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Preserving the Pixel Party: Archives for Born-digital Social Communities

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Library and Information Science

by

Katharine Anne Lawrie

2012

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Preserving the Pixel Party: Archives for Born-digital Social Communities

by

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Master of Library and Information Science

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Anne Gilliland, Chair

Born-digital social communities are evolving into rich places of cultural interaction. A lack of broad awareness of these communities is leading to an unfortunate situation in which we increasingly lose the chance to document this developing area of contemporary culture, resulting in a regrettable gap in future knowledge. The archival situation is in need of change. Exploratory studies that establish an introduction into the born-digital community type and its archival needs must be done before any informed consensus may arise.

This study attempts to discern the contemporary situation of born-digital social communities and propose strategies for improvement. Professional and public communities are explored to gain understanding of the situation. Working with the anonymous Community B, a picture of one community's archival prospects is painted. A pervasive sense of confusion mingles with issues of privacy, preservation, and purpose among internet-savvy community members. Aided by community collaboration, potential solutions are reached. The dramatic need for dissemination of information to the public, to empower personal archiving actions and prevent loss of cultural data, is made clear. Conclusions provide material from which to extrapolate practical and beneficial archival actions in the future preservation and documentation of digital communities.

The thesis of Katharine Anne Lawrie is approved.

Jean-François Blanchette

Jonathan Furner

Anne Gilliland, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2012

For my Mother

With thanks to Community B

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Introducing Born-digital Social Communities

The developing expressions of everyday life represented by born-digital social communities are a wealth of contemporary cultural heritage. As a relatively new expression of community, these social groups have yet to develop a strong presence in the documented narrative of our history. The archiving of born-digital social communities is a developing subfield, ready for professional attention. This intersection of two growing areas of archival research activity, community-based archiving and digital archiving, offers the exciting opportunity to merge archival theories and practices for the benefit of communities - yet the subfield is relatively unexplored by those in the archival profession. This thesis may serve to initiate discussion of the subfield by highlighting the existence of born-digital social communities and their potential for archival action. Through an exploration of professional and public actions and attitudes toward the archiving of documentation created by these communities, and with the assistance of one such community in deepening understanding and developing potential solutions, a conversation may be started that will spark further exploration of this compelling subfield.

Born-digital social groups are increasingly recognized as legitimate forms of culture, community, and social interaction. Acceptance of their contribution to our cultural heritage has become more widespread as this type of community becomes more common. Research into born-digital social communities has revealed the fostering of rich relationships and social exchange that rivals those found in any other community type. Unfortunately, a lack of broad awareness of their value, complicated by the high rate of turnover in these communities and the fragility of digital records, is leading to an unfavorable situation in which we are increasingly losing the chance to document this developing area of contemporary culture. A lack of documentation in this area would lead to a regrettable gap in future knowledge. Although research into both community-based archives and digital archiving is extensive and ongoing, the intersection is sparsely attended.

Highlighting the existence of born-digital social communities and initiating discussion of their archival potential may help to mitigate the risk of loss by increasing the likelihood that appropriate solutions will be developed.

As a member of several born-digital social communities and beneficiary of the rich, meaningful relationships they foster, I have a personal knowledge of the value of this community type that is sensed by its members. The dual perspectives of both community member and archivist provide the opportunity to examine this situation in a sensitive and knowledgeable fashion. It is hoped that this thesis may benefit both born-digital social and archival communities.

Development of Born-digital Social Communities

The growth and development of born-digital social communities has been moving at a rapid pace since the inception of the Internet. In the 1970s, the development of ARPANET to enable military communication between distributed computer systems proved to be quite effective at the transmission of communication between people as well. This capacity for communication was embraced by US policy makers in need of a communication medium that could enable dispersed decision making.¹ Almost immediately, enabled communication grew beyond that which was strictly needed in an official capacity. The development of the personal computer initiated the process of bringing the newly developed communication medium to the public.² Expanded use was embraced by computer hobbyists for social discourse. With the development of high speed connections to the US government-sponsored Internet came increased capacity for accelerated communication.³ Accelerated communication capacity encouraged the development of relationships and communities across vast distances. The 1990s brought further rapid development, greatly popularizing the

1 H. Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (Rev Sub.) (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), 8.

2 *Ibid.*, 67-68.

3 *Ibid.*, 8-9.

communication medium outside of the US and advancing web sites from static objects to highly interactive ones.⁴ Speed and interactivity further enabled effective communication, and with that, the expanded development of strong tie relationships within digital communities. Although born-digital social communities were initially dismissed as lesser than physical communities, by this stage, their legitimacy as a community type was more broadly accepted within academic circles.⁵ Interest in studies questioning how and why such communities formed, why people became members, why people stayed members, and how people behaved as members of born-digital social communities grew. Information exchange, social support, friendship, and recreation were looked to as answers to these questions.⁶ Although a popular topic among researchers of other fields, those in information studies have not recognized the community type with as much interest as others express.

Approaching a thesis

This thesis represents the accumulation of data and analysis from a body of work regarding the archiving of born-digital social communities. The work defines terminology, clarifies actions and attitudes toward the archiving of these communities, deepens understanding of the archival situation, develops potential solutions, offers recommendations for archivists, and identifies areas for further research. These actions have been conducted through a review of published literature and professionally sponsored projects, survey of three public born-digital social communities, interaction with a private born-digital social community through case study, and analysis of data.

The research design was largely informed by grounded theory development. Although there have been some deviations from the method, (for example, a pre-existing influence from literature in the archival field, analysis of data through observation of accumulation as well as conceptual coding,

4 *Ibid.*, 68.

5 S.M. Wilson and L.C. Peterson, "The anthropology of online communities," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 456.

6 C. Ridings, and D. Gefen, "Virtual Community Attraction: Why People Hang Out Online," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 10, no. 1 (2004). http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol10/issue1/ridings_gefen.html

and reception to feedback prior to the final write-up of developed theory) the primary action of generating theory from the collection and analysis of data has been the driving methodology.

Progression of the work has been driven by three questions developed over the data collection process:

- What attitudes exist toward the archiving of born-digital social communities?
- What actions are being taken toward the archiving of born-digital social communities?
- Could community-based or digital archiving practices improve the archival situation revealed by collected data?

The exploratory question of what attitudes toward the archiving of born-digital social communities exist initiated the data collection process. This data was pursued through examination of archival and sociological literature, professionally sponsored archiving projects, and concise observation of a number of online social communities. Early review prompted the development of the second question regarding actions. Examinations of literature, projects, and communities also served to provide illuminating data at this second stage. These examinations both revealed the need for further research and inspired the third question regarding potential improvements. Addressing all three questions was a case study that constitutes the bulk of data collected. The case study, accomplished with the assistance of a small, private born-digital social community referred to in this text as Community B, was conducted in three stages. The first focused on discerning community identity, attitudes, and archival actions through data collection. The second was formed by development of potential solutions. The final stage was composed of subsequent observations. Data collection was accomplished through a variety of techniques including a survey with response from over twenty-seven percent of the active population inquiring on topics of community and archival matters, interview, participant and direct observation, and content analysis of the collected data, existing records, and community structures. The methodological approach guiding the survey of

communities and case study will be elaborated on before the review of respective data. The conclusions drawn will provide material from which researchers, archivists, and born-digital social community members may extrapolate practical and beneficial archival actions in the preservation and documentation of such communities.

This work is not meant to address comprehensively all attitudes, actions, and born-digital social community types currently in existence. Limitations of time and access preclude such comprehensive coverage. This work is intended as a survey of a selection of existing attitudes, actions, and communities that may serve as introductory representation of the broader community type and associated issues. From this proffered starting point, further research on the part of qualified professional colleagues and myself may build a richer body of knowledge with which to address the situation of born-digital social communities.

This thesis is constructed in seven chapters. The first introduces the topic, methodology, and structure. The second pauses to define terms and concepts used in the work. The third peruses literature of relevant archival subfields and professionally sponsored archiving projects. The fourth seeks to assess actions and attitudes toward the archiving of born-digital social communities expressed from within such communities in a series of proto-case studies. The fifth relates work done with Community B to deepen understanding and develop potential solutions. The sixth delivers results garnered from the primary case study. The seventh and final chapter offers implications of the work and recommendations for archivists, and highlights areas for further research.

Defining Terms

The terminology of this developing field can be problematic. Two kinds of communities create language: specialized communities create language for special purposes, and all-inclusive communities create language for general purposes. At times, those in specialized communities may borrow terminology developed by those in all-inclusive communities, leading to ambiguity of meaning.⁷ Although well-documented practices for developing terminology within specialized settings exist,⁸ these practices are most useful in contained settings, within which terms may be carefully developed. The realm of born-digital social communities is not a contained setting. The broad range of people engaged in such communities suggest them to be closer to all-inclusive than specialized. When approaching these communities from an academic perspective, specialized language and general purpose language may clash. Even within specialized communities such as the archival community, the use of broad terminology in reference to specialized concepts may create misunderstanding. Presumption of shared understanding inhibits the usefulness of research. Therefore, before embarking on a study of attitudes and communities, a discussion of terminology, definitions, and classifications may prove useful. The following sections will seek definitions of community type, discuss problematic language and the terminology choices of this thesis, and clarify the meaning of archiving a community.⁹

7 Stephanie W. Hass and Carol A. Hert, "Terminology Development and Organization in Multi-Community Environments: The Case of Statistical Information" (presentation, 11th Annual ASIS&T SIG/CR Classification Research Workshop, Chicago, IL, November 12, 2000) 55.

8 Esther Ramani, Tebogo Kekana, Mamphago Modiba, and Michael Joseph, "Terminology development versus concept development through discourse: insights from a dual-medium BA degree," *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 25, no.2 (2007).

9 Although this chapter stresses the importance of clearly understood definitions of terminology, the importance of context must also be acknowledged. Archives and communities both exist in a wide array of situations. The culture and circumstances of different archives and communities may result in different definitions and practical use of terminology, even in different terminology altogether. The stress placed in this chapter on reaching working definitions is present so as to provide clarity of terminology throughout this work. However, the suitability of terminology to the context of a community or archive should take precedent over universal application of terms.

Identifying Virtual Social Communities

Ridings, Gefen and Arinze define 'virtual community' as “groups of people with common interests and practices that communicate regularly and for some duration in an organized way over the Internet through a common location or mechanism.”¹⁰ Setting aside the means of communication, this definition of virtual communities could easily cover physically-based communities as well, suggesting a validity of virtual communities that is not always commonly recognized. Figallo offers a definition of virtual communities in which members feel a sense of belonging to a larger social group, enjoy a variety of intertwined relationships with community members, participate in ongoing exchanges of information regarding commonly valued matters, and have lasting relationships with other members.¹¹ Value may be assigned to relationships that are lasting, in turn conveying value to the community that fosters them. Rheingold suggests a sense of reality, richness, and vitality belonging to virtual social groups, stating “people in virtual communities do just about everything people do in real life, but we leave our bodies behind. You can't kiss anybody and nobody can punch you in the nose, but a lot can happen within those boundaries.”¹²

Figallo and Ridings et. al. provide satisfactory initial definitions of the virtual community, but further clarification would prove helpful. Ridings and Gefen seek to deepen these definitions by determining what does not qualify as a virtual community, therefore discerning an inherent quality of virtual communities supported by Figallo. They suggest chat rooms that exist to “cater to single people looking to meet other single people, each room having a different mix of people each day,

10 C. Ridings, D. Gefen, and B. Arinze, “Some antecedents and effects of trust in virtual communities,” *Journal of Strategic Information Systems* 11, no. 3-4 (2002): 273.

11 C. Figallo, *Hosting Web Communities: Building Relationships, Increasing Customer Loyalty, and Maintaining A Competitive Edge* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998).

12 Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, 5.

none returning on a regular basis”¹³ would not be designated as communities due to the lack of regular participation by those involved. Similarly, sites designed to promote the exchange of goods (such as Craigslist¹⁴ or Freecycle¹⁵) would not qualify as communities, despite the drawing together of participants within a local geographic area, due to the lack of relationship-building regular participation. Distinctions may be made between virtual communities and virtual networks.

Dholakia, Bagozzi and Pearo highlight the socially dispersed interactions of networks, often short in nature and fulfilling utilitarian needs, as contrary to those of communities, in which members sustain a high level of group interaction and nourish specific relationships among members.¹⁶ As Parks and Floyd mention, online friendships- lasting relationships- require time and commitment not usually embraced by the virtual network format.¹⁷ It is Figallo's suggested quality of lasting relationships that pulls together participants in a way that transforms a group of people into a community.

A difficulty facing potential researchers of virtual social communities is the lack of a universally accepted typology of virtual communities. Markus attempts to divide virtual communities into a typology consisting of three root categories: social orientation, professional orientation, and commercial orientation.¹⁸ Communities capable of building the kinds of lasting relationships identified as definitive of virtual social communities are limited to the socially oriented category, and supported by such qualities as shared hobby or geographic location. While this typology successfully incorporates a wide variety of community types, it is faulty. Markus's classification of virtual social

13 Ridings and Gefen, “Virtual Community Attraction.”

14 <http://losangeles.craigslist.org/>

15 <http://www.freecycle.org/>

16 U. M. Dholakia, R. Bagozzi, & L. K. Pearo, “A social influence model of consumer participation in network- and small-group-based virtual communities,” *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 21, no. 3 (2004): 241-263.

17 Malcom R. Parks and Floyd, Kory, “Making Friends In Cyberspace,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 1, no. 4 (1996): 0.

18 Ursula Markus, “Characterizing the virtual community,” *SAP Design Guild*, last modified September 12, 2002, <http://www.sapdesignguild.org/editions/edition5/communities.asp>.

communities clings to qualities of offline social communities. As a result, the typology becomes uncomfortably narrow in its definitions of virtual community types. Its lack of accommodation for overlapping community types is a failing. The ability of virtual communities to break strict boundaries of definition defies strict classification. Much as it is certain that the world's knowledge cannot be accurately and securely sorted in one rigid hierarchy, the expansive range of virtual community types are unlikely to adhere cleanly to such a sorting.

Porter attempts an expansion and correction of Markus' typology by re-classifying virtual communities by establishment, as either member-initiated or organization-sponsored.¹⁹ At a second level of classification, communities are divided by “relationship orientation.” Member-initiated communities are deemed either social or professional, and organization-sponsored communities are divided into commercial, nonprofit, or government classifications. Porter's typology succeeds in expanding beyond Markus' to more readily include nonprofit and government sponsored communities. However, the same lack of provision for fluidity of cross-type communities is present.

An area where both of these typologies run into complicated classification difficulties is that of communities centered around professionally written and edited blogs that derive profit wholly from the placement of 3rd party advertisement. Such communities, which hold the earning of income as a main function of the site around which the community gathers, could justifiably be classified under either social or commercial headings, thus breaking the neat boundaries of both typologies. Krishnamurthy's virtual community classifications handle this variety of community with more ease, including what he refers to as community enablers - entities hosting communities, centered around a wide array of topics and/or interests, that earn income through advertising and/or subscription fees.²⁰

19 C. Porter, “A Typology of Virtual Communities: A Multi-Disciplinary Foundation for Future Research,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 10, no.1 (2004): 00.

20 Sandeep Krishnamurthy, *E-Commerce Management: Text and Cases* (Mason, Ohio: Thomson/South-Western, 2002), pg. 261.

Based on the discussion above, a functional definition of virtual social communities may be reached. A virtual social community is a community located in a digital space, enabled by technology. Its members are drawn together for social reasons (although the community-hosting entity may have other reasons for existence). Interaction within the community may foster long-lasting relationships. These three qualities of location, *raison d'être*, and relationship-type form the basis for the definition of virtual social community at work in this thesis.

The Problematic Nature of the Virtual Community

The terminology used for the description of these communities is often problematic. Although 'community' is a very accurate term, when analyzed, the word 'virtual' has troublesome implications. Established in regard to the WELL by Rheingold,²¹ the term is meant to indicate an alternative to physically-based communities. Ridings and Gefen define 'virtual' as indicative of electronic or technology-enabled interaction.²² Virnoche and Marx define 'virtual' as existing only in virtual space, never reaching into a physical realm.²³ They contrast this with what they deem 'hybrid' communities - those that engage in both virtual and physical spaces. In either case, it is clear that the main intention of these definitions is to draw contrast between physical and non-physical worlds. In the cases of many contemporary communities featuring the qualities defined in the prior section, this contrast may not be necessary, or even accurate. The strict distinction between physical and online interaction suggested by definitions of virtual (as regards communities) ignores the tendency of online relationships to develop and strengthen concurrently with offline relationships.²⁴ More

21 "Learn About the WELL," well.com, last modified 2005, <http://www.well.com/aboutwell.html>.

22 Ridings and Gefen, "Virtual Community Attraction."

23 Mary E. Virnoche and Gary T. Marx, "'Only connect'--E. M. Forster in an age of electronic communication: Computer-mediated association and community networks," *Sociological Inquiry* 67, no. 1 (1997): 88.

24 Bo Xie, "The Mutual shaping of online and offline social relationships," *Information Research* 13, no. 3 (2008), <http://informationr.net/ir/13-3/paper350.html>.

recently, this distinction has come under fire.^{25 26} As research into the intersecting areas of offline and online interaction develops, the concept of contrasting natures weakens. As the definition of virtual in regard to community-type is based on this distinction, the appropriateness of the term itself weakens.

Even out of the specific context of community-type as terminology definition, when applied to communities, the term 'virtual' poses problems. Although a term is necessary for classification, the term virtual may exclude communities from consideration as what might be called typical, or conventionally accepted communities. As virtual communities grow in prominence, it is an error to disregard them so. In trying to determine parallel classification terminology for non-virtual communities, one may look to antonyms of 'virtual' and find suggestions such as 'actual,' 'authentic,' or 'real'. The implications offered by such terms decry virtual communities as lesser than physically-based communities. This is increasingly a mistake.

The term which most readily lends itself to the conversation is that of “online,” already in frequent use.²⁷ Working from a definition of “online” suggests that an online community is one that is “connected to, served by, or available through ... a computer or telecommunications system.”²⁸ In this definition, the only available antonym is “offline.” The terms lack the positive and negative connotations provided by “virtual” and its antonyms, thus escaping any problematic judgements of validity. The characteristics of online communities mirror those defined as representative of virtual communities - Internet-mediated communication, a population drawn together by shared interest or

25 Steve Jones, "Studying the Net: intricacies and issues," in *Doing Internet research: critical issues and methods for examining the Net*, ed. Steve Jones (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999).

26 Wilson and Peterson, "The anthropology of online communities."

27 *Ibid.*

28 "Online," Merriam-Webster.com, last modified January 17, 2012, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/online>.

condition, and the potential for strong relationships.²⁹ The terms are considered so closely linked that, in popular online reference materials such as those that would likely be checked by members of these same communities, the terms are presented as interchangeable.³⁰ Given this presentation of accepted interchangeability, and the lack of unfortunate connotations associated with the term, “online” is a fine substitution for an increasingly outdated term.

The phrase “online social community” represents an incredibly broad spectrum of communities. While the phrase is an improvement on prior terminology, its broadness exceeds the scope of this thesis. Therefore, a more specific term is recommended: born-digital. As defined by OCLC (Online Computer Library Center, Inc.) a born digital resource is, quite simply, an item that is both created and managed in a digital form.³¹ This definition pertains to photographs, documents, web content and electronic records - all digital items that may be found in online social community spaces. Working from this simple definition, and considering the interactions of a community to be also potentially under the defining umbrella of “born-digital,” a working definition of born-digital community may be reached. Such a community would be both created and managed in digital form. This definition would suggest that both the interactions of a community and its documentation would be created digitally. This working definition is in contrast to that of the broader online community, which may have its origins and any percentage of its documentation in a less digital form. Although all communities that meet the definition of “connected to, served by, or available through” the Internet will inherently deal in born digital records, not all will deal exclusively in born digital resources. Similarly, not all online communities with born-digital origins will remain

29 Wilson and Peterson, "The anthropology of online communities," 455.

30 As of March 2012, Wikipedia used the term “online community” to define “virtual community” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_community) and “virtual community” to define “online community” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Online_community). These apparently self-referential articles emphasize the sense of interchangeability seen in usage of the terms.

31 Ricky Erway, “Defining 'Born Digital',” *OCLC*, last modified November, 2010, <http://www.oclc.org/research/activities/hiddencollections/borndigital.pdf>.

exclusively born-digital, as strong tie relationships encourage community members toward more in-person and analog interactions. Therefore, let the working definition of born-digital social community reflect this potential for movement toward more inclusivity of resource type, and emphasize origins: the born-digital social community is one with born-digital origins, whose interactions and documentation are entirely or predominantly digital. Although the implications of this research may pertain to the broader realm of online social communities, the communities examined for the purposes of this thesis are exclusively of this born-digital type. Accordingly, the phrase “born-digital social community” will be used throughout the text.

Clarifying Born-Digital Social Community Archives

As later data will show, there exists a great deal of confusion among the public about the definition of an archive. This confusion may be due to appropriation of the term for digital circumstances- most every blog has an “archive” in which posts are automatically collected for future access, and many email platforms offer the option of “archiving” emails. Whether or not such collections of documents meet the definition of an archive is debatable, and a matter better suited to future discussion. Even among archivists, there is some ambiguity regarding the term. Jenkinson defined the archive as covering the written documentation that accumulates in an office (of business or administration) for current reference, is “consigned thereafter to oblivion,”³² and ultimately preserved as historical evidences. Immediately, the timeline of digital preservation suggests that Jenkinson's definition may be outdated. Angel suggests defining the archive as a records center- a house for accumulated records, with an emphasis on government use.³³ While this definition may be broad enough to encompass many contemporary interpretations of “archive,” his emphasis on government disregards many. Glancing through the index of archival texts, one may find references

32 Hilary Jenkinson, “Reflections of an Archivist,” in *A Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory and Practice*, ed. M. Daniels and T. Walch (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 2009), 15.

33 Herbert E. Angel, “Archival Janus: The Records Center,” *The American Archivist* 31, no. 1 (1986): 5.

to archives as decentralized, administrative, customer-driven, academic, conceptualized as collective memory or communication, or from eighteenth-century and contemporary perspectives.³⁴ Within this list and a variety of other definitions, neither the terms community nor digital even arise, yet such archives are examined in other literature as reviewed later in this thesis. The conclusion one may draw is that the term “archive” is, or has become, a general language term, used by specified communities with a notable degree of ambiguity among different groups of users.

Exploration of community-based and digital archives, as reviewed later in this thesis, reveals no concrete definitions of archive type, even at a more specific level. However, some features may be drawn from the literature that might help to define the practice. Community-based archives focus on community groups, often with a hope of benefiting the community. These archives may be for or by communities,³⁵ independent or more institutionally-based.³⁶ The community-based archivist takes an active role,³⁷ engaging in participatory archiving practices with a community.³⁸ Community-based archives may include materials made for or pre-dating an archive.³⁹ Digital archives concern digital resources, with a heavy emphasis on preservation of digital items.⁴⁰ The rapid timeline of digital

34 “Index,” in *American Archival Studies: Readings in Theory and Practice*, ed. Randall C. Jimerson (Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 2000), 639-657.

35 Katie Shilton and Ramesh Srinivasan, “Participatory Appraisal and Arrangement for Multicultural Archival Collections,” *Archivaria* 63 (2007): 92.

36 Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd, “Whose memories, whose archives? Independent community archives, autonomy and the mainstream,” *Archival Science* 9 (2009): 80.

37 Dominique Daniel, “Documenting the Immigrant and Ethnic Experience in American Archives,” *The American Archivist* 73 (Spring/Summer 2010): 86.

38 Sue McKemmish, Livia Iacovino, Lynette Russell, and Melisa Castan, “Editors’ introduction to Keeping cultures alive: Archives and Indigenous human rights,” *Archival Science* 12 (2012): 0.

39 Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd, “Whose memories, whose archives?,” 74.

40 Brian Lavoie, “The Open Archival Information System Reference Model: Introductory Guide,” *Microform & Imaging Review* 33, no. 2 (January 2008): 3.

objects⁴¹ promotes an active archivist.⁴² Digital archives may be institutional or personal.⁴³

Communities of use define the significant properties that determine preservation priorities.⁴⁴

As archives for born-digital social communities lie at the intersection of these fields of archival research and practice, we may suggest a definition of “born-digital social community archive” based on the qualities of these fields. An archive for a born-digital social community may be independent or institutionally instigated, though an emphasis on personal digital archiving and the existence of innumerable small community-based projects⁴⁵ suggest independent projects are more likely to occur. These archives would focus on the digital objects of a designated community. Archiving would be done for purposes of preservation and community benefit. The archivist involved in such projects would need to actively pursue toward these goals. Such archives could manage either materials made for or pre-dating an archive. Although the definition suggested by these qualities is broad, the community type it seeks to serve is correspondingly broad. Narrowing of the definition to suit more specific communities may be accomplished at a community level. A more inclusive definition serves this early stage of research, in which preemptively disregarding any communities through stricter definition would be unfortunate.

41 Gareth Knight and Maureen Pennock, “Data Without Meaning: Establishing the Significant Properties of Digital Research,” *The International Journal of Data Curation* 4, no.1 (2009): 159.

42 Blue Ribbon Task Force on Sustainable Digital Preservation and Access, “Sustainable Economies for a Digital Planet: Ensuring Long-Term Access to Digital Information,” February 2010, http://brtf.sdsc.edu/biblio/BRTF_Final_Report.pdf, 38.

43 “Personal Archiving Day A Hit.” digitalpreservation.gov. Last modified May 5, 2011. http://www.digitalpreservation.gov/news/2011/20110505_news_PAD2011.html.

44 Blue Ribbon Task Force, “Sustainable Economies for a Digital Planet,” 26.

45 Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd, “Whose memories, whose archives?,” 78.

Academic and Professional Perspectives

In order to make any informed recommendations regarding the archiving of born-digital social communities, one must first be informed about the contemporary state of such archiving. Understanding the circumstances currently surrounding this field may begin with exploring relevant literature. This chapter will address professional outlooks through an examination of published literature and professionally sponsored projects. This examination is not intended as a comprehensive review, but rather a sampling of materials that may represent the larger worlds discussed herein.

Examining published literature in the field of born-digital social community archiving is particularly difficult, as there is no specifically dedicated body of literature for the field. In light of this lack, a multifaceted approach to literature research was developed. The literature of closely related fields will substitute for more specific literature. Both community-based archiving and digital archiving are well established fields, with plentiful bodies of literature to support them. As the archiving of born-digital social communities represents an intersection of these fields, the literature of both have been examined, along with a selection of professionally sponsored projects relating to each. Synthesizing implications from the examination of each field sheds light on composite attitudes and actions toward a field unexamined in a published manner.

Community-based archiving

In a history of community archives, Eric Ketelaar declares the importance of shared documentary community records: “any group recognizes itself through its memory of a common past.”⁴⁶ Creation, storage, and use of records as a social and cultural practice has a long history. Ketelaar notes the public, communal nature of records use dating back to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The notion of records as private objects was a noteworthy transformation in style of use

⁴⁶ Eric Ketelaar, “Records out and archives in: early modern cities as creators of records and as communities of archives,” *Archival Science* 10 (2010): 202.

in the fifteenth century.⁴⁷ Indeed, the sense of records as communally owned objects that is suggested by community-based archiving is not the revolutionary development some believe, but a return to original practice. This return was slow coming. Development of interest in social history and ethnic studies in the 1970s lead to an academic realization in the value and importance of immigration and ethnicity. This realization brought about a push for inclusion of these stories and perspectives in reputedly academic, researchable, archival institutions.⁴⁸ The development of the Activist Archivist was demanded by this push. This archivist did not passively sit back, waiting for the narrative of cultural heritage to be delivered to the archive. The activist archivist assertively pursued undocumented narratives through fieldwork.⁴⁹ With increasing use of and dependence on technology came a paradigm shift in archival theory and practice.⁵⁰ The 1980s brought a change of focus, from major historical societies to everyday life, illuminating the lives of women, children, and family units.⁵¹ In the 1990s, Samuels developed the concept of the “documentation strategy,” focusing on the context of creation rather than on records themselves. In the National Archives of Canada, Cook originated macro-appraisal theory, laying the groundwork for community-based archiving practices by providing a conceptual framework for grassroots outreach of archival institutions to communities.⁵² Wurl further directed the course of the activist archivist by suggesting archivists reframe their self image as custodians of records, rather than stewards, emphasizing an open and active partnership between archivist and records creator.⁵³ Today, community-based

47 *Ibid.*, 206.

48 Daniel, “Documenting the Immigrant and Ethnic Experience,” 82.

49 *Ibid.*, 86.

50 McKemmish, Iacovino, Russell, and Castan, “Editors' introduction to Keeping cultures alive,” 0.

51 Daniel, “Documenting the Immigrant and Ethnic Experience,” 87.

52 *Ibid.*, 90.

53 *Ibid.*, 96.

archiving is still often the province of the activist archivist. Motivation for heritage preservation projects often originates in mainstream heritage institutions.⁵⁴ Shilton and Srinivasan place an emphasis on the archivist's responsibilities in community-based archiving.⁵⁵ Archivists working with community input allow the community to speak through the archivist's work,⁵⁶ while retaining primary responsibility for the work completed. Countering this suggestion is the existence of community archives that may be more independent, even anti-institutional.⁵⁷ Innumerable unregistered, small community archives may exist.⁵⁸ These community archives may provide a contrast to town or city collections, which purport to gather a community's story while maintaining a different working definition of community.⁵⁹ An emphasis on self-determination of a people participating in a decision making process is supported by either institutionally supported community archives or more independent projects,⁶⁰ suggesting that either type of project may fall under the umbrella of community-based archiving.

Purposes vary from project to project, but regardless of the specifically stated intention of a community-based archiving project, actions benefit the community in question. Inclusion of a community's stories in an archive may add value and esteem to lives.⁶¹ The act may preserve and

54 Andrew Flinn, "Independent Community Archives and Community-Generated Content," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 16, no. 1 (2010): 41.

55 Shilton and Srinivasan, "Participatory Appraisal and Arrangement," 92.

56 *Ibid.*, 95.

57 Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd, "Whose memories, whose archives?" 80.

58 Ketelaar, "Records out and archives in," 78.

59 *Ibid.*, 73.

60 McKemmish, Iacovino, Russell, and Castan, "Editors' introduction to Keeping cultures alive," 0.

61 Leon J. Stout, "Reimagining Archives: Two Tales for the Information Age," *The American Archivist* 65 (Spring/Summer 2002): 16.

affirm identity,⁶² ⁶³ improve self image, and even establish a sense of community among a disparate people.⁶⁴ Community-based archiving projects can help a people to recover their heritage⁶⁵ and support their place in society.⁶⁶ These projects may repair situations in which archives lose understanding of cultural context by holding collections about rather than by a community.⁶⁷ Community-based archiving is an assertion of resistance to exclusionary and marginalizing dominant narratives,⁶⁸ and a chance for communities to “set the record straight.”⁶⁹

Actions of the community-based archivist may take place in the archive or the field. Shilton and Srinivasan promote the re-articulation of traditional archival practices as community-oriented processes that encourage the inclusion of community voices in official records.⁷⁰ Outside of the archive, the activist archivist may grow close to a community, engaging in significant interaction with members.⁷¹ In the course of interaction, primary requirements for the success of these collaborative projects becomes clear. Inclusion of a personal dimension is key to the successful functioning of community archives.⁷² Communities thwarted by traditional archival practices require responsive

62 Shilton and Srinivasan, “Participatory Appraisal and Arrangement,” 90.

63 Daniel, “Documenting the Immigrant,” 92.

64 Flinn, “Independent Community Archives,” 40.

65 Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd, “Whose memories, whose archives?” 76.

66 Daniel, “Documenting the Immigrant,” 92.

67 Shilton and Srinivasan, “Participatory Appraisal and Arrangement,” 90.

68 Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd, “Whose memories, whose archives?” 83.

69 Sue McKemmish, Anne Gilliland-Swetland, and Eric Ketelaar, “Communities of Memory!: Pluralising Archival Research and Education Agendas,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 33 (May 2005): 5.

70 Shilton and Srinivasan, “Participatory Appraisal and Arrangement,” 87.

71 Daniel, “Documenting the Immigrant,” 98.

72 Flinn, “Independent Community Archives,” 79.

behavior in their archivist.⁷³ Above all else, successful communication between the archivist and a community relies upon trust.⁷⁴

Many community-based archiving endeavors share a focus on “communities outside the mainstream.”⁷⁵ Heritage-focused projects are predominant within the field.⁷⁶ A strong emphasis on human rights is developing. Rights to preservation of culture, cultural histories, and ways of thinking and communicating are being enacted through archives.⁷⁷ Aboriginal groups are the most frequent beneficiaries of these empowering community archiving projects.⁷⁸ Both cultural objects and documents made for the purpose of inclusion in a community archive and those that exist prior to such projects may be included.⁷⁹

Many issues exist that challenge these community strengthening projects. Incommensurable ontologies of collaborating cultures may threaten successful outcomes by subjugating one culture's interpretation of culture for another's.⁸⁰ Lack of expertise among participants is another challenge.⁸¹ Many communities may lack the knowledge base necessary for the successful design and implementation of a community-based archiving project. Limited funding may enforce a short lifespan on projects, although some archivists are learning to extend the dissemination of a project's

73 Ruth Grossman, “Our Expectations About Archives: Archival Theory Through a Community Informatics Lens,” (presentation, Conference Proceedings of Constructing and Sharing Memory: Community Informatics, Identity and Empowerment, CIRN Prato, October 9-11, 2006).

74 Daniel, “Documenting the Immigrant,” 87.

75 McKemmish, Gilliland-Swetland, and Ketelaar, “Communities of Memory,” 3.

76 Flinn, “Independent Community Archives,” 41.

77 McKemmish, Iacovino, Russell, and Castan, “Editors' introduction to Keeping cultures alive,” 0.

78 Daniel, “Documenting the Immigrant,” 98.

79 Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd, “Whose memories, whose archives?” 74.

80 McKemmish, Gilliland-Swetland, and Ketelaar, “Communities of Memory,” 5.

81 *Ibid.*, 8.

outcome through Internet-enabled sharing.⁸² Many projects, particularly those attempting to transform a traditionally passive user-archive relationship into an active and collaborative one, experience difficulty achieving an effective level of participation from the community.⁸³ Even the most basic terminology of the field – community archives, community – are contentious.⁸⁴ All other issues aside, what has become clear to many is that different communities have different archival needs.⁸⁵ Unfortunately, acknowledgement of needs and issues does not always translate to active practice,⁸⁶ which may run behind published literature in the implementation of theoretical developments.

Digital archiving

In contrast to the very people-based focus of community archiving, digital archiving places an emphasis on actions in the care of objects. This refocusing of archival activity in response to new formats presented by technologies brings forth new conceptualizations of the archivist and the archive, heightened demands for intervention, and a variety of issues.

To meet the needs presented by digital objects, the digital archivist focuses on preservation.⁸⁷ Preservation leads to a concentration on enabling the identification, retrieval, and correct processing of all digital components necessary to reconstruct a digital object.⁸⁸ An emphasis on careful appraisal of records precedes preservative actions. Provision of access to appraised and preserved

82 Flinn, "Independent Community Archives," 42.

83 Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd, "Whose memories, whose archives?" 74.

84 *Ibid.*, 74.

85 McKemmish, Gilliland-Swetland, and Ketelaar, "Communities of Memory," 3.

86 *Ibid.*, 4.

87 Lavoie, "The Open Archival Information System Reference Model," 3.

88 Kenneth Thibodeau, "Overview of Technological Approaches to Digital Preservation and challenges in Coming Years" (presentation, The State of Digital Preservation: An International Perspective, Washington, D.C., April 24-25, 2002): 12.

digital objects completes the set of primary tasks the digital archivist must accomplish.⁸⁹

A digital archivist has the ability to consider the digital object from a variety of perspectives. The object may be considered at a physical level, addressing the physical inscription of data onto a medium; a logical level, addressing the ability of an object to be recognized and processed by software; and at a conceptual level, addressing how an object is interpreted and understood by a person (or able computer system).⁹⁰ An object addressed as physical may require more traditional preservation methods to conserve the condition of the physical object. The logical object calls for a preservationist focus at the level of bits and their representation.⁹¹ The conceptual object may be preserved and represented in a variety of physical and logical ways while maintaining a sense of conceptual authenticity.⁹² In determining the criteria for inclusion in collections of web-based materials, the Library of Congress focuses primarily on a digital object's worth as conceptual object. An included object must be useful in the process of fulfilling current and/or future information needs, provide unique and/or scholarly information, and a contemporary perspective. The potential risk of loss of a digital object is also factored into appraisal criteria, which are carefully considered prior to any inclusion decisions are made.⁹³

The role that digital objects, particularly those on the web, play in our intellectual, commercial, and creative lives is being recognized.⁹⁴ These objects are considered important to

89 Lavoie, "The Open Archival Information System Reference Model," 4.

90 Thibodeau, "Overview of Technological Approaches," 6.

91 Christopher A. Lee, "Open Archival Information System (OAIS) Reference Model," in *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences, Third Edition*, ed. Marcia J. Bates and Mary Niles Maack (CRC Press, 2010), 4024.

92 Thibodeau, "Overview of Technological Approaches," 10.

93 "Library of Congress Collections Policy Statements Supplementary Guidelines," loc.gov, last modified November 2008, <http://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/webarchive.pdf>.

94 *Ibid.*

social, cultural, and political aspects of contemporary life.⁹⁵ It is the important nature of these objects that prompts their preservation and inclusion in archival collections. The ephemerality of these objects, which have the potential for great impact by providing sociological and historical data unfound in other types of more mainstream records, also spurs archival and preservationist action on their behalf.⁹⁶ Further incentive is found in the self-interest of creators desiring to preserve their creations.⁹⁷ Additionally, the general worth of digital objects is being recognized in archives that are increasingly making use of digital means in the creation of administrative records, broadening the existence of digital objects to being of, in, and for archives.⁹⁸

The sheer quantity of digital objects and records may be cause for intimidation when considering the appraisal, preservation, and provision of access to digital collections. This sense of intimidation has led to reassurances among published literature that a decision to preserve digital objects does not equal a mandate to save all digital objects.⁹⁹ Nor do all attributes of an object necessarily need to be preserved in order for it to be successfully understood.¹⁰⁰ It is the action of a careful appraisal of objects that may dictate what objects, and what attributes, need to be saved and preserved on a case by case basis. An option strategy, as recommended by the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Sustainable Digital Preservation and Access, echoes this effort to minimize overwhelmed reactions. The option strategy would offer the digital archivist the option of taking only minimal preservation action, thus initially preserving an object until such a time as more information can lead to better informed decisions about how to best care for such objects, and what objects will have

95 Blue Ribbon Task Force, "Sustainable Economies for a Digital Planet," 66.

96 "Library of Congress Collections Policy Statements Supplementary Guidelines."

97 Blue Ribbon Task Force, "Sustainable Economies for a Digital Planet," 20.

98 Stout, "Reimagining Archives," 21.

99 Blue Ribbon Task Force, "Sustainable Economies for a Digital Planet," 40.

100 Thibodeau, "Overview of Technological Approaches," 5.

enduring value.¹⁰¹ In the meantime, actions taken may be in the form of small, concise activities that lay the groundwork for future action by both initiating archival activity and providing encouragement through successful implementation of reasonable steps.¹⁰² Until such a time as the preservation of web-objects is better developed, exporting web-objects to more stable digital formats is recommended.¹⁰³ Multiple strategies may be necessary.¹⁰⁴ Consideration of digital objects from multiple levels will help to ensure future access, and with access, continued value.¹⁰⁵ Raising awareness among stakeholders, including the owners and creators of collectively produced web content, could be beneficial.¹⁰⁶ Private collectors of web-objects may be of assistance in the development of digital collections.¹⁰⁷ Reaching out to the public may also be of great assistance in the preservation of digital objects. This action will help to develop Stout's "cyberarchivist," blurring the definition of archivist by enabling the public to successfully take archival action in the preservation of their own materials.¹⁰⁸ The Library of Congress is taking active steps to pursue this development through informational programs of public outreach. Accessing a public audience through the web and in partnership with public libraries, archives, and other cultural institutions, the Library of Congress is dissemination information about why and how to archive one's own digital

101 Blue Ribbon Task Force, "Sustainable Economies for a Digital Planet," 38.

102 Jeanne Young, "Electronic Records Management on a Shoestring: Three Case Studies," *The Information Management Journal* (January/February 2005): 59.

103 "Keeping Personal Websites, Blogs and Social Media," digital preservation.gov, last modified March 28, 2012, <http://www.digitalpreservation.gov/personalarchiving/websites.html>.

104 Knight and Pennock, "Data Without Meaning," 160.

105 *Ibid.*, 162.

106 Blue Ribbon Task Force, "Sustainable Economies for a Digital Planet," 70.

107 *Ibid.*, 39.

108 Stout, "Reimagining Archives," 21.

objects. This dissemination comes in the forms of annual personal archiving conferences,¹⁰⁹ Personal Archiving Day events,¹¹⁰ distribution of personal archiving kits, and other outreach programs. Information is presented through webpages, handouts, highlighted resources, and introductions to preservation for the public.¹¹¹

Effective communication is vital if the digital archivist is to accomplish the goals of digital archiving.¹¹² Marshall suggests the development of a system for the heuristic assessment of value that will make intuitive sense over time. Distribution of responsibility through communal maintenance may also help to spread understanding of the process. Fundamental goals should be the development of knowledge of what is held, where, and how to access it.¹¹³ Developed strategies should be feasible, sustainable, practical, and appropriate to the objects in question.¹¹⁴

Many issues complicate the path to successful digital archiving. Lack of general awareness and understanding is a key issue. A sense of confusion exists between digital archives and backups, external storage, email attachments, and social media storage. Assumptions that no curation of digital objects is required, that recognition of value is immediate, that records will be retrievable and accessible over time are pervasive.¹¹⁵ Statements of value are actually difficult for digital object

109 Mike Ashenfelder, "Personal Digital Archiving 2012 in San Francisco" *The Signal*, last modified March 1, 2012. <http://blogs.loc.gov/digitalpreservation/2012/03/personal-digital-archiving-2012-in-san-francisco/>.

110 "Personal Archiving Day A Hit." digitalpreservation.gov.

111 Keri A. Myers, "Hey Libraries and Archives: Personal Digital Archiving Kit Now Available" *The Signal*, last modified February 16, 2012, <http://blogs.loc.gov/digitalpreservation/2012/02/hey-libraries-and-archives-personal-digital-archiving-kit-now-available/>.

112 Young, "Electronic Records Management on a Shoestring."

113 Catherine Marshall, "Rethinking Personal Digital Archiving Part 2," *D-Lib Magazine* 14, no. 3/4 (March/April 2008): section 6.

114 Thibodeau, "Overview of Technological Approaches," 15.

115 Marshall, "Rethinking Personal Digital Archiving Part 1," section 2.

creators to make.¹¹⁶ Lack of awareness of the value of digital objects is a threat to future access.¹¹⁷ Creators are slow to realize that their work may, in addition to immediate and identified purposes, be the creation of cultural heritage.¹¹⁸ Additionally, a gap exists between those with technical know-how and those with awareness and interest in preservation of digital objects.¹¹⁹ A lack of transparency regarding preservational intentions of major web-content creators is not beneficial to the situation.¹²⁰

The intellectual value of a digital object may easily outlive the access one has to it.¹²¹ Assessment of value may change over time,¹²² but steps must be taken now to ensure access that will enable reappraisal later.¹²³ Focusing on the needs of, and potential use by, existing users rather than debatable prospective users may help to shape sustainable and practical preservation goals.¹²⁴

Identification of the significant properties of a digital object, or collection of digital objects, will determine the best method for preservation.¹²⁵ Similarly, authenticity will be determined by the context of a digital object.¹²⁶ The user community, stakeholders, resource type, legal rights, and capability of the curator will all factor into a determination of significant properties and context,¹²⁷

116 *Ibid.*, section 3.

117 Blue Ribbon Task Force, "Sustainable Economies for a Digital Planet," 47.

118 *Ibid.*, 69.

119 Ashenfelder, "Personal Digital Archiving 2012 in San Francisco."

120 Blue Ribbon Task Force, "Sustainable Economies for a Digital Planet," 41.

121 Knight and Pennock, "Data Without Meaning," 159.

122 Blue Ribbon Task Force, "Sustainable Economies for a Digital Planet," 20.

123 *Ibid.*, 25.

124 *Ibid.*, 37.

125 Blue Ribbon Task Force, "Sustainable Economies for a Digital Planet," 26.

126 Thibodeau, "Overview of Technological Approaches," 13.

127 Knight and Pennock, "Data Without Meaning," 162.

thereby determining method of preservation, access, and to a degree, future value.

Professional projects undertaken

In 2006, Libraries and Archives Canada (LAC) embarked on a national digital community archive project called “Moving Here, Staying Here: the Canadian Immigrant Experience.”¹²⁸ The project was conceived as a mass digitization effort, increasing access to historical documents held at LAC. The site created to digitally house the collection included firsthand narratives, original manuscripts, publications, visual materials, and a database of digitized materials. The project sought to improve access, provide Canadians with history, and offer immigrants of old a voice in official documentation. However, organizers found themselves challenged in their pursuits. Finding a sufficient diversity of voices within the older, digitized documents, capable of representing the history of a wide array of contemporary Canadians, proved more difficult than expected. The Moving Here, Staying Here project did not attempt to involve the designated community in development of the digitization project or accompanying digital exhibition. This lack of community involvement meant that the project could be about and for the designated community, but not by it. At the completion of the project, organizers felt that community involvement may have helped to overcome gaps in the narrative of the collection. Later projects were designed to incorporate this type of involvement.

The similarly titled “Moving Here: 200 Years of Migration to England” was also originally conceived as a mass digitization project.¹²⁹ Sponsored by the National Archives of England and Wales (TNA), the project ultimately became one of greater community involvement. Working with archives, museums, libraries, and forty-five community groups, the Moving Here project not only provided members of the designated immigrant community with the opportunity to share their

128 A. Alain and M. Fogget, “Towards Community Contribution: Empowering community voices on-line,” in *Museums and the Web 2007: Proceedings*, ed. J. Trant and D. Bearman (Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics, 2007).

129 *Ibid.*

stories, but also taught them how to do so. Beginning with digitized photos and documents, Moving Here prompted community contribution to the collection of uploaded text and photos. Organizers sought to empower ethnic groups and communities to record their own histories while concurrently enriching the collections of archives, libraries, and museums in England. The Moving Here project benefited from a high rate of community buy-in. However, this high rate of involvement brought forth unexpected problems. Pursuing this high rate of involvement required an intensive commitment of resources. The wealth of participation created a delay between community contribution of digital objects and subsequent inclusion in online collections. Organizers were made aware of disappointment felt by contributors regarding this delay, and amended later projects to enable immediate inclusion of contributions.

The year 2006 also saw Affleck and Kvan embark on a project to manage heritage through digital media: the Memory Capsule project.¹³⁰ To gain access to their designated community, the researchers partnered with a local community art center. They sought to engage community members in discursive interpretation of overlooked heritage and recent history of Hong Kong. This was to be done through digitally enabled involvement of the community in the creation of a collection that would later be used in the creation of a physical memory capsule, providing a tangible outcome for the project. Emphasis was placed on the voluntary, non-captive nature of participants. Photos and textual contributions would make up the collection. Through online discussion of the past, as inspired by digitized objects, the researchers hoped to use community contributions as a supplement to the work of archivists. The project was plagued by involvement problems. In addition to an underwhelming level of participation, Affleck and Kvan found the quality of participation to be less than what was hoped for, diminishing the supplemental effect they sought. The researchers determined that the development of cultural heritage collections was better performed by major

130 Janice Affleck and Thomas Kvan, "A Virtual Community as the Context for Discursive Interpretation: A Role in Cultural Heritage Engagement," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 14, no. 3 (2008): 271.

heritage institutions than by communities. Flinn offered a more hopeful interpretation of their results, suggesting that nature of the designated community as organic and promoted by a sense of ownership and belonging, rather than “constructed by an external agency,”¹³¹ may partially determine rates of participation, thus nurturing the potential for strong community involvement in community-based archiving projects.

The projects discussed thus far have focused on designated communities, whether as audience or participants. Digitally enabled interactions have been involved, but have not been a focus. Nor has the creation of records as born-digital objects drawn the attention of project organizers. On the other side of the community/digital archiving spectrum are those projects that seek to preserve and archive digital objects, collecting records of community almost incidentally through the process.

The Internet Archive features collections with an impressive array of digital text, audio, moving images, software, and webpages.¹³² Focused on issues of storage and preservation, the Internet Archive offers both access to their own collections and assistance to those would would create and manage their own. Over 150 billion web pages have been added to the non-profit's archives since 1996. The Internet Archive provides access to these web pages through the Wayback Machine - a searchable entry point to the web page collections.¹³³ Additionally, they offer a subscription service by the name of Archive-It. This “web archiving service” helps organizations to “collect, catalog, and manage collections.”¹³⁴ By creating and providing access to collections, and assisting others in the process of managing their own collections, the Internet Archive hopes to

131 Flinn, “Independent Community Archives,” 49.

132 “About the Internet Archive,” archive.org, last modified March 28, 2012, <http://archive.org/about/about.php>.

133 “Wayback Machine,” archive.org, last modified March 28, 2012, <http://archive.org/web/web.php>.

134 *Ibid.*

preserve cultural artifacts and prevent the loss of digital mediums with historical significance.¹³⁵

Although the Internet Archive focuses on objects over communities, their digital object preserving actions in turn conserve the communities from whence the objects came.

Finally, a recent collaboration between the Library of Congress and popular micro-blogging site twitter has resulted in a collection that has excited many.¹³⁶ In 2010, twitter donated their Tweet Archive to the Library of Congress. The collaboration of institutions enabled the Library of Congress to add to their collections without taking away from any pre-existing responsibility toward existing collections.¹³⁷ Guidelines for treatment of the collection were established prior to transfer. No private or deleted tweets will be kept by the archive. Following a six-month delay, all public tweets added to the collection will be made available for internal use by the library, noncommercial research, public display by the library, and preservation.¹³⁸ The collection will not be posted online, although individual tweets will remain on the twitter site. Exceptions may be made in the form of curated exhibits of tweets organized by the library. The collection will not attempt to preserve any functionality of the twitter site, not any sort of linked information such as photos or websites, focusing instead on the conceptual nature of the textual micro-posts.¹³⁹ The Tweet Archive has been deemed important and worthy of preservation in large part because of its potential as a research collection. The collection may enable research into contemporary life, the development and evolution of digital social networks, consumer behavior, and economic, social, and political trends.¹⁴⁰

135 "About the Internet Archive."

136 Matt Raymond, "The Library and Twitter: An FAQ," *Library of Congress Blog*, last modified April 28, 2010, <http://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2010/04/the-library-and-twitter-an-faq/>.

137 "Twitter Donates Entire Tweet Archive to Library of Congress," loc.gov, last modified April 15, 2010, <http://www.loc.gov/today/pr/2010/10-081.html>.

138 Biz Stone, "Tweet Preservation," *twitter blog*, last modified April 14, 2010, <http://blog.twitter.com/2010/04/tweet-preservation.html>.

139 Raymond, "The Library and Twitter."

140 Stone, "Tweet Preservation."

The tweets represent a wide array of firsthand accounts of trends and history from individuals' perspectives. Although individual tweets may not be of much value, as an aggregate collection, they may have much evidential value. The collection is intended as a compliment to the Library of Congress' cultural heritage collection, capable of enriching knowledges provided by more traditional records.

Synthesizing professional outlooks

From the literature reviewed, a loose picture of the fields of community-based archiving and digital archiving may be drawn. Community-based archiving tends to focus on weighty ethical issues such as the human rights of indigenous peoples,¹⁴¹ and improvement of lives^{142 143} through the creation of a more inclusionary narrative.^{144 145 146} Organizers often work with broad or externally constructed communities to create collections of digitized material.^{147 148} Projects are supported by the activist archivist,¹⁴⁹ who may work with or on behalf of communities, in the archive or in the field.¹⁵⁰ Significant interaction with communities is common.¹⁵¹ This interaction may include some of the education necessary for the development of a community capable of self-determination of their

141 McKemmish, Iacovino, Russell, and Castan, "Editors' introduction to Keeping cultures alive," 0.

142 Stout, "Reimagining Archives," 16.

143 Flinn, "Independent Community Archives," 40.

144 Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd, "Whose memories, whose archives?" 83.

145 Shilton and Srinivasan, "Participatory Appraisal and Arrangement," 87.

146 Alain and Fogget, "Towards Community Contribution."

147 *Ibid.*

148 Affleck and Kvan, "A Virtual Community," 271.

149 Daniel, "Documenting the Immigrant," 86.

150 Shilton and Srinivasan, "Participatory Appraisal and Arrangement," 72.

151 Daniel, "Documenting the Immigrant," 98.

records and history.¹⁵² However, perhaps due to constraints of time and funding,¹⁵³ field projects are more likely to focus on direct assistance of activity by the archivist rather than on enabling communities to work independently of the archivist.^{154 155} Although not necessarily engaged in, adaptation of traditional archival practices is considered worthwhile by the professional community.¹⁵⁶ Community-based archiving projects are challenged by issues of lacking community participation and public awareness.^{157 158}

Digital archiving places a greater focus on objects and the actions needed for their preservation than on the communities that create them.^{159 160 161} Born-digital objects receive a special focus.^{162 163} Traditional archival activities are being adapted to suit new media, and institutions are engaging in efforts to enable individuals to take on an archival role.^{164 165 166} Preservation is a key

152 Alain and Fogget, "Towards Community Contribution."

153 Flinn, "Independent Community Archives," 42.

154 Alain and Fogget, "Towards Community Contribution."

155 Affleck and Kvan, "A Virtual Community," 271.

156 Shilton and Srinivasan, "Participatory Appraisal and Arrangement," 87.

157 Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd, "Whose memories, whose archives?" 74.

158 Affleck and Kvan, "A Virtual Community," 271.

159 Thibodeau, "Overview of Technological Approaches," 6.

160 *Ibid*, 12.

161 Young, "Electronic Records Management on a Shoestring," 59.

162 "About the Internet Archive."

163 Raymond, "The Library and Twitter."

164 Stout, "Reimagining Archives," 21.

165 Ashenfelder, "Personal Digital Archiving 2012 in San Francisco."

166 Keri A. Myers, "Hey Libraries and Archives."

activity,¹⁶⁷ and its best practices contested.¹⁶⁸ Research into the determination of significant properties guides preservationists.¹⁶⁹ Educational outreach programs strive to raise public expertise with a notable dose of enthusiasm.¹⁷⁰ A predominant challenge is lack of awareness. Many creators do not understand the value of their records,¹⁷¹ and are unaware of any importance that would justify preservation.¹⁷² Those who are aware of value lack the knowledge of how to preserve,¹⁷³ or even the awareness that an effort must be made.¹⁷⁴ Great confusion exists about both small, personal collections and overwhelming large collections.^{175 176}

Born-digital social communities, with their organically formed, digital-savvy memberships seem a natural intersection of the two fields, but neither exhibits an apparent focus on these groups. It is possible that these communities lack the clear, ethical value that many community archivists pursue in their research. Digital archivists seem to recognize the cultural value of such communities, but do not engage in the community participation necessary for their preservation. The work of both fields suffer from a lack of public knowledge and participation, in their respective ways. Both could benefit from understanding of the other, and a merging of priorities and actions. However, the intersection remains unexplored in published works and professionally sponsored projects. This lack of apparent acknowledgement suggest either that born-digital social communities are a very low

167 Lavoie, "The Open Archival Information System Reference Model," 3.

168 Blue Ribbon Task Force, "Sustainable Economies for a Digital Planet," 38.

169 *Ibid*, 26.

170 "Personal Archiving Day A Hit." digitalpreservation.gov.

171 Blue Ribbon Task Force, "Sustainable Economies for a Digital Planet," 47.

172 *Ibid*, 69.

173 Ashenfelder, "Personal Digital Archiving 2012 in San Francisco."

174 Marshall, "Rethinking Personal Digital Archiving Part 1," section 2.

175 Blue Ribbon Task Force, "Sustainable Economies for a Digital Planet," 40.

176 Thibodeau, "Overview of Technological Approaches," 5.

priority for those in each field, or that awareness of the community type is so low as to prevent to formation of an attitude toward their preservation at all.

On the Digital Ground

Awareness of professional outlooks provides only a partial understanding of the larger picture of archiving born-digital social communities. It is important to consider the perspectives and work of professionals in fields that directly contribute to the process. However, these professionals are not always engaged with activity on the ground. The attitudes of communities and their members may be different than those of professionals. Their actions may not adhere to practices established in professional debates and projects. Rarely do such communities publish official perspectives on preservation and archival activity in regard to themselves. As such, it becomes necessary to examine born-digital social communities firsthand to ascertain what attitudes toward archival actions may exist among their varied memberships. This chapter will explore a selection of born-digital social communities to increase awareness of the situation within such communities prior to engaging in deeper case study work.

Research Design

Three born-digital social communities were selected for examination in order to determine what attitudes toward the archiving of such communities might exist within the communities. The following section reports on the examination of the three born-digital social communities: io9's Observation Deck, the dooce® Community, and Persephone Magazine. Each meets the qualifications of a born-digital social community as established earlier in this work: locations are digital, with interactions enabled by technology; community members interact for social purposes; and community interaction offers the potential for long-lasting relationships.¹⁷⁷ Interaction is accomplished primarily through text-based discussion of common interests, sharing of information, and general social engagement. Each of the three communities is related to a blog or blogging

¹⁷⁷ Although it is the *presence* of long-lasting relationships that was earlier established as a quality of born-digital social communities, communities examined here have been selected in part for their *potential* to foster such relationships. Proof of the presence of such relationships may not be obtained without pursuing a level of interaction within the community that exceeds the purpose of their inclusion in this work.

platform that serves as host or enabler.¹⁷⁸ The nature of these sites allows the drawing together of people with common interests and communication styles, fostering the creation of a potential community.

In the course of this research, I joined each community reviewed here to gain access to full community functions and records. This community joining action was taken to learn of any records that may have been available only to registered members. Although access required the creation of a password protected account, no records or community actions considered to be private by community members were reviewed for the purpose of these examinations. All community accounts were obtained through easy registration processes. Any records and interactions reviewed were accessible at this level of basic access, indicating that any person willing to engage in a quick and simple registration process would be able to immediately obtain identical access.

Information was gathered through direct observation of the sites, as well as external Internet searching for illuminating documentation created outside of the communities. Three areas of focus guided these observations. The first area of information pursued regarded community context. Questions included: what is the site? What kinds of people make up the membership? Why are they a part of this community? How do they interact? What topics guide their interactions? What types of relationships are possible or present? Records relating available statistics, demographics, discussion topics, and information about community enabling hosts, along with observed site structure, provided answers to these questions of context. The second area of information sought regarded community records. Questions included: does the community create records?¹⁷⁹ If so, what are they? Who creates them? Who has ownership rights to the records? What privacy and/or deletion issues exist? Examination of administrative documents regarding copyright, directories, and

178 Blog-related sites were chosen for their accessibility and emphasis on text-based communication methods, which promote the creation of widely recognizable records.

179 This question regarded creation of records beyond the records of discussion that form the basis of each community. Existence of these records is here acknowledged for each community examined.

general observation assisted in the pursuit of answers to these questions. The final area of information explored regarded archival activity. Questions included: Does the community take action to preserve their records? If so, who takes these actions? What actions are taken? Is there an appraisal process or retention schedule? What organizational structure exists, and how does it serve retrievability of records? Direct observation of the sites furnished answers for this area of information. Two weeks were spent engaging with each community. This time frame for exploration allowed for the full exploration and examination of any basic functionalities that may have been revealed through interaction.

The use of existing documentation and direct observation as data collection methods allowed me to gather relevant information in an unobtrusive manner. Documentation of the communities examined was written for purposes other than study of the communities, and therefore was weighed for potential reporting bias. Examination of published documents allowed me to interact with stable data without disrupting the activities of community members.

Direct observation provided me with the opportunity for firsthand involvement with artifacts (records, community structure, discussion topics) of the social setting. At this stage of research, I did not attempt to interact directly with community members or interpret individual member actions for evidence of attitudes toward archival action. Rather, evidence of relevant attitudes was provided by the potential for action enabled by site structure and administrative action, as informed by contextual evidence, and supported by visual observation of the presence or lack of archival actions.

After sufficient information had been gathered to offer an initial assessment of each community site, I began a process of comparison. Comparison between communities brought to light similarities and differences that revealed broader archival activities of born-digital communities. These activities suggested attitudes that were then compared to those of the professional archival community. These comparisons have helped to clarify the situation of born-digital community

archiving.

io9's Observation Deck

The Observation Deck¹⁸⁰ of the popular sci-fi themed website io9 is a social community platform hosted by the community enabler of the Gawker network of blogs. Community size is difficult to determine. Although registration is required for full participation within the community, members may log in with Gawker Media, Facebook, Twitter, or Google accounts,¹⁸¹ making dedicated membership numbers difficult to ascertain. The site reaches over 5 million monthly visits globally. 3.1 million of those visits originate from the United States.¹⁸² Although these numbers may not be relied upon to relay specific community statistics, they do suggest a large population of primarily American membership. Nearly 20 professional and semi-professional writers regularly contribute articles on sci-fi, fantasy, and science topics to the io9 blog. These blog posts prompt discussion within commentary threads that accompany each article. Commenting activity within these threads serves to expand upon the articles by supplementing them with reactions, opinions, and further information. Additionally, these commentary threads provide community members with the opportunity to identify other like-minded community members with whom they may wish to further interact. To accommodate the social interaction desires of the so-called site commentariat, io9 introduced the Observation Deck in late 2009.¹⁸³ This social interaction platform is an incorporated section of the site that may be used by community members for discussion of off-topic subjects and social interaction. Communication is carried out through short textual posts and

180 "Observation Deck," io9.com, last modified March 27, 2012, <http://io9.com/observationdeck/forum/>.

181 A.J. Daulerio, "Attention: You Need To Convert Your Commenting Account Right Now, People," *Gawker*, last modified March 26, 2012, <http://gawker.com/5896384/attention-you-need-to-convert-your-commenting-account-right-now-people>. The use of Gawker Media accounts is being phased out due to reasons of security. This action will make community numbers still more difficult to ascertain.

182 "io9.com Traffic and Demographics Statistics by Quantcast," quantcast.com, last modified March 27, 2012, <http://www.quantcast.com/io9.com/traffic/sites?country=US&contains=>.

183 Annalee Newlitz, "Join the Conversation in io9's Observation Deck." *io9*, last modified November 26, 2009. <http://io9.com/5413322/join-the-conversation-in-io9s-observation-deck>.

occasional hyperlinks or embedded images. Discussion topics include sci-fi, daily life activities, tips to the editors, calls for advice and/or information, and contemporary issues. Members form lasting relationships through these discussions, carrying their interactions into other forums and physical realms, and celebrating each other's birthdays and personal achievements. The Observation Deck is supplemented by five smaller forums focused on more specific topics, including events, tips, science, fiction writing, and dating.

Records of the community are created to serve the community's interactions. Registered members have user profiles. These profiles are a collection of records including a member-selected image that may function as a visual surrogate, contact information, lists of “friends and followers,” accumulated posts and/or comments made across the site, and publicly sent or received messages. Private messages are withheld from public view. These records can assist community members in furthering their interactions publicly and privately, on and offsite. Other records include commenting guidelines. Most administrative records are held by the primary community enabler, the Gawker network. No mention of specific copyright ownership as pertains to comments is made within the Gawker terms of service.¹⁸⁴ The terms of service do state that community members should use caution when posting, as they will not retain control over the publication of comments once submitted. The right to delete records is withheld.

Archival efforts are incidental and indiscriminate. All commentary, discussion, and records are saved to the site. This act of preservation is conducted through the automated functions of the site, without intentional human interference beyond initial programming and design. No appraisal of worth is conducted prior to saving. No retention schedule is in place. The organization of comments and posts by creator does suggest the archival tradition of organization via *fonds*, however, the lack of any other present archival principle suggests that this organization was

¹⁸⁴ “Gawker Media – Legal,” *gawker.com*, last modified February 13, 2011, <http://advertising.gawker.com/legal/>.

established through common logic rather than concern for prescribed archival practice. Record retrieval is conducted primarily through application of social tagging to aid in the identification, sorting, and retrieval of records. Tagging is employed to classify posts and comments as belonging to a specific article-related comment thread, to the social area of the Observation Deck, or to one of the supporting forums. This system is sometimes used to further classify comment threads by subject. Some tags may be considered something like a controlled vocabulary. These tags are typically established by io9, commonly used, and suggested for use. Tags applied to comments are assigned by comment creators. Although common tags exist, comment creators are free to classify their posts in whatever manner they please with any tags they imagine.¹⁸⁵ Beyond the actions of automated saving and application of social tagging, no directed effort at archival functions exist. With thousands of comments being added to the site on a daily basis, and the rights to ownership of submitted words withheld from community members, increased efforts at archival action would likely require hiring of staff, extensive volunteering, or redesign to incorporate additional automated archival functions, and are thus, at this stage, unlikely to occur.

the dooce® Community

The dooce® Community¹⁸⁶ sprung from the comment section of the popular blog dooce.com. The blog follows the daily thoughts and events of blogger Heather Armstrong. Often characterized as a “mommy blogger,”¹⁸⁷ Armstrong's content revolves heavily around family life. The dooce® Community was launched by Armstrong in 2009 as an on-site location for readers of her blog to “pool [their] knowledge and experiences and drunken mishaps into one highly accessible and

185 Annalee Newlitz, “The Giant, Mega-Helpful Guide To Commenting On io9,” *io9*, last modified April 1, 2010, <http://io9.com/5507595/the-giant-mega+helpful-guide-to-commenting-on-io9>. Members are free to comment and tag as they please, but exceptionally off-topic or abusive comments may be moved or removed by moderators.

186 “dooce® Community,” *community.dooce.com*, last modified March 27, 2012, <http://community.dooce.com/>.

187 Lisa Belkin, “Queen of the Mommy Bloggers,” *The New York Times*, last modified February 23, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/27/magazine/27armstrong-t.html>.

fun place.”¹⁸⁸ Although community demographics are unavailable, members of the dooce® Community are most likely readers of the blog. Over 72% of community activity originates in the United States.¹⁸⁹ Members must be above the age of thirteen to join the community.¹⁹⁰ Nearly 44,000 members are registered¹⁹¹ through community-specific, Wordpress.com, Typepad, or Open ID accounts,¹⁹² each with a unique profile. Members interact primarily through comment thread-based conversations formatted around member-submitted conversation prompts which are referred to as questions. These short, text-based question posts encourage similar text-based responses that accumulate over time. There does not appear to be any limit imposed on length of responses, but brief, conversational responses are common. Text may include hyperlinks,¹⁹³ but no other format (such as images, audio, or video) is involved. Members may also form or join groups dedicated to specific conversational topics. Discussion topics range wildly and include, but are certainly not limited to: family & relationships, arts & entertainment, food & drink, news & events, sports, and pets. Both weak-tie and strong-tie relationships are supported by the community format, which encourages members to follow each others contributions, mark questions and member responses as favorites, and send and receive private messages.

Community records pertain to member identity and interaction. Each member's unique profile contains a member-selected image, the date upon which the member joined the community, location and offsite contact information, optional biography, and links to lists of followed members

188 Heather B. Armstrong, “A super special secret something!” *Dooce*, last modified November 2, 2009, <http://dooce.com/2009/11/02/super-special-secret-something>.

189 “Statistics Summary for Community.dooce.com,” *webstatsdomain.com*, last modified March 27, 2012, <http://www.webstatsdomain.com/domains/community.dooce.com/>.

190 “Terms of Service,” *community.dooce.com*, last modified March 27, 2012, <http://community.dooce.com/terms-service>.

191 “Members,” *community.dooce.com*, last modified March 27, 2012, <http://community.dooce.com/members>.

192 Armstrong, “A super special secret something!”

193 “Compose Tips,” *community.dooce.com*, last modified March 27, 2012, <http://community.dooce.com/filter/tips>.

and following members, favorite questions and responses, and contributed questions and responses. These profile records are composed primarily of hyperlinks to interactions stored elsewhere in the community. Question threads function as record of conversation, quantifiable interaction, and popular responses within the thread. Private records include onsite correspondence between members. The content of profiles, question threads, and private correspondence is created by members. Administrative records also exist. These records are created by the community enabler. Records include lists of members, organized comment threads, community guidelines, comment formatting tips, and terms of service. Additionally, members are encouraged to maintain private administrative records within profiles, to record personal administrative tasks pertaining to the maintenance of one's profile. Members retain ownership rights to any content they create on the site, however, Armstrong Media (copyright holders of dooce.com and community.dooce.com) retain licensing rights to all member-generated content. If a member chooses to delete her account, all content contributed by that member will be likewise deleted from the site.¹⁹⁴

There are no apparent efforts being made toward preserving the community or maintaining its records in an archival fashion. All generated content is saved, however, this saving is done indiscriminately, without any overall appraisal of worth or retention schedule in place. Saving actions are done automatically through the functions of the site. The right of deletion provides community members with some extent of personal control over the records saved by the dooce® Community. This control does not appear to function as a surrogate for archival appraisal or a records retention schedule at anything more than a very basic, personal scale. Organization of records is managed in both a hierarchical manner and through social tagging. Question threads, groups, and group discussion threads are classified according to a pre-set vocabulary. Any member creating a new question, group, or thread is obliged to select a classification from this vocabulary before submitting

194 "Terms of Service," community.dooce.com

content. Members may voluntarily further classify question threads, groups, and group discussion threads through application of open-vocabulary tags. Both the controlled vocabulary classifications and open vocabulary tags may be used to retrieve records based on subject matter. Links to member-generated content held within member profiles enable retrieval by creator. Although systems are in place to save, delete, and retrieve records within the community, none of these efforts seem to be intended as any kind of preservationist or archival action.

Persephone Magazine

The youngest of the communities reviewed here, Persephone Magazine¹⁹⁵ opened operations in 2010. Self-described as “an online destination for bookish, clever women,”¹⁹⁶ Persephone offers original content on current events, pop culture (current and retro), women’s issues and women’s history. Readers are described as “well-read, active Internet users who engage in reading, commenting, and promoting [Persephone] content.”¹⁹⁷ Registered members number at 2,952.¹⁹⁸ Community membership is predominantly found in major cities within the United States. 89% are between the ages of 18-34, and 45% have earned or are in the process of earning a post-graduate degree.¹⁹⁹ In addition to pursuing content and interaction based on shared interests, many community members joined the Persephone community in order to reconnect their friendships with members of former shared communities.²⁰⁰ Interaction is accomplished through the posting of

195 “Persephone Magazine,” persephonemagazine.com, last modified March 27, 2012, <http://persephonemagazine.com/>.

196 “Media Kit,” persephonemagazine.com. Last modified March 27, 2012, <http://persephonemagazine.com/about/media-kit/>.

197 *Ibid.*

198 “Members Directory,” persephonemagazine.com, last modified March 27, 2012, <http://persephonemagazine.com/members-2/>.

199 “Media Kit,” persephonemagazine.com.

200 “Denton's Refugees,” persephonemagazine.com, last modified March 15, 2012, <http://persephonemagazine.com/groups-3/dentons-refugees/>.

contributions to conversation, whether as response to a published blog post, part of an “open thread,”²⁰¹ group forum, or public and private messages. These posts are primarily text-based, although they may include hyperlinks, images (.jpg or .png files), moving images (.gifs) or other compressed files that have been uploaded to the site. Topics cover a wide range of magazine subject matter, daily life events, food, cult television, and more. Relationships are encouraged through the joining of groups, sending and receiving of messages, “friending,”²⁰² and interaction in comment sections and forums. Additionally, members are classified by rank. Rank is designated by a number of points, which may be earned through interaction with the site and its membership, or given from member to member. As evidenced by the presence of groups dedicated to reconnecting prior relationships from other communities, the relationships of Persephone are long-lasting.

The majority of records created in the Persephone community relate to personal identity and site functionality. Member, group, and forum directories make up the majority of administratively-created records. Records are automatically created through the functionality of the site, and do not require intentional upkeep. Other records created by community administrators include commenting guidelines and privacy policies. These records are maintained by Persephone Magazine and community staff. Member-created records, generated by members interacting with automated site functionalities, are present in the form of member profiles. These profiles include a representative image (avatar), ranking within the community, linked lists of friends (onsite relationships), groups of which the community member is a member, points earned, and mentions of the community member by other members in their respective posts within the community setting. No copyright or content ownership rights are mentioned in Persephone Magazine's documents. However, as

201 The term “open thread” refers to an administrator-created blog post that features minimal blog content, as its primary function is to provide an open-topic comment section that is easily found and available to all members from the site's main page.

202 The act of “friending” creates a link between members. This link expands community connections, enables private messaging, and provides both parties with points that raise their community ranking.

Persephone Magazine is operated in connection to Wordpress, the Wordpress terms of service apply. These terms state that although content creators at Persephone Magazine retain ownership rights to any content they create, unrestricted licensing rights belong to Wordpress owners Automatic.²⁰³

Persephone Magazine's community feature does not have any emphasis on archival action whatsoever. No intentional intervention is done to archive or preserve community records and documents. While member-generated content is saved, it is done so only as an automatic function of the site, not as an intentional act. There is no considered appraisal of worth, no retention schedule, no apparent organizational structure. The community spaces do not employ any enforced structure via hierarchy, controlled vocabulary classification, or social tagging. This lack of structure and archival action could be attributed to the youth and scale of Persephone Magazine. The organization and accompanying community are quite small compared to other communities examined in this work. Persephone Magazine's funding matches this scale. Maintenance of a large site can be difficult for the organization, which has recently had problems with servers,²⁰⁴ causing probable loss of records. The close calls the community has faced may be impetus for considering archival action. A community that is unable to rely on external preservation support may be inclined to take such action into their own hands for the benefit of the group. Unfortunately, the expenses associated with such action may prove overwhelming for a small community.

Assessing Archival Attitudes

Having gathered information on each community through observation of records and interaction with structures, assessment of each community may be made for the purpose of cross-community comparison. Communities will be compared in three ways: context, records, and archival

203 "Terms of Service," wordpress.com, last modified March 6, 2012, <http://en.wordpress.com/tos/>.

204 Selena MacIntosh, "LTP: 3/26/12," *Persephone Magazine*, last Modified March 26, 2012, <http://persephonemagazine.com/2012/03/ltp-32612/#more-70968>.

activity. These comparisons will assist in an assessment of the archival attitudes of each community.

Each of the three communities examined has a predominantly American audience. The audience of io9 and dooce® are quite large and well established. The audience of Persephone Magazine is significantly smaller. Each community host or enabler covers a very different topic. However, a wide range of subject matter is discussed within all three communities. A common feature of the communities is made clear: although drawn together by different interests, members of each community engage in discussion of any subject matter relating to issues encountered in life. These conversations offer members the opportunity to deepen their relationships. Favorite-ing or friending and the sending of messages are common features that may also strengthen ties. Regardless of why community members are brought together, the array of discussion topics and tie-strengthening functionalities of each community site promise to foster lasting relationships.

The text-based nature of communication in each community creates a plethora of written documentation of social interaction. Records of these interactions form a predominant part of each community's online presence. Secondary in predominance to these records are community member profiles. Each community offers members a profile that, through accumulation of information about a member and their interaction with the site and its membership, stands as record and surrogate of a community member. Although actual interaction with other member profiles may vary from member to member, the presence of a profile is important to membership. Although their presence is not always emphasized, administrative records also hold importance within the communities. Directories and guidelines assist active members in their use of the community site, and may help new community members become acclimated to the community environment. Records relating legal information about such issues as copyright, content control, and privacy are rarely emphasized. Often the legal records of a parent institution (such as the Gawker Network or Automattic) stand in for legal records of a community. As a result, some community members may

be unaware of the contents of such documents, their consequences, or even that such documents exist. This situation could potentially be problematic.

Archival activity among the communities examined is almost non-existent. Records of all interaction may be saved, however, this action of saving functions more as an automatic feature of a text-based platform than as any sort of intentional preservation of documentation. No traditional archival activity such as appraisal or implementation of retention schedules is in use. This lack suggests that although records are being saved, there is little, if any, archival-minded thought behind this action. Organization of records is most often found in the form of tagging structures that make use of both controlled and open vocabularies. These tagging structures appear to be a privileged function of more financially secure sites with much larger membership. Organization of records by creator is another primary form of record classification. The linking of records to member profiles echoes the concept of organization by fonds. Primary forms of retrieval are by tag and by profile records that lead members to a variety of further records. Access to administrative records is occasionally provided through links sporadically placed through sites. Often, access to administrative records is not indicated, and would require members to undergo extensive searching to locate information of which they might not be aware.

Based on evidence provided by the information gathered, archival activity is a very low priority for these communities. Access to records is unreliable. What evidence of preservation and access exists does not indicate conscious effort or even awareness of related archival activity. One hinderance to the application of archival practice is the apparent lack of awareness of community records as records of importance or potential use. Indeed, whether these records are recognized as records at all is up for debate.²⁰⁵ Overall, it would seem that a lack of awareness- of records, their

205 Contributing to said debate is the distinction between recorded information and records. Although information is regularly and automatically saved and recorded in so many online spaces, being recorded may not always be enough to qualify information as a record. Or, depending on the inclusivity of one's definition of "record," being recorded may be enough to classify information thusly. Like "community" and "archive," the definition of "record" proves variable and contentious if closely examined.

status, potential use and importance, and of archival practice- pervade the communities. Given these conditions, it is difficult to clearly identify attitudes toward the archiving of born-digital communities from within the communities. There is little to no evidence that these communities have enough awareness of the potential for archival activity to have developed an attitude toward it.

Professional and Public Outlooks Compared

The similarity in attitudes implied by both professional and public communities may, perhaps, be noted with wry humor. A survey of professional and public actions and attitudes reveals predominantly that neither community appears to place the other's work as any major priority. Indeed, neither seems to be enough aware of the other to have formed any sort of appreciable attitude toward the work or existence of the other. While this may suggest a grim outlook for the archival future of born-digital social communities, some hope may yet be retained. Born-digital communities are still a relatively new kind of community from the long term archival perspective. The digitally required concept of direct influence on records is, for many archivists, an uncomfortable one. Efforts at public education are promising, but have room to grow. It is possible that, with time, these communities may still find themselves as the beneficiaries of an organic intersection of archival practice- just not yet.

Working with Community B

Having established an initial assessment of the actions being taken, and outlooks toward, the creation of archives for born-digital social communities, the research progressed to a stage of deepening understanding. This stage was achieved through in-depth work with a small, private, born-digital social community. This interaction addressed all questions posed in the research design. Personal interaction with a community of this sort allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of actions and attitudes, as well as group and individual perspectives. Initiation of discussion regarding the hypothetical creation of an archive for the community in question served both this work and the community, as awareness was raised and concepts pondered. Based on the data collected from a variety of community interactions and observations, some guidelines for the creation of a hypothetical archive were developed. These guidelines were informed by both background knowledge in archival theory and practice, and a rich understanding of the community in question. Engagement with the community through case study and proffering of recommendations provided me with the opportunity to witness the actions of a born-digital social community considering archival action firsthand. This chapter will recount the case study process, analysis of data collected, development of recommendations for creation of a community archive, and subsequent activity within the community following receipt of suggested guidelines.

Research Design

From October 2010 to October 2011, I was engaged in the completion of a case study focused on the anonymous Community B. The case study sought to deepen understanding of contemporary attitudes and actions toward the archiving of born-digital social communities, as well as to benefit the community through proffering of recommendations developed in association with provided data. Data collection for this work was accomplished through five methods: examination of documentation, participant observation, survey, interview, and direct observation. Impressionistic

data collected through these methods was analyzed through coding and interpretation.

Engagement with Community B began three years prior to the initiation of this research. I was an active community member during the early stages of Community B's development. Strong-tie relationships were well established between myself and other community members. This pre-existing relationship was vital for the access to the private community that was required by the research. My involvement provided me with a thorough understanding of Community B's background, development, and social structure. Established strong-tie relationships allowed me to engage community members with a sense of pre-established trust, ensuring open access to their thoughts and actions. In the development of the case study and analysis of data, I was aware of potential biases presented by this pre-existing relationship. Multiple data collection methods were chosen to provide me with the ability to corroborate data across multiple forms of information and multiple perspectives, guarding against any potentially biased interpretations of data. The use of both participatory and unobtrusive data collection methods allowed me to create a distinction between my role as community member and as outside researcher. Survey questions were composed in such a way that respondents would not perceive a desired response. I was aware of the potential for community members to have attempted to please a friend through their responses, despite my efforts not to present a perceptible bias. Allowing for this possibility in the coding process, I coded for responses that may have been biased due to personal relationship, and weighed them accordingly to counteract implicit bias. Additionally, I made use of an "invisibility" function of the community's hosting site. This "invisibility" function allowed me to be present on the community site without appearing to be so, thus allowing me to engage in examination of documents, retrieval of responses, and evaluation of structure and site-changes, without playing a participatory role. Use of the "invisibility" function was done with permission granted by community moderators, and was used to help maintain a distinction between member and researcher roles over time. At no time was this

function used for observation of unaware community members.

Initiation of the case study began in October 2010. I reached out to community moderators with a proposal for research. Moderators were supportive of the proposal, but concerned about the privacy of members of the password-protected, private community. Permission to engage with the community as a researcher was granted upon the condition of community anonymity. In addition to removing any names, pseudonymous internet handles, identifying location information, and community-specific terminology (none of which would influence case study outcomes) from the data, I agreed not to name the community in any report of the work. The pseudonym “Community B” was selected, and is used throughout this work.

With permission granted, I began designing data collection tools. All tools and information were disseminated through posting to a topical thread within the community's message board location. This thread was highlighted by moderators to ensure wider community awareness. Prior to any data collection, an information sheet was posted, describing the research, research tools, scope of data collection, and rights of participants.

The principal data collection tool was a survey was designed to provide data along three areas of information. The open-ended survey sought to encourage community members to consider both the community and its records. Participants were allowed to answer all or some questions, skipping any questions to which they did not feel comfortable responding. Responses could be submitted to the thread, in view of other community members, or privately to my in-community private message address. Publicly-submitted responses were shown to encourage community discussion of research topics. The first part of the survey collected information regarding community demographics. Age, gender, general location, and educational level information helped to paint a picture of the membership as a whole. The second part of the survey encouraged discussion of community identity. Questions prompted participants to consider community identity,

temporal development of identity, defining events in community history, important community features, and how participants might help others to understand their community. Responses to these questions broadened my understanding of community context through multiple perspectives. Additionally, the process of considering these questions, formulating responses, and engaging in community discussion of the topic helped members to begin thinking of their community in an evaluative fashion that would aid them in the third section of the survey. The third and final section of the survey prompted participants to consider a hypothetical community archive. Questions in this section regarded potential value (or lack thereof) of a community archive, what materials could (or should not) be included in a community archive, where and how such an archive could be stored, what purpose such an archive might have, and whether or not participants would be interested in participating in a community archiving project. Responses to this section helped to define community attitudes toward, and awareness of, archives and archival activities such as appraisal and preservation. Finally, the survey informed participants of forthcoming interviews and solicited informed volunteers. Participants were given a span of two weeks to consider, formulate, and submit responses. This time span provided members with time to discuss and contemplate survey questions, while suggesting a deadline that was near enough to prevent diminishment of attention. Responses were gathered from twenty-six members of the active community population.

During the survey response submission stage, I reviewed responses in order to gain a sense of general community perspectives, and identify topics that may have benefitted from further discussion. Following this preliminary review, I initiated open-ended interviews. These interviews were conducted in the community's primary gathering space, a main message board thread where active members would congregate for conversation throughout the day. Interviews were conducted over a period of four weeks following the initial posting of survey questions., and initiated at times when volunteer participants formed the majority or entirety of the population present in the main

thread. The interview process was casual and conversational. Often, I began interviews by asking community members if they would like to discuss one or more of the research topics.

Conversational enthusiasm would then guide discussions, allowing me to assume a less dominant role in interviews. Additionally, some members chose to submit supplementary statements to my in-community private message address. These discussion-interviews and supplementary statements both provided and clarified data points.

Concurrent with the survey and interview processes, I engaged in six week examination of community documents. These documents included two kinds of member profile, site-enabled documents, moderator-created documents, and member-created documents. Two types of member profiles were examined: those that represent documents with a set location, and those that move about the site with members. These mobile profiles are visually formatted around each post made by a member, thereby assigning a sort of community member metadata to each post. Profiles include an icon image in the form of a .jpg or .gif file, member name, date of account registration, gender, post count, location, community ranking (earned through post count), community title (earned through post count or specially assigned by moderators by request), personal text (similar to a tag-line), contact information (both in-community and offsite, in the form of links), and a signature, which may contain text and/or images. A set profile contains all information of a mobile profile, as mobile profiles are formatted around a member's set profile as well as posts. Additionally, a set profile contains redundant notations of member name, contact information, gender, location, post count, and date of registration, as well as birthdate, age, account status, and recent activity in the form of a last login date and links to a member's five most recent posts. This information is available to any registered member. Profiles also contain private information in the forms of access to private message systems, administrative user notes, and links to bookmarked threads.

Other records include a community calendar notating all user birthdays in a centralized

location; a members directory sortable by alphabetical order, post count, or date of registration; and a hierarchal organization of threads by topic and chronological order. The creation of these documents is enabled by and through the functionality of the community platform. Moderator created documents include records of privacy and access policies, as well as announcements of any changes made within the structure of the community. Member created documents include two informational threads intended to hasten the acclimation of new members, a community history, message board navigational hints, a member introduction thread, guides to emoticon shortcuts and community memes, and two cookbooks. Additionally, members have the ability to design “skins” that, when saved to the platform and selected by a member in user settings, allow the member to alter the appearance of the message board. Members maintain a record of the creation of, and feedback on, these appearance altering tools. Examination of these records provided a deeper understanding of platform structure and community context. Additionally, perusal of these documents from an archival perspective helped me to anticipate participant responses and prepare suitable recommendations.

For six weeks following the posting of the survey, I engaged in participant observation of the community site. Although I was already familiar with the circumstances of the community, approaching it from a participatory research role allowed for a refreshed perspective. Firsthand interaction with the community and site from a participatory research perspective brought forth a new understanding of the community's social structure, practices, needs, the functionalities of the site's physical structure, and failings of the platform. This new perspective allowed me to reframe these features as potential impetus for community archival action.

Data collection methods were selected following consideration of benefits and disadvantages of a variety of methods. Use of a survey allowed me to gather a large amount of data in an efficient manner, interacting concurrently with many members. The survey timeframe allowed participants to

act independently, responding at their convenience, which allowed for a greater number of participants. A written survey greatly suited the primarily textual nature of the community site. Additionally, the survey process encouraged continued thought, discussion, and awareness of research topics. Survey responses could be influenced by participant's emotional states and community relationships. Screening for such biases in the coding process helped to diminish this effect.

The interview process similarly suited the highly conversational nature of the community's primary interactions. Open-ended formatting of interviews as conversations allowed participants to guide discussions, free of any preconceived notions that I may have held. This format enabled the emergence of more honest participant reactions to concepts. The conversational nature could be a detriment at times, as the free-conversational structure of the primary message board carried a heavy risk of unexpected topic change as members entered and exited the space.

Examination of documents as evidence allowed me to engage in research in an unobtrusive manner. This method of data collection provided an opportunity for me to act from a purely analytical role as researcher, rather than as participatory community member. Inclusion of this perspective in the data collection process allowed for greater corroboration of data, clearer researcher/participant distinction, and a diminished influence of potential biases. Documents provided a stable source of evidence. As the documents' creation was originated outside of the research done for this thesis, they were established as evidence that could be considered bias-free within the context of their use as research artifacts. A lack of documentation regarding record use by members did flatten the likely varying degrees of importance records may hold. Although not entirely necessary for the purposes of this study, such information may have been beneficial.

Participant observation enabled me to benefit from the access and insider perspective provided by pre-established relationships within the community. Of the four methods of data

collection employed in this stage of the study, participant observation carried the greatest risk of biases. However, this type of observation also enabled me to maintain the trust-based relationships that provided access to the community throughout the course of study.

Following the data collection process, I engaged in an initial review of data. This process began with anonymizing data and responses. Member names and pseudonymous identifiers were removed from data and replaced with a numerical code that would represent creator identities. This action both served the desire for privacy expressed by the community and reduced the potential for researcher bias by eliminating identifiable relationships. Responses, interview text, and supplemental statements were then organized by survey topic, distinguishing between demographics, community identity, and hypothetical archive topics. Demographics related data were assembled for statistical analysis. Community identity and hypothetical archive data were then reviewed in a preliminary coding process to identify basic categories expressed by community members. Immersive interaction with the data followed. The greater familiarity with data provided by this immersion period allowed for broader preliminary categories to be refined. Concepts were then identified within categories. The impressionistic, open-ended nature of data collected lead to a variety of terminology being used to represent concepts. I was careful to consider the context of statements during the coding process. Some concepts were represented by contextually placed vocabulary. These concepts could be identified though the presence of such terms. Prevalence of these concepts could then be determined by the quantity of terms and number of repetitions of terms within data. If a term often used in the representation of a concept appeared without the context of that concept, it was not included in the concept occurrence count. Other concepts were represented by complex statements that would not be replicated across multiple responses. Such concepts were identified through careful consideration of context. Prevalence of such concepts was assessed through quantity of concept occurrence. Where appropriate, data points were pulled and organized into

broader community responses. Documents and data collected through participant observation were analyzed for presence of information regarding social and physical structure that amplified contextual understanding. Following analysis, concepts were interpreted according to prevalence, correlation, and implication, as informed by stable data and contextual information.

Subsequent to the collection and analysis of this data, I developed recommendations for a hypothetical community archive. These recommendations will be included later in this work.

Recommendations were delivered to the community three months after the research process was initiated with moderators. Upon delivery of recommendations to the community, I withdrew from the analytical role, allowing the community to interpret and implement recommendations as they saw fit. I did not participate in any implementation of recommendations so as not to exert undue influence on the process. As most communities of this type are unlikely to have an archivist on hand, I felt that direct involvement on my part would bias any results of community action.

Following a five month sabbatical from analysis, I began a series of five monthly follow ups. These follow ups were conducted through direct observation of changes regarding archival activity made within the community. Observations that took place following the bulk of research activity will be related in this work following analysis of collected data.

Community B

Community B is a private, member-initiated, socially-oriented, born-digital community. The password protected location, featuring moderated membership restrictions, fosters strong tie relationships between its members, as well as a sense of safety online, and community pride in being an exceptionally supportive and safe online venue.

The community initially formed in late 2007 through the shared activity of commenting on a popular feminist website. Registered members took to open threads to engage in informal conversations. Through these conversations, strong tie relationships began to form. In mid 2009,

the site's editors abruptly closed these threads, essentially evicting the informal community. This action disregarded the relationships that had been forming between registered members, who were suddenly without a place to continue their daily interactions. Within five hours of this eviction, one member founded a new home for the community on a free message board hosting site. A grassroots effort quickly spread word of the location and members gathered at the new site. With this move, the community transformed from a loose gathering of site visitors to a more cohesive social community. Since then, the community has grown and developed through a variety of developmental events which challenged its members to confront notions of privacy, accountability, purpose, and identity.

The physical structure of the message board site that hosts Community B has a strong influence on the social structure of the community. It is generally regarded by members as tolerably clunky. The board is divided into discussion threads, which are organized hierarchically in a series of nested tables of contents. Although divided by subject matter, the threads are also divisible by type: daily use, topical, protected, and functional. The daily use threads compose most of the community's regular social interactions, serving as a close approximation of real-time conversation concerning an ever-changing variety of daily topics. These threads are akin to a community center, where members may gather to spend time socializing or seek immediate support. Each day warrants a new thread, accumulating thousands of posts before being replaced by a new thread for a new day. Most of the board's threads are topical, created for the discussion of distinct subjects. These threads are used in a more conventional manner of message boards, without the real-time conversation seen in the daily threads. The purpose of these threads is to provide a space for specific, sustained discussion that could be overlooked in the fast-paced daily threads. These threads include an impressive array of subject matter, with nearly 1500 topical threads currently in existence. Protected threads are hidden behind further levels of password shielding, requiring newer members

to establish a reputable presence before gaining access to more sensitive, personal discussions, as well as those regarding the ongoing activities of the former site, which many members still frequent. Functional threads make up the smallest part of the board, providing an area for members to experiment with the board itself. Many of these are used to learn how to post images and video. All threads are listed in a chronological order in which those that have been most recently updated are bumped to visual prominence at the top of their thread grouping. Moderators have the abilities to assign temporary or permanent prominence to threads, ensuring that they will not be lost behind newer threads and updates.

Community records list 480 registered members. However, due to many registered members not becoming active within the community (16.86% of registered members have never posted; 59.17% of registered members have made under 75 posts) and other active members leaving the community for a variety of reasons, the active population is composed of approximately 105 members. (This number was determined through listed post-counts, as higher post-counts tend to correspond with more active community members.) The average member of Community B is a Caucasian female, aged approximately 25.9 years, college educated, and a U.S. resident who identifies as a feminist. However, this average member does not represent the total population, which includes males, members ranging in age from early twenties to early 40's, living on 5 continents, with a wide spectrum of ethnicities, levels of education and sexual orientations.

Demographics collected from survey participants suggest that 96.2% of the community population is female. 48.1% are city dwellers, 51.9% reside in suburbs. 70.3% of the community population resides in the United States, 14.8% reside in Canada, 7.4% in the UK, and 7.4% in Australia or New Zealand. 85.1% identify as Caucasian, 7.4% as Asian, and 7.4% as having mixed heritage. 25.9% of the community have or are working on a graduate degree. 70.3% have or are working on an undergraduate degree. 40.7% of the population identify as single, 33.3% as

partnered, and 22.2% as married.

In addition to regular interaction on the primary message board location, members socialize in a number of ways. Many interact on social networking and blogging sites such as facebook, google+, and tumblr. Email and texting are popular offsite forms of communication. Members regularly engage in postal projects, exchanging postcards, mix cds, and gift packages through the mail. Regional meet-ups are common, and many members who live near one another will regularly socialize in person. National and international meet-ups have also been held. These events may occupy community attention for a year or more as members plan elaborate community gatherings. This multiplicity of interactions have resulted in very strong ties between members.

Results of Data Collection

The following section regards reporting and analysis of data collected through survey, interview, and member-submitted supplemental statements. Report and analysis will be presented in two parts, according to data category. Each part will include discussion prompts offered to the community, a summarization of data received, and implications of gathered data.

Community identity

In the process of gathering information relating to community identity, participants were presented with two groups of questions:

- How do you see/understand the [Community B] identity? Who are we, as a group? Do you think this identity has changed over time? If so, how?
- Is there anything you think would really help someone to understand [Community B]? Defining events? Things you love? Or hate? Or consider important? Or just want to talk about because you think it's relevant?

Responses, interview dialog, and submitted statements regarding community identity suggested five major themes: strong tie relationships, community development, diversity of subject matter,

difficulties imposed by strong tie relationships, and feminism. Data revealed 52 mentions of strong tie relationships. Terms indicative of the strong tie relationship concept included “friend”/“friends”/“friendship” (18 occurrences), and modifiers “close” (11 occurrences), “support”/“supportive” (8 occurrences), “extend”/“extended” (5 occurrences), and “personal” (5 occurrences). The community development concept was mentioned 20 times, represented by action terms including “shift,” “evolved,” “grown,” “matured,” and “developed.” Diversity of subject matter was mentioned 13 times, as represented by terms including “everything,” “anything,” “diversity,” “multiple,” and “million.” 7 mentions were made of the difficulties imposed by strong tie relationships, as represented by terms and phrases such as “outsider,” “challenging,” “insular,” “out of place,” and “lost in the mix.” Finally, the concept of feminism (as related to community origins) was mentioned 5 times as represented by the terms “feminist” or “feminism.”

The inclusion of terms explicitly representative of the concept of strong tie relationships in over 74% of survey responses indicates the concept to be of high importance to the community. The concept of the strong tie relationship is the predominant concept to emerge from discussions of community identity. This predominance suggests that the strong tie relationships experienced by members are considered a defining feature of the community. The second most prevalent concept to emerge was community development. The community development concept appeared in 70.3% of responses. Although a more explicitly prompted concept, consensus suggested that development was a widely recognized feature of the community. Many participants suggested that the community had developed far beyond its origins, and that this development was most indicated by the extent of strong tie relationships. The emphasis on diversity of subject matter suggested a lack of topical motivation for existence of the community. This suggestion supported the implication that strong tie relationships are the predominant defining feature of the community. The inclusion of terms and phrases identifying difficulties imposed by these strong tie relationships indicates that although the

quality of relationship may serve as a community defining feature, it is not necessarily a wholly positive feature. Responses indicated that not all community members felt equally comfortable with the existence of such strong relationships that may, in bringing some members together, serve to exclude others. Text also indicated that this feeling of exclusion brought on by the predominant presence of strong tie relationships is a source of concern to some members. These members worry that strong tie relationships may have an unintended negative influence on community expansion, thereby increasing the potential for issues of community attrition. Finally, the inclusion of the concept of feminism as a community feature suggests that, although the community is generally acknowledged to have developed beyond its origins, the initial, topical motivation for gathering may have more of a continued presence in the community than many are aware of, or acknowledge.

Discussing a hypothetical community archive

Data gathered on the topic of a hypothetical community archive focused on the revelation of community awareness of, and attitudes toward, archives and archival action, as well as practical consideration of archival design. Thus, the process of coding data for the identification of concepts brought forth both concepts as more abstract ideas and as practical groupings of opinion.

Discussion prompts were as follows:

- Do you think a [Community B] archive would be valuable? How so?
- What would you put in it?
- Where do you think such an archive should be stored?
- How do you think such an archive should be stored?
- Would you participate in such a project if one were started?
- What do you think would be the point of making and sustaining such an archive (if any)?

More abstract concepts revealed in the coding of survey responses, interview dialog, and submitted statements regarding a hypothetical archive were value, attitude, and identification of issues. These concepts were refined into further concepts. Statements representing an expression of value were classified into declarations of positive value and doubt of value. Statements of attitude were revealed by six classifications of concept: positive, doubtful, conflicting, and confused, supplemented by expressions of personal buy-in or a lack thereof. Identification of issues were classified further by the issues identified: threat of loss, privacy, authenticity, and access. More practical groupings of opinion regarded archival purpose, appraisal, preservation, and storage. Additionally, coding of data revealed a variety of definitions of “archive,” and a long and sometimes conflicted list of what materials community members would like to archive.

Statements representing an expression of positive value of community archiving appeared in 65.4% of responses. Terms representing positive value expressions included “useful,” “helpful,” “beneficial,” “handy,” and “pure gold.” 23.1% of responses indicated doubt regarding the value of a community archive. Doubt was indicated by such terms as “not sure,” “no idea,” and “possibly.” Although the researcher allowed for the identification of negative value statements in the coding process, none were identified.

Over half of respondents used terms coded as expressive of a positive attitude toward a community archive. Terms included “interesting” (7 occurrences), “cool” (6 occurrences), and “fun” (3 occurrences). Four respondents expressed doubtful attitudes, as evidenced by statements of concern regarding archival issues. Conflicted attitude statements were expressed by two respondents, as identified by conflicting statements and the term “but.” No wholly negative attitude statements were identified. Eight respondents expressed confusion. Statements of confusion included disclaimer phrases such as “not an expert,” “don't know what archiving entails really,” “not sure,” “honestly don't know,” and “not sure how you'd archive something.” These attitude expressions

were supplemented by statements of personal buy-in. Twelve respondents indicated personal buy-in regarding a community archiving project. Six indicated a lack of personal buy-in.

Other issues identified by participants included threat of loss, privacy, authenticity, and access. Ten respondents identified the potential for sudden loss of documents as a threat faced by the community. Issues of privacy as either a deterrent or concern were mentioned by six community members. Three respondents also identified authenticity of records as a concerning issue. Concern for authenticity was expressed in relation to member-created content of records. The issue of access was most widely recognized, with eleven respondents identifying the issue as important in the context of a community archive.

Seven potential purposes of a community archive were identified among participants. Community archive as a tool for improving the acclimation rate of new community members was mentioned by twelve respondents. The second most acknowledged potential purpose was community archive as historical record and object of study, identified by eight respondents. Documentation of community development was also identified as a potential purpose by seven respondents. The potential for a community archive to provide improved information retrieval was anticipated by six respondents. Four viewed community archiving as a way to strengthen the community through shared effort, memory, and community pride. The potential purpose of a community archive as nostalgic community keepsake was also identified by three respondents. Finally, community archive as backup in case of loss or migration to a new location was mentioned by four respondents. Ten respondents were able to identify one potential purpose, seven identified two, and five identified three.

The concept of archival appraisal elicited varied opinions in regard to a hypothetical community archive. Seven respondents felt that all community-created materials should be included in a community archive, without exception. Nine participants expressed a need for appraisal of

value prior to the inclusion of materials in a community archive, suggesting in submitted texts that some community-created materials were not worth including. Concern for privacy prompted eight respondents to attempt appraisal based on sensitivity of documents. Nine respondents felt that records should be created specifically for inclusion in a community archive, apart from any potential function within the regular activities of the community. A mere two respondents identified the potential for inclusion of administrative records in a community archive.

Thirteen respondents felt that preservation of community records ought to be performed in a purely digital fashion. Five supported a hybridized form of preservation that included transformation of some or all documents into analog format. No participants expressed an interest in entirely analog preservation methods.

Three respondents felt that storage and care of a community archive ought to be the responsibility of community moderators. Seven felt that a community archive ought to be located on the common community platform. This option was supported by concerns of access. One participant suggested the creation of a sister board for storage of a community archive. Ten respondents expressed that such an archive ought to be stored in an unspecified online location. Two suggested unspecified use of google products as archival host.

Both expressions of the potential value of a community archive, and of attitude, were predominately positive. While both concept categories featured expressions of doubt or uncertainty, no thorough negativity could be found. It is possible, based on the identification of a variety of potential purposes of a community archive, that the lack of negativity in these areas corresponded with complete and accurate honesty to participant feelings on the subject. However, it is also possible that responses to prompts regarding value and attitude were influenced by a desire on the part of participants to please the researcher. It is not suggested that these results be dismissed, as

evidence of positivity in attitude and expression of value may be found elsewhere in the data. However, other expressions found elsewhere may be more reliable sources of information.

Data revealed an interesting collection of member descriptions and definitions of “archive.” Terms and phrases used by participants in the description and definition of archive included “any place where things are stored,” “collection of records,” “backup,” “duplicate,” “documentation,” “reference tool,” “organized,” “public,” and “community encyclopedia.” Six respondents expressed a belief that the community platform is inherently an archive. Assembled, this community description indicates varying levels of understanding. Some terms suggest a conflict of definitions. The lack of a stable, working definition of archive within the community could be a hinderance to the development of consensus among members on issues of purpose and design.

Correlation of expression of concepts and opinions within responses submitted by individual participants proved enlightening. Respondents who identified privacy issues and expressed accompanying concern were more likely to have a doubtful attitude toward a hypothetical community archiving project. This correlation suggests that issues of privacy would need to be addressed prior to the initiation of such a project. Identification of privacy issues also correlated with identification of access issues. Members expressing concern about archival access may not be concerned about who will not have access, so much as they are concerned about who will. As active community members are presumably comfortable with existing community privacy policies, adaption of these privacy policies to an archival setting might soothe concerns and increase enthusiasm about community-based archiving.

Identification of concepts of access and authenticity of records also correlated. Respondents expressing concern over one concept were likely to rationalize this concern with identification of the other. Arguments were made both for and against democratic access to archival materials based on concern for authenticity of materials. The conflicting arguments expressed with

these correlating concepts suggest that the issue of authenticity may also need to be addressed early on in a community archiving process. Establishment of policies regarding appraisal, selection, and retention of documents could help members gain confidence in such a project. As terms such as appraisal, selection, and retention were never used by respondents, discussion of these issues would likely need to be conducted in more naturalistic language.

A correlation was also discerned between identification of potential purpose and attempted appraisal. Respondents who identified one or more potential purposes that a community archive could serve were more likely to identify a need for some form of appraisal. Identification of potential purpose suggests a better awareness and understanding of the possible functionalities of an archive. Therefore, an apparent correlation exists between understanding of the need for appraisal and of awareness of the benefits a community archive may convey. Discussion among community members regarding potential purpose may promote the creation of appraisal policies.

A final correlation appeared between identification of flaws within the community platform and of potential purpose. Over a quarter of participants identified an active risk of loss threatening the community due to its reliance on a sometimes unstable, third-party platform. Just under a quarter of participants expressed negativity about the site's search function, and how it affects information retrieval. Respondents who identified either of these flaws were more likely to identify a specific potential purpose. Expression of the concept of a community archive as a solution to platform issues could raise enthusiasm among community members.

Outcomes of Community Engagement

During the data collection process, members of Community B raised issues that would need to be addressed within informed recommendations. The issues presented included identity (and its relation to purpose), privacy, loss, authenticity, access, and consensus. These issues shaped my engagement with Community B during the design and follow up stages of this work. The broadly applicable, thematic nature of the issues raised suggests that such issues may be shared on a larger scale. Contemplation of these issues in relation to the overall picture of born-digital social communities would be beneficial in further studies.

This chapter will begin with a relation of the process of designing archival recommendations for Community B with relevant issues in mind, before advancing to the resulting recommendations, and a narrative follow up with the community. Subsequently, implications of the work with Community B are discussed. Finally, some potential approaches to archiving born-digital social communities from the archivist's perspective are contemplated.

Designing Recommendations

Following the gathering and analysis of data, I embarked on a process of giving back to the community. In exchange for their gift of participation and access, the community was provided with recommendations concerning the potential creation of a community archive. These recommendations were informed by analysis of data and observation. During the development process, the roles of archivist, researcher, and community member were carefully balanced in order to best balance professional, analytical, and personal knowledges. The goal of this balance was the successful development of archival solutions to community-identified issues. These solutions would rely heavily on continued input from the community in order to better the chances of attaining solutions that would best suit the community, and increasing buy-in among members.

The process of designing archival recommendations began with a return to the data. Re-immersing myself in the data, as well as the textual voices of community members, issues that would need to be addressed were identified. Identification of issues brought forth the need for continued community development, and spurred the development of recommendations.

Community B's identity is rooted firmly in the existence of strong tie relationships. The importance of these relationships to community members suggests that emphasis on community ties could help to increase member buy-in. The potential for a community archiving project to strengthen community ties through shared effort and memory has already been identified by members. Emphasizing this potential and framing the project as an activity that could further increase already impressively strong ties would likely have a positive effect on community desire for, and involvement in, a community archiving project. As these recommendations will serve as introductory guidelines for the development of such a project for Community B, belief in the potential value of such will need to be presumed.

Issues identified by community members will need to be addressed. The process of archiving will combat the threat of loss, and community members may be reassured of this. Privacy may be the most sensitive issue in need of addressing. Community consensus on how to address the issue is more likely to satisfy members than the recommendations of one. However, offering a considered solution may help to further discussion of the issue. Comfort of the majority of the community would be a reasonable goal for these discussions. Emphasizing existing privacy policies should reassure doubtful community members. Likewise, policies regarding the maintenance of authenticity of records should be developed with assistance from the community. Access to a community archive should echo access to the community itself. Members concerned about undue access may be comforted by development of privacy and authenticity policies.

Seven potential purposes for a community archive were identified by members. Purposes affecting current members are most likely to be of immediate benefit to the community. Of the purposes identified, strengthening of ties, creation of backups, and improvement of information retrieval are the goals that may be most quickly reached. Attainment of goals could encourage the community in their project. Purposes of community documentation and development of the archive as a source of nostalgia may take a greater time commitment to reach. Use of the archive as a tool for increasing rates of acclimation in new members is a strong possibility, but extensive effort would be needed before this functionality could be fully attained. Community opinions on the conflict between maintenance of strong ties and recruitment of new membership could delay this purpose. Finally, the community archive could someday become a potential source of historical study. However, this function is not guaranteed. As such, pursuit of this purpose may be less effective than the pursuit of others that could have more direct and immediate effects.

Initial attempts at appraisal by community members led to some conflicting ideas. Within survey responses, interviews, and supplementary statements, the following materials were mentioned as desirable objects for the community archive: lists of memes, guides, introductions, “the cookbooks,” demographics, documentation of activities, projects, meet-ups and trips, open threads, end of month recaps of big events, a spreadsheet directory of members, their join dates, contact emails, and any other acquired information, “admin’ type information,” a history/timeline, and “clickable links that show whatever they showed originally.” Additionally, contested materials were mentioned, including “lots of photos,” and duplicates of all threads, including confessional and TMI threads.²⁰⁶ Issues of privacy, access, and identification of purpose are likely to strongly influence appraisal of these materials.

²⁰⁶ Confessional and “Too Much Information” threads contain personal and sensitive information. Within the community, these threads are found behind multiple layers of password protection. Passwords must be earned through establishment of a trusted relationship with the community.

Issues of preservation and archive location seem to be significantly more simple. Respondents leaned heavily toward digital preservation. Hybridized preservation was contested, and analog preservation not considered. Preservation, access, and potential loss issues all affect archive location, requiring an off-site, digital, readily accessible storage location. However, issues of preservation do bring forth legalities not considered by community members. According to the community's third party server platform's terms of service, all rights, title, and interest in, and to, community-created content are held by the community. Copyright of the platform's design, graphics, and selection, arrangement, and organization of files belong to the owners of the platform. These copyrights would prevent the community from creating an identical replica of the community platform as the platform for the archive. Only community-created content could legally be removed from the site and stored as property of the community. As such, any potential debate over the preservation of an authentic presentation of community-created content is shaped by heretofore unexamined legalities. If the concept of authentic presentation as part of community preservation were to be raised, these copyright issues would need to be emphasized.

Recommendations for Community B

Based on analysis of provided data, observation, implications thereof, knowledge of archiving practices and of the inner workings of Community B, the following recommendations were developed. These recommendations were delivered to the community in the form of a brief report written in the community vernacular. Recommendations addressed issues to consider, and suggested qualities for a Community B archive. Recommendations did not address technical execution, as the researcher wanted to emphasize simplicity of action in order to not overwhelm members with an apparently complicated project. Additionally, the technology- and Internet-savvy nature of members suggested a basic level of relevant competence capable of managing such issues effectively. Similarly, recommendations avoided archival terminology and such concepts as

description metadata schema and finding aids, in order to better suit the language and understood concepts of the community.

The most fundamental recommendation delivered to Community B addressed the vital need for continued communication between members regarding development and maintenance of the archive. Communication in the immediate would enable members to develop a consensus on issues. This consensus would allow for the development of policies that could guide creation and maintenance of the archive, comforting doubts and increasing enthusiasm through clear communication. Over time, continued communication will help to ensure the validity of the archive as a functional tool of the community that meets the needs and desires of the membership.

More immediately satisfying potential purposes should guide the initial goals of the Community B archive. These goals will include stabilization of community records through the creation of a backup of community-created content, strengthening of community ties through shared experience of recollection and creation, and improvement of information retrieval through migration of records to a more search-friendly platform. Other identified purposes should be recognized as valuable and worthy of revisiting in future community discussions. By working toward immediate goals, members may prepare for long term goals in an incidental manner.

Community consensus should determine policies regarding issues of privacy, access, and authenticity. Until a consensus may be reached, the following suggestions may adequately serve as solutions. Current community privacy policies should extend to the archive. In line with this privacy policy, access should be provided through password protection. Pre-existing records being accessioned into the archive should not be edited for inclusion. Any documents created specifically for inclusion in the archive should be circulated within the community for broad approval prior to inclusion.²⁰⁷ If the archive is stored in more than one location, all versions should be updated as

²⁰⁷ Although such circulation of documents may be impractical for other communities, the small scale and textual nature of Community B makes this suggestion reasonable.

close to simultaneously as possible. These policies should ensure a community-acceptable level of authenticity within archived records. Community discussions of these issues should address potential rights of a member to opt out of inclusion in the archive, and the the potential for censoring or removal of identifying or sensitive materials if access policies were to become more open.

The archive of Community B should be stored online in a digital format. The archive's specific location should be determined by community consensus. Qualities of a selected location should include moderated access, community-owned copyright of stored information, and adequate storage capacity.

Community members should develop a consensus regarding appraisal policies. Highly contested materials such as confessional threads or personal photos should not be included in the archive, as such inclusion could create unnecessary strife through potentially distressing ownership and privacy arguments. If necessary, members could create a document recording what types of materials have not been included, to serve as a respectful surrogate for more controversial records. Suggested materials for immediate inclusion in the community archive include: a representative selection of open threads, a directory of members that would include profile-accessible information such as join dates and contact information, administrative documents such as official and revised privacy and access policies, pre-existing guides and introductions (including a list of community memes), and existing documentation of community meet-ups, trips, and projects (including community-composed cookbooks). Materials for future inclusion might include: a community history or timeline, monthly recaps of community activity and/or events, and continued documentation of community meet-ups, trips, and projects.

Following up with Community B

Following delivery of these recommendations, I stepped back from the community for a period of five months. During this time, the community underwent changes. Since the early days of its time on the message board, the community had suffered from a conflict of opinion between those who prioritized member recruitment over privacy, and those who preferred strong ties and broad extension into other, still more private forums for communication. Tension between these factions had been growing. Change within the community escalated during a time of social and political upheaval: the change of moderators. Throughout the community's early years, moderators had supported community growth over privacy. Objecting to increasing tensions, these existing moderators stepped down and were replaced. New moderators placed a higher priority on privacy and established new access policies for more sensitive threads. These new policies had the controversial effect of excluding key community members from popular threads.

It was at this point that I began a five month period of monthly follow ups with the community. These follow ups were conducted through unobtrusive direct observation. Although I remained available for contact during this period, I did not attempt to influence any community action regarding potential implementation of recommendations. Rather, I observed what and how the community independently chose.

New moderators were enthused about the creation of an archive. Although recommendations were not followed, it was clear that the general concept of archive creation had been considered. Moderators undertook the creation of an archive without first engaging the broader community in discussion. Creation of the archive was an independent act. The lack of consensus did not benefit the archive. Many perspectives that had proven valuable in the development of recommendations were disregarded, and few issues identified by members were

addressed²⁰⁸. Furthermore, no documentation was created regarding choices made in the archival process, making potential updating of the archive difficult. The archive was located onsite. Access was granted through two levels of password protection, matching privacy and access policies of more sensitive threads. While this onsite location provided easy access to members, and simplified transference of records to an archival area, it maintained and even worsened information retrieval issues. The process of transferring records to the newly created archival area ripped them free of the organizational hierarchy under which they had been created. Records were placed into one of two created series: open threads and other threads. By lumping together threads that had previously been filed into over a dozen major categories, existing context and organization was erased, making retrieval of specific threads through a subpar search system still more difficult. No appraisal was evident. All threads, including those that contain private and sensitive materials, were included. Although placed behind multiple levels of password protection, this choice, complicated further by the new lack of identifying context, ensures difficulty in securing potential future use. Records transferred to the archive section remain open to editing, which may pose a threat to authenticity of records. Beyond the clearing of older documents from current spaces, no clear purpose is identifiable. Assessment of this archive suggests that it was created with good intentions, but little consideration of relevant issues.

Not long after the creation of this archive, the community suffered an estrangement between factions. Pro-expansion members left the community to re-form on another message board. Remaining members continued to strengthen and tighten close relationships. No longer drawn to the message board by a membership who clung to the format, remaining members began

²⁰⁸ It should be noted that, during the community archive design process, moderators did not have access to either the data collected for this work or the archival training involved in designing recommendations. Thus, the results of their work should be considered not as that of informed and practiced archivists, but as enthusiastic community leaders.

to rely more on alternative means of communication, moving away from the community location. At this point, I ceased follow up observations.

Happily, the defining feature of the community has helped to hold it together across strife, time, and distance. Strong ties between members of different factions ensured that relationships between conflicting parties could continue, albeit in different venues. Very recently and prior to the time of this writing, the pro-privacy community re-formed on a different platform, much to the apparent excitement of members. In some of their first conversations as a newly reunited group, members expressed pleasure that the prior community platform is still in existence, as the act of revisiting the site and rereading old documents gives many a nostalgic satisfaction. As of this writing, the message board of Community B does not resemble the thriving social hub it once was. Its archive does not resemble the product imagined by members engaged in active discussion with a friendly researcher. However, the relationships it fostered are still strong, and the archive has found a purpose once identified by enthusiastic members: nostalgic keepsake.

Learning from Community B

Although the development of an archive for Community B did not go as expected, there is still much to learn from the process. Attitude toward, awareness of, and perceived value of community archives for born-digital social communities may be in a slightly more positive state than is apparent from a more distant perspective. Attitudes, as interpreted through interaction with Community B, are generally positive. Members of born-digital social communities do have some awareness of archives. This awareness may be confused, even conflicting, but it does exist. The general concept of preservation is perceived to be a good one, but born-digital social community members are not sure how to go about any archival or preservation process. They can identify concepts and issues relevant to archiving, but may be unable to identify this relevance. Knowledge of the archival counterparts to understood concepts is not widespread. Understanding of the

archival process is slim, and born-digital social community members may have significant trouble developing a successful community archive even with minimal guidance from an archivist. Uninformed enthusiasm may help to initiate projects, but can set the stage for later problems. Within born-digital social communities, archives are seen as potentially valuable- however, they might not be viewed as important. Community archives are regarded as a potential good rather than a vital need. They are a low priority for members who are actively engaged in current creation of digital social content. Positive attitudes, recognition of potential value, and enthusiasm may have the ability to raise the priority level of community archiving projects within born-digital social communities, but follow through on such projects is a serious issue.

The records of born-digital social communities are at risk of more than just sudden loss due to failure of third party servers or hosting institutions. Archives of communities in which relationships are a defining factor are subject to changes in the social and power structures of communities. Establishment and faithful use of clear policies regarding community-identified issues may help guard community archives against damage from social change.

Born-digital social community members are aware of issues of privacy, access, and authenticity. Creation and treatment of community archives depend on how these issues are handled. Ownership of member-created content is not an often considered issue. Many communities do not seem to be aware of the legalities of their existence. Efforts to educate Internet-savvy public about the importance of copyright awareness may help to minimize this issue. The issue of ownership can dictate what parts of a community may be archived. When considering what significant properties of the born-digital records of a born-digital social community are most in need of preservation (which, it would seem, many do not) these copyright issues could be a determining factor. It may be advisable to recommend that communities focus on preservation of

member-created content, and leave the responsibility of preserving platform design and format to hosting entities.

Finally, it is clear that the success of a community archive for a born-digital social community is dependent on the support of its membership. To attain this support, archive creators and managers *must* listen to their community populations. If asked, community members will have opinions, many of which are valuable. Issues of concern will be identified, priorities clarified, needs and desires stated. Listening to community members will allow archive creators and managers to develop a functional tool of which community members will make use. An archive in use is more likely to be thought of as vital, and appropriately maintained and preserved. Thus, to create a successful born-digital social community archive, the voices of the significant community must be considered.

Approaches to Archiving Born-digital Social Communities

As an archivist, it is easy to presume the importance of one's own field, and declare archiving to be a vital need of born-digital social communities. However, such a declaration may undermine the traditional archivist's self-perception of neutrality by imposing a clear bias on the interpretation of such communities' needs. As online culture is better represented by the idea of an ecosystem of diversity than a monolith,²⁰⁹ it is difficult to state conclusively whether or not archiving is important to born-digital social community members. Despite this, we may still explore approaches to the situation through potential scenarios for the benefit of the archivist's perspective. Three possibilities of action come to mind.

As archivists, we may sit back, not interfering by example of Jenkinson's neutral archivist,²¹⁰ and wait until such a time as we may approach born-digital social communities from an

209 Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, 5.

210 Hilary Jenkinson, "Reflections of an Archivist," 20.

anthropological perspective. This course of action would allow the communities and their respective self-documentation to grow organically, untainted by any professional influence. Such an action could solve the dilemma of how to address the expansive quantity of communities by simply allowing documentation of some to fall by the wayside, later collecting only the cream of records that have risen to the top. These records that survive after time has passed will carry an air of trustworthiness due to the lack of professional interference in their creation and preservation. Unfortunately, this idealized traditionalist approach has some flaws. While waiting passively for records may function in an analog world, the fragility of digital documents demands more immediate attention. The activist archivist of community-based archiving theory suggests that this passive stance does not actually work well in analog format to begin with, as it allows the potential for mainstream narratives to dominate the record, leading to a misbalanced and biased interpretation of history. Why then, would we expect the passive stance to work in a faster paced digital realm where preservation concerns threaten the loss of cultural data in such a hastened manner? If we choose this approach to the archiving of born-digital social communities, we may find there is nothing to archive by the time we get there.

Alternately, we can take a direct approach and engage in active outreach to born-digital social communities. Diligently pushing for preservation, even if it means taking the act into our own hands, will ensure that documentation of these communities will exist in the future. In addition to working directly with the communities, we may work with the owners and developers of the platforms on which these communities operate. Collaborating to build preservation and archiving functions into the platforms could potentially secure documentation for the future without even having to track down smaller, less visible communities. Direct collaboration with communities and platform developers may increase awareness and knowledge, thereby bettering the chances that thorough documentation of the wide array of communities will exist for future benefit. While this

approach may carry the guarantee of preserving a much larger quantity of records, it, too, has flaws. The concept of directly influencing document preservation in the creation stage is most distasteful to the purportedly neutral archivist, not wholly without reason. Interfering with the record threatens to change it. By directly interacting with communities and platform developers, we may accidentally alter what we seek to preserve, inadvertently creating misrepresentative records. The historical narrative supported by such records could be as inaccurate as one created by a total lack of interference.

A third course of action, representing a compromise between the prior two, is possible. As archivists, we could take a more indirect approach to outreach. Disseminate educational information regarding the value of documentation and how it may be accomplished to the general public instead of directly to communities, and let the communities handle their own documentation and preservation. Some communities might still fall through the cracks, but the records created by those that do not may be trusted as more authentic due to the lack of direct archival influence over their creation. The archives of these communities may even serve as a type of independent record in addition to the records intentionally preserved as a part of community record, by preserving attitudes and actions toward archiving, preservation, and community dynamics and priorities. Of course, this course of action is no more perfect than either of those previously mentioned. The hands-off approach may lead to community archives that are not compatible with other archival systems. Standardized practices are beneficial to information access, and non-conversant archives may reduce the future usability of the records contained within. Insufficient knowledge of archiving and preservation may be worse in some circumstances than mere benign neglect.²¹¹ Additionally, the indirect approach carries no guarantee that educational information will reach all communities that could benefit from it. An unbalanced narrative could still develop, weighted more heavily with those

211 Marshall, "Rethinking Personal Digital Archiving Parts 1 & 2."

who had better access to indirect outreach programs.

As none of these options are wholly ideal, let us consider them from a practical standpoint. In choosing a course of action, we must consider funding, and required resources. There will never be an overabundance of funding, so approaches that may be undertaken in a fiscally responsible manner are best. Those that require a great commitment of resources (including time, staff, and technologies) will require more funding, and may not be as practical to attempt. Evolving technologies and their evolving uses have thus far prevented the formation of an informed consensus regarding best practices. Without established best practices, it may be difficult to determine what information should be involved in educational outreach programs. The extensive diversity of communities fitting into a born-digital social community classification may not be best served by any one-size-fits-all solutions, and may require case-by-case consideration to most fully benefit from archival programs. Finally, the innumerable presence of small, unidentified communities on the Internet will surely preclude any truly comprehensive outreach.

Having considered potential scenarios and some of the issues that affect their practical implementation, this researcher would recommend an indirect educational approach to the archiving of born-digital social communities. This approach would allow archivists to reach a wider audience with fewer resources, thus making effective use of limited funding. Wide and indirect dissemination of educational materials may reach community audiences that would not otherwise engage with professional archivists. An indirect approach will allow communities the right of complete self-determination regarding documentation and preservation of their records, culture, and community. Included in this right to self determination will be the potential choice not to engage with archival activity, thus allowing for the possibility that a given community will not assign importance to preservation. Although documentation of some communities may be lost, documentation of other

communities will be gained. What is gained will be more authentic records, worthy of trust and respect, capable of speaking clearly about the communities they represent.

Summation

In an effort to highlight the existence and archival potential of born-digital social communities, and to initiate discussion that may help to better the situation in which these communities exist, this thesis has performed several activities. In the first chapter, the topic of archives for born-digital social communities was introduced. The second chapter defined terms and concepts related to the work and proposed the adoption of more appropriate terminology. Outlooks of professionals in the archival field as suggested by literature and professionally-sponsored projects were examined in the third chapter. Assessment of public attitudes based on exploration of a selection of born-digital social communities composed the fourth chapter. Work with Community B supplied the fifth chapter, including community background and collected data. In the sixth chapter, development of potential archival solutions for the community and implications of events following the bulk of case study research were shared, and potential approaches from an archival perspective posited. The totality of data collected in the research methods involved in this work may again be addressed to elicit broader implications for the archival field.

Both those in the archival profession and in born-digital social communities express vague positivity about the other, but awareness is dramatically lacking on both fronts. If combined, the perspectives of community-based archivists, digital archivists, and born-digital social community members may be enough to present a compellingly full awareness. As archivists with experience in born-digital social communities enter the field, such a fusing of perspectives may occur. However, the current lack of awareness prevents this optimistic melding.

Some level of influence will be needed if we are to ensure the preservation of this font of cultural data. Either too much or too little influence in the creation and preservation of documentary records of born-digital social communities may have unintended negative consequences. A careful balance must be struck to increase positive action without inadvertently

changing or neglecting the record.

Some important issues that influence the process of archiving are recognized by both professional and public realms. Recognized issues include preservation, privacy, access, and authenticity. Additionally, the interactive tendency of such issues to affect one another is clear. Design of any educational outreach program or community archive will need to consider these issues and their potential influence.

Educational outreach programs could certainly be of assistance in the improvement of circumstances surrounding the archiving of born-digital social communities. At the least, such programs could spread awareness of issues and reduce some existing confusion regarding archives and preservation. At best, such programs could successfully increase public knowledge, spur implementation of community-digital based archiving projects, and minimize any gap in cultural knowledge that could result from this time of uncertainty and confusion. Due to contemporary confusion regarding terms, values, and practices, the content of educational outreach programs should be kept simple and approachable, so as not to overwhelm the public, and possibly discourage archival involvement. The overlapping nature of issues that are readily identifiable by both professional and public communities may allow such programs to spread awareness like dominos, one issue inspiring awareness and contemplation of another, and still further insight and realizations encouraged from the prior round. If successful enough, such a flow of information could concurrently inspire action on the part of those being educated. Of course, indirect action would prevent archivists from having any ability to control or determine outcomes of work inspired by educational outreach programs. However, as such control could easily threaten to tip over into undue influence, it should not be a goal of the archivist to begin with, and thus the lack thereof should not be a discouraging feature of indirect work. The virtue of patience may be applied instead, as the archivist engaged in indirect educational outreach hopes for current successes to

someday be shown.

Admittedly, the lack of established best practices regarding this kind of archiving or its related subfields poses a challenge to the development of such educational outreach programs. However, missing the opportunity to preserve (even in part) the development of this relatively young branch of our cultural heritage simply because we are not yet sure of the best way to do so would be a regrettable shame. This is not an opportunity that we, as archivists, should allow to slip by unheeded. Time should be taken to formulate practical and applicable plans. The potential plans we construct may even be conservative in their scope as we await further developments in respective fields. These plans may be designed in such a manner as to leave room for the possibility of new developments in technology and theory. We may then format plans as educational outreach, disseminate information widely, and cling to hope. Further research is needed to gain a more complete understanding of the community type in question and how it may best be served. We may readily embark upon expanded review of circumstances and developments, endeavoring fieldwork that actively engages with communities in a collaborative manner. Awareness of these issues must be raised. Working with those in other fields that have already delved into the subject of born-digital social communities may be beneficial to the archivists progress in this work.

Through actions designed to raise awareness, reduce confusion, and educate the public, we may dramatically improve the state of born-digital social community archiving. Development of such plans may only come about through a combination of discussion, contemplation, and action. Therefore, it is vital that we begin our conversation.

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