

**The Society for American Archivist's (SAA) Impact on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in
American Archives.**

Research Proposal Component 2

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Theoretical or Philosophical Perspective

In order to examine diversity in the archival workforce in SAA member organizations, we will be approaching our research using pragmatic and transformative worldviews. Creswell & Creswell (2018) state that the pragmatic worldview understands “that research always occurs in social, historical, political, and other contexts” (p.11) and applies mixed methods approaches to best understand the research problem. To fully explore our research questions, we must look at the archival workforce through these broader contexts to better understand how and why there is a lack of diversity and what steps can be taken to create a profession that is more inclusive. The transformative worldview recognizes the need for research to help reform societal issues and has a collaborative and participatory approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This research aims to enact change in the archival institutions of the SAA. To do so, we must implement research that will take action towards creating a more equitable and inclusive workforce so that diversity can thrive. The qualitative aspect of our research seeks collaboration with those in the archival workforce who identify with diverse populations. We must work collaboratively to refrain from further marginalizing or inflicting damage upon these individuals (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This research aims to provide actionable changes within archival institutions to improve workplace cultures that foster and promote diversity equity and inclusion with measurable outcomes.

Here we will also employ critical theory in our approach. Cannella (2010) describes critical theory as addressing “societal structures and institutions (whether long standing or newly emerging, ideological, discursive, or material circumstance) that oppress and exclude so that transformative actions can be generated that reduce the inequitable power condition” (para. 1) and “concerned with issues of power, intersecting oppressions, and inclusion-exclusion”

(para. 1). It is impossible to address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in archives, without looking with a critical lens upon the structures which have created and upheld inequities within the archival profession for so long.

Literature Review

DEI in Library and Information Science

As cultural heritage and information institutions is it worth examining literature from the wider Library and Information Science (LIS) community to understand overarching trends in DEI research, and how they can be applied to the archival field. The greater LIS community faces similar challenges to those we are seeing in the archival community, where DEI and social justice values are stated explicitly by professional organizations like the American Library Association (ALA) and the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), and yet the field has remained predominantly white with little change in the past 15 years (American Library Association, 2006; Department of Professional Employees, AFL-CIO, 2020; International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), 2019). To address this, most LIS research on the topic has focused on education of LIS professionals, and how to increase diversity through a variety of recruitment methods.

Research into why this disconnect between stated values and workforce diversity is so persistent in LIS fields demonstrates that intersecting societal and institutional factors have created barriers. Poole et al. (2021) compiled documentary evidence from four decades of LIS research that shows diversity trends in LIS have not only been lacking, but that what has been done has resulted in few positive results. The authors state that one reason for this may be a longstanding challenge in defining and operationalizing diversity in regards to LIS, and posit that despite the variety of definitions from various organization, efforts should focus on equity and

inclusion, not just diversity if change is to be enacted (Poole et al., 2021a). Collins (2018) attributes that institutionalized language that centers the *need* to challenge existing systems of oppression rather than the *action* required to effect change, is a factor in the lack of diversification of the field. They advocate for interrogating language used as a tool to conserve power, and by doing so shift conversations in the field to more directly facilitate action (Collins, 2018). Ndumu (2021) outlines the historical and cultural changes in the US that “have resulted in librarianship being out of reach, at best, or out of sight, at worst, for many Blacks in the United States” and advises that DEI discussions and efforts consider larger “big picture” demographic perspectives (Ndumu, 2021, pp. 151, 154). Williams & Hagood (2019) examined how disability is represented and supported in the workforce and found that disability is not adequately included in DEI conversations, and attitudes toward effective changes in LIS differ depending on personal impairment or disability status. This critical LIS research shows that intersectional factors, along with a distinct trend of discussion rather than action may be a primary reason why homogeneity of the workforce has persisted in the field (Collins, 2018; Ndumu, 2021; Poole et al., 2021b; Williams & Hagood, 2019).

Pragmatic research in the field that seeks to provide solutions has largely focused on LIS education as a key factor in creating a more diverse workforce. Jaeger et al. (2015) states that diversity and inclusion efforts have been largely focused on only professional recruiting, and that the field has had difficulty putting their stated values into action. They suggest that the *Virtuous Circle*, originally described by Jaeger & Franklin (2007), may be one way to begin to effectively represent the DEI values of the profession in the workforce (Jaeger et al., 2015). The *Virtuous Circle* describes how diverse LIS doctoral recruiting leads to more LIS program faculty diversity, which leads to more culturally aware LIS masters graduates, which creates better, more equitable

public services and inspires the circle to continue (Jaeger & Franklin, 2007; Poole et al., 2021a). Subramaniam & Jaeger (2010) support this emphasis on LIS education as a means to more impactfully support diversity in the workforce, drawing from findings from other fields that show diverse representation in faculty successfully attracts more diverse candidates. Morales et al. (2014) posits that diversity and education efforts from the ALA like the Spectrum Scholarship Program, and various MLIS degree scholarship programs for racial and ethnic minority are likely to benefit the field, although their impact is hindered by the small number of participants and scholarships actually available. Despite this, the authors concur that increased recruitment, support and retention of under-represented LIS students will help “create a base of librarians of color to fill openings” in the LIS workforce (Morales et al., 2014, p. 444).

In addition to increased representation of diversity in LIS program faculty and recruitment, Foy (2021) argues that retention and inclusion and belonging practices are essential to creating a truly diverse LIS workforce. They point to examples from other sectors, including science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) and corporate fields for examples of how to create retention and inclusion programs that can accommodate and support a more diverse workforce (Foy, 2021). Foy shows that there is evidence that DEI initiatives can be successful in a workforce, and their recommendations for the LIS field can be directly applied to archival institutions as well. The push for increased representation in LIS educational ventures in the literature also impacts degrees with archival focuses and archival degree recruitment. It is also reasonable to assume, as information institutions, that the critical examination of why there has been little change in diversity statistics in the LIS field can be seen in a similar extent in archives.

DEI in Archives

Engseth (2018) discusses the application of the cultural competency framework in archival practice, stating that its use “reveals archivists thinking and practicing with humility and self-reflection” (Engseth, 2018, p. 476). Where cultural competency as a framework for inclusion of diverse voices in the field there is no discoverable research in regard to the effects and outcomes of these practices. While discussion is occurring in the archival profession around these values, little is being done to measure impact and change.

Archives Collections

The previously mentioned concept of the *Virtuous Circle*, where “inclusive libraries will also help to open up young from diverse backgrounds to the idea that they may want to work in a library one day or even become a library educator” (Jaeger & Franklin, 2007, p. 25) provides the reasoning for why we must also look at diversity within archival collections to understand their implications for diversity within the profession. Contemporary work in diversifying the histories represented within archival and cultural heritage institutions may in fact contribute to a more inclusive and diverse future of the profession through increasing interest in the field for those whose identities have often been underrepresented in preserved histories.

The needs of Native American and Indigenous communities within archival practice greatly differ from the cataloging, classification, access, and ownership practices used in non-Native repositories (Karuk Tribe et al., 2017). As the Sípnuuk digital library, archive and museum in California, the Xwi7xwa Library in British Columbia, and the Brian Deer Classification illustrate (Doyle et al., 2015; Karuk Tribe et al., 2017), the proper care of Native American and Indigenous histories require space for more Indigenous voices and practices within the traditionally western archival profession. The SAA does have a Native American

Archives Section, which serves to educate archivists working with Native American Collections, (Society of American Archivists, 2021c), but no research exists on the impact of their work on collections or the employment of Native American or Indigenous professionals.

Gay and Lesbian Archives often occur in areas where there are “powerful and sustained social and political action” (Lukenbill, 2002, p. 96) but are usually run by volunteers and face many funding issues. LGBTQ+ professional organizations exist within the SAA (Society of American Archivists, 2021a), demonstrating a force within the archival field that are hoping to make change in collections and archives, but again there has been no research about the outcomes of these groups on representation in collections or in the field.

Archives Workforce

There has been very little discoverable work done around diversity in the archivist profession. One of the only studies found is the Poole (2017) study of twenty-one Harold T. Pinkett Minority Student Award recipients. This award is given by the SAA to students of color studying archival management selected based on personal statements to encourage involvement in SAA and to further their careers in archives (Society of American Archivists, 2021b). Poole (2017) investigates the educational and professional experiences of these students, and their recommendations for archivists of color. Membership in student chapters of SAA was common for the majority of students in the study however, 10 of the 21 students interviewed did not retain their professional membership in SAA, with 4 citing cost and 4 citing the change in their career trajectory based on their lack of employment in archives despite applying “for probably hundreds of archives jobs around the country” (Poole, 2017, p. 124). Participation in the SAA Annual Meeting and Archives and Archivists of Color Roundtable granted exposure to other diverse professionals from around the country but provided mixed experiences for students in terms of

connections and inclusion. This would imply that despite an interest in archives, students of color may experience increased difficulty in finding a job and making connections with mentors in the field. Among the recommended areas of future research that Poole (2017) proposes is an expansion of studied experiences to include all archivists of color, and not just those who were Pinkett award winners. The expansion of study is critical, in that it would include the shared experiences of archivists of color and those who have not received the financial assistance and recognition of the Pinkett award, this could help with the understanding of how the SAA can take action to increase longevity of the participation of archivists of color in professional organizations and their inclusion in the profession as a whole. This study also only considers the racial and ethnic identities of these students and does not examine the effects of any areas of intersectionality that these students may identify with on their experiences within the profession.

Society of American Archivists

Upon reviewing diversity and inclusion reports from the Society of American Archivists listed on their website, the organization openly recognizes the importance of diverse individuals and groups to the archival profession. In 1997, the Council of the Society of American Archivists established a Task Force on Diversity whose purpose was to “investigate issues relating to diversity currently being addressed by the Society” (Society of American Archivists, 1999, Section I). One of the issues they address is the “poor visibility of archivists in society at large” (Society of American Archivists, 1999, Section III), which causes a lack of awareness of the archival profession among minority groups. Furthermore, low pay in the archival profession puts it at a disadvantage in competition with other jobs that could recruit minority groups (Society of American Archivists, 1999). The SAA also claims that the large institutions in which archivists

are often employed are difficult to diversify due to their size (Society of American Archivists, 1999).

This task force has looked inward as well, recognizing problems within the SAA itself that discourage minority members from participating in the organization. They state the costs of joining and attending the annual meeting as deterrents as well as the lack of apparent opportunities for participation to new members and, especially, minority members (Society of American Archivists, 1999). The task force established a list of recommendations to the Society as an attempt to remedy these issues. Developing an organizational position statement, incorporating diversity into strategy planning, and reinforcing/expanding existing diversity activities were among the list (Society of American Archivists, 1999). Furthermore, the task force laid out goals for the SAA's executive offices as well. Actions such as adding multiple languages to the website, holding a diversity fair, increasing scholarship aid, conducting public relations on behalf of the archival profession, and encouraging archival internships for minority populations within high school and college students were suggested as proactive approaches to the diversity problem within the Society (Society of American Archivists, 1999). The work of the task force was to be discussed, documented, and reported at council and leadership meetings.

If we jump ahead to 2005, however, not much progress had been made between the inception of the diversity task force and the 2004 A*CENSUS Diversity Report. Brenda Banks, a Special Research Consultant for the SAA, published an article to *The American Archivist* voicing their dismay and disappointment over the numbers shown in the 2004 survey. They state that “the numbers of this 2004 survey were not substantially different from those collected in the past” (Banks, 2006, p. 482) and that the survey itself was flawed in the questions it asked. The numbers speak for themselves, with 84% of respondents self-defining as White/Caucasian, 3% as

African American, 2% as Native American, 2% as Latino/Hispanic, 1% as Asian, 3% as “other”, and 5% choosing the “I’d rather not say” option (Banks, 2006). Furthermore, 0% of respondents identified as Alaskan Native or Pacific Islander, bringing to light a stark and harrowing absence of these races within the SAA (Banks, 2006).

Banks (2006) also states that the A*CENSUS results indicate that most of the minority respondents were what they call “accidental archivists,” meaning they discovered the job by happenstance (n=18.9%) or were assigned archives-related responsibilities by their employer (n=18.5%). This raises the question of, “What does it say about a profession when the majority of its professionals enter it accidentally rather than purposefully?” (Banks, 2006, p. 485). In the survey, 67.3% of minorities stated that archives was not their first career (compared to 61.9% of white respondents), meaning that these archivists had other plans for their careers and entered the field through other jobs (Banks, 2006). 40.5% of minorities reported that they worked in the public sector (federal and state government), and 34.5% worked at academic institutions (Banks, 2006). These large percentages can be attributed to the size of these organizational entities, the number of available jobs, and the equal opportunity requirements to which these organizations are held.

Banks suggests several outreach initiatives that have either never been considered by the SAA or have been proposed but never implemented. They suggest that the SAA should take advantage of Archives Week, an annual week-long celebration of archives, by partnering with the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators and state and regional archival organizations to find creative ways to make the event more appealing to a broader audience (Banks, 2006). They also recommend more fervent attempts at reaching students who are at formative stages in their education and future career planning. Creating

informational packets about archives careers for distribution amongst secondary school counselors and university departments as well as partnerships with the Historically Black College and Universities Archives Institute and the Native American Archives Institute could yield exponential growth in interest among minority populations (Banks, 2006). They also criticize the traditional exclusion of children under the age of twelve being allowed to visit archival institutions, stating that “it is between the ages of ten and fifteen that children are most influenced” (Banks, 2006, p. 492). Implementing programs that invite this population could create impressions that factor into the shaping of these children’s future careers. Banks expresses that there is no excuse to also take advantage of technological resources that are available to digitize interesting collections and make them available to the public while also creating websites that are not only attractive to researchers but casual users as well (Banks, 2006).

The 2011-2012 Diversity Speaker Bank Survey distributed by the SAA provides frustrating insight into how infrequently archival speakers discuss diversity when invited to speak to student chapter programs. Of the respondents, 64.29% stated that they have never heard a speaker talk about diversity in the profession or in archival collections (Society of American Archivists, 2012). Yet, when asked if they would attend an event featuring a speaker addressing diversity among archivists, 100% of respondents indicated that they would (Society of American Archivists, 2012). It is also of note that 53.57% of respondents stated that they were persons of color (Society of American Archivists, 2012). This survey exemplifies a very clear interest in diversity among archival students. They want to hear about it and discuss it but are often not given the opportunity. The end of the survey included a collection of comments from the survey respondents. Among these comments were a few statements of note, such as one respondent stating that most of the discussions they have attended “mention this issue [diversity], but the

entirety of the lecture is not focused on it” and that they feel “it could be very beneficial to hear these discussions from archivists who represent this diversity” (Society of American Archivists, 2012, p. 3). Another respondent stated they would “like to see the definition of ‘diversity’ be expanded within the profession” and that diversity “goes beyond race and ethnicity” (Society of American Archivists, 2012, p. 3). This is a valid sentiment and another aspect of the diversity problem within archives. We are not only seeing a lack of minority populations in terms of race and ethnicity. Things such as gender expression, disability, and sexual orientation should be considered as well.

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