

**INCLUSIKH: INCLUSIVELY REPRESENTING SIKHS AND SIKHISM IN
NORTHERN CALIFORNIA AND THE CENTRAL VALLEY**

A Project Report

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IncluSikh: Inclusively Representing Sikhs and Sikhism in Northern California and the
Central Valley

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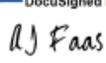
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Abstract

The objective of my project was to create a virtual museum exhibit that inclusively represents Sikhs and Sikhism. My virtual museum exhibit, entitled *IncluSikh*, serves as a platform that is accessible to the public and educates individuals on Sikh religion, people, and culture. Through my assessments of the Sikh religion and culture, historical Sikh migration, and Sikh oral histories and experiences, I created an intervention that will influence public opinion, cultural acceptance, and conversations across difference without bringing up historical instances of humiliation. Throughout this project, I worked in partnership with The Sikh Coalition, a community-based organization whose focus is civil and human rights for all, to create a virtual museum exhibit that inclusively represents Sikh religion, culture, and people in Northern California and the Central Valley. The data collected through my interviews and photographed materials included in the virtual museum exhibit provide significant progress towards the public's understanding of Sikh religion and culture and aid in the inclusive representation of Sikhism.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The portrayal of South Asian and Middle Eastern identities in the press and popular media has long conflated Sikh (pronounced as both *sick* with an aspirated *k* or as *seek*), Arab, and Muslim identities, with especial attention to head coverings. Mainstream and social media representations after September 11, 2001 abetted a rise in xenophobia and Islamophobia in America, facilitating increased surveillance of the Muslim community (Ali 2016), a shift in discrimination from African Americans to Middle Easterners (Jacobs-Huey 2006), and marginalization (Kazi 2014). Furthermore, many Sikhs in the US and elsewhere have been subjected to discrimination, verbal harassment, and violent attacks largely as a result of being mistaken for Muslims or Arabs. Sikhs immigrated to California's Central Valley in the late 19th and early 20th century; they were crucial to the development of the agricultural industry in California (The Sikh Coalition 2018; Gonzales 1986). Although Sikhs are an important aspect of the economy in the United States, they continue to face public misunderstanding due to misinformation and lack of public knowledge.

Twenty years ago, the events of September 11, 2001 precipitated a rise in discrimination against anyone assumed to be Muslim. Mass media coverage following September 11 presented Muslims in the stereotypical form of wearing turbans and having long beards. Since then, the Sikh community in particular has faced an increased amount of racialization. In fact, the first victim of a revenge killing post-9/11 was Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh man, who was shot to death at his gas station in Mesa, Arizona. The suspect claimed that it was a display of retaliation against Osama bin Laden's actions towards "towel heads" (Basu 2016). Another paradigm shifting event was the Oak Creek massacre of 2012 in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. A white supremacist went on a shooting rampage at a Sikh *gurdwara* murdering one woman and five

men; all of the men were wearing turbans (Basu 2016). Since then, there has been an increased effort in tracking and documenting hate crimes against Sikhs in the United States. In 2015, the FBI announced they would begin tracking hate crimes against Sikhs. The Sikh Coalition (2018), a New York based organization that was birthed from the aftereffects of September 11, reported an average of one hate crime per week against Sikhs in the United States. In August of 2019, The Sikh Coalition reported on Parmjit Singh, a 64-year-old Sikh man stabbed to death while walking in a park in Tracy, California, as the seventh attack since 2011 on an elderly Sikh man in California's Central Valley (Kuruvilla 2019). In April and May of 2021 in San Jose, two Sikh men who were both VTA (Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority) employees lost their lives in two separate incidents – one was shot in the back with an arrow on April 27, 2021, while the other was a victim of mass shooting at the VTA rail yard on May 26, 2021 (Narayan 2021).

To address the ongoing prejudice against Sikhs, I followed an anthropological approach by creating a virtual museum exhibit about religious and cultural Sikh identities. The exhibit will not only widely reach the public, but also serve as a culturally based informative opportunity for the public to gain knowledge on the topic of Sikhism through visuals. By drawing from examples such as Vienna's Jewish Museum and the American Anthropological Association's Race Project, in addition to my assessments of the principles of Sikh religion and culture, historical Sikh migration, and Sikh oral histories, I created an intervention that will influence public opinion, cultural acceptance, and conversations across difference without bringing up historical instances of humiliation. The data collected through my interviews and photographed materials added in the virtual museum exhibit provide significant progress towards the public's understanding of Sikh religion and culture and aid in the inclusive representation of Sikhism.

Sikhism: The Fundamentals

Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak in the fifteenth century in Punjab, India with the emphasis of *Ek Onkar* or *Ek Om-Kar* meaning “One God” (Singh 2011). The emphasis on “One God” is to eliminate racial bias. There were nine successors of Guru Nanak, all of whom carried his mission forward. Though Sikh practices and identifiers vary by their devotees, Sikhism consists of religious fundamentals and a religious code of conduct. The three fundamentals of Sikhism include *Naam Japo*: the daily remembrance of God in the form of meditation, *Kirt Karo*: the denouncement of a life of diversion and pursuance of a hardworking life, and *Wand ke Chhako*: the sharing of your earnings with others whenever it is possible (Singh 2011). Sikh identifiers may include the Five K’s: *Kes* (uncut hair), *Kangha* (a wooden comb symbolizing cleanliness), *Kara* (a metal bracelet worn on the dominant wrist symbolizing integrity), *Kachera* (a loose, cotton undergarment symbolizing self-discipline), and *Kirpan* (a dagger worn symbolically to fight against injustice and oppression). To further create a distinct identity, Sikh men and women traditionally adopt the surname *Singh*, meaning lion or king, for men and *Kaur*, meaning princess, for women (Singh 2011). The adoption of these surnames not only creates a sense of equality among Sikhs but also represents the condemnation of a caste system.

Kes is often identified by the *dastaar*, or turban, which became a requirement for all Sikh men in the 17th century and optional for Sikh women (Micalizio 2013). Currently, however, it is worn by individual choice. *Dastaars* are considered sacred by Sikhs and a symbol of their devotion to Sikhism. They are not to be taken off in public, only in privacy in order to uphold the *dastaar*’s sanctity and the individual’s devotion to Sikhism (The Sikh Coalition 2021).

In addition, the *gurdwara* (house of worship) is a place of gathering for Sikhs. It is a place of worship that also functions as an educational and service organization to the public. The

main *gurdwara* known as *Sri Harmandir Sahib* or the Golden Temple, is located in Amritsar, Punjab and was built in the 16th century. The *gurdwara* is recognized for offering *langar*, a communal meal, where anyone is welcomed to eat (The Pluralism Project 2020). The *gurdwara* also houses the *Guru Granth Sahib*, which is the sacred scripture of Sikhism. This script contains several *shabads* (hymns) known as *gurbani*, hymns of the Gurus, or *bhagatbani*, hymns of the saints (The Pluralism Project 2020). Sikhs often sing or listen to these *shabads* as there are recorded versions available in addition to the textual versions.

The Sikh Diaspora in California

Diasporic cultures represent cultures whose participants have dispersed outside of their homeland yet continue to uphold their cultural practices (Kaur 2011). Despite being thousands of miles away from their home state of Punjab, India, Sikhs maintain strong ties with their country of origin through cultural practices such as religion, language, and traditional practices – for example, praying at the Sikh place of worship known as the *gurdwara* or partaking in a communal meal known as *langar*, therefore satisfying the classification of a diasporic culture (Kaur 2011).

Sikh migration to California began in the late nineteenth century and greatly increased during the first decade of the twentieth century (Gonzales 1986). With the discovery of similar weather and geographical conditions to that of Punjab along with similar agricultural productions (Gonzales 1986), most of the immigrants were illiterate farmers and agricultural laborers who took up agricultural work in the Central and Imperial valleys of California where they were viewed as the newest Asian threat (Singh 2018). Laws were soon passed in which Indians were prohibited from owning and leasing farmland in California and deemed Indians ineligible for citizenship. After the official halt on Indian immigration in 1923, the Punjabis who remained in

California faced opportunistic hardships until the Immigration Act of 1946 which naturalized Indians as citizens (Singh 2018).

Since the start of Sikh migration to California, Sikhs have continued to play an important role in California's agricultural industry. Their prominent role in Northern California and the Central Valley along with the robust attachment to their religious and cultural beliefs led to the site of the first American *gurdwara* in Stockton, California founded by Baba Jawala Singh and Baba Wasakha Singh (The Sikh Coalition 2020).

A History of Marginalization

The racialization of Sikhs was present since their migration to the United States began. By 1910, there were between five and ten thousand South Asians in the United States, and though they were made up of a majority of Sikhs with a minority of Hindus and Muslims, they were all identified as Hindus or "Hindoos," (Joshi 2006) implying the racialization of Sikhs. In 1910 and 1913, two Supreme Court decisions initially ruled that South Asians were Caucasian and could therefore become naturalized citizens. This ruling, however, was overturned in 1923, when courts decided Indian Americans were not considered Caucasian and were no longer able to become citizens (Joshi 2006). The court rulings exemplify the overall dismissal of the Sikh identity and rather, fall back on Hinduism as being the acceptable alternative.

The term *Caucasian* refers to individuals from the Caucasus region which spans from Europe to Asia. However, the use of *Caucasian* to mean white was popularized in the late 18th century by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, a German anatomist who labeled the people living in the Caucasus Mountains as such when he visited the area between the Caspian and Black seas (Dewan 2013; Moses 2017). It is important to note that Blumenbach also racially labeled four other groups: Africans (excluding light-skinned North Africans) as Ethiopians or *black*, Asians

that were not part of the Caucasus region as Mongolian or *yellow*, Aboriginal Australians and Pacific Islanders as Malayan or *brown*, and Native Americans as *red* (Moses 2017).

Blumenbach's racial classification system was implemented in the United States to uphold racial discrimination with theories stating that differences in behavior were linked to skin color, and that there were scientific ways such as craniometry to measure race (Moses 2017). This inaccurate use and application of science resulted in other scientists further developing an inaccurate system of racial classification that categorized five races from most primitive – black and brown races, to more advanced – the Asian races, to the most advanced – the white or Caucasian races (Mukhopadyay 2008, 13). Today, the use of Caucasian as a racial classification is still prevalent. One such reason is because the United States legal system made use of Blumenbach's taxonomic system. However, the definition had to be reinvented to mean *white* when naturalization laws passed as immigrants wanted to become U.S. citizens (Moses 2017) such as in the case of *United States v. Bhagat Singh* which I discuss further below.

Identity Politics

With a history of marginalization comes the presence of identity politics. In the second half of the twentieth century, there was a rise in extensive political movements such as Black Civil Rights in the U.S., LGBTQ freedom, and the American Indian movements (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2020). These political movements emerged due to injustices done to particular social groups, and the social movements were firmly supported by and cultivated questions about the nature, foundation, and futures of the identities being upheld (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2020). Identity politics as a means of unification is deeply associated with the idea that some social groups are oppressed. Sonia Kruks (2001, 85) explains:

What makes identity politics a significant departure from earlier, pre-identarian forms of the politics of recognition is its demand for recognition on the basis of

the very grounds on which recognition has previously been denied: it is *qua* women, *qua* blacks, *qua* lesbians that groups demand recognition. The demand is not for inclusion within the fold of “universal humankind” on the basis of shared human attributes; nor is it for respect “in spite of” one’s differences. Rather, what is demanded is the respect for oneself *as* different.

A critical component of identity politics is the personal experience of the individual within the very social structure that produces bias. Concern about this component of identity politics develops around the lucidity of experience and the unambiguousness of how it is understood. Therefore, an individual’s experience is not accessible prior to analysis (Scott 1991); but it requires a theoretical framework to give it meaning (Heyes 2020).

Project Goals

I developed a virtual museum exhibit to create an intervention that will influence public opinion, cultural acceptance, and conversations across difference without bringing up historical instances of humiliation. The data and photographed materials included in the virtual museum exhibit provide significant progress towards the public’s understanding of Sikh religion and culture and aid in the inclusive representation of Sikhism in Northern California and the Central Valley. The virtual exhibit was created on Squarespace through collaborations with San Jose State University’s Anthropology Department, The Sikh Coalition, and Sikh interview participants. As both mediator and curator, I was responsible for ensuring suitable communication between myself and each stakeholder in order to gain enough guidance, material, and information to create the virtual exhibit. Elements showcased in the virtual exhibit include materialistic items which are cultural identifiers that represent the Sikh identities of the individuals who were interviewed. They are featured to demonstrate devotion, faith, selfless service, justice, honesty, and equality. The photographed items are separated into five different sections which were chosen based on themes that emerged during my participant interviews.

Each section includes an accommodating description of the provided photographs, and the photographs of the items are accompanied by short captions.

The main goal of this project has been to get firsthand involvement and contributions from the local Sikh community to create a publicly accessible platform which shares cultural and religious knowledge on Sikhs and Sikhism. More importantly, my goal is to create an exhibit that facilitates further dialogue on public opinion, cultural acceptance, and difference by avoiding incidents of exclusion. Additionally, in the future, I plan to have the virtual exhibit circulate outside of Northern California and Central Valley to be used as an informative platform. The challenge in doing so was creating an exhibit that embodied the intricacy of Sikhism's past and present without, however, essentializing Sikh culture (Bunzl 2003). A subsequent goal is the maintenance of both the personal and professional relationships created between me, The Sikh Coalition, San Jose State's Anthropology Department, and members of the Sikh community in Northern California and the Central Valley.

Significance

The significance of this project comes as a result of the present-day misconception of Sikhs and Sikhism. Sikhs are renowned for their aid within their communities. They are historically known to fight for justice, yet they continue to be targets of racial injustice. This project is an endeavor to assist the public in understanding Sikh religion and culture. The Sikh Coalition and additional stakeholders, including San Jose State University and my interview participants, will be able to publicize the *IncluSikh* website through personal websites and social media. The Sikh Coalition, who is well known for working towards the integration of Sikh education within public schools in the United States, will be able to use the *IncluSikh* website as a resource to educate the public on Sikhs and Sikhism. Additionally, the impacts of *IncluSikh* on

society will benefit Sikhs as it is a step towards the understanding and accurate representation of Sikh religion, culture, and people. Furthermore, *IncluSikh*'s impact on Anthropology demonstrates that virtual methodologies are effective in social activism. *IncluSikh* advances anthropological knowledge by presenting and publicizing images and information on Sikhs and Sikhism. Rather than further publicizing occurrences of humiliation, however, it is crucial that this project accurately represents Sikh religion and culture in an inclusive manner. A virtual museum exhibit that delineates the purpose of Sikh cultural markers serves to both educate the public and counter negative stereotypes. This chapter established the premise of the research project. The next chapter examines the promise of the project in relation to anthropological theory.

Chapter 2: A Migratory Past to the Present

It is important to understand and acknowledge the historic instances and implications of marginalization and racialization of Sikhs and Sikhism in order to understand the necessity of a visual intervention. Additionally, it is also critical to understand the necessity of the absence of said instances and implications within the intervention. Individuals may interpret representations of past hardships as an indication of what should remain unrepeated, while others may interpret those same visuals as a repetition of the hardships (Bunzl 2003, 443). Therefore, a critical understanding of history and historical context is vital when working with a community that has faced recurring incursions.

This critical understanding is also essential when considering how Western institutions like museums, though they serve as sites for understanding of varieties of difference (Parezo 2015), can propagate systems of dominance, colonialism, and delegitimization. Museums play a critical role in constructing narratives of national identity through their displays. Fiona McLean (2005) explains that museums authoritatively validate and present identities through heritage. McLean (2005, 1) explains that museums also serve to “voice or silence difference and can reflect and influence contemporary perceptions of identities within the national frame.”

Other research in museum spaces has also identified shifting attitudes towards representation. Matti Bunzl (2003) analyzes the exhibits at Vienna’s Jewish Museum which were originally meant to commemorate Austria’s Jewish past and present (Bunzl 2003, 435). One such exhibit is a sculpture entitled “The Street-Washing Jew”, a sculpture made by Alfred Hrdlicka, that was created for the 50th anniversary of *Anschluss*, the annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany resulting in Jews facing public humiliation and attacks (Gutman 1990). The sculpture depicts a male covered in barbed wire who has seemingly been forced to kneel and scrub the

streets following *Anschluss* (Spivak 2014). As Bunzl (2003, 442-443) explains, the sculpture is not a portrayal of commemoration, but rather an instance of continued marginalization:

The design was made public in early 1988, and it featured in its four-part structure the figure of a “Street-Washing Jew,” commemorating the humiliations Vienna’s Jews had to endure in the weeks following Austria’s annexation by Nazi Germany. The Jewish response to this design was overwhelmingly negative. Not only was its overt depiction of Jewish degradation felt to be insensitive to survivors and their descendants...it was feared that the statue might occasion new taunts and insults. These Jewish concerns, however, went unheard. Zilk [Vienna’s mayor] had excluded the Jewish community from the decision-making process, and when Hrdlicka’s monument was unveiled in the fall of 1988, Austria’s Jews were faced with a permanent monument to their subordination.

The marginalization of Vienna’s Jewish Museum as shown by the sculpture of “The Street-Washing Jew” imposed the invisibility of the Austrian Jewish community causing the museum to close. In light of the museum’s resurrection, however, viewers still believed some of the “anti-exhibits” (Bunzl 2003) caused Austria’s Jewish community to feel withdrawn from Austrian nationalism. Therefore, utilizing a museum exhibit as a virtual space that promotes understanding without the permeation of historic exclusion will effectively work towards the cultural relativism of Sikhs and Sikhism.

It is important to discuss the historic instances of Sikh migration and Sikh attempts to assimilate to be able to create a more inclusive representation of Sikhs and Sikhism through virtual methods in the present day. The racialization against Sikhs in America began as Sikh immigration to the United States rose in the late 1800s with the majority of immigrants being Sikh men (Leonard 1992). This racialization led to Sikh men seeking to assimilate through an indirect path, coined circuitous assimilation, rather than a direct one by marrying Mexican American women (Dadhabay 1954). Additionally, Sikhs believed naturalization laws would allow them to become American citizens as exemplified by the fateful court case of *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* in which Thind was denied citizenship upon the argument of him

not qualifying as Caucasian (United States v. Thind 1923). Historic occurrences of the racialization of Sikhs during their attempts to assimilate as well as ongoing discrimination against Sikhs set the foundation for the need for Sikh inclusion. My project focuses on a virtual method of inclusion: a virtual museum exhibit. Virtual methods serve as an ideal alternative to anthropological field sites. The use of hashtags, such as during the Farmers Protest which started in 2020, lets advocates widely publicize information regarding social activism, but also enables followers to retrieve and search for information easily (Bonilla and Rosa 2015). Similarly, museums that are created through collaborative methods (Wali 2014) can successfully eliminate xenophobia and promote awareness for historically marginalized groups. Thus, *IncluSikh's* virtual museum exhibit was created through collaborative methods between myself and my Sikh participants.

Sikh Immigration on the Rise

Initially, periodic Indian travel to the United States in the 1880s was common as many of those Indians' main occupation was trade. Not long after, a rising number of Indians began to migrate to the United States. Between 1899 and 1914, most of the Indians that migrated to the west coast of the United States were Sikh peasants from Punjab, India (Leonard 1992). Due to the unfair treatment by British colonials in India, Sikhs settled mainly in the west coast of North America where they worked in lumber mills, on the railroad, and more primarily on farms (Leonard 1992). Sikh sons were sent abroad to earn money for their families which they would then send home to support their patrilineage (LaBrack and Leonard 1984). With California's economic shift towards agriculture, came job opportunities in agriculture, lumber mills, and railroads for Sikh men.

As the rise in South Asian immigration to the United States rose, so did American concern. In May of 1907, journalist Fred Lockley published an article titled “The Hindu Invasion: A New Immigration Problem” in *Pacific Monthly*. Lockley (1907, 584) begins his article by comparing Indian immigrants to sheep who have fully grazed a field and now look to the lush pastures in the next field longing for an opportunity to make their way through the fence and onto the other side, “India, densely populated, plague-smitten, famine-stricken, is that overcrowded and over-pastured field; British Columbia and the United States are the green fields toward which the ever-hungry hordes of India are eagerly looking. They found the gap and are pouring in.” This interpretation of Indian immigration as parasitic allowed for the continued dispersion of adverse views against Indians. South Asians continued to be viewed as uneducated and regressive. They were reputed to be the least desirable of the Asian races with the lowest assimilative qualities of any race in the west (Leonard 1992). The following statement was published in the 1920 report of the California State Board of Control (101-102):

The Hindu, in the opinion of the Commissioner of the State Bureau of Labor Statistics, is the most undesirable immigrant in the state. His lack of personal cleanliness, his low morals and his blind state of adherence to theories and teachings, so entirely repugnant to American principles, make him unfit for association with American people.

It is noteworthy that, in each published document, Indians altogether are referred to as “Hindus.” Though, it is apparent when reading further, the authors were aware of the distinction between Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims. Their lack of acknowledging this distinction not only contributes to stereotypes, but also to the lack of cultural acceptance and understanding of Sikhism today.

Circuitous Assimilation

It was clear that Americans were not thrilled with the rising number of Sikh immigrants in the early 1920s. Regardless, the assimilation of Sikhs into their newfound settlements was also

on the rise. Because Sikh men were originally sent to support their patrilineage in hopes of either returning to India or later shifting their families to their location, they immigrated alone even if they were married (LaBrack and Leonard 1984). After immigration policies became stricter, however, it was not possible to shift family members to America, nor was it possible to leave America and reenter. The likelihood of Sikh men acquiring Indian companions was systemically denied in the United States, though many did seek marriage and family life (Das and Gupta 1995). Studies show that 73 Sikh immigrants in California married before 1924, and most of the marriages were to Mexican American women (LaBrack 1982). Das and Gupta (1995) suggest that these exogamous marriages between Sikhs and Mexican Americans were attempts to produce a second generation which would serve to bridge the gap between old and new culture further allowing Sikhs to integrate within American society.

Yusuf Dadhabay (1954) introduces the idea of circuitous assimilation – rather than following a steady path to assimilate into the dominant American culture, Sikh men took an indirect, or circuitous, path by marrying Mexican American women. Dadhabay (1954) observes the similarities between Mexican and Indian immigrants in both their physical appearance and their social and economic position. This circuitous path through marriage allowed for the assimilation into American culture through Mexican subculture where acceptance was more easily attainable. Their eagerness to be accepted within the society led them to take a circuitous route (Dadhabay 1954) by joining the subculture of another minority group which possibly allowed them to be more easily accepted. This proposed circuitous route Sikhs chose to take did not strip them of their identity, but it did essentially cause them to suppress their distinctiveness.

At the start of Indian migration to the United States, there was a small number of Sikhs settling in California. This, along with their living pattern of individual isolation, kept them from

establishing their own ethnic communities (Dadhabay 1954). Sikhs settled in marginal areas where most residents were Mexican which expanded Sikh interactions. Additionally, the emphasis on agriculture by both Sikhs and Mexicans in the Central Valley led to further intercultural interactions. Dadhabay (1954) noted that broad cultural similarities including patriarchal family systems, children's roles, and female roles within the family allowed for successful relationships between Sikhs and Mexicans. Studies showed that in married Sikh and Mexican households, the wife was the center of social life (Dadhabay 1954). This led to the Sikh husband and any children leaning towards extended relationships with members of the Mexican subculture. Rather than a direct cultural assimilation into American society, Sikhs diverted into Mexican subculture which tied into Mexican American subculture (Dadhabay 1954). Dadhabay (1954) concludes that when individuals from a minor subculture, such as Sikhs, are prevented from forming their own subculture, they participate in the subculture of another minority group, such as Mexicans, which is more accessible. Though marriages between the subcultures are indicative of mutual decision and acceptance, it also led to Sikhs moving away from their ethnicity and culture as they assimilated to practices of Mexican subculture.

It can be argued that circuitous assimilation once again emerged post-9/11. With the increase of Islamophobia and xenophobia, Sikhs were targets of hate crimes and discrimination that emerged from the lack of knowledge surrounding Sikhism along with physical similarities between Sikh and Arab garments. Several establishments have been in the media for attempting to have Sikhs remove their religious garments. Chanbir Dhingra, a Sikh man who was traveling through Oakland International Airport, was asked to remove his turban when walking through the metal detector along with Gurmeet Singh who was traveling through Albany International Airport and Jasmeet Singh who was traveling through San Francisco International Airport (Kai-

Hwa Wang 2016) even though nothing was detected during their initial screenings (Deseret News 2001). Currently, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) website has the following answer to the question whether religious head coverings may be kept on:

Persons wearing head coverings, loose fitting or bulky garments may undergo additional security screening, which may include a pat-down. A pat-down will be conducted by a TSA officer of the same gender. If an alarm cannot be resolved through a pat-down, you may ask to remove the head covering in a private screening area (Transportation Security Administration 2021).

Jasmeet Singh who was forced to remove his turban when traveling through San Francisco International Airport in 2016 was given a private room where he was able to remove his turban. Once the screening was done privately, however, he was denied immediate access to a mirror and told to walk – without his turban on – to the nearest restroom (Kai-Hwa Wang 2016). This serves as an example of public humiliation because Sikhs who wear turbans are not able to take them off publicly as it signifies devotion to their faith. Though the TSA provides some religious accompaniments, the knowledge surrounding Sikhism and how to appropriately assist Sikhs is lacking.

Nevertheless, other organizations have recently begun to make inclusive accommodations in terms of religious expression. It was in 2016 that police officers in New York were given the right to wear turbans instead of traditional police caps and grow beards up to an inch (Lam 2016). Following closely in 2017, the United States Army allowed Sikhs permanent immunity to wear beards and turbans (Dickstein 2017). Just last year in 2020, Air Force members were given the ability to ask for a waiver to wear turbans and beards for religious reasons (Losey 2020).

Recent progress continues in allowing an inclusive expression and portrayal of Sikhism within associations, but there is still a lack of literature on the several Sikhs who abandoned religious identifiers like turbans or beards altogether to avoid discrimination. For example, a 30-

year-old computer engineer, Jagdeep Gill, stated to me during his interview when discussing his experiences growing up while Sikh, “We [Singh and a family member] cut our hair in 2008 and haven’t worn a turban since then. People still made racist remarks. I only have like two or three friends that still wear turbans. My family still does, but the younger generation had to face a lot of bullying, so a lot of us took them off. I think we felt more accepted” (Amrit Singh, personal communication December 20, 2020).

On the topic of post-9/11 effects, 23-year-old Jagdeep Gill, a business major at the University of California, Davis stated:

I remember after 9/11, my family hung an American flag outside the house. A bunch of our other Sikh neighbors did it too. I mean of course we felt for the victims, but my parents were freaked out about what could happen to us, too. We’re over here with beards and turbans just like the terrorists they kept showing on TV. With the flag outside, it kind of showed that, you know, ‘We’re American, we’re in this with the rest of the country, and we’re not dangerous’ (Jagdeep Gill, personal communication December 22, 2020).

Singh and Gill along with their families took actions they felt were necessary to feel, in their words, “accepted” and “American.” Like the Sikh immigrants who married Mexican women in order to be more easily accepted, Sikhs nowadays such as my interviewees also chose a path of circuitous assimilation to be accepted by America and Americans, though they had to repress their cultural and ethnic individuality in order to successfully assimilate. Sikhs pride themselves in their cultural values and practices but have historically been compelled to move away from their values and practices due to social circumstances as seen with Indian immigration and post-9/11 events. My virtual exhibit helps those who are less knowledgeable in Sikh identities and practices understand Sikh individuals and culture to promote an inclusive portrayal of Sikhs and Sikhism without undermining their individualism.

United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind

The case of *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* was a momentous case for the Sikh community and for possibility of future citizenship for Asian immigrants. Bhagat Singh Thind, a Sikh man originally from Punjab, came to the United States in 1913. He was granted naturalization after his first application for citizenship, but it was later retracted. He filed to petition for naturalization into the United States under the Naturalization Act of 1906. This act allowed naturalization to those who are “free white persons” and “of African nativity and African descent” (Naturalization Laws and Regulations 1906). After Thind’s petition was granted, the case made it to the Supreme Court in 1923. Though he was Sikh, Thind argued that he was a “high caste Hindu of full Indian blood.” He argued that Indians had been scientifically proven to be of Aryan or Caucasian descent through anthropological and archaeological studies. Thind argued that Indo-Aryan languages are indigenous to North India just as they are to Europe, making North Indians linguistically and racially of the same stock as European Aryans (*United States v. Thind* 1923). This then meant that he could be treated as a white man who is part of the Caucasian race. Ultimately, the court ruled against Thind. They argued that the words “white person” and “Caucasian” are identical but not of the same scientific origin, the term “Aryan” has to do with linguistic rather than physical characteristics, and the exclusion of non-whites was because of racial difference not superiority versus inferiority. The racial difference between Indians and whites was so great that the most would reject assimilation with Indians (*United States v. Thind* 1923). In conclusion, the Court emphasized that Congress excluded all natives of Asia from admission into this United States. This case illustrates how courts constructed whiteness in a way that best aligned with the existing xenophobia they wanted to continue to

instill. The aftermath of this case included revoking the right for future Indian Americans from gaining citizenship. This in turn caused many of the Indians to lose their jobs and property.

A few months before Thind went to trial, a Japanese American man named Takao Ozawa fought for his citizenship in the case of *Takao Ozawa v. United States* (Pawa 2019). Ozawa argued his good character and that his skin tone was as white or whiter than the average Caucasian's (Takao Ozawa v. United States 1922). Ozawa stated, "My honesty and industriousness are well known among my Japanese and American friends. In name Benedict Arnold was an American, but at heart he was a traitor. In name I am not an American, but at heart I am a true American" (Takao Ozawa v. United States 1922). In addition, Ozawa lived in the United States for over 20 years. He also attended high school and college in California before settling in Hawaii. Ozawa was denied citizenship when the court decided that he was Mongolian and did not fall under the contemporary anthropological definition of Caucasian. Justice George Sutherland who presided over the *Takao Ozawa v. United States* case determined that Japanese individuals could not be considered American because they were "clearly of a race which is not Caucasian" (Takao Ozawa v. United States 1922).

Due to the claims made during the *Takao Ozawa v. United States* case, Thind argued that he was in fact Caucasian based on the same contemporary anthropological definition which did include certain parts of India. Denying Thind citizenship, the United States Supreme Court went against the precedent they set just a few months earlier with Ozawa (Pawa 2019). The decision to deny Takao Ozawa and Bhagat Singh Thind American citizenship along with others, gave anti-Asian advocates more of a reason to culminate the Immigration Act of 1924. The Immigration Act of 1924, also known as the Johnson-Reed Act, was signed into law to "preserve the ideal of American homogeneity" (Office of the Historian 1924). The Immigration Act of 1924 created a

permanent quota system based on national origin. Through the Act, the number of immigrants that were admitted into the United States was limited to two percent of the total number of individuals from each nationality that were residing in the United States based on the 1890 census. However, the Immigration Act of 1924 prevented immigration from Asia altogether further imparting xenophobia within the United States. Upon introducing the Immigration Act of 1924, additional restrictions on landowning and landowners were also introduced causing several Sikh immigrants to lose their property and return to their homeland of Punjab (Tanabe 2014). At that point, Sikh immigration became stagnant until the 1940s.

United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind is only one of many cases of discrimination that Sikhs and South Asians faced as they immigrated to the United States. *United States v. Thind* puts an emphasis on the long withstanding struggle for Sikhs to integrate within the United States. Though they have held economically valuable jobs since the beginning of their immigration, their identities continue to be vilified. Bhagat Singh Thind felt the need to not only refer to himself as a Hindu, but also identify as a white and Caucasian man to be granted naturalization. Though times were undoubtedly different, it is still vital to understand the intersectionality of Sikhism. *United States v. Thind* demonstrates an early framework of what has led to the current intersectionality of Sikhs. In order to be successful in portraying Sikhs in an inclusive manner, it is important to be effective in understanding the complex history of their discriminatory experiences.

Eventually, the Luce-Cellar Act of 1946, also known as the Immigration Act of 1946, allowed Indians residing in the United States to become naturalized citizens. It was the Luce-Cellar Act that launched the second wave of Sikh immigration after being dormant for about 20 years. The Act also allowed for a quota of 100 Indian immigrants in the United States annually.

More recently, it was the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act that finally eliminated quotas entirely which paved the way for more Indian arrivals. However, once again, the rise in Indian immigrants in the United States including Sikhs, led to the corresponding rise in discrimination.

Grassroots and Hashtag Activism

Among anthropologists, there is agreement that participatory research enables social change. This includes grassroots development based on political awareness that is a result of being educated on the subjugated group or as a way of mediating at the local level through activist programs which are grounded in research that is designed to improve the lives of the people that are studied by anthropologists (Freidenberg 1991). The Sikh Coalition is a community-based grassroots organization whose focus is civil and human rights for all. The organization formed in response to the crimes against Sikhs following 9/11. What started as a small volunteer-based group in New York has now grown into a nationally recognized nonprofit organization with offices in California that focuses on advocating for Sikh rights. The Sikh Coalition has worked on numerous legal cases fighting for the inclusion of Sikhs as well as creating public school curriculum on Sikhism.

Although Sikhs have been discriminated against since they began immigrating to the United States in the 19th century, their progress towards inclusion is gradual. After two years of advocacy by The Sikh Coalition following the Oak Creek, Wisconsin *gurdwara* massacre, it was in August of 2013 that Eric Holder, U.S. Attorney General, announced the FBI would start to include hate crime data against previously unrepresented groups including Sikhs, Hindus, Arab-Americans, Buddhists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Orthodox Christians (The Sikh Coalition). This was a significant turning point for Sikh justice, but it is also quite bothersome knowing this change occurred less than ten years ago which means much data on hate crimes

against Sikhs has likely gone unreported, forgotten, or dismissed. Though FBI statistics from 2018 show a 200 percent increase in anti-Sikh hate crimes (United States Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2018), The Sikh Coalition believes low reporting contributes to the failure in capturing the scope of the bias, prejudice, and repercussions that Sikhs face. They believe the community remains disproportionately targeted relative to its small size among the population due to their distinct appearance (The Sikh Coalition 2018). However, this also portrays the pivotal role of The Sikh Coalition in making successful attempts towards Sikh inclusion.

As seen with The Sikh Coalition, the grassroots organization members rallying for Sikh inclusion are often Sikh themselves. Others include Jakara Movement and Khalsa Aid International. Issues outside of one's social group often remain unknown due to underreporting by the public and mass media. More recently, however, social media activism has become common in spreading knowledge and promoting awareness and social action within communities. The Sikh Coalition, Jakara Movement, and Khalsa Aid International each have their own social media platforms through which they regularly post about current events and provide informative measures to create change. Ahmed Tohamy (2017) explains that the influx of technological platforms has made the work of professional activists more efficient and has gained societal and observational attention. New social media platforms have provided the youth with new networks for involvement and empowerment. However, it is critical to have both online and offline methods of activism for change to occur (Tohamy 2017).

One such ongoing social movement that started in September 2020 is that of Indian farmers who are protesting the Indian Agriculture Acts of 2020, also known as the Farm Bills, which were approved on September 17, 2020. Most of the Indian protestors are Sikhs from Punjab and Haryana. The Farmers Protest has been dubbed the world's largest protest, and yet,

has not garnered nearly as much media attention as it deserves. In fact, it was only recently that it caught the attention of worldwide media who began reporting on it. Indian farmers are demanding that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi retract the farming laws which would reduce the government's role in agriculture and, in turn, create space for private investors. The farmers would be at risk of exploitation that may very well lead to an increase in an already high number of farmer suicides. This would exacerbate the already severe ecological and economic conditions the farmers live in (The Sikh Coalition 2020).

The Sikh Coalition argues The Farmers Protest not only affects the Indian farmers themselves, but also a majority of the global Sikh population. Sikh Coalition has continued to advocate for farmers' rights, nobility, and justice. Additionally, the Sikh Coalition has commenced numerous approaches to raise awareness and prompt action. They have sent letters to U.S. elected officials asking them to raise awareness to the public, they have provided publicly accessible resources on their website, and they continuously post updates on their social media promoting the hashtag #FarmersProtest.

The use of the hashtag #FarmersProtest on social media has allowed for the spread of knowledge within communities nationwide through hashtag activism. #FarmersProtest has both promoted and organized car and truck rallies titled *Kisaan Solidarity* – *kisaan* meaning Indian farmer – which have been ongoing in the United States as a message of unity with the Indian farmers. Additionally, singer Rihanna, teenage activist Greta Thunberg, and author Meena Harris (niece of U.S. vice president Kamala Harris) each tweeted in support of Indian farmers using #FarmersProtest. This allowed for a rise in awareness and public support of Indian farmers.

Virtual Field Sites

The use of social media platforms by members of the public to promote awareness and a call for action in support of Indian farmers has gained the media attention The Farmers Protest needed. Social media platforms have become influential locations for documenting and challenging instances of misrepresentation of racialized bodies in the media (Bonilla and Rosa 2015). The use of a hashtag such as #FarmersProtest establishes shared political views among the public, and its use on social media platforms provides tactical outlets for disputing and reimagining the materiality of racialized bodies (Bonilla and Rosa 2015).

It can be argued that virtual elements such as social media platforms and hashtags can serve as anthropological field sites. Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa (2015) write that hashtag use within social media is used in both a clerical and semiotic sense. Hashtags allow for the ordering and easy retrieval of information surrounding the hashtag topic. In the case of #FarmersProtest, viewers can see any policy or event updates when clicking the hashtag serving as an indexing system (Bonilla and Rosa 2015). Semiotically, hashtags mark the proposed significance of expressions. Just as anthropologists use coding systems, hashtags allow individuals to both stash their comments under a certain hashtag and performatively frame what their comments are actually about. This then enables users to implicate meanings or ideas that may not have been apparent otherwise. Hence, someone may write, “Years of religious suppression and increasing agricultural poverty boiled to the surface last night” followed by the hashtag “#FarmersProtest” to create a distinct interpretive frame. Thus, hashtags locate texts within a particular dialog, allowing for quick retrieval and also marking comments and conversations as being *about* a specific topic (Bonilla and Rosa 2015).

Inclusion through Museums

Just as hashtags can serve as anthropological field sites, museums serve as locations to provide viewers an understanding of varieties of difference (Parezo 2015). A virtual museum exhibit on the Sikh religion and culture that is accessible to the public will facilitate greater awareness of and engagement with Sikh culture and practices, with attention to their extensive history in California culture. A virtual exhibit allows for intervention into how a society views a minority culture and religion that is much maligned in American public imagination. An exhibit that delineates the purpose of Sikh cultural markers will serve to educate the public and counter negative stereotypes. In some cases, individuals may interpret visuals of hardships as an indication of what should remain unrepeatable such as the sculpture of “The Street-Washing Jew” as examined by Bunzl (2003), while others may interpret those same visuals as a repetition of the hardships. The American Anthropological Association’s museum exhibit titled “RACE: Are We So Different?” (<https://understandingrace.org/>) serves as a representation of necessary verbal exchange surrounding race that also satisfies an educational need (Penn et al. 2008) by including history and lived experiences which further serve to educate and produce dialogue among observers.

Through their analysis of the Oklahoma Native American Youth Language Fair (ONAYLF), Daniel Swan and Mary Linn (2021) highlight the need for diverse interpretations of collaboration to provide inclusion within museums. ONAYLF is a gathering of members of the Native American community at the Sam Noble Museum in Norman, Oklahoma to celebrate language diversity through methods such as art, videos, books, and poetry (Swan and Linn 2021, 56). Rather than the commonly observed occurrence of Indigenous people serving as objects within museums, the Fair serves as an opportunity for Native American community members to

exchange ideas. Therefore, it is important to have community collaboration to address diversity and inclusion which is necessary within museums. Similarly, Alaka Wali (2014) emphasizes the importance of designing a museum exhibit that is based around the themes of interrelationships between people and their environment and cultural change which then shape diversity while also paying mind to the semiotic qualities of the objects involved.

Through my virtual exhibit, it is my goal to represent the complexity of Sikh religion and culture by finding middle ground between hardships and endeavors and culture and religion, while also steering clear of unchanged and uniform representation. Additionally, my virtual exhibit avoids the essentialization of Sikhs and concretization of stereotypes. Through the process of selection, erasure, and display (Wali 2014), which eliminate intolerance and advocate understanding, this virtual museum exhibit will serve as a location to display the experiences of Sikh people as they participate in their culture and religion without displaying the wrongdoings against Sikhs since their migration to California. While this chapter examined the promise of the research project, the next chapter explores the methodologies.

Chapter 3: Virtual Methodologies

Initially, my goal was to build rapport, conduct interviews, and collect data face-to-face with Sikh participants. I planned to visit locations such as the Sikh *gurdwara* and attend the Sikh parade known as the *Nagar Kirtan* in Yuba City, California. I had already met with a volunteer of The Sikh Coalition previous to the shutdown and planned to attend his public-school presentations on Sikhism as well. These became undoable as the global pandemic hit and the shutdowns were enforced. At a standstill, I realized all of my rapport-building, surveys, interviews, and data collection would need to be done remotely. Therefore, virtual ethnographic methods became my core approach throughout my research. In addition to the connections that I made before the global pandemic, Inderpreet Kaur, The Sikh Coalition's Southern California Community Development Manager helped as my key informant during the course of my research. Kaur's emphasis on direct communication with and participation of members of the Sikh community led me to use community-based participatory research and respondent-driven sampling.

Virtual methodologies that I used included partnering with a collaborative key informant, community-based participatory research (CBPR), and snowball sampling paired with providing research participants with an incentive. As Southern California's Community Development Manager for the Sikh Coalition, my collaborative key informant, and a Sikh herself, Inderpreet Kaur helped as both a guide and educator throughout my research. Through my collaborative partnership with Kaur, I was able to better address issues surrounding Sikh marginalization and the path to inclusion with the application of CBPR methods. As explained by Nina Wallerstein et al. (2008, 27), CBPR has three interconnected goals: research, action, and education. Researchers transfer tools for community members to use to examine circumstances and further make well-

versed decisions. Additionally, CBPR allows community members to transfer their knowledge to researchers in the pursuit of mutual knowledge and use of that knowledge to their communities (Wallerstein et al. 2008, 27). “Ultimately CBPR is about knowledge creation and the value of practical and critical emancipatory reason for understanding power dynamics, for recognizing the interconnections between the personal and the social and between life worlds and system worlds, and for identifying the barriers to and facilitators of human actions that move toward the goal of social change” (Wallerstein et al. 2008, 40). Lastly, I utilized snowball sampling to reach participants within a group considered to be “hidden” due to the marginalization of Sikhs (Browne 2005) which was accompanied by an incentive of \$40 to increase the likelihood of participation (Resnik 2015). The virtual methods I employed during my research allowed me to connect with an array of participants ranging in age, gender, location, occupational fields, and immigratory background. In doing so, the virtual museum exhibit I created utilized the information received by the range of participants and their contributions.

Collaborative Key Informants

One of community-based participatory research’s (CBPR) main principles is to understand the community and its priorities. A collaborative research partnership that enables the identification and prioritization of community views on both their own needs and interests requires an instructive ally that belongs to the community. Russell Bernard (2006, 196) defines key informants as “people whom you can talk to easily, who understand the information you need, and who are glad to give it to you or get it for you.” Because key informants possess a social and professional role in their community, they are sought to provide knowledge based on education within the community (McKenna and Main 2013). Inderpreet Kaur, a Sikh herself, is knowledgeable in Sikh religion and culture, and she was more than willing to provide me with

information and assistance. Not only did she share her own expertise with me, but she also helped as a collaborator and supporter throughout my research project.

Key informants are undeniably valuable in CBPR as they provide knowledge about the community and help the researcher make further acquaintances within the community. Consequently, to recognize the community for the purpose of a project, researchers must realize that key informant perspectives can influence the research in several ways (McKenna and Main 2013). Key informants' worldviews are prone to affect how they define the community and what they understand to be community strengths, weaknesses, needs, and capabilities. Researchers are then able to strengthen the quality of community-involved research along with its capacity to foster useful interpretation by recognizing the differences in what community members and key informants may have to offer during the course of research. First, this means classifying who encompasses the qualities of a key informant and, on the other hand, who encompasses those of a community member. In some cases, an individual can be both, so the researcher must consider how each could benefit from the other (McKenna and Main 2013).

Similarly, in my own research project, Kaur was able to provide me with information regarding the Sikh community. I notified Kaur of my research project goals and deliverable including my approach methods. Kaur advised me on the history of Sikhism, the accomplishments of Sikhs within California, the history of The Sikh Coalition along with their mission, and current Sikh issues and possible interventions. Through my collaboration with Inderpreet Kaur as my key informant, I was able to create a virtual museum exhibit that is representative of Sikh inclusivity.

Bridging through Community-based Participatory Research

Community-based participatory research (CBPR), originally known as action research, is credited to Kurt Lewin (Holkup et al. 2004) who developed the method as a means to use research in support of social change. Community-based participatory research provides a structure for learning and reflection in action. Key principles are to foster collaboration amid community members and researchers, engage in reflective practice and reciprocal learning, build the ability of community groups to create change, balance research and action, practice both inter- and multi-disciplinary work, and position community concerns in a larger framework. It was necessary to have willing Sikh participants for the success of my research project as to avoid exploitation and further misinterpretations of the group. David Campbell (1987, 165) explains, “Without the active acceptance and involvement of a community, such an approach to research, while well-meaning, will only serve to reinforce the domination and manipulation of people characteristic of the ‘top down,’ induced development process.” Rather than using top-down processing in which context-based assumptions are made from knowledge that is already present, community-based participatory research uses the community’s involvement to develop conclusions based on observations. The opposition to accept change or difference can be reduced by learning how to accentuate that the nature of change is from the bottom-up through community-based participatory research rather than the top-down (Holkup et al. 2004).

The key idea behind CBPR is the involvement of community members during the research process. The quality of the interactions with community members is more important than the quantity of interactions as that is what allows for the “bridging” between groups (Cartwright and Schow 2016). From the interactions and understandings come data that is detailed, contextualized, and finally made beneficial for meaningful engagement and community

action. My research involved conversing with members of the Sikh community to produce conversation on their religious experiences while living in Northern California and the Central Valley. I endeavored to maintain naivete within the conversations by controlling the potential biases if my own prior knowledge of Sikhism to then actively listen and understand from the standpoint of my Sikh participants. This allowed my participants to openly engage with me in the way they would with any other members of the public. Conversations with my interview participants set the foundation for the virtual museum exhibit and the information and material that would be provided to the public. Participants were also asked to submit photographs of their personal items allowing for the virtual exhibit to be created from the Sikh community members alone. This will further pave the way for meaningful engagement and community action among the public.

According to Cartwright and Schow (2016), bridging the social gap between researchers and the community involves more than just shared physical and linguistic attributes; it is meant to engage in learning about another culture. It is not enough to be part of the same ethnic group as that does not allow for the qualities needed to definitively bridge the cultural divide between CBPR researchers and community members to further bridge the gap between community members and the public. Going into my research project, I decided not to disclose my ethnic or religious background unless I was asked by a participant. I was aware that my physical attributes may lead to the assumption that I am Sikh or that I speak Punjabi or Hindi. I did not want this to take away from the information my participants had to share. Therefore, participants were constantly asked to elaborate and translate throughout the interviews. This helped minimize notions of my own understanding and contributed to extensive conversations that were laden with knowledge and further used to create the virtual exhibit.

Furthermore, CBPR projects provide a structure for bilateral bridging from researchers to community members and back, and from community members to researchers (Cartwright and Schow 2016). My own research also accounts for a third – the bridging between community members and the public. The latter is the ultimate goal of my research project. A bridging between Sikh community members and the public will advance the public’s understanding of Sikhs and Sikhism to create meaningful engagement that can then lead to community action.

The Principal Investigator’s Positionality

My awareness of the possibility of assumptions is backed by the presence of my positionality as the principal investigator and how it affects my research. Positionality refers to the researcher’s world view along with the position they implement during a research project and its social and political climate (Holmes 2020). The world views concern:

ontological assumptions (an individual’s beliefs about the nature of social reality and what is knowable about the world), epistemological assumptions (an individual’s beliefs about the nature of knowledge) and assumptions about human nature and agency (individual’s assumptions about the way we interact with our environment and relate to it) (Holmes 2020, 1).

These assumptions further depend on components such as one’s religion, location, ethnicity, race, or so on (Holmes 2020). As the principal investigator, my positionality also affects how the research is conducted, the research outcomes, and the research results (Rowe 2014). Commonly, positionality is identified through three parts: the research topic, the research participants, and the research context and process (Holmes 2020). Fixed aspects of positionality include elements such as gender or race which may influence someone’s point of view.

A constant reflexive approach is needed for the principal investigator to identify and construct their positionality (Holmes 2020). This simply means that the principal investigator must first identify their own views and position and how these factors may directly or indirectly

impact the design, implementation, and understanding of the research findings (Greenbank 2003). Kirsti Malterud (2001, 484) suggests researchers approach a reflexive stance by:

identifying preconceptions brought into the project by the researcher, representing previous personal and professional experiences, pre-study beliefs about how things are and what is to be investigated, motivation and qualifications for exploration of the field, and perspectives and theoretical foundations related to education and interests.

By taking a reflexive approach, the researcher must also understand that their positionality will not remain the same throughout the research project and is subject to change.

As I stated previously, I was aware that my physical attributes may lead to the assumption that I am Sikh or that I am knowledgeable in the topics surrounding Sikhism which I covered during my interviews. There were several instances throughout my interviews where research participants spoke to me in Punjabi or Hindi and spoke of certain customs or aspects of Sikhism with no context. As I took on the positionality of a principal investigator who did not want to include any of my own previous knowledge of Sikhs or Sikhism, I continuously asked my participants to provide translations and additional context. By doing so, I avoided any weakening of research data provided by my participants.

Snowball Sampling with Incentive

Snowball sampling is a method of research in which individuals use their own interpersonal and social networks to reach “hidden” populations. Snowball sampling is often used in cases where the population being studied is scarce, or the topic is sensitive (Browne 2005). The population being studied is considered “hidden” in some cases because openly identifying with specific divisions can result in discrimination (Browne 2005). Recruiting Sikh participants is considered sensitive due to the continuous discrimination against Sikhs or Sikhs who are misidentified yet still discriminated against as well as the current political climate with

the farmers protests. In addition, snowball sampling was deemed useful in connecting with participants with whom I likely would not have been able to speak to if my research had not been conducted virtually. I was able to both easily and effectively reach a wide range of Sikh participants through the snowball sampling research method.

To find my participants, I first created a short virtual survey on Qualtrics that consisted of eight questions. I sent the survey to my collaborative key informant, Inderpreet Kaur, who then passed it on to individuals whom she knows identify as Sikh and live or lived in Northern California. I also posted the survey link to my own social media accounts via Facebook and Instagram because many of my personal connections identify as Sikh and also reside locally. From there, many of my friends and family members passed the survey link on to their own contacts. I chose to get participants by passing along the survey rather than collecting personal contact information to avoid violating any and all participants' privacy. Participants who took the survey willingly provided their personal contact information. In the end, I was able to garner a total of 34 survey responses. Of those 34 responses, I interviewed a total of eleven participants virtually on Zoom.

The virtual Zoom interviews were scheduled through Calendly. I included multiple days and 90-minute time slots. The interviews were semi-structured and based on ten main questions. I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews for my data collection because it was the best way to navigate through the personal experiences and opinions of my participants. As Barriball and While (1994, 330) explain, semi-structured interviews are suitable for the “exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues and enable probing for more information and clarification of answers”. In addition, because of the

variety of personal experiences and histories of the participants, a regulated interview schedule was unsuitable.

I conducted my first interview on December 20, 2020, and the last was on January 12, 2021. Though I had ten main questions, several of my interview discussions branched off depending on the topic and the willingness of my interview participants to openly share information regarding their experiences and beliefs. The first five interview questions were fact-based questions regarding the research participants' individual experiences as Sikhs. Research participants were asked to state how long they have identified as Sikh, how they came about identifying as Sikh, how often they practice Sikhism, what ways they practice Sikhism, and what items represent their Sikh identity. From there, participants were asked opinion-based questions concerning Sikhism within their communities. Participants were asked if they believe Sikhism is well represented in their community and if they believe Sikhism is understood in their community. Further, participants were asked to explain a couple personal experiences: whether they have had explain what Sikhism is to anyone and whether they have ever experienced being mistaken for another religion. For the last question, I asked participants what they would like non-Sikhs to know about Sikh religion, culture, and people. Lastly, depending on whether or not any of my participants brought up the Farmers Protest, I asked some participants what their thoughts were on the protests and what their stance was if they had one. These interview questions allowed my Sikh participants to share their personal experiences and beliefs while also providing me with information to include in *IncluSikh's* virtual museum exhibit.

Along with using the snowball sampling method for my research survey, I offered an incentive of \$40 to participants who completed the final interview process. The funds were provided by Dr. William and Mrs. Joan Reckmeyer, who awarded me a grant in support of my

research for the Global Reckmeyer Fellow Award. Providing financial incentives to research participants boosts recruitment. Studies also show that individuals are more likely to participate in research projects when a financial incentive is provided (Resnik 2015). Additionally, paying human subjects for their participation provides them with a share of the benefits of research which is consistent with the view that participation in research projects is a form of paid labor (Resnik 2015). A fundamental principle of ethical research is that the benefits and risks of research should be allocated equally. Human subjects who devote their time toward taking part in research activities and place themselves at risk ought to receive benefits in return (Resnik 2015).

The risks and benefits, however, are dependent upon the research project. In my research project, the risks were minimal and included the possible discussion of sensitive topics such as xenophobia and Islamophobia as well as potential emotional discomfort due to the previously stated risk. Participants were only asked to share if they felt comfortable in doing so to eliminate as much risk as possible. The benefits greatly outweigh the risks. Participants had the opportunity to share information about their religious background to provide knowledge to the public. They contributed photographs that helped create the virtual exhibit made each participant a project collaborator.

Lastly, the incentive was offered on my part as a means to convey my gratitude to each human subject for their participation. By expressing my appreciation for each participant's contribution, I was able to bolster the trust and rapport that is crucial to the relationship between the principal investigator, myself, and my research participants (Resnik 2015). In this chapter, I discussed the virtual methods used throughout my research. The next chapter delves into the discussion of the themes resulting from the methodologies.

Chapter 4: The Path to Inclusion

An important aspect of my research was to get the personal views from Sikhs themselves on their experiences living in Northern California or the Central Valley, how they feel non-Sikh society members view Sikhs and Sikhism, what they want non-Sikh society members to know about Sikhs and Sikhism, what visual aspects of Sikhs and Sikhism they want to share with non-Sikhs, and what outcome they would like from the virtual museum exhibit I created. To accomplish this, I connected with eleven Sikh participants, all of whom are currently residing in Northern California or the Central Valley, who were willing to share their personal experiences and opinions with me. In order to protect their identities and avoid trivializing the significance of their Sikh names, I provided a pseudonym for each participant. Sikh names are important to their religion and serve as Sikh identifiers. Therefore, the pseudonyms provided are still recognizable as Sikh. Each interview lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. Though I had ten main questions that I asked each participant, several of the interview topics branched off depending on the information that was shared with me. The data collected with each participant varies based on their personal experiences while living in different locations throughout Northern California and the Central Valley. Each participant shared their individual experiences and beliefs which makes their story unique. Although the information gathered does not reflect the experiences of other Sikhs within Northern California or the Central Valley, it serves as a model of what other Sikhs may experience throughout the nation.

Though Sikhs are considered a minority in India, the majority of Sikhs reside in Punjab, India (The Sikh Coalition 2018). The political issues surrounding state control and borders has been ongoing since the 19th century (Barwinski and Musiaka 2019). Sikhs have faced continuous persecution by the Indian government causing many Sikhs to either leave or push for a

sovereignty (Barwinski and Musiaka 2019). The longing for Sikh acceptance because of India's political climate has been a persistent reason for many Sikhs to leave India to pursue inclusion elsewhere. Thus, Sikh immigration to California is ongoing as exemplified by interviews with my research participants. Additionally, Sikh inclusion has remained challenging because of media representation following 9/11. The stereotypical representation of Muslims following 9/11 include turbans and long beards which often cause Sikhs to be mistaken as Muslim and further discriminated against (Varisco 2002). Therefore, it is vital to display common physical identifiers of Sikhs and Sikhism for visual comprehension and public understanding which will further contribute to Sikh inclusion. Lastly, one of the main components of Sikhism is selflessness. Sikhism is described by many of my research participants as being a religion of peace and spirituality. Therefore, Sikhs pride themselves in selflessness and often provide community assistance to those in need (Hirvi 2015). The subsequent segments provide a political background of Sikhism in India that sets the basis for Sikh immigration. Additionally, I summarize interview themes regarding the visual comprehension of Sikhs and Sikhism and the role of Sikhs within their communities along with a qualitative analysis of the data collected.

India's Political Climate

As I discussed previously, Sikh immigration to the United States began in the late 19th century. Four of the Sikh participants I interviewed are first generation Sikh-Americans, while the other seven are immigrants. Reasons for my participants or their family members to migrate to California range from job opportunities to education to marriage just to name a few. The long turmoiled past and troubled political climate of caste systems and religion in India were prominent reasons for Sikhs to leave the country.

Sikhism was first introduced in the 15th century by Guru Nanak as a partial combination of Hinduism and Islam with some major differences. Regardless of the similarities between Sikhism and Hinduism and Sikhism and Islam, Sikhs were condemned through the years for their differing beliefs (Barwinski and Musiaka 2019). Prolonged persecution of Sikhs led to Afghan raids in the early 19th century where Sikhs took complete control of Punjab which became an independent state for ten years (Barwinski and Musiaka 2019). With the arrival of the British, however, Punjab control and borders continuously changed. As a consequence of decolonization, Hindus in India and Muslims in what is modern-day Bangladesh, received their own states. Sikhs, who were far outnumbered, not only did not get their own state, but the province of Punjab which most of them inhabited, was split in half by the Indian-Pakistani border (Moore 1982). The division of British India in 1947 resulted in thousands of casualties among Sikhs and forced millions of Sikhs to relocate.

In 1966, the Indian government once again divided Punjab agitating many Sikhs which resulted in the start of an extremist separatist movement that sought either Sikh territorial sovereignty or the creation of a Sikh state known as *Khalistan* (Barwinski and Musiaka 2019). The idea to form *Khalistan* was first introduced in the 1940s during Britain's rule over India. This idea emerged again in the 1980s when aggression between Sikhs and Hindus began to grow because India's government failed to consent to Sikh autonomy. This resulted in the Indian government announcing a state of emergency and further conducting Operation Blue Star beginning on June 2, 1984, which was initiated by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (Barwinski and Musiaka 2019).

Operation Blue Star was an attempt by the Indian government to weed out Sikh separatists (Taneja 2013) and capture Sikh militants who the Indian government believed were

operating out of the Golden Temple (Kaur 2004). On June 3rd, 1984, eyewitnesses reported that there were more than 10,000 Sikh pilgrims trapped inside the Golden Temple when the Indian government imposed a shoot-on-site regulation (Kaur 2004). The Indian army conducted their attack on June 4th when Indian militants stormed the Golden Temple, which was filled with thousands of pilgrims who made the journey for a Sikh religious holiday – the death anniversary of the fifth *guru*, Arjan Dev Ji (Taneja 2013). Operation Blue Star was said to be completed successfully on June 6, 1984, with the death and capture of many terrorists. However, there has been a lot of contradicting evidence presented that goes against many claims made by the Indian government in relation to Operation Blue Star. The Indian government claimed to have killed 493 terrorists (Kaur 2004) while nongovernmental sources claim it was between 5,000 to 7,000 Sikh civilians (Singh 2021). Many Sikhs, such as Gurmej Singh, came forward as civilians who were illegally detained and tortured because of the operation (Kaur 2004). While Indian government officials claimed to use necessary force, a Sikh witness, Ranbir Kaur, watched more than 150 people being executed. Doctors that conducted autopsies found that many civilians' hands were bound with their own turbans, and they were executed at point-blank range (Kaur 2004). The head librarian of the Golden Temple also claimed the Indian Army burned the Sikh Reference Library that had historic Sikh manuscripts and artifacts (Kaur 2004). Indian news outlets commended the operation for saving India's unity and integrity from anti-national Sikh secessionism (Singh 2021). Sikhs, however, viewed the operation as an attack on their religion and faith. In retaliation to Operation Blue Star and its effect on Sikhs and Sikhism, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards on October 31, 1984 (Taneja 2013). The assassination led to anti-Sikh riots which resulted in the innocent deaths of thousands of Sikhs.

Today, Sikhs are considered a religious minority in India as they only account for about 1.7 percent of India's population (justice.gov 2020), and they continue to face discrimination in and out of India. The current Farmers Protest exemplifies the lack of support for Sikhs in their homeland. As of May 2021, at least 477 Punjabi protestors have died while opposing agricultural laws imposed upon them by the Indian government (Chaba 2021). The continued lack of support and discrimination against Sikhs and Sikhism led to many Sikhs leaving India. Though relocation may allow for the ability to practice Sikhism more openly and understandably, anti-Sikh sentiments are ongoing across the world. With the misunderstanding surrounding Sikhs and Sikhism, comes bias.

Reasons for Relocation

Of the ten main interview questions I asked each of my interviewee participants, the second question requested participants to explain how they came about identifying as Sikh. Along with this request, I asked participants to provide a quick background for how and why they came about living in Northern California and/or the Central Valley. All the interview subjects practice Sikhism today because they come from generations of Sikhs. The values, traditions, and beliefs were passed down and continue to be practiced with the current generation. Amrit Singh, Jagdeep Gill, Sonal Dutt, and Jasneet Kaur are first-generation Sikh Americans who were born and raised in Northern California or the Central Valley. They each explained that their parents came to the United States for better opportunities for themselves and their families. Jagdeep and Jasneet also explained that their families faced years of discrimination when they lived in India. They were made to feel lower because of the religion they practiced. Jagdeep said:

It's crazy how you can be from somewhere, but still feel like you don't belong, right? My parents felt that way in India – that's why they left. And I feel like that

in America – not all the time, but sometimes. But here we can at least practice more openly, and there are laws against hate crimes (Jagdeep Gill, personal communication December 22, 2020).

Jasneet is a 31-year-old project manager who currently resides in Southern California. She is also the daughter of interview participant Jasnoor Kaur, a 64-year-old retiree who is an immigrant that currently resides in the Bay Area. Jasneet explained, “They [Jasneet’s parents] wanted me and my siblings to grow up in a place where we could exercise our freedoms without hesitation. Why should we have to second guess what we believe in? Especially after they decided to leave their home where they didn’t feel like they fit” (Jasneet Kaur, personal communication December 29, 2020). In addition, Gurprit Sandhu, Jasnoor Kaur, Mandeep Singh, Raman Singal, Navdeep Kaur, Simran Kamboj, and Parneet Bahia are all immigrants. Gurprit, Jasnoor, Navdeep, and Parneet immigrated as adults, while Mandeep, Raman, and Simran immigrated as children with their families. When asked about the reasoning behind immigrating to Northern California, Parneet, a 43-year-old former teacher and mother of two, explained:

We came in 2014, so I’m still getting used to everything. My husband got a good job offer so we decided to take it. You know we have two kids, they were young then, so we thought why not come here? We thought they can have good schooling, [my husband] can have a good job, and I will find something. We are part of a big Sikh community here, so we don’t feel like missing home a lot. Everyone welcomed us (Parneet Bahia, personal communication January 12, 2021).

As my interviewees explained their or their parents’ reasoning for relocating out of India to Northern California or the Central Valley, they each tied their relocation back to the importance of their Sikh faith. Though none of my participants relocated solely because of Sikhism, the presence of Sikhism in the area was of great importance. Each interview participant stated the importance of being surrounded by a Sikh community as well as being able to practice openly.

Visual Comprehension

When speaking to my interviewees, a main theme that came up was one of visual misinterpretation. It is common for individuals to make assumptions based on what they know – or think they know – and what they see. Race and ethnicity, along with cultural garb, can also often intersect with religion. Many of the religions that emerged out of Asia have similarities in practices and beliefs. However, making inaccurate assumptions based merely on what one sees or believes can lead to unjust bias and discrimination. Therefore, visual comprehension of Sikhs and Sikhism is necessary in their inclusion.

The ninth question I asked all my interviewees was: “Have you ever experienced being mistaken for another religion?” Of my eleven interview subjects, eight responded that they have been mistaken for being a religion other than Sikh. To these eight subjects, I followed up with: “Please describe at least one instance.” Each interviewee said they were mistaken for being Hindu, Muslim, or both. Jasnoor explained an instance when she was visiting the San Jose *gurdwara* which is located in the Evergreen district of San Jose – also a residential area:

We went to *gurdwara* in San Jose one day and everyone has to cover their hair out of respect. Most women don't wear turbans, so sometimes I wear a scarf, or if I wear an Indian dress, I use my *dupatta* (shawl), but we all have our hair covered. So, the *gurdwara* is on a hill in a residential area – lots of families and everyone walking around. I was just in the outside parking lot talking to friends, and two women come up. They ask us, ‘Is this a mosque? It's beautiful.’ We say, ‘No, it's *gurdwara*, we are Sikh.’ They tell us it looks like mosque because the scarves on our head. I guess they thought we are wearing a *hijab* like some Muslims (Jasnoor Kaur, personal communication December 23, 2020).

In Sikhism, turbans are optional for both men and women, though they are one of the most common identifiers of Sikhs. The experience described by Jasnoor was especially interesting as it countered that of Gurprit. Gurprit, a volunteer and father of two, claimed that he had never been mistaken for another religion. When asked, he laughed and answered, “No because I'm not

wearing turban or beard, right? But most commonly, they know I'm from India as soon as I start talking; my accent gives it away pretty quick even if I don't tell them my name" (Gurprit Sandhu, personal communication December 22, 2020). Jasnoor who was wearing a head covering as a practicing Sikh was mistaken as being Muslim. Gurprit, however, who does not wear a head covering has never been mistaken for another religion, though he was also not identified as being Sikh by outsiders.

To accurately identify one as Sikh, it is important to be knowledgeable in the subject. This is challenging in areas where diversity is lacking. Sonal, for example, is a criminal prosecutor that lives in a small Northern California town where she says there are only five Sikh families within a population of 28,000 people. She explained that she has been mistaken as being Hispanic in the past. "I usually get mistaken for Hispanic. They'll start talking to me in Spanish, etcetera because of, just like I said, it's mostly White here; and the few Brown people that are here are Mexican" (Sonal Dutt, personal communication December 26, 2020). When diversity is lacking, individuals tend to make assumptions based on the surroundings they become accustomed to. The individuals that mistook Sonal for Hispanic, did so knowing that this town has a mainly White or Mexican populace.

In continuation of her response, Sonal said, "I say to them, 'Oh no I'm Punjabi, I'm Sikh, I'm a different kind, I'm Indian. No, I'm not just like the red dot Indian,' you know? That's not even something Punjabis do. So yeah, I've corrected that" (Sonal Dutt, personal communication December 26, 2020). The effort to distinguish herself from non-Sikh Indians which she termed "red dot Indian," is further evidence of the political stance of Sikhs in relation to India. This is not to say that they do not consider themselves as Indian, but it simply supports the struggle of Sikhs and their continued fight to discern their own identity.

Jagdeep is an American-born Sikh who possesses the more obvious Sikh identifiers such as a beard and turban. However, he has still been mistaken as being Muslim. When answering question nine, he explains:

Growing up, a lot of people will think you're Muslim, right? Usually, it's not like they don't know who you are, but more of a generalized like poking fun – or not poking fun – kind of just being mean. In those experiences it's hard for me to be like, 'Oh no, we aren't like them. This is who we are.' A lot of them are just rude and ignorant, right? My thought process is that a person who is already racist and ignorant, do they really want to hear out someone who's like, 'Hey you're wrong, we're actually this [Sikh]'? So, I just make some jokes out of it. I'm not an educator, I'm just trying to exist (Jagdeep Gill, personal communication December 22, 2020).

A noteworthy point made by Jagdeep was questioning whether the individuals who mistook his Sikh identity for Muslim actually cared to know or learn about Sikhs and Sikhism. The ignorance he faced caused him to believe that these individuals did not care and that he was not in a position to educate anyone on the topic of his faith. While these are reasonable feelings to have, it is necessary for knowledge on Sikhs and Sikhism to circulate not only to reach visual comprehension, but also to reach Sikh inclusion.

Common Sikh identifiers can often lead to inaccurate assumptions of one's identity causing their Sikh identity to go unrecognized. The media representations of Muslims and terrorists following 9/11 caused several Sikhs to be misidentified and targeted due to Islamophobic reactions. As a result, most of my interview participants have been mistaken for being of another religion. In some cases, they were able to be identified as Indian but not as Sikh, and in other cases they were not recognized as Sikh at all. Because Sikhism includes notable physical attributes, visual comprehension of Sikhs and Sikhism is vital in their inclusion.

***Seva*: Selflessness**

In Punjabi, *seva* (pronounced seh-vah) translates to selflessness. *Seva* is a key component of practicing Sikhism as Sikhs believe in helping others without personal gain or reward. *Seva* directly influences civic engagement which is “the process by which individuals enter into and act within civic space to address issues of public concern” (Hirvi 2015, 56). Sikhs often practice *seva* within their own communities such as making donations to local charities or passing out food and/or water to those in need. Practicing *seva* is considered the highest service within Sikhism that will eventually lead to spiritual fulfillment.

During my interviews, each of my participants brought up the topic of *seva*. *Seva* came up when I asked question four: “What are some ways you practice Sikhism?” Several of my participants responded that *seva* was one way they practice Sikhism. Though *seva* is not practiced on a daily basis by any of my interview participants, it was recognized as one of the most important because Sikhism is regarded as a spiritual religion for many followers and practicing *seva* is believed to lead to spiritual attainment. Before explaining how she practices Sikhism, Simran, a restaurant owner and content writer, explained her thoughts on Sikhism being a spiritual religion for her:

Sikhism to me has many variants. You have people who completely commit to the ideology of Sikhism. They completely commit to the ideologies of our Gurus. I’ve never sensed a feeling of not belonging because I cut my hair or eat meat. For me, my faith comes from – it’s more spiritual. That’s the key thing about Sikhism. It’s a very spiritual religion. We have pictures of the Gurus, but they’re not there to worship. I always tell my kids that. When I look at Guru Nanak Ji, who was the founder, I find peace because he founded this religion in a very humble way, in a very teaching type of way (Simran Kamboj, personal communication January 4, 2021).

Gurprit is an active participant and volunteer at the San Jose *gurdwara* and explained to me the importance and role of *seva* within Sikh religion as well as how it affects the communities that the Sikhs participate within:

You know during Covid times, it is hard to practice Sikhism like we used to. Gurdwara is only open for very small events, and they are limiting the people. But it gave us the chance to practice *seva*. *Seva* is like the religious livelihood of a Sikh; I don't feel like I am Sikh unless I have helped my community in some positive way. So for past few months, we are cooking food in the gurdwara kitchen, we pack it in individual boxes, and we set up tables in the parking lot for anyone to come pick up. They can have a meal, some water, extra grocery. We are doing *seva* by helping our San Jose neighbors and we don't want anything in return – we just want to help who we can when we can (personal communication, Gurprit Sandhu December 22, 2020).

Additionally, Sonal explained the roles of Sikhs within her small Northern California town:

One of the Sikh households is a prominent member of our community. He owns hundreds of acres, he owns a couple gas stations, a liquor store, a wing place. So, I think because he owns so much and does so much for the community, he wants to make sure the Sikh name, culture, and traditions are represented in a community where it isn't. So, he purchased a property kind of in the middle of our town – a big home – and he converted it to a Punjabi Sikh society drop-in center where you can learn about the Sikh community, you can join us for worship, and even just a meal since a lot of Sikh worship is about eating together. Guru Nanak, our founder's, birthday is always around Thanksgiving, so what he does is a celebration of our founder's birthday with the spirit of giving. He gives away like tablets to foster youth or bicycles to kids in need to show, 'Hey we're going to give to you, so it's incentive for people to come, but also try this Indian food, come learn about us, look at the clothes we're wearing.' Not only is he practicing *seva*, but he's doing it in a way that's also helping people who wouldn't otherwise be exposed to Sikhism learn more about us and accept us (Sonal Dutt, personal communication December 26, 2020).

Navdeep, a stay-at-home mother of three in her early forties, explained how welcoming Sikhs and gurdwaras are to anyone that may need assistance:

The key of it comes from the temple. They do so much *seva*, and *seva* is that they're so giving to everyone – everybody who needs help can come to them for help. They feed the homeless. We were actually lucky enough to be a part of this. We would make sandwiches, and they would be distributed to homeless shelters locally. And it was so nonspecific in terms of color or religion. It was just to whoever needed it. So, it's about giving. If you have enough, give your time, give

your money, do something for somebody less fortunate. People are so unaware of how open and willing majority of Sikh people are to help people who are less fortunate (Navdeep Kaur, personal communication January 4, 2021).

After each interview, I emailed all participants with the next steps giving instructions on how to send me photographs of the material items they each believe represent their Sikh identity. They were notified that they would receive a \$40 gift card incentive upon receiving the photographs. Gurprit and Jasnoor both opted out of receiving the \$40 gift card. Instead, they asked me to send the \$40 to a charity. Gurprit sent photographs and requested, “Please do not send me gift card, if you must, please donate it to a needy person. Or, please feel free to pick any organization that you find serving most disadvantaged in San Jose.” I accepted and sent \$40 to the San Jose Animal Shelter in Gurprit’s name. Jasnoor emailed photographs and similarly requested, “Instead of a gift card, please donate money to Khalsa Aid International,” to which I also agreed and complied. I sent each participant a donation receipt. These requests further exemplify the importance of *seva* to practicing Sikhs. Rather than accepting a \$40 incentive for the time, information, and materials they provided me with to complete my research project, they practiced *seva* and asked that the \$40 go to a person or organization that would be benefitted.

Not only does *seva* play a significant role within the lives of Sikhs, but also within the communities that Sikhs are a part of. Sikhs are known to contribute helpful efforts to their society, and it is something they do for the spiritual means of Sikhism. As shown through participant interviews and requests, *seva* helps the community in times of need, and can also serve as a means for the public to learn about and understand Sikhs and Sikhism.

A Warrior in a Garden

Historically, Sikhism is a religion that was founded by Guru Nanak on the basis of peace. However, it is also constructed by self-defense, strength, and defiance. Sikhs are well known for

their warrior culture which may seem to contradict to their peaceful religion. However, it is the Sikh identity of a warrior saint that best exemplifies their character. While Sikhs are heavily centered on the spiritual aspect of Sikhism, they also exhibit a defensive and strong persona.

Jagdeep explained during his interview:

We are heavily in tune with our energy and the emphasis of oneness for all. It's as important to be physically strong, but not offensively – defensively for others. There's a huge emphasis on the saint-soldier aspect. Like the saying goes: It's better to be a warrior in a garden, than a gardener in a war. That's us, that's Sikhism (Jagdeep Gill, personal communication December 22, 2020).

The last question I asked my interview participants was probably the most informative in terms of reaching Sikh inclusion. I asked, "What would you like non-Sikhs to know about Sikh religion, culture, and people?" Though answers varied by participants, the overall consensus determined that my participants generally want non-Sikhs to understand the type of people Sikhs are, their core values and beliefs, and their contribution to society.

A main theme that emerged from this question was the idea that Sikhs are welcoming of people from all backgrounds and treat everyone with equality. Gurprit answered:

It is taught to Sikhs from a very young age to respect all religion, all races, all genders. Most of the time, religions say this is the only way to God or there is only one way to God. Sikhs believe there are many ways to find God. If you're a good human being and you are trying to be a spiritual person, you can be any religion, you can find God using your own path. So we accept everyone as they are (Gurprit Sandhu, personal communication December 22, 2020).

Similarly, Mandeep, a recently married civil engineer, answered, "We're really humble. We try to help anybody that is in need or asks. We respect every other religion. All religions are equal, we treat everyone with equality. Being humble is just one of the main values of Sikhism"

(Mandeep Singh, personal communication December 26, 2020). Jasneet answered:

I would love for people to recognize how welcoming the religion is. Sikhs really believe in giving back to the community, welcoming others with open arms, and truly just being a good person, you know? This religion isn't just about having

you follow anything other than being a good person. That really what we believe in and what we try to bring into the world (Jasneet Kaur, personal communication December 29, 2020).

Lastly, Parneet answered, “We’re very welcoming. If you go into temple, if you ask somebody for help, or if you want to know more about anything, the priests there are very welcoming. They’re more than willing to sit down and talk to you about the religion and what Sikhism represents” (Parneet Bahia, personal communication January 7, 2021). Each of the above interview participants had an emphasis on Sikhs being a very open community. In addition, it was also clear that Sikhs are very willing and wanting to educate others on their religion. Whether it is a Sikh friend or a prominent member of the *gurdwara*, they are open to answering questions without opposing the beliefs of others. Rather, their intent is to inform.

Another theme that emerged was the constant misunderstanding of Sikh turbans. Amrit explained the purpose and reasoning behind wearing a turban,

I would like them to know what the religion preaches, so like the core values, and why Sikh people wear turbans. So, what it represents and how the religion symbolizes love versus hate. More of like your natural form to why we wear our turban. We don’t cut off our arm, so why cut off our hair? The body should remain in its most natural state (Amrit Singh, personal communication December 20, 2020).

Knowing that turbans have been reason for Sikhs to be discriminated against in the past, Parneet added, “Non-Sikhs should understand turban of a Sikh is very sacred to him. Turban is also named as *dastaar*, and *dastaar* means ‘given by God,’ so it is that sacred. People should not make fun of them” (Parneet Bahia, personal communication January 12, 2021).

As I discussed before, Sikh turbans are one of the most common physical attributes of Sikhs. They are sacred to Sikhism, but commonly misinterpreted due to media representation. Several of my interview participants or their family members have experienced discrimination

because of their turbans. Understanding the meaning of a Sikh turban and its importance to Sikhs and Sikhism will allow non-Sikhs to both better identify and understand Sikhs and Sikhism.

The last theme I found in common among my interview participants was that of the helpful nature of Sikhs further exemplifying the Sikh warrior history. Gurprit explained, “The biggest teaching or quality of Sikhs both in what our parents teach us and what is quite evident from the history of Sikhs is the way Sikhism stands out and their focus on service, whether physical service or protecting people or taking care of people. We are called to service not just to Sikhs but all humanity” (Gurprit Sandhu, personal communication December 22, 2020).

Navdeep added:

The other thing I love about my religion is the ability to teach you to be strong enough to stand up for people who otherwise don't have a voice. Like I say to my kids, 'If you see a friend who's not being treated properly, have the strength to be their voice. You don't have to get yourself in trouble for it. You don't have to get yourself in a position to hurt yourself or hurt somebody else, but be the strength for somebody who has no voice (Navdeep Kaur, personal communication January 4, 2021).

The path to Sikh inclusion requires the understanding of Sikhism in terms of values, beliefs, and Sikh participants. Political Sikh history within their home country of India is crucial in both the stance of Sikhs as well as how they are viewed by non-Sikhs in Northern California and the Central Valley. As demonstrated through interviews with my Sikh participants, relocation, physical attributes, their selfless acts for the community, and their supportive qualities all contribute to better understanding Sikhs and Sikhism. As Interviewee 2 had pointed out during his interview, not everyone is willing to learn, however. So, in addition, it is also the willingness of a non-Sikh to want to learn about Sikhism that will further the path to Sikh inclusion. I analyzed the themes and meanings of my research in this chapter. The next chapter concludes my findings based on the analysis.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Sikhs and Sikhism are known for their accepting nature within their communities, yet their misrepresentation due to media, politics, and lack of public knowledge has caused them to be continuously discriminated against. My research allowed me to work in collaboration with the Sikh Coalition to successfully produce a virtual museum exhibit titled *IncluSikh: Inclusively Representing Sikhs and Sikhism in Northern California and the Central Valley* which will continue to make contributions towards the inclusive representation of Sikhs and Sikhism. The virtual exhibit includes personal photographs from my interviewee participants themselves who believe the photographs are materialistic representations of their Sikh identities, religion, and culture. In addition to the photographs, I included a brief summary of who Sikhs are, what they believe in, Sikh history in California, and short descriptions for each of the photographs. *IncluSikh* provides a visual and conceptual understanding of Sikh religion, culture, and people as it allows the public to both read about and see photographs pertaining to Sikhs and Sikhism within Northern California and the Central Valley. *IncluSikh* is a publicly accessible online platform that serves to educate the public while countering negative stereotypes.

An Anthropological Approach

An anthropological approach to Sikh inclusion includes numerous stakeholders that vary from social justice advocates, policymakers, government officials, to anyone who identifies as Sikh. Taking an anthropological approach and conducting ethnography allowed for the acquisition of information that is not otherwise readily or easily available to the public. Through my anthropological research of Sikh religion, people, and culture, I was able to gain firsthand knowledge from Sikhs themselves. By exploring questions pertaining to Sikh history in both India and America, Sikh individual experiences, beliefs, and opinions, an anthropological

approach aided in producing discourse surrounding the current status of how Sikhs and Sikhism are perceived. How are Sikhs portrayed in the media and perceived by others? Who is advocating for Sikhs and how? Both questions are correlated as the portrayal of Sikhs has much to do with why organizations advocate for them. The application of anthropology in my research, thus, aided in gaining knowledge to comprehend Sikhs' and Sikhism's role within society and further disseminating that knowledge.

The use of ethnography within my research study of Sikhs and Sikhism underlines their beliefs, opinions, character, practices, and effect on their community as demonstrated through the participant interviews and provided photographs. I was given the chance to hear the personal thoughts and experiences of local Sikhs that I otherwise would not have been aware of. The information and knowledge I gained through participant interviews enabled me to pinpoint specific themes that contribute to the path to Sikh inclusion. Overall, the ethnography I conducted revealed themes of public misunderstanding, community, and peace that I was able to use to create the *IncluSikh* website as a step towards Sikh inclusion.

IncluSikh: The Exhibit

IncluSikh's website highlights the several different qualities of Sikhs and Sikhism in Northern California and the Central Valley. Before creating the *IncluSikh* website, I asked each of my interview participants if they would allow me to post the photographs that they provided me with on the publicly accessible website, and they were each more than willing. This website will also be available to the Sikh Coalition who may share it or use it for educational purposes to contribute their agenda of assisting Sikhs globally. Ultimately, the *IncluSikh* website will be accessible to the public to better understand Sikh identities, culture, and religion.

The *IncluSikh* website starts with the homepage which introduces the purpose of the website. Under that, is a short section titled *The Fundamentals of Sikhism* which highlights the history and core beliefs and practices of Sikhism. Following that is a photograph depicting the Five K's: *Kes, Kangha, Kara, Kachera, and Kirpan*. Finally, under that is a brief history of Sikhs within California followed by a photograph of the Sikh *gurdwara* in San Jose. The top right corner of the website also includes links that lead to the exhibit, the "About" section, the "Contact" section, the accommodating Instagram logo to connect with IncluSikh on social media, and an email logo.

By clicking on *The Exhibit*, the viewer is brought to the main exhibit page. *IncluSikh's* exhibit is split into five main sections which were created based on the themes that emerged during participant interviews and the photographs that were provided by my participants. The sections are *Physical Attributes, Kara, Imagery, Books, and Seva*. Each section contains a short description of the importance of the topic to Sikhs and Sikhism, a group of photographs portraying said topic, and short captions explaining each photograph. Navigating through the website, viewers will be able to click on any one of the five main sections. When doing so, a short paragraph about the section will be provided first. Scrolling down, viewers will see the photographs relating to the section each with an accompanying caption to specify what that photograph depicts. All of the captions were created based on the descriptions my participants gave me when they sent me the photographs. This way, the exhibit was essentially created through the voices and beliefs of my Sikh participants.

Finally, the *About* section shares the purpose behind the research project and virtual website. It also includes a photograph of myself and a short paragraph about me, the creator. The *Contact* page permits anyone to send in any questions or comments they may have which will be

sent directly to me. They are also able to contact me by clicking either the Instagram or email logo where they are given the opportunity to send in any photographs that they would like to be shared on the *IncluSikh* website. This allows for the continuation of IncluSikh to eventually expand and include Sikhs outside of Northern California and the Central Valley.

Limitations

My research project consisted of interviewing Sikhs and Sikhism in Northern California and the Central Valley. Though the Sikh populace in that particular area is quite large, the efforts to find a sample size to reflect the population were difficult. Due to the global pandemic and shut down of multiple counties, I was unable to build rapport or find participants in person at locations such as the *gurdwara* or at Sikh gatherings. Rather, I had to depend on the feedback from the survey I created and distributed. Limitations of survey results included not everyone wanting to participate in the participant interview, some individuals not responding to follow-up emails, and some individuals not scheduling the interviews after agreeing to participate. This led to a sample size of 11 Sikh participants. I believe gaining participants through building rapport face-to-face would have led to a larger and more reflective sample size.

Additionally due to the global pandemic, I was unable to attend any Sikh parades or gatherings. All parades and gatherings were postponed in 2020 and early 2021 which led to me rely on the experiences of my Sikh participants. I was, however, able to visit the Sikh Gurdwara of San Jose. Visitors were not allowed inside at the time, but I was able to drive around the building as well as take some photographs.

Something that I had first viewed as a limitation was my original plan of creating a traveling museum exhibit. The traveling museum exhibit would have allowed in-person visitors

and had the materialistic items showcased rather than photographed. Due to the pandemic, this idea transformed into the idea of a virtual museum exhibit. Though it was technically a limitation of the research project, IncluSikh's virtual museum exhibit allows for a more widely accessible platform that can be reached by more of the public.

Concluding Remarks

In summation, my research project in collaboration with the Sikh Coalition created an intervention to influence public opinion, cultural acceptance, and conversations across difference without bringing up historical instances of humiliation. Through the use of ethnographic methods, I was able to get firsthand information on Sikh experiences and knowledge within Northern California and the Central Valley. With the information, I created a virtual museum exhibit about religious and cultural Sikh identities that will not only widely reach the public, but also serve as a culturally based informative opportunity for the public to gain knowledge on the topic of Sikhism through visuals. These visuals. *Inclusikh's* virtual museum exhibit will serve to produce discourse among communities that will further contribute to Sikh inclusion.

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Appendices

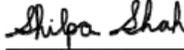
Appendix A: Memorandum of Understanding

DocuSign Envelope ID: 09C0E143-1C7D-4DA3-B698-6968919D3FE8

Applied Anthropology M.A. Program San Jose State University

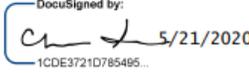
Graduate Committee Memorandum of Understanding

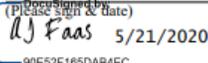
The purpose of this MOU is to formalize membership of the undersigned student's graduate committee. Any changes in committee membership, plan (A or B), or significant changes in topic should be documented in a brief written addendum to this MOU. It is the responsibility of the student and committee chair to inform other committee members of the changes.

Student Shilpa Shah  5/18/2020
(Please Print Name) (Please sign & date)

Plan: Plan A Thesis or **Plan B Project** (circle one)

Committee Chair/
Advisor: Marco Meniketti  5/20/2020
(Please Print Name) (Please sign & date)

Committee Members: Charlotte Sunseri  5/21/2020
(Please Print Name) (Please sign & date)

A.J. Faas  5/21/2020
(Please sign & date)

Brief Abstract/Proposal:

In this project, I will work in partnership with The Sikh Coalition, a community-based organization whose focus is civil and human rights for all, to create a virtual museum exhibit that inclusively represents Sikh religion and culture in California. Through my assessments of the Sikh religion and culture, anti-Sikh media representation, and anti-Sikh hate crimes, I aim to create an intervention that will influence public opinion, cultural acceptance, and conversations across difference without bringing up historical instances of humiliation. The data collected through my interviews and materials added in the virtual museum exhibit will provide significant progress towards the public's understanding of Sikh religion and culture and also help support Sikh community-based organizations.

Appendix B: IRB Approval



Office of Research
Division of
Research and Innovation

San José State University
One Washington Square
San José, CA 95192-0022

TEL: 408-924-2272
officeofresearch@sjsu.edu
sjsu.edu/research

SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

IRB Notice of Approval

Date of Approval: 12/3/2020

Study Title: IncluSikh: Inclusively Representing Sikhs and Sikhism in Northern California and the Central Valley

Primary Investigator(s): Dr. Marco Meniketti

Student(s): Shilpa Shah

Other SJSU Team Members:

Funding Source: None

IRB Protocol Tracking Number: 20293

Type of Review

- Exempt Registration: Category of approval §46.104(d)(2ii)
- Expedited Review: Category of approval §46.110(a)(i)
- Full Review
- Modifications
- Continuing Review

Special Conditions

- Waiver of signed consent approved
- Waiver of some or all elements of informed consent approved
- Risk determination for device:
- Other:

Continuing Review

Is not required. Principal Investigator must file a [status report](#) with the Office of Research one year from the approval date on this notice to communicate whether the research activity is ongoing. Failure to file a status report will result in closure of the protocol and destruction of the protocol file after three years.

Is required. An annual [continuing review renewal application](#) must be submitted to the Office of Research one year from the approval date on this notice. No human subjects research can occur after this date without continuing review and approval.

Approved by Dr. Pamela C. Stacks
Associate Vice President
Institutional Official
Office of Research
San Jose State University

IRB Contact Information:
Alena Filip
Human Protections Analyst
Alena.Filip@sjsu.edu
408-924-2479

Primary Investigator Responsibilities

- Any significant changes to the research must be submitted for review and approval prior to the implementation of the changes.
- Reports of unanticipated problems, injuries, or adverse events involving risks to participants must be submitted to the IRB within seven calendar days of the primary investigator's knowledge of the event.
- If the continuing review section of this notice indicates that continuing review is required, a request for continuing review must be submitted prior to the date the provided.

Appendix C: Survey Questions



Do you identify as Sikh?

Yes

No

If you answered yes in Question 1, how many years have you identified as Sikh?

Do you currently live in or have you ever lived in Northern California and/or the Central Valley?

Yes

No

If you answered yes to Question 3, please specify what city you live or did live in along with the years you resided there. List up to 3 starting with the most recent:

City and years resided

City and years resided

City and years resided

Which gender do you identify as?

Female

Male

Other. Please specify.

Prefer not to say

What age range are you in?

18-25

26-33

34-40

41-47

48-55

56-63

64 and above

If chosen for the final interview, are you willing to provide the researcher with photographs of personal items (of your choice) you relate to your Sikh identity to be displayed on a public virtual platform?

Yes

No

Please fill in the following information. Should you be chosen to participate in the final interview, you will be contacted by email to set up a virtual interview.

First Name

Last Name

Email Address



Appendix D: Email for Chosen Participants

Hello _____,

First off, I would like to thank you for taking the time to fill out the survey.

This email is to notify you that you have been selected to be part of the final interview process of the project entitled *IncluSikh: Inclusively Representing Sikhs and Sikhism in Northern California and the Central Valley*.

Please use this [link](#) to book a date and time for your interview on my calendar. After booking, I will send out a follow-up email to confirm your interview date and time, how to prepare for your interview, and the link to the Zoom meeting.

Best regards,

Shilpa Shah

Appendix E: Zoom Interview Confirmation Email

Hi _____!

Thank you for booking your interview and for agreeing to take part in this study.

We are confirmed for: ____ PST.

Join Zoom Meeting here: _____

Meeting ID: _____

Passcode: IncluSikh

To get you prepared for your interview, here are some points to go over:

1. Start to think about your experiences as a Sikh. What would you like to share? What do you want the community to know about Sikhs and/or Sikhism?
2. Start to think about an item that you relate to your Sikh identity. This could be an item of clothing, photograph, or symbol for example. I will send instructions on emailing me the photographs following our interview.
3. Please download and familiarize yourself with Zoom, the video conferencing platform we will be using for the interview. I have attached a Zoom "cheat sheet" for those that have never used the platform.
4. I will be emailing you a DocuSign containing the consent form. Please fill this out prior to your interview.

If you have any questions or concerns about your upcoming interview- or feel the need to reschedule- please feel free to email me at any time.

Appendix F: Zoom Interview Consent Form

REQUEST FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

IncluSikh: Inclusively Representing Sikhs and Sikhism in Northern California and the Central Valley

NAME OF THE RESEARCHER

Shilpa Shah, San Jose State University graduate student

Marco Meniketti, Ph.D., Faculty Supervisor

PURPOSE

I am conducting research on how to inclusively represent Sikhs in Northern California and the Central Valley by interviewing Sikhs who currently or have previously resided in the aforementioned areas. I will also ask interviewees to provide photographs of materials they associate with their Sikh identity. With the information collected through interviews and granted permission to use photographs, I will create a virtual exhibit with the materials that represent the Sikh participants.

PROCEDURES

Once screened through an emailed survey, chosen participants will be asked to participate in a final interview conducted through a virtual platform such as Zoom or Skype on my computer. This will be scheduled by Shilpa Shah through email based on the availability of the participants. The interview will take up to two hours. In the interview, participants will be asked to answer a series of questions on their experiences as a Sikh. While interviewing, I (Shilpa Shah) will be recording the interview through the virtual platform. I will also be taking notes on the computer. In a follow-up email, participants will also be asked to provide their photographs of materials that represents their Sikh identity. The interview will take up to two hours.

POTENTIAL RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks of discomforts to the participants. However, should they arise, Department Chair, A.J. Faas, will act as a mitigator to resolve the concerns.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

A potential direct social benefit will be a greater understanding of Sikhism in the participant's local community. A potential indirect benefit is the participants' contribution to knowledge on Sikhism as well as conversations across difference.

COMPENSATION

Participants chosen for the final interview will receive a \$40 Visa gift card to compensate for their time and contribution of photographs.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information taken from the study will be coded by interview number order and date (Example: Interview 1: 12-22, Interview 2: 12-23, etc.) to protect each subject's name. No names or other identifying information will be used when discussing or reporting data in final

publications. The investigator (Shilpa Shah) will keep all files, and the Faculty Supervisor (Marco Meniketti) will have access to them. The investigator will safely keep all files and data collected on a secured computer that is password protected in her home office. Once the study is completed, the data will be destroyed.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the entire study or any part of the study without any negative effect on your relations with San Jose State University or [name any other participating institutions]. You also have the right to skip any question you do not wish to answer. This consent form is not a contract. It is a written explanation of what will happen during the study if you decide to participate. You will not waive any rights if you choose not to participate, and there is no penalty for stopping your participation in the study.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study, please contact Shilpa Shah by phone at (408) 832-9312 or email at shilpa.shah@sjsu.edu or Marco Meniketti by email at marco.meniketti@sjsu.edu
- Complaints about the research may be presented to Roberto Gonzalez at roberto.gonzalez@sjsu.edu
- For questions about participants’ rights or if you feel you have been harmed in any way by your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Pamela Stacks, Associate Vice President of the Office of Research, San Jose State University, at 408-924-2479.

SIGNATURES

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to be a part of the study, that the details of the study have been explained to you, that you have been given time to read this document, and that your questions have been answered. You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records.

Participant Signature

Participant’s Name (printed)	Participant’s Signature	Date
------------------------------	-------------------------	------

Researcher Statement

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to learn about the study and ask questions. It is my opinion that the participant understands his/her rights and the purpose, risks, benefits, and procedures of the research and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent	Date
--	------

Appendix G: Zoom Interview Questions

Interview questions for participants:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research project! I will be asking you a series of questions. If you do not wish to answer a question or want to end the interview, you may.

1. How long have you identified as a Sikh?
2. Please explain how you came about identifying as a Sikh.
3. In a month, how often would you say you practice Sikhism?
4. What are some ways you practice Sikhism?
5. What materialistic item(s) represent(s) your Sikh identity? Why?
6. Do you think Sikhism is well represented in (insert location where interviewee lives or has lived in Northern California/Central Valley)? Why or why not?
7. Do you think Sikhism is understood in (insert location where interviewee lives or has lived in Northern California/Central Valley)? Why or why not?
8. Have you ever had to explain what Sikhism is to anyone that does not identify as Sikh? If so, please explain that experience.
9. Have you ever experienced being mistaken for another religion?
10. What would you like non-Sikhs to know about Sikh religion, culture, and people?

Appendix H: Exhibit Photograph Instructions

Hi _____!

First off, I want to thank you so much for participating in the interview. Your time and input are truly appreciated.

I will include instructions on attaching photographs of your chosen item(s). Please reply to this email with the photographs.

1. Make sure your item(s) is placed against a solid background with nothing else visible.
2. If it is a three-dimensional (3D) item, please make sure to take photographs from all angles (front, back, sides).
3. After you have taken the photographs, please make sure the quality is clear.
4. Please include a short description (2-3 sentences) describing what the item(s) is and why you chose it.

Lastly, I will send your Visa gift card via email upon receiving your photographs.

Please email me if you have any questions. Thank you!