Crossing a Librarian with a Historian: The Image of Reel Archivists*

TANIA ALDRED, GORDON BURR, and EUN PARK

RÉSUMÉ L'image et les stéréotypes de notre profession sont des sujets qui continuent de nous embêter en tant qu'archivistes. Que pensent les gens à notre sujet? Que s'imaginent-ils que nous faisons? Pensent-ils réellement que nous sommes empoussiérés, vieillots et malheureux? Cette étude exploratoire tente d'examiner des questions liées aux images et aux stéréotypes des archivistes tels que présentés au cinéma. Les auteurs ont ef fectué une analyse du contenu de dix-neuf films afin de déterminer comment sont présentés les archivistes à l'écran, à la fois au niveau du physique et du comportement. À partir d'une recension des écrits en archivistique et en bibliothéconomie, ils ont élaboré une liste de contrôle pour évaluer les caractéristiques des films, le rôle des archivistes dans chacun des films, et leurs caractéristiques physiques et leur comportement. Une hypothèse de départ au sujet de la représentation au cinéma des archivistes comme bibliothécaires a été formulée puis rejetée. Les résultats de l'étude indiquent que, dans le contexte cinématographique, les archivistes à l'écran se conforment généralement aux stéréotypes répandus par rapport à leur apparence physique et à leur conduite. Les auteurs concluent que cette étude pourrait servir de base à la recherche sur les stéréotypes des archivistes tels que véhiculés dans d'autres formes de culture populaire.

ABSTRACT The image and stereotypes of archivists are topics that nag at the back of every archivist's mind. What do people think of us? What do they think we do? Do they genuinely think that we are covered in dust, aging, and unhappy? This exploratory study aims to investigate issues surrounding the image and stereotypes of archivists as presented in films. A content analysis of nineteen films was performed to determine how archivists are portrayed, both physically and behaviourally . Based upon previous

---

* A shortened version of this paper was presented at the *Fun House Mirr ors* session at the Association of Canadian Archivists' Annual Conference in Kingston, Ontario, 21–23 June 2007. The title was adapted from Richard Pearce-Moses, "Identity and Diversity: What is an Archivist?" *Archival Outlook* 3–4 (March/April 2006), p. 3, http://www.archivists.org/periodicals/ao_backissues/AO-Mar06.pdf (accessed on 7 October 2008), where he paraphrased an *Archives and Archivists List* posting by F. Holly Hodges, 13 November 1997, http://listserv.muohio.edu/scripts/wa.exe?A2=ind9711b&L=archives&D=0&T=0&P=10170 (accessed on 7 October 2008).

literature in the fields of archivy and librarianship, a checklist was created to appraise the characteristics of the films, the role of the archivists within each film, and the archivists' physical and behavioural characteristics. A preliminary assumption concerning the portrayal of archivists as librarians in the films was hypothesized and proven to be false. Results of the study indicate that, within the context of film, physically and behaviourally, archivists follow generally accepted stereotypes. It is suggested that this study could provide the basis for future research into archival stereotypes found in other forms of popular culture.

Introduction

The image of archivists, as with that of librarians, has preoccupied the minds of archivists since before the time of Hilary Jenkinson. [1] Archivists are obsessed with examining how they see themselves, yet the public's perception has had a minimal impact upon the profession. One way the public forms judgements and opinions about people, is through media (e.g., film, television, advertising, and literature); the media portrays groups of people in certain ways, stereotyping them, and thus influencing the public' s perception. Unfortunately, Hollywood's lack of concern surrounding accuracy of detail has a serious effect on the public's perception:

what they [screenwriters] do care about is storytelling, generating conflict … [it is] a way of drawing out a commentary on the character 's relationship to other characters, or to himself, or to the culture around him … most screenwriters … [are] writing for largely urban audiences who are equally ignorant … so … they [screenwriters] tend to get away with it.[2]

Hollywood, through its screenwriters, cares more about getting its overall point across in a film, and less about how accurately it is depicting details. This attitude breeds continual stereotypes and false images.

Media stereotypes, particularly those created by Hollywood, have persisted since the early days of film and have become "a part of our visual heritage."[3] Because the media has a profound ef fect on people' s opinions, ideas, and judgements, "there is no form of communication more powerful than film in creating propaganda."[4] Stereotypes grab "hold of the few 'simple,

---

1   Hilary Jenkinson, "The English Archivist: A New Profession," in *Selected Writings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson*, eds. Roger H. Ellis and Peter Walne (Gloucester, Great Britain, 1980), pp. 236–59. Jenkinson comments that archivists are custodians, Jack-of-all trades, and selfless devotees of truth.
2   Charles Wilkins, "Hooks, Bullets & Hollywood," *Outdoor Canada* (March 2008), p. 31. This article discussed the image of hunting and fishing in films.
3 Jack   Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood V illifies a People,* DVD, directed by Sut Jhally (The Media Educational Foundation, 2006).
4 Ibid.

vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized' characteristics about a person, *reduce* everything about the person to these traits, *exaggerate* and *simplify* them, and *fix* them without change or development to eternity."[5] Shaheen states that by taking "a few structured images and repeating them over and over again … [so that they] take a long time to wither away,"[6] stereotypes are created.

The stereotypical portrayals of archivists are a minimally researched yet important area of archivy: archivists should be aware of how the media portrays them and how the public perceives their profession. The current exploratory study investigated the image and stereotypes of archivists found in films. Using librarian and archivist stereotypes presented and discussed within previous literature, the study examined whether or not these stereotypes were found within nineteen selected films in which archivists are visually represented. Using content analysis, we looked at various characteristics of archivists (or reel archivists[7]) in those films in order to find patterns and thus prove or disprove a preliminary hypothesis: that archivists will primarily be represented as librarians in films. In addition to their physical and behavioural characteristics, we examined the role of archivists with respect to the film's story: are they present only to provide the hero with the information needed to succeed? Or are they portrayed in major roles, integral to the film's conclusion? Are they themselves the heroes of the story? Finally, following the results of that analysis, we propose a number of relevant issues for further study.

While it is important to examine one's own profession, this self-examination does run the risk of not being able to "see the forest for the trees." An examination of the image of reel archivists must be considered as a starting point for *real* archivists to look at the broader context of our profession, and allow us to see ourselves as others see us. By examining how we are being portrayed to the public, we can work to counteract any negative stereotypes that affect us and project a better, more positive image of ourselves that will help us determine where our profession should be going in the future. It is necessary for us to advocate for our profession so that we can gain more respect and recognition from the public, which in turn will provide us with a

---

5   Marie L. Radford and Gary P. Radford, "Librarians and Party Girls: Cultural Studies and the Meaning of the Librarian," *Library Quarterly*, vol. 73, no. 1 (2003), p. 58, quoting Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (Thousand Oaks, CA, 1997), p. 258; emphasis in the original.

6   Shaheen.

7   The term "reel archivists" has been adopted from the more widely spread field of librarianship, where the term "reel librarians" has been coined. For example, see Jennifer Snoek-Brown, "Reel Librarians: Connecting Librarians & Film," http://www.uwplatt.edu/~snoekbrownj/LibFilm/ (accessed on 18 March 2008).

more positive image within society and our parent or   ganizations. Archives and libraries constantly struggle for recognition and the funding to support their work, and are often one of the first divisions to face budget cuts. However, if an or ganization understands and appreciates the necessity and value of having an archives, and thus supports the maintenance of the heritage and memory of the or ganization, archivists' efforts can be better directed toward archival work, rather than protecting their funding.

Popular culture is a huge force in our world, with films being one of its most influential forms. Thoroughly understanding the issue and perhaps even taking advantage of this knowledge to educate people on the true nature of the archival profession by calling these stereotypes into question and discussing them fully, is necessary if we want to obtain a more positive and accurate recognition of the value of archivists to society   , and to demonstrate why archives and archivists are important.

Literature Review

Librarianship Literature

The preliminary hypothesis – that archivists are generally represented as librarians in films – combined with the overall lack of studies within the archival literature concerning the image of reel archivists, [8] led us to begin our study by examining several key studies in the related profession of librarianship, notably those by King, Yeagley, and Helms. [9] The image of librarians in film brought up in these studies also raises many questions that are relatable to the image of reel archivists and were therefore utilized in the current study.

In 1990, King performed a content analysis of seventeen films depicting librarian characters in order to determine the type of image represented within

---

8   There have been no studies performed concerning the image of archives or archivists in film
     specifically. Rather, the focus has been on archives and archivists within newspapers and
     literature: Richard J. Cox, "International Perspectives on the Image of   Archivists and
     Archives: Coverage by *The New York Times,* 1992–1993," *International Information &
     Library Review* 25 (1993), pp. 195–231; Barbara L. Craig, "'What the Papers Say': Archives
     in the English-Language Canadian Public Press, 1899–1994," *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995), pp.
     109–120; Peter Gillis, "Of Plots, Secrets, Burrowers, and Moles: Archives in Espionage
     Fiction," *Archivaria* 9 (Winter 1979–80), pp. 3–13; Suzanne Keen, *Romances of the Archive
     in Contemporary British Fiction* (Toronto, 2001); Arlene B. Schmuland, "The Image of
     Archives and Archivists: Fictional Perspectives" (Master 's thesis, Western Washington
     University, 1997); Arlene Schmuland, "The Archival Image in Fiction: An Analysis and
     Annotated Bibliography," *The American Archivist* 62 (Spring 1999), pp. 24–73.
9   The field of librarianship has had a number of studies performed concerning the image of
     librarians in film: William H. King, "The Celluloid Librarian: The Portrayal of Librarians in
     Motion Pictures" (Master 's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1990); Beth

the films. His study examined librarians in the context of three different areas: physical attributes, behaviour, and professional nature. King concluded that the conventional librarian stereotype is "middle aged, female, unattractive, single … antisocial," [10] and is represented in films that portray librarians as secondary characters.

Later, in 1999, Yeagley performed a study on the positive image of librarians in order to review the American Library Association's 1989 promotional campaign. Thirty films released between 1989 and 1999 were selected in order to gauge the image of librarians through physical, personality, and job characteristics.[11] Yeagley concluded that librarians were positively portrayed in the films, especially those in major roles.

More recently, in 2006, Helms performed a content analysis of thirteen films in order to "determine if the traditional stereotype of the librarian is still prevalent and whether or not computers and technology are becoming associated with librarians and their profession." [12] Helms related the image of librarians to that of archivists, stating, "the related profession of archivists has escaped the librarian stereotype. Unlike librarians, archivists are almost entirely absent from popular culture, and when they are present, they are portrayed interchangeably with librarians." [13] Helms concluded that librarians are still being portrayed as bookworms who have yet to recognize and accept technology, and implied that librarians have to work harder than other professions in order to win respect. Helms also observed that the films *The Mummy* (1999) and *National Treasure* (2004), "contain librarian characters who could best be classified as archivists because of their work with documents and artifacts,"[14] yet he does not provide a definition of an archivist or librarian, or any parameters for their roles. This observation, combined with the lack of

Yeagley, "Shelving, Stamping, and Shushing: Librarians in the Movies" (Master's thesis, Kent State University, 1999); Bari L. Helms, "Reel Librarians: The Stereotype and Technology" (Master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006); Ann O'Brien and Martin Raish, "The Image of the Librarian in Commercial Motion Pictures: An Annotated Filmography," *Collection Management*, vol. 17, no. 3 (1993), pp. 61–84; Radford and Radford, "Librarians and Party Girls"; Stephen Walker and V. Lonnie Lawson, "The Librarian Stereotype and the Movies," *The Journal of Academic Media Librarianship*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 1993), pp. 16–28.

10 King, p. 28.

11 An inconsistent aspect of Yeagley's study was during the review of the film *In the Name of the Father* (1993). She specified a character's role in the film as a "male police archivist" (p. 14) but considered this character to be a librarian. She used this film as an example of one which portrays the "librarian" with positive characteristics, but which gives off a negative impression due to his unfriendly nature. She clearly stated the "archivist" projects this negative impression within the film.

12 Helms, p. 5.

13 Ibid., p. 4.

14 Ibid., p. 30.

archival literature within Helms's bibliography and the lack of examination of films with reel archivists make it appear that the observation about archivists being absent from popular culture and being interchangeable with librarians, was made without research or a knowledge base of archivy. As a result, this assertion was central in formulating the current study's hypothesis.

These previous studies reveal that the most common librarian image is that of a woman who wears drab, stuffy, conservative clothing – long skirts and big bulky sweaters or cardigans – and has her hair tied up in a bun; she wears glasses; and she is usually of middle to elderly age. Her character is stern, quiet, shy, and prim; she is a spinster, destined to live a boring life alone, a characterization that evokes the quintessential "old maid" stereotype. Her professional career consists of reading books all day; checking books in and out; drinking coffee; and shushing people who are talking too loudly.[15]

Stereotypical images of librarians "derive from second-hand knowledge, abstract ideas of what a librarian should be, and not concrete, first-hand experience with librarians."[16] Because many people do not know what librarians actually do, the general public perceives them in a certain way; the media industry gives further credence to these common perceptions by portraying them as the norm. The public's initial perception is then reinforced by these portrayals, creating a snowball effect.

Archival Literature

Few studies have been done on the image of archivists, as opposed to librarians, within various media sources. Gillis, Cox, Craig, and Schmuland discussed archives and archivists within the context of newspapers and literature, Levy and Robles examined the perception of funding allocators, and Gracy attempted to examine the public's perception of archives and archivists. Through the examination of these media sources, the studies also inadvertently examined the public's perceptions; perceptions held by authors, journalists, and even funding allocators, have a direct correlation and impact upon the perceptions of the general public. After reading a book or watching a film, the layperson will not take the extra time to discover whether or not the portrayal of an archivist in the book or film was accurate; instead, they will adopt the

---

15   This image is derived from a compilation of sources: Thad E. Dickinson, "Looking at the Male Librarian Stereotype," *The Reference Librarian* 78 (2002), pp. 97–1 10; Amy M. Duncan, "Caught Between the Stacks and a Hard Place: Dealing with Librarian Stereotypes," *Louisiana Libraries*, vol. 66, no. 4 (Spring 2004), pp. 3–5; Helms, "Reel Librarians"; O'Brien and Raish, "The Image of the Librarian in Commercial Motion Pictures";   Walker and Lawson, "The Librarian Stereotype and the Movies."
16   Gary Mason Church, "In the Eye of the Beholder: How Librarians Have Been   Viewed Over Time," *The Reference Librarian* 78 (2002), p. 6.

perspective of what they have read and seen.

The examination of archives and archivists in newspapers and literature is that which is closest to a study of reel archivists. Gillis, Cox, Craig, and Schmuland approached this area of study in different ways: Gillis by examining the role of archives within espionage fiction [17]; Cox and Craig by examining the image of archives and archivists in American and Canadian newspapers[18]; and Schmuland by examining the image of archives and archivists in novels.[19] The results of all of these studies contributed in part to the present study.

Gillis, while not directly addressing the image of the archivist, discussed two main concepts prevalent within espionage fiction that may influence that image: information as power, and the concept that the past haunts the present. He also touched upon the increasingly important dichotomy between the research value of records and information versus respect for personal privacy. Of these issues, however, only that of information as power comes through as an important and persistent concept within the films we examined. A film's protagonist was often able to progress within the storyline based upon the information delivered by the archivist, information that gave the protagonist power, and thus the ability to complete his/her mission. While the idea of the clash between confidentiality and the value of nominal information did not seem to play a large role within the films we examined, where the protagonist was usually focused on finding a confidential file or the name of a person (something that would 'break the case' and help the plot progress), the increasing importance of these kinds of privacy issues within society, how they are portrayed in films, and how they might affect the image of archivists could become the subject of future study.

In his examination of archives and archivists within *The New York Times*, Cox hypothesized that "there will be little attention to the archivist of archival institutions, but there will be some interest in manuscripts and archival records as curiosities and as authorities for news stories on other topics such as national and international politics and events."[20] He confirmed this hypothesis, concluding that the press treats archives and historical manuscripts as curiosities, associating them with political disputes and prominent individuals. However, while purporting to examine the image of archivists, Cox does so briefly throughout the paper, and in no way synthesizes the information acquired through his study or relates its importance to archivists. He gives

---

17 Gillis.

18 Cox, "International Perspectives"; Craig, "What the Papers Say."

19 Schmuland, "The Archival Image in Fiction"; because there is both a thesis and a peer-reviewed published paper in *The American Archivist*, the latter was chosen as the primary source.

20 Cox, "International Perspectives," p. 196.

---

minimal examples to back up his view that archivists are only mentioned within the context of political investigations or scandals. It would have been interesting and worthwhile to see the number of times archivists were mentioned and in what relation they were discussed.

Craig examined the English-language, Canadian press for archival stories from 1989 to 1994 in order "to find out what the public gets about the work of archivists."[21] The article discusses many concepts also seen in the films we examined, including secrecy, revelation, archival material as cultural objects and archives as memory, as well as makes an essential contribution toward further research. Concerning the image of archivists, Craig concluded that the image in the Canadian press was ambiguous and that there is a silence in the press about the archivist's role that creates a barrier to understanding that role. Her comment that archivists are "an elusive protagonist with a blurred image"[22] resonates within the films we examined; it is a reflection of the archivist's role in the films as the catalyst for plot progression. The information he/she can provide the film's protagonist is what matters, while the archivist blurs into the background – and our memories – as the film progresses.

Schmuland's research is the most comprehensive study on the image of archivists from a point of view external to the profession (authors of books). Many of the characteristics added to the current study's checklist were derived from her study. Because of this, it is somewhat disappointing to see so little synthesis of the information gleaned from reading the books. Additional analysis, perhaps having all of the different traits of archivists in the form of a table, would have strengthened the study. While Schmuland does mention the connection between librarianship and archivy, for example, she fails to see it as having a consequence on the depiction of archivists with glasses. Glasses are a prevalent image within depictions of librarians, and one that may have been passed on to the image of the archivist as well; Schmuland discusses the relationship between glasses and a perception of intelligence, but without any deeper analysis as to why such a linkage should matter. While the numerous examples provided throughout the study were important to the explanation of what was found within the novels, it was not until the conclusion that Schmuland briefly discussed *what* it all means. A section to discuss or even summarize all the connections found and interpretations revealed would have been useful to the reader.

In their study, Levy and Robles reported on interviews with forty-four people who control or influence the funding of archives (resource allocators).

---

21   Craig, "What the Papers Say," p. 110.
22   Ibid., p. 115.

Their results determined important traits about the image that such funding allocators have of archivists, regardless of whether the image is correct or not. Levy and Robles concluded that in the eyes of funding allocators, archivists have an identity comprised of various skills, but that they are "burdened by unexciting stereotypical elements." [23] Some of these stereotypes were also found in Schmuland's study: territoriality, devotion to their duties, dustiness, mustiness, and curiosity. Levy and Robles's study should weigh heavily with archivists as it reflects the opinions of the people who dictate the amount of funding an archives receives. As members of the general public, resource allocators usually share the public's opinions of archivists. Archivists always need to let the public know what they contribute: that an archives is an integral and important part of the functioning of society and its institutions.   While we remain "out of sight, out of mind," [24] so too will our funding. However, if we step into view, projecting a positive and more accurate image, perhaps the perception of us will change, the public will recognize our value, and resource allocators will see the benefit of maintaining archives.

Gracy's article on the totem of archivy examined the public's perception of archival images, yet a key element was missing from his article: the public's perception of archivists themselves. Gracy asked the question, "what animal would your choose as a symbol for archivists (and thereby for archival work)?"[25] He answered this question by providing three examples, one from the *New York Times* (squirrels), and two others (pack rats and moles), the sources of which he does not provide. The bulk of Gracy's article was devoted to discussing, adamantly, how archivists need to change in order to be able to move forward and define an image for themselves; discussing the archivists' point of view; and attempts by the Society of   American Archivists (SAA) to create an archival accreditation program. Unfortunately, the discussion within the paper is in direct conflict with the title of the article, and Gracy does not delve deeply enough into the image of archivists in the public's mind to affect stereotypical images. The observation that the image of archivists reflects the image put forth by archivists themselves may explain why the majority of the paper concentrated on archivists and archives from an archivist's point of view, but it does little to address the question of archival stereotypes. He concluded by going back to his initial question and proposing the ant as an archival totem, suggesting that this choice of totem demonstrates the concept of recognizing that if archivists have an image problem, we can do something about it, and work (just like the ant does) to achieve our goals.

---

23 Sidney J. Levy and Albert G. Robles, *The Image of Archivists: Resource Allocators' Perceptions* (Chicago, 1984), p. v.
24 Ibid., p. ii.
25 David B. Gracy II, "What's Your Totem? Archival Images in the Public Mind," *Midwestern Archivist*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1985), p. 17.

Stereotypes of Archivists

While Gracy's arguments did not directly affect the parameters of our study, his paper is a clear example of the fascination archivists have with self-examination. The archival profession's internalized discussions [26] have looked at how archivists see themselves, rather than focusing on the public's perception. Yet every member of the public has his or her own image of an archivist: for example, it might be a man wearing a three-piece, tweed suit, possibly sporting glasses, smoking a pipe, and using an umbrella as a walking stick. This vision has very nineteenth-century overtones not unlike that of Sherlock Holmes; it brings to mind the image of a man who will sit all day, working by candlelight or gaslight, his nose buried in the annals of history, waiting to discover some great connection or ancient secret hidden within the dusty, musty papers surrounding him. This image is traditionally closely connected to that of a historian or scholar as much as it is to an archivist.

Most stereotypes of archivists have not been examined in detail, but have rather been mentioned in passing, meant to be humorous to those reading a paper or listening to a conference talk. Authors have also used them within the context of discussing others' opinions about archivists. For instance, archivists have been described as:

- Dusty, old people in cardigans.[27]
- Bent, old recordkeepers surrounded by dusty parchments.[28]
- "Burrowers" … who continually collect, sift, and file information.[29]
- At best, keepers of trash and, at worst, revelers in the ultimate refuse.[30]
- Wizened old folks dealing with even older paper documents.[31]
- Dusty, mild-mannered individuals squirreling away old documents.[32]
- It's what you get when you cross a librarian with a historian.[33]

---

26 Some of these studies include: Terry Cook, "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift," *Archivaria* 43 (1997), pp. 17–63; Richard J. Cox, *Managing Records as Evidence and Information* (Westport, 2001).

27 The National Library of Wales, "Archives Awareness Campaign: Gathering the Jewels," http://www.gtj.org/articles/archives.php?lang=en (accessed on 6 January 2007; site now discontinued).

28 Sandy Newton, ed., "Archives," *Culture Works*, ca. 2004, p. 18.

29 Gillis, p. 10.

30 David B. Gracy II, "Archivists, You Are What People Think You Keep," *American Archivist* 52 (Winter 1989), pp. 72–78, especially p. 73.

31 Nicholas C. Burckel, "Archivists Facing the Millennium: Preparing for an Unknown – but not Unknowable – Future," SAA: Presidential Address (Burckel-8/31/96), http://www.archivists.org/governance/presidential/burckel.asp?prnt=y (accessed on 17 July 2007).

32 Richard J. Cox, "Making the Records Speak: Archival Appraisal, Memory, Preservation, and Collecting," *The American Archivist* 64 (Fall/Winter 2001), pp. 394–404, especially p. 395.

33 Pearce-Moses, p. 3.

The characteristics examined for the current study were derived in part from previous literature discussing the stereotypes of archivists, with particular emphasis on those outlined by Schmuland. The stereotypical archivist's physical appearance was determined to be a middle-aged to elderly man or woman, wearing glasses, and dressing sloppily or primly. Stereotypical women archivists tend to be clerical or technical-level workers, while male archivists occupy administrative positions. Glasses are seen as a sign of intelligence and those wearing them are usually portrayed in relation to people who do a lot of reading (which archivists generally do). Younger archivists are seen in entry-level positions with little status. Overall, the lack of attention to their appearance suggests that archivists are more focused on what they do rather than what they look like.[34]

The behavioural traits of archivists portrayed in the literature are many and varied: archivists have an appreciation for history; they are disgruntled, introverted, somewhat ordinary, isolated, impartial, passive, mild mannered, quiet, territorial, dusty, musty, mousy, and bookworms; they are devoted to their duties as guardians or gatekeepers of history; they have difficulty relating to the outside world and are not in touch with society (especially members of the opposite sex); they come from diverse backgrounds, but have an innate sense of curiosity and a quest for knowledge; they are excellent at finding what is wanted or needed from the archives; and they prefer working in solitude and are often ignored by other people.[35]

All of these characteristics, which comprise the stereotypes of archivists, were utilized in the current study through the creation of a checklist. But how many of these characteristics are actually displayed in films with reel archivists, and what do these portrayals reveal?

Methodology

Definition of Terms

In conducting the content analysis of films that formed the basis of the current study, two essential elements were to define terminology and to establish why the films involved were selected; for the purpose of clarification, these definitions were created by the authors.

Past studies concerning librarians in films have shown a lack of standardization in their terminology, resulting in the selection of films irrelevant to

---

34   Physical characteristics were derived from both Schmuland's masters thesis, "The Image of Archives," and her published article "The Archival Image in Fiction."
35   Behavioural characteristics are derived from a compilation of sources: Cook, "What is Past is Prologue"; Cox, "International Perspectives"; Levy and Robles, *The Image of Archivists*; Schmuland, "The Image of Archives"; Schmuland, "The Archival Image in Fiction."

their study. These authors, particularly Helms and Yeagley, seemed to be confused as to the definition of a librarian as opposed to that of an archivist. The studies were often attempting to examine information professionals in general, yet were incorrectly terming them "librarians." This confusion can be seen through the films chosen for examination within these studies, which actually portray archivists, not librarians (e.g., *National Treasure* [2004] and *In the Name of the Father* [1993]).

For the purpose of this study, an *archivist* is defined as a person, male or female, who works within a variety of institutions, deals with records in any format, at any point in their life cycle, [36] and helps people find and understand the information needed from the records. To refine, archivists can work in museums, rare book libraries, law firms, government institutions, universities, and other institutions.[37] Their function as preservers of primary sources or records that contain evidence of events, distinguishes them from other information professionals (such as librarians and curators). In addition, an *archives* is defined as a repository for records of any format.

Film Selection

As the first step toward compiling an inventory of films for analysis, an initial list of thirty-seven films was assembled through the use of five sources: suggestions from acquaintances, the Internet Movie Database (IMDB), [38] The Fictional World of Archives, Art Galleries and Museums, [39] Librarians in the Movies,[40] and a posting for suggestions on the Arcan-L Mailing List.[41] Films were selected based on two main criteria: the observation of directly credited

---

36   Format here is taken to mean form or media. The format could be paper, bound manuscripts, artefacts, film, photographs, etc. Life cycle here is taken to mean active, semi-active, and/or non-active records.

37   Sometimes the line between a library and an archives can blur. It becomes difficult to distinguish between a library and an archives when dealing with those in medieval or earlier times, or when libraries retain archival material. These types of institutions can be considered libraries or archives, depending on the perception of the person examining them; it is in these instances that the line blurs. Examples of this can be seen in the films *Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring* (2001) and *Citizen Kane* (1941). The repositories depicted in these films were considered archives for the current study, as they are repositories for records. Unfortunately, *Lord of the Rings* was eliminated from this study due to the lack of character development of the archivist. He merely walks Gandalf down a long winding staircase, and points to a shelf with his torch.

38   Internet Movie Database, http://www.imdb.com (accessed on 18 July 2007).

39   David Mattison, "Films and TV Programs," *The Fictional World of Archives, Art Galleries and Museums*, http://victoria.tc.ca/~mattison/ficarch/index-filmstv.htm (accessed on 18 July 2007).

40   Martin Raish, *Librarians in the Movies – An Annotated Filmography*, http://emp.byui.edu/raishm/films/introduction.html (accessed on 18 July 2007).

41   Tania Aldred, email to Arcan-L Mailing List, 15 January 2007.

---

archivists, and film descriptions that warranted the possible appearance of an archivist. For example, if a description stated the protagonist of the film visited an archives, the film was examined as there would likely be an archivist portrayed.[42] However, if further examination did not reveal an archivist in the film, it was eliminated from the list. A few additional limitations were applied: documentaries,[43] television programs, and television movies were left out.

Suggestions from acquaintances were varied, and only two such suggested films were included. IMDB search strategies included a keyword search for films that had been tagged with the term *archive*. Character searches were performed for both *archive* and *archivist*. These three text-based searches combined yielded ten films. Only the "Films and TV Programs" section was reviewed on the Fictional World of Archives website. Most films from this section are annotated with brief plot descriptions, including the presence of archivists and archival elements within the films. Relevant films were then noted and selected based on their description, and seventeen films from the Fictional World of Archives were included. Films listed on the Librarians in the Movies website are grouped into four categories based on the degree of connection to libraries or librarians. These categories were searched using the CTRL-F function for *archiv*, which produced relevant films within the text. Annotated descriptions of character appearances were included on the site and five films were selected. The Arcan-L postings yielded many responses, most of which were already on the list. Those that were not on the list were searched on IMDB; from these, three were added. In total, thirty-seven films were included on the initial list.

The films were then obtained through a variety of sources: local video stores, loans from acquaintances, and the McGill University Library. Among the thirty-seven films, ten could not be found or ordered,[44] leaving twenty-seven films available for viewing. Upon viewing the films, it became clear that while all of them contained archival elements or an archives, visual representations of archivists were not always present, or the archivist was not on-

---

42 For instance, the description of the film *The Bone Collector* (1999) on the Fictional World of Archives website stated: "an archivist for the City of NY plays a minor but key role – and is shown as a helpful resource" (Mattison, quoting Kaye Lanning Minchew). This film does not have a credited archivist and the film was included on the initial list for further examination. It was later eliminated, as there were no archivists in the film; there may have been confusion with a character who owned a bookstore.

43 The primary purpose of a documentary is to instruct or record events. While some films that were chosen as part of the sample set for the current study were also based on true stories, they are essentially an interpretation of events, and as such could be construed as fictional.

44 Films eliminated as unavailable (in chronological order) were: *1984* (1956), *They Might Be Giants* (1971), *Chinatown* (1974), *Macaroni* (1985), *Das Schreckliche Madchen (Nasty Girl)* (1990), *Deceived* (1991), *Prague* (1992), *Scream 3* (2000), *Abandon* (2002), and *Valley of the Innocent* (2003).

---

screen long enough to analyze characteristics; these films were also eliminated.[45] The final analysis sample (sample film set) consisted of nineteen films, with a total of twenty-one archivists (sample character set), with the films spanning from 1941 to 2004 (see Appendix 1 for Filmography).[46]

Data Collection

Based on the stereotypes and the image of archivists discussed in the previous section, a checklist was created in order to facilitate data collection from the films. This checklist, which was filled out while watching each of the films, [47] emulated those present in previous studies performed on librarians in film, [48] and was divided into three sections: film analysis, character analysis, and comments. The film analysis section provided general information about the films: title, genre, director, production company, actors, and year of release. The character analysis section described information about the archival character: name and/or credit; role of the character; the type of archives represented; tasks performed; physical characteristics; and behavioural characteristics. The comments section provided any additional information, including observations on the success of the protagonist within the film, and whether the film was based upon a previous literary work.

The checklist response criteria were designed to ensure objectivity and consistency across all films. Each category was assessed with caution, particularly the age and behavioural characteristics of the reel archivists, which were especially vulnerable to subjectivity. For those films in which the archivist's on-screen time was short and their role less developed, behavioural characteristics were selected and judged based on initial impressions and perceptions.

Analysis

The characteristics present in the films were analyzed in order to determine whether the reel archivists followed the established and previously discussed

---

45 Films eliminated upon viewing (in chronological order) were: *Journey to the Far Side of the Sun (Doppleganger)* (1969), *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *The Name of the Rose* (1986), *The Phantom* (1996), *The Bone Collector* (1999), *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), *DaVinci Code* (2006), and *Silent Hill* (2006).

46 Sample film set (in chronological order): *Citizen Kane* (1941)*, The Mask of Dimitrios* (1944*), Carlton-Browne of the F.O.* (1959), *Agnes of God* (1986), *Treasure* (1990), *Secret Nation* (1992), *In the Name of the Father* (1993), *Just Cause* (1995), *Ridicule* (1996), *The Avengers* (1998), *Blade* (1998), *John Carpenter's Vampires* (1998), *8mm* (1999), *Erin Brockovich* (2000), *Bartleby* (2001), *Possession* (2002), *Star Wars II: Attack of the Clones* (2002), *The Time Machine* (2002), and *National Treasure* (2004).

47 A copy of the checklist is found in Appendix 2.

48 Helms;   King; Yeagley.

---

stereotypes. The films were viewed multiple times, in order to look for all of the characteristics present within the checklist.   The raw data compiled from the checklists was converted into a quantitative format to allow for frequency analysis, based on either the nineteen films (sample film set) or twenty-one archivists (sample character set). The results of the analysis of each variable were then discussed and cross-references between variables, and were examined in order to determine trends.

   The results were grouped according to three categories: physical characteristics of reel archivists, behavioural characteristics of reel archivists, and tasks performed by the reel archivists. Explanations were given about each category in order to define the criteria utilized in their selection.   The three categories included several characteristics, which were further delineated with variables. For example, the physical characteristics category includes the gender characteristic, which consists of the two variables, male and female.   Variables were illustrated in tables representing the number of occurrences and percentage of occurrences based on either the appropriate sample film set (nineteen films) or the sample character set (twenty-one archivists).[49]

Physical Characteristics

The physical characteristics of reel archivists that were examined included gender, age, the wearing of glasses, hairstyle, and style of dress. Both hairstyle and style of dress were further classified in relation to gender.

Gender of Reel Archivists

Gender was determined as either male or female within the sample character set.

Table 1. Gender of Reel Archivists

Gender (sample character set)	Number	Percentage
Male	14	67%
Female	7	33%
Total	*21*	*100%*

   The majority of archivists within the films were male (67%) with the remainder female (33%).

---

49   Total percentages in some tables may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Age of Reel Archivists

Three age variables were determined based on Statistics Canada's Standard Classification for Age Categories – young (under 34 years), middle age (35 to 49 years), and mature (over 50 years).[50] Determining the age of the reel archivists within the films was difficult at best, resulting in the most subjective category of the study. Age was never mentioned within the films, therefore, placing reel archivists within these three variables was done solely using the viewer's judgement of the character's age.

Table 2. Age of Reel Archivists

Age (sample character set)	Number	Percentage
Young (under 34)	6	29%
Middle Age (35 to 49)	11	52%
Mature (over 50)	4	19%
Total	*21*	*100%*

The majority of the reel archivists were determined to be middle aged (52%).

Glasses Worn by Reel Archivists

The wearing of glasses was determined within the sample character set as either a yes or no response, with the criterion that the archivist wore glasses at any point throughout the film. As well, if the reel archivist was seen removing

---

50   These age variables were created by examining Statistics Canada's Standard Classification definitions for Age Categories: Statistics Canada, "Age Categories, Life Cycle Groupings," http://www.statcan.ca/english/concepts/definitions/age02.htm (accessed 4 March 2008). Categories 22 to 38 were utilized. For this study, it was assumed that a person under the age of twenty would not be employed as an archivist, and that a person over the age of sixty-five would likely be retired. The nine categories were divided into three equal portions, resulting in the three age ranges provided. To account for the possibility of someone under the age of twenty and over the age of sixty-five being represented as archivists in the film, the outer characteristics were broadened: under thirty-four, thirty-five to forty-nine, and over fifty. These categories also reflect the 2006 Canada Census results, which detail the median age of Canadians to be 39.5 years (Statistics Canada, "2006 Census: Portrait of the Canadian Population in 2006, by Age and Sex: National Portrait," http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/analysis/agesex/NatlPortrait3.cfm (accessed on 2 February 2008).

---

or putting in a pair of contacts for purposes other than disguise, they were considered as wearing glasses.

Table 3. Glasses Worn by Reel Archivists

Glasses (sample character set)	Number	Percentage
Yes	11	52%
No	10	48%
Total	*21*	*100%*

The results indicated a fairly even response with archivists who wear glasses (52%) being slightly more frequent.

Hairstyle

Hairstyle was examined within the sample character set in order to determine various trends. The variables examined were based upon previous literature on librarians in film: short, long, in a bun, bald, and hidden. The characteristic was further divided by gender in order to obtain a more accurate picture of hairstyle. In order to produce results that could be analyzed, it was decided that only one variable would be applied to each reel archivist, as allowing multiple variables to be applied would have skewed the results. For instance, the variable bald included both a receding hairline with some hair regardless of length, and total baldness. If hair was seen up in any fashion, with the exception of a bun, it was considered long. Buns were isolated in order to compare with the common image of librarians.

Table 4. Hairstyle in Relation to Gender

Gender (sample character set)					
	Male		Female		Total
Hairstyle	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Percentage*
Short	9	64%	2	29%	52%
Long	2	14%	1	14%	14%
Bun	0	0%	3	43%	14%
Bald	3	21%	0	0%	14%
Hidden	0	0%	1	14%	5%
Total	*14*	*100%*	*7*	*100%*	*100%*

The majority of the results indicated that reel archivists generally have short hair (52%). This percentage may have been skewed, as the majority of reel archivists were male (fourteen versus seven): men tended to have short hair (64%), while most women had their hair in a bun (43%).

Style of Dress

Style of dress was based on the sample character set, and divided into five variables: conservative, sloppy, ordinary, traditional, and eccentric. These broad variables were chosen based on generalities and the stereotypes of archivists as previously discussed, and were modified as the films were viewed. The selection of a variable was limited to the reel archivists' role within a professional capacity, thereby facilitating only one response. The conservative variable generally denoted a suit or button-down shirt with a tie for men, and a suit for women. This variable also included those considered as dressing primly.[51] Ordinary dress was taken to mean average or common, [52] which included any type of dress not considered to be represented by another variable. Traditional dress was considered as those types that were average to the select group represented such as nuns, priests, monks, eighteenth-century courtiers and futuristic information professionals, but which would not be considered average or ordinary to the current layperson. Sloppy was considered as dishevelled or unclean, while eccentric was considered as strange, unique, and outside the norm.

Table 5. Style of Dress in Relation to Gender

	Gender (sample character set)				
Dress	Male		Female		Total
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Percentage
Conservative	9	64%	3	43%	57%
Sloppy	1	7%	0	0%	5%
Ordinary	1	7%	2	29%	14%
Traditional	2	14%	2	29%	19%
Eccentric	1	7%	0	0%	5%
Total	*14*	*100%*	*7*	*100%*	*100%*

51 Yeagley examined dress in terms of the conservative characteristic, but does not provide a definition or parameters for this characteristic.
52 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines ordinary as: the regular or customary condition or course of things (noun); of common quality, rank, or ability (adjective), http://www.britannica.com (accessed on 18 July 2007).

The majority of reel archivists dressed conservatively (57%). Dividing this category by gender also revealed that both the majority of men (64%) and women (43%) dressed conservatively.

Behavioural Characteristics

The behavioural characteristics of reel archivists revealed aspects of their personalities. The selection of behavioural variables was taken from previous studies about archival stereotypes; similar variables were combined to lessen redundancy. The variables examined within the sample character set included: appreciates history; disgruntled; shy/introverted; isolated/solitary; knowledgeable about the material in the archives and how to access them; impartial; passive/mild-mannered; quiet; territorial; bookworm; curious; ignored; non-social; and nervousness. The category stipulated to "check all that apply," thereby allowing the archivist to have multiple behavioural characteristics.

Table 6. Behavioural Characteristics of Archivists

Behaviour Category	Male		Female		Total
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Percentage*
Appreciates History	1	2%	1	5%	3%
Disgruntled	7	16%	3	14%	15%
Shy/Introverted	1	2%	1	5%	3%
Isolated/Solitary	8	18%	2	9%	15%
Knowledgeable	7	16%	6	27%	20%
Impartial	4	9%	2	9%	9%
Passive/Mild-mannered	4	9%	1	5%	8%
Quiet	1	2%	1	5%	3%
Territorial	1	2%	4	18%	8%
Bookworm	1	2%	0	0%	2%
Curious	3	7%	1	5%	6%
Ignored	2	5%	0	0%	3%
Non-Social	2	5%	0	0%	3%
Nervousness	2	5%	0	0%	3%
Total	*44*	*100%*	*22*	*100%*	*100%*

Three variables dominated this category: reel archivists were knowledge-able (20%), disgruntled (15%), and isolated/solitary (15%). Dividing the category by gender revealed certain trends. Men were more isolated/solitary (18%) than women (9%); men were more disgruntled (16%) than women (14%), but the results were close; and women were more knowledgeable (27%) and territorial (18%) about their archives than men (16% and 2% respectively). Beyond these variables, every other behavioural characteristic is represented to an extent within the films as a whole.

Tasks Performed by Reel Archivists

The various tasks performed by the reel archivists were examined based on the sample character set in order to determine the degree of professionalism the reel archivist exhibited. This category also stipulated to "check all that apply," thereby providing the archivist with the opportunity to perform multiple tasks. These tasks included both technical and administrative functions, which were further refined: technical included retrieval and accessioning; administrative included reference, research, acquisition, and outreach. Reference was considered a consultation or interview , where the archivist or the protagonist asked questions, and where the archivist was knowledgeable and provided access to the information or record needed without having to consult any materials or sources. Research, then, was considered as consulting sources in order to provide the protagonist with the information needed.

Table 7. Tasks Performed by Reel Archivists in Relation to Gender

Task Category (sample character set)	*Gender*				
	Male		Female		Total
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Percentage*
Technical Retrieval	6	29%	1	10%	23%
Accessioning	0	0%	1	10%	3%
Total Technical	6	29%	2	20%	26%
Administrative					
Reference	10	48%	6	60%	52%
Research	3	14%	1	10%	13%
Acquisition	2	10%	1	10%	10%
Outreach	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Total Administrative	15	71%	8	80%	74%
Total	*21*	*100%*	*10*	*100%*	*100%*

Administrative tasks were performed more often, with reference being top priority for the reel archivists (52%). Retrieval was the most common technical activity (23%) performed by the reel archivists.

The stereotypes specified that women were more likely to perform technical tasks, while men were more likely to perform administrative   tasks.[53] The sample character set for each gender determined that both men (71%) and women (80%) performed more administrative tasks in the films than technical (29% and 20% respectively).

Secondary Results[54]

Role of the Reel Archivist

The role of the reel archivist was classified as main, minor   , or cameo within the sample character set. Main characters provided a pivotal role in the progression of the film, and were represented frequently   , if not entirely throughout the film. Minor characters were represented in more than one scene of the film, but did not play an important part in the film. Cameo characters appeared only once in the film, interacted with the protagonist, and were not seen again.

Table 8. Role of the Reel Archivist

Character Role (sample character set)	Number	Percentage
Main	4	19%
Minor	6	29%
Cameo	11	52%
Total	*21*	*100%*

Cameo appearances by reel archivists were the most predominant within the films (52%), with minor characters also highly represented (29%). Reel archivists who were main characters were few (19%).

---

53   Schmuland, "The Image of Archives," p. 21.
54   Two categories were examined which were not included in the results: genre, and films based on works of literature. The two genres most represented in the films were drama (32%) and action/adventure (32%). The number of films not based on works of literature (58%) was slightly higher than those that were (42%).

Type of Archives

The various types of archives found in the films were classified based upon generalizations about the dif ferent kinds of records produced and preserved, such as academic, religious, private, business, and government. The number of archives equals the sample character set (21) rather than the sample film set (19) due to the presence of multiple archivists from different archives within a particular film. For example, the film *Agnes of God* (1986) contains two archivists working in religious and government settings.

Table 9. Type of Archives

Type of Archives (sample character set)	Number	Percentage
Academic	1	5%
Religious	2	10%
Private	2	10%
Business	1	5%
Government	15	71%
Total	*21*	*100%*

Government archives dominated the films (71%) (government archives were considered to be those that seek to preserve the records of a government or subordinate institution, and included police archives, public records offices, city archives, and national archives).

Success of the Protagonist

A curious secondary question arose during the viewing of the films: Was the protagonist successful in finding the information he/she needed through the archivist or consulting the archives? As the protagonist was the character who continually found the information desired, the question was rephrased: Was the archivist successful in providing the information to the protagonist? [55] Three variables were applied to the sample character set: successful (yes), not successful (no), and not applicable (N/A). The Not Applicable characteristic

---

55 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines a protagonist as: a leading actor, character, or participant in a literary work or real event; a leader, proponent, or supporter of a cause, http://www.britannica.com (accessed on 18 July 2007). To add to this, the protagonist was considered the character who instigated events within the film.

was created due to the film *Bartleby* (2001); although there was an archivist within the film, the plot did not actually involve utilizing or consulting the archivist or archival materials.

**Table 10. Success of the Protagonist in Relation to
Archival Character Role**

Archival Role (sample character set)

Success Rate	Main		Minor		Cameo		Total
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Percentage*
Successful	3	75%	5	71%	9	90%	81%
Not Successful	0	0%	2	29%	1	10%	14%
Not Applicable	1	25%	0	0%	0	0%	5%
Total	*4*	*100%*	*7*	*100%*	*10*	*100%*	*100%*

The protagonist was highly successful (81%) in acquiring the information needed through the archivist or the archives.　 The type of archival character represented was also linked with the success of the protagonist and examined. Reel archivists who were cameo characters were the most successful (90%) at helping the protagonist find the information desired.　 The success of the protagonist was also very high when dealing with reel archivists who were main (75%) and minor characters (71%). This suggested that regardless of the reel archivist's role in the film, they were able to help the protagonist be successful in his/her endeavours.

Discussion of Results

The purpose of our study was to determine if reel archivists embodied the stereotypes identified by previous literature.　The results indicated a cohesive outcome, demonstrating that both physically and behaviourally, reel archivists generally followed the stereotypes; in terms of the tasks the reel archivists performed, the evidence suggested that they did not follow the stereotypical image.

Before embarking upon our analysis of archival stereotypes, we addressed Helms's original statement about archivists being portrayed in films interchangeably with librarians. As outlined earlier, the stereotypical librarian is a shy and prim, conservatively dressed, older, single woman with her hair in a bun, who carries out traditional library tasks. Of the small sample size of women archivists (7), we concluded that only one reel archivist *truly*

portrayed this type of stereotypical librarian – the Maritime Museum's archivist in the film *Treasure* (1990). This reel archivist had all the librarian physical characteristics: female, middle aged, with glasses, hair up in a bun, and conservative clothing. This result was achieved by selecting all the female archivists and eliminating all those who were young (under 34), who did not wear glasses, who did not wear their hair up, and who did not dress conservatively. While only one film truly followed the librarian stereotype, another was close and could also be considered as part of this stereotype. In *Star Wars II: Attack of the Clones* (2002), the Jedi Archivist Jocasta Nu was only missing the glasses, but wore a traditional, conservative robe, the pattern of which has been observed in popular literature to represent her "devotion to knowledge and learning." [56] The archives even resembled a library, with stacks of glowing records lined up on the shelves. The remaining five females in the films were unlike the typical librarian stereotype. Therefore it can be concluded that Helms's statement about archivists being "portrayed interchangeably with librarians,"[57] is not valid.

Physically, the stereotypes of archivists were deemed by the literature to be either male or female, middle aged to elderly, wearing glasses, and dressed sloppily or conservatively. In contrast, the majority of reel archivists were found to be male, middle aged, dressed conservatively, and about half wore glasses. Reel archivists may have reflected a male gender bias because of the sample size and the films available for the study. It may also have been a result of the typical media situation in which some of the women were portrayed as librarians.

While age was the most subjective and controversial category examined within the study, there might be a simple correlation between age and the nature of the administrative/professional functions performed by the reel archivists that is based on a natural progression of acquiring experience. Because these administrative functions of reference, research, and acquisition are often integral to the plot, to be believable, their presence requires a character of a certain age, based on a common assumption that archivists who perform these tasks would be managers, and should therefore appear to be older. The perception would be that these archivists would have taken some time to work their way up to be managers with a higher level of responsibility, as compared to technicians just beginning their career.

Society often sees the wearing of glasses as a sign of intelligence. This can be seen in films where characters are historians or scholars, etc. The films demonstrated that approximately half the reel archivists wore glasses, howev-

---

56 *Wookieepedia: The Star Wars Wiki*, "Jocasta Nu," http://starwars.wikia.com/wiki/Jocasta_Nu (accessed on 1 April 2007).

57 Helms, p. 4.

er the results remain inconclusive. A larger sample size might help to provide a clearer picture of what is going on.

Previously, a stereotype for the hairstyle of archivists did not exist. This category arose from studies of librarians in film, where women were said to have their hair up in buns and men were balding or receding,[58] and was examined to compare whether or not reel archivists were portrayed interchangeably as librarians. The majority of male reel archivists had short hair, and therefore do not follow the typical librarian stereotype. Three of the seven female reel archivists did have their hair up in a bun, and so, it can be concluded that they did follow the typical librarian stereotype, at least to a certain extent. While the image of women librarians dominates the big screen, this conclusion tells us that women reel archivists are still often seen or portrayed as counterparts to their librarian cousins, while men are not. It is clear that Hollywood does not see a distinction between a female librarian and a female archivist. Why is this? Is the image of a spinsterish, drab, and repressed female librarian so ingrained in the minds of Hollywood that they cannot (or choose not to) see beyond it? But then why aren't male archivists also portrayed as a typical librarian? What purpose does it serve to portray women archivists (or librarians for that matter) with their hair in a bun? None that we can see. However, what we do see is that the portrayal of female archivists as stereotypical librarians is detrimental to our profession, as it misrepresents what we do based on a representation of what a librarian (and, by extension, an archivist) *should* look like.

While the majority of reel archivists was determined to dress conservatively, this is most likely simply a reflection of their institutions of employment (the majority of archives in the films were governmental) and professional functions. Conservative or business attire, especially in government settings where dress codes may apply, is generally accepted by society as more appropriate to their work environment, and thus more likely to be reflected in a popular film.

In terms of behaviour, a number of the reel archivists we observed followed certain well-established stereotypes. The government archivist in *Carlton-Browne of the F.O.* (1959) was portrayed as being ancient and old like the archives he keeps. Pearl, vampire archivist in the film *Blade* (1998) was sloppy and messy. Scott, the young records office clerk in *Erin Brockovich* (2000) was stereotypically nerdy, nervous, and easily persuadable. Colonel I. Jones, British Ministry archivist in *The Avengers* (1998) was the epitome of the ignored archivist: he was relegated to the basement after an unfortunate camouflage accident rendered him the Invisible Man. As the

58   Ibid., p. 25.

invisible archivist, Jones kept the secrets that could save the world, and when asked why he never told anybody , he responded with a simple statement: "nobody ever asked."[59]

In general, reel archivists followed the broad stereotype of being reclusive and intelligent. While every behavioural characteristic was represented within the sample film set, the three which stood out as a majority were knowledge-able, disgruntled, and isolated/solitary . There were notable dif ferences between men and women: men were mainly isolated, disgruntled, and knowl-edgeable, while women were mainly knowledgeable and territorial. It is a corollary to these results that reel archivists were portrayed as grouchy people who are isolated from the world, who do not like to share their holdings, but who are nonetheless knowledgeable about what is in their archives and how to access it. Strangely , while they are portrayed similar to librarians as being quiet, shy or introverted, bookish, ignored, non-social, or nervous, reel archivists are rarely portrayed as having an interest in history , despite their close involvement with records.

The predominant, observed stereotypical characteristics – being knowl-edgeable, isolated/solitary, and disgruntled – may even be deliberately inter - related by filmmakers. Being portrayed as isolated and alone all day in the archives provides a foundation for the reel archivist to have had the time to become very knowledgeable about his or her archives simply because there is no one else there to depend on, and nothing else to do. Isolation can also be the basis for the disgruntled outlook, as many people have a need for at least a minimal level of social contact.

However, reel archivists' knowledge of their archives also contributes to an impression of territoriality and possessiveness, resulting in the image of the archivist as guardian. There may actually be some element of truth in this portrayal of reel archivists, as revealed by the work of Barbara Craig, who found in her demographic profiling of Canadian archivists, that the guardian personality predominated.[60] The territoriality of reel archivists, related to archivists as guardians or keepers of knowledge and secrets, protecting the heritage of mankind, would thus be a stereotypical image that was supported to some extent by external evidence.

Interestingly, Craig also noted that Canadian archivists were actually more extroverted than expected, calling into question the observed stereotypical image of an archivist as a reclusive, shy professional. This is also borne out by the portrayals of some of the reel archivists, particularly women, as feisty

---

59 *The Avengers* (1998).
60 Barbara L. Craig, "A Look at a Bigger Picture: The Demographic Profile of Archivists in Canada based on a National Survey ," *Archivaria* 49 (Spring 2000), pp. 20–52; Barbara L. Craig, "Canadian Archivists: What Types of People Are They?" *Archivaria* 50 (Fall 2000), pp. 79–92.

creatures exerting territorial control over their archives. For example, Doris, provincial archivist of Newfoundland and Labrador in *Secret Nation* (1992), argued and fought with government agents who had entered the archives after hours to seize controversial files. She was trying to protect humankind's right to records, whether they were controversial or not. Dolores Rodriguez, newspaper archivist and "keeper of the archives" [61] in *Just Cause* (1995), was described in the film as having had three husbands, a vivacious woman who was almost aggressive in her behaviour, flirting with the protagonist of the film, played by Sean Connery. Bertha Anderson, librarian/archivist in *Citizen Kane* (1941), was described as "the world's meanest archivist, a woman with … an intimidating stare on her face, a real dragon lady at the gates of knowledge."[62] Portrayed as a very masculine female, with a severe suit, and short, slicked-back hair, she was a no-nonsense type of woman, who worked in a large, barren, and forbidding space with only a security guard for company. Bertha was severely territorial about her archives, telling the reporter there to examine a diary, that under no circumstances should direct quotations from the diary be used. She informs the security guard – stationed next to the reporter for the duration of his visit – of the page numbers the reporter is limited in viewing. She not only protects the diary itself, but access to it as well. This is probably one of the more extreme depictions of guarding the knowledge a record has to offer.

Reel archivists were most often portrayed as providing reference service, a professional rather than technical function. The common depiction of this function is most likely related to the need for the protagonist to succeed in getting what he/she needs from the archives. By speaking to the reel archivist or having the reel archivist find this information for them, the protagonist of the film was successful and thus the plot advanced. Other tasks, such as outreach, are not as integral to the progression of the film or to the success of the protagonist, so were not demonstrated frequently. The stereotypes of females performing technical tasks and men performing administrative tasks were not proven within the films: both genders performed a higher percentage of administrative tasks, although this may have been a reflection of the small sample size of female archivists.

Outside of the three categories of elements, this study also revealed other interesting aspects of the portrayal of reel archivists. The most important of these was that the success of a protagonist in dealing with a reel archivist is often a key element not only to maintaining the stereotypical archivist image, but also at the same time, providing the audience with a more positive interpretation of archivists in general. All of the films viewed shared a common

---

61   *Just Cause* (1995).
62   O'Brien and Raish, p. 68.

element: someone was searching for something – be it an artefact, person, or information – and they used the archives to find their answer . While the protagonist was not always successful in their own archival explorations (e.g., *Citizen Kane* [1941] and *Star Wars II: Attack of the Clones* [2002]), in the end, they usually found the information through the assistance, direct or indirect, of the reel archivist.

In that search, reel archivists are the gatekeepers of knowledge, opening the doors of the archives "when a quester comes looking." [63] They often provide the means for the protagonist to be able to continue his/her journey by providing them with essential information in much the same way that *real* archivists assist their clients every day . Because the majority of the reel archivists are able to provide this key information to the protagonist at the crucial moment, their task becomes fundamental to the progression of the film. This positive, yet hidden element of the portrayal of reel archivists makes them a catalyst for the film's plot development. Unfortunately, the critical role of the archivist to the development of the story is not always recognized, especially when the reel archivist was a cameo character . Reel archivists usually appear before a pivotal scene or turning point in the film, yet as the action progresses to the climax, the viewer promptly forgets that it was the reel archivist whose actions provided the catalyst. For instance, in the film *Star Wars II: Attack of the Clones* (2002), ObiWan Kenobi searched the Jedi Archives' database for a planet, and discovered it did not exist within the archives. Jocasta Nu, archivist of the Jedi Archives, tells him sternly "if an item does not appear in our records it does not exist!" [64] Obi Wan, clearly not one to follow the advice of an archivist, went out in search of the planet nonetheless and found the clone army, which was pivotal in the establishment of a new government regime in the galaxy far , far away. Jocasta Nu, with all of her extensive knowledge, was quickly forgotten.

The protagonists of the films viewed for this study were almost always successful in obtaining the information desired from the archives or the reel archivist, particularly in those films where the reel archivist was a main character or protagonist themselves (the exception being *Vampires* [1998] where the reel archivist, Father Adam Guiteau, aided the protagonist in hunting down a pack of vampires).

Those reel archivists who were main characters were portrayed in an overall positive light, rather than as a stereotype. They were the heroes of the film, solving mysteries, fighting vampires, and trying to help those in need. They were educated individuals with distinct personalities. Abigail Chase of *National Treasure* (2004) was a curious, intelligent archivist at the National

---

63   Keen, p. 46.
64   *Star Wars II: Attack of the Clones* (2002).

Archives and Records Administration. She was the only reel archivist examined whose level of education was explicit (doctorate), who was the protagonist's love interest, and was the only female main character in the film. Unfortunately, even though she was positively portrayed, she was never formally identified as an archivist at any time during the film. To the audience, she is nothing more than a knowledgeable treasure hunter.[65]

Conclusion

The current study explored some stereotypical images of archivists to see if they were present in films. The results of this content analysis indicate an overall impression of the reel archivists within the films as both physically and behaviourally following the established stereotypes, while disproving the initial assumption of being represented interchangeably as librarians in the films.

What was somewhat unexpected in this study was that despite the fact that the majority of reel archivists followed stereotypical patterns, many portrayals exhibited positive traits or attributes that put archivists in a very good light with the audience. While it is encouraging on one level, it is disheartening to think that the public might not even realize that Abigail Chase in *National Treasure*, the one positive portrayal of an archivist, was even an archivist. How can the image of archivists change when the public remains oblivious and ignorant to these stereotypes? Archivists need to begin advocating for their profession on a higher level, using any means possible, so that the public may become aware of what it is we really do. If the public is not aware of the true roles and responsibilities of archivists, how can we ask for respect and recognition for our work? How can we advocate for funding to carry out that work or convince donors to entrust us with their records? The media has such a large influence on what people believe, and by educating Hollywood, and insisting on accurate interpretations wherever we can, the profession will increase its visibility with the public. This visibility or recognition will in turn aid in breaking the stereotypes that have been set upon archivists.

Future research, including an expansion of the current study to increase the sample film size, is clearly necessary in order to solidify the results we have discovered. As well, the study , or related studies, should be expanded to

---

65   In the sequel *National Treasure 2: Book of Secrets* (2007), we once again encounter Abigail Chase; she performs one "archival" function: she uses a computer to manipulate a digital image of a page torn from John Wilkes Booth's diary, all the while either wearing or holding a white glove. This humorous image aside, we learn that she is now working for the Library of Congress and is Director of Document Conservation. Her job change from the National Archives and Records Administration to the Library of Congress is never mentioned in the film.

include other forms of popular culture such as television programs, movies, and advertising; an exploration of the positive or negative portrayal of reel archivists; the amount of technology reel archivists are portrayed as utilizing; an examination of the archives represented in films; and a comparison of archival characters in books-to-film with their counterpart literary sources. Any of these studies could be taken outside the realm of the media through surveys of how archivists see themselves, how the public perceives archivists and their archives, followed by a comparison of the two.[66]

The current study benefits the archival profession by providing a solid base for archivists to begin examining their portrayal in the media. While this is only one part of a lar ger picture, the influence of the media means that its vision or perception is imparted to the public on a regular basis, and thus ultimately shapes how the archival profession is viewed, either positively or negatively. By examining how the public perceives them, and how they are being portrayed, archivists can gain a better understanding of themselves and their perceived place within society , identify areas of longer -term concern, and thus work toward strengthening that position.

---

66   Another interest of further study could be the future "hybridization" of information professions within films. An example of hybridization can be seen in the film *The Time Machine* (2002), where Vox, a human-looking hologram in the New York Public Library of the future, introduces himself as "the compendium of all human knowledge." He is a photonic memory core, connected to every database on the planet and able to survive eighty thousand years into the future.

Appendix 1. Filmography

8mm. Cage, Nicolas. DVD. Directed by Joel Schumacher . Columbia Pictures, 1999. Tom Welles (Nicolas Cage), a surveillance expert, is hired to track down the identity of a girl whose murder was recorded in a snuf f film. During his investigation Welles visits the US Resources Center , where he meets Archives Director (Luis Oropeza), and discovers the identity of the girl on the film by looking through thousands of cards of missing people.

Agnes of God. Fonda, Jane, Anne Bancroft, and Meg Tilly. DVD. Directed by Norman Jewison. Columbia Pictures, 1986. Martha Livingston (Jane Fonda) is a court-appointed psychiatrist sent to investigate the murder of a baby at a convent. During her investigation, she comes across a Sister who helps her find records from the convent' s records room, and she visits the Archives nationales du Québec, where she and the "Librarian" (V ictor Désy) look through the storage area for a map of the nunnery grounds.

Bartleby. Paymer, David, and Crispin Glover . DVD. Directed by Jonathan Parker. Outrider Pictures, 2001. Manager (David Paymer) of the Public Records Of fice of a California community , hires new employee Bartleby (Crispin Glover). The department is located in a small room within an impos-ing building, at the top of a winding hill off the side of the highway.

Blade. Snipes, Wesley, and Stephen Dorf f. DVD. Directed by Stephen Norrington. New Line Cinema, 1998. Blade (W esley Snipes) is a human-vampire hybrid who must save humankind from the evil vampire race. He visits the vampire archives in search of an ancient manuscript, which details instructions on creating a machine that transforms humans into vampires.

Carlton-Browne of the F.O. Thomas, Terry, Peter Sellers, and Luciana Paoluzzi. DVD. Directed by Roy Boulting and Jef frey Dell. Charter Film Productions, 1959. Cadogan de Vere Carlton-Brown (Terry Thomas), a diplo-mat at the British Foreign Of fice, is sent to the remote island of Gaillardia to prevent other nations from reaping the benefits of the island' s rich mineral deposits. The film begins with the need to gather more information about the unknown island, and the archivist (Robert S. Young) is called to search the archives for this information. The alphabetically arranged (by country) archives resembles a mausoleum, complete with dust and rats.

Citizen Kane. Cotton, Joseph, and others. DVD. Directed by Orson   Welles. RKO Radio Pictures, 1941. Jerry Thompson (William Alland), a reporter , is investigating the final word "Rosebud," of newspaper magnate Charles Foster Kane (Orson Welles). During his investigation Thompson visits the Thatcher

Memorial Library where he is greeted by cool and strict Bertha   Anderson (Georgia Backus), and reads the diary of William Thatcher.

Erin Brockovich. Roberts, Julia, Albert Finney, and Aaron Eckhart. DVD. Directed by Steven Soderber gh. Columbia Pictures and Universal Pictures, 2000. Erin Brockovich (Julia Roberts), working as a file clerk in a law of fice, investigates a case concerning the industrial poisoning of a city' s water supply. Brockovich visits the Hinkley County   Water Board Records Of fice, where she persuades Scott, the young records clerk, to let her pick through the water board's records located in a messy and disor ganized back storage room, where she searches and copies the documents she needs to win her case.

In the Name of the Father . Day-Lewis, Daniel, Pete Postlethwaite, and Emma Thompson. DVD. Directed by Jim Sheridan. Universal Pictures, 1993. Gareth Peirce (Emma Thompson) is a lawyer who works to clear the name of Gerry Conlon (Daniel Day-Lewis), who was wrongly convicted of taking part in an IRA bombing in Guilford, England in 1974. During her search for informa- tion, Peirce visits the police archives, and is refused access to certain public documents by archivist Jenkins (Alan Barry). On a second visit, Jenkins is of f duty and another archivist (Liam O'Callaghan) who doesn' t know Peirce isn' t supposed to see the documents, allows her access.

Just Cause . Connery, Sean, and Laurence Fishburne. DVD. Directed by Arne Glimcher. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1995. Paul Armstrong (Sean Connery) is a retired legal expert who gets involved in the case of a murdered girl. During his research on the case,   Armstrong visits a newspaper , where he meets Delores Rodriguez (Liz Torres), the newspaper's archivist.

National Treasure. Cage, Nicolas, and Diane Kruger . DVD. Directed by Jon Turteltaub. Walt Disney Pictures, 2004. Benjamin Franklin Gates is a treasure hunter searching for the Founding Fathers' hidden treasure. Clues lead him to the conclusion that he must steal the   *Declaration of Independence* , where Abigail Chase (Diane Kruger), National Archives and Records Administration employee, gets caught up in the affair, and helps Gates discover the treasure.

Possession. Paltrow, Gwyneth, and others. DVD. Directed by Neil LaBute. USA Films and Warner Bros. Pictures, 2002. Roland Mitchell (Aaron Eckhart) is an American academic working as an archivist at British Museum, where he unravels the mystery surrounding a famous Victorian poet.

Ridicule. Ardant, Fanny, and others. DVD. Directed by Patrice Leconte. Miramax Zoë, 1996. Gregoire Ponceludon de Malavoy (Charles Berling), a baron of eighteenth-century France, pleads to the king for more money to

save his suffering village from ruin. He must impress the court with his verbal banter, and makes a visit to "Le Généalogiste" (Philippe Du Janerand) where his noble descent is proven.

Secret Nation. Jones, Cathy, and others. VHS. Directed by Michael Jones. Black Spot, Inc, 1992. Frieda (Cathy Jones), a graduate student, researches the Newfoundland referendum into the Confederation of Canada. She makes many visits to the provincial archives, where she meets the Provincial Archivist, Doris (Mary Lewis).

Star Wars II: Attack of the Clones . McGregor, Ewan, and others. DVD. Directed by Geor ge Lucas. Lucasfilm, 2002. Jedi knight Obi-W an Kenobi (Ewan McGregor) is searching for the planet of Kamino. Star charts in the automated database at the Jedi Archives do not find the planet. Jocasta Nu (Alethea McGrath), Jedi Archivist, provides assistance to Obi-W an. She is adamant that "if an item does not appear in our records, it does not exist!" The archives resemble a library, with glowing "records" lined up on the shelves.

The Avengers. Ralph Fiennes, Uma Thurman, and Sean Connery . DVD. Directed by Jeremiah S. Chechik. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1998. John Steed (Ralph Fiennes) is a secret agent working to thwart Sir August de Wynter (Sean Connery), the evil menace who is trying to control the world' s weather. Steed pays a visit to the Ministry Archives, where he encounters Colonel I. (Invisible) Jones, Ministry Archivist (Patrick Macnee). The archives is located in the basement of the Ministry , and Jones comments upon being lucky if the tea trolley passes by . Jones helps Steed find more information about Wynter and the location of his infernal weather machine by looking through dusty , confidential files.

The Mask of Dimitrios . Greenstreet, Sydney , and others. VHS. Directed by Jean Negulesco. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1944. Cornelius Leyden (Peter Lorre), a mystery writer travelling through Istanbul, hears about a criminal whose body was found washed up on the beach. Leyden decides to research the criminal's life for his next book. His research takes him to the Athens Bureau of Records, where he meets the archivist (unknown actor , possibly uncredit-ed). The archivist is very curious about Leyden' s research and constantly discusses organization and patience.

The Time Machine. Pearce, Guy, and others. DVD. Directed by Simon Wells. DreamWorks Pictures and Warner Bros. Pictures, 2002. Alexander Hartdegen (Guy Pearce) invents a time machine and travels into the future. He first trav-els to the twenty-first century , where he encounters the New York Public Library's "Fifth Avenue Public Information Unit" named Vox (Orlando

Jones). Hartdegen then travels eight hundred thousand years into the future and finds out the human race has split into two races, the Morlocks and the Eloi. He again encounters   Vox who has been left running for thousands of years. Vox helps Hartdegen gain more information about the nature of the two races.

Treasure. Weisbarth, John, Freddie Rible, and Frank Jimison.   VHS. Directed by Robert Cording. Questar Pictures, 1990.   Three boys happen upon an old map, which sends them on a quest to seek out a legendary treasure rumoured to have been buried in the coastal clif f of Emerald Cove. During the county' s fair, they visit a restored docked boat, where they talk to the Maritime Museum's archivist (Shirley Rible).   They look at a map in the archives, giving them a clue to where the treasure is buried.

Vampires. Woods, James, and Daniel Baldwin. DVD. Directed by John Carpenter. Columbia Pictures, 1998. Vampire killer Jack Crow (James Woods) searches for the king vampire   Valek (Thomas Ian Grif fith). Father Adam Guiteau (Tim Guinee), a priest and archivist, is recruited to join Crow' s team in the hunt for Valek.

Appendix 2. Checklist Used for Film Assessment

Film Analysis

Film Title: _____

Film Genre:
- ☐ Drama
- ☐ Comedy
- ☐ Action/Adventure
- ☐ Other (Specify: _____)

Creative Control:

Director: _____

Production Company: _____

Actors:_____

Year Released:_____

Character Analysis

Archivist Character:_____

Character Role:
- ☐ Main
- ☐ Minor
- ☐ Cameo

Type of Archive:
- ☐ Academic
- ☐ Religious
- ☐ Private
- ☐ Business
- ☐ Government

Tasks Performed: (check all that apply)
Technical:
- ☐ Retrieval
- ☐ Accessions
Administrative:
- ☐ Reference
- ☐ Research
- ☐ Acquisition
- ☐ Outreach

Physical Characteristics:
    Gender:
☐   Male
☐   Female
    Age:
☐   Young (under 34)
☐   Middle Age (35 to 49)
☐   Mature (over 50)
    Glasses:
☐   Yes
☐   No
    Hairstyle:
☐   Short
☐   Long
☐   Up
☐   Bald
    Dress:
☐   Conservative
☐   Sloppy
☐   Ordinary
☐   Traditional
☐   Eccentric

Behavioural Characteristics: (check all that apply)
☐   Appreciates History
☐   Disgruntled
☐   Shy/Introverted
☐   Isolated/Solitary
☐   Knowledgeable
☐   Impartial
☐   Passive/Mild-mannered
☐   Quiet
☐   Territorial
☐   Bookworm
☐   Curious
☐   Ignored
☐   Non-social behaviour
☐   Nervousness

Does the protagonist of the film find what he/she is looking for because of the information provided by the archivist?
- ☐   Yes
- ☐   No
- ☐   N/A

Is the film based upon a previous work of literature?
- ☐   Yes
- ☐   No

Additional Comments