

UCLA

UCLA Previously Published Works

Title

Community-centered collecting: finding out what communities want from community archives

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0rz7t71t>

Journal

Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, 51(1)

ISSN

0044-7870

Author

Caswell, Michelle

Publication Date

2014

DOI

10.1002/meet.2014.14505101027

Peer reviewed

Community-Centered Collecting: Finding Out What Communities Want from Community Archives

Michelle Caswell
UCLA
214 GSE&IS Building
Box 951520
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1520
caswell@gseis.ucla.edu

ABSTRACT

While much recent work on community archives assumes that independent, grassroots archival organizations better match the priorities and needs of local communities than mainstream government or university repositories, little empirical work has been done to confirm this assumption. This study begins to remedy this gap by exploring what one subgroup of users of one community archive (the South Asian American Digital Archive or SAADA) would like to see the archive collect through a content analysis of responses given by South Asian American undergraduates to the questions of what they wish to know more about their grandparents' generation and what they would like their grandchildren to know about them. The analysis uncovered several key themes about the past of interest to the subpopulation: information about specific relatives, major historical events in South Asia, economic, cultural, and racial barriers their parents or grandparents faced when they came to the U.S., and reasons for leaving South Asia. It also uncovered several areas that participants would like future generations to know about the present: social justice activism, blending two cultures, struggling to fit in as a minority, the impact of technological change, and discrimination in the wake of September 11, 2001. Based on these findings, some key collection priorities are suggested for SAADA to better match community needs.

{This is the space reserved for copyright notices.}

ASIST 2014, November 1-4, 2014, Seattle, WA, USA.

[Author Retains Copyright. Insert personal or institutional copyright notice here.]

Keywords

**COMMUNITY ARCHIVES, PARTICIPATION,
COLLECTION PRIORITIES**

INTRODUCTION

Much recent work on community archives has assumed that independent, grassroots archival organizations better directly address the priorities and needs of local communities than mainstream university or government repositories (Flinn, Stevens and Shepherd, 2009; Cook, 2013; Croke 2010; Bastian and Alexander, 2009). Community archives are often positioned as alternative venues for groups that have been marginalized, ignored, or shut out of mainstream institutions to seize the means by which to document their own pasts and engage in self-representation, identity construction, and empowerment (Flinn and Stevens, 2009). Indeed, the logic of community archives discourses is built on the assumption that rooting collection priorities, appraisal decisions, descriptive choices, fundraising and governance structures within communities leads to a more straightforward relationship between archival collections and community needs. Web 2.0 technologies have been held out as particularly productive venues for encouraging community participation in the archival endeavor (Krause and Yake, 2007; Shilton and Srinivasan, 2007). Yet, little empirical work has been done to study the connection (or disconnection) between the collection priorities of community archives and the wants and needs of the communities they serve.

This study attempts to remedy this gap by exploring what one subgroup of users of one community archive (the South Asian American Digital Archive) (SAADA) would like to see the archive collect. While the needs of the particular community served by SAADA are unique to its specific history, this study aims to reach some generalizable

findings regarding the methods for studying community-based archives' users needs and the types of topics community members would like to see independent archival organizations collect. Furthermore, although the research reported in this paper focuses on the needs of one subgroup of community members—college students attending a conference on South Asian American activism—this subgroup represents an important bloc of SAADA's targeted users and is therefore an important constituency for the organization. The hope is that by better understanding community needs, community archives can shape collection priorities to reflect the values of the community they serve, and then actively seek out collections within the scope of those priorities.

BACKGROUND

SAADA is a U.S.-based online community archival repository that the author co-founded in 2008 with Samip Mallick. At that time, both co-founders were working at the University of Chicago; the author was the Assistant Bibliographer for Southern Asia, Mallick was the Outreach Coordinator for the Center for Southern Asian Studies. We did an assessment of archival materials related to South Asian American history and found that no repository had South Asian American history as a collecting priority. We sensed an urgent need; with much of the material history from the early 20th century in the possession of children and grandchildren of first generation immigrants, many of the South Asians who came after American immigration policy opened up in the Immigration & Nationality Act of 1965 aging, and many of the early community websites and born-digital materials from the 1990s disappearing, we felt that much of this history would be lost had someone not intervened. Furthermore, we sensed a real need for these materials to remain under community control and not be subsumed under larger institutional repositories, where could be undervalued, get lost in the shuffle, or misinterpreted. We also knew that we did not have the financial resources or stability to create a physical space where the materials could be housed permanently.

Despite these limitations, we decided to start a digital community archives. We each contributed \$100, bought some server space, recruited a volunteer with experience managing nonprofit finances, incorporated as a nongovernmental organization, and created the South Asian American Digital Archive as an independent online-only community-based repository. Six years later, SAADA holds the world's largest publicly-accessible largest collection of materials documenting South Asian American experiences and remains the only non-profit organization working nationally to document, preserve and provide access to the rich history of South Asians in the United States. SAADA has a particular emphasis on collecting materials related to early South Asian immigration to the U.S., to anti-South Asian race riots, to labor, student, and religious

organizations, to political involvement, and to artists and intellectuals. SAADA collects materials that are not just celebratory in nature, but reflect the diverse range of South Asian American experiences, from pamphlets created by Punjabi laborers organizing against British rule in the 1910s to webzines created by Muslim punk bands in the 2010s.

SAADA's board of directors defines South Asian American as broadly as possible and takes a transnational, regional approach. Our collection reflects records created by or about people residing in the United States who trace their heritage to Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the many South Asian diaspora communities across the globe. This later point—the many South Asian diaspora communities across the globe—is key to the inclusion of immigrants of South Asian descent from places like Trinidad and Fiji, where many Indians migrated as indentured laborers in the nineteenth century. Some of the descendants of these indentured laborers have migrated to the United States, forming substantial Indo-Caribbean communities (and to a lesser extent, Indo-Fijian communities). While these secondary diaspora communities are often excluded from or overlooked by other South Asian American organizations, SAADA makes a concerted effort to include them in our collections.

SAADA is radically focused on access and still has no publically accessible physical location; we digitize historic materials and collect born-digital sources located in private and family collections and those of government and university repositories, archivally describe them in a culturally appropriate manner, link them to related materials in the archives, and make them freely accessible online to anyone in the world with an internet connection. After digitization, the physical materials remain with the individual, family, organization, or repository from which they originated. SAADA currently has 1,641 unique digital items in its collection and the archive is growing by the day.

The archive is governed by a five-member board made up of two archivists, two professors whose work focuses on Asian American studies, and a nonprofit development professional. The author is the only board member who is not of South Asian descent. SAADA also relies on a dedicated group of volunteers nationwide to track down, digitize, and describe materials, as well as pro bono lawyers who helped fill out the incorporation paperwork, craft our deed of gift, and address copyright issues. Mallick is the organization's only paid staff and we are engaged in a fundraising campaign that aims to raise enough money to ensure Mallick's employment on a fulltime basis and hire additional staff. Fundraising is our biggest challenge, and, like many community organizations, we are trying to find the balance between independence and sustainability (Flinn, Stevens, Shepherd, 2009). While we are committed to administrative and fiscal independence, we also work closely with well-established institutions to identify and digitize materials in their collections that fit within our scope and to publicize our materials to potential users. We

also use our website, online magazine, Facebook page, Twitter account, and email list to update the public about our activities.

We had more than 180,000 unique visitors in 2013; this more than quintuples the figure of 33,000 from the previous year. We are still working on ways to evaluate who uses SAADA and how, gauge level of engagement with the materials, and track our impact. Figuring out how to measure our success is one of our biggest challenges, particularly given our pressing need to build ongoing relationships with funders.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past decade, a growing body of archival studies literature has addressed burgeoning community archives movements and examined the ways in which communities have developed independent grassroots efforts to document their own histories (Flinn, Stevens and Shepherd, 2009; Cook, 2013; Croke, 2010; Bastian and Alexander, 2009). A community-based archive is defined by Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd (2009) as "collections of material gathered primarily by members of a given community and over whose use community members exercise some level of control" (p.73). While notions of identity and community are constantly shifting, community archives are independent grassroots efforts for communities to document their own commonalities and differences outside the boundaries of formal mainstream institutions, such as government repositories and university archives. Grassroots archival communities have materialized around ethnic, racial, or religious identities (Kaplan, 2000; Daniel, 2010), gender and sexual orientations (Barriault, 2009), economic status (Flinn and Stevens, 2009), and physical locations (Flinn and Stevens, 2009). Examples include the Mayme A. Clayton Library and Museum, the archives of the Japanese American National Museum (based on racial and ethnic identity), the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives (based on gender and sexual orientation), Center for the Study of Political Graphics (based on political orientation), and the Southern California Library (based on geographic location and commitment to social justice).

In these community-based organizations, decisions about what materials to collect, how to describe those materials, and who should have access to them are made by community members, many of whom are not professionally trained archivists. In this way, community archives often operate outside the purview of dominant archival standards and practice. Yet, scholars of archival studies have recently called on professional archivists to embrace community-centric values. Terry Cook (2013), for example, contends that recent archival orientation toward community constitutes an important paradigm shift in the field, from custodianship to shared stewardship, from a singular dominant mode of archival work to a plurality of modes. In

the wake of these shifts, Cook argues, professional archivists should reconsider their prior marginalization of community archives, and instead view them as legitimate and longstanding (if parallel) archival traditions. Building on Cook's claim of a paradigm shift, Caswell (2014) posits that community archives generally cluster around five key principles: broad *participation* in all or most aspects of archival collecting from appraisal to description to outreach; shared ongoing *stewardship* of cultural heritage between the archival organization and the larger community it represents; *multiplicity* of voices and formats, including those not traditionally found in mainstream archives such as ephemera and artifacts; positioning archival collecting as a form of *activism* and ongoing *reflexivity* about the shifting nature of community and identity.

As Kaplan (2000) detailed, community archives are often forged at very specific moments in community history in response to highly-charged political environments, battles over the boundaries and makeup of group identity, and damaging stereotypes of the community in the mainstream. This is confirmed by Flinn, Stevens and Shepherd's (2009) findings that political activism, community empowerment, and social change were prime motivating factors undergirding these fiercely independent archival efforts. Indeed, the creation of community archives can be seen as a form of political protest in that it is an attempt to seize the means by which history is written and correct or amend dominant stories about the past (Flinn and Stevens, 2009). In this way, community archives can be read as a direct challenge to the failure of mainstream repositories to collect a more accurate and robust representation of society.

Much of the empirical research on the direct involvement of communities in archival collecting centers on using Web 2.0 technologies to increase participation in archival appraisal and description. Shilton and Srinivasan (2007) have proposed community participation in archival appraisal through an interactive online platform. Similarly, Krause and Yakel (2007) harnessed digital platforms for participatory archival description, while Huvila (2008) posited that new technologies call for a shift to a radical user orientation and decentralized curation. SAADA is currently seeking grant funding to provide a platform that will allow users to tag, contextualize, and comment on archival records, essentially opening up archival description to online users. However, this current paper differs significantly from previous scholarship in its focus on getting in-person participation on collection priorities through a community event.

METHODS

This study employs content analysis as its method to uncover the community-based archival needs of a group of undergraduate South Asian Americans. Content analysis, as defined by Gilliland and McKemish (2004), is "the

examination of both the visible and the underlying, latent or symbolic content of a document based upon a system of coding” (p. 179). Content analysis is a well-established social science method (Neuendorf, 2002; West, 2001) that uses inductive reasoning to determine recurring themes. Content analysis has been used in archival studies in a variety of contexts, including to characterize how archivists are portrayed on film (Aldred, Burr and Park, 2008), to determine common themes in archival studies syllabi across programs (Bastian and Yakel, 2006), to compare finding aids and MARC records (Czeck, 1998), and to investigate the degree to which archives’ websites are engaging users (Samouelian, 2009). Krause and Yakel (2007) performed a content analysis of user comments posted on an archival website; however, content analysis remains an underutilized tool for understanding the needs of archival users.

The author performed a content analysis of responses generated at a community event. In January 2014, SAADA Executive Director Samip Mallick gave the keynote address at the twelfth annual South Asian Awareness Network (SAAN) conference at the University of Michigan. SAAN is a South Asian American social justice organization run by undergraduates at the University of Michigan. The audience of more than 250 people was comprised largely of University of Michigan undergraduate students. While the undergraduate student population is not representative of SAADA’s entire user base, it does represent an important targeted constituency for the organization.

At the event, Mallick asked attendees to anonymously fill out cards with two questions: on one side the card asked: “What stories from your parents’ or grandparents’ lives do you wish you knew more about?” and on the second side, the card asked: “What stories from your generation would you like your grandchildren to know about?”. The questions were asked in order to solicit audience involvement in the event and were not designed with this research study in mind. Participants were informed that their responses might be digitized and placed on SAADA’s website and were given the opportunity to decline by circling “Do Not Post” on the bottom of each card. Mallick then digitized and posted a total of 70 responses on the SAADA website (SAADA, 2014). After reading the 70 responses posted online, the author of this study then asked Mallick for access to the remaining cards. IRB approval was granted to use the cards for a content analysis.

The author of this study first read through all the responses to question one on all the cards, taking notes on emerging themes. She then sorted each card into piles based on themes, reread each pile to make sure its theme was accurately reflected in the cards, and adjusted and refined. After the data was analyzed for question one, the same process was repeated for question two.

Responses were short, ranging from a few words to four sentences in length. Given the brevity of the responses, the vast majority expressed a single answer to each question

and, as a result, each answer was coded for a single dominant theme.

Even though the event had a specific South Asian American theme, not all of the participants were South Asian. Indeed, 41 of the 202 responses explicitly indicated that the respondent was not of South Asian descent. This confirms Huvila’s assertions (2008) that community cannot always be pre-determined in a participatory archive, but consists of who shows up, regardless of their identity. Because SAADA has a specific mission to serve South Asian Americans and solely collects materials related to South Asian American history, the 41 responses in which the respondent clearly indicated in the answers that he or she was not of South Asian descent were disqualified from the content analysis.

While a mainstream repository might apply a similar content analysis methodology to investigate the needs of users, it would be unlikely that a mainstream repository would segment its users by ethnic group or attempt to assess the specific needs of a targeted ethnic group. Furthermore, it would be less likely that a mainstream repository would actively seek out user participation in collection priorities to the same degree a community-based archive like SAADA does. This difference reflects the difference in mission, collection scope, and targeted user groups between a community-based archive like SAADA and a mainstream government or university repository, which is beholden to a much larger and diffuse group of stakeholders (such as the general public or students and alumni) than an independent community-based archive.

FINDINGS

Question 1

The first question, “What stories from your parents’ or grandparents’ lives do you wish you knew more about?,” generated 202 responses. 6 responses were disqualified because the respondent indicated that he or she did not wish their responses to be made public by circling the “do not post” indication on the card. 41 responses were disqualified because the respondent clearly indicated he or she was not of South Asian descent in the response. 18 responses were disqualified for being too vague (such as “I wish I knew more about India.”) This left a total of 137 eligible answers to the first question.

Theme	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Narratives about specific relatives	44	32%
Key moments in South Asian history	36	26%
Barriers faced by parents and/or	34	25%

grandparents in U.S.		
Why their parents and/or grandparents left South Asia	9	7%
Issues related to gender and women's roles	8	6%
Life before recent technological developments	3	2%
Religion and cultural practice	3	2%
Total eligible responses	137	100%

Table 1: Answers to the question: “What stories from your parents' or grandparents' lives do you wish you knew more about?”

Of the 137 eligible responses, 32% (44 responses) indicated that they wanted to know more detailed narratives about specific relatives. Responses in this category ranged from vague, such as, “I would like to hear more about how my great-grandmother went about her daily life,” to specific, such as “My great grandparents used to own a huge amount of land in Kerala, India during British colonization. I wish I knew more about the struggles they faced and how/why they lost a lot of their land.” Of particular interest were respondents who told very short narratives about specific relatives. For example, one respondent wrote, “My mother, when she was in medical school in Bombay, used to go with her friends to the red light district and educate sex workers about/ get them access to birth control.” Another shared, “My Grandfather [sic] was the first Indian to attend the University of Michigan and helped design the World Trade Center. He is easily one of the most humble men that I have ever met and I wish I took more time to understand his struggle to come to the United States and become part of designing the world's largest building.” It is clear from these responses that there are both a wealth of interesting stories that can be told by older South Asian Americans and a great deal of interest in these family stories among this group South Asian American undergrads.

The second most common theme indicated was key moments in South Asian history, and, in particular, family members' involvement in these events. 26% (36 responses) fit within this category. While this theme is clearly related to the first theme of specific family narratives, the main focus of the responses in this category was involvement in historic events in South Asia, including: the Partition of the Subcontinent in 1947 (15 responses); the movement to gain independence from the U.K. prior to 1947 (12 responses); colonial South Asia (5 responses); the 1971 Bangladesh Independence War (3 responses); and the 1984 anti-Sikh violence in India (1 response). One respondent wrote, “My father's mother moved from Lahore to Bombay during Partition... She talks about how her family helped others

struggling with displacement after partition. But she's never been able to share what she went through personally as a child experiencing all of this. That's something I regret not knowing more about.” Another wrote, “I wish I knew more about how my grandparents grew up through the British India/ Independence Era. I know my grandpa witnessed one of the salt marches. He passed away when I was young, so I never got a chance to ask him.” These responses expressed a need for further information about the interplay between personal family stories and larger historical narratives.

The third most common theme was the economic, cultural, and racial barriers respondents' parents and/or grandparents faced when they arrived in the U.S., with 25% (34 respondents) indicating this topic. One respondent wrote, “I wish my parents would tell me more about how it was for them to move from India to the U.S. with little money and how they built themselves up to be so successful today without help from anyone. I know they try to hide their difficulties from me but I want them to share so I can be more aware.” Another wrote, “I wish I knew more about my father's experience growing up in New Jersey. He came here at a time when there were few Indians and said he had few friends. In fact, his best friend was black and both experienced racism.” Many of these cards indicated both that older generations of immigrants had experienced and overcome significant barriers in the U.S. and that such difficulties were often kept hidden or secret from younger generations.

In the remaining categories, 7% (9 respondents) indicated they would like to know why their parents and/or grandparents left South Asia and 6% (8 respondents) indicated they were interested in learning about gender and women's roles in previous generations. Only 2% indicated they would like to know more about life before recent technological developments, and another 2% indicated they would like to know more about religion and cultural practice.

Question 2

The second question, “What stories from your generation would you like your grandchildren to know more about?” generated 116 eligible responses. 21 of these responses were eliminated for being too vague, with answers such as “my experiences as an Asian American” and “what it is like to grow up as an American born Indian.” This left 95 eligible responses.

Theme	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Community-based social justice activism	23	24%
Maintaining SA culture while being American	20	21%
Struggles to fit within mainstream US society	16	17%

Impact of technological change	13	14 %
Impact of September 11, 2001	8	8%
Difficulty in pursuing non-traditional professions	7	7%
Generational differences	6	6%
Stories of successful South Asian Americans	2	2%
Total eligible responses	95	100%

Table 2 Answers to the question: “What stories from your generation would you like your grandchildren to know more about?”

The most common theme reported was the South Asian American community’s involvement in ongoing social justice activism, with 24% (23 out of 95 respondents) listing this as the primary story about their generation they would want their grandchildren to know. One respondent wrote, “I would like my grandchildren to know about the movements for social justice that took place—though not as large scale as the 60s, I hope they know our generation sought to improve the world around us.” Another wrote, “I’d like them to know and be aware of current and developing social justice issues and I hope to educate them about it too so they know that South Asians have a voice and major representation in society.” Such results are unsurprising given the social justice theme of the conference at which data was collected.

Notably, 6 respondents in this category specifically mentioned feminist and LGBTQ activism. One respondent wrote about *Yoni Ki Baat*, a South Asian American performance inspired by *The Vagina Monologues*; “Yoni Ki Baat: these kickass South Asian American Women in California who created a monologue show to promote the voices of S.A. women and shed light on taboo topics.” Another wrote that he or she would like his or her grandchildren to know about “the fabulous queer artistic South Asian community that lives in NYC, LA, Oakland, Toronto, everywhere.” Several respondents specifically mentioned the struggle to legalize gay marriage.

The second most common theme was the ability to maintain South Asian culture while at the same time being American, with 21% of responses fitting within this category. Responses reflecting this theme commented on cultural awareness, the success of bridging two cultures, and the respondents’ ability to adapt. One respondent wrote, “how we managed to create a new culture which maintains both American and Indian values and cultures,” while another wrote, “how we managed to balance and meld our Indian heritage with the American culture... through dance, religious identity, etcetera.” These responses were positive

in nature, with respondents using words like “balance,” “blending,” “bicultural,” “adapt” and “integrated.”

By contrast, the third most common theme was the struggle to fit within mainstream American society as a minority, with 17% of responses fitting within this scope. While closely related to the second theme, responses in this category used words and phrases with negative associations, such as “struggle,” “challenge,” “culture clashing,” “ethical dilemmas,” “bizarre duality,” “exclusion,” and “stigma.” One respondent would like his or her grandchildren to know, “How the experiences of being Muslim and American in the United States has morphed [sic] throughout my life—from tolerance/ignorance to hatred/ignorance,” while another wrote she would like future generations to know about “my experiences as a child growing up in a primarily white, Christian town... going to a Catholic school while trying to maintain my faith.” From these responses it is clear that participants value documenting and preserving stories of their own personal struggles.

The impact of technological change was the fourth most common theme, with 14% of responses falling within this category. One respondent wrote, “How we experienced the transition into the digital age from the 90s [to the] 2000s and how that changed the face of communication,” while one wrote, “I want my grandchildren to know about life before this extremely technologically advanced era.... I want children to realize that life existed even before the iPhone, Mac, etc.”

Significantly, 8% of respondents remarked on the importance of communicating the impact of September 11, 2001 on South Asian American communities to future generations. One respondent wrote, “What it was like to have brown skin in New York City after 9/11 and other stereotypes I overcame...,” while another wrote, “As a Muslim, and events surrounding 9/11, my community has faced lots of trials and tribulations in the past and continues to be stigmatized today.” Another wrote, “I think all brown people have a story about how the 9/11 tragedy affected their lives in the U.S.” As these responses show, living through September 11, 2001 and the discrimination experiences by South Asian Americans in its wake remain a formative experience in many of these undergraduates’ lives, one they view as having historic significance.

The difficulty of choosing nontraditional professions and the related issue of generational conflict were also emerging themes. 7% of respondents commented on the difficulty of choosing career paths that were not commonly found in the community or accepted by their parents. One wrote, “how hard it is to pursue a job that your parents disagree with,” while another wrote, “I would like my children to hear stories about Asian Americans choosing fields that typically have few Asian Americans, i.e. actors, comedians, etc. I think that by their generation, there will be many Asian Americans in this field and I want my children to remember

the people who made this possible.” Another 6% of respondents commented on generational gaps. One wrote, “I want my grandchildren to know how hard my parents worked to support me, and some of the conflicts we faced because of the generational gap.” Two respondents indicated they would like future generations to know specific stories of economically successful South Asian Americans.

DISCUSSION

While the author makes no claims that these responses are representative of the larger South Asian American population, they can still help us glean some important information about the archival needs and priorities of a significant subset of SAADA’s targeted constituency and represent a first attempt at the organization attempting to systematically assess community needs.

The responses to these two questions, while limited, can help shape SAADA’s collection policies and illuminate what sorts of records we should encourage the community to generate in the present. The findings suggest two areas in which SAADA is currently meeting user needs, as well as three areas in which new projects can be launched to better match those needs.

First, SAADA’s ongoing First Days project, in which South Asian immigrants are asked to generate short audio, video, or textual narratives about their first day in the U.S., seems to perfectly match the respondent’s desires to hear personal narratives from family members about the barriers they faced in the U.S. and why they left South Asia (Caswell and Mallick, 2014). This sort of participatory microhistory project validates the historical significance of the stories of everyday people, echoing participants’ desires to hear more stories from their ancestors.

Second, SAADA’s attempt to document ongoing social justice activism within the community—and the board’s vision of SAADA as a social justice organization in and of itself—fits well with the respondents wishes that their own political activism be documented for future generations. Recent acquisitions like the records of the South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association, the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, and political involvement of various South Asian Student Associations reflect this collection priority.

In addition to these areas where SAADA seems to be currently meeting the needs of this user group, three proposed collection projects emerge from these findings.

Project One: SAADA could continue to reach out to older generations of South Asian Americans to collect records that document both their everyday experiences in the U.S. and their involvement in key historic events in South Asia.

Such collections would help meet respondents’ desires to know more detailed narratives about specific relatives, their involvement in South Asian history, the barriers they faced

in the U.S., and why they left South Asia to come to the U.S. This would shift SAADA’s current collection priority from its focus on major figures in South Asian American history—politicians, intellectuals and artists—to everyday immigrants who might not recognize the importance of their own narratives to history and whose stories often remain untold.

Project Two: SAADA could launch an intergenerational oral history project in order to overcome the generational barriers to communication experienced by the respondents and to create new records documenting events for which there is no or little existing documentation.

Knowing that so many of the undergraduate participants simultaneously expressed interest in older generations and regret at not asking older generations about their pasts, the proposed oral history project could provide an impetus for intergenerational dialogue while adding to SAADA’s growing oral history collection. Many of the themes uncovered by the responses lack pre-existing documentation; for example, few written records document barriers faced by new immigrants or the reasons why immigrants left their home countries. Oral histories can fill this gap while connecting younger generations to the past. Such a project can be done in conjunction with undergraduate courses in history and Asian American studies.

Project Three: SAADA should actively seek to record the stories of younger generations of South Asian Americans through digital participatory microhistory projects that document social justice activism, cultural resilience, and experiences in the wake of September 11, 2001.

As the participants clearly indicated, they were not only interested in the lives of their grandparents and parents, but also saw the historic significance of their own experiences. In light of this finding and building on the success of SAADA’s First Days project, SAADA could launch several themed participatory microhistory projects in which undergraduate students are encouraged to create brief textual, audio, or visual records documenting their involvement in or attitudes toward key collection themes (as indicated in the responses) and upload such records directly to the SAADA site. These participatory microhistory projects could be organized around key themes indicated in the responses, such as social justice activism, bridging two cultures, and discrimination in the wake of September 11, 2001.

Given the limited budget SAADA currently operates on, such projects present opportunities for grant proposals and fundraising drives. They would also allow SAADA to strengthen existing ties with immigrant families, undergraduate students and faculty, and community-based social justice organizations.

CONCLUSION

The findings reported in this paper constitute a preliminary first step towards discovering the archival needs of SAADA's users. Further research needs to be done with other South Asian American undergraduate groups, as well as with SAADA's other target demographics to see if the themes reported here are also applicable to other user groups. More work is also needed to see if similar or corollary themes emerge from other communities that can help guide collection priorities for other archival organizations.

As an increasing body of scholarship addresses the growing community archives movement, it is important to investigate the commonly-held assumption that community archives' collections accurately reflect the interests and needs of their home community. Through empirical study, we can examine if the collection priorities of community archives do, in fact, match the needs of the communities they serve. Content analysis of community-generated text provides a fruitful method through which to gauge community needs and enables researchers and community archives practitioners to assess the interests and needs of specific targeted communities. From the community archives perspective, such periodic check-ins are essential to ensuring the continued relevance of the organization's collections to the communities they are based in and serve.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank SAADA Executive Director Samip Mallick, who graciously allowed the organization to serve as a research site.

REFERENCES

Aldred, T., Burr, G., and Park, E. (2008). Crossing a librarian with a historian: the image of reel archivists. *Archivaria* 66, pp.57-93.

Barriault, M. (2009). Archiving the queer and queering the archives: a case study of the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA). In: Bastian J and Alexander B (eds) *Community archives: the shaping of memory*. Facet, London, pp. 97-108.

Bastian, J. and Alexander, B. (2009). Introduction: Communities and archives—a symbiotic relationship. In: Bastian J and Alexander B (eds) *Community archives: the shaping of memory*. Facet, London.

Bastian, J. and Yakel, E. (2006). Towards the development of an archival core curriculum: The United States and Canada. *Archival Science* 6: 133-150.

Caswell, M. 2014. Toward a survivor-centered approach to human rights archives: Lessons from community-based archives. *Archival Science*, preprint available online.

Caswell, M and Mallick, S. 2014. "Collecting the Easily Missed Stories: Digital Participatory Microhistory and the

South Asian American Digital Archive." *Archives & Manuscripts* 2014, preprint available online.

Cook, T. (2013). Evidence, memory, identity, and community; four shifting archival paradigms. *Archival Science* 13 (2-3): 95-120.

Crook, E. (2010). The politics of community heritage: motivations, authority and control. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16: 1-2: 16-29.

Czech, R. (1998). Archival MARC records and finding aids in the context of end-user subject access to archival collections. *American Archivist* 61: 426-440.

Daniel, D. (2010). Documenting the immigrant and ethnic experience in American archives. *American Archivist* 73(1): 82-104

Flinn, A. and Stevens, M. (2009). 'It is nohmistri, wimekin history.' Telling our own story: independent and community archives in the UK, challenging and subverting the mainstream. In: Bastian J and Alexander B (eds) *Community archives: the shaping of memory*. London: Facet, pp. 3-28.

Flinn, A., Stevens, M., and Shepherd, E. (2009). Whose memories, whose archives? Independent community archives, autonomy and the mainstream. *Archival Science* 9 (2009): 71-86.

Gilliland, A. and McKemish, S. (2004). Building an infrastructure for archival research. *Archival Science* 4 (2004): 149-197.

Huvila, I. (2008). "Participatory archive: Towards decentralised curation, radical user orientation, and broader contextualisation of records management" *Archival Science* 8:15-36.

Kaplan, E. (2000) We are what we collect, we collect what we are: archives and the construction of identity. *American Archivist* 63: 126-151.

Krause, M. and Yakel, E. (2007). Interaction in virtual archives: The polar bear expedition digital collections next generation finding aid. *American Archivist* 70 (2): 282-314.

Neuendorf, K.A. (2002). *The content analysis guidebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

SAADA, (2014). Recap: SAAN Conference. <http://www.saadigitalarchive.org/news/20140122-3494>.

Samouelian, M. (2009). Embracing web 2.0: Archives and the newest generation of web applications. *American Archivist* 72: 42-71.

Shilton, K. and Srinivasan, R. (2007). Participatory appraisal and arrangement for multicultural archival collections. *Archivaria* 63: 87-101.

West, M.D. (ed.) (2001). Theory, method and practice in computer content analysis. Westport, CT: Ablex, 2001).

