White Paper: Information Avoidance in the Archival Context

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Abstract: The cognitive phenomenon known as information avoidance (IA) has been researched by scholars and professionals in multiple disciplines, but often flies under the radar in the LAM professions which focus more on information seeking behavior. Sweeny et al. (2010) define IA as "any behavior intended to prevent or delay the acquisition of available but potentially unwanted information" (p. 341). This preliminary research, as part of an MLIS thesis project, explored how archivists understand and conceptualize IA, and how they have experienced IA in their practice both behind the scenes and when working with researchers. 12 archivists across the United States were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling to participate in hour long qualitative, semi-structured interviews to explore this topic. Participants were given the working definition by Sweeny *et al*. and then queried with a mix of questions regarding their background, how they conceptualize IA in general and within their field, and if and how they have experienced IA in their careers. Careful methodology and extensive coding of the resulting transcripts have resulted in an array of common themes across academic, government, community, museum archives and more, as well as interesting divergent perspectives across institutions. Is this a particular concern in the archival field? What can we learn from this data and what possible impacts could the data have on the field? This white paper version of the thesis "Information Avoidance in the Archival Context" (Beland II, 2024) seeks to introduce a summary of IA, reveal key findings and implications for the archival field, and present ideas for further research.

Introduction

Sweeny et al. (2010) define information avoidance (IA) as "any behavior intended to prevent or delay the acquisition of available but potentially unwanted information" (p. 341). Rooted in theories developed by psychologists such as selective exposure theory (Festinger, 1954), IA has also been researched by economists, communications scholars and information professionals. However, despite falling under the umbrella of information professionals, archivists do not appear to have a focus on in-depth research centered in IA within their profession. In the larger scope of libraries, archives and museums, several tenets of IA explored in my research appeared in the literature, but often were not labeled as IA and were more focused on information *seeking* behavior. In archives, this included Power et al.'s (2017) observation that the processing or expansive amounts of information and data in archival collections can prove to be unwieldy and may delay users in accessing the information, and McCallum's (2017) and McCracken's (2019) mention of "deliberate ignorance" in their respective studies about Indigenous peoples' systemic reluctance to engage with archival materials, among others. None of the above deliberately puts IA in conversation with archival practices, rather including IA as consequential to other main points. One piece by Hertwig and Ellerbrock (2022) did center on IA in archives specifically, but the paper used the term "deliberate ignorance" rather than "information avoidance," which also creates a conundrum when it comes to discovery of relevant articles.

Background

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Using Sweeny et al.'s (2010) systematic review as the basis of this study, a summary and organizational structure categorized the key tenets of IA by the "what," "when/why," and "who" of IA. Those listed below in regular font are from Sweeny et al. (2010), and those in italics are additions that emerged from this preliminary research (Beland II, 2024) followed by an explanation.

What is IA: 1) IA can occur when content about the information or outcomes that might arise from receiving the information are known or unknown; 2) IA can have positive or negative outcomes; 3) IA can be temporary or permanent; 4) IA can be active or passive; 5) IA is not restricted to one's self, and; *6) IA can be an outright denial or refusal, or omission of information after originally accessing it.*

Sweeny et al. (2010) excluded instances where information is received and then omitted or rejected ("knowledge dismissal") and where an individual's interpretation of information may be inappropriate or inaccurate ("inference avoidance"). The additional tenet was added as one could argue that since IA is not restricted to one's self that denial, omission and poor interpretations may also impact another individual's potential avoidance as common in economic IA literature (e.g., omitting information to control markets or negotiations–Golman et al., 2017), or may be employed to protect another individual as seen in health-related IA (e.g., not telling someone about a diagnosis to "protect" others or finding conflicting information about treatment online–Rauscher & Dean, 2018). In this study, instances of omission were more commonly discussed than were instances of outright denial, and the general "obscurity" of archives in terms of public knowledge harkens back to ideas of "archival intelligence" and how that can preclude effective usage of archival material (Yakel & Torres, 2003).

When/Why: Once an individual has the opportunity to potentially engage with some information, they will take measurements of: 1) Their own perceived control over the final outcomes of receiving that information; 2) Their perceived ability to cope with receiving that information; 3) perceived ease or difficulty of accessing the information; 4) Their expectations about the information itself; *5) Whether the information is relevant or interesting to them, and; 6) Availability of time, money, etc.*

Measured variables that Sweeny et al. (2010) omitted include lack of relevance, interest, and other resources like time and money, but one could argue that these are important factors that people measure in their everyday information behavior. These were commonly mentioned by the interviews for this study. Further, this aligns with their own tenet that IA is not restricted to one's self because all of the aforementioned variables may be influenced by others, therefore impacting decisions.

Moderators of IA can be organized into intrapersonal (personality, emotions, demographics, etc.), interpersonal (close relationships, social influence, etc.) and situational (physical environment, time, money, etc.) factors.

In addition to these measurements and moderators, three rationales to avoid information can be called up. These can occur individually or in any combination and they include avoiding the information because: 1) The information demands a change in beliefs; 2) The information demands an undesired action, or; 3) The information causes unpleasant emotions or an abatement of pleasant emotions.

Who: Everyone is susceptible to IA and has likely engaged in IA behavior in any combination of the tenets above. Some people may be more likely to engage in IA based on demographic (Deng et al., 2023) and socioeconomic factors (St. Jean et al., 2017), and personality traits (Howell & Shepperd, 2016).

Problem Statement

In observation that IA is notably absent from archival scholarship and practice, it is important to study IA in the context of archives as archival records and those who interact with them enter into an information exchange in which the phenomenon of IA can affect how individuals interact with archives (Beland II, 2024; Yeo, 2018). It is for this reason that the following RQs were created to intentionally center IA in the archival context by interviewing archivists to investigate:

RQ1: What abstract ideas do archivists have about IA as it relates to archives?

RQ2: How do archivists experience IA in their daily work?

Importantly, this research confirms the notion that archivists are not familiar with IA, despite the tangential extant literature, but that there is clear evidence to support the fact that archivists have abstract ideas about IA and that they do have experiences with IA in their daily work. This alludes to several key implications and room for future research to examine archival practices, customer service and information literacy.

Methodology

This preliminary research adopted a qualitative phenomenological approach by interviewing 12 archivists from across the United States. Creswell and Baez' (2020) phenomenology framework uses six points that allowed me explore the phenomenon of IA in archives by: 1) Focusing on IA as the central phenomenon; 2) collecting data from archivists; 3) exploring the context of how those archivists experienced IA; 4) framing the study in the philosophy of hermeneutics–how archivists interpret the concept of IA, and how they experience it *through* this concept to create meaning of the experience and (See George, 2021, para. 9, for more information on hermeneutics); 5) bracketing out my own experiences with IA through self-reflexivity; and 6) developing aggregate meanings and a description of the experience of IA as the archivists have described it. This approach, along with an extensive literature review, provided the foundation for well-executed qualitative interviews.

As there is a lack of universally adopted theory surrounding IA, the nature of this study was inherently exploratory, so a smaller sample of twelve participants was enough to achieve saturation (Creswell & Baez, 2020; Schamber, 2000). The sample consisted of archivists of varying experience levels and demographic backgrounds from across the United States and myriad types of institutions. Materials including abstracts, interview protocols, recruitment criteria and more were reviewed by the University of Maryland College Park IRB and the research was considered to be exempt. A semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix 1) allowed me to explore the phenomenon of IA with the participants through open-ended questions and a relaxed, organic interview style (Creswell & Baez, 2020). Each interview was recorded and transcribed using AI, then I checked them for accuracy before sending them back to the participant with notes for member checks. The twelve transcripts were then thematically analyzed (Strauss & Corbin, 2015) and organized using synthesis grids (Miles et al., 2020). Appendix 2 shows the full code book and exemplar quotes from the transcripts.

Although the small sample size is appropriate as preliminary evidence on a topic with limited comparative research, some key limitations should be acknowledged. 1) A larger, more inclusive sample size and strategy may reveal additional implications for IA in the archival field as it may be more nationally and institutionally representative. 2) The sample only included archivists, but the findings

implicate additional "actors" in the archival information exchange including researchers, stakeholders, the archives as place, and consumers of research. 3) This research did not seek to explore IA in archival practices of any specific kind, but many well-known practices are implicated. These all inform future research ideas which will be discussed in the conclusion section.

Results

Nine of the twelve archivists interviewed were not familiar with the existing IA literature or more clinical definitions of IA. However, once they were provided with this definition, they were able to develop abstract ideas and relay experiences about IA, both generally and in the context of archives, that aligned well with the RQs and with the principles gleaned from the extant literature. To make sense of these ideas and experiences, I developed the RIAS model (Figure 1) inspired by Littletree et al.'s (2020) Indigenous systems of knowledge model. This is a relationality model which is meant to illustrate how the multiple parts of the model (the concentric circles) are all interrelated rather than being independent from one another, ultimately converging together in any combination to result in IA. The model then presents the key principles of IA: 1) That everyone is susceptible to IA and approaches information with pre-existing knowledge and attitudes; 2) That information content and/or outcomes are known or unknown; 3) That measurements of their own ability to cope with the information, ability to control outcomes, ease of access, expectations about the information itself and other factors like interest and resources are taken; 4) That intrapersonal, interpersonal and situational factors moderate IA; and 5) That rationales are applied. This avoidance of information can then impact the individual's overall knowledge and attitudes and reciprocates back into their approach to other, new information. It is also important to note that IA does not need to be confined to one's self and that others can impose IA on others for any of the same principles above (Golman et al., 2017; Sweeny et al., 2010).

The key to understanding this model is that the trajectory leading an individual to IA can include any of the factors being interwoven together, and that the occurrence may not be the same each time for the same individual approaching the same information. For example, on Day 1, a politically conservative individual approaching election information may assess their interest in their information, and ultimately refuse to even look at it because it may cause an unpleasant emotion (anxiety or fear). On Day 2, the same individual may choose to ignore the information because they assume it is from a more liberal source, therefore playing on their expectations about the information and the thought that seeing the information may cause a change in beliefs. On Day 3, the very same individual may choose to access the information, but then later disregards it because a conservative friend provided conflicting information, whether it was true or false, thus impacting their decision regarding that information and their future knowledge and attitudes towards similar information.

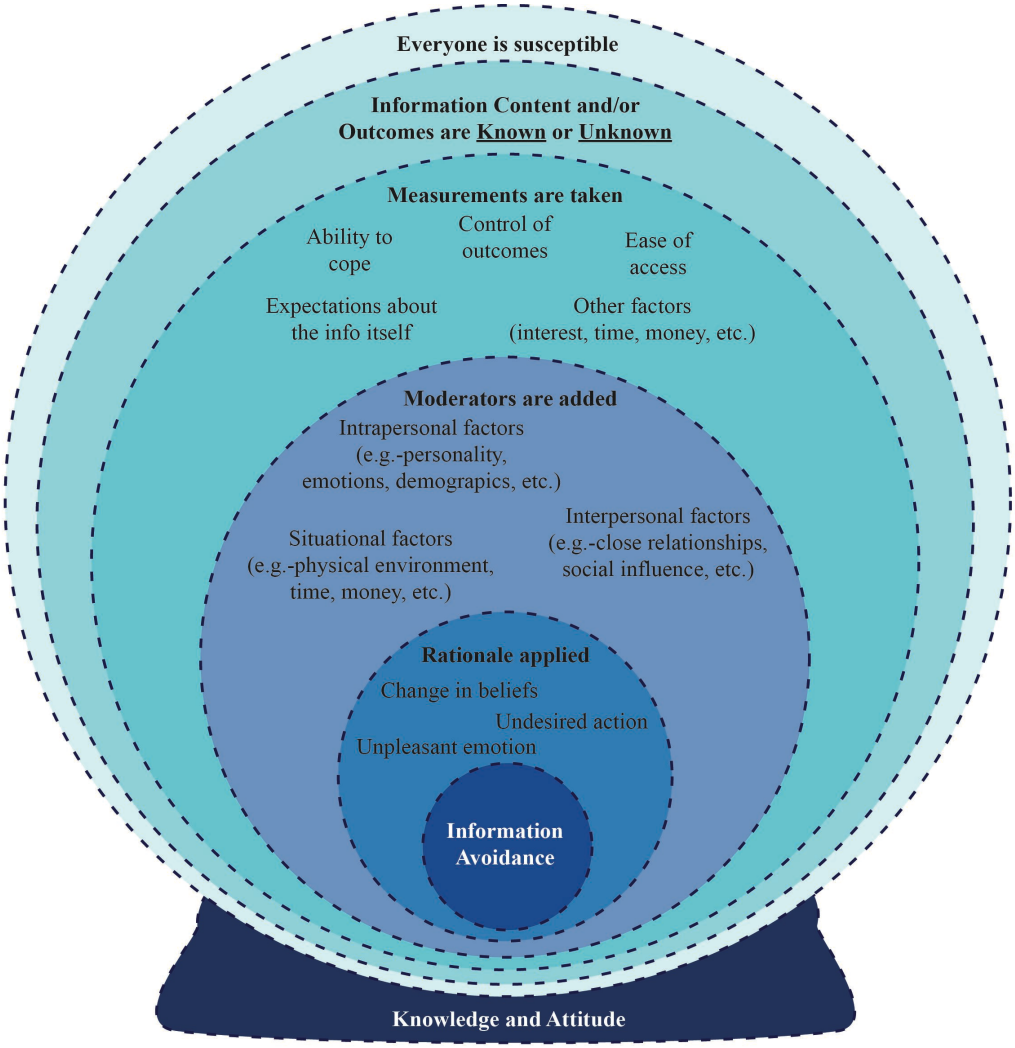

Figure 1. The Relational Information Avoidance System Model.

Five major findings emerged from the interviews that relate to the RIAS model above specifically in the archival context. Three findings were relevant to RQ1 (abstract ideas about IA in archives–Figure 2) and two findings were relevant to RQ2 (how IA is experienced in an archivist's daily work–Figure 3). The statistical results for the occurrence of mentions for the findings are all significant and can be seen in Table 1.

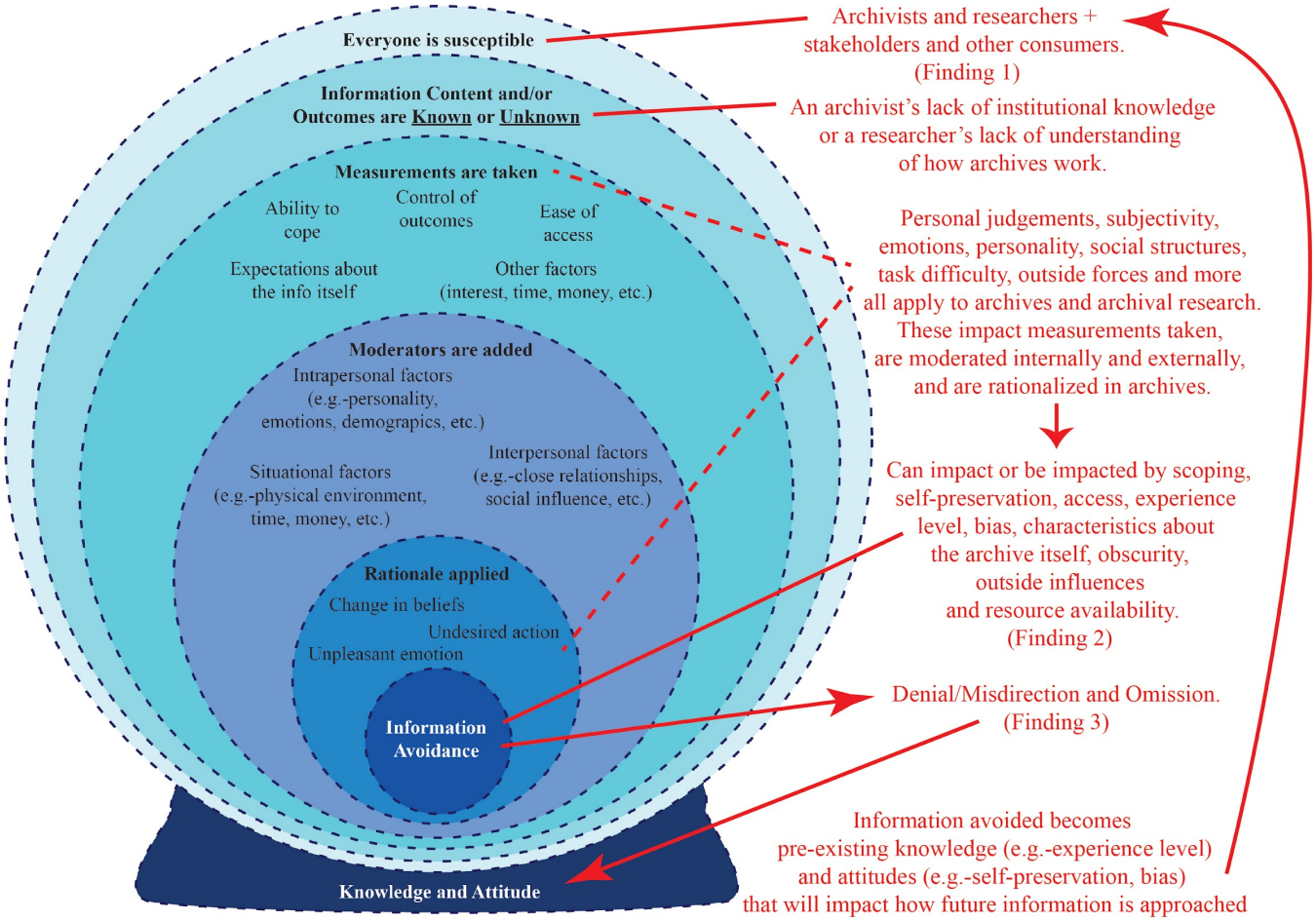

Figure 2. RIAS Model Annotated with Findings 1, 2 and 3.

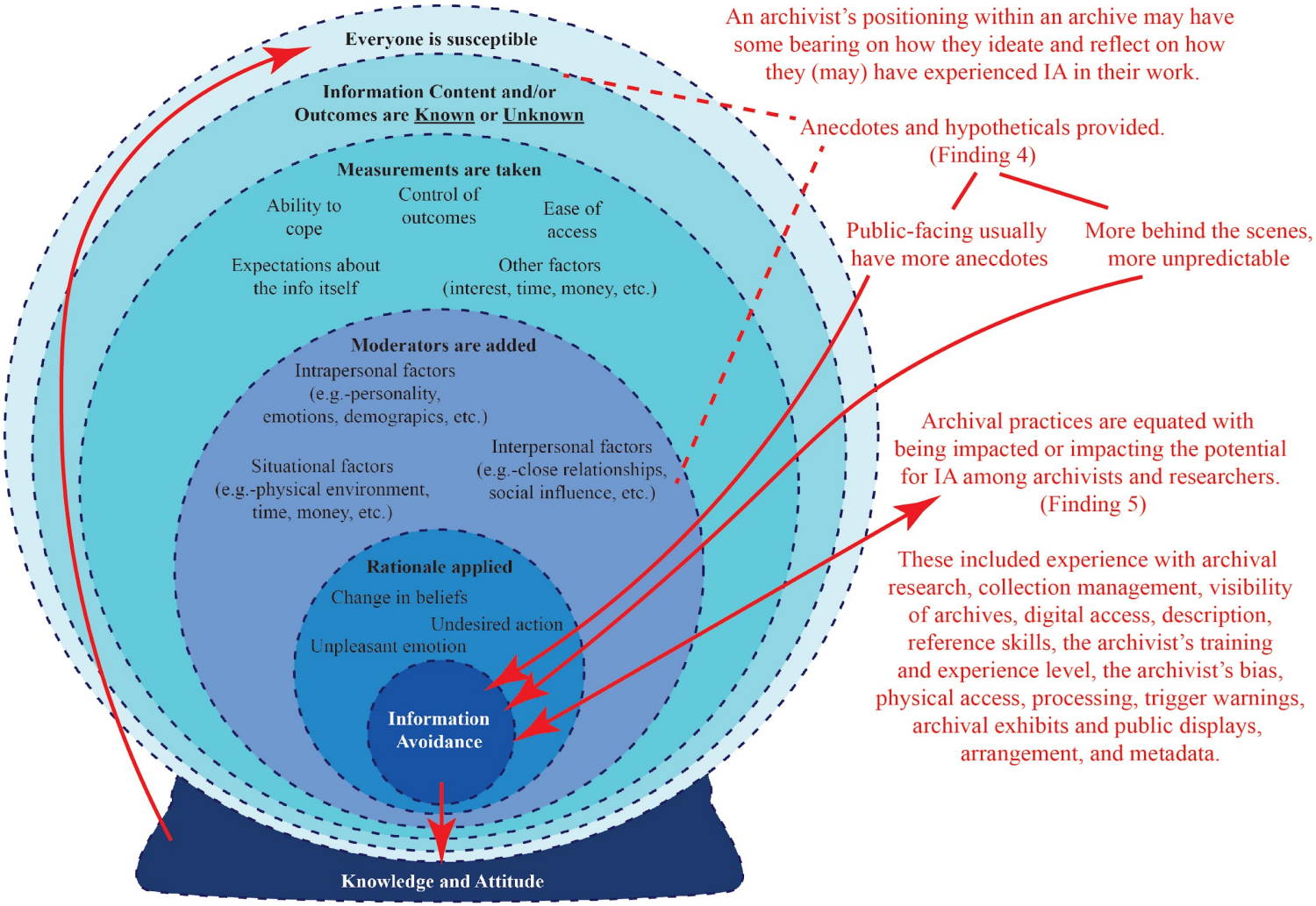

Figure 3. RIAS Model Annotated with Findings 5 and 6.

RQ1: What ideas do archivists have about IA as it relates to archives?			
	Codes Included	**Total # of References**	**Number of Transcripts Tagged with Code**
Finding 1.1: IA Susceptibility	Archivists exhibiting IA Researchers exhibiting IA	42 32 **Sum: 74**	12 (100%) 12 (100%)
Finding 1.2: Contributing Variables	Scoping factors Self-preservation Access Experience level Bias/Worldview Type of archive Obscurity Outside influence Resource availability	113 103 89 69 61 56 44 42 28 **Sum: 605**	12 (100%) 12 (100%) 11 (92%) 12 (100%) 12 (100%) 12 (100%) 12 (100%) 11 (92%) 11 (92%)
Finding 1.3: Denial vs. Omission	Omission of information Purposeful denial/misdirection	58 35 **Sum: 93**	11 (92%) 12 (100%)
RQ2: How do archivists experience IA as it relates to their daily work?			
	Codes Included	**Total # of References**	**Number of Transcripts Tagged with Code**
Finding 2.1: Applications	Anecdotal evidence Hypothetical evidence	55 40 **Sum: 95**	12 (100%) 12 (100%)
Finding 2.2: Archival Practices and Workflows	Experience with archival research Collection management Overall visibility of archives Digital access Description Reference skills Archivists' training/experience Archivists' bias Physical access Processing Trigger/Content warnings Exhibits/Public Displays Arrangement Metadata	45 39 35 32 29 27 25 23 19 16 8 6 4 4 **Sum: 312**	12 (100%) 10 (83%) 11 (92%) 9 (75%) 10 (83%) 9 (75%) 8 (67%) 8 (67%) 9 (75%) 8 (67%) 4 (33%) 2 (17%) 4 (33%) 3 (25%)

Table 1. Findings, Codes, Number of References and Number of Transcripts Tagged with Code by RQ

Throughout the interviews, the relationships among various "actors" in the archival process were also implicated which required further sense-making and heavily related to the tenet that IA is not relegated to one's self and can be consciously or unconsciously imposed onto another person. The "actors" implicated included the Creators of archival documents, Archives as Place, Archivists, Researchers, and Other Consumers. My second contribution is the proposal of the Archival Information Avoidance Exchange (AIAE) model (Figure 4) which illustrates a top-down exchange of information starting with the Creator of an archival document. The document, which may have been, for instance, created with biased information or points of view, then works its way down into other "actors" in the information exchange timeline and shows an increase in the imposition of IA through the process. As other actors in the process can potentially create their own archival materials by appropriately or inappropriately utilizing the original document in this narrative, the exchange can perpetuate and continue to grow. For a deeper, narrative description of this model, see Beland II (2024, p. 107-121).

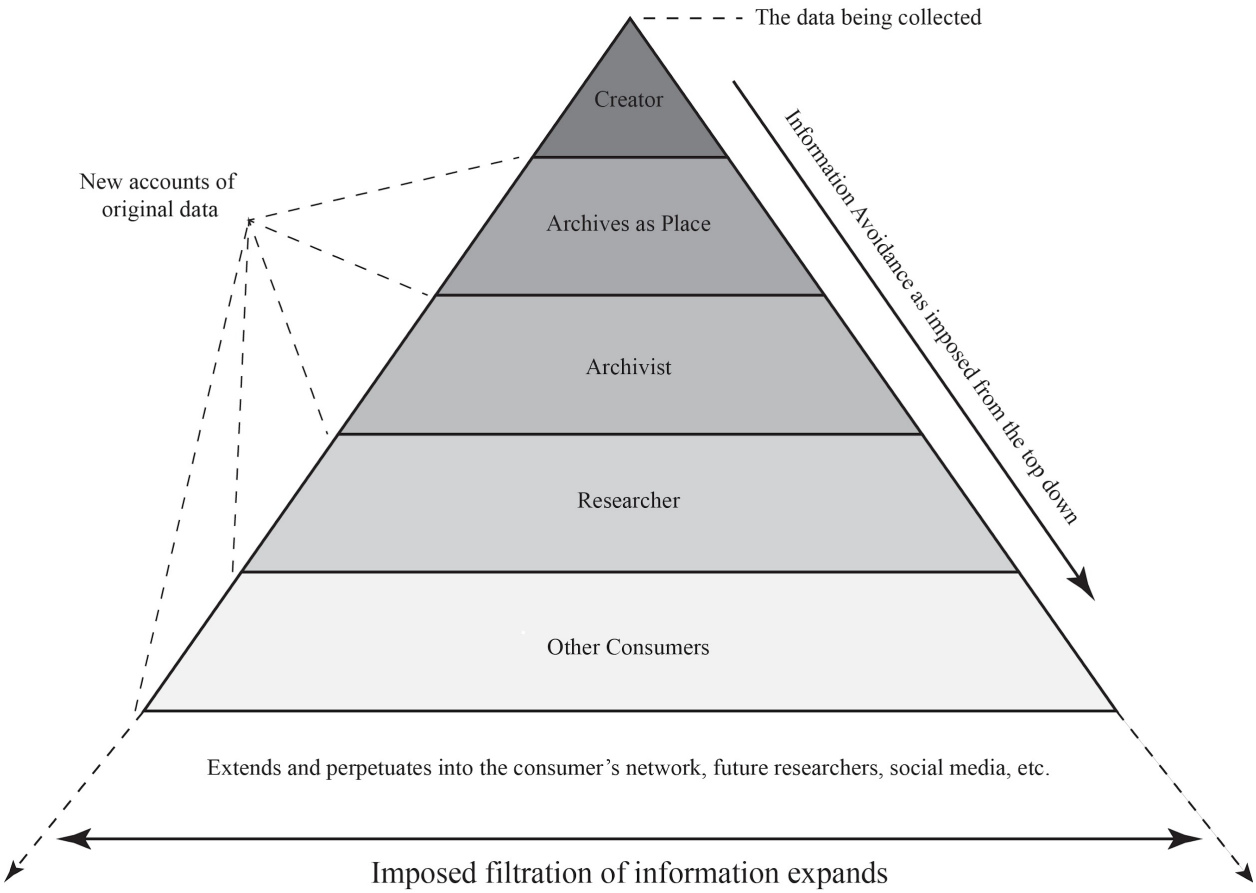

Figure 4. The Archival Information Avoidance Exchange Model.

Findings

The first finding related to IA susceptibility in archives, and the interviewees relayed ideas that all "actors" in the lifecycle of archival information are susceptible to IA. Due to the structure and context of the interviews, the most explicit codes in this theme were that archivists and researchers were susceptible

to IA when working with archival material. The participants cited personal judgments, human nature, politics, institutional missions, social positions and more as things that lead to subjective decisions about archival information that they make and that researchers might make.

The second finding relevant to RQ1 related to the variables that contributed to IA in archives. These could be intrapersonal, interpersonal or situational, and were discussed by the participants in relevance to archivists and researchers. The variables included (in descending order by number of mentions across transcripts) ideas about scopes of research and collections, self-preservation, access, experience level with archival research, bias and worldview, characteristics about the archive itself, obscurity, outside influences and resource availability. It is important to note that many of these variables were overlapping, and the examples in Appendix 2 may reflect multiple codes for the same quotation.

The third finding relevant to RQ1 related to the way in which IA manifests itself in work with archives: Denial/Misdirection vs. omission. All of the participants provided ideas in which archivists and researchers engage in outright refusal or purposeful misdirection of other archivists, researchers or other actors in archival work. It is important to note that, in the case of misdirection specifically, this was exclusively discussed in regards to the archivist imposing IA on the researcher and not the other way around. Eleven of the 12 participants provided ideas in which archivists and researchers engage in omission of information by potentially accessing the information first and then omitting or rejecting the information later. This was more commonly cited in the transcripts, directly refuting the notion in Sweeny et al.'s (2010) systematic review that IA is not knowledge dismissal.

The fourth finding related to applications of IA in an archivist's daily work. The participants were able to discuss real life applications of IA both hypothetically and anecdotally. Interestingly, those participants who perceived their role in the archives they work at to be more public-facing tended to provide more anecdotal evidence of IA, and anecdotes were more commonly provided than hypotheticals. This demonstrated that, once provided a definition to apply to their own experiences, archivists can reflect and identify instances of IA that they have encountered or could imagine occurring.

The fifth finding relevant to RQ2 related to archival practices and workflows that the participants specifically mentioned during the interviews. Archival concepts like experience with archival research, collection management, visibility of archives, digital access, description, reference skills, the archivist's training and experience, the archivist's bias, physical access, processing, trigger and content warnings, archival exhibits and public displays, archival arrangement and metadata can influence, and are influenced by, IA. One example came from Archivist 1 who provided that collection management involves "subjective decisions and personal judgment that comes into decisions around acquisition, deslection, the curation of collections and more." Those decisions can be an archivist's own, or may be influenced by others, in which Archivist 7 provided, "I mean, we have [antisemitic materials] in our collection, we do not make that public and we will not provide information about it, because [the board of directors is] concerned that that item and that paperwork is potentially so inflammatory that it just seems ethically wrong to… provide that."

Conclusion

Despite a lack of in-depth familiarity with IA, the fact that archivists could still provide ideas and real-life hypothetical and anecdotal experiences with IA that were salient with the existing literature demonstrates that IA is a relevant concern in the archival profession. Simply providing the participants with a definition and allowing that to ruminate with the information on their own terms and in their own context, also

demonstrates that exposure to key concepts may allow them to reflect on their practices and consider possible change in the service they provide.

The contributions resulting from this research have the potential to be used as systematic teaching tools in assisting archivists to understand IA in a way that they can easily understand and apply to their work. For example, findings from the National Finding Aid Network (NAFAN) suggest that end users of archival collection aggregators measure resource limitations "against the potential importance of particular archival material to their research" (Weber et al., 2023, p. 11) and how this may lead to access concerns and inconsistency. Further, testing existing frameworks like SAA's (2018) *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy* against the RIAS or AIAE models could reveal weaknesses and concerns worth addressing. Reflecting back to Power et al.'s (2017) familiar case of archival processing, archivists across the globe are most likely plagued by backlogs which can spur instances of IA, but is that the only problem? Would examining some of those practices (not just processing) with a better understanding and context of IA help in making beneficial decisions? For instance, perhaps the issue is not that there is a backlog of overwhelming amounts of information, but instead an issue of colonial, systemic networks of purposeful concealment causing avoidance among any number of "actors" in the AIAE model. Revisiting their inventories and descriptions with a lens of IA may help with processing decisions that emphasize truth-telling, transparency and inclusivity.

That is not to say that all concealment is *bad* or counterproductive as some cultures and groups may want to impose restrictions to protect sacred or sensitive material (Reijerkerk & Reed, 2023; Thieberger et al., 2023). Like the example above, this double-edged sword likely exists for other archival decisions that may be identified as IA. This makes IA a dynamic and complex phenomenon worth exploring and understanding in the archival context, and also means that solutions for IA may be just a complex.

Future research should not only examine specific archival practices and developments like the ones outlined above, but should also aim to pinpoint better solutions and best practices. Dyad focus-group interviews may also provide helpful insights to bridge barriers between archivists and researchers in mutually creating those solutions. Within the community of archival professionals, understanding IA can also provide a lens in which archivists can apply checks and balances to the work of their peers. The IA approach may help archivists to be more mindful and empathetic in how they handle information themselves, understanding the costs and benefits of their decisions and better serving their patrons. Future research on IA in archives could expand beyond the archivist's perspective to include other stakeholders and should aim to center IA instead of nesting it under information seeking behavior.

Resources

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Appendix 1: Interview Protocol

Introduction

"Thank you for your participation in this interview. [INTRODUCTION OF MYSELF]. You have been asked to participate in this interview today because you are an archivist who has an advanced degree in library science or archival studies. I am collecting data for my Master's thesis which focuses on a phenomenon known as information avoidance in the archival context. Information avoidance is described by psychologists as any behavior designed to prevent or delay the acquisition of available but potentially unwanted information. As stewards of information and cultural memories, I am curious about the connection between this cognitive phenomenon and if and how archivists' encounter it in their daily work with researchers.

"To recap what we are doing here today, this meeting should take approximately an hour and I will be asking you questions that are meant to explore concepts and spark a conversation. I have planned out some questions ahead of time, but we may not get to all of the questions and new questions may arise as conversation continues. As a reminder, the interview will be AV recorded and transcribed with your permission so that I can refer to it for the development of my thesis, but it will only be viewable by me and I will not provide anyone with identifiable information. Do I have your permission to record? Thank you (or "not a problem, I will just take notes if you can bear with me between questions" if they decline). You are allowed to exit the interview at any time. Are there any questions before we begin?**"**

Questions

Ice Breakers/Background

1. How long have you been working as an archivist and where do you currently work?
    a. Could you briefly describe your current role and responsibilities?
2. Where did you earn your degree and what specific degree did you get?
    a. Is that program accredited and/or standardized by any professional organizations like SAA or ALA?
    b. What degree did you earn prior to your graduate studies?
3. What, if any, continuing education or scholarship requirements are in place to maintain your role or to earn a promotion in your institution?
4. In your career as an archivist, would you say your role is more public-facing or more "behind the scenes"? Why?
5. Do you believe that you are fairly familiar with current trends, practices, critical studies, etc., in the archival field?
    a. Do you believe that archives are neutral? Why or why not?

Topical

"As we get into these questions, I just wanted to let you know that there are no right or wrong answers and it is just meant to explore your thoughts or feelings about this concept and how it may relate to archives and how researchers might exhibit certain behaviors. Do you have any questions before we get into this part of the interview?"

1. As I mentioned earlier, information avoidance is any behavior designed to prevent or delay the acquisition of available but potentially unwanted information. How well does that definition resonate with your own understanding of information avoidance in your experience working with researchers, and what do you think influences your definition?
    a. If you have heard of it specifically, when/why/how/where did that occur?
2. If you've been able to identify information avoidance when working with researchers during your career, what were the characteristics and/or actions that made this recognizable?
    a. Can you give an example from your experiences working with a researcher without mentioning their name?
    b. What do you think it was about the material or the experience that caused the researcher to decide to avoid the information you were trying to give them?
    c. Would you say information avoidance has increased, decreased, or stayed the same in terms of frequency over the span of your career? Why?
    d. Do you think it is a particular concern in the archival field? Why or why not?
3. Some studies say that information avoidance is a *strategic* evasion: do you believe that information avoidance among researchers is always intentional? Why?
    a. Do you think there are varying levels/degrees of information avoidance? What do they look like, or how would you classify them?
4. Can you think of any archival standards or common practices that could cause a researcher to avoid information? Can you provide examples?
    a. What about standards or practices that can prevent it?
5. In what ways do you think that information avoidance can potentially lead to prejudiced narratives and ideals among researchers?
    a. In what ways do you think information avoidance can lead to misuse of archival materials?
6. Do you believe it is your responsibility as an archivist to intervene when a researcher exhibits signs of information avoidance? Why or why not?
    a. What are some things that you think you could do or that you have done?
7. Do you believe other professionals and the public have a shared responsibility to understand and combat information avoidance? Why or why not?
    a. Whose responsibility is it?
8. Do you think that more information literacy standards and programs would help? If so, what specifically would you recommend?
    a. What else do you think would help combat this phenomenon?
9. Do you think that there are types of archives that information avoidance among researchers is more common in? Can you provide examples?

    a. Do you think that the context of IA is different for an archivist than it would be for a librarian or a museum professional? Other professions? Why or why not?
10. Do you think that there is a particular type of person, demographically and/or psychographically, that is more likely to avoid information?
    a. What are those characteristics?
    b. Why do you think this might be the case?
    c. What would you do to mitigate information avoidance if you were working with this person?

Exit

Our hour is coming to a close so…

1. Is there anything else that you would like to add to this interview that you believe we did not cover?
2. Do you have any questions for me about the interview or what happens next, etc?
3. Do you mind if I contact you in the future if I have any questions or if I need any clarification?

"Thank you so much for your time, and please reach out if you have any questions or concerns in the future. To reiterate from the consent form, the recordings from this interview will be in a secure folder that only I will have access to and I will make sure that your identity is protected throughout the lifecycle of this project. I will go ahead and stop recording now and I hope that you will enjoy the rest of your day."

Appendix 2: Code Book Definitions

Code Identifier	Definition
Archivists exhibiting IA	Participants sharing examples of an archivist engaging in IA themself or imposing IA on another individual.
Researchers exhibiting IA	Participants sharing examples of a researcher engaging in IA themself or imposing IA on another individual.
Scoping	Parameters and boundaries of a study regarding the exclusion of certain types of information.
Self-preservation	Examples of exclusion of information in order to preserve positive emotions, morals, ideals, attitudes, habits, opinions, privacy, safety, trust, reliability and/or reputation.
Access	Ability to physically, digitally or intellectually access information in respect to amount of information, ability to contextualize or interpret information, difficulty, or access to staff.
Experience level	Level of experience with archival research specifically, or research in general as it impacts archival research.
Bias/Worldview	Alignment in favor of one thing over another (Note: This does not always mean racism, sexism, etc., and in this case means preferring one type of media over another, etc.)
Type of Archive	Examples where a characteristic about the type of archive could cause IA.
Obscurity	Anytime the word obscurity was used or in reference to things that may not be obvious or clear to understand.
Outside influence	When things outside of the individual's control impact their decisions (e.g., subordination, legal mandates).
Resource availability	Lack of money, time, materials, etc., leading to IA.
Omission of information	The acceptance of some information and later exclusion of it.
Purposeful denial/misdirection	The outright denial of, or misdirection from, particular

	information.

Code Identifier	Definition
Anecdotal evidence	Any story that the participant provides in which they clearly experienced it (e.g., "I"/"We" statements, mention of particular collections, etc.).
Hypothetical evidence	Any potential situation that the participant provides in which they may not have experienced, but could imagine it occurring (e.g., they say "hypothetically…" or pondering questions).
Experience with archival research	Examples where archival research experience level is referred to as a potential means of avoidance (e.g., less experience = more avoidance, or more experience = more avoidance, etc.).
Collection management	Policies and decisions that govern an institution's collections (what gets in, what gets tossed out, etc.) and how those may impact avoidance.
Overall visibility of archives	Mentions of the lack of universal understanding of what archives are, how they work, who can access them, etc.
Digital access	Examples where digital technology serves as a barrier to information because of technophobia, lack of internet access, software problems, etc.
Description	Representative words that help identify content about archival material or collections (Note: Trigger/Content warnings were sometimes discussed as elements of descriptions; these were tagged as both codes).
Reference skills	Skills associated with face-to-face or virtual interactions between an archivist and a researcher to help identify archival materials of interest.
Archivists' training/experience	Anytime a participant brought up an archivist's number of years of experience, their educational background, professional development, etc.

Archivists' bias	Anytime a participant brought up how an archivist's preferences could lead to IA.
Physical access	Examples where a barrier to the physical archive or archival material causes IA (e.g., limited hours, COVID-19 shut downs, etc.).

Code Identifier	**Definition**
Processing	The umbrella process of what happens when a collection comes to an archive and must be prepared for use. This may include arrangement, metadata, description, and others, but those can be ongoing, and this code is specifically referring to collections which are new or unprocessed and therefore underutilized or unknown by potential researchers (or the archivists in some cases).
Trigger/Content warnings	Statements used to warn people about content or topics that are dubbed as sensitive by the describing archivist (e.g., graphic material, harsh language, etc.)
Exhibits/Public displays	The act of taking archival material and publicly displaying them in a way that they may not have been intended for.
Arrangement	Organizing materials in a way that makes sense of the material, and in a way that preserves the material for longevity, however, archival standards for arrangement are not universally considered to be common sense so it may cause IA.
Metadata	"Data about data." Considered part of description at times, these make materials discoverable by trying to utilize controlled vocabularies.