Care, Community, and Collaboration: A Feminist Critical Praxis for Assessing Reparative

Description Through User Experience Testing

Quin DeLaRosa & Kate Mitchell

Princeton University Library Special Collections

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I. Introduction

Reparative action has become of increasing concern for archivists in the twenty-first century. With the rejection of neutrality in the archive has come the mandatory recognition of the harm and oppression perpetuated by archival practices, in particular the way archivists describe and process collections. Shifting paradigms relating to the agency of the archivist and the social justice imperative have each contributed to transforming reparative description into a key discourse within contemporary archivy. Yet, for all its noted popularity, much of the archival literature to date has tread the crowded area between conceptual frameworks and initial implementations. If, however, archivists are to make good on their dedication to repair past work and lingering legacy practices, it is necessary for archivists to ascertain just how reparative their redescription practices are beyond initial implementation. To assist Princeton University in this endeavor, this work proposes a user experience (UX) testing model to assess the social justice impact of reparative description in Princeton University Library's (PUL's) finding aids.[1] By adopting an ethics of care, as stipulated by this model, Princeton can forge stronger relationships with community stakeholders while continually improving reparative practices to encourage a sense of representational belonging for those that the archives have historically failed to serve.

The goals for this project are tripartite, each with equal importance. They include:

- Produce an ethical user feedback model to assess the social justice impact of Princeton's current reparative description practices. (Project Goal 1)

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[1] Caswell and Duff define social justice impact of archives as the "outcome or change in individual or community's relationship to the world in regard to social justice, which results from records and/or the processes of creating/keeping/activating records." Wendy Duff and Michelle Caswell, "Methodologies for Archival Impact Studies," in *Archives, Recordkeeping, and Social Justice*, ed. David Wallace, Wendy Duff, Renée Saucier, and Andrew Flinn (New York: Routledge, 2020): 52-69.

- Consider how user feedback can be procedurally integrated into Princeton's reparative description practices. (Project Goal 2)

- Foster stronger community relations with the marginalized groups represented in Princeton's collections and better represent and include them in archival recordkeeping. (Project Goal 3)

Elaborating from the top, Goal 1 seeks to improve reparative description practices through ethical user feedback. Focusing explicitly on ethics, this goal ensures the authors' model is responsive to the human element in archival description and that all user interactions are characterized by a care-driven framework. In practice, this means conducting UX testing that consciously avoids perpetuating the harm incurred by exposing the user to potentially triggering or upsetting descriptions. Goal 2 mandates that the proposed model play a constructive role in drawing connections between user experience and reparative description practices. Insights regarding the impacts of reparative description should be utilized to improve current practices. Goal 3 frames such impacts around notions of social justice, particularly as they affect community relations and representational belonging in the archive. While markedly more aspirational than the previous two goals, goal 3 stresses the importance of ingraining social justice into the archive. With goal 3 in mind, the proposed model aims to counteract the technocratic and neoliberal tendencies of methodological procedures, which overshadow the social dimensions of evaluation research.

In pursuit of these goals, the authors first seek to frame the discourse around user experience and reparative description. As a relatively untrodden path, a literature review is used to draw connections between this topic and relevant themes such as community collaboration, social justice in the archive, and evaluation frameworks for assessing impact in archival

environments. Following this is a discussion regarding a survey which was circulated by the authors among the professional archival community. The survey gauges where archival institutions are in their reparative description programs and provides an empirical look at their need for an assessment model. With all this background established, the authors then introduce the proposed UX assessment model for reparative description and address considerations for implementing the model in a testing environment. Recommendations for future work complete the discussion.

II. Literature Review

While there is a rich scholarship pertaining to social justice in the archives, which includes discussions of inclusive and reparative description, insufficient work has been done to assess the impact of these practices on the community members using and being represented by the materials.

a. Community Collaboration & Archives

Scholars have focused more broadly on the role of community collaboration in creating, what Caswell, Cifor, and Ramirez term, representational belonging –meaning, the empowerment of "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."[2] Using structured interviews to examine the affective and ontological impact of the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA) on South Asian American educators, Caswell, Cifor, and Ramirez found that this community archive drastically improved the educators' sense of

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[2] Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario H. Ramirez, "'To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing': Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives," *The American Archivist* 79, no. 1 (2016): 57.

belonging and inclusion.[3] In her 2014 study of the effect of archival absences or

misrepresentations on members of marginalized communities, Caswell similarly found that

community archives significantly diminish the symbolic annihilation experienced by these

groups when using emic description and adopting policies which consider the community's

values.[4]

Christen, Merrill, and Wynne offer an example of a successful community collaboration

archive project in describing their work with the Warumungu people to appropriately manage,

circulate, and narrate their materials online.[5] As a case study, this community archive project

demonstrates the positive impact of archival autonomy in both combating symbolic annihilation

and supporting the advocacy work of indigenous peoples and other oppressed groups.[6] By

working closely with Warumungu stakeholders and considering the feedback gathered from

workshops, Christen, et al. created an online archive platform, which reflected the cultural

protocols of the Warumungu people and honored their customs of knowledge creation and

distribution.[7] As a paradigm of success, in addition to fostering a trusting relationship, this

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[3] Caswell, Cifor, and Ramirez, "'To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing,'" 30-35.

[4] Caswell defines symbolic annihilation as"what happens to members of marginalized groups when they are absent, grossly under-represented, maligned, or trivialized," and in archives, this refers to "repositories [that] ignore or overlook materials that document [a community's] history, treating the community simply as if it did not exist." Michelle Caswell, "Seeing Yourself in History: Community Archives in the Fight against Symbolic Annihilation," *The Public Historian* 36 (2014): 27, DOI: 10.1525/tph.2014.36.4.26. Caswell, Cifor, and Ramirez, "'To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing,'" 59.

[5] Kimberly Christen, Alex Merrill, and Michael Wynne, "A Community of Relations: Mukurtus Hubs and Spokes," *D-Lib Magazine* 23, no. 5/6 (2017), http://dlib.org/dlib/may17/christen/05christen.html.

[6] Archival autonomy is defined as "the ability for individuals and communities to participate in societal memory, with their own voice, becoming participatory agents in recordkeeping and archiving for identity, memory, and accountability purposes." Joanne Evans, Sue McKemmish, Elizabeth Daniels, and Gavan McCarthy, "Self-determination and Archival Autonomy: Advocating Activism," *Archival Science* 15 (2015): 337-368, DOI: 10.1007/s10502-015-9244-6.

[7] Some platform features include different levels of user access based on cultural and social relationships and visible tribal metadata alongside institutional metadata. Christen, Merrill, and Wynne, "A Community of Relations."

community archive project granted the Warumungu significant authority over their records'
description and accessibility, which other mainstream archives had denied or compromised
through unethical or culturally disrespectful practices.

Framing the impact of this aforementioned project and the work of other community
archives, Caswell, Migoni, Geraci, and Cifor propose a tripartite structure for understanding
representational belonging by examining community archive's ontological, epistemological, and
social impacts on those typically excluded from mainstream institutions. For members of
marginalized communities, the ontological impact affirms the 'I am here,' the epistemological
impact affirms the 'we are here,' and the social impact affirms the 'we belong here.'[8] From
structured interviews with community archive founders, staff, and volunteers, they determined
that the complex and autonomous representation in community-led archives produced these
separate yet intersecting impacts, which together served to engender representational belonging.
Reflecting on these findings, our model considers these three impacts as they relate to reparative
description to better assess Princeton's attempts to enact social justice.

While PUL is not a community archive, it has the potential to serve a similar purpose and
ethically represent marginalized groups as long as "community members maintain some degree
of control over the appraisal, description, and use of the material."[9] By developing a model
dependent on user feedback, our project considers this and seeks to make amends for the
symbolic annihilation of groups represented in Princeton University's archival collections by
offering community stakeholders more authority over descriptive practices. While, ideally,

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[8] Michelle Caswell, et al., "'To Be Able to Imagine Otherwise': Community Archives and the Importance of Representation," *Archives and Records* 38, no. 1 (2016): 6, DOI: 10.1080/23257962.2016.1260445.

[9] Full quote is "no significant distinction between the impact of independent community archives in combating symbolic annihilation and those community archives located within 'mainstream' university collections in which community members maintain some degree of control over the appraisal, description, and use of the material." Caswell, et al., "'To Be Able to Imagine Otherwise…,'" 17.

reparative description should address the unmet needs of groups historically neglected or abused

by archivists, without a user feedback model to accompany it, community stakeholders are not

afforded the necessary degree of control over description to allow for the continuation of social

justice action in the archive.

b. Social Justice Frameworks

Frequently accompanying conversations of community collaborations in recent

scholarship is the social justice imperative and the archive's potential to affect positive change on

wider society. In their argument in favor of a feminist ethics framework over a rights-based

approach to archiving, Caswell and Cifor center the needs of community stakeholders in the

archive's social justice imperative. To counteract the injustice perpetrated by archival

institutions, they stress the archivist's affective responsibility to empathize with stakeholders so

as to transform the archive's relationship with the record creator, record subject, user, and the

larger communities "for whom the use of records has lasting consequences."[10] This ethics of

care, underpinned by radical empathy, requires archivists to not merely consider the unmet needs

of marginalized communities, but to actively and continually care for them.

Care in archival work has an impact on communities and the descriptive practices

archivists employ in representing them. Antracoli and Rawdon stress how a lack of respect and

consideration in description actively marginalizes records subjects, creators, and their wider

communities.[11] They levy particular criticism at the role name authorities play in the continued

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[10] Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor, "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives," *Archivaria* 81 (2016): 38.

[11] Alexis Antracoli and Katie Rawdon, "What's in a Name? Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia and the Impact of Names and Name Authorities in Archival Description," in *Ethical Questions in Name Authority Control*, ed. Jane Sandberg (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2019), 307, https://scholarshare.temple.edu/handle/20.500.12613/377.

marginalization of Black lives in the archival record and contemporary society.[12] Erin Baucom

extends this conversation to descriptions of LGBTQ archival materials. The terminology used in

description plays a pivotal role in affirming identities. Care-driven access characterized by

identity-affirming language corrects misrepresentations while also combating "minority stress."[13]

Reciprocally, use of identity-denying language enhances feelings stigmatization and

discrimination.[14]

Description and access that is not care-driven bears the potential to incur the opposite

effect—harm. Mitigating this harm requires acknowledging the stakeholder status of those who

may be adversely affected by harmful descriptive practices and responding in ways that embody

care. In their Anti-Racist Description Resources, Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia

(A4BLIP) recommend that archivists "speak directly with creators/subjects who may be harmed

by legacy description to determine whether the language should be maintained or changed."[15]

Oftentimes, as A4BLIP implies, it is stakeholders who are best positioned to truly assess if

reparative description work succeeds in supplanting harm with care. Sourcing input from such

sources is in itself an act of radical empathy in that it challenges the preconceived notions of

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[12] Antracoli and Rawdon, "What's in a Name…", 322.

[13] Minority stress is a term that originates from the work of Dr. Ilan Meyer and is cited in Baucom's work as "feedback from others that is incompatible with one's self-identity." Erin Baucom, "An Exploration into Archival Descriptions of LGBTQ Materials," *The American Archivist* 81, no. 1 (2018): 66, https://www.jstor.org/stable/48618001.

[14] Baucom, 70.

[15] Antracoli, et al., "Anti-Racist Description Resources," Anti-Racist Description Working Group. Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia (October 2019), https://archivesforblacklives.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/ardr_final.pdf.

archivists and advocates a deeper, more collaborative deconstruction of the oppressive legacies

systematized in archival description.[16]

Community collaboration is essential to the cause of social justice as it facilitates the

dismantlement and expansion of "notion[s] of who has the power to process and control archival

records."[17] Initial inputs justifying the need for reparative description, however, are not enough.

Social justice, as Verne Harris contends, is "always in the process of becoming."[18] It is and must

be understood as a continuous, never ending endeavor for archival institutions. Duff, Flinn,

Suurtamm, and Wallace describe it as "a circular and multi-directional process," which requires

recognizing the systemic inequalities present, employing intellectual and physical procedures to

combat these inequalities, and studying the impact of these efforts on minimizing inequalities.[19]

While Princeton has recognized and sought to remedy problematic description practices through

reparative projects, the university still needs to gauge the impact and effectiveness of reparative

description. Considering the required sensitivity and responsiveness to those who maintain a

stake in the records, the advantages of a care-based framework are especially relevant for a UX

assessment model in which radical empathy also entails mitigating potential trauma to

participants as they interact with harmful descriptions and materials.

Another useful concept for framing a reparative description assessment model is evident

in the form of a critical praxis, which is defined as "an intervention on ethical or moral grounds

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[16] Arroyo-Ramírez, et al., "Editor's Note," in *An Introduction to Radical Empathy in Archival Practice*, Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies 3, no. 2 (2021): 4, http://journals.litwinbooks.com/index.php/jclis/article/view/171.

[17] Ricardo L. Punzalan and Michelle Caswell, "Critical Directions for Archival Approaches to Social Justice," *The Library Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (2016): 30, https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/684145.

[18] Verne Harris, "Jacques Derrida Meets Nelson Mandela: Archival Ethics at the Endgame," *Archival Science* 11 (2011): 120.

[19] See *figure 2*; Wendy M. Duff, et al., "Social Justice Impact of Archives: A Preliminary Investigation," *Archival Science* 31 (2013): 338, DOI: 10.1007/s10502-012-9198-x.

designed to address dilemmas that may have technical or procedural roots."[20] Archivists and

librarians of music collections, while certainly not the only ones to benefit, have employed

critical praxis to great effect. Wells, et al. point out that such collections are "a locus of musical

study and discourse"[21] and, as such, the librarians who steward them should utilize a critical

praxis to oppose the inequities inherent in the information literacy of Western music. Others have

relied on a critical praxis to deconstruct issues surrounding intellectual property and access to

musical collections.[22] Conway and Markum encountered the issue of stringent copyright

restrictions preventing the digitization of live folk music recordings, a situation which critically

endangered the content as it languished on deteriorating magnetic tapes. Their solution replaced

the standard copyright first approach with a Performers First model that sought to forefront the

needs of performers as agents and stakeholders, in so doing justifying the transmission of

recordings without clearing all rights beforehand.[23] Mapping this process to the elements of a

critical praxis, it can be seen that this new approach (Performers First) aimed to solve a technical

problem (the slow destruction of live folk music recordings) by applying a guiding ethical

mandate (critically reframing intellectual property practices around the primary stakeholder

relationship). Additionally, the decision to share the recordings reflects a community-oriented

mindset in how it embraces the "gift exchange" ethos that the stakeholder performers acted

upon.[24]

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[20] Paul Conway and Robert B. Markum, "Performers First: Gift Exchange and Digital Access to Live Folk Music Archives," *The American Archivist* 82, no. 2 (2019): 571, DOI: 10.17723/aarc-82-02-08.

[21] Wells, Veronica, et al., "Towards a Critical Music Information Literacy Praxis," *Notes* 78, no. 3 (March 2022): 339.

[22] Martin Scherzinger, "Musical Property: Widening or Withering?" *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 26, no. 1 (2014): 162-192, DOI: 10.1111/jpms.12065.; Conway and Markum, "Performers First…"

[23] Conway and Markum, "Performers First…," 592.

[24] Conway and Markum, "Performers First…," 571.

Critical praxis is also applicable to reparative description. As an ethically motivated act, reparative description is essential to the representational belonging of communities. As a technical or procedural act, reparative description is inseparable from the daily workflows that instantiate its tangible production. For an assessment model like the one proposed here to have any use, it must be poised to successfully navigate both the ethical implications as well the procedural expressions of reparative description. In the proposed model, social justice is acted within the affective relationships of Caswell and Cifor's feminist ethics of care. Serving as the ethical backbone for the collection of user feedback, this decidedly feminist framework assigns a moral dimension to the process of UX testing. Further, this feminist-defined moral dimension is not a passive framework, but actively shapes the procedural aspects of assessment. Arroyo-Ramírez, et al. offer a notable warning on this point, citing that "metrics-driven, efficient, hyper-productive approaches" are a holdover of "toxic ambition" that acts as a continual barrier to intentionality and reflection in archival practice.[25] Meanwhile, the feedback yielded from UX testing has a direct bearing on how the archival institution reflects on its reparative description policies. Taken in its entirety, the proposed model constitutes a feminist critical praxis that seeks to apply an ethical mandate to a procedurally rooted issue, thereby approaching solutions that would otherwise be unknowable.

c. Evaluation Frameworks & Impact Studies in the Archives

Archivists harbor a somewhat complicated relationship with evaluations. Documenting collections, analyzing metadata, illuminating context, and seeking to be transparent about the archivist's agency are all part of the twenty-first century archivist's praxis. Yet, for professionals who are so emphatic about evaluating information, the call for evaluating programs and services

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[25] Arroyo-Ramírez, et al., "Editor's Note," 2-3.

has been comparatively meek. Some claim that evaluation of archival programs—both in terms

of use and users—has steadily gained traction over the past 30 years.[26] Even still, Jacques

Grimard levied sweeping criticism in 2004 that "archivists have not significantly addressed

evaluation of their programs, either from a theoretical or from a methodological perspective."[27]

Grimard continues on to argue that program evaluation is primed to assess quality and impact,

but that to do so it must be adapted to the archival perspective and fundamentally integrated into

archival theory and practice.[28] This is not to say that evaluation does not exist in the archival

profession. The Society of American Archivists (SAA) circulated the first A*CENSUS survey in

2004—the same year as Grimard's critique—to glean information from archivists regarding

"their positions, employers, demographics, credentials, job functions and specialization, salaries,

career paths, issues, professional identity, and affiliation."[29] However, evaluating a professional

community is not the same as assessing the impacts of products and services on users.

Previous research has indicated that although interest exists for user-focused program

evaluations, time and expertise are often perceived as issues to implementing such assessments.[30]

Even rarer are user-based evaluations that forefront archival impacts on users. While informal

mechanisms for user feedback in finding aids (e.g. social tagging, embedded forms, user

annotations) have, at times, been leveraged for reparative description purposes, the information

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[26] Duff, et al., "The Development, Testing, and Evaluation of the Archival Metrics Toolkits," *The American Archivist* 73, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2010): 571, DOI: 10.17723/aarc.73.2.00101k28200838k4.

[27] Jacques Grimard, "Program Evaluation and Archives: 'Appraising' Archival Work and Achievement," Archivaria 57 (2004): 69–70, https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/12453.

[28] Grimard, 81-82.

[29] "A*CENSUS: Archival Census and Education Needs Survey in the United States," *The American Archivist* 69, no. 2 (2006): 294, https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/ACensus%20Full%20Report%202006_0.pdf.

[30] Duff, et al., "The Development, Testing, and Evaluation…," 569-570.

these methods provide is limited, unstructured, and largely contingent on situational context. SAA's A*CENSUS II (data forthcoming) is intended to be more conscientious than its predecessor regarding the impacts archival work has on diversity, equity, inclusion, and access.[31] Despite this dedication, however, A*CENSUS II falls outside the scope of utilizing user feedback to meet these needs. One notable initiative that breaks the mold is Archival Metrics. This project has produced several sets of standardized toolkits aimed precisely at promoting user-based assessment of archival products and services.[32] Seeking to build a "culture of assessment" [33] in the profession, Archival Metrics is perhaps among the closest to fulfilling Grimard's call to develop and systematize theories and methods of archival program evaluation. As much as the Archival Metrics project has succeeded in pushing the discourse on evaluation and assessment forward, its five toolkits—the Researcher Toolkit, Online Finding Aids Toolkit, Website Toolkit, Student Researcher Toolkit, and Teaching Support Toolkit—are centered around usability and user behavior. This fails to address the impact of archival description in terms of social justice and, at worst, reinforces the legacy of "toxic ambition" which Arroyo-Ramírez, et al. warn is laden in metrics-driven methodologies for assessment.[34] A UX assessment model may be better suited to bridging the current disconnect between users, impact, and social justice in archival program evaluations.

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[31] "A*CENSUS II: Let's Get Started!" The Society of American Archivists, August 3, 2021, https://www2.archivists.org/acensus-ii.

[32] "About Archival Metrics," Archival Metrics, University of Michigan, the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and the University of Toronto, accessed July 28, 2022, https://sites.google.com/a/umich.edu/archival-metrics/home?authuser=0.

[33] "About Archival Metrics," accessed July 28, 2022.

[34] Arroyo-Ramírez, et al., "Editor's Note," 2-3.

For archivists relying on evaluation research to understand the social justice impact of

their work, Caswell and Duff outline four theoretical constructs and methodologies, which reject

neoliberal practices designed to measure productivity and efficiency. Rather, these evaluation

frameworks serve to subvert hegemonic and Western-centric means of knowledge production,

opting instead for "holistic methods involving stakeholders and communities in decision-making

and data gathering."[35] They include the following: culturally responsive evaluation, Indigeous

evaluation practices, democratic evaluation, and transformative evaluation.[36] Culturally

responsive evaluation methods require the consideration of communities' cultural values in

applying appropriate methodologies and a recognition of the power dynamics underlying

evaluation research.[37] Indigeous evaluation practices specifically call for the application of

methodologies which reflect Indigeous identities, epistemologies, and values, and which rely on

multiple means of data gathering to better frame the Indigeous community's worldview.[38]

Democratic evaluation offers a more general approach, articulating that evaluation studies should

require including all stakeholders in data gathering, establishing a dialogue with them, and

deliberating to "address concerns about how dialogue is structured and what information is

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[35] Duff and Caswell, "Methodologies for Archival Impact Studies," 62.

[36] Duff and Caswell, "Methodologies for Archival Impact Studies," 52.

[37] Duff and Caswell, "Methodologies for Archival Impact Studies," 62-63. For further reading on culturally responsive evaluation, see Haugen's and Chouinard's "Transparent, Translucent Opaque: Exploring the Dimension of Power in Culturally Responsive Evaluation Contexts" (2019), McBride's "Sociocultural Theory: Providing More Structure to Culturally Responsive Evaluation" (2011), Kirkhart's "Advancing Considerations of Culture and Validity: Honoring the Key Evaluation Checklist" (2013), and Mertens' "Stakeholders Representation in Culturally Complex Communities: Insights from the Transformative Paradigm" (2008).

[38] Duff and Caswell, "Methodologies for Archival Impact Studies," 64. For further reading on Indingenous evaluation practices, see Kawakami's, et al. "Improving the Practice of Evaluation through Indigenous Values and Methods: Decolonizing Evaluation Practice: Returning the Gaze from Hawai'i and Aotearoa" (2008) and Morelli's and Mataria's "Indigenizing Evaluation Research: A Long Awaited Paradigm Shift" (2010).

considered."[39] Transformative evaluation further emphasizes the importance of community collaboration by insisting upon involvement of researchers and community members in creating and executing these studies; it demands that the evaluators reject their neutral stance and instead actively work towards the empowerment of these community members by "ensur[ing] the experiences of individuals who have been marginalizing are included in research in meaningful ways."[40]

Quantitative data is incongruous with these frameworks that seek to decolonize knowledge production in the archive. As Marsh, et al. note, currently, there is a "lack of measurement among institutions beyond simple usage statistics and frequency of visits to evaluate the value of their work."[41] To correct that, they argue in favor of narrative and storytelling as a means of data gathering, emphasizing the merit of qualitative data over quantitative data in impact assessments, especially for marginalized communities for whom quantitative data (i.e. numbers and meatrics) has been used to justify their oppression.[42] As Punzalan, Marsh, and Cools contend, by using interviews and "going directly to user communities, [archivists can] aim to develop a more holistic characterization of impact that goes beyond institutional perspectives."[43]

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[39] Duff and Caswell, "Methodologies for Archival Impact Studies," 64-65. For further reading on democratic evaluation, see Podems' "Democratic Evaluation and a New Democracy: Acquaintances, Adversaries or Allies" (2017) and House's and Howe's "Deliberate Democratic Evaluation: Successes and Limitations of an Evaluation of School Choice" (2000).

[40] Duff and Caswell, "Methodologies for Archival Impact Studies," 65. For further reading on transformative evaluation, see Fetterman's "A Window into the Heart and Soul of Empowerment Evaluation: Looking through the Lens of Empowerment Evaluation Principles" (2005).

[41] Diana E. Marsh, et al., "Stories of Impact: The Role of Narrative in Understanding the Value and Impact of Digital Collections," *Archival Science* 16, no. 4 (2016): 331, DOI: 10.1007/s10502-015-9253-5.

[42] Marsh, et al., 329; Duff and Caswell, "Methodologies for Archival Impact Studies," 61-62.

[43] Ricardo Punzalan, Diana E. Marsh, and Kyla Cools, "Beyond Clicks, Likes, and Downloads: Identifying Meaningful Impacts for Digitized Ethnographic Archives," *Archivaria* 84 (Fall 2017): 98.

Our model offers a means of analyzing the qualitative data gathered from structured interviews with users. It builds on other scholar's impact scales used to study the value of services offered by libraries. Brophy, in his 2005 article, created a model for measuring the learning and educational impact of library services on its users and considers how they have changed the user's perceptions and behaviors.[44] By using the -2 to 6 scale, he tracks both the positive and negative impacts, allowing information professionals to better ascertain the quality of services they provide. His study evaluates the impact made on individuals, rather than on a larger group of stakeholders. Despite this narrow focus, though, his model still has potential to assess archival practices in the larger context of social justice and community. Duff, et al. maintains that his model "could be used to measure impact on social memory, social cohesion and public opinions… it [just] requires some adaptations for considering social justice impacts."[45] Horton and Spence, in part, demonstrate this by expanding Brophy's model to evaluate the levels of impact over time and on whom, shifting attitudes towards archives, and the projected social outcomes of the library, museum, and archive services offered.[46] Similarly, our model makes adaptations to broaden the uses for Brophy's model. In addition to tracking the level of impacts over time and on whom, it also judges the wider social justice impact of reparative description by seeking to understand its role in cultivating representational belonging for community stakeholders.

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[44] See *figure 3*; 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, DOI: 10.29173/lirg200.

[45] Duff, et al., "Social Justice Impact of Archives…," 333.

[46] See *figure 4*; Horton and Spence incorporate other impact studies, the Generic Learning Outcomes (2004) and the Prototype generic social outcomes (2006), into their model. Sarah Horton and Jaqueline Spence, "Scoping and the Economic and Social Impact of Archives," Yorkshire Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (2006).

III. Survey

a. Survey Goals

In the interest of bridging the conceptual and methodological nodes of discourse, the authors have conducted a survey of the professional archival community. This survey is not meant to be comprehensive or exhaustive, but to gather a baseline of empirical data for supporting informed recommendations in the authors' emerging model. The intellectual impetus behind the survey is to gauge how archival institutions approach and evaluate reparatively describing archival materials. From such responses, the intention is to determine what archival institutions need from an assessment model and, in turn, how an assessment model can coincide with those needs.

b. Methodology

Creating the survey required careful attention to balancing objectives with the kinds of data sought from responses. In this case, it was determined almost immediately that it would be critical to collect a breadth of responses from as many archival institutions as realistically achievable. Given the largely uncharted status of the discourse surrounding the assessment of reparative description, maximizing the number of institutions represented in the data offered a way of documenting common needs and trends across the archival profession. With this in mind, the survey was designed to be as brief and simple as its framework would allow in order to encourage responses. A questionnaire consisting of 13 questions divided into 5 sections—demographics, user feedback, reparative description, priorities, and additional comments—was selected as the survey format. Underpinning the questions is a mixed methods commitment to the "culture of assessment" advocated for in the Archival Metrics toolkits.[47]

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[47] "About Archival Metrics," accessed July 28, 2022.

Much like these toolkits, the survey privileges qualitative data and the rich variety it brings to responses. While quantitative data is still present, numbers alone are inadequate to capture the full significance of a concept as tangible yet nebulous as social justice impact. Qualitative-leaning assessment in archives, on the other hand, "increases the depth of understanding"[48] attained from analyzing responses.

Google Forms was chosen for delivery due to its ease of use and automated export of form responses to Google Sheets. Responses were collected over a period of 11 days from July 22 to August 8, 2022. Circulation took place entirely via email. While some individuals were emailed directly, the vast majority of responses were acquired through listservs maintained by professional organizations. These include SAA Description, SAA Announcements, SAA SNAP, ARL-ASSESS, and ALA Connect. The authors consciously avoided distributing the survey over institution-specific channels out of care to prevent skewing the data disproportionately towards a particular institution.

A series of guiding questions, none of which were distributed to survey respondents, drove the formation of the actual survey questions. Each also served as a locus to interpret responses and categorize observations. Identified by the prefix SQ, meaning "Survey Question," they are as follows:

- SQ1: What is the gap between <u>implementation</u> vs. <u>assessment</u> of reparative description?
- SQ2: How is user feedback factoring into reparative description?
- SQ3: Do archivists feel that a model for assessing the effectiveness of reparative description would be useful?
- SQ4: Do these answers change across differing types of archival institutions?

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[48] Grimard, "Program Evaluation and Archives…," 74.

The final results of the survey, as understood through these guiding questions, are detailed in the section below. Data from the survey has also been reproduced in Appendix B for further viewing.

c. Results

      SQ1, as defined in the previous section, seeks to determine whether there is a gap between implementing and assessing reparative description in archival institutions. This query is meant to help discern where most archives are currently positioned in the development of their reparative description programs. In terms of action, the data indicates that a majority of institutions are actively involved in reparative description programs, yet very few are evaluating their practices post-implementation. For instance, when asked "Is your institution currently executing or planning to execute a reparative description project?", 58 (69%) respondents answered "Yes."[49] Compared to the whopping 67 (79.8%) respondents who answered "No" to the question "Does your institution have a process for evaluating reparative description practices in collections that have already been re-described?"[50], there is a clear divergence between the actionable steps taken as part of implementation and assessment stages of reparative description programs. Aside from concrete steps, many respondents indicated notable discordance in terms of the degree to which their institutions prioritize reparative description. When asked "On a scale of 0-3, how highly do you feel your institution prioritizes reparatively describing collections?", responses were as follows: 6 (7.1%) Very Highly, 39 (46.4%) Highly, 32 (38.1%) Low, 7 (8.3%)

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[49] See *figure 5*.

[50] See *figure 6*.

N/A.[51] Yet again, it appears that most institutions are at least attempting a foray into reparatively describing archival materials. As with the previous example, however, this engagement wanes when making the jump to program assessment. This negative trend is evident in the following responses to the question "On a scale of 0-3, how highly do you feel your institution prioritizes **assessing the effectiveness of** reparative description?", which are: 2 (2.4%) Very Highly, 12 (14.3%) Highly, 50 (59.5%) Low, 20 (23.8%) N/A.[52]

Qualitative responses further elucidate the reasons underlying these observable trends. When asked to elaborate on their previous answers, common patterns emerged that explain the practical factors inhibiting progress. Contrasting with the strong interest in general for enacting reparative description policies, many respondents cited institutional barriers preventing assessment from taking place. Most of these barriers fell into one of two categories:

1. Underdeveloped reparative description programs

2. Resource scarcity

Comments such as "Understaffed-time and financial constraints" and "we aren't there yet" exemplify the tenor of these responses. One particularly telling comment on reparative description assessment reads "I keep raising the flag to address it and it keeps being ignored." If anything, these responses indicate that personal initiative is one thing and institutional support is another.

Taken together, the data exposes a clear implementation-assessment gap in reparative description programs. Chronic resource constraints and inconsistent institutional priorities are contributing factors to this lack of assessment. As one respondent put it, "we just haven't gotten

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[51] See *figure 7*.

[52] See *figure 8*.

there in our planning/execution." While these results are somewhat concerning, they are not necessarily surprising. Re-description work, after all, is not the only priority archivists in the 21st century have sought to address. In an age of MPLP, systemic backlogs, and exponential proliferation of archival records, re-description of any kind often occurs within the context of institutional decision-making apparatuses subject to a quagmire of competing professional obligations and stratified hierarchies. Antracoli and Rawdon hone in on the immense scale of reparative description work, explaining that decisive action is challenging because "Practically speaking, the sheer volume of legacy finding aids describing primary source collections written over the course of many decades, and held in nearly every paper-based and electronic form imaginable, leads to difficult-to-access descriptive language. For this reason, remediating outdated language or pulling names for further analysis or authority work are rarely undertaken."[53] In other words, archivists are so preoccupied with discerning how to propel reparative description programs forward that comparatively little attention has been paid to where these programs are ultimately going.

SQ2 shifts the discourse to user feedback and how such input can potentially support reparative description work. User feedback itself is a conflicting topic for archives. Many do not seek it at all. If they do, it is through more traditional modes of consultation such as email or face-to-face interactions. In response to being asked "What are the mechanisms your institution uses to get feedback on finding aids?", a broad majority of 64 (76.2%) respondents selected "Traditional user consultation (e.g. email, face-to-face)."[54] Still others are idiosyncratic in their

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[53] Antracoli and Rawdon, "What's in a Name…", 307.

[54] See *figure 9*.

approaches, as evidenced by how ¾ of all options to the aforementioned question represented only a single respondent each.

Given the prevalence of informal and idiosyncratic user feedback mechanisms, it should not come as much of a shock to find that most institutions have not received user feedback on reparative description. A largely one-sided set of responses was collected from the question "Has your institution sought and received feedback from users concerning the quality of reparative description in finding aids?", which are: 65 (77.4%) No, 11 (13.1%) Unsure, and 8 (9.5%) Yes.[55] Based only on the data so far, these results may seem to be entirely consequent of standing disagreements over user feedback in archives and merely display an ancillary relation to description. However, a stronger connection to description becomes evident with the striking similarity between these results and those of another question. Juxtaposed with the question "Does your institution have a process for evaluating reparative description practices in collections that have already been re-described?"[56], the deviation between "Yes," "No," and "Unsure" responses is no greater than 2.4% between both sets of data. In fact, the number of "Unsure" responses, in both amount and proportion, are identical. A crucial piece of information to remember in this comparison is that only the former of the two questions makes any mention of user feedback, while the latter centers exclusively on assessing reparative description. The implication from this data is that some correlation—seemingly a positive one—exists between reparative description assessment and the collection of user feedback for re-description. Qualitative responses support this assertion. Respondents indicated broad interest in both user feedback and reparative description, often citing familiar barriers of underdeveloped programs

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[55] See *figure 10*.

[56] See *figure 6*.

and resource constraints. Some respondents explicitly expressed their desire for both, with one explaining "We have had limited feedback since we do not have a formal feedback mechanism, but we have made changes to finding aid[s] at researcher requests and the feedback they have offered over email has been supportive." Essentially, archival institutions display similar desires and limitations concerning both user feedback and reparative description.

Taken in conjunction with the implementation-assessment gap, this correlation between assessing reparative description and collecting user feedback for re-description suggests the presence of a causal link. For one, it could signal that the institutions that are not routinely sourcing user feedback for descriptive purposes are the same institutions that have yet to delve into assessing their reparative description programs. This would explain the overwhelming "No" responses for both questions. It would also be consistent with previously cited issues concerning overextended institutional resources. Conversely, this relationship could also be construed to mean that access to more robust user feedback mechanisms will make archival institutions more able and/or willing to undertake assessments of their descriptions. However, this interpretation is dependent on the presumption that access to user feedback will have a direct causal effect on reparative description assessment. While the quantitative data is too sparse to confirm this, the noted enthusiasm and common connections expressed by respondents for both user feedback and reparative description suggest that this connection could be well worth exploring. Fortunately, the authors' proposed UX testing model is primed to address this relationship in a testing environment.

SQ3 takes a more direct approach to this discourse by asking if archivists actually have a desire for a model to assess their reparative description programs. This question gets to the core of whether the correlation between user feedback and reparative description assessment is

ultimately useless or if it harbors a causal link that can be leveraged to improve descriptive

practices. In principle, an overwhelming number of survey respondents—84.6%—indicated that

such a model would have some degree of use in their institutions. When asked "On a scale of

0-3, how useful do you feel a model for assessing the effectiveness of reparative description

would be for your institution?", the responses were as follows: 46 (54.8%) Useful, 25 (29.8%)

Somewhat Useful, 5 (6%) Not Useful, 8 (9.5%) N/A.[57] While reflecting an overall positive

attitude toward the subject, the 25% gap between "Useful" and "Somewhat Useful" responses is

significant in that it suggests hesitation and disagreement on how useful an assessment model

could be in practice.

Qualitative responses provide additional context on these attitudes regarding the utility of

a reparative description assessment model. Prompting respondents to "Please expand on why a

model for assessing reparative description would or would not be useful for your institution"

resulted in considerable variation. The same can be said of when respondents were offered a

space to provide additional comments. Most respondents took the positive angle by contributing

reasons for why an assessment model would prove useful. Some of these cited responses include

planning and implementing assessments, convincing administrators to support action,

supplementing passive (and less effective) feedback, collecting data to advocate for reparative

description programs, bridging theory and practice, and supporting DEIA initiatives. Other

respondents were skeptical of how such a model could be of use to their institutions and

displayed concerns over matters such as staff and resource shortages, lack of relevant collections,

conflicting priorities, and more immediate institutional concerns. Conflicting interpretations

arose as well. While most seemed to view an assessment model as a useful tool to facilitate their

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[57] See figure 11.

respective institutions' reparative description programs, a minority of respondents viewed it as an extra burden on already overextended programs. From the perspective of one detractor, "A model isn't helpful if no one is doing the work."

Despite the doubts, however, a clear hope remained that an assessment model might provide something stable and actionable to further develop reparative description programs. One respondent noted that they "lack a framework or model to systematize this process. We currently rely on people volunteering their feedback, which hasn[']t been effective." Such a comment underscores the need for more formal and effective mechanisms of user feedback aimed at improving archival description. This view that methodological development could support action was common, as evidenced by a similar response that claims "Having a tried and tested model would make it easier to implement." Internal advocacy featured heavily as well, particularly in the sense that having clear models and metrics can positively influence decision-making within archival institutions. One tongue-in-cheek comment emphasizing utility for internal advocacy simply reads "Deans are very assessment-heavy :-)." The general consensus among respondents, regardless of skepticism, seems to be that user feedback is needed to support reparative description programs and that an assessment model could be useful for this if implemented properly.

SQ4 seeks to determine if the answers to the previous questions vary across differing types of archival institutions. The primary way of addressing this was through a single demographics question at the beginning of the survey which asked respondents "What type(s) of archival institution(s) do you currently represent? (check all that apply)."[58] Much to the authors' dismay, the results were lacking. While various types of institutions are represented in the data,

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[58] See *figure 12*.

the survey received a disproportionately higher number of responses from academic archives at 61.9% of total responses. The next highest category was special collections libraries at 21.4% of total responses, although it is likely that some or many of these overlap with respondents who also checked academic archives. Beyond that, 7 out of 12 total options only represent 1-3 respondents each. In consideration of these skewed results, it is regrettable to acknowledge that the survey's demographics data is insufficient to provide an empirically supported answer to SQ4.

The overrepresentation of academic archives is a significant limitation on the applicability of the survey data to other types of archival institutions, as these institutions may have unseen needs worthy of exploring. Qualitative responses indicate some variance in needs, though not comprehensively so. For instance, the survey received exactly one respondent who identified with a tribal institution. This respondent contributed several responses which stand out as unique. They claim that "As a Tribal entity our collection descriptions are already culturally competent. There is no need for reparative description." This differs from non-tribal institutions which need to continually resist systematized colonial legacies in order to attain a similar level of cultural competency in their archival description. Another comment from the same respondent details that "As a tribal institution it is part of our policy to seek the knowledge of elders and people within the community on how to describe collections, if the archivist doesn't already know. However, when there is a question on how to describe something the archivist seeks advice from members of the community on how to best represent a particular item." In this type of environment, community-based, culturally competent user feedback is already ingrained into descriptive practices. This respondent's comments may be seen as a microcosm of the variance between archival institutions and, in turn, serve as justification for future data collection in this

area beyond the current work. Representing archival institutions is a matter that could affect the applicability of the proposed assessment model. More crucially, though, it is also a matter of representing the stakeholders of the records contained within. If archivists are serious about assessing the social justice impact of their description—reparative or otherwise—, then it is a necessary act of care to apply measures that are scalable to the needs of archives and stakeholders wherever they are found.

IV. Model Summary & Use

a. Social Justice Impact Model

Contributing to the "development of a framework to evaluate archival projects based on these principles [of social justice]," this proposed model responds to the evident need for an evaluation tool by creating a means of assessing the impact of reparative description on community stakeholders.[59] Recognizing that impact is not a zero-sum outcome, we use Brophy's -2 to 6 scale as a foundation to gauge users' reactions to reparative description efforts in finding aids. To rewrite Brophy's definitions, we rely on Marsh's, et al. indicators of impacts, focusing on the changed attitudes and perceptions of community members, which include the "community['s] return to the institution for help/resources [and the] evidence of increasingly reciprocal relationships and increased trust."[60] While a -2 denotes the most negative response to the finding aid, entailing the user feeling alienated, misrepresented, offended, or 'triggered' by the archival description, a 6 signifies a positive changed action for the community stakeholders, meaning they are more inclined to collaborate with the institution in the future and are more

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[59] Punzalan and Caswell, "Critical Directions for Archival Approaches…," 26.

[60] Marsh, et al., "Stories of Impact…," 358.

likely to feel comfortable or safe using Princeton's collections and finding aids. The lowest level at which there is a recognizable social justice is 3, where the community stakeholders feel the reparative description done is accurate and respectful and a higher degree of trust has been established. Alongside these levels of impact, the model also assesses impact over time (short-term, medium-term, longer-term) and on whom (individual, community, society).

As Caswell and Duff conclude, "determining the elements or criteria by which one identifies a change in an individual's or community's relationship to the world is…an essential component of research on social justice."[61] Considering the goals of this project and purpose of Princeton's reparative description work, the model focuses on the changed attitude and perception of the institution, judging it not only by the community's willingness to collaborate with the institution in the future but also by the degree of affective resonance expressed by users. For groups historically excluded from mainstream archives, reparative description should ideally help foster a sense of representational belonging, thereby allowing these community stakeholders to resonate more strongly with collection. To track this, the model considers the ontological, epistemological, and social impacts described by Caswell, Migoni, Geraci, and Cifor.

Ineffectual reparative description contributes to the archive's symbolic annihilation of these groups, so impact levels -2 through 0 have no measurable ontological, epistemological, or social impacts on users. At levels 1 and 2, where the user recognizes and appreciates that the institution is seeking to correct inequitable archival description practices, there are less substantial feelings of representational belonging spurred by PUL's finding aids. Here, the ontological impact allows the user to 'imagine otherwise' and "envision a life lived outside of current systems of oppression;" the epistemological impact provides the user with evidence of

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[61] Duff and Caswell, "Methodologies for Archival Impact Studies," 65.

community existence; and the social impact offers the user a sense of inclusion in the archival record.[62] At levels 3 and 4, where trust is improving between the institution and the community stakeholders, and at levels 5 and 6, where reparative description has led to changed world views and actions, users have a much more secure sense of representational belonging. At level 3 and 4, the ontological impact refers to users' abilities to identify themselves within the description. At the 5 and 6, the ontological impacts reflect the improved context of the user's interactions with the institution by offering them more robust self-representation. For levels 3 through 6, the epistemological impact includes validating community stakeholders' contemporary existence through the recognition of their values and experience in the archival record, and the social impact grants users a better sense of inclusion and helps them to see themselves and their community represented in history.[63] While the impact descriptions are the same for each of these levels, they are felt to varying degrees, with higher levels of impact corresponding to stronger feelings of representational belonging. To also note, as demonstrated by *figure 1*, these three impacts overlap with one another and should not be treated as strictly separate or distinct from one another. It is also possible that individuals may experience some kinds of impact more strongly than others or that they might not resonate with certain impacts at all. It depends on the context of the user, the finding aid being reviewed, and the contents of the collection. The impact scale is reproduced in its entirety below in Table 1 in addition to Appendix C.[64]

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[62] Caswell, Migoni, Geraci, and Cifor, "'To Be Able to Imagine Otherwise,'" 17.

[63] Caswell, Migoni, Geraci, and Cifor, "'To Be Able to Imagine Otherwise,'" 17-19.

[64] See *figure 13*.

Table 1: Social Justice Impact Scale of Reparative Description in Archival Institutions

Scale (Brophy, 2005)	Definition (Adapted Brophy's definitions, integrating Marsh, et al.'s indicators of impact)	Impact, Over time / on whom (Horton & Spence, 2006)	Representational Belonging
-2	Hostility ➔ User feels alienated, misrepresented, offended, and/or triggered by archival description.	Short-term / Individual Medium-term / Community Longer-term / Society	(null)
-1	Dismissive ➔ User feels misrepresented and/or *unseen* because reparative description fails to uphold/consider community values, language, or customs.	Short-term / Individual Medium-term / Community Longer-term / Society	(null)
0	None ➔ User has neither a negative nor positive reaction to finding aid's reparative description.	Short-term / Individual Medium-term / Community Longer-term / Society	(null)
1	Awareness Raised ➔ Description has a positive impact on user simply because they recognize/appreciate the institution's effort to do reparative description.	Short-term / Individual Medium-term / Community Longer-term / Society	*Ontological Impact* (users can 'imagine otherwise') *Epistemological Impact* (having proof of community's existence) *Social Impact* (sense of inclusion)
2	Better Representation ➔ As a result of the reparative description efforts, the user is better represented by the institution's finding aid than before.	Medium-term / Individual Medium-term / Community	*Ontological Impact* (users can 'imagine otherwise') *Epistemological Impact* (having proof of community's existence) *Social Impact* (sense of inclusion)
3	Improved Trust ➔ The description is acceptable to the user,	Medium-term / Community Longer-term / Society	*Ontological Impact* (users able to identify with materials/description)

	and they feel it is accurate and respectful to their community. A level of trust has been established between the institution and the community stakeholders. ➔ This level equates to the lowest level of social justice impact.		*Epistemological Impact* (validating contemporary existence) *Social Impact* (sense of inclusion)
4	Changed Perception/Attitude ➔ Reparative description actions have changed user's and/or community's perception of the institution, and they feel comfortable with the institution stewarding materials they hold a stake in.	Medium-term / Individual Long-term / Community Longer-term / Society	*Ontological Impact* (user able to identify with materials/description) *Epistemological Impact* (validating contemporary existence) *Social Impact* (sense of inclusion)
5	Changed world view ➔ The user's world view has shifted more significantly and see reparative description efforts as "evidence of increasingly reciprocal relationships and increased trust" (Marsh, et al., 2015, p. 358).	Longer-term / Individual Longer-term / Community Longer-term / Society	*Ontological Impact* (affecting context of user's existence and interactions with world) *Epistemological Impact* (validating contemporary existence) *Social Impact* (sense of inclusion)
6	Changed action ➔ Community is more inclined to collaborate with the institution in the future. ➔ And/or the community is likely to return to institution and/or institution's finding aid in the future for research assistance.	Medium-term / Community Longer-term / Society	*Ontological Impact* (affecting context of community's existence and interactions with world) *Epistemological Impact* (validating contemporary existence) *Social Impact* (sense of inclusion)

To determine levels of impact, we recommend conducting structured interviews with community stakeholders, allowing them to use storytelling and narrative as a means of relaying their resonances. To assess the longer-term impacts of reparative description, we recommend

also doing follow-up interviews with stakeholders. As Marsh, et al. argue, collecting qualitative data told through stories and narrative "offers a cost-effective and meaningful way for institutions to begin to understand the impacts of their…work,"[65] which will also "inspir[e] a culture of assessment…[and] encourage institutions to change their practices when they receive feedback."[66] A frequent barrier cited in executing projects such as this one is that these studies also demand significant time, effort, and money.[67] Often, institutions do not have the resources to do this work, despite its importance in gathering user feedback to improve archival systems.[68] A more cost-effective means of doing this research is, therefore, essential to creating the culture of assessment and feedback mechanisms necessary to further social justice in the archive.

To design the structured interviews, evaluators should adopt democratic and transformative evaluation frameworks, meaning users and community stakeholders should be involved in the process, so as to establish a trusting dialogue and gather more insightful data.[69] PUL first needs to be transparent about their work, clarifying the library's reasons for performing UX testing and explaining the need for reparative description in the library's finding aids. This act also requires PUL to take accountability for the problematic description practices previously used to describe collections these communities have a stake in and demonstrate their openness to honest feedback so as to better represent them in the future. In designing structured interview

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[65] Marsh, et al., "Stories of Impact…," 367.

[66] Marsh, et al., "Stories of Impact," 359.

[67] International Organization for Standardization, "Information and Documentation: Methods and Procedures for Assessing the Impact of Libraries (ISO 16439:2014)," (Geneva, Switzerland: ISO, 2014): 18.

[68] The information gathered from our survey also points to this fact, that though they would like to do assessments, most institutions do not have the resources to do so. Duff, et al. "The Development, Testing, and Evaluation of Archival Metrics Toolkits," 570.

[69] Further down the line, when the UX testing is being tailored to specific community groups being studied, PUL should then consider integrating culturally responsive and Indigenious evaluation frameworks.

questions, evaluators should consult with stakeholders, allowing them to identify inappropriate

questions, unknown technical terms, and areas where more elaboration or focus is necessary.

Transparency with this emphasis on collaboration will, in the end, lead to a more supportive,

sustainable relationship between PUL and the communities it seeks to better represent in the

archival record. By offering community stakeholders control and influence over the UX design,

they will have a "genuine interest and desire in pursuing it to completion."[70] When treated as

partners in the process, they are less likely to feel exploited by the institution and be more

invested in the project's success.[71] Overall, this approach to UX testing aims to resist neoliberal

methodologies by creating a more holistic and empowering experience for users.

　　　Opting for more of a collaborative effort does, however, require a greater time

commitment from the users and community stakeholders involved in the project. Ideally, then,

PUL would be able to offer some kind of compensation for the work they are performing. White

institutions, such as archives, have a long legacy of requiring extensive emotional labor from

people of color without offering them any form of recognition or payment. In these white spaces,

the emotional labor required commonly derives from "the stark contradiction between their

racialized experiences in these institutions… and the dominant discourse that minimizes and

delegitimizes their experiences."[72] In attempting to judge the success of their reparative

description efforts, PUL should, obviously, avoid replicating these dynamics, which spurred the

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[70] Rouse finds that co-design is essential to community stakeholder's participation in UX testing as it keeps them invested in the process and diminishes feelings of being exploited for the institution's gain. Rebecca Rouse, "Someone Else's Story: An Ethical Approach to Interactive Narrative Design for Cultural Heritage," In *ICIDS 2019: Interactive Storytelling*, ed. Cardona-Rivera, Rogelio E., Anne Sullivan, and R. Michael Young, 47-60. *Lecture Notes in Computer Science* 11869, 2019, DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-33894-7_6.Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook

[71] Pablo Helguera, "Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook," New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2011.
[72] Louwanda Evans and Wendy Leo Moore, "Impossible Burdens: White Institutions, Emotional Labor, and Micro-Resistance," *Social Problems* 62 (2015): 441, DOI: 10.1093/socpro/spv009.

need for reparative description in the first place. By making this UX testing experience a truly

collaborative one and by compensating users for the time they are investing in improving

description practices, PUL can redress this legacy of exploitation, invalidation, and erasure.

b. Research Alignment Matrix

While not a prescribed element of the proposed UX assessment model, evaluators may

find it useful to create an alignment matrix capable of providing structure to their research

methodology.[73] The purpose of an alignment matrix is to represent connections between related

components of a larger entity—in this case, a research project—in a graphic display that is

visually clear and conceptually coherent. Elements of a research alignment matrix could

constitute a variety of forms such as a statement of problem or purpose, theories and concepts,

underlying questions, methods, and more or less elements as needed. For the purposes of the

current discussion, a research alignment matrix could prove useful as an intermediary link

between the project-agnostic and project-specific parts of the assessment model. For instance,

while the structured interview method tied to the UX testing component of the model is

inherently project-specific, the impact of the responses are measured along the axes of the

project-agnostic impact scale reproduced in Table 1. Ensuring that these and other project

components complement one another is an important consideration when applying the

assessment model in practice.

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[73] Research alignment matrices are commonly used in the process of dissertation writing. Advice on using alignment matrices for academic research is available in sources designed for help with dissertations. See "Using a Matrix to Develop Your Research Methodology," The Dissertation Success Coaching Team, Dissertation Success Institute (August 2021), https://dissertationsuccess.com/blog/matrix-develop-research-methodology/; David Weintraub, "Alignment: The Key to a Strong Dissertation," Nova Southeastern University (2017), https://education.nova.edu/summer/2017sessionmaterials/Required_T1_Alignment_Presentation_Weintraub.pdf.

In the interest of showing what this might look like in a project application, a sample research alignment matrix has been developed and inserted into Appendix C.[74] This sample matrix was designed in response to descriptive needs gleaned from referencing internal PUL Special Collections documentation, particularly from the ongoing case studies identified in the Inclusive Description Working Group's "(Re)description Case Studies" document. A problem and purpose statement were framed around the need to assess reparative description concerning racist content and language. Specific collections were also marked for assessment. The rest of the sample matrix maps underlying research questions (RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3) to research methods, including a corresponding column in which structured interview questions can be identified. A research alignment matrix is but one possible tool and is not required to utilize the impact scale proposed above. Whether or not an institution decides to use the matrix, however, project-specific planning is an absolute necessity to apply the UX assessment model.

c. Research Liabilities

Yet to be discussed is the matter of research liability. Conducting any kind of research involving human participants entails that certain considerations be addressed on account of the participants' well-being. Legal, institutional, and always ethical, the researcher grapples with these considerations as part of a responsibility toward participants and stewardship over the information they provide. Neglecting the affective relationship between researcher and participant would prove particularly hypocritical for a model supposedly rooted in an ethics of care. It is for this key reason that consent forms and IRB approval warrant some degree of discussion for the proposed model.

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[74] See figure 14.

Institutional research initiatives should necessarily leverage institutional resources. Doing so prevents duplicate work and, by extension, trims down excess labor. In addition, when such resources are standardized, usage can facilitate operational efficiency and ensure institutional compliance. Fortunately, Princeton University maintains a consent form template that fulfills these roles.[75] Research & Integrity Assurance's standard Adult Consent Form primarily serves to obtain a research subject's informed consent. In so doing, it hits the mark with several other considerations. First is communication. The form is formatted to provide a clear and concise description of the research and what the participant's expected role will consist of. Secondly, the form communicates to researchers in a way that is consistent with an ethics of care. Specifically, provisions regarding consent, compensation, and confidentiality are considerate of the participant's stakeholder status in the assessment. One clause in particular prompts the researcher to clarify "the reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts to the subject as a result of participation," which is a statement that is highly relevant in a project that exposes participants to potentially harmful content and descriptions. The third consideration addressed in the form, simply put, is the indication of IRB review status.[76] Any elements on this form can, of course, also be altered to suit the needs of the project. Overall, the authors of this paper recommend that a consent form be utilized by any institution when applying the proposed UX model for assessing reparative description. Additional helpful materials may be located through UX

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[75] "Adult Consent Form," Princeton University Research & Integrity Assurance, https://ria.princeton.edu/sites/g/files/toruqf1776/files/consenttemplate_0.pdf.
[76] The need for IRB approval varies between institutions and projects. At Princeton University, the following form exists to apply for IRB approval: "eRIA-IRB," Princeton University Research & Integrity Assurance, https://ria.princeton.edu/eRIA/eRIA-IRB.

sources, such as Princeton University's User Experience Office[77] and the plethora of freely accessible UX internet resources.[78]

The question of IRB review also needs to be addressed. Institutional Review Boards, or IRBs, are bodies established within research institutions to protect the rights of participants during the course of research. While the need for IRB approval varies by situation, determining whether it is necessary is part of the due diligence enacted by research institutions to ensure ethical treatment of participants and accountability for associated liabilities. Key terms and definitions relating to IRBs are codified in legal statutes, with "research," "human subject," and "identifiable private information" all being defined in 45 CFR § 46.102.[79] However, the application of these terms is ambiguous in practice. This is especially the case for humanities projects which often fall outside the official definition of "research."

As another large-scale research university, documentation from New York University (NYU) may offer some guidance on how to proceed. NYU's form on humanities projects and IRB review states the following regarding human subjects:

> Key to this definition is that the information collected is about an identified person. Information collected without any identifiers or other details which could lead to identification of an individual would not be considered to involve human participants. Information which involves interaction with an individual but which does not collect information about a person, such as interviews on government or corporate policies or historical events are also not considered to involve human subjects. Such interviews would include human subjects if the questions were to turn to issues of an individuals' involvement in such matters or of their personal opinions and compliance with these

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[77] See assistance with designing user interviews. "User Experience Office," Princeton University, https://ux.princeton.edu/methods-and-tools/tools.

[78] See for example: Lizzy Burnam, "Consent Forms for UX Research: A Starter Template," User Interviews, Inc., last updated July 28, 2022, https://www.userinterviews.com/blog/how-to-write-research-participant-consent-forms; Usability.gov, U.S. General Services Administration, https://www.usability.gov/index.html.

[79] 45 Code of Federal Regulations § 46.102.

issues.[80]

The proposed UX assessment model would presumably not lead to soliciting private information about a person's behavior or personal activities in the way that these terms are understood above. With this in mind, a reparative description project applying the model could, in theory, avoid meeting the definition of human subjects research, thereby not fitting the full legal definition of research that would incur legal liability for IRB approval. Again using NYU as an example, their IRB review flow chart indicates that internal research for assessing organization services also does not qualify as human subjects research.[81] Under this presumption, an institution assessing its own reparative description workflows would be exempt from IRB review.

Even still, the question of what constitutes "research" is ambiguous enough that PUL should consider communicating with Princeton University Research Integrity & Assurance to ensure that proper procedures are enacted. The basic definition of research according to 45 CFR § 46.102(l) only vaguely describes it as "systematic investigation, including research development, testing, and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge."[82] Exemptions do, however, offer room to maneuver. For instance, 45 CFR § 46.104(d)(2)(i) allows projects with interview or survey components to elude being designated as "research" as long as they do not collect personally identifiable information.[83] While IRB review and approval would likely not be necessary for applying the proposed assessment model,

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[80] "Do Humanities Projects Require IRB Review?" New York University, https://www.nyu.edu/content/dam/nyu/research/documents/IRB/humanitiesprojectsguidance.pdf.

[81] "Does Your Project Require an Application to the NYU IRB Office? Decision Tree #1," New York University, https://www.nyu.edu/content/dam/nyu/research/documents/IRB/IRBDecisionTree.pdf.
[82] 45 Code of Federal Regulations § 46.102.

[83] 45 Code of Federal Regulations § 46.104.

checking with relevant institutional teams on research ethics would display due diligence for this and other research liabilities.

V. Conclusions

a. Summary of Recommendations

The authors of this paper recommend the following actionable steps to assist PUL in their endeavor to understand the social justice impact of reparative description in their finding aids:

- Conduct UX testing with community stakeholders to assess the impact of reparative description and feed back into description practices; use structured interviews to collect focused input from community members.

- Ensure that UX testing in PUL is a truly collaborative and equitable experience. Using principles of radical empathy and ethics of care, evaluators should involve community stakeholders in the UX testing design by getting their feedback on structured interview questions and the finding aids selected for user review. If possible, users should also be compensated for the time they take to participate in this testing.

- Adopt a consent form and determine if IRB review is necessary; Princeton University Research & Integrity Assurance can assist on both of these points to ensure that due diligence is being taken in protecting the institution and participants.

b. Limitations of Model and Extending the Research

Carrying out user experience testing regrettably falls outside what is feasible for this project. Amidst time and resource constraints, the authors have instead opted to delegate the responsibility for case studies to those in the—hopefully near—future. This project prioritizes conceptual and methodological articulations which will hopefully set a firm foundation for others

to build upon. Foundations, however, are ultimately only as useful as whatever is constructed upon them. It is for precisely this reason that future work remains vital to the model's overall viability.

Part of building something better entails acknowledging where there is room for improvement. Survey respondents expressed noteworthy interest in having access to an assessment model for reparative description, although the responses also uncovered potential limitations to the model proposed here. Among the most pressing of these limitations is scalability. For all its merit, UX testing could potentially set a higher bar for implementation than other approaches. This type of evaluation requires labor resources at various stages from design and approval to conducting testing and analyzing results. As a project-based approach, labor and other associated costs may be seen by some institutions as a strain on resources. That being said, the assessment model would not need to be reimplemented on a regular basis as long as the results gained are being used to improve reparative description practices across the institution. Future research could explore workflows that scale to the needs of archival institutions, considering such factors as the nature of their collections, available resources, and size of operation. Admittedly, the proposed assessment model is not currently positioned to provide an exhaustive approach capable of scaling to every need and circumstance. Thankfully, it does not need to. The discourse bridging user feedback and reparative description is broad enough to accommodate a plethora of methods and approaches. Toolkits, guidelines, rubrics, and other standards would complement the feedback gained from UX testing and might provide the flexibility needed to compensate for the proposed assessment model's limitations.

Interrelated to concerns over scalability are the divergent needs of differing types of archival institutions. It has already been noted that the data collected by the authors' survey is

skewed towards the perspective of academic archives and that this poses a problem for the representation of archival institutions as well as the stakeholder groups they serve. As such, there is an apparent need for additional research regarding the needs of archival institutions to ensure that the assessment model remains as widely applicable as it is able to be.

A logical next step would be to test the assessment model in a production environment. This can be done by identifying a use case based on an existing collection or collections, applying the research matrix to develop structured interview questions, and collecting feedback through UX testing in alignment with the impact scale. At its current stage, the model in question is still a theoretical expression of what could be utilized for assessing reparative description. Theories are useful for understanding problems and approaching solutions, yet they only solidify when they are refined in the crucible of reality. Reparative description inhabits a multi-faceted reality informed by archivists, patrons, communities, records subjects and creators, institutions, and legacies ripe for redress. Implementing the proposed assessment model is a practice of navigating these distinct dimensions and the affective relationships interconnecting them. Such a task cannot be accomplished from the archivist's lone standpoint. Reparative practice requires interfacing with the archivist's predecessors as they "speak" in archival description. Even more so, it necessitates the cultivation of a shared epistemological authority that consciously seeks to center the stakeholder in the processes of knowledge creation. While user feedback broadly and user experience testing in particular are primed to open such a collaborative dialogue on archival description, evaluators should remain cognizant during testing that the models they employ are, too, subject to the same level of scrutiny.

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Appendix A: Background Models

Figure 1. Caswell's, Migoni's, Geraci's, and Cifor's Impact of Community Archives in Response to Symbolic Annihilation Model (2016).
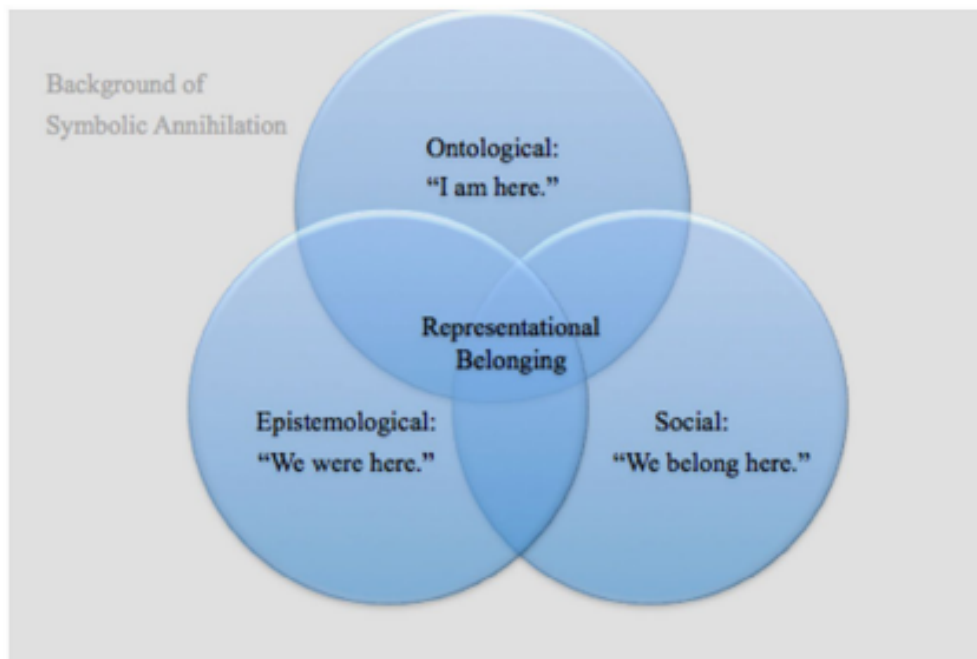

Figure 2. Duff, et al. (2013), "Employing archives within the struggle for social justice."
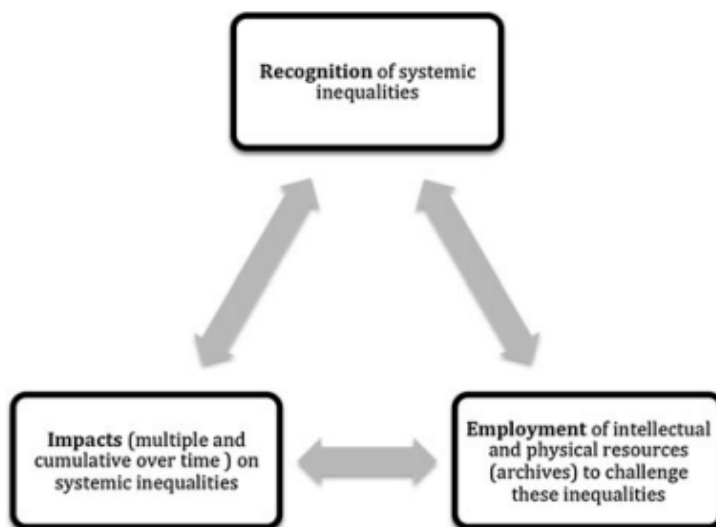
Figure 3. Brophy's Levels of Impact (2005)

Value	Characterization	Explanation
−2	Hostility	A user may be so disappointed with the service that he or she decides that it is a total waste of money. He/she feels alienated, misrepresented, or miseducated by the archives
−1	Dismissive	The user is not actively hostile, but simply feels that the service is not worthwhile. He/she feels alienated or discriminated against. There is a barrier to future engagement
0	None	The user has neither positive nor negative feelings or views about the service. It is almost as if it did not exist
1	Awareness raised	Here, the service has had a positive impact, but simply in terms of the user being made aware of something which he/she was not aware of before. They now know about the existence of a particular event or set of records and might turn to it in the future if they feel a need. They might also mention, or possibly even recommend, it positively to friends and colleagues
2	Better informed	As a result of coming into contact with the service the user has better information than before. This information may have been memorized or recorded for future use and is clearly of relevance
3	Improved knowledge	The information obtained has been considered and the user is now more knowledgeable about the subject. This level equates to the lowest level of learning impact
4	Changed perception and/or ability	The knowledge gained has resulted in a change to the way that the user looks at a subject. Real learning has taken place and/or a new skill acquired
5	Changed world view	Here, the user has been transformed by the service. His or her view of the world has shifted significantly, and constructive learning has taken place which will have long-term effects. Transferable skills have been acquired
6	Changed action	The new world view has led to the user acting in a way he or she would not have done before. Learning has turned into action, so that the encounter with the service has changed not just that user, but—in some way—the broader world

Figure 4. Horton's and Spence's Adaptation of Brophy's Model (2006)

Scale (Brophy, 2005)	Definition (Brophy, 2005)	Impact over time / on whom	GLO equivalent (MLA, 2004b)	Prototype GSO equivalent (Burns Owens Partnership, 2006)
-2	Hostility (extreme disappointment)	Short-term / Individual Medium-term / Community Longer-term / Society	*Attitudes and Values* (about archives)	
-1	Dismissive (service not worth money/time)	Short-term / Individual Medium-term / Community Longer-term / Society	*Attitudes and Values* (about archives)	
0	Neither positive nor negative – unaware	Short-term / Individual Medium-term / Community Longer-term / Society		
1	Awareness raised (mild positive impact)	Medium-term / Community Longer-term / Society	*Attitudes and Values* (about archives)	*Strengthening Public Life* (inclusive public spaces and services)
2	Better informed (with relevant information)	Short-term / Individual	*Knowledge and Understanding* (learning facts or information)	*Stronger and Safer Communities* (tackling fear of crime)
3	Improved knowledge	Medium-term / Individual Longer-term / Community	*Knowledge and Understanding* (deepening understanding) *Skills* (knowing how to do something)	*Stronger and Safer Communities* (contributing to crime prevention) *Health and Well-being* (encouraging healthy lifestyles) *Strengthening Public Life* (enabling community empowerment)
4	Changed perception and/or ability	Medium-term / Individual Longer-term / Community Longer-term / Society	*Skills* (key; info management; social) *Attitudes and Values* (self-esteem; attitudes to others) *Enjoyment, Inspiration, Creativity* (creativity; being inspired)	*Stronger and Safer Communities* (supporting cultural diversity; family ties) *Health and Well-being* (supporting care and recovery) *Strengthening Public Life* (encouraging participation)
5	Changed worldview (transferable skills acquired)	Longer-term / Individual Longer-term / Community Longer-term / Society	*Skills* (social; emotional; communication) *Attitudes and Values* (empathy, capacity for tolerance)	*Stronger and Safer Communities* (improving inter-group understanding) *Strengthening Public Life* (building capacity)
6	Changed action	Longer-term / Individual Longer-term / Community Longer-term / Society	*Activity, Behaviour and Progression* (doing more; changing ways of managing life; behavioural change)	*Stronger and Safer Communities* (improving inter-group dialogue) *Health and Well-being* (supporting older people; helping children) *Strengthening Public Life* (encouraging participation; improving service)

Appendix B: Survey Data

Figure 5.

Is your institution currently executing or planning to execute a reparative description project?
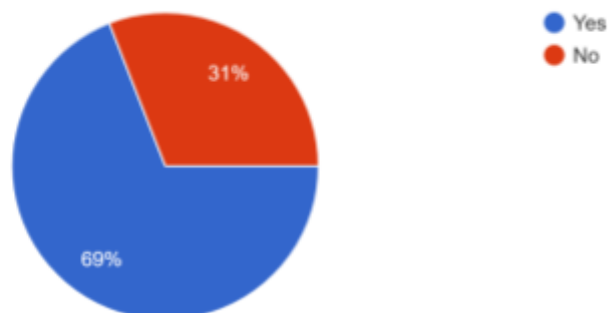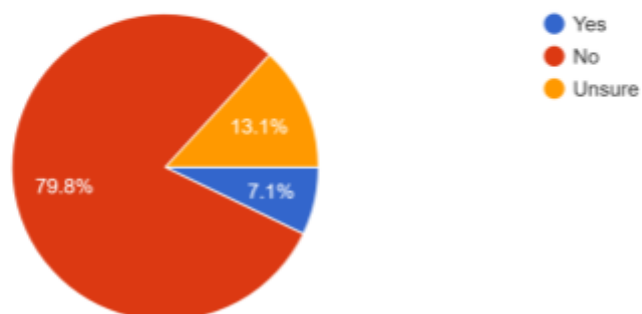84 responses

Figure 6.

Does your institution have a process for evaluating reparative description practices in collections that have already been re-described?

84 responses

Figure 7.

On a scale of 0-3, how highly do you feel your institution prioritizes reparatively describing collections?
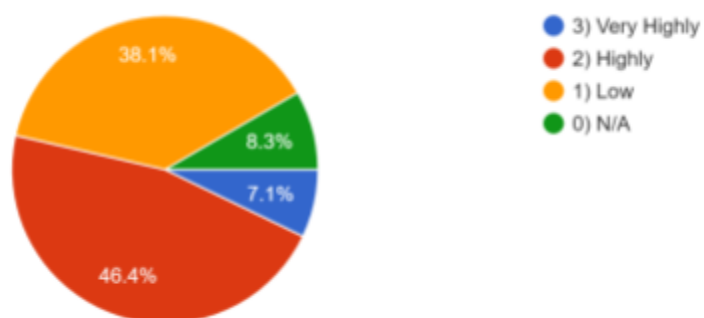
84 responses

Figure 8.

On a scale of 0-3, how highly do you feel your institution prioritizes assessing the effectiveness of reparative description?
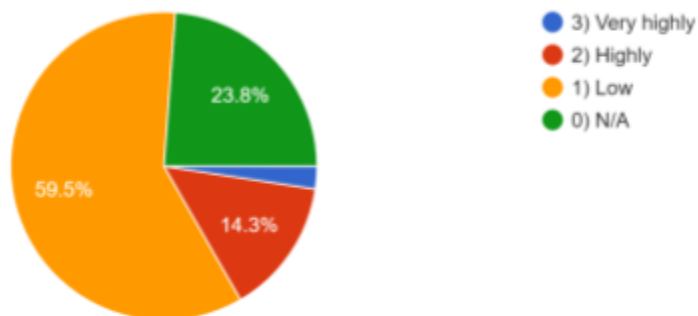
84 responses

● 3) Very highly
● 2) Highly
● 1) Low
● 0) N/A

Figure 9.

What are the mechanisms your institution uses to get feedback on finding aids? (check all that apply)
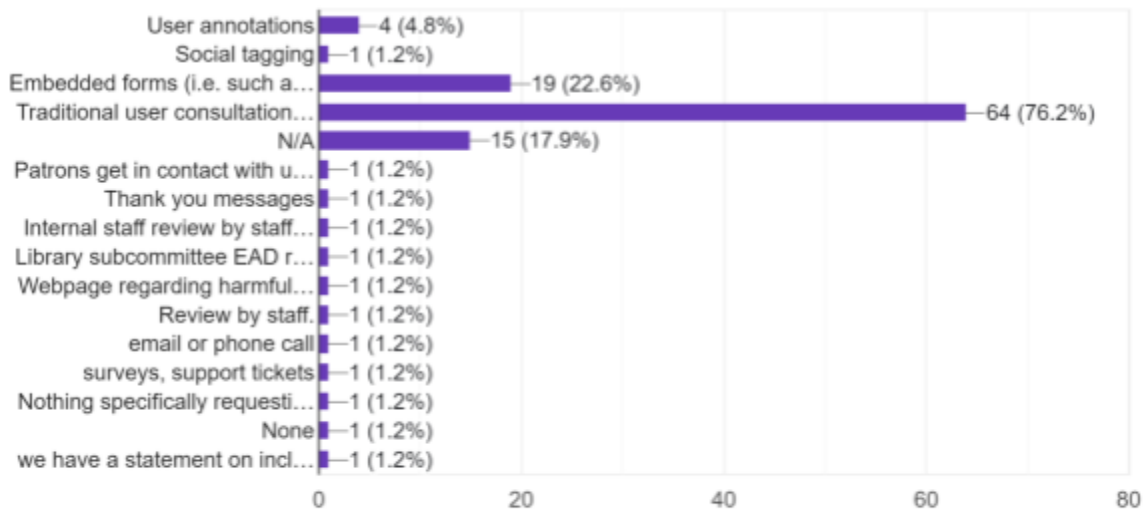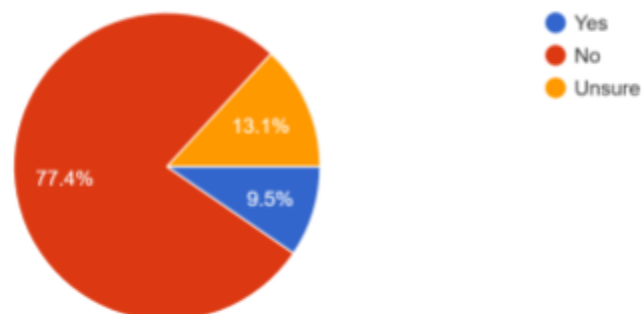
84 responses

Figure 10.

Has your institution sought and received feedback from users concerning the quality of reparative description in finding aids?

84 responses

Figure 11.

On a scale of 0-3, how useful do you feel a model for assessing the effectiveness of reparative description would be for your institution?
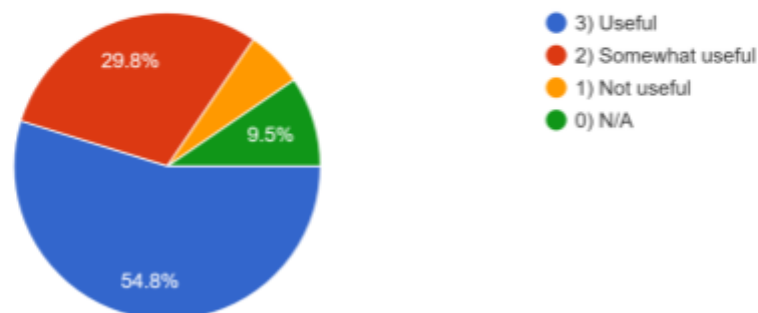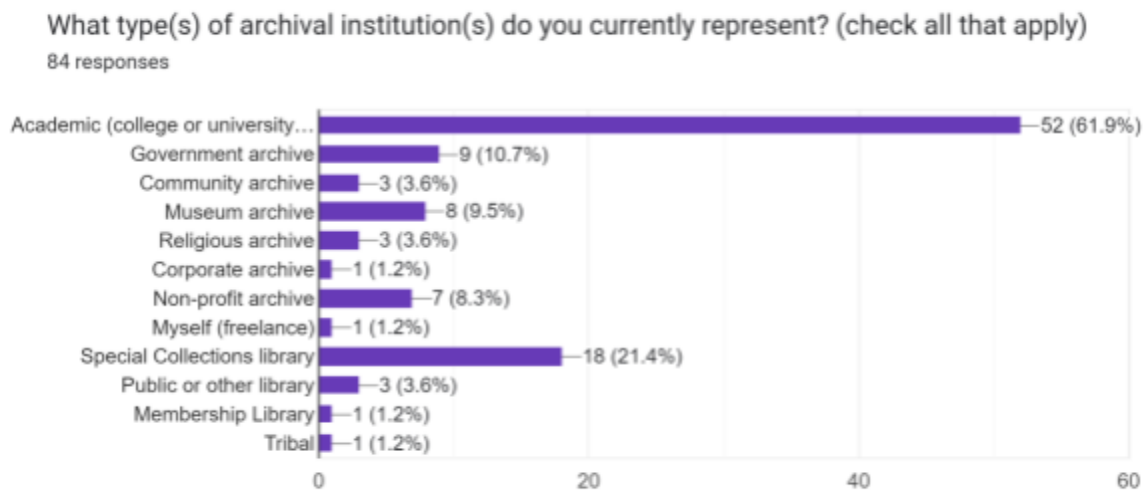
84 responses

Figure 12.

What type(s) of archival institution(s) do you currently represent? (check all that apply)

84 responses

- Academic (college or university...) — 52 (61.9%)
- Government archive — 9 (10.7%)
- Community archive — 3 (3.6%)
- Museum archive — 8 (9.5%)
- Religious archive — 3 (3.6%)
- Corporate archive — 1 (1.2%)
- Non-profit archive — 7 (8.3%)
- Myself (freelance) — 1 (1.2%)
- Special Collections library — 18 (21.4%)
- Public or other library — 3 (3.6%)
- Membership Library — 1 (1.2%)
- Tribal — 1 (1.2%)

Appendix C: Model & Research Alignment Matrix

Figure 13. Social Justice Impact Scale of Reparative Description

Scale (Brophy, 2005)	Definition (Adapted Brophy's definitions, integrating Marsh, et al.'s indicators of impact)	Impact, Over time / on whom (Horton & Spence, 2006)	Representational Belonging
-2	Hostility ➔ User feels alienated, misrepresented, offended, and/or triggered by archival description.	Short-term / Individual Medium-term / Community Longer-term / Society	(null)
-1	Dismissive ➔ User feels misrepresented and/or *unseen* because reparative description fails to uphold/consider community values, language, or customs.	Short-term / Individual Medium-term / Community Longer-term / Society	(null)
0	None ➔ User has neither a negative nor positive reaction to finding aid's reparative description.	Short-term / Individual Medium-term / Community Longer-term / Society	(null)
1	Awareness Raised ➔ Description has a positive impact on user simply because they recognize/appreciate the institution's effort to do reparative description.	Short-term / Individual Medium-term / Community Longer-term / Society	*Ontological Impact* (users can 'imagine otherwise') *Epistemological Impact* (having proof of community's existence) *Social Impact* (sense of inclusion)
2	Better Representation ➔ As a result of the reparative description efforts, the user is better represented by the institution's finding aid than before.	Medium-term / Individual Medium-term / Community	*Ontological Impact* (users can 'imagine otherwise') *Epistemological Impact* (having proof of community's existence) *Social Impact* (sense of inclusion)

3	Improved Trust ➜ The description is acceptable to the user, and they feel it is accurate and respectful to their community. A level of trust has been established between the institution and the community stakeholders. ➜ This level equates to the lowest level of social justice impact.	Medium-term / Community Longer-term / Society	*Ontological Impact* (users able to identify with materials/description) *Epistemological Impact* (validating contemporary existence) *Social Impact* (sense of inclusion)
4	Changed Perception/Attitude ➜ Reparative description actions have changed user's and/or community's perception of the institution, and they feel comfortable with the institution stewarding materials they hold a stake in.	Medium-term / Individual Long-term / Community Longer-term / Society	*Ontological Impact* (user able to identify with materials/description) *Epistemological Impact* (validating contemporary existence) *Social Impact* (sense of inclusion)
5	Changed world view ➜ The user's world view has shifted more significantly and see reparative description efforts as "evidence of increasingly reciprocal relationships and increased trust" (Marsh, et al., 2015, p. 358).	Longer-term / Individual Longer-term / Community Longer-term / Society	*Ontological Impact* (affecting context of user's existence and interactions with world) *Epistemological Impact* (validating contemporary existence) *Social Impact* (sense of inclusion)
6	Changed action ➜ Community is more inclined to collaborate with the institution in the future. ➜ And/or the community is likely to return to institution and/or institution's finding aid in the future for research assistance.	Medium-term / Community Longer-term / Society	*Ontological Impact* (affecting context of user's existence and interactions with world) *Epistemological Impact* (validating contemporary existence) *Social Impact* (sense of inclusion)

Figure 14. Sample Research Alignment Matrix

Problem Statement: The social justice impact of reparatively described collections regarding racist content and language is unclear.		
Purpose Statement: To collect stakeholder feedback through user experience testing that can support new reparative description workflows relating to the handling of racist content and language in collections.		
Collections to be assessed: AC067, C0605, C1210, C0391		
Research Question:	**Methods**	**Corresponding Structured Interview Questions**
RQ1: What level of social justice impact is reparative description in finding aids having on users and community stakeholders?	Structured Interviews Scale-based impact model	
RQ2: How can Princeton's reparative description practices be improved? (e.g. use of different language, inclusion of content warnings, authority names, subject headings)	Structured Interviews	
RQ3: What are the unmet descriptive needs of the community stakeholders using and represented in these materials?	Structured Interviews	