contributed to this methodological decision; content analysis has the advantages of being an unobtrusive method, and does not require access to information not already in the public domain (Bryman, 2016).

3.2 Sample

The scope of the study is limited to analysis of digital oral history collections created by organisations in English-speaking countries. The unit of analysis was individual websites containing digital oral history collections or showcasing specific oral history projects. The sites were selected using purposive sampling. Twenty sites for inclusion were identified in a preliminary scoping review. Further sites were selected using information within oral history journals and publications, Google searches, and the DigitalNZ database for local sites. Random sampling was considered unfeasible for this research because of the time involved in located every website hosting digital oral history collections, then selecting a random sample from this subset. Instead, any site that meets the selection criteria was included in the sample as it was discovered, with the aim of identifying 40-50 sites. This was considered a manageable sample size for the time available in which to conduct the research. Due to time constraints, 44 sites were identified and 40 of these in total were analysed.

Sites were included in the sample if they meet the following criteria:

- The site was created by an organisation engaged in disseminating primary oral history resources
- The site provided direct online access to oral history collections held by the institution as audio and/or textual resources.

3.3 Limitations and delimitations

– Sites which contain information about oral history collections held by the institution, without making actual collection material accessible online, were not included in the sample. This was because the research focused on how original oral history testimonies are published online. The content of online catalogues or finding aids that describe oral history material, or mentions of oral history collections within institutional websites, is out of scope for this project.

– The sample was limited to digital oral history collections in the English language, or largely in English.

– The sample was necessarily limited to publicly available sites. Sites where access is restricted to particular user groups, e.g. university students, were not included.

– The analysis was limited to online content. Therefore, data collected about promotional strategies, for example, could not include physical promotional tools that organisations might deploy. As such, some aspects of the results may not be complete.

As a result of these limitations and delimitations, and the exploratory nature of this project, the research findings are not representative of all current web-based oral history collections. However, the sample was considered large and diverse enough to be able to draw some valid conclusions about current presentations of oral history online.

3.4 Ethical considerations

The study only involved analysis of information in the public domain so no ethical considerations applied.

3.5 Data collection

Data collection involved gathering quantitative and qualitative data about the presence, absence and quantity of specific features and content, for example, the number of items in the collection, the types of metadata present and types of supporting written materials; the promotional strategies employed, such as blogs or social media pages; and the tools used to enhance audience engagement with the material provided, such as the presence of participatory features. A framework for data collection was established

to ensure the collected data aligned with the research objectives. An iterative process of directed content analysis was used, and a directed approach where both deductive and inductive codes are applied to the sample was chosen to make use of existing knowledge while maintaining an open approach to data collection (Leedy & Ormrod, 2012; Drisko & Maschi, 2015). Preliminary codes and categories were derived for the initial scoping review from previous empirical research into the features and content of digital oral history collections (Brewster, 2000; McIntyre, 2006), and from the wider discourse on the presentation of oral history online by Perks (2009), Gluck (2014) and others. For instance, McIntyre's (2006) codes to denote different types of oral history content (e.g. 'interview summary'; 'audio clips') were used as a starting point. Codes and categories were expanded and refined as the data collection proceeded, and during subsequent rounds of inductive coding. Inductive coding involved recording any recurring features present in the digital collections not captured by deductive codes. Attribute codes captured descriptive elements such as the name of the organisation, and the type of site i.e. collection database, online exhibition, to give context for later analysis and interpretation (Saldaña, 2011). All data were stored in Microsoft Excel.

3.6 Data analysis

The nature of content analysis is such that data collection and data analysis are not clearly delineated; Basit (2003, p.145, in Saldaña, 2011) states, "coding and analysis are not synonymous, though coding is a crucial aspect of analysis". Data collection using this technique involved some level of data analysis, as first stage deductive and inductive codes were applied to sites. Some categories subsequently underwent additional rounds of coding to refine initial codes or to create new ones to assist analysis. For example, magnitude coding was applied to data in the category 'number of oral history items available' to assess the relative sizes of each web archive. Four levels of this category were determined; 0-100 items (small), 101-1000 items (medium), 1001-10,000 items (large), and 10,000+ items (very large). These codes were then used to compare among online archives of varying sizes. Once coding had been achieved, analysis had a quantitative leaning. Quantitative data on the presence, absence and frequencies of deductively and inductively coded features were tabulated in Microsoft Excel, and extensive colour-coding was employed to draw out patterns in the sample. Appendix 1 illustrates the process of coding and analysing the discoverability features within the sampled sites.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of the investigation are organised into four major sections which align with the four research objectives, and discussion follows on naturally from the results in the same section. Results and discussion about the content, information structures, discoverability and modes of access within the sample sites are first addressed; followed by results and discussion relating to the way organisations are encouraging users to meaningfully engage with digital oral history collections online; then looking at how online oral history collections were promoted by organisations; and finally, how issues of copyright and ethics were dealt with. Before addressing these objectives we first turn to the basic characteristics of the sample.

4.1 Who is providing online access to oral history?

A range of organisations were found to be providing online access to oral history. These organisations broadly fell into nine categories. National or state libraries and archives made up the largest proportion of the sample (20%). Research institutes and archives operating out of universities, and professional bodies, were the next most common (12-13%), followed by museums, public libraries, and non-governmental organisations/charities (10%).

Figure 1
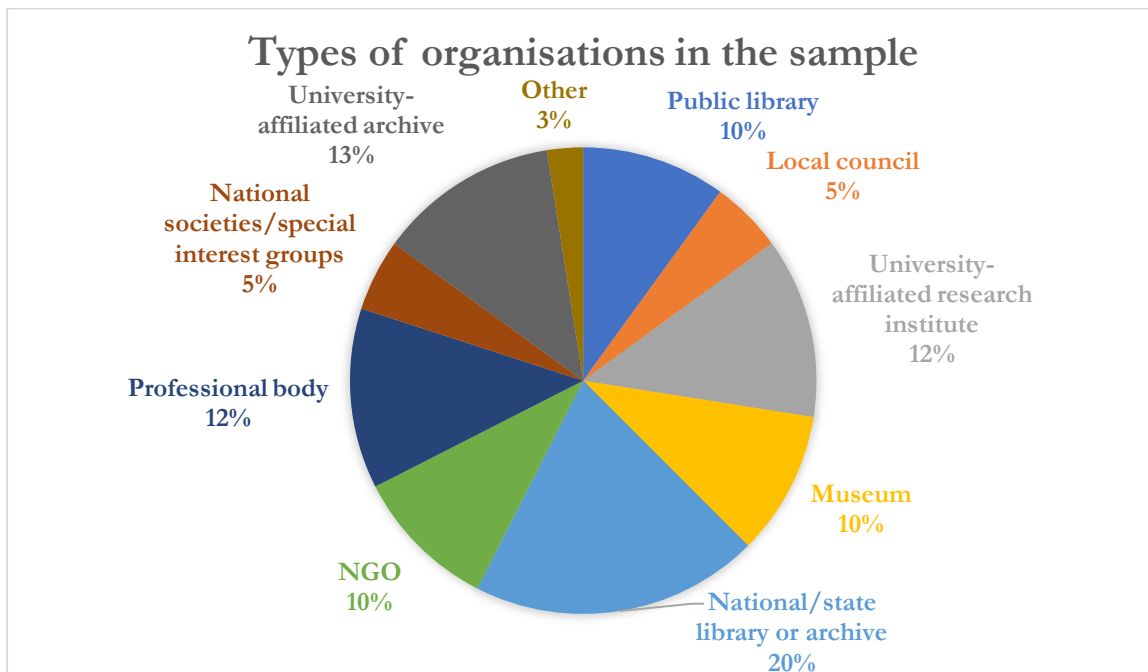
Organisations categorised as university-affiliated research institutes encompass oral history research centres housed within and funded by universities, such as the Centre for Popular Memory at the University of Cape Town, the Historical Archives of the European Union at the European University Institute, and the Concordia University Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling. By contrast, those categorised as university-affiliated archives are archives directly administered by a university (usually run through the university library), such as the University of Alaska Fairbanks Project Jukebox, and the Caltech Institute of Technology Archives. Professional bodies included professional associations, such as the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects, or other organisations representing a professional group like the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. The single organisation categorised as 'other' represented a website presenting the results of a student oral history project about the Occupy movement in Chicago. The sites originated in the following countries: New Zealand, United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Singapore, and South Africa, and several multi-national organisations were also represented.

Figure 2
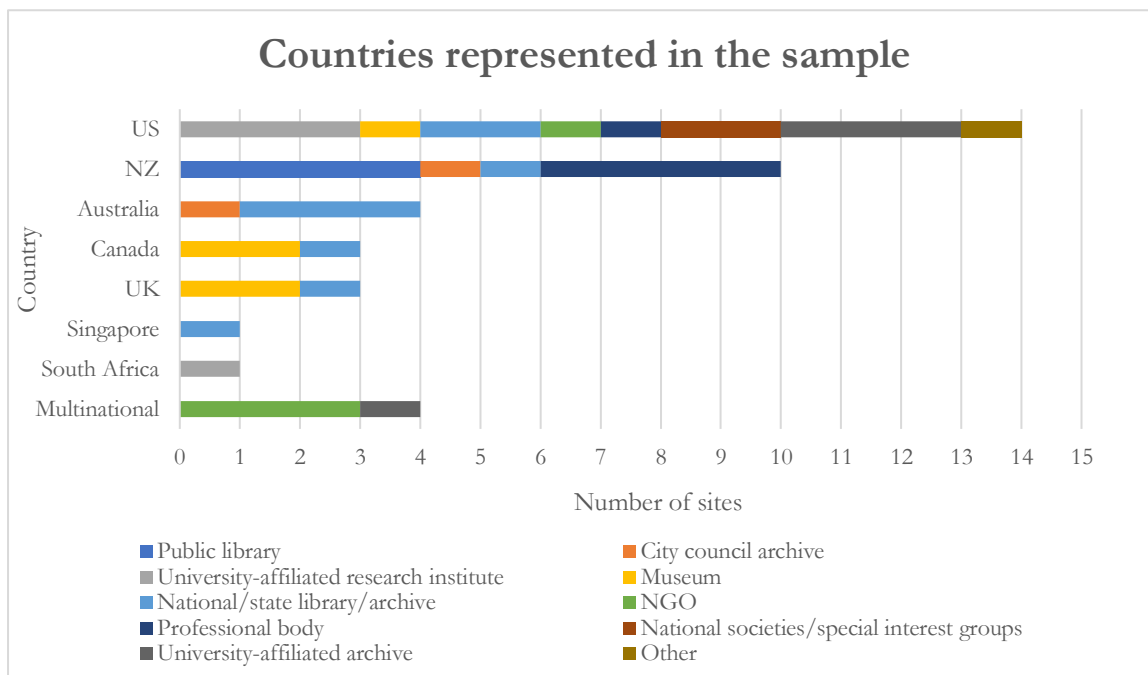
4.2 Content, structures and modes of access

Research objective 1: *Explore the current landscape of digital oral history collections: their organisation, contents and the modes of access available to users.*

High-level categories of digital oral history archives

Two main types of web oral history archive were present in the sample; catalogue-based collection databases provided by larger collecting institutions such as national libraries, archives and museums, and simpler websites often created by alternative heritage organisations such as NGOs or professional bodies presenting the output of a specific oral history project.

22 sites were categorised as digital collection databases, most of which were run by libraries, archives and museums. These sites often had large amounts of oral history content available, and 59% (13) of them also contained other types of digital content such as photographs, manuscripts and video. The primary point of entry to these portals was through online catalogues and in many cases finding aids were also available. Sometimes the oral history material was accessible directly within the finding aid, as in the case of the State Library of Queensland's digital oral history collections. Other times, the finding aid and or/catalogue was simply the point of discovery, and actual access to oral history interviews was through a separate module. For example, in the case of the National Library of Australia, once the user has found the finding aid to an oral history interview through the NLA catalogue, they click on a link which takes them to the material in a specialised oral history module in Trove.

By and large these digital collection databases had advanced search functionality, with users able to search within multiple metadata fields and filter results. These sites were usually active with new material periodically being added to the digital collections. It was also observed that the institutions who provided oral histories via these digital collection portals were more likely to engage in promotion of oral history collections, compared to organisations who used more simple websites to present oral history.

18 sites were categorised as basic websites. These sites were mostly showcasing specific projects, sometimes a single project, and usually had minimal search functionality. They were often inactive sites and many of them did not appear to have been updated since their initial creation. Most of the organisations who were responsible for these websites did not promote the oral history material on an ongoing basis, despite the continuing value of the oral history material presented.

The following chart outlines the types of sites used by the different types of organisations. Unsurprisingly, organisations who are most likely to have significant resources already dedicated to digital collection management (e.g. national or state libraries, archives, museums and university archives) presented their digitised or born-digital oral history collections via sophisticated collection databases. Conversely, those organisations whose main purpose was not collecting and disseminating cultural heritage, and who may be less likely to have sustainable funding for these activities, tended to present

their oral history collections or projects via simple websites – for example, professional bodies or associations, non-governmental organisations or charities, and local councils.

Figure 3
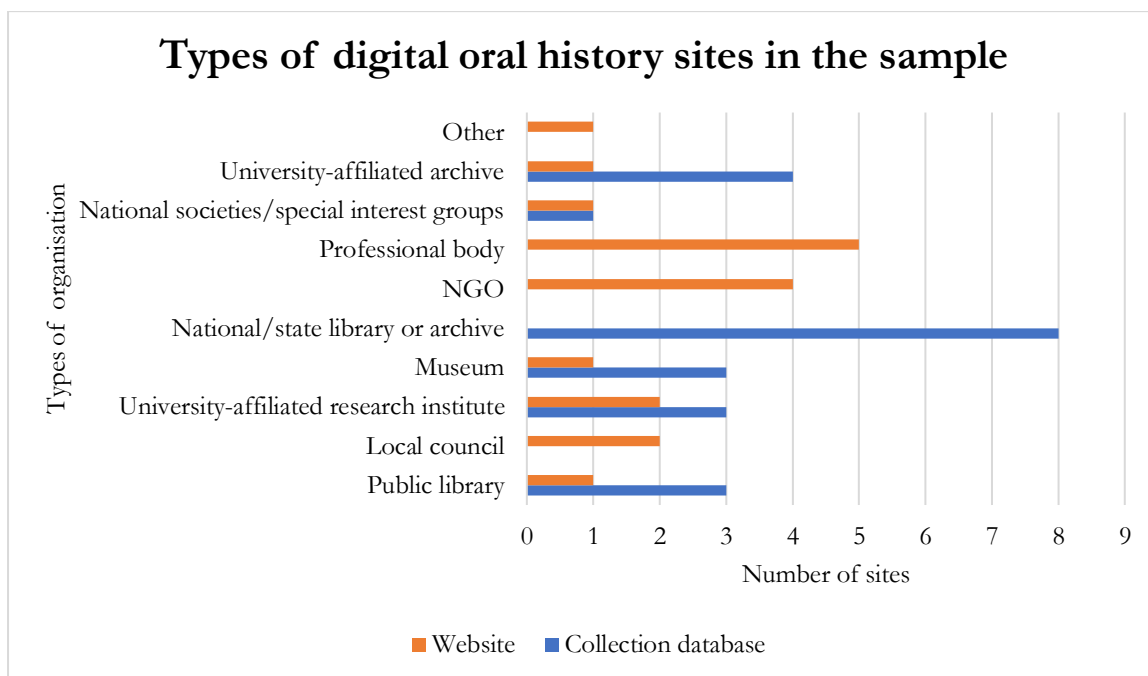
Types of oral history content

Two-thirds of sites in the sample provided web access to full-length oral history interviews; a further quarter provided audio clips, while 5% provided no audio at all, instead presenting only written oral history content such as transcripts and interview summaries. Compared with McIntyre's (2006)[3] findings, which showed only three out of 85 surveyed sites in the UK providing access to full audio interviews, there was a great deal more original source material available suggesting that online access to oral history has progressed considerably in the past decade, and that a 'return to aurality' (Boyd, 2014; Gluck, 2014; Tebeau, 2013) has been realised at least to some extent. It is clear that progress to transcribe interviews and make the transcriptions available is still ongoing for many organisations and is one of the major challenges, with only a little more than half of sites providing transcripts. Several sites which provided audio material without transcripts noted that transcription was planned and that these documents would be made available once complete. In most cases transcripts were only available as downloadable pdfs, rather than being digitally linked to the audio material.

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[3] McIntyre, H. (2006). Web-based Oral History in the UK: A Study. Obtained through personal correspondence with Rob Perks, September 2018.

Several more categories of oral history material were found additionally to the categories put forward by McIntyre. A quarter of sites provided a biographical note about each interviewee separate from general interview summaries, and a significant number of sites provided timed indexes or abstracts to enable users to more easily find points of interest within the audio files. Eight per cent of sites also provided supplementary information about projects; for example, their funding partners, project team, and methodology. A third of sites were providing at least some of the oral history content as video interviews; 5 sites provided only video interviews, while eight further sites provided a mixture of video interviews and audio interviews.

Figure 4

Categories of oral history material presented
NB: sites may include more than one type
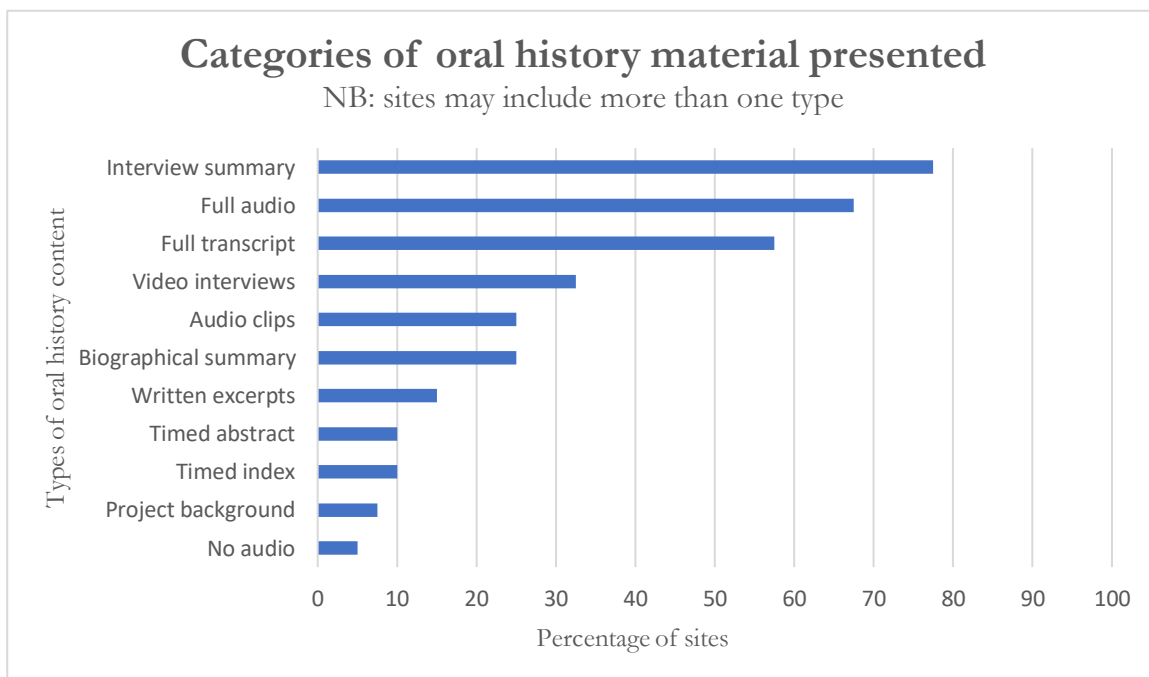
The use of audiovisual streaming platforms such as Youtube, Vimeo and Soundcloud was notable with eight sites employing these platforms. In most instances the third-party content was embedded within the organisation's own website or database. For example, the site for the Tibet Oral History Project presented each individual's testimony on its own webpage, giving an interviewee profile, interview details and summary, a link to download the pdf transcript, with an embedded Youtube video below this presenting the interview itself. One advantage of using existing streaming platforms to present oral history content is that the content is also searchable and available within those external sites; any Youtube user searching for oral history material could find these organisations' content, so the potential audience is broader. Additionally, for organisations with limited funding for oral history projects, using

an existing service that can be embedded within their own site would no doubt be a cheaper and easier option.

Use of digital media and software

The use of software and interfaces which link together audio and written oral history material through digital indexing was relatively low in this sample. Four sites used the Oral History Metadata Synchroniser; these were the Louie B. Nunn Oral History Center (from which the OHMS originates); the website for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' oral history project *From Latin America to Hollywood: Latino Film Culture in Los Angeles 1967-2017*; the Brooklyn Historical Society; and the Baylor University Institute for Oral History. In all cases the OHMS software was a very effective way to enhance access to the material. One advantage of the OHMS is that all elements of an oral history interview are present within a single interface. The audio or video content is displayed alongside the index and transcript, which the user can toggle between. OHMS can be embedded within a catalogue-based collection database, or a static website. In this sample, three of the organisations employing the OHMS embedded it within their collection portals, while the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences embedded the OHMS interface into their oral history project website to great effect. A handful of other sites used other methods and software for timed indexing; for instance, the WWII Museum, which uses similar software to link subject headings to video content, enabling users to jump to specific segments in the interview. The National Library of Australia developed a specialised audio delivery system for oral history within the digital portal Trove that allows the user to navigate between different topics in an interview at the click of a button (Bradley, 2014). Though only a handful of sites in the sample had implemented these technologies which allow non-linear, flexible access to original source material, it is encouraging to see these technologies starting to be used by a variety of organisations. It signals a slow-moving yet important shift away from dichotomous 'raw' versus 'cooked' modes of access (Frisch, 2011), the 'raw' being unmediated, original and unmapped source material, accessed in a linear fashion through static repositories, and the 'cooked' being polished documentary presentations of oral history as podcasts, radio programmes, films or exhibitions. New modes of digital access which allow diverse user groups – such as students, scholars, teachers, filmmakers, curators, and the general public – to go "messin' in the kitchen", empowered to find their own meanings and interpretations in oral testimonies, is what Frisch (2011, p.130) advocates for, though the results indicate that this is yet to be realised in the majority of digital oral history projects and archives. Two major issues highlighted in the literature are those of sustainable funding and software interoperability. "[O]ral and public historians are quite hesitant about adopting tools that offer no . . . guarantee of long life" (High, Mills & Zembrzycki, 2012, p.398), and funding structures often mean an initial outlay of money is used to develop the project

but further funding for project maintenance is difficult to obtain (High, Mills & Zembrzycki, 2012).

Figure 5: Use of OHMS by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

Figure 6: User interface for oral history material in Trove

Figure 7: Brooklyn Historical Society oral history user interface

Structural and organisational features

There were discernible patterns to the way oral history material was arranged within websites. Many of the sites arranged the material in a flat structure, where all interviews were shown in alphabetical order in a grid or list formation, and clicking on one of the interviews leads to another webpage where the content can be streamed or downloaded. This 'flat' structure was the most typical for the sites with small numbers of interviews available. Some sites had a two-tiered structure, where a list of projects, collections, or topics/themes was shown as an initial point of entry, then subsequent webpages showed the corresponding interviews. Some of the larger sites, generally those with large collection databases, arranged oral history material like all other content in an archival, hierarchical tree structure with a collection record, parent records and child records. Some sites offered a variety of points of entry into the content, for example, options to see all interviews, browse by topic, or conduct an advanced search (Fig. 8). Multi-linear, multi-modal access predominated in the large collection databases in the sample which provided numerous options for searching and browsing material. By contrast, static websites had fewer modalities for access available, which was unsurprising considering that their primary interest is "less likely to be with wholesale web access for open-ended exploration" (Frisch, 2006, p.105) and more to do with making available the output of a specific oral history project. Eighteen per cent of sites

included the capacity to directly search within audio and textual oral history material, or had indexed the content of the oral history material so that the site's search engine drilled down into the content itself, as well as into the metadata in the catalogue record or finding aid.

Figure 8: Multiple modes of access to Louie B. Nunn collections
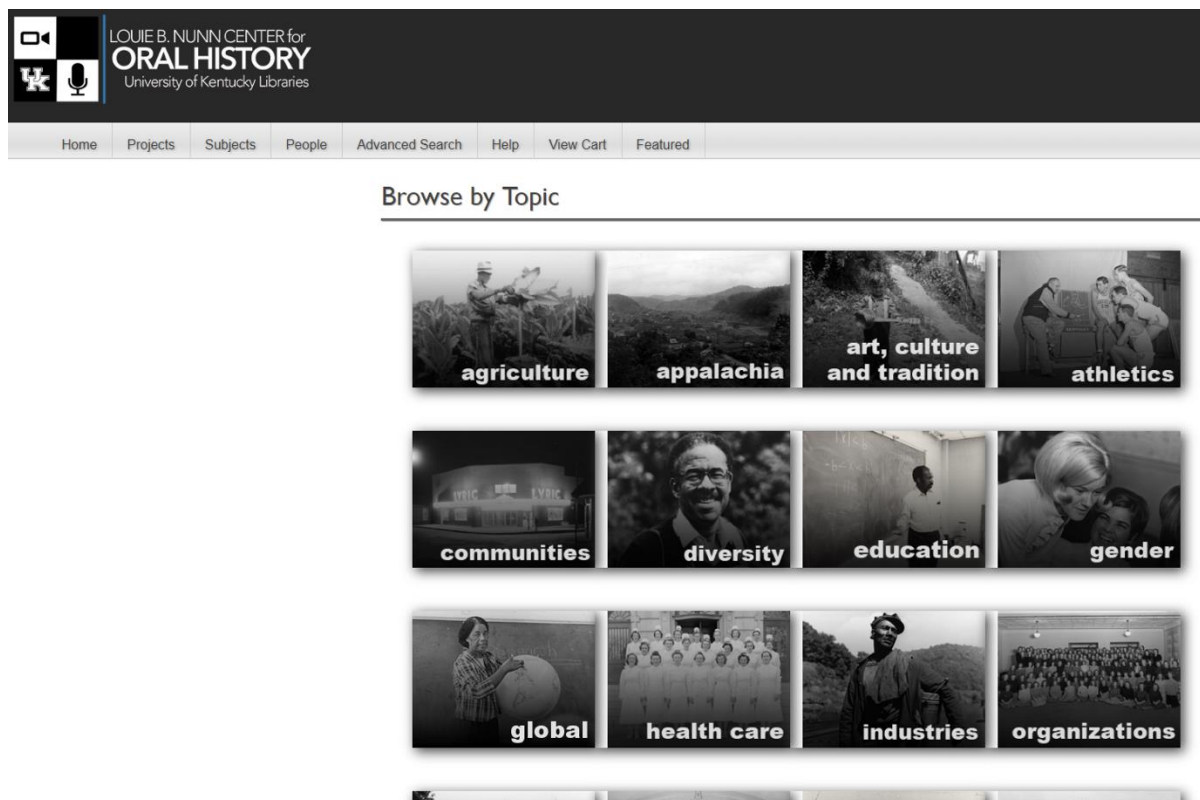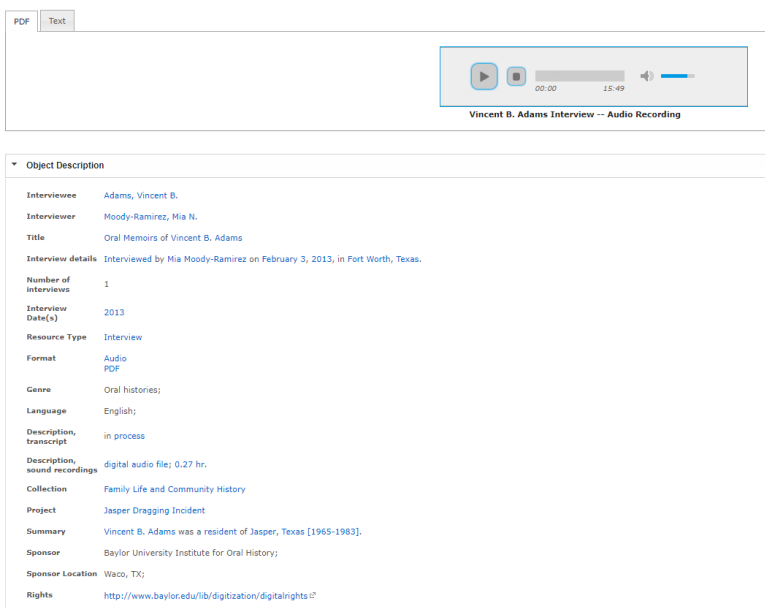
Figure 9
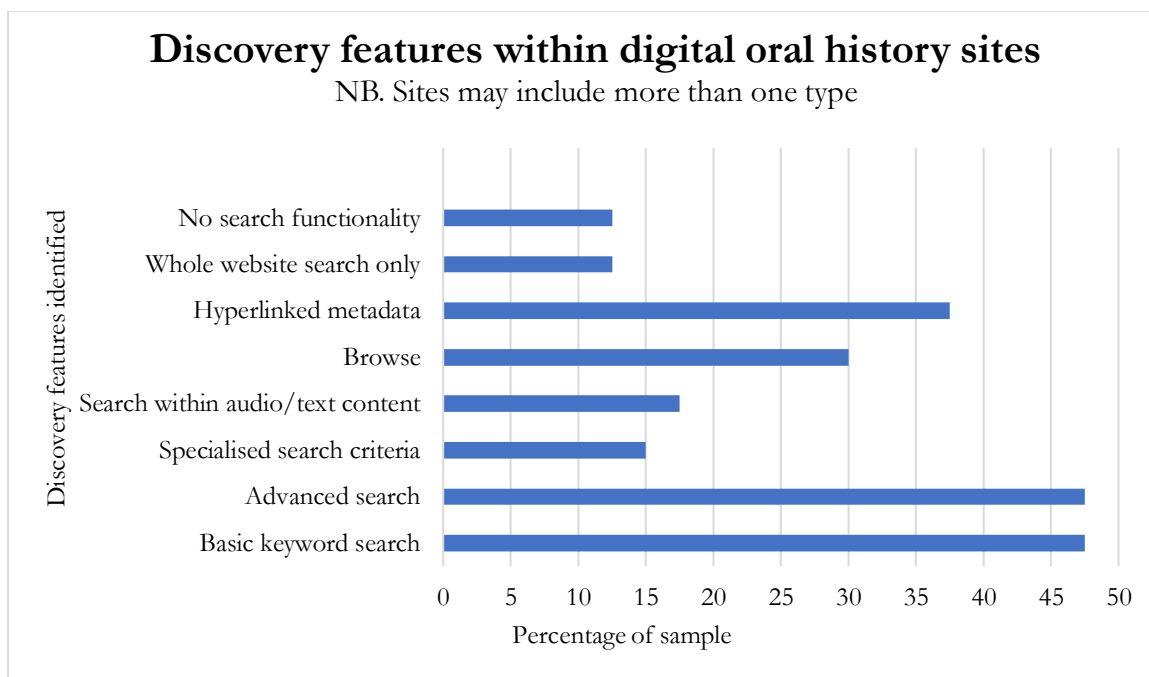
Metadata and contextualising information
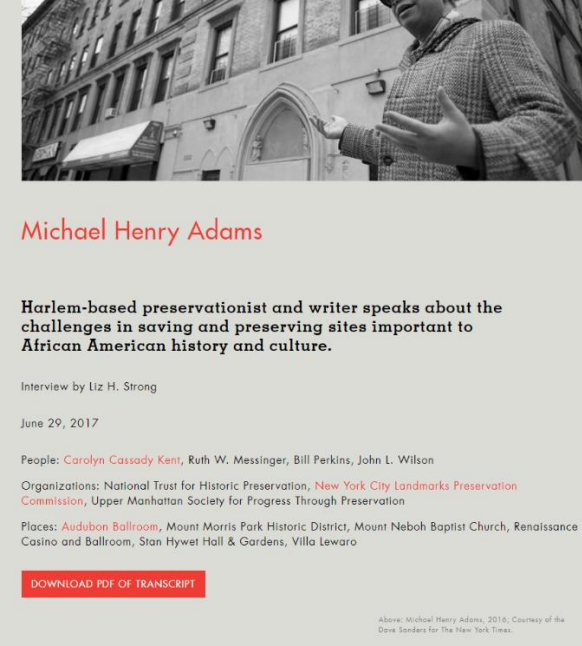
Most sites presented at least some metadata alongside the interviews, with large collection databases hosting a variety of content formats tending to have the richest metadata, though not necessarily the most useful for users looking specifically for oral history material, as the metadata tended to be more general rather than specific to oral history collections. That said, in large databases the use of general metadata means that searching and browsing is not limited to oral history content, which can be desirable as it allows users to discover oral history content serendipitously, or without having existing knowledge about the presence of oral history material in the database. Linked metadata, where the user can click on a subject or place term within one record and see all records including that term, maximises this capacity for serendipitous discovery, and was utilised by a third of the sampled sites to varying extents. For example, Baylor Institute for Oral History's digital collection makes heavy use of hyperlinking (Fig. 10). Some sites made effective use of hyperlinks to lead users to more information about specific places, people or organisations, such as the New York Preservation Archive Project which has created resources about specific places, people and organisations related to preservation, then linked those resource pages to relevant oral history records (Fig. 11). Other sites did not use any hyperlinking; this hindered the ability to discover related material, and reduced 'flow' within the collections, as changing the thread of a search required going back to the beginning and starting another search using new search terms.

Figure 10: Baylor Institute item richly hyperlinked

Figure 11: NYPAP oral history item with link to related place 'Audubon Ballroom'

Above: Michael Henry Adams, 2016; Courtesy of the Dave Sanders for The New York Times.

Above: The Audubon Ballroom, circa May 1917; Courtesy of Once Upon a Town.

Some of the sites which were solely dedicated to oral history had very specific and useful metadata, much of which was linked and searchable. For instance, some of the metadata used by the Tibet Oral History Project, which provides a wealth of first-hand testimony about the Chinese occupation of Tibet in the 1950s, included the name of the interviewee, their date of birth, birthplace, year they left Tibet, their profession, whether they were a monk or nun, whether they were a political prisoner, location of the interview and subject keywords, all information which is unique to that particular project and enhances researchers' ability to understand the wider context of the testimony. Similarly, the University of California Shoah Foundation archive which provides online access to the testimonies of victims of genocide, uses highly specific metadata alongside basic descriptors like dates and interviewee/interviewer name, including religious identity prewar/postwar, ghetto, location of liberation, alias, and whether the interviewee was a participant in war crimes trials.

19 out of 40 sites presented a portrait photograph of each interviewee either on the page where users select from a list or array of items, or on individual item pages. A few sites included other related photographs, or other formats of material such as maps. For example, the site for the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project presented interviews with other artists who knew Rauschenberg, showing photographs of the interviewee as well as images of their own art to contextualise the interview. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences showed photographs of the participant in the process of being interviewed for the oral history project.

 The inclusion of rich metadata, including information related to the context in which an oral history interview occurred, is considered by some oral history practitioners as crucial. British Library Oral History Curator Mary Stewart advocates for presenting oral history not in isolation, disembodied from its context, but actively making visible what she terms the "biography of the archive": the "interconnected factors driving its past and current work such as the politics of the institution, funding sources and the beliefs and practices of archivists themselves"[4]. She argues that each individual oral history project also has its own unique biography: "its primary research purpose or historical brief, the nature and demands of the funder, the selection of both interviewers and interviewees and the relationships between the interviewing team" (p.4). Most sites surveyed for this research did provide a reasonable amount of contextualising information such as the date and place of recording, the name of the interviewer and other contributors like videographers, and in some cases information relating to history of the item within the archive such as the accession date, arrangement notes, processing notes, provenance, and information about the project such as its sponsors, methodology and contributors, historical notes, and motivation for the project. The University of Alaska Fairbanks Project Jukebox website provides extensive contextual information on its project pages (Fig. 12). For instance, the homepage of the NN Cannery History project gives historical background to the project, shows a map of relevant places, a photograph of the cannery, the purpose of the project, names the sponsors, and provides links to external related content.

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[4] Stewart, M. (2010). Unveiling the biography of the oral history archive. Unpublished paper presented to *16th International Oral History Conference* (Prague, 2010), and to *Oral History and the Sense of Legacy Conference,* organised by the Centre for Public History, Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology (Bengaluru, India, July 2011). Obtained through personal correspondence with Mary Stewart, August 2018.

Figure 12: Homepage for the NN Cannery oral history project (Project Jukebox)

Discoverability problems

Some difficulties with discoverability were noted. One problem is that some sites have categorised sound recordings of other types as oral histories. For example, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision's catalogue has applied the tag 'oral histories' to other kinds of audio items like speeches, making it difficult to filter out irrelevant items. Some sites, such as the Centre for Popular Memory's database, present each part of a multi-part oral history interview as a separate record, which also complicates discovery, especially if these separate records are not linked as related items. It is easier for users to have a single initial entry point then split the record into multiple audio and/or textual objects if necessary, or at least to make each part obvious as related items.

4.3 Engagement, participation and collaboration

Research objective 2: *Examine the ways in which institutions providing access to digital oral history collections are enabling audiences to meaningfully engage with them, including opportunities for participation and collaboration.*

Web 2.0 and other participatory features

Participatory features were common within the sampled sites, with 78% of sites including such features, though they were usually quite superficial or facilitated only one-way interaction rather than meaningful participation or collaboration. The most common participatory feature present in 42.5% (17) of sites was the ability to share oral history content using embedded social media widgets, most commonly with

Facebook and Twitter 'share' or 'like' buttons. Thirty-five per cent of those (6 sites) had no other participatory features. A further five sites which presented oral history content via Youtube, Vimeo or Soundcloud only had the capacity to share content via the functionality within these platforms.

The next most common participatory feature was the ability for users to create sets or curated collections of items, followed by commenting and tagging content. However, the actual use of these features by visitors to the sites appeared low. There was little evidence that oral history sites are inviting and soliciting direct user contributions in forms other than comments, tags or ratings. Five sites allowed users to upload their own content; the Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony invites users to conduct oral history interviews and upload them to the site as part of their Bridging the Gap project, and Upper Hutt City Libraries' Recollect heritage database invites users to upload their own media to the site. An additional six sites invited users to contact the organisation if they wish to submit content.

Figure 13
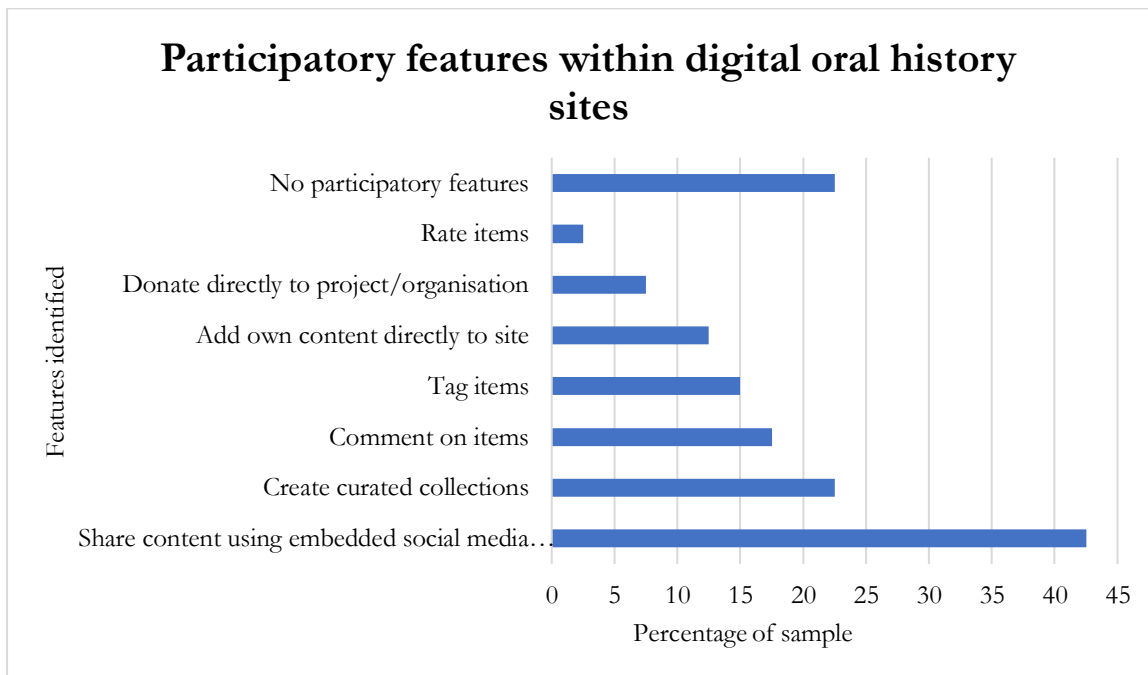
Out of eight sites which deployed three or more participatory features, seven of those were classified as collection databases. The only website with three or more participatory features was the interactive website for the Quipu Project, where users can share content to social media, upload their own message in response to specific oral testimonies, and donate directly to the project online. Four out of the eight most participatory sites were exclusively presenting oral history material; these were the Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony, the Baylor University Institute for Oral History, the National Library of Australia's oral history portal, and the Quipu Project site. Upper Hutt City Libraries, Hamilton City

Libraries, and the State Library of South Australia all used the Recollect interface to present their collections, which includes in its design a variety of user-contribution features such as adding 'recollections' to items, creating user-curated sets, and uploading content to the site. The British Library Sounds user interface also provides a variety of participatory opportunities, providing widgets to tweet, like or share items, and allowing registered users to tag and add notes to items (which can be seen by other users), add items to personal favourites, and add items to playlists.

Nine sites had no participatory features, with five of those being basic websites; this is suggestive of the resourcing constraints many organisations face when undertaking digital heritage projects such as creating online oral history resources, and that including user-contribution features in oral history websites may be unlikely to be prioritised when resources are tight.

Democratising public history

The presence of user-contribution features within the majority of sites reflects the wider trend in the GLAM sector towards relaxing its traditional gatekeeper, curator and interpreter roles. Web 2.0 has been heralded as a bringer of democracy to the cultural heritage sphere, disrupting the hegemony of cultural history by allowing ordinary people to collaborate in the meaning-making process, and "forc[ing] the public historian's hand" towards relaxing their historical authority (Adair, Filene & Koloski, 2011, p.17). "[U]sers now have an ever-increasing number of ways to tag, share, annotate, rearrange, and recontextualize [. . .] digital collections. . . New technologies also make it easier for the community in whose trust the objects are held to help define their meaning and significance— or at least participate in a conversation about them" (MacArthur, 2011, p.56). For the oral history discipline specifically, Chenier (2011) has argued that Web 2.0 features in digital repositories can help revive the grassroots, democratic imperative of oral history, and is particularly important as oral history becomes separated from its original creating organisations and is shifted to institutional archives as a result of revived scholarly interests, as in the case of LGBTQ oral history archives in North America. She writes that "a Web 2.0 environment can facilitate the creation of new research environments that overcome some of the problems associated with loss of a nonhierarchical community-based, not-for-profit framework [. . .] and encourage robust and ongoing community involvement that will strengthen the connection between archives users and archives managers" (Chenier, 2011, p.171). Indeed, much oral history material within the sampled sites originates from a volunteer-run, community-centered, not-for-profit model. Regardless of who is responsible for archiving and controlling access to the oral history collections, it seems proper that the way in which they choose to make them accessible should include the means for ongoing

community contribution. However, the results indicate that the potential for ongoing community contribution remains relatively untapped, with participatory features being largely superficial and in many cases limited to one-way sharing functionality. The question of whether the ability to comment, share, like or tag oral history content in the digital environment is having a meaningful impact on users' engagement with oral history seems ambiguous at best. The results also suggest the tension that exists between the archivist's custodial responsibility and role as 'gatekeeper' (Perks, 2009), and the philosophical and political stance of the oral history discipline as inherently collaborative and participatory.

4.4 Promotion and outreach

Research objective 3: *Explore the strategies these institutions employ to promote their digital oral history collections.*

Promotion of digital oral history

An initial finding when analysing the data related to promotion was that larger collections were not necessarily better promoted than smaller collections. Some of the largest digital oral history collections were not promoted online at all, such as the University of Alaska Fairbanks Project Jukebox, whose Facebook page has not be updated since 2012, despite Project Jukebox's very large collection of over 11,000 interviews. Among the smallest collections, none were actively promoted except for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences project interviewing 12 filmmakers, which was promoted using clips from interviews posted to the Academy's Facebook page, as well as a programme of events – perhaps a reflection of the amount of funding provided for the project. Medium-sized collections holding between 100-10,000 oral history interviews were most commonly and most actively promoted, and there was clear evidence that these institutions were not relying on users finding them and their collections, but engaging in 'active outreach' to attract new audiences. For example, the Smithsonian Archives of American Art oral history collection, containing around 2000 interviews, is promoted via posts to Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr highlighting collection items; the Archives also produces short films in collaboration with ARTnews using oral history material, and at one time produced a podcast about art topics. The State Library of Queensland, which provides online access to about 500 oral histories, uploads oral history clips to Youtube and Facebook, including links directing users to the full items in the collection database.

The most common method of promotion was through social media sites, particularly Facebook and Twitter, with 15 sites employing these platforms for promotion. In cases where the organisation also

collected and disseminated other formats of heritage content, oral history collections or projects were by and large promoted through the primary social media page of the institution, rather than the oral history department or project having its own dedicated social media profile. In most instances oral history was only a very minor presence on these social media pages. A notable exception to this is the British Library, which promotes its large oral history collections via an active Twitter feed dedicated to British Library oral history, in addition to a Sound and Vision blog and an oral history podcast.

Six organisations used blogs to their collections, but for the most part oral history played only a small part in institutional blogs or was mentioned only in one-off 'news' features, such as the blog posts by Wellington City Libraries mentioning the addition of a new oral history project to the website, or the Brooklyn Historical Society's blog post about its new oral history portal. By contrast, the British Library's Sound and Vision blog has a big focus on oral history and uses the site as a vehicle to promote its oral history collections, for example through its 'Recording of the Week' posts, and to present oral history in curated written forms as educational and scholarly resources. Similarly, the Louie B. Nunn Center's active blog promotes the Center by highlighting notable items from the online collections and new additions.

The finding that very small and very large oral history collections were being promoted to a lesser extent than more moderately-sized collections raises questions relating to the challenges involved with maintaining digital collections that require further investigation. One possible reason for this discrepancy is that very small collections do not get promoted because funding and resources are not sufficient or may have been limited to a one-off grant for a single project, and the small size of the collections mean they are not prioritised for promotional activities. At the other end of the scale, very large collections, which for a long time may have been sitting in archives underused and neglected, are unwieldly and difficult to revive when digitised, and so sit on the institution's backburner awaiting the resources for much-needed attention. By contrast, medium-sized collections are large enough to be seen as important to promote, and are allocated funding and staff who carefully grow and manage the collections. Further research which surveys relevant collection managers would be needed to confirm these hypotheses.

Creation of secondary oral history resources

Several organisations were drawing on oral history material in their collections to create secondary resources, such as podcasts, blog posts, and educational resources which present oral history in more 'digestible' forms. Podcasts were a recurring feature in the data, with five organisations in the sample creating podcasts using oral history testimony in their collections: the Archives of Lesbian Oral History

Testimony; the British Library, the Brooklyn Historical Society, the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, and the Louie B. Nunn Center. In the case of the New Zealand Society of Authors' oral history project, podcasts were the chosen format for presenting all of the oral history material. Podcasts are a popular form of 'edutainment', and functioned as promotional tools by widening the audience for oral history and bringing it into the mainstream media.

Five organisations had used oral history interviews from their online collections to develop in-depth educational resources focusing on specific topics of interest. The British Library's new Voices of Art online resource invites visitors to "[e]xplore the art world behind the scenes through life story recordings with artists, curators and writers" (British Library, n.d.). The site uses clips from the Artists' Lives oral history project to explore various themes and form the basis of a series of insightful articles. Voices of Art also includes teaching resources suitable for the British school curriculum. The Digital Classroom section of the National Library of Australia's website includes a module drawing on oral histories with Australian scientists, where students are encouraged to formulate their own interpretations of the testimony content as well as reflect on the nature of oral histories as historical sources. The Shoah Foundation has developed education programmes centering on the use of visual testimonies in the classroom, like the IWitness educational website which "brings the first-person stories of survivors and witnesses of genocide from the Institute's Visual History Archive to students via multimedia-learning activities" (Shoah Foundation, 2019). The Imperial War Museum created an extensive series of podcasts and written web resources called 'Voices of the First World War', using oral history clips and written extracts alongside photographs to provide first-hand perspectives on various topics relating to the war such as trench warfare, munitions, sport in war, and conscientious objection.

The proliferation of podcasts, educational resources, blogs and other forms of contemporary, digital 'cooked' oral history resources, absent in previous surveys of online oral history sites, demonstrate an increasing focus on contextualisation and curation, which according to Boyd and Larson (2014) characterises both the modern oral history discipline and the digital humanities field alike. As well as being used to promote organisations' own unique oral history collections, there was a strong sense that these secondary resources were working to show the value of oral history and heritage resources in general. Heritage organisations disseminating oral history are trying to help a new generation understand its value and encourage their engagement with oral history by presenting it in contemporary curated formats, like podcasts. Cultural heritage organisations have been warned that they must adapt to stay relevant to current and future generations (Liew, 2014), and their increasing use of digital media and information tools to reinvent and reuse their collections in engaging, educational and even entertaining

ways indicates that they have taken up the challenge. That said, Sloan (2014, p.180) argues that "[o]ral historians must resist succumbing to the pull to brevity in sharing interviews online to the point that this impulse distorts the integrity of the interview. Although the mutability of oral history has increased with the turn to digital, we, as oral historians, need to work to resist bending our aims to popular culture's desires. Understanding requires a level of patience and deep listening from users that entertainment does not."

4.5 Copyright, ethical issues and oral history disclaimers

Research objective 4: *Examine the ways in which cultural heritage institutions are addressing copyright and ethical issues related to the provision of oral history in their digital repositories.*

Copyright information

The majority of sites included copyright notices. However, they were not always made obvious or presented in ways that would be clear to the average user, and were presented in many different locations. Nineteen sites provided copyright statements within item records or on the same webpage as individual oral history interviews, making the copyright information clear to users at the point where they access the content. Six sites did not provide copyright statements at the point of access, but provided a link directing users to a separate information webpage. In many cases these webpages were dedicated to information about copyright, guidelines for reuse of collection material, the website's terms of use, and other administrative matters. Ten sites did not provide copyright statements on collection items, nor provide a link to a separate webpage, requiring users to seek out the copyright information themselves. Five sites had no apparent copyright information available anywhere in relation to the provided oral history material. These were sites presenting small amounts of oral history content or projects as a point of interest, or for which scholarly reuse may not have been an expected outcome or aim: the New Zealand Society of Authors, Wellington City Libraries, the Canal Museum, the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation and the Quipu Project. On sites which provided copyright information on the same page or alongside oral history content, presentation of this information varied from persistent copyright symbols at the bottom of each page, to dedicated tabs within items records for copyright and usage information. In some cases copyright information was present but not easily comprehensible. For example, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision's catalogue includes the Māori phrase 'Tonu korero mai' at the top of each item record which links to the site's copyright information page, but for most users the meaning of this phrase would not be understood. Item records in the Imperial War Museum's database often include '©IWM' but other times only provides statements like '©24191', the meaning of which is

unclear and not stated anywhere on the Museum's website. The Tasman Kete includes a statement on the collection page for oral histories: "These oral histories are made available for your private research or study only. Please do not copy or distribute these oral history materials in any way" (Kete Tasman, 2017). Yet the item-level pages include a clear Creative Commons notice in the sidebar showing the items as licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial Share-Alike 3.0 licence, contradicting the notice not to copy or share the materials. Seven sites in total made oral history collections available under Creative Commons licences.

Consideration of ethical issues

Despite the substantial literature on ethical challenges relating to networked access to oral history, few of the sampled sites made any mention of this issue. Six sites included information about how users can ensure they use the material ethically, or about how the organisation itself was mitigating ethical risks. These were by no means the six largest or most technologically advanced sites; they included a low-tech, legacy oral history website created by a NGO (Mountain Voices) and a small community archive (Kete Tasman), as well as the digital repositories of larger organisations (British Library, Brooklyn Historical Society, Project Jukebox, Montreal Life Stories). The Mountain Voices site, created by the global PANOS network of NGOs, includes the statement

> "All narrators agreed to be part of this project because they wished their experience and opinion to reach a wider audience. Yet opening up access to the interviews by publishing them on an international website makes it more difficult for Panos to monitor the contexts in which their words might be used. Occasionally you may find that a narrator's full name appears somewhere in the testimony, but always observe the rule that when you refer to a narrator or quote from a testimony, you use the first name only; and please respect the original context in which a testimony was given." (Mountain Voices, n.d.)

The Kete Tasman asks users to "approach this material with respect for the individuals whose thoughts and memories are recalled here" (Kete Tasman, 2017); similarly, Project Jukebox asks that researchers "approach the material with respect for, and awareness of the cultures and individuals whose lives, ideas, and creativity are represented here", and also makes specific references to cultural competency, recommending that users "become knowledgeable in the cultural backgrounds of the speakers before interpreting and referencing these works in print or media publications" (Project Jukebox, n.d.)

Site user agreements

In most cases administrative information or other notices regarding reuse were presented alongside oral history testimony or on related webpages, leaving it up to the user whether they read and adhere to these notices. However, four sites controlled access to oral history interviews through compulsory site user agreements, which included guidelines around reuse and notices about the subjective nature of oral history. These were the National Library of Australia; University of Southern California Shoah Foundation; Brooklyn Historical Society; and the Historical Archives of the European Union at the European University Institute. Access was controlled either by way of a pop-up message requiring users to read and agree to terms of use before proceeding to view content (as in the former two cases), or by requiring user to register to the site and agree to the site's terms of use (as in the latter two cases).

Figure 14: National Library of Australia end user licence agreement

Figure 15: Brooklyn Historical Society pop-up Terms of Use
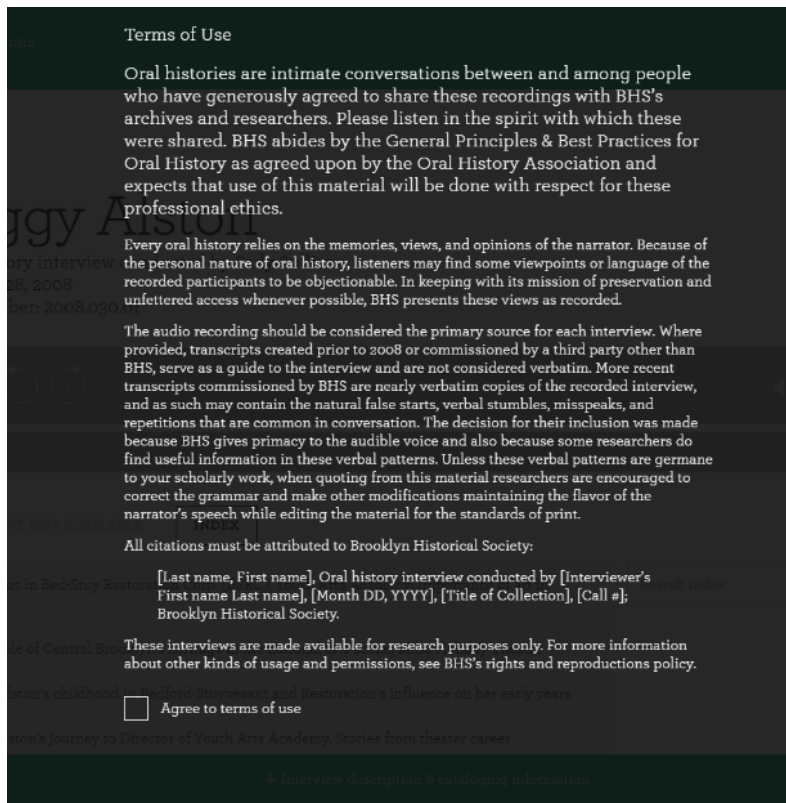
Disclaimers

Oral history 'disclaimers', noting the subjectivity of oral testimony and disclaiming liability for any inaccurate information given in the interviews, were evident in a quarter of the sites. For example, the City of Sydney's oral history project webpage states "The content of oral history interviews is personal, experiential and interpretive because, by its nature, it relies on the memories, perceptions and opinions of individuals. While all reasonable attempts are made to avoid inaccuracy, interviews should not be understood as statements of fact or opinion endorsed by the City of Sydney" (City of Sydney, n.d.). The first paragraph of the NLA's pop-up end-user licence agreement states: "This is important: You are seeking access to an oral history recording. Oral history is by its nature spoken memory. It is a personal opinion and is not intended to present the final verified or complete narrative of events" (National Library of Australia, n.d.). Three sites made direct reference to potentially offensive material within the oral histories. The British Library warns listeners that "[t]he interviews are historical documents and their language, tone and content might in some cases reflect attitudes that could cause offence in today's society" (British Library Sounds, n.d). Similarly, BHS notes that "[b]ecause of the personal nature of oral history, listeners may find some viewpoints or language of the recorded participants to be objectionable" (BHS, n.d.). The Shoah Foundation's registration process requires users to agree "that we are not responsible for any content or commentary contained in the interviews or anywhere else on the Sites

that you might find to be derogatory, defamatory, offensive, disagreeable, or displeasing in any way" (Shoah Foundation, 2019).

These results are not dissimilar to McIntyre's (2006) findings; she found few oral history sites that included discussion of ethical issues or controlled access to oral history through site user agreements. She listed the amount of material available online, the nature of the organisation, the recency of the site, and the nature of the project itself to be factors that would influence how much consideration was given to these issues. For instance, sites which provided access to large amounts of material, or those that were created recently, would be more cognisant of ethical issues and concerned about protecting the interviews in their collections. These speculations did not hold up in the current study; some of the largest repositories had no mention of ethics and did not control access in any way. Some of the more recent sites such as the Brooklyn Historical Society's oral history portal which was created in 2017 did consider these issues, but so did some sites which were created close to two decades ago, such as the Mountain Voices site. The presence of notices regarding ethical reuse, or detailed end-user agreements, seemed to be more related to whether the site was provided by an organisation with a specific focus on oral history, such as the National Library of Australia and the BHS. Inevitably, these discussions come back to the question of resources and institutional priorities. For organisations whose strategic plans include a focus on the provision of strong oral history programmes and services, staff may have more time and funding to dedicate to researching current issues in the oral history field and building best-practice digital repositories for their oral history collections. Again, further research is needed to tease out the factors involved in these findings.

The provision of oral history disclaimers, and information about how oral history source material can be used ethically and with integrity, is possibly more important than ever in a networked environment where anyone is free to access, interpret and in many instances reuse oral history interviews. An egalitarian model of public history and scholarship where everyone can be a researcher and connect digitally to historical source material from around the world is certainly a transformative and powerful shift, and is to be welcomed. However, at the same time there is a moral imperative to ensure that users understand the nature of what they are accessing and are provided with guidance about how to use it. 'Ordinary users', now empowered to mine an increasingly rich field of original heritage material may not be au fait with the standards of historical interpretation that professional historians adhere to, and which are enshrined in professional codes of conduct; for instance, the requirement that sources are not misrepresented (American Historical Association, 2011, cited in Bradley & Puri, 2016). Oral history material presents unique challenges to the interpretation of evidence which are not often mentioned in

such codes of conduct, for example, "to recognise that in any interview there may be contradictions that need to be examined; and to ensure that any such use takes into account interviewee understandings at both the time of the event and the time of the telling", as well as understanding the wider context of the interview (Bradley & Puri, 2016, p.89). Oral historians and archivists of oral history are constantly aware of the ethical dimension of their practices, and the protection of interviewees' rights to control how their personal testimonies are created and used is paramount (Bradley & Puri, 2016; Perks, 2009). They have grappled with the risks to interviewees and potential legal risks to institutions with mounting personal testimonies on the Web, so making sure the end use of this material is ethical and respects interviewees would surely be vital. The finding that only a fraction of the sampled digital oral history collections made mention of these issues is of concern, and highlights the need for more collaboration among the wide variety of groups now involved in digital oral history projects. It also raises the point that while many organisations may be uploading oral history interviews to their websites as a point of interest for their own communities, the reality of Web access is that this material can be used by anyone for any purpose, and those who are disseminating personal testimonies must be cognisant of their responsibilities to interviewees.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the ways in which oral history collections are currently being made accessible in an online environment. The results of a content analysis of 40 websites indicated that oral history resources are provided in a multitude of different ways in terms of their structure, organisation, modes of access, technologies employed, the way the digital collections are promoted, how copyright and ethical issues are conveyed to users, and how meaningful engagement with oral history source material is facilitated. Online presentations of oral history fell broadly into two main categories: databases providing searchable, multi-modal access to oral history interviews for use by researchers, and websites presenting the output of specific oral history projects, often as a point of interest. A large proportion of sites provided access to full interviews and/or full transcripts, considerably more than in previous surveys. A variety of organisations were found to be providing access to oral history interviews, including many 'non-traditional' heritage groups such as professional bodies and charities engaging in community oral history projects. There were significant disparities around the treatment of copyright and reuse information within the sites, and only a small number of sites mentioned the ethical dimension of recording and reusing oral history material, with guidance for users about how to interpret and use the material ethically and with integrity. Many sites were not actively promoted, and it was found that the moderately-sized digital oral history collections were most likely to be the subject of promotional efforts. A significant number of organisations were creating podcasts, blog posts, and educational resources about or featuring oral history content which provide alternative ways of engaging with oral histories and enhance online collections.

While some practitioners in the oral history field advocate for greater non-linear and multi-modal access to original oral history material, empowering users to find their own meanings within the interviews (e.g. Frisch, 2006; Perks, 2009), there was little evidence that this is being achieved to a significant degree. Funding and skills constraints are likely to play a major part in this, with the results suggesting that only large organisations with significant funding for oral history are currently able to implement and maintain the technologies required for this sort of complex access.

Implications, recommendations and suggestions for future research

One implication of this research is that communities of practice may need to be expanded to include the many different types of organisations who are creating oral history and putting it online. Oral and public historians, curators, archivists and digital humanists have long been discussing the methodological, political and practical challenges of providing web access to personal testimonies. However, those

participating in community heritage projects may be less aware of these issues. Oral history training programmes in the community could be expanded to include not just methods of conducting oral history projects and interviews, but also include training around how to effectively present the end result online. That said, there is a danger of becoming too paternalistic, and defeating the social justice aspect of oral history by imposing specific requirements on community-based projects, so there is a careful balance to be struck here.

Furthermore, a set of standards around the presentation of oral history on the web would be extremely valuable. Ideally, these standards would set out minimum requirements including providing information about the nature of oral history as a subjective version of history, how audiences can ethically reuse oral history content, guidelines around metadata, and the provision of contextualising information to help users understand the wider context in which interviews were recorded. These standards should be accessible and comprehensible to everyone, to reflect the reality that many different groups and communities outside the traditional cultural heritage hegemony are now empowered to create oral history and present it on the web, and are actively doing so.

Some specific recommendations are made below about how oral history websites could be improved, based on the results of this project. Sites should:

- Provide at least basic information about the context of the oral history collections, including the funding sources, project team and methodology.
- Include dates to show when sites were last updated.
- Include clear and visible copyright and reuse statements at the point where oral history content is accessed; basic statements can be expanded on in other (linked) webpages.
- Include guidelines for users around the ethical reuse of oral history sources, and information about the subjective nature of oral history as evidence.

Further research is warranted which engages the perspectives of practitioners involved in the presentation of digital oral history content online. A notable area for future research is a follow-up survey to obtain the opinions and first-hand experiences of oral history collection managers, oral historians and other individuals engaged in digital oral history projects. The results of this project suggested some specific avenues for investigation around the topic of promotion, resourcing constraints and use of digital media to enhance access to oral history.

Another significant (and broad) topic for future research is an investigation of user perspectives of digital oral history collections, to help practitioners understand what aspects of digital oral history collections are most useful, how audiences engage with digital oral history online, and what could be improved from a user perspective.

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Appendix 1: Exemplar of initial data collection

Institution	Web address	Country	Institution type	parent org	Site type	dedicated OH site?	Purpose of site	Active site/OH programme?	Number of OH interviews
Sydney Oral Histories (Council of the City of Sydney)	http://www.sydneyoralhistories.com.au/	Australia	local council	city council	Website	yes	Urban history - "the fine grain of daily life, distilled from the living memories of Sydneysiders."	Unclear - appears that most recent interviews are from 2015	153

Type of oral history material	Structural features	Metadata features	Video content	Other media?	Search function	Language	access	Copyright information
Written excerpts, interview summary, audio clips (on webpage), Full interview transcript, Full audio (to download), biography of interviewee	Organised by topic at highest level. At lower level organised by interviewee. Visually - organised as a grid	Interviewee name, interviewer name, date of interview, location of interview, topic tags, links to external websites	No	Photographs of interviewees accompany their interviews.	Basic keyword search. User can use tags to discover related content.	English	no access requirements/restrictions except user must accept disclaimer for distressing content	Yes - on separate webpage.

Copyright policy	Ethical use information	oral history disclaimer	Share content	Contribute	Collaborate?	Use of material?	How collection is promoted	Outreach
Personal/non-commercial user only, unaltered, correctly cited.	No	"The content of oral history interviews is personal, experiential and interpretive because, by its nature, it relies on the memories, perceptions and opinions of individuals. While all reasonable attempts are made to avoid inaccuracy, interviews should not be understood as statements of fact or opinion endorsed by the City of Sydney." - Some interviews have a pop up content disclaimer which user must agree to before proceeding - about distressing content.	Widgets to share content to Facebook, Twitter, Google+	No		Webpage called 'Stories' hosts digital stories, essays, audio features and slideshows about aspects of Sydney's history, using oral history material	No evidence of promotion

Appendix 2: Second round of coding for discovery features

Institution	Structural features	Metadata features	Search function	Site type	basic keyword search available	advanced search available	specialised metadata	search within audio/text material	can browse by xyz	general website search only	hyperlinked metadata
Sydney Oral Histories (Council of the City of Sydney)	Organised by topic at highest level. At lower level organised by interviewee. Visually - organised as a grid	Interviewee name, interviewer name, date of interview, location of interview, topic tags, links to	Basic keyword search. User can use tags to discover related content.	Website	X				X		
Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony	Organised by collection at highest level. Collections represent different projects either donated to ALOT or created by ALOT. At lower level organised by interviewee. Collections shown in grid form. individual	Interviewee name, interviewer name, date of interview, location of interview, locations mentioned, dates mentioned, Format, topics, collection name, language, topic tags.	Basic keyword search, browse by: collection, topics, tags, rating, all interviews.	Collection database	X		X		X		
Montreal Life Stories (project by Concordia University Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling)	Organised by topic/working group. Alternatively alphabetically by surname. Visually - displayed as a horizontal array - when one item is selected it is displayed below in a larger box.	Interview title, interviewee name, description, topic, number of views	Basic keyword searching - search either 'peoples' or 'videos'. Advanced search option allows search for exact phrase, all words, or at least one word.	Website for specific project	X	X					
Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21	Organised in searchable database according to various searchable descriptors e.g. topic, country of origin of interviewee.	Interview title, interviewee name, Topic category, Culture (of interviewee), Country of origin (of interviewee), Extent of full interview (time), Accession number, Interviewer name, place of interview, date of interview, usage statement, whether full interview is restricted or unrestricted.	Basic searching in collection database. Search by keyword, accession number. Refine by collection type (image, oral histories, story collection), related ship, language, date of arrival from, date of arrival to.	Collection database	X		X		X		
Historical Archives of the European Union – European University Institute	Organised by project in list form, then as an alphabetical list of interviewees. Or can view an A-Z list of all interviews. Some interviews are part of a larger fonds	Name of interviewee, reference code, access level, use restrictions, date of interview, place of interview, name of interviewer, language of interview, collection. Interviews that are part of a larger fonds include further metadata and related	Basic and advanced searching in whole database. Can refine to search only OH interviews. Can browse OH interviews by project, or browse all.	Collection database	X	X					
Mountain Voices	Organised by country, theme. Testimonies featuring the selected country and or/theme are presented as a list at the bottom of the page. The top of the page gives detailed background info about the place/theme	Name of interviewee, Sex, Place, Age, occupation, location, date of interview, themes in this interview, themes in this testimony(linked)	Several modes of access. Can choose a location or theme. Can also combine location and theme through a grid display and see relevant testimonies e.g. choose mexico x economics. Exploratory modes – e.g. when on a given page, user can click on related themes or other local themes in a sidebar. no	website	X				X		
Auckland Libraries	Organised/indexed by collection. Indexed by date range.	Title of item, record id, collection, creator, interviewer, contributor, date recorded, decade	advanced boolean searching, filters	Collection database		X					

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