Title:

"'To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing': Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives"[1]

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Abstract:

Although there has been much work published that assumes that independent community archives have an important impact on communities, little research has been done to empirically assess this impact. This research paper begins to fill in this gap by reporting on the results of a series of qualitative interviews with academic members of one ethnic community regarding their responses to one community archives. More specifically, this study reports on interviews conducted with South Asian American educators regarding their responses to the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), an independent nonprofit community-based organization that operates the websites www.saadigitalarchive.org. and www.firstdaysproject.org. The study reports on several emergent themes: the absence of or difficulty in accessing historical materials related to South Asian Americans before the emergence of SAADA; the affective and ontological impact of discovering SAADA for the first time; the affective impact of SAADA on respondents' South Asian American students; and SAADA's ability to promote feelings of inclusion both within the South Asian American ethnic community and in the larger society. Together, these

1 The authors would like to thank Anne Gilliland, Ricardo Punzalan, and Gregory Leazer for their insightful comments on an earlier draft of this paper and all of the respondents for their participation.

responses suggest the ways in which one community archives counters the symbolic annihilation of the community it serves, and instead produces feelings of what we term “representational belonging.” The paper concludes by exploring the epistemological, ontological, and social levels of representational belonging.

Key words: impact, affect, community archives, symbolic annihilation, representational belonging, SAADA

Introduction

Although there has been much work published that assumes that independent community archives have a positive impact on communities and individuals, little research has been done to empirically study this impact. This research paper begins to fill in this gap by reporting on the results of a series of qualitative interviews with South Asian American academics regarding their affective responses to the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), an independent nonprofit community-based organization that operates the websites www.saadigitalarchive.org and www.firstdaysproject.org. SAADA's mission is to create a more inclusive society by giving voice to South Asian Americans through documenting, preserving, and sharing stories that represent their unique and diverse experiences. The organization broadly defines South Asian American to include all those in the U.S. who trace their heritage to Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the many South Asian diaspora communities across the globe.

This research began with the theoretical concept of symbolic annihilation. Symbolic annihilation is a term media studies scholars use to describe the ways in which minoritized groups are ignored, misrepresented, or maligned by mainstream media.[2] We sought to collect empirical data to assess whether a similar phenonomenon was at play in archives and, if so, if community archives have an impact in countering such feelings of misrepresentation. Through the collection of empirical data, we sought to uncover how members of one particular ethnic community respond to both absences and misrepresentations in mainstream repositories *and* attempts to counter such absences and misrepresentations through an independent community

2 Gaye Tuchman, "Introduction: The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media," in *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media*, Gaye Tuchman, Arlene Kaplan Daniels, and James Benet, eds., New York: Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 3-38.

archives. More specifically, our research builds theory by answering the question: How can we think about the impact of community archives on members of communities that have been marginalized by mainstream archives? Our findings indicate that community archives can have an important episteomogical, ontologicial, and social impact on members of marginalized communities. We propose a new term, representational belonging, to describe the ways in which community archives empower people who have been marginalized by mainstream media outlets and memory institutions to have the autonomy and authority to establish, enact, and reflect on their presence in ways that are complex, meaningful, substantive, and positive to them in a variety of symbolic contexts.[3]

We choose SAADA as our case study because of both ease of access (the first author of this paper is one of the organization's co-founders) and the practical implications our findings may have for the organization.[4] SAADA is an independent nonprofit community archives whose 2008 founding and history has been well-documented in the archival studies literature.[5] The

3 Although the research team developed the term "representational belonging," we were subsequently made aware of a prior usage of this term in Josen Masangkay Diaz, "The Subject Case: The Filipino Body and the Politics of Making Filipino America," Dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 2014.

4 The first author of this paper is also a board member of SAADA. The authors fully acknowledge that they are not impartial, "neutral" observers of community-based archives, but active participants in the phenomenon they are examining, in line with the past forty years of social science research in the interpretivist paradigm.

5 Michelle Caswell, "Seeing Yourself in History: Community Archives in the Fight Against Symbolic Annihilation."; Michelle Caswell, "Community-Centered Collecting: Finding Out What Communities Want from Community Archives," *Proceedings of the 77th ASIS&T Annual Meeting*, volume 51, October 31-November 4, 2014; Michelle Caswell, "Inventing New Archival Imaginaries: Theoretical Foundations for Identity-Based Community Archives," *Identity Palimpsests: Ethnic Archiving in the U.S. and Canada*. Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books, 2014: 35-55; Michelle Caswell and Samip Mallick, "Collecting the Easily Missed Stories: Digital Participatory Microhistory and the South Asian American Digital Archive," *Archives and Manuscripts* 42:1 (2014): 73-86.

organization is governed by an independent board of directors made up of a paid fulltime Executive Director, two scholars of South Asian American history, a media strategist, a lawyer, a journalist, and a scholar of archival studies. Only one of the board members is not of South Asian descent. The organization relies on a group of dedicated volunteers nation-wide who track down, digitize, and describe materials; fundraise; and help plan events. SAADA is run entirely on a post-custodial model such that, rather than accept physical custody of records, SAADA borrows records from individuals, families, organizations, and academic and government repositories, digitizes them, describes them in a culturally appropriate manner, links them to related materials in the archives, and makes them freely accessible online to anyone in the world with an internet connection. After digitization, the physical materials remain with the individual, family, organization, or repository from which they originated. Although every community archive is unique, there are broad commonalities that unite many community archives such as participation, shared stewardship, multiplicity of formats and views; activism, and reflexivity[6]. SAADA exemplifies many of these commonalities and as such, provides a fertile ground for further exploring the community archives phenomenon in the U.S.

Literature Review

This literature review describes the existing state of scholarship in areas key to the research reported in this study: symbolic annihilation; affect in archives; community archives; and assessments of the impact of archives.

Symbolic Annihilation

6 Michelle Caswell, "Toward a Survivor-Centered Approach to Records Documenting Human Rights Abuse: Lessons from Community Archives," Archival Science 14:3-4 (2014): 307-322.

Communications scholar George Gerbner was the first to use the term "symbolic annihilation," to claim that, in the realm of television, "representation in the fictional world signifies social existence, absence means symbolic annihilation."[7] Since the late 1970s, feminist media scholars have used the term "symbolic annihilation" to denote how strong women characters are absent, grossly under-represented, maligned, or trivialized by mainstream television programming, news outlets, and magazine coverage, both fictional and nonfictional.[8] This absence and misportrayal of women sends the distinct message that "women don't count for much" in society, with profound and wide-ranging implications for how children perceive gender roles, how girls imagine what is possible in their futures, and how women are treated at home and at work.[9] To be symbolically annihilated is to be an eternal outsider whose very existence is presumed to be an impossibility. In the wake of this absence, marginalized communities fail to see themselves or their place in the world.

The concept of symbolic annihilation has since been taken up to describe how marginalized groups are misrepresented or absent in a variety of symbolic contexts, from media to museums to tours of historic sites. For example, Debra Merskin surveyed Native Americans to gauge the impact of the group's both "actual and symbolic annihilation" at the hands of white film and television makers.[10] Hugh Klein and Kenneth Shiffman performed a content analysis of

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7 George Gerbner, "Violence and television drama: Trends and symbolic functions," in G.A. Comstock and E. Rubenstein (eds) *Television and social behaviour, Vol. 1: Content and control* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), 44.

8 Gaye Tuchman, "Introduction: The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media," in *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media*, Gaye Tuchman, Arlene Kaplan Daniels, and James Benet, eds., New York: Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 3-38. See also: Gaye Tuchman, "Women's Depiction by the Mass Media," *Signs* 4, no. 3 (1979): 528–42.

9 Ibid., p. 10.

10 Debra Merskin, "Sending Up Signals: A Survey of Native American Media Use and Representation in Mass Media," *Howard Journal of Communications* 9 (1998): 335. For a

a sample of cartoons to show that the ways in which cartoons have symbolically annihilated "out groups"—women, racial minorities, the elderly, and LGBT people—has changed little since the media's inception, arguing that "by rarely or never showing certain types of persons, the mass media, as cultural mechanisms, systematically dispense with imagery and messages associated with these types of persons and, in the process, send a symbolic message to viewers/ readers about the societal value of the persons compromising that group."[11]

In public history, the concept has been further developed by Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, whose book *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* analyzed plantation museums for the representational and discursive strategies they employ to address—or elide—narratives about the lives of enslaved people.[12] Such sites symbolically annihilate African Americans, Eichstedt and Small argue, when slavery and enslaved people "are either completely absent or where mention of them is negligible, formalistic, fleeting, or perfunctory."[13] Eichstedt and Small found that more than 55% of the sites they explored symbolically annihilated African Americans through this discursive practice. They

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discussion of representations of other racial groups see also: Mauricio Mazon, *The Zoot-Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation* (University of Texas Press, 1984). Debra Merskin, "The Construction of Arabs as Enemies: Post-September 11 Discourse of George W. Bush," *Mass Communication & Society* 7, no. 2 (2004): 157–75.

11 Hugh Klein and Kenneth Shiffman, "Underrepresentation and Symbolic Annihilation of Socially Disenfranchised Groups ('Out Groups') in Animated Cartoons," *Howard Journal of Communications* 20 (2009): 56-7.

12 Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2002). See also: Derek H. Alderman and Rachel M. Campbell, "Symbolic Excavation and the Artifact Politics of Remembering Slavery in the American South: Observations from Walterboro, South Carolina," *Southeastern Geographer* 48, no. 3 (2008): 338–55. E. Arnold Modlin Jr., "Tales Told on the Tour: Mythic Representations of Slavery by Docents at North Carolina Plantation Museums," *Southeastern Geographer* 48, no. 3 (2008): 265–87.

13 Ibid., p. 107.

further identified six representational strategies through which this symbolic annihilation operates: exclusive focus on slave owners; absence of any mention of slavery; mention of slavery briefly and perfunctorily; use of euphemism such as “servitude” rather than slavery; use of passive voice and neutral pronouns; and presenting the white experience as universal.

In archival studies, the first author of this paper has adapted the term to denote how members of marginalized communities feel regarding the absence or misrepresentation of their communities in archival collection policies, in descriptive tools, and/ or in collections themselves.[14] She asserts that community archives can serve as powerful forces against symbolic annihilation by collecting a more inclusive historical record; using language emic to communities to describe those records; and creating preservation and access policies that reflect community values.

This initial conversation about symbolic annihilation in archives contributes to a longstanding discussion in archival studies over silences and absences in the historical record. Without identifying appraisal as an archival function, anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot identified four major stages in which silences are written into the historic record: the creation of sources, the creation of archives, the creation of narratives, and the creation of formal history.[15] Similarly, Verne Harris argues that archives collect only a sliver of available documentation about only a sliver of events, resulting in a deep amnesia in archives.[16] Rodney S. Carter provides

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14 Michelle Caswell, “Seeing Yourself in History: Community Archives in the Fight Against Symbolic Annihilation,” *The Public Historian* 36(4) November 2014: 26-37.

15 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Beacon, Boston, 1995. To see an alternative take on how archives can respond to historic silences in a different context, see Michelle Caswell, *Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory, and the Photographic Record in Cambodia*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014.

16 Verne Harris, *Archives and Justice* (Society of American Archivists: Chicago, 2006).

a nuanced examination of silences in archives, not as neglected absences, but as powerful sites of refusal, resistance, and non-participation.[17] More recently, Michelle Caswell and Anne Gilliland have explored silences as potentially productive spaces in which communities can collectively imagine records that do not actually exist, but nonetheless have affective resonance.[18] Yet while silences have served as a fertile ground for theorizing in the field, little empirical work has been done to examine how these silences are accrued and what their impact is in practical case studies.

Affect in Archives

Affect here is defined as "those visceral forces beneath, alongside," feeling and emotions, encompassing the conscious, the semi-conscious, and that which is "*other than* conscious knowing" the non-cognitive, non-linguistic and non-rational forces that undergird thought, action, and relationships.[19] Since the 1990s, affect has become a burgeoning area of interdisciplinary scholarly inquiry in the social sciences and humanities. Work on the intersections of affect and archives is being undertaken in fields as diverse as anthropology, sociology, literature, art, cultural studies, gender studies and post-colonial studies, as well as in archival studies. In 2003 cultural theorist Ann Cvetkovich's work *An Archive of Feelings* urgently called for (in the context of what she called "actually existing" grassroots queer archives) "a radical archive of emotion" in order to "document intimacy, sexuality, love, and

17 Carter, Rodney G.S. "Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence." *Archivaria* 61 (2006): 215-233.

18 Michelle Caswell and Anne Gilliland, "Dead Perpetrators, Imagined Documents, Emergent Evidence and False Promises: Deconstructing an Archival Paradox," *International Journal of Human Rights, International Journal of Human Rights* 19(5) 2015: 615-627.

19 Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010): 1.

activism" experiences fundamental to queer people and histories and which traditional archives have difficultly chronicling.[20]

Though it has always been present as an underlying factor in archival scholarship and practice, the concept of affect is only just beginning to be explicated and developed into a rich area of inquiry and praxis. In Australia, Sue McKemmish, Shannon Faulkhead and Lynette Russell have explored the traumatic impact on Indigenous communities both of over-documentation (through surveillance records) and misrepresentation.[21] In related work, Sue McKemmish, Livia Iacovino, Eric Ketelaar, Melissa Castan, and Lynette Russell, suggest ways in which Indigenous communities can help heal from such trauma by reclaiming, reimagining, and "talking back" to records of Australian colonial administration.[22] Recently scholars Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, Anne Gilliland, and Barbara Reed have made explicit calls in archival studies for the acknowledgement of the significance of affects and their theorization in archives and recordkeeping scholarship and practice as part of their emphases on the human dimension of archives.[23] Building on this momentum in the field, the "Affect and the Archive" Symposium,

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20 Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003): 241.

21 Sue McKemmish, Shannon Faulkhead and Lynette Russell, "Distrust in the Archive: Reconciling Records" *Archival Science* 11 (2011): 211-239;

22 Sue McKemmish, Livia Iacovino, Eric Ketelaar, Melissa Castan, and Lynette Russell, "Resetting Relationships: Archives and Indigenous Human Rights in Australia." *Archives and Manuscripts* 39 (1) (2011): 107–144.

23 Michelle Caswell, "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives," Presentation at Affect and the Archive Symposium (2014); Marika Cifor, "Visceral Forces: Introducing Affect Studies to Archival Discourse," Presentation at Archival Education and Research Institute (2014); Anne Gilliland, *Conceptualizing 21st-Century Archives* (Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists, 2014); Anne Gilliland, "Moving past: probing the agency and affect of recordkeeping in individual and community lives in post-conflict Croatia," *Archival Science* (2014); Anne Gilliland, "Studying affect and its relationship to the agency of archivists in the countries of the former Yugoslavia," Presentation at Archival Education and

held at UCLA in November 2014, explored the scholarly and professional understandings of and encounters with affect in the archive as well as in broader record- and memory-keeping contexts. It showcased innovative research on the intersections of affect and the archive relating particularly to human rights, migration and diaspora, sexuality, labor, bodies and embodiment, and visual art. In addition to work focusing directly on affect in archives are there are a significant number of archival scholars who implicitly acknowledge affect's importance in their recent work on human rights archives including Michelle Caswell, Hariz Halilovich, Verne Harris, and David Wallace amongst others.[24] Work in this area is still new and requires deeper development especially through qualitative research aimed at exploring the impacts of affect in archives on the individual, community, and societal levels.

Community archives

Recent work in archival studies reflects a growth in independently operated, community-based archival organizations.[25] Although much of the scholarship documenting these community

Research Institute, (2014); Barbara Reed, "Reinventing Access," *Archives and Manuscripts* 42, no. 2 (2014): 123-132.

24 Michelle Caswell, *Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory and the Photographic Record in Cambodia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014); Michelle Caswell, "Defining Human Rights Archives: Introduction to the Special Double Issue on Archives and Human Rights," *Archival Science* (2014); Verne Harris, "Antonyms of our Remembering," *Archival Science* (2014); Hariz Halilovich, "Reclaiming Erased Lives: Archives, Records and Memorie in Post-War Bosnia and the Bosnian Diaspora," *Archival Science* (2014); David Wallace, P. Pasick, Z. Berman, E. Weber, "Stories for Hope–Rwanda: A Psychological–Archival Collaboration to Promote Healing and Cultural Continuity through Intergenerational Dialogue," *Archival Science* (2014).

25 Jeannette Bastian and Ben Alexander, B, "Introduction: Communities and Archives- A Symbiotic Relationship," *Community Archives: The Shaping of Memory* (London: Facet, 2009); Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd, "Whose Memories, Whose Archives? Independent Community Archives, Autonomy, and the Mainstream," *Archival Science* 9 (2009), 71-86; Dominique Daniel, "Documenting the Immigrant and Ethnic Experience in American

archives has been based in the U.K., a growing body of literature in the U.S. addresses the trajectories of such organizations and projects in the U.S.[26] While definitions of community are contextual and shifting, Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd define community as "any manner of people who come together and present themselves as such, and a 'community archive' is the product of their attempts to document the history of their commonality."[27] Archival communities can materialize around ethnic, racial, or religious identities,[28] gender and sexual orientation,[29] economic status,[30] and physical locations.[31] As U.K.-based archival scholars Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd note, independent grassroots archival efforts first sprung up in response to the political and social movements of the 1960s and 1970s.[32] Flinn and Stevens

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Archives," *American Archivist* 73:1 (2010): 82-104; Terry Cook, "Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community: Four Shifting Archival Paradigms," *Archival Science* 13 (2013): 95-120.

26 For a historical perspective on the differences between community archives in the U.S. and the U.K., see: Gilliland, Anne J. and Andrew Flinn. "The Wonderful and Frightening World of Community Archives: What Are We Really Talking About?" Keynote address, *Nexus, Confluence, and Difference: Community Archives meets Community Informatics: Prato CIRN Conference Oct 28-30 2013*, Larry Stillman, Amalia Sabiescu, Nemanja Memarovic, eds, Centre for Community Networking Research, Centre for Social Informatics, Monash University. ISBN 978-0-9874652-1-4, http://www.ccnr.infotech.monash.edu.au/assets/docs/prato2013_papers/gilliland_flinn_keynote.pdf.

27 Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd, p. 75.

28 Elizabeth Kaplan, "We Are What We Collect, We Collect What We Are: Archives and the Construction of Identity," *American Archivist* 63 (2000): 126-151; Dominique Daniel, "Documenting the Immigrant and Ethnic Experience in American Archives"; Michelle Caswell, "Seeing Yourself in History: Community Archives in the Fight Against Symbolic Annihilation."

29 Marcel Barriault, "Archiving the Queer and Queering the Archives: A Case Study of the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives," *Community Archives: The Shaping of Memory*. London: Facet, 2009.

30 Flinn and Stevens, 2009.

31 Ibid.

32 Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd, 2009.

position community archives as parts of larger social and political movements whereby groups who have been ignored, misrepresented or marginalized by mainstream archival repositories launch their own archival projects as means of self-representation, identity construction, and empowerment.[33] These community archives are framed as grassroots alternatives to mainstream repositories through which communities can make collective decisions about what is of enduring value to them, shape collective memory of their own pasts, and control the means through which stories about their past are constructed. In the American context, the majority of the staff and volunteers of these community archives are usually members of underrepresented groups. In maintaining independence and encouraging participation, these archives strive to provide a platform in which previously marginalized groups are empowered to make decisions about archival collecting on their own terms.[34] Flinn, Stevens and Shepherd found that political activism, community empowerment, and social change were prime motivating factors undergirding these fiercely independent archival efforts.[35] In this light, the creation of community archives can be seen as a form of political protest in that it is an attempt to seize the means by which history is written and correct or amend dominant stories about the past. Flinn and Stevens assert: "…The endeavor by individuals and social groups to document their history, particularly if that history has been generally subordinated or marginalized, is political and subversive. These 'recast' histories and their making challenge and seek to undermine both the distortions and omissions of orthodox historical narratives, as well as the archive and heritage collections that

33 Flinn and Stevens, 2009.

34 Michelle Caswell, "SAADA and the Community Archive Model: What Is A Community-Based Archives Anyway?" Blog post. South Asian American Digital Archive, 2009.

35 Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd, 2009.

sustain them."[36] In this way, community archives are responses not only to the omissions of history as the official story written by a guild of professional historians, but the omissions of memory institutions writ large, and can thus be read as a direct challenge to the failure of mainstream repositories to collect a more diverse representation of society.

It is important to note here that the term "community archives" is a general umbrella term under which a host of different types of projects may fit. Community archives can range from entirely independent, permanent, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations dedicated solely to archival endeavors, to archival projects within larger community organizations, to informal, loosely defined, temporary configurations of community members dedicated to shaping collective memory of a community's past. As such, the term "community archives" can be seen an external imposition by archival studies scholars rather than emerging organically from within such community efforts.

The archives profession in the U.S. is only now coming to terms with this burgeoning community archives movement. In the realm of practice, the rise of community archives has meant a reframing of the functions of appraisal, description and access to align with community-specific priorities, reflect contingent cultural values, and allow for greater participation in archival decision-making.[37] Community input into archives has also led to conceptual shifts, as Chris Hurley developed the notion of "parallel provenance" to better accommodate Indigenous Australian perspectives on record creation, Joel Wurl advocated for ethnicity as a form of provenance, and Jeannette Bastian echoed calls to expand the core archival concept of

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36 Flinn and Stevens, 2009, p. 3-4.

37 Katie Shilton and Ramesh Srinivasan, "Participatory Appraisal and Arrangement for Multicultural Archival Collections," *Archivaria* 63 (2007): 87-101.

provenance to include descendants of the subjects of records.[38] Terry Cook has even declared that the recent emphasis on community constitutes a paradigm shift in the field, akin to previous conceptual guideposts like evidence and memory.[39]

Yet while much scholarly work has been done in this area, virtually none of it addresses the impact of community archives on the communities they serve. More work is needed not only to understand the conceptual impact of these archival organizations on archival theory and practice, but also to assess the needs and the impact of these memory organizations on the individual, community, and societal level.

Impact of archives

Over the past decade, several studies have been conducted that sought to measure the social, economic and pedagogical impact of museums, libraries and archives. Peter Brophy, in his assessment of impact in information and library services as "…any *effect* of a service, product or other 'event' on an individual or group…"[40] that can have positive or negative, short term or long term results, developed a scale of levels of measurable impact that range from -2/Hostility to 6/Changed Action. Brophy's model of evaluation attempts to not only gauge the user's affective relationship to information and library services, but to supply a means for information professionals to qualitatively account for the import of the services they provide.

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38 Chris Hurley, "Parallel Provenance: What If Anything is Archival Description?" *Archives and Manuscripts* 33, no. 1, 2005: 110-145; Joel Wurl, "Ethnicity as Provenance: In Search of Values and Principles for Documenting the Immigrant Experience," *Archival Issues* 29 (2005): 65-76; Jeannette Bastian, *Owning Memory: How a Caribbean Community Lost its Archives and Found its History*, Libraries Unlimited, Westport, CT, 2003.

39 Terry Cook, 2013.

40 Peter Brophy, "The Development of a Model for Assessing the Level of Impact of Information and Library Services," *Library and Information Research* 29, no. 93 (2005): 43–49. 44.

Admittedly a limited model, whose large scale use Brophy himself debates, these levels of impact nonetheless provide a starting point for thinking about the concrete ways in which social and economic impact, for example, can be measured.

In archival studies, the Archival Metrics project has provided detailed toolkits to help archivists and special collections librarians measure the economic impact of archives, as well as to assess the effectiveness of online finding aids and teaching tools.[41] Research emerging out of the Archival Metrics project suggests that archives have a significant monetary impact on the communities they serve.[42] Several studies in the U.K. have attempted to measure the social impact of libraries, archives, and museums. Among these studies the general consensus is that social impact can be defined as "…encompassing inclusion or overcoming exclusion of individuals or groups in terms of poverty, education, race, or disability and may also include issues of health, community safety, employment and education…."[43] Accordingly, the Burns Owens Partnership maintains that social impact can be located in three areas of focus, including "Stronger and Safer Communities" (which supports cultural diversity and identity, as well as familial ties and relationships); "Health and Well-Being" (which, among other things, supports care and recovery); and "Strengthening Public Life" (which encourages community empowerment and capacity building). [44]

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41 http://www.archivalmetrics.org/. The site contains an extensive bibliography about impact.

42 Elizabeth Yakel, Wendy Duff, Helen Tibbo, Adam Kriesberg, and Amber Cushing, "The Economic Impact of Government Archives," *American Archivist* 75(2) (2012): 297-325.

43 Caroline Wavell et al., *Impact Evaluation of Museums, Archives and Libraries: Available Evidence Project* (Robert Gordon University, 2002). 6. See also: Wendy M. Duff, Andrew Flinn, Karen Suurtamm, and David Wallace, "Social Justice Impact of Archives: A Preliminary Investigation," *Archival Science* 13, no. 4 (2013): 317–48.

44 Sarah Horton and Jaqueline Spence, "Scoping the Economic and Social Impact of Archives," *Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA) Council Yorkshire*, 2006. 49-50. See also: Duff et al.,

The social impact of archives in particular manifests itself in issues surrounding the development of personal and community identity, the preservation of culture, broadening understandings of history and the positive representation of communities.[45] As Wendy Duff, Andrew Flinn, Karen Suurtamm, and David Wallace point out, the impact of archives is distinct from museums and libraries insofar as archives contain records which in addition to having informational value, also demonstrate evidence of actions taken.[46] In reference to archives in general and not community archives specifically, they state, "The evidential value of archival records gives them greater power—as legal documents, as evidence in court, and as agents of accountability. Even if one person only accesses a record, it may have wide-reaching impact."[47] This capacity of archival records to reach beyond the scope of just one person and to broaden "people's perceptions and behaviors," is at the heart of their more direct engagement with users and the social import of the information related to them.[48] Duff et al assert that rather than focusing on service provision, archives' greater impact is a result of the secondary and indirect use of archival documents through publications, journalism, academic work, film and drama, that therefore leads to a larger public interacting with archives.[49] As Duff et al maintain, this leads to a consideration of the social justice impact of archives insofar as "…all people experience the

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"Social Justice Impact of Archives: A Preliminary Investigation." Wendy M. Duff and Joan M. Cherry, "Archival Orientation for Undergraduate Students: An Exploratory Study of Impact," *American Archivist* 71, no. 2 (2008): 499–529.

45 Wavell et al., *Impact Evaluation of Museums, Archives and Libraries: Available Evidence Project*. 19-20.

46 Duff et al., "Social Justice Impact of Archives: A Preliminary Investigation."

47 Ibid., 348.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid. 332.

larger social impacts that archives have: whether that be through experiencing a public apology or redress, being a member of a society that expects open access to government records, or by having a previously under-recognized history revealed through a grass roots heritage initiative."[50] In assessing the role and impact of archives in social justice, Duff et al emphasize the ways in which the archival components of social justice, as manifested in Brophy's levels, can either be negative or positive, and have opposite impacts on different communities, necessitating the study of social justice impact on the micro-, meso- and macro- levels.

In the community archives world, the U.K.-based Community Archives and Heritage Group commissioned independent research to investigate the impact of community archives.[51] The research found that community archives have wide-ranging impact in several areas, such as the development of skills in volunteers, the preservation of narratives not found in mainstream institutions, and promotion of community pride, citizenship, empowerment and social inclusion.[52] Although these findings by the Community Archives Development group are very important, the community archives landscape in the U.S. is quite different, due in part to lack of government funding for such projects.[53] Furthermore, the Community Archives Development group's report is based on the results of a questionnaire, which presents particular impediments for assessing personal, affective impact.

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50 Ibid. 333.

51 Community Archives and Heritage Group, http://www.communityarchives.org.uk/.

52 Community Archives Development Group, "Impact of Community Archives," 2007: http://www.communityarchives.org.uk/content/resource/summary.

53 For example, the report found that 50% of community archives in the U.K. receive funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. While we lack formal statistics in the U.S., very few community archives in the U.S. receive support from the federal government. Ibid.

This literature review has assessed the state of scholarship in several areas key to our study: symbolic annihilation; affect in archives; community archives; and archival impact. We situate our research within these strands of scholarship and posit that our research responds to gaps in each of these areas. For example, while symbolic annihilation is a powerful theoretical concept, ours is the first study to empirically observe it in archives. Similarly, fantastic theoretical work is being done to delineate the importance of affect in many aspects of the archival endeavor, but much more work is needed to observe empirically the way affect operates. Community archives present an emerging research area in archival studies, but much of the work on community archives has been based in the U.K. and does not necessarily reflect the same cultural and economic milieu in which such organizations operate in the U.S. And finally, although archives have demonstrated their impact using external factors like revenue generated or users served, little research assesses internal impact at the individual level. Our research bridges these areas and fills in crucial cracks in existing scholarship.

Methods

This research employed semi-structured qualitative interviews with eleven South Asian American members of SAADA's Academic Advisory Council. SAADA's Academic Advisory Council consists of fourteen faculty members who serve an advisory role in the organization, including helping to determine collection priorities, representing the organization at community and academic events, contributing to SAADA's *Tides* blog,[54] and participating in SAADA's end-

54 https://www.saadigitalarchive.org/tides

of-year fundraising campaign.[55] The Academic Advisory Council was first established in 2014 shortly before the launch of this research project. Twelve of the fourteen Academic Advisory Council members are of South Asian descent. Their academic fields include: English, Asian American Studies, American Studies, History, Sociology, and Gender Studies.

Using semi-structured qualitative interviews to collect data is a well-established method in archival studies and in information studies more broadly.[56] This research fits squarely within an interpretivist research paradigm that assumes reality is socially constructed, that the results of any research are contextually dependent on the interaction between researcher and subject, and that aims to elucidate a specific case rather than create generalizable results.[57] Interviews allow researchers to gain detailed understandings of the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of subjects from their point of view using their own words.[58] The resulting data is descriptive in nature; the goal of such research is to generate a "thick description" of a particular phenomenon in a single setting.[59] The research team followed the seven stages of the interview process recommended by Alison Pickard: thematizing, designing, interviewing, recording, transcribing, analyzing, and verifying.[60]

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55 A SAADA staff member who oversees (though is not technically a part of) the Advisory Council was also included as a research subject.

56 Anne Gilliland and Sue McKemmish, "Building and Infrastructure for Archival Research," *Archival Science* 4 (2004): 149-197.

57 Alison Jane Pickard, *Research Methods in Information*, 2nd ed. (Neal-Schuman/ ALA: Chicago) 2013, 7.

58 Pickard, 195-206.

59 Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." In *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1973. 3-30.

60 Pickard, 196-201.

In the thematizing phase, the research team decided on central themes they would like the research to address. These themes included the affective nature of archives, the social and personal impact of community archives, the role of community archives in the identity formation of marginalized groups, and the uses of community archives in academic teaching and research.

In the design phase, the research team created a series of questions related to these themes (see Appendix A). The team decided to interview a purposeful sample, consciously selecting an atypical group of users who are both members of the community being documented and actively dedicated to the community archives being examined. The resulting data is not generalizable to the total South Asian American population nor to members of ethnic communities in the US more broadly, but rather provides details about an information-rich case.[61] In this phase, the research team sought and received approval from their university's Institutional Review Board.

In the interview phase, each of the three members of the research team conducted three or four interviews using the same interview protocol (Appendix A). Interviews were conducted over the phone, via Skype, or over email, based on the preference of the interviewee. Interviews conducted via phone or Skype were recorded with the permission of the interviewee and transcribed using the transcription service Scribie.com. The research team then checked the transcripts for accuracy and analyzed all of the transcripts (including the text of the email interviews) for emerging themes. These themes were then narrowed, expanded, and/or verified by each member of the research team using a consensus-based process.

Furthermore, this research was conducted about a single information-rich case (SAADA) with the aims of generating theory about community archives. As such, we aimed for depth over

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61 Pickard, p. 64-65.

breadth, aiming for detailed description that points to the emergence and delineation of key theoretical concepts.

Limitations

Given that the respondents were all involved in a single community archives, we do not seek to make generalized claims about the affective impact of all community archives everywhere, but rather we develop a theoretical framework for thinking about affective impact more broadly. Furthermore, even within the case that we explore, our interviews were conducted solely with a specific subgroup of highly dedicated users—members of SAADA's Academic Advisory Council—about whom we make no claims of representing all of SAADA's users or all South Asian Americans. Although all of the Academic Advisory Council members are also South Asian American community members, we recognize that they are a unique, non-representative subset of community members who are both familiar with archival research and well-versed in academic discussion of social identity. Academic users in particular are trained to discuss archival records in a professional manner that may undervalue or discredit affective responses. As a result, their responses may have under-emphasized the personal and emotional reactions to archival use. Furthermore, all three of the interviewers were outsiders to the South Asian American community, which may have caused some interview subjects to have reticence in opening up about issues related to South Asian American community formation, inclusion, and belonging; additional research conducted by South Asian American interviewers would be necessary to confirm or deny the possible impact of insider/outsider dynamics on the results. Additionally, although interviews yielded particularly rich data, other methodologies such as focus groups, diaries, and ethnographic observation also could be used to uncover affective

impact and triangulate our findings. In summary, our research presents a specific view of the ways in which one subgroup of users from one ethnic community affectively responds to records documenting the history of their own ethnic group in one community archives and represents a first attempt at a larger ongoing research trajectory.

Findings

The interviews surfaced a number of key themes related to SAADA's impact in countering feelings of symbolic annihilation in archives specifically, and in understandings of American history and contemporary American society more broadly. These themes are: the absence of or difficulty in accessing historical materials related to South Asian Americans before the emergence of SAADA; the personal affective impact of discovering SAADA for the first time; the affective impact of SAADA on the respondents' South Asian American students; and the ability of SAADA to both reflect diversity within the South Asian American community and promote feelings of inclusion both within the ethnic community and in the larger society. Taken together, these recurring themes shed light on the ways in which one community archives has had an affective impact on part of the community it serves by countering feelings of symbolic annihilation and instead promoting what we term to "representational belonging."

Archival Gaps and Difficulty of Access Prior to SAADA

Prior to their exposure to SAADA, participants had varying degrees of success accessing archival materials related to South Asian Americans in government and university repositories. Several participants noted a complete lack of knowledge about and/or access to primary source material on South Asian American history in their childhoods. For these participants, this gap had

an impact on their identity and sense of belonging as South Asian Americans. For example, Interviewee 8 said,

> When I was growing up in Alabama... no one even knew what South Asian American meant. There were no South Asian blogs, there was no internet, there was nothing. So we really didn't have anything at all there to read and even these days, it's hard if you were thinking about going into a primary school library and finding something related to South Asian history... The odds are pretty slim that you're going to find anything.

Similarly, Interviewee 11 spoke at length about the dearth of sources related to South Asian Americans during his childhood, particularly the absence of any South Asian American figures in his history textbooks. For him, this absence led to feelings of social exclusion. He said,

> Even though I was born and brought up in Michigan…from a young age I felt unsettled in my identity as an American…. I felt trapped between two worlds, feeling entirely at home in neither one…. I too was part of a first wave; a wave of children born to… newly arrived immigrants who were at once entirely American, but who felt a sense of displacement by not seeing themselves reflected in the American story.

Several interviewees, particularly those whose work focuses on more contemporary events, noted that, in the absence of records on South Asians in mainstream repositories, they had to search for records outside of archival settings. For example, Interviewee 1 conducted dissertation research on South Asian communities in New York in the 1990s. She described how, prior to the creation of SAADA, the majority of her research involved accessing collections of records in their creators' homes and offices. She said:

> I told everybody about my dissertation and what I was working on, because I was in New York and I was interacting all the time with people who were a part of the organizations and communities that I was writing about…. And so people would just tell me, "Oh, I have a bunch of flyers and meeting notes from this non defunct organization. If you want to look at it, you can come over to my apartment and I'll share it with you…." I spent an entire day just going through [one person's] files. He was like, "I just stuck everything in these file cabinets and then I don't remember what's in there but you can look." And I scanned a bunch of his documents that he had. So I was relying on people who had taken care to save things.

Interviewee 8 also mentioned a reliance on informal networks for accessing records. In response to the questions as to whether or not she had looked for archives on South Asian Americans before, she stated:

> No, because there was nothing that was around. And so whatever we were trying to do and whatever information we would gather, would usually be by word of mouth and by the kindness of people who would actually save things. You had to actually construct your own networks of contacts, together and access materials. I mean, sure there were some library collections here and there… but [those efforts failed] because they lacked funding.

Interviewee 9 noted that while she could find records related to prominent South Asian Americans in archives, there was a dearth of records related to every day people and oral histories in mainstream repositories. She said:

> This last summer when I was down at the National Archives in Washington, DC, I was doing a project that pertains to South Asian Americans, and apart from the most famous South Asian Americans… I did not find any South Asian Americans in the archives, and I found it very frustrating because I had kind of a disconnect looking for the kinds of stories that I am accustomed to as an oral historian, and then going and looking for those kinds of stories in the archive and having to confront the fact that I was looking for the wrong thing, that those kinds of stories don't appear in the archives. That's why we have SAADA, that's why we do oral history, because otherwise we can't find them.

By contrast, a number of participants did have success as academic researchers finding archival sources related to South Asian American history, but many of them spoke of the difficulty of finding these sources, the financial costs and time commitment required to conduct such archival research, and the partial and "hidden" nature of collection related to South Asian American history. For example, one interviewee spoke about her experience conducting dissertation research on South Asian American history at the National Archives:

> While I greatly enjoy the time I spend in archives, I have discovered archival research is a lonely business—months spent in strange cities living in strangers' houses in often deplorable conditions. There is a also the question of paying for it…I know I need to conduct further research for this project, but without additional funding or a tenure-track job with a flexible work-schedule in the future, I'm not sure how this would be possible.

One participant talked about the difficulty of finding materials via existing descriptive systems; she said, “I found the holdings catalog at the National Archives to be incredibly unintuitive and hard to use. Every time I go to the archives, I feel like I’m trying to find a needle in a haystack.” Another participant discussed how much serendipity had been involved in her discovery of archival records related to South Asian Americans. She said, “I was not looking for South Asian Americans in the archives. I stumbled upon them.” Others described archival sources related to South Asian Americans as “fragmented,” “dispersed,” and “limited,” belying a frustration with traditional archival organizational structures based on provenance.

As these responses indicated, participants did not see South Asian Americans adequately represented in mainstream repositories. Though none of the respondents used the academic term “symbolic annihilation” to discuss the repercussions of the exclusion of members of their own ethnic community from archives, their responses indicate a sense of alienation, isolation, and misrepresentation in mainstream repositories that is consistent with the concept. Furthermore, the absence of records documenting South Asian Americans in mainstream archives, coupled with the difficulty in accessing such records when they have been archived, has had epistemological impact in the sense that community members had little physical materials to prove the existence of their community in the U.S. prior to 1965. In the absence of physical materials, it has been hard to build knowledge about community history.

Personal Affective Responses to SAADA

Across the board, participants described affective responses to seeing SAADA for the first time. They spoke of “the joy” of using SAADA, the “thrill” of discovery, “amazement” at the breadth and depth of sources, “excitement” at searching the archives, and “awe” at how easy

it was to use. Interviewee 3 asserted that after seeing the archive for the first time, he was delighted and thought, “SAADA is a wonderful thing to do, an important thing to do.” Interviewee 4 remarked, “…I was very, very excited about [seeing SAADA]. I thought that it was an awesome project and thought this is something that could really revolutionize the way in which we think about these archives… [by] ‘centralizing’” information in local museums and archives.

A few of the participants were moved to volunteer for the organization after having emotional responses during their initial exposure to the archives. Interviewee 6 said, “I remember being quite excited when I first found [SAADA] and immediately shot an email to Samip [Mallick, SAADA’s Executive Director] because I wanted to know how I could get involved.” Interviewee 9 in particular discussed the affective, personal value of the archive and the emotional impact volunteering with the organization has had on her. She said:

> Okay, I'm just gonna get emotional a little bit. My dad died…a little over a year ago. And the [oral history] interview that I did with him [for SAADA] was the only one that I did with him. And it's there. And that is a treasure to me. And I did it because I wanted to work with SAADA and to have a place for these oral histories. So, for me personally, the value of the archive is profound. And I think that that may be true for a lot of people who suddenly are able to discover themselves, existing, being documented.

The interviewee quoted above eloquently points to SAADA’s affective impacts on both a personal and social level. In this case, it was not just the existence of SAADA, nor just exposure to the records in SAADA, but active participation in record creation for SAADA that provokes such an emotional response. As this interviewee confirmed, SAADA offers a much-needed counter-narrative for individuals and communities who have repeatedly been misrepresented and/or made invisible. This one record—a single oral history—holds much affective power for a daughter for whom the record represents a trace of her father. It documents and validates both his

existence and experiences and her feelings. But even more so, the existence of this record and its inclusion in an archives has an ontological impact; it changes her sense of being in the world such that she can "discover" herself "existing" in ways she did not before this record was created and made accessible. Representation in community archives catalyzes this ontological shift from not-being/ not-existing/ not being documented to being/existing/being documented, with profound personal implications.

This record described by Interviewee 9 also matters on an affective level to the larger community. It is only through such records that this community is able to discover themselves, to validate their existence, and to be represented in ways that reflect their needs and desires. This record also points to the urgent need to do this documentation work before such stories are lost and for their creators, their users, and scholars in archival studies to think about the personal and affective impacts of records. Symbolic annihilation is not merely an abstract academic concept; the occlusions of yourself, your loved ones, and your community have a deep affective impact on everyday lives, as our respondents suggested.

Students' Affective Responses to SAADA

Several respondents mentioned the affective impact that using SAADA in the classroom had on South Asian American students. Interviewees described how their students were "surprised," and "inspired" to find out about largely unknown histories and "excited to see themselves as part of history." "It's exciting for them to get a chance to see themselves," said one respondent; it's "incredibly meaningful" said another. Interviewee 1, an Asian American studies professor, said that her South Asian American students are:

> …always surprised, especially that the [materials in SAADA] are so directly relevant to understanding American immigration, or the legal system, when you think about things

> like the Bhagat Singh Thind case, which was a key moment when the U.S. had to be really direct about the racial discrimination that was built into its naturalization laws. They are surprised that it was us [South Asians] who were directly part of that history…. In the Bay Area, there's a lot of knowledge and attention to Chinese and Japanese and Filipino history. My students generally understand that there's a longstanding presence of those communities in California. They're surprised that the same is true for South Asian communities.

Interviewee 7 echoed this response: "I think students have responded well, and sometimes been surprised by the sheer presence of South Asians so [far] back into the early 20th century. South Asian American students, I have found, are really interested in it for the reason I just mentioned —students sometimes express surprise about the early presence of Bengali Muslims in the U.S., or the radical Gadar Party." Likewise, Interviewee 4 reported, "Among the South Asian American students that take that class, there's always a feeling of they already know everything prior to coming in and I think they leave… with a lot more questions because they didn't [initially] understand how diverse the community is or the aspects of migration and the economics of why people came to the US. So, [seeing SAADA] is in many ways, eye opening for them… [It] is an important way, I think, for students to recognize the complex history of South Asians."

Interviewee 8, describing how SAADA's Executive Director had given a lecture on her campus, noticed a difference between the way South Asian American and non-South Asian American students reacted. She said:

> They were struck by the fact that they didn't know any of these stories. And then the students who weren't South Asian American, who could or had knowledge of their families having immigrant histories, whether it be like 100 years ago or 80 years ago, or 50 years ago, they were actually bringing that up when they were writing responses,… they were bringing up those connections to their own family histories and thinking about the stories that had perhaps had been lost in their own histories. So that was interesting. But with South Asian American students it was actually quite different. They were totally, as most people are, they were unaware as well, but they were sort of talking about the facts. [They said,] "It was interesting to see that people who looked like me... or looked like my parents, they actually had a place in history and they did all sorts of things. We

> didn't know that there was a [South Asian American] senator, we didn't know this, we didn't know that." So, they were actually really, really interested in it…. There was a lot of interest and it was actually quite a distinct difference between those students who were South Asian decent and who were not."

Several respondents described SAADA as an important bridge for students to learn about their own immigrant backgrounds. Interviewee 6 said: "I think SAADA is particularly important for new immigrants to understand the community's histories and past struggles. I work with international students from India on a day-to-day basis and most of them are unaware of the history of the present of South Asians in North America or even of the Civil Rights movement. Resources like SAADA are incredibly important in helping raise awareness of this history."

As our respondents noted, South Asian American students have largely been denied the opportunity to see themselves in American history. Their surprise that they actually have a century-long history in the U.S. points to the extent of the symbolic annihilation experienced by this community. In this sense, the reactions our interview subjects described in their students confirm our previous finding that community archives can have an ontological and affective impact not just on individuals, but on the communities writ large. The student responses to SAADA (as reported by their instructors) show that the materials collected by community organizations can affirm a collective sense of being and belonging in the absence of sufficiently complex representations and narratives in mainstream cultural heritage organizations and media.

Affective Impact of Community Inclusion

Many of the participants discussed the impact of SAADA's broad and inclusive sense of South Asian American identity on their personal feelings of belonging. SAADA's success at crossing boundaries of nation and religion was repeatedly brought up by subjects; the organization's use

of the regional umbrella term "South Asian," rather than focusing on a single national origin or ethnic or religious identity strongly resonated with the participants' own sense of identity.[62] All of the participants personally identified with the term "South Asian American," though some also described themselves as belonging to additional communities based on region, religion, language, and nation as well.

A few discussed the ways in which they feel that they are strengthening their ties to the community through their involvement with SAADA. For example, Interviewee 8 said, "The other thing that was really very good for me, in terms of making SAADA exciting, was the fact it focused not on India, which is where my parents originally came from, but on South Asia which was a category that I much more closely identified with." Similarly, Interviewee 9 said:

> I think the thing that's so great about SAADA is that…the people affiliated with SAADA have worked very hard to ensure that the diversity of the community is represented, and that is one part of it that's incredibly important to me….. One of the things that is so stunning about the [records in SAADA] is that they are not composed of North Indian Hindi speaking Hindus basically. It represents a wide range of religious backgrounds, linguistic backgrounds, regions of origin, times of migration, reasons for migration. SAADA does not represent the stereotypes of South Asian Americans in this country by limiting the kinds of stories that tells to those of upwardly mobile successful medical professionals and entrepreneurs. That is, I think, a real testament to the people who have been working on it and doing the collection, and also is vital to the public's understanding of the experience of South Asians in this country.

The diversity of the collection was a key factor that made respondents feel welcome and represented in the archives. Interviewee 5 articulated the importance of SAADA's broad, regional approach to community:

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62 For further discussion about the strategic politics of SAADA using the umbrella term "South Asian," see: Michelle Caswell, "Inventing New Archival Imaginaries: Theoretical Foundations for Identity-Based Community Archives," in *Identity Palimpsests: Ethnic Archiving in the U.S. and Canada* (Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books, 2014): 35-55.

> SAADA is unique and it's such a treasure that we have. I mean, it's a resource that collects all of the pieces of our identity that we share together, right? I mean, one person may be from Bangladesh, another from Pakistan, another from Sri Lanka, but we have a shared history and we have a shared identity. How we're seen in the U.S. is similar, right? So, people may see me as a Bangladeshi, or they may see a Bangladeshi as an Indian. I mean, how we are perceived is the same, and so that plays a huge part in how we sort of come together as a community. And so to have a resource like SAADA is amazing. A place where we can look up our history, we can see how people lived their lives and how they're doing so today, and how the past impacts the present, all of it. It's really incredible.

Another respondent echoed that SAADA was not just a reflection of the community, but a community-building tool. She said, "SAADA creates a home for the history of South Asians in America, a place that we can go and find them because we can't find them in other places… SAADA creates an opportunity to really understand the complexity of the [South Asian American] experience." Interviewee 5 echoed this sense that community-building is happening through SAADA's work. She said, "It's definitely enriched my experience as an academic. My connection with SAADA has definitely expanded the circle of South Asian colleagues, and that's been really, really wonderful."

Several respondents also noted that the ways in which SAADA shows how South Asian American history reaches back well before 1965 (when U.S. immigration laws opened up) was in and of itself a way to counter misrepresentation and stereotypes. "SAADA contests a short-sighted glimpse of this history by looking deeper and further back than the prominent immigration waves that started in 1965," said Interviewee 7. A few respondents mentioned the importance of SAADA in challenging stereotypes of South Asians as a "model minority" or, conversely, being labeled as terrorists in the wake of September 11, 2001.

Other respondents noted how the diversity of stories within SAADA makes them feel represented in the larger society. For example, Interviewee 11 spoke effusively about the role SAADA has played in developing his identity as a South Asian American. He said:

> Learning about South Asian American history was transformational for me. Stories like that of Anandibai Joshee, Dalip Singh Saund, and Lalit Gadhia were not stories that I could learn about in school, read in textbooks or see covered in the media. But it was through learning about these stories and the many others like them that finally helped me see myself reflected in the American experience. For me knowing there is a long, rich and diverse history of South Asians in the U.S. counteracts that feeling of displacement.

This transformational moment is a compelling illustration of what we term "representational belonging," that is, the ways in which community archives enable those who have been left out of mainstream repositories to have the power and authority to establish and enact their presence in archives in complex, meaningful, and substantive ways. In this way, seeing oneself reflected in archives has significant epistemological, ontological, and affective consequences. On a basic level, community archives provide an empirical basis of evidence on which to assert the community's historical presence; they allow communities to prove the facts of their presence in the face of silencing, marginalization, and misportrayal. Yet, their power extends beyond the empirical to the ontological, in the sense that they affirm a sense of being among people who have felt their very existence was denied by mainstream media and cultural heritage institutions, as the earlier discussion of Interviewee 9's responses confirmed. This ontological affirmation has important affective implications, as community members have emotionally charged responses to symbolic forms of representation. As articulated by Interviewee 7 and other respondents, the work of SAADA has brought to relief the varied roles that South Asian Americans have taken on in society, providing an expansive form of 'representational belonging' that moves beyond stereotype and embodies the community's diversity.

Return to Theory

Our findings confirm that, while not specifically named as such, the concept of symbolic annihilation accurately describes how members of one marginalized community feel about their

community's representation (or lack thereof) in mainstream archives. Our research also generated a new concept, representational belonging, which serves as a counterweight to symbolic annihilation and describes the affective responses community members have to seeing their communities represented with complexity and nuance.

Moreover, our interviews also hinted at a new theoretical framework for understanding several levels through which representational belonging operates in community archives. On an *epistemological level*, community archives provide empirical evidence for a community to assert its existence in the past. Epistemology, or the theory of how we know what we know, aptly describes the ways in which community archives enable communities to establish their histories through material artifacts. By collecting materials that document the previously unknown history of a community, community archives assert *we were here*. This epistemological impact also has an ontological effect. Ontology, or the study of the nature of being, examines how people exist in the world. On an *ontological level*, community archives affirm *I am here*. They reflect and assert identities in the present, allowing individuals "to suddenly see themselves existing" in ways they could not and did not previously. This epistemological and ontological impact, in turn, has a social impact. On a *social level*, community archives assert *you belong here* to members of the communities they serve. At the social level, our research showed how one community archives enabled both academics and their students to feel a sense of belonging and inclusion with each other through interaction with the archives. These three levels of impact—epistemological, ontological, and social—together undergird our conception of representational belonging. As our interviews indicated, each of the proposed levels has strong affective resonances in community members.

Conclusion

As our study showed, community archives can have an important epistemological, ontological, and social impact on the communities they represent. While quantitative measures of such impact remain elusive, it is possible to qualitatively assess this impact through in-depth interviews with community users, as our research has indicated. The themes identified in our research—the absences of mainstream media and repositories, the affective impact of discovery both personally and on students, the complex representation of diversity within the community, and the promotion of feelings of inclusion—all point to the ways community archives are powerful forces in communities who have historically been excluded from more formal and well-established institutions.

This article provides one early attempt to understand the personal and social impact of community archives in the U.S. context. In revealing how one subset of community members affectively responds to representation in one community archives, our research has raised a host of issues for future exploration. Do other community archives have the same or similar affective impact on the communities they serve? Does the tripartite structure presented here of epistemological, ontological, and social impact provide a useful heuristic for talking about community archives in general? How does affective impact compare to other types of impact archives might have such as political, financial, and social justice impact? These are all questions we hope to explore in future research.

Such research is needed if we are, as an academic field and a profession, to truly understand the nature, function, and impact of community archives. Our research points to ways in which these grassroots memory projects change the nature of the archival endeavor by taking into account not only the evidential value of records, but their affective value (as manifested on

epistemological, ontological, and social levels) as well. Although there is certainly the potential for any records—regardless of the type of institution stewarding them—to produce affective impact, we posit that community archives have been at the forefront of documenting and responding to communities and producing both affirmations of existence and feelings of belonging among the community members they serve. In this way, mainstream archival repositories and professionally trained archivists would do well to take a page from the community archives movement in order to more profoundly counteract the effects of symbolic annihilation, and to instead work to invoke feelings of representational belonging for the communities and individuals they exist to serve.

Appendix A: Semi-structured Interview Protocol

1. Biographical and Demographical Info

- What is your title?
- What field are you in?
- How would you describe your ethnic identity? [Would you describe yourself as South Asian American? Are you first or second generation?]

2. Research

- What is your research about? How did you come to study that topic?
- What is your experience doing research in archives?
- How central are archival records on South Asian Americans to your research?
- Have you published articles or books that cited SAADA? If so, can you give me the citations?
- Prior to SAADA, had you looked for South Asian Americans in archives? What did you find? Can you describe this experience? *How did you feel? Did you feel these materials were representative of the community you were interested in or apart of?*

3. SAADA's impact

- How did you first find SAADA? What was your initial response to it?
- Do you feel the records in SAADA are representative of the community you were interested in or apart of? Why or why not?
- How would you describe the importance of SAADA to someone who has never seen it before?
- Does it matter to you that SAADA is an independent community-governed nonprofit organization (as opposed to a collecting project of a larger university or government archives)? Why or why not?

4. Involvement with SAADA

- How is that you became involved with SAADA's academic council? What inspired you to participate in the academic council?
- What do you hope to accomplish on the council?
- What does involvement with SAADA bring to your role as a professor, community advocate, or activist?

5. Teaching

- What are your main areas of teaching?
- Do you use primary source materials or materials acquired through archives in your classes?
- How central are archival records on South Asian Americans to your teaching?
- Do you use SAADA to teach? If so, How?
- How have the students responded to SAADA materials? How have South Asian American students in particular responded?

6. Conclusion

- Is there anything we haven't asked that you would like to discuss?