

# **Archivists' Information Practices and Archivists' Personal and Professional Identity: A Theoretical Framework**

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This presentation features a theoretical framework for investigating archivists' information practices in relation to archivists' formation of personal and professional identity. I developed the framework in my dissertation, a qualitative case study in the interpretivist tradition completed in 2021. The research questions explored archivists' information work and information practices as contemporary, complex social phenomena within the geographic boundary of Philadelphia. The theoretical framework was constructed to analyze case study data through sensitizing concepts drawn from LIS literature on information work, information practice, and communities of practice. The framework's four work contexts comprised participants' physical work settings, biographies, perceptions of workplace documents, and work task performance. The purposive sample consisted of 11 archivists working at six repositories listed in the National Library of Medicine's Directory of History of Medicine Collections. Two rounds of semi-structured interviews coincidentally bracketed COVID-19 quarantine 2020. Data analysis relied on constructivist grounded theory, the constant comparison method, a human instrument, and emergent design. Findings demonstrated that multiple work roles leveraged personal and professional biography. Participants performed the visible information work of reference services and outreach through trajectories enabled by the invisible information work of processing, curating, and internal and external collaborations. The capacity of participants' information work to coalesce as information practices at the work setting hinged on participants' perception of institutional workplace culture, institutional mission, and workplace documents. Results position archivists' information work as a collaborative and holistic form of collections use grounded in multiple work roles and work task performances. Participants' sense of personal and professional agency surfaced during the COVID-19 hiatus as information work continued away from the physical site. Social justice movements in the spring of 2020 led participants at four of six sites to foreground what I term "intellectual affect" and personal agency in stewardship. Data triangulation of institutional websites revealed that participants' information work is underrecognized on these user gateways. Given this background, I propose using the theoretical framework as a tool for archivists to construct a personal and professional identity from their perspective and in line with core values of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Social Justice (EDIS) in archival work.

## **About the author:**

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