

OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND?  
NON-USER UNDERSTANDINGS OF ARCHIVES  
IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

by

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## ABSTRACT

**Research problem:** Despite a significant amount of research on archival users, only a small number of studies have focused solely on the non-user. This study investigated non-user understandings of archives in Aotearoa New Zealand to learn about their awareness of archives, perceptions of accessibility and use, and views on an archives' purpose and societal role. This included whether non-users valued archives and what this said about the democratic archival contract.

**Methodology:** A qualitative research design influenced by critical theory was employed. Eight non-user samples of individuals over the age of 18 were purposively selected within the population of Aotearoa New Zealand, covering variables of geographical location, socio-economic status, education, gender, age, and ethnicity. Three activist samples were also included. Data were collected by semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically.

**Results:** While their image of an archive was generally accurate and positive, participants had little knowledge of how they were organised. Archives were highly valued and viewed as accessible places for those who needed it, but with clear differences to other institutions. These differences prevented half of the sample with a need to use an archive from doing so. The archival contract was generally accepted, but was problematized in terms of access and cultural bias.

**Implications:** The findings support the view that understandings of archives greatly influence use. Although limited to a small and geographically specific sample, this study enables archives to know more about potential users, and design, target and implement outreach in order to raise awareness and increase use.

**Keywords:** Archives - Non-users - User Studies - Outreach - Awareness - Power

## CONTENTS

Contents

Abstract

1.0 Introduction .....	4
1.1 Definition of terms .....	4
1.2 Research significance .....	5
2.0 Literature review .....	5
2.1 User/ non-user studies .....	6
2.2 Non-user studies .....	8
2.3 Non-user studies (libraries) .....	9
3.0 Research question & objectives .....	10
4.0 Research design .....	10
4.1 Sample .....	11
4.2 Data collection .....	11
4.3 Ethical considerations .....	12
4.4 Limitations .....	12
4.5 Data analysis .....	12
5.0 Findings .....	13
5.1 Awareness of archives .....	13
5.2 Perceptions of accessibility & use .....	16
5.3 Purpose & societal role of archives .....	20
6.0 Discussion .....	24
7.0 Conclusion .....	28

References

Appendix

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

User studies in archival research have become a major topic over the last six decades (Chowdhury & Chowdhury, 2011, p.25). Despite one definition of user studies as ‘investigations of the use and users (including non-users and potential users and users) of documents, information, communication channels, information systems and information services’ (Hjørland, 2000), only a small number of studies have focused solely on the non-user. As a result, there is a distinct lack of information and research-based studies on archival non-users, including in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is simply not known how non-users perceive the accessibility and purpose of the country’s numerous archives.

The same can be said of the relationship between non-use and the often-cited societal outcomes of formal archives. How effective are objectives such as ‘efficient and effective government’, ‘trusted and accountable government’, and ‘nationhood and social cohesion’ (Archives New Zealand, 2010) if the archive is not used, or even valued? Such questions also problematise the democratic archival contract: the assumed ‘agreement between archivists and society’ (Hamilton, Harris & Reid, 2002, p.16). Is this agreement reciprocal?

‘If we accept the premise that archives play a public role in modern society,’ note Blais & Enns, ‘we must consider the perceptions people have of archives’ (1990, p.104). This study focuses on the non-user of archives in Aotearoa New Zealand, in order to contribute to the present knowledge gap around archival non-users and their understandings of archives.

### 1.1 DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Non-users** are generally defined in relation to users, or more specifically, as their opposite. The Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science defines the term user as ‘any person who uses the services of the library’ (Reitz, 2007). For this study, non-users are defined as those who have not directly used the services of an archive. This does not include secondary or indirect use of archives.

**Archives** can be defined in a number of ways and on a variety of levels. Australasian archives are sometimes defined differently to others due to their records continuum model, while postmodern discourses have also reshaped the traditional definitions of archives (Hamilton, Harris, Taylor, Pickover, Reid & Saleh, 2002; McKemmish, Piggott, Reed & Upward, 2005; Burton, 2005). In this study I have defined archives as ‘an organisation (or part of an organisation) responsible for appraising, acquiring, preserving and making available archival material’ (Archives New Zealand, 2012).

An **activist** is someone whose practices ‘are used to challenge injustice and discrimination in order to create a more inclusive and just environment’ (Wakimoto, Bruce & Partridge, 2013, p.295).

## 1.2 RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

As well as apparently being the first to focus on non-users in Aotearoa New Zealand, this research is significant because it:

- enables archivists, public planners and archives in general to better understand non-users and their perceptions
- helps locate potential users and possible barriers to use
- informs how outreach endeavours could be designed, targeted and implemented in order to promote archives and increase use
- helps improve the image and awareness of archives
- locates possible weaknesses in an archive’s services, organization or purpose
- explores the relationship between demographics, non-use and the intended societal outcomes of archives
- examines notions of the archival contract between archives and society

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the 1970s, archival literature has employed a more systematic approach to understanding users and use (Conway, 1994). Freeman (1984), Dowler (1988), Jimerson (1989), Gracy II (1989), Cox (1992) and Duff & Cherry (2000) are among those who place users at the heart of their studies via a wide range of approaches. As Banwell & Coulson (2004) note, these can be generalised into four main strands: a focus on the user themselves (their needs, wants, motivations, expectations and tasks); on use (what the information is used for, with barriers and enablers to use investigated); on the information system or service (technology, design, evaluation); or the organisational setting (both internal and external factors). Literature analysing rights and access (see Zinn, 1977; Duchein, 1983; Blais & Enns; Ketelaar, 1997) and the role archives play in existing power structures (see Jimerson, 2009; Burton; Duff, Finn, Suurtamm

& Wallace, 2013; Wakimoto, Bruce & Partridge, 2013) has also increased, especially with the rise of postcustodial discourse.

Yet despite this significant research on archival users, there are a limited number of studies that focus on the non-user. The research that exists can be divided between user-studies that allude to the non-user, and specific non-user studies. The former is typical of studies conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand, as it appears no specific non-user studies have been conducted. Finally, the statement ‘awareness and perception are important factors, because they are connected to the action of library use’ (Saez, 2002, as cited by Park, 2007, p.1) easily translates to an archival setting. With this in mind, and due to the lack of non-user studies in archival literature, I have also considered non-user studies in a library context.

## 2.1 USER/ NON-USER STUDIES

Amongst the literature on archival users there are a number of studies that include the non-user as a part of their research. Laporte (2004) conducted a quantitative survey of 1,200 adults in Catalonia, Spain to measure the public’s awareness, perceptions, and use of municipal archives. Using a telephone survey with multi-stage design by geography, population size, age and gender, the study highlighted two different views concerning archives: younger people held ‘a modern and dynamic view’ encompassing information, technology and access, while predominant was ‘an archaic and static view’ associating ‘archives with the past, with heritage, with history’ (Laporte, p.486). The study successfully explored a number of concepts associated with archives via questions containing keywords and contrasting meanings for answers, highlighting respondents’ perceptions of content, accessibility and value. This included perceptions of democracy, such as rights and secrets.

User and non-user perceptions of archives also feature strongly in a qualitative study commissioned by the Society of American Archivists to investigate how state resource allocators perceive and characterise archivists—including their attitudes towards archives, their image of archivists and whether they thought the public was aware of archives (Levy & Robles, 1984). Findings were based on face-to-face interviews with a sample of 44 resource allocators across five cities in the United States. The study segmented participants by city, type of archive, sex, years in the field, and years with the firm/ institution. It found that although resource allocators valued archives and had positive perceptions of archives and archivists, they generally believed the public were not ‘well informed about archives, their locations and their contents’ (Levy & Robles, 1984, p.53). The study also found that traditional stereotypes of archives—such as being dusty, musty, and places of dead accumulation (Levy & Robles, 1984,

p.V)—still linger, and more open days and showcases encouraging public participation were needed to counter such a perception.

Promoting the public's active participation in archives was the aim of the *National Audience Development Plan for Wales* (Johnson, 2008). A core part of the Plan involved evaluating current users as well as non-users through a quantitative survey, which aimed to discover non-user perceptions of archives and why they failed to visit. In all, 548 people were surveyed in public spaces such as markets and shopping centres, and covered an equal number of men and women. Of the respondents, 5.7% did not know what an archive was while 9.4% stated they would not visit an archive, despite 86% of respondents having watched a historical documentary in the twelve months previous. The main reason non-users had failed to visit an archive was time (18%), followed by not knowing where they were (16%). The study's focus meant non-user perceptions of archives were not analysed in any depth; nor were participants asked whether they valued archives or not.

A quantitative omnibus survey conducted by Research New Zealand (2009) 'to measure the general public's perceived knowledge of, and trust and confidence in, a range of public sector organizations' (p.5) included comments which show users and non-users value archives and their services. As well as archival value, other questions asked a representative sample of 502 people aged over 15 to provide 'insights into the public's understandings of what Archives New Zealand actually does' (Research New Zealand, p.5). Of the respondents, 39% felt they knew a reasonable amount about what the public archive does, and over 150 verbatim comments listed in Appendix C shared a selection of the answers given. These ranged from accurate responses to more general perceptions. It is one of the few studies on user and non-user perceptions of archives in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Another study of archival users and non-users conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand was *A Measure of Culture: Cultural experiences and cultural spending in New Zealand* (Statistics New Zealand & Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2003). Part 3 of the wider quantitative survey focused on heritage, with questions investigating the use of archival services, whether non-users had wanted to use archives, and if so, why they had not. Of the representative sample surveyed, 5% (approximately 137,000 people) had used archive services in person in the four weeks before the survey—of the remaining 2.6 million who had not, 2% wanted to but the main barrier was time. Unfortunately no further information is provided on these non-users, and no questions relating to awareness, perception or values were included.

These Aotearoa New Zealand studies, as well as other international research, highlight both the minimal data on non-user understandings of archives, and the lack of theoretical frameworks to replicate. The majority of these mixed user/ non-user studies are quantitative. Overall, the inclusion of non-users was secondary to that of the user, and magnifies the need for archival research with a non-user focus.

## 2.2 NON-USER STUDIES

Studies that focus solely on archival non-users are limited in number. The two identified were conducted by Museums Libraries and Archives (MLA) in the United Kingdom in 2003. One is a qualitative study (MLA, 2003a) while the second employs a quantitative approach (MLA, 2003b).

*Listening to the Past, Speaking to the Future (Annex E)* (MLA, 2003a) is the sole qualitative study found with a non-user focus. Its objective was to ‘understand more about non-users and why they fail to use archives’ (p.1) using five focus groups structured by age, sex and use. Hour-long sessions were divided into three parts: existing views were established through discussion, an archivist then presented on archives, and reactions were measured using show cards and questions to provoke discussion. Participants’ understandings of archives were overwhelmingly apathetic and negative. Archives were seen as inaccessible—geographically and psychologically—and mainly used by professionals in information management/ cultural production (and were therefore not for them). Keywords describing archives were ‘official’, ‘old’, ‘dusty’, ‘not user-friendly’, ‘remote’, ‘locked away’, and there was a fear of ‘being overwhelmed by, or lost in, information’ (MLA, 2003a, p.4). The reasons for non-use were a lack of relevance to the participants (16%), time (14%), or simply no interest in visiting one (13%). Yet they were still valued as a preserver of unique records and public memory, ‘where a straight-forward record of the past, untouched by politicians, journalists or others, is kept’ (MLA, 2003a, p.6). Although suggesting an agreed archival contract, the findings show that an archive’s democratic value was salient only to those with a real interest in history, or when faced with examples of extreme loss (ie. the burning of Iraqi records).

*Listening to the Past, Speaking to the Future (Annex D)* (MLA, 2003b) was a quantitative study that surveyed 1,953 adults using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing and face-to-face interviews in people’s homes, in order to ‘explore the attitudes, opinions and behaviours of non-archive users’ (p.1). Other objectives included investigating the public’s understanding of archives, barriers to use, perceptions of value, potential reasons for use, and strategies for increasing use. Four in ten 15-24 year-olds did not know what an archive was, and those less socially affluent were less likely to know;



while the most common definition was ‘a place where documents and old records are kept’ (32%) and did not include electronic records (MLA, 2003b, p.4). Once a definition of an archive was provided people were more able to consider what they might use an archive for, although 20% said they would still not use an archive. Despite this, 92% considered archives to be of high importance, although the older people were, the less they valued archives.

These two studies found that in the United Kingdom, archives were generally perceived by non-users to be old, official places of little value to their needs. There is some level of awareness as to who uses archives and what an archive does, and these services are generally valued. But overall, the impression gained from the research is that for the non-user (in the United Kingdom at least), archives are generally out of sight and out of mind.

### 2.3 NON-USER STUDIES (LIBRARIES)

The lack of non-user studies in the archival realm means there is value in looking to research undertaken in a library setting. Indeed, library literature is ahead of archives in terms of non-user studies. Despite many differences between archives and libraries, the theoretical frameworks used are still useful.

After the *Public Library Enquiry* (Berleson, 1949) of library use and non-use was undertaken in 1946 there have been a number of similar studies, although the application of multivariate analyses by Zweizig (1973) saw them become more sophisticated (Sin & Kim, 2008). Further improvements to Zweizig’s model were forwarded in the 1980s and 1990s, ensuring that external variables—such as the geographical location of libraries—complemented demographic perspectives on library non-use. For example, Green (1994) noted three primary barriers to library use: physical barriers (fixed materials that affect the general public, such as library location and hours, interior design, poor signage, use of jargon by staff); personal environments (education, demographic, lifestyle, history of the individual); and the ‘images and perceptions that emerge when individuals interact with physical environments’ (as cited by Park, 2007, p.4). These barriers were identified in an Aotearoa New Zealand context by Worth (1995), whose large-scale survey of Māori users and non-users of Auckland Libraries found that institutional anxiety was a significant factor to use/ non-use.

Despite the proliferation of such studies, the relationship between different variables and public library use/ non-use still appears inconclusive due to inconsistent findings. Apart from the effect of education, the eight studies cited by Sin & Kim (p.3) are con-

tradictory on the extent to which variables such as age, sex and socio-economic status contribute to use/ non-use. Other studies that focus solely on the non-user have not considered such variables at any depth. Flowers (1995) conducted a quantitative survey of those who did not use the services of the Upper Goulburn Library (Australia) to ascertain the reasons why, and to gain knowledge on their perceptions and opinions. Of the 127 respondents, 98% valued the existence of the library, and of the '28 people who said they would never use it, 25 supported its existence' (Flowers, p.75). A large number were aware of the basic services provided, but only a third of services were known to more than 50% of the sample. A number of reasons for non-use were provided, yet no analysis of demographics or physical barriers were undertaken by the study.

### 3.0 RESEARCH QUESTION & OBJECTIVES

Due to the lack of non-user studies in archival literature, my primary research question was to investigate non-user understandings of archives in Aotearoa New Zealand.

This included the following objectives:

- **Analyse their level of awareness of archives:** what do non-users think archives are? What do they think they hold?
- **Learn about perceptions of accessibility and use:** who do non-users think archives serve, and why? What do they think using an archive would be like? Why have they never used one before?
- **Identify whether archives are valued:** do non-users value the existence and role of archives in society? What does this say about the archival contract, or their societal role and goals?

### 4.0 RESEARCH DESIGN

Due to the limited number of existing theories and models on archival non-users, and because of its suitability 'for learning more about a little known or poorly understood situation' (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p.141), this study employed a qualitative research design. The advantage of this approach is the recording of detailed information within a particular context, as well as the 'bottom-up' building of hypotheses or theories. The inclusion of the non-user's voice is another benefit.

This study was also influenced by critical theory, 'a reflexive and politically inspired mode of enquiry which is sensitive to the discontinuities and conjunctures of history' (Hope, 1996, p.57). As critical theory aims to reveal 'the hidden power relations and patterns of domination within a society' (Bates, 2005, p.11-12), a qualitative research design is useful in both the collection and interpretation of data.

#### 4.1 SAMPLE

The unit of analysis was the non-user as defined in the Introduction, who possibly exemplified ‘a broader category of which it is a member’ (Bryman, 2012, p.70). Eight non-user samples of individuals over the age of 18 were purposively selected within the population of Aotearoa New Zealand. They were chosen to cover variables of geographical location, socio-economic status, education, gender, age, and ethnicity. Three activist samples were included to highlight notions of the archival contract, and the role of archives and archivists in society.

Of the eight individuals chosen, two were based in the South Island (Christchurch and Cromwell), while the rest were from the North Island (Wellington, Ōtaki, Paraparauamu, and Auckland). Half of the sample earned between \$25,000–\$49,000 per year, while two earned between \$0–\$24,000 and two between \$50,000–\$74,000. Their occupations ranged from unemployed to retired, and included a grocery assistant, call centre worker, retail worker, office manager, researcher, and pūkenga (specialist or lecturer). The highest level of educational qualifications varied—three had graduated from high school, three had graduated from a polytechnic or university, and two had PhDs. There was an equal divide of male and female genders, and ages ranged from 24 to 80. Finally, six of the eight individuals identified as New Zealand European or Pākehā, and two as Māori-Pākehā.

#### 4.2 DATA COLLECTION

In keeping with the qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews were the method of data collection. Participants were emailed an information sheet, consent form, and questions before the interview took place. They were informed they could pull out of the research before the collection period ended and data analysis began, and they would remain anonymous at all times. The interviews were conducted over a period of five weeks, either at the home of the person, or when travel was not an option, via Skype. These ranged from 30 to 50 minutes in length, and were recorded and later transcribed.

Ten questions were organised to cover three broad themes—awareness of archives; perceptions of accessibility and use; and the purpose and societal role of archives. For the final theme participants were asked to comment on two quotes from Archives New Zealand’s *Statement of Intent 2010-2013* (although they were not told the source of the statements).

As well as capturing the participants’ answers, contextual data on their demographics were collected via an anonymous online survey.

### 4.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Schutt (2006) notes four ethical issues that need to be considered when conducting qualitative research: voluntary participation, subject well-being, identity disclosure and confidentiality (as cited by Park, 2007, p.9). SIM Human Ethics Committee approval, consent forms, respondent validation, the deletion of identifying information, and best ethical practice throughout the collection process were employed to minimise any ethical issues. Participants were given as much information as possible about the nature and use of the study, and every effort was made to answer their concerns.

Jackson (1988) has noted the problem of monocultural frameworks when data from Māori is collected and interpreted by non-Māori. As a Pākehā researcher I have tried to be conscious of this throughout the study, and of any biases or cultural assumptions.

### 4.4 LIMITATIONS

There are limitations to the generalisations this study can offer:

- The study focused on non-user understandings of archives; therefore it does not examine the non-user in detail, such as their interests and habits (although some information of that nature was captured).
- As I am an archivist working at a government archive, this often led to a focus on public or formal archives over other archival institutions.
- In most cases I had previous relations with the participants, which meant they were vaguely aware of the existence of archives prior to the study.

However, as the purpose of the study was to understand more about a little-known topic, generalisation of its findings was not a focus.

### 4.5 DATA ANALYSIS

Due to its research design and the lack of previous qualitative studies, the intensive examination of data was paramount to this study. A thematic analysis was used following the process identified by Leedy & Ormond (2013):

1. Organisation of details: specific facts are arranged in a logical order.
2. Categorisation of data: categories are identified to help cluster data into meaningful groups.
3. Interpretation of single instances: data are examined for related meanings to the case.
4. Identification of patterns: data are scrutinised for themes/ patterns that characterise the case.

## 5. Synthesis and generalisations: overall portrait of the case and their implications constructed (p.141-142).

Once data had been collected, the name of the participant was replaced by a code to provide anonymity. Each interview was then canvassed separately to gain familiarity with the data, identify key themes and keywords, and formulate specific data sets. The three broad themes used to collect data were continued into the second phase of data analysis. Interviews were divided and arranged into data sets according to the three themes (and sub-themes). Although these were often interrelated, this division aided systematic analysis of data. I then examined the rearranged data for patterns and commonalities, as well as key differences and absences. They were also analysed with regards to the demographics of the participants, and compared with the findings of previous studies.

## 5.0 FINDINGS

### 5.1 AWARENESS OF ARCHIVES

#### **Definition and image of archives**

Participants were asked what they thought an archive was, and what images they associated with the term. Of the eight, three associated archives with a physical place—a ‘store’, ‘a huge dark room’ or ‘structured locations’ that held filing cabinets or ‘stuff on shelves’, such as records and boxes. ‘I think of them as an intimidating library’ replied the pukena, ‘the back room of the library you need permission to go to’. In contrast to a physical space, three associated the term more with the things or information you would find there. ‘My first thought would be of old stuff like photos and historical records’ noted one, or ‘things that have happened in the past people want to keep a record of.’ For the eldest participant, an archive was ‘history. The history of everything.’ Finally, the two youngest participants clearly associated archives as both a physical space and individual records. The context was important for them: ‘say “I’m looking at an archive” I would think you’re looking at something physical, and “you’re visiting an archive” would be like a library.’

Half of the sample initially associated archives with the word ‘old’ or ‘historic’, but contrary to my expectations, only one used the word ‘dusty’. The two youngest participants associated the term with records or information as opposed to old or historic. However throughout the study the association of archives with history repeatedly surfaced from all participants, and when asked about current record keeping or collecting digital formats, it was often the first time they had considered such a function. ‘I’ve never really thought like that—I’ve always thought archives would be working 20 years in the past,’ responded one participant.

What was the source of these definitions and images? Three had seen archives in the media, either in films (2) or in the news (1), while two knew friends that had either used an archive or were interested in record keeping. In terms of education, only one of the eight (the youngest) had learnt about archives at high school; however three had become aware of them at university. 'I wonder though if I would have known about them at high school if I'd picked a non-science route,' noted the researcher and PhD graduate. Finally, archival outreach was mainly absent in the findings. Although two were aware of some archival outreach online, 'I don't barely see them. A very low presence' was the typical response.

### **Records and their content**

Participants were asked what kind of things they thought they could find in an archive. Although one said 'pretty much anything could be an archive if it's got historical relevance', all eight participants noted paper-based records. This included photographs, books and manuscripts, newspapers, magazines, employment or business files, group minutes, and letters. However, only three participants mentioned non-paper formats. Of these, all mentioned microfiches, one mentioned film, two mentioned sound recordings, and one mentioned a 'cloud'. Only after being prompted were digital records considered by participants. Objects such as medals, stamps and early technologies were mentioned by three participants, but were seen as being held by museums rather than archives.

Over half of the sample used words like 'unique', 'delicate' or 'sacred' to describe records held by archives. They also viewed records as being 'one-off' or primary source material, and not 'duplicates' such as you would find in a library: 'it's almost raw—it's the uncut version of all the material that is yet to be interpreted'. Yet three participants thought archives kept both unique and everyday or common records. For example, one compared 'really old documents like the Treaty of Waitangi' to records about the Second World War. Another thought archives held:

really, really, special, sacred information, but perhaps if I went there I would find out that it's actually full of what you might call normal records on regular people and events... I guess there's common things that people identify to be more important in a historical context, but of course there's always going to be people who dig for one type of thing, so there may be more of that in one collection.

This highlights the type of information thought to be in an archive. Historical information was mentioned by almost every participant, with four specifying local

history. Family history was also a major trend, with seven of the eight mentioning genealogical information. Four of the participants (including all three activist samples) thought you could find information on social movements.

The participants of Māori-Pākehā ethnicity both raised the point of oral traditions, and how stories as records did not fit comfortably into a Western paradigm. This relationship felt ‘particularly loaded in terms of who holds Māori knowledge because of colonisation—there’s that big power imbalance, and a history of various kinds of theft, so theft of information is a thing’. For this participant, it also affected what information was collected:

in terms of my family history, it was obvious to me. My Māori ancestors are from the bottom of the South Island. Early on a whaler married into the area... and there’s heaps of information about him, and there’s lots of archived information about that family because he was this notorious character... there’s also indigenous family history as well, but through the lens of a white man making them important. So there’s this theft of knowledge and there’s the distortion of knowledge, when it is filtered through that lens of what makes someone noteworthy.

For him taonga was not immediately associated with archives: ‘there’s something about the ordering of [records] which seems very western to me’.

### **Organisation of records**

Awareness of how records are organised in an archive was low. Only one of the eight participants (the pūkenga) thought that it might be by creator, but she also mentioned by subject or ‘some system like Dewey’. Of the remaining participants, four answered ‘like a library’, one thought there would ‘probably be overlapping systems of classification’, and two thought it would have to be categorised in some way but did not know: ‘because I know that it’s not a library, I don’t know the different ways to search for stuff and how things are categorised’. Participants mentioned organisation by the Dewey system (2), by topic or subject (4), alphabetically, (1) and by date (1).

### **Other institutions**

Throughout the study archives were compared to other institutions. By far the most predominant was to a library. Besides libraries, three participants mentioned museums—two thought they were closest to an archive they had previously come across. However the third believed archives were very different from a museum, ‘because otherwise everything would be in a museum, wouldn’t it? You wouldn’t have a separate building

for archives.’ Others were aware of universities having archives or ‘closed stacks’, as well as records being held in private collections (in this case, by hapū). One participant clearly defined public archives as ‘run by the government or council’ and therefore different to other institutions. The three activist participants all mentioned organizations or social movements as having archives (such as trade unions or activist groups). One also thought the ‘police have their own, the SIS [New Zealand Security Intelligence Service] have their own’.

I did not ask participants to name archival institutions they knew of, but two mentioned Archives New Zealand (Wellington) during their interviews. Two also mentioned the Alexander Turnbull Library (Wellington), and one mentioned the Hocken Library (Dunedin) and Macmillan Brown Library (Christchurch). Of these participants, two lived in the greater Wellington region, and one lived in the South Island. The pūkenga by far had the greatest awareness, mentioning all of the institutions above.

## 5.2 PERCEPTIONS OF ACCESSIBILITY & USE

### **Who uses archives and why?**

When asked who used archives, the biggest perceived users were family historians (5), followed by historians (4), interested members of the public (4), students (4), and official or government bodies (4). Two participants with the highest level of education thought archives were for serious researchers, while two participants aged over 45 mentioned fiction writers as users. Also mentioned were foreign organisations and doctors. The two youngest participants did not mention genealogists as users, and again, all three activist participants thought activists used archives.

Users were thought to be visiting archives for a number of reasons. Finding historical information for family history was most common, but accessing information for future use was also a clear trend. Half of the participants talked of users accessing information to track progress or inform future decisions, and half thought users were there to create new stories. ‘I think that stories are really important, and there are always so many different ways to look at historical events’ noted the call centre worker, ‘so I guess if someone writes one version of it then someone might want to challenge it and go and do that research as well, and have another look over that material to find a different point of view’. Similar reasons were given when discussing the purpose of archives.

### **Reasons for not using an archive**

Four of the eight participants had not intended to use an archive, due to not knowing their location or what they held. One participant—the retail worker and youngest of



the sample—was clear he had never needed to. ‘I could maybe think of a couple of times at school when I would have possibly needed one, just for say, history projects’ he recalled, but ‘I haven’t really wanted to—it’s not a passion of mine. Yeah I just haven’t had the need’. For the two participants between 45 and 65 years of age, not being aware of archives generally meant they did not use them. One said the library and, with the advent of computers, the Internet was their first source of information. Although he had a keen interest in history, he believed ‘the profile of Archives New Zealand wasn’t high enough for me to think, “Okay, there’s a resource here that I can tap into”’. It was also a matter of location: ‘pre-computer technology, I guess it had a bit to do with locality, in terms of if you had a local library or your school had a set of encyclopaedia, they were the resource.’ Likewise, although the office manager knew of archives through a friend, she had not used one,

because I wouldn’t even know where to find one. I would have never had the need to use one, so far, but if I wanted to follow up the family tree I guess that’s where I’d start looking... if I had more time I’d look into things, but it’s hard when you’re working.

For the science researcher and PhD graduate, not knowing what information was available meant she had no information need: ‘I don’t know enough about what’s in there to know why I would want to go and visit it’. When asked if she had ever wanted to use an archive, she mentioned family history: ‘I had the thought once: “I wonder where that information might be stored”. But then I wasn’t sure if archives would be a place that would have that kind of stuff.’

I was surprised that half the participants had a need to use an archive but had not done so. For the retiree, family history had ‘come up lately’ as his friends used genealogical websites such as [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com), and he wanted to know more about his father’s history. But the main barrier was time, as well as personal reasons. For the two Māori-Pākehā participants, personal reasons were also a factor. For one it was the emotional impact of finding certain information, as well as the individual nature of research. ‘It’s a lot to do with not enjoying being on my own with information,’ he said. ‘I like the socialness of shared stories—of hearing stories with other people and being told stories by a person. It seems lonely’. The other Māori-Pākehā participant had a clear need to use an archive but had ‘worked around it’. It was her research process and the use of an intermediary that was a barrier:

the way I’ve found I do research is a bit haphazard. I go and sit with material—the path emerges from finding out what’s there and what’s available. And

having an intermediary between the me and the material seems hard... even having someone see me doing that feels like, 'do you even know what you're doing?'

When these concerns were framed as institutional anxiety, the two Māori-Pākehā participants responded differently. Visiting an archive seemed 'scary', but 'I don't know how much of that fear is actually related to the institution,' noted the participant concerned about emotional impact. 'There is something about the formality of it, like not wanting to be told off by a teacher or librarian-type figure. But there's also something about the relationship to the stuff I might find... I feel that in relation to personal archives too'. However for the pūkenga, institutional anxiety was a factor:

I was living Wellington at the time, and I had good access to what was in Wellington—which is a lot of stuff—and I never went.... that probably is institutional anxiety. There's no reason why I shouldn't go to the National Library if I'm happy to go to the Wellington [Public] Library, except that it seems a bit more serious.

She also thought it was a factor for her students:

I think pretty much all of my students at the wānanga, on the spectrum of people comfortable using institutions like that to uncomfortable, they're much more down the uncomfortable end, where I am. And I'm much more likely to not use big libraries. I think any space like that is going to be more intimidating to people who are less comfortable in government/ institutional-feeling places. I definitely don't think it's unique to me.

For the fourth participant needing to use an archive, anxiety was also a barrier. What stopped her was the clear difference between archives and libraries, and not 'knowing where to start in there... the different ways to search for stuff and how things are categorised'. It was the unknown systems that were an issue.

### **Accessibility and use**

Participants were asked what they thought the process of using an archive would be like. There was an awareness that it was different to a library in that you could not walk in and directly access records, but similar in terms of having some kind of finding aid or index. That these finding aids might be online, however, was not considered. Finding aids were a 'guide like an index or contents-like document', a 'draw of cards', or an onsite computer with a keyword search engine.

Five of the eight were aware that records were ‘brought out’ on their behalf, and seven expected to access information through an archivist: ‘I’d imagine you couldn’t just walk and know where you’re going to find something. You’d need help’. This intermediary was generally viewed positively, but for one it ‘would be very dependent on there being a nice person... I can imagine there being someone grumpy and that being off-putting’. Again, the pūkenga found not being able to access material directly as off-putting: ‘the sorts of subjects I saw searchable five years ago just weren’t helpful. You know, “so and so wrote some stuff and it’s broadly about blah blah”—well, did they talk about this or what? I can’t tell until I’m looking at it’. Browsing digitised records was more appealing to her: ‘say I wanted to dig around in an archive for the way Māori have talked about sexuality 200 years ago... I think that’s too fine a detail, unless everything is completely digitised’.

Participants were asked where, on a spectrum of easy to hard, using an archive might sit. Although different aspects were mentioned as being easier or harder, two leaned towards being easy, two sat somewhere between the two, two thought it would be harder than other places, and two did not know. One participant thought ‘anyone could go there’ but you would need to make an appointment first: ‘it’s not like a museum where you’d just go for a look—you would make an appointment to visit’. He was the only one who thought an appointment was needed, which was fewer than expected.

### **Open or closed information**

Five participants did not associate the word ‘secret’ with archives, but only two of the eight thought records were mainly open and accessible. The majority viewed archives as having various restrictions or ‘not totally open’, while one saw them as ‘heavily guarded’. Restrictions were to preserve or protect ‘sacred’ records, ‘for a cooling-off of tensions’ or ‘stability’, or for the privacy of individuals. However two activists were concerned about control: ‘there’s all these requests under the Official Information Act that we’re hearing at the moment that the Crown is turning down... if they can say under some circumstances that they don’t have to give information because it’s commercially sensitive, all of a sudden everything becomes commercially sensitive.’ A non-activist participant was also concerned about ‘censorship’ or undue restrictions: ‘who makes that decision? Who says it’s good? Who says it’s bad? Who says we shouldn’t know about it?’

### **Future use**

When asked if they would use an archive in the future, four said yes, two were undecided, and two said no. Of those who said yes, the reasons were to experience the

‘tactile’ object; family research; an art project; and to ‘demystify’ archives for her students. For the two undecided, the interview had made one more curious about visiting and she wanted to know what information was there, ‘because without knowing I suppose I don’t know whether I’d use it’. And for the participant concerned about the emotional process, the interview would ‘probably’ enable him ‘to engage with them strategically’. It was the youngest and oldest participants who said no to future use. The reasons given were not having any interest or need; and due to time/ personal factors.

### 5.3 PURPOSE & SOCIETAL ROLE OF ARCHIVES

#### **The purpose of archives**

For the two youngest participants access to information and the documentation of past decisions were the main purposes. Archives to aid future decision-making were core to their responses (although two other participants also mentioned this). More typical was the response given by half of the sample—to protect and store history. For these participants, an archive aided cultural memory by holding ‘relevant history. You don’t want all our history to be lost and not known by the future generations.’ Losing this history would be ‘a sad thing’, and ‘a sense of where we came from’ would be lost.

Two participants, both Māori-Pākehā, gave varied responses on a similar theme—the storing of knowledge. One thought of archives ‘in terms of stories... what is cool about archives is that you don’t know at the time what stories are going to be important, so there’s something about that mass holding on to information so you can tell different stories later’. New stories about gender and sexuality could be told from records originally kept for different purposes. However, ‘that model of caretaking knowledge—that Western model—is obviously problematic in terms of indigenous knowledge and history.’

This model was also critiqued by the other Māori-Pākehā participant:

I imagine it comes from the same idea as the ‘web of knowledge’—the idea that you can collect all the knowledge on a subject, or possibly all the knowledge in the world: collect it, put it somewhere and have people access it. I imagine that’s where the idea of archiving came from. Which I think is such a culturally specific drive. It really makes me think about the Enlightenment, and that drive to know and catalogue everything. And the weird idea of collecting as a thing in of itself: a noble pursuit to collect stuff.

Yet she acknowledged the importance of archives, even if records had been kept ‘for the wrong reasons’: ‘when we’ve been through a process that New Zealand’s been through—of basically trying to destroy a culture and all of the knowledge that that culture holds, then I think archives are pretty useful’.

### **Role of the archivist**

These responses allude to the role of archives in society. Discussion with participants about this covered appraisal, notions of neutrality, and the assumed archival contract between archives and society.

Apart from the retiree, participants had a vague awareness that archives did not keep everything, and believed archivists had to decide what was kept or destroyed. Their views on what made a record worth keeping varied. One thought ‘you have to look its relevance, its importance’, while another believed ‘a government archive would keep as much as it could... as much official stuff.’ ‘I would imagine that not everything is kept’, noted the office manager, ‘because some things would be politically incorrect without the permission of the person that you’re keeping records on’. The pūkenga believed it was ‘impossible’ to keep everything, and that was possibly a good thing: ‘if you can keep everything then you stop having to make judgements. And I think making decisions about what is most important and what is less important—learning to prioritise knowledge—is actually really valuable’.

The researcher and all three activists mentioned issues of neutrality. ‘You’d love to think that, for want of a better word, they’re paper-filers and that it’s an objective process’ noted the researcher, ‘but I don’t think any process is ever without bias... if you were choosing to be an archivist, I imagine that you have a general interest in preserving all possible kinds of information, and presenting many sides to stories or events or history. But it can’t always be objective’. For the call centre worker, there was a potential conflict of interest due to funding: ‘of course they’re influenced by the powers that be, because that’s where the funding comes from! But hopefully [funding] wouldn’t be [influential] in terms of what should stay and what should be thrown out’. Funding was also mentioned by the pūkenga, as was cultural bias: ‘of course they have to make decisions and I wonder how aware people are of their cultural biases and what’s important and what’s not important’. For her, people keeping their own records seemed ‘safer’ because government was ‘only partially independent’:

I guess that’s part of why I think stuff should stay as close to the people that it concerns as possible. At least I know what’s important to me... if I want to look at how Māori talk about homosexuality, that probably wasn’t considered

something important or civilised 200 years ago, so that probably wasn't recorded very well. And whatever stuff was written down or said about it probably went through a lot of hands that were making decisions, thinking that they were making objective decisions. And I imagine lots of stuff is really set out, that we need to record this certain information for these reasons. I imagine lots of decisions are explicitly articulated, but I imagine that lots aren't as well. Lots of personal or cultural bias.

What does this say about the archival contract—the assumed 'agreement between archivists and society' (Hamilton, Harris & Reid, p.16)? Six of the eight participants consented to the archival roles noted above, 'because I don't think everybody has an interest in keeping information'. 'Archivists are caretakers in this sense, aren't they?' agreed the retiree. 'I mean it's got to be looked after, you can't just bung it away in the cupboard, it's got to be filed, and put down. I think it's a great thing, I really do'. The grocery assistant believed 'we can only rely on their training and professionalism, and the experience of worldwide archivists in making the correct selections'. If this process was open to the public 'you're going to have such a demographic and which way it goes will depend completely on the subject matter'. However one participant thought the public 'should have a say, but I don't know how you could police it'.

As assumed, two activists felt uneasy about the archival contract. For one, this contract was a liberal rather than a radical paradigm, and amounted to control in the hands of the few. But it was 'better than it not being there. I would rather live in a liberal democracy than a totalitarian police state. But it's not my ideal'. Again, the pūkenga preferred archives to be in the hands of their creators: 'the work I'd like to see an archivist doing is getting stuff back in the hands of the people of whom it belongs, as much as possible'.

### **Accountability and authenticity**

Participants were given a statement about archives contributing to effective and accountable government due to accurate records being kept (see Appendix). Half of the participants agreed with the statement, and half gave a mixed response. For those who agreed, government records were seen as authentic evidence: 'it's not an individual or organization saying this is what we believe; it is the actual record and it is being controlled by professionals who are trained in what they do, and it is under a government banner. So that gives it the stamp of authenticity'. That records can be interpreted differently was not mentioned; instead, 'the written word is there—if it's written down the proof is in there. That is what happened'.

The four with mixed responses were the researcher and three activists, who viewed the statement in terms of access. The researcher agreed ‘about people trusting the government, but I don’t know if that automatically leads to democracy. And that first part wasn’t quite right for me. I don’t know if I innately think that’s right’. For her, it depended on ‘how much importance you place on those things, and how much consultation those things would have for new, evolving decisions or movements’. Likewise, the call centre worker thought archives contributed to effective government, but ‘it doesn’t mean there’s an effective government in place’. One activist replied, ‘I don’t think it is enough, which is the understatement of the century’. He questioned the ability for everyone to access records and therefore make government accountable:

there are all sorts of ways that people are disenfranchised from accessing information—whether that’s various kinds of literacy i.e. the most basic literacy, or literacy on the level of being able to filter and understand the particular languages that are used by officialdom. And also that emotional reality of being disenfranchised—what’s your motivation to access information and know about the particulars of your disenfranchisement if you don’t have hope for things being different? It’s fundamentally a liberal paradigm, where you have a few people with the skills and the sense of their own efficacy who will engage in holding the government to account. There are small groups who do that, so there are some checks or balance to government power. But it’s only a check or a balance, it’s not revolutionary.

Another activist thought ‘having access to information does give people some power to speak to people who have power over them’, but also doubted the availability (and authenticity) of records: ‘when you most want stuff to be accurate is probably the least likely that good records are going to be kept’.

### **Nationhood and social cohesion**

Participants were also given a statement that claimed archives created nationhood and social cohesion (see Appendix). Four participants agreed, one had mixed views, and three disagreed. ‘I agree with that’ noted the researcher, ‘because I wonder whether I would understand more about our country if I accessed things that are held in archives’. The grocery assistant also agreed, because of ‘that coin of phrase, we’re all reading from the same page. You’re not getting disparate bits of information... you’re getting a common set of information so everybody thinks, “that’s what I heard, that’s what you heard, so therefore it’s correct”’.

However the youngest participant felt mixed due to issues of access: 'I agree with the greater sense of identity. I'm not sure about social cohesion, how much cohesion an archive would bring [because] you can't just go to an archive. Not everyone can go, or there's a little bit of a hassle to go'.

The three activists strongly disagreed with the statement, again, due to accessibility and interpretation concerns. 'I just don't see at all how archives could create nationhood and social cohesion', noted the call centre worker. 'I think that historical events can pit people against each other just as much as unite each other... and there are so many different ways that you can interpret a historic event'. For one of the Māori-Pākehā participants, the 'idea that we have a shared history which anyone can access, and which we all should access—it's such a bizarre myth'. His ideal under the 'current social and economic system' was archivists 'who don't want to use them to create nationhood and social cohesion, but are looking after them because someone, somewhere might want to use them to tell a different story—to put together some different pieces of a puzzle than were allowed in the official or dominant narratives'. Notions of access and a shared identity were also problematic for the third activist, who thought 'hardly anyone seems to know anything about the colonial history of New Zealand, and I think that collective amnesia around that stuff is actually New Zealand's national identity'. Yet if more people used the archive, 'people would feel more secure as people living in this land if they actually knew their history'.

## 6.0 DISCUSSION

The first objective of this study was to establish what non-users thought archives were, and what they held. Overall, the definition and image of archives were similar to other studies—archives were places with historic documents and information. That the two youngest participants associated the term with information as opposed to historic records echoes Laporte's (2004) findings, as does the general association with history for older participants. Likewise, six of the eight participants thought of archives as a place or 'store'—the most common definition found in the MLA quantitative study (2003b). Yet while some negative imagery found in the MLA study is evident (dusty, intimidating), the majority of participants did not emphasise this aspect. No one explicitly mentioned preservation in their definitions, although a 'store' could arguably equate to such a function. More common was the understanding of an archive as 'a store of records and knowledge... structured locations with specific information in each location that can be recalled by the people that need to recall it'. Most striking of the data was the lack of engagement with archives at the secondary school level, emphasising the need for better archival programs for students and teachers.



Paper records were the most common record format mentioned by participants, but in contrast to Laporte's study (2004) that found posters, plans or drawings as the second most mentioned format (behind documents), these were not named. Again, the two youngest participants thought of archives in terms of information and were able to name non-paper records, reinforcing the findings of Laporte (2004). Generally, perceptions of what information is held match the findings of the MLA quantitative study (2003b), which found that 44% of respondents associated archival information with family history, and 37% with local history.

My assumption that non-users are generally unaware of how records are organised in an archive was valid, with only one participant mentioning by creator. The lack of awareness of provenance-based organization sheds light on the difficulties new users have when first visiting an archive. As Duff & Fox (2006) note, the provenance-based arrangement and description systems are a challenge unique to archival institutions, which these findings support. It also shows the 'importance of archival literacy and the role that archivists need to play' during the reference interview (p.149).

Understanding how non-users perceived the accessibility and use of archives was the second research objective. The data suggests participants viewed users as a diverse group. Although serious researchers and government bodies were mentioned, so were family historians, students, and curious members of the public. While one saw archives as 'not really for everyone', the findings are at odds with the MLA qualitative study (2003a), whose participants viewed users as mainly professionals in information management. Indeed, that half of the participants with various backgrounds and occupations saw themselves as potential users reinforces this view.

Unexpectedly, half of the participants had wanted to use an archive but had not done so. From a socio-economic perspective, gender was not a factor, but age, income, level of education and ethnicity were. The four who believed they had no need to use an archive earned between \$25,000–\$49,900 per year, while two of those with a need were in the higher income bracket. Three of the four needing to use an archive were also university graduates (one with a PhD). This suggests that cultural capital, or forms of knowledge, skills and education (Bourdieu, 1996) play a part in non-users' awareness of archives, and the perception of need.

The physical barriers identified by Green (1994) are also evident in the findings. Location was a factor for some participants, but most thought location would not prevent use for those with the need (which of course has consequences for those without access to money, time or transport). Both Johnston (2008) and MLA (2003b) found that time

was the biggest and second-biggest factor to non-use, respectively. While time was mentioned ('it's hard when you're working'), these findings suggest a lack of awareness—either of their location, what they held, or their systems—as the most common reason for non-use. 'It is not enough to know that there may be pertinent or interesting information in archives', argue Blais & Enns. 'A user must learn how to retrieve that information... it is in bridging the gap from awareness to use that education has a vital role to play' (1990, p.106). As a result, understanding archival systems and how to conduct research before visiting would greatly aid the non-user.

However for some non-users, an understanding of archives may still not be enough to prevent feelings of institutional anxiety. When asked, three of the eight participants felt anxious about the thought of visiting an archive. All three were activists and included both Māori-Pākehā participants. This was due to both 'physical barriers' and 'personal environments'. Anxiety about the information found at archives underline the potential trauma of family research, and how reading rooms can be intimidating for those negotiating intimate information (Etherton, 2006). Anxiety due to archives as institutions affirm how formal, often monocultural spaces such as government buildings can act as a barrier for some Māori. Indeed, the survey conducted by Auckland Libraries (Worth, 1995) found that nearly a third of participants reported feelings of discomfort. Archives can increase the use of bilingual signage and staff with knowledge of te reo Māori and tikanga to aid such non-users. However, institutional anxiety will always likely to be present until information systems and spaces are truly 'based on the philosophies or belief systems of iwi' (Hayes, 2013).

Laporte (2004) found that a significant minority of non-users associated the word 'secret' with archives, and I assumed my findings would be similar. The data suggests participants were aware of restrictions being in place, but for 'reasonable' reasons as opposed to protecting 'secrets'. However there was a concern about control and who decided what information was open or closed, highlighting questions raised about the role (or power) of the archivist. As Jimerson notes, this role 'is not a passive or neutral position' (2009, p.348). All three activists had a strong awareness of power, access, and the importance of records being kept by a range of organisations (including their own).

'One of the first tasks of archivists in designing effective education programmes' note Blais & Enns, 'is clearly to identify relevant client groups that require specific guidance or instruction in the use of archives' (1990, p.107). What does this study tell us about non-users as potential users? Drawing on its findings, the MLA qualitative study created five segments of potential users: the indifferent; outsiders; latent supporters;

potential questers; and advocates (2003a, p.8). According to this formulation, the four participants who said yes to future use can be considered personal questers—high potential users who ‘need some encouragement to go further’ (p.9). Latent supporters are the two undecided participants, ‘put off by not knowing how to progress’ and who ‘need to be shown what’s available’ (p.8). Those who said no are outsiders, either too busy or uninvolved to see archives as being for them.

The third research objective sought to find out whether non-users value the existence of archives in society, and what this says about the archival contract. Participants were asked about the purpose of archives and the role of the archivist. Like the findings of the MLA qualitative study (2003a), the main purpose of an archive for participants was to store a record of the past. The reasons for this varied depending on age and supported the findings of Laporte (2004) and MLA (2003a), which found younger non-users saw archives as primarily having a functional or administrative purpose. Likewise, the four who associated ‘archives with the past, with heritage, with history’ (2004, p.486) were older in age, and less likely to have a university degree. Cultural memory featured prominently, questioning the claim of Collis that the public appear to link archives with individual rather than ‘national, regional or cultural identity’ (2008, p.176)—although there was an element of individual identity in terms of family history research.

The archival contract of storing historical information on behalf of society was generally accepted, albeit in relation to sound decision-making and checks on undue restrictions. However those with higher levels of education, and the activist sample, were quick to qualify or critique notions of accountability, national identity, and social cohesion. For them, these societal outcomes of formal archives were determined by how much the public placed importance on accessing records, or whether they could access them at all. In Marxist terms, ‘classical’ relations of production still underpin ‘the mode of information’: capitalism based upon the development and increasing role of information technology (see Olssen, 1996). Like the digital divide in the online sphere, an individual’s material conditions (such as education, income and ethnicity) can affect physical access to information, and any decentralisation of power that this access is meant to facilitate.

Archives do not exist in a vacuum. The cultural and economic realities of society therefore limit the often-assumed societal outcomes of formal archives. As noted by one participant, such factors also influenced the way information was collected on his tūpuna (ancestors). Can formal archives truly be ‘of the people, by the people, for the people’ (Ketelaar, 1997, p.23) within the confines of a Western, liberal paradigm? While

a number of participants believed it was the duty of government to store and provide free access to past information, one activist was clear to point out the limitations of such a framework:

I'm absolutely opposed to archives costing money, but at the same time I wouldn't want the idea of a free service become part of the myth-making about the liberal state: that the lovely state is providing. Well f\*\*\* that's the least you could do if you're going to store all this information about us, and about how you control us... the least you can do is let us see that information.

Yet despite this, and despite having never used one, all of the participants thought that archives were valuable public institutions. While the Western model of archives were problematic for Māori-Pākehā participants in terms of the *mātauranga* continuum—'knowledge accumulated by, managed by and inherited from our ancestors' (Winiata, 2010, p.1)—they were still regarded as useful in terms of what they held, and to enable users to question dominant narratives.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

Using a qualitative research design, this study set out to learn more about non-user understandings of archives in Aotearoa New Zealand. Eight participants shared their views on what they thought an archive was, what it held, and why. I also hoped to discover whether the societal role of archives was valued, and what this said about the archival contract.

Participants had mixed levels of awareness. While their image of an archive was generally accurate, there was little awareness of how it was organised. Knowledge of digital records or an archive's online presence was notably absent, as was engagement with archives at the secondary school level. Archives were viewed as accessible places for those who needed them, but with clear differences to other institutions (due to the nature of what they held). For some participants it was these differences that prevented them from using an archive.

The findings identified commonalities with other non-user studies, such as the definition of an archive as a store of mainly paper-based records, and holding authentic information on a range of individuals and local history. Likewise, younger participants tended towards an informational over an historical view. However key differences were identified—archives were viewed less negatively than other studies, their value did not diminish for older participants, and archives were seen as more accessible to a wider range of users. It was a lack of awareness over time that was a barrier.

Despite the limitations of a small and geographically isolated sample, the findings support the view that understandings of archives greatly influence use. A lack of awareness on what an archive held, as well as its systems, prevented half of the sample from using them—even when there was a need to do so. It also prevented those with less cultural capital from identifying whether an archive would fulfil an information need. While a minority were indifferent or ‘outsiders’, outreach programs—especially at the secondary school level—would have seen a number of these non-users become users. Future research covering a wider sample of the population (including other ethnic minorities) could shed further light on the relationship between awareness, perception, and use.

This study has implications for archives—many of which are already known by archivists or latent in their day-to-day practice. That is, increased visibility, awareness-raising, and educational programs are important for increasing use. As Blais & Enns note, this “has serious implications in our era of retrenchment and scarcity of resources” (1990, p.104). It also has implications for archival outreach designed to facilitate increased use, both onsite or online. As a result, the perceptions and awareness of non-users—or at least those segments of non-users identified as potential users—should be a primary concern for any archive.

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## APPENDIX



## SCHOOL OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

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## Questions...

1. What is an archive? What does this word suggest to you? What images does it bring up?
2. What kind of things do you think you could find in an archive?
3. Who do you think visits / uses an archive? Why?
4. Why have you never visited an archive?
5. Have you ever wanted to visit an archive? If so, what prevented you from using it?
6. What do you think using an archive would be like?
7. What is the purpose of an archive?
8. Why do people keep archives? Is it important? Does it matter?
9. What do you think of these statements:
  - a) *Archives contribute to efficient and effective government:* trust in government is a prerequisite for a healthy democracy. People will trust government and be able to hold it to account due to full and accurate records being kept.
  - b) *Archives create nationhood and social cohesion:* New Zealanders will have a greater sense of identity and social cohesion through their ability to understand and access records of our nation's past.
10. No we've talked about archives do you see yourself ever visiting one in the future? Why?