

A Qualitative Study Examining the Challenging Emotional Responses of Archival Donors

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Investigations into the trauma and emotions archivists experience when dealing with sensitive records have increased in the past ten years. Research has shown that archivists fall into the same categories with those who work in life-threatening situations or professions where workers are repeatedly exposed to trauma. While there is myriad scholarship about the emotional difficulties archivists and people who work with sensitive materials may face, there is a lack of investigation into the experience of archival donors. Thus, the research question that deserves more scholarly attention focuses on discovering what kinds of challenging emotional responses donors experience when they are bestowing their collections to archives. In addition, it is important to investigate how many donors are experiencing this, what are the causes, and how can we identify and define the emotions experienced. Answering these questions can help archivists to be better educated, prepared, and supportive when it comes to working with donors. Moreover, the literature about donor relations applicable to archival work is plentiful, but the research focuses on accessibility, legal issues, obligation, and general relations. Clearly, there is a gap in the literature that focuses on the emotional difficulties donors face when they are handing over their collections to archives. The investigation into this topic fits nicely into the research that focuses on trauma and emotion in archival work because it redirects attention from archivists to donors. During this talk, the author's goal is to explain her study proposal, receive feedback, and open up discussion about this area of archival work. The author will also offer a brief literature review and discuss her research methods.

About the author:

Amanda Greenwood is the Bigelow Project Archivist at Union College in Schenectady, New York. She earned an MSIS in Archives and Records Administration from the University at Albany, SUNY and an ALM in English from Harvard University. Greenwood currently serves as a board member of the James Joyce Society of Korea, the Society of American Archivists Web Archiving Section, and the New York Archives Conference. Her writings and research interests focus on the intersection of postcolonialism and masculinity in the works of James Joyce, linguistics and gender in hard-boiled fiction, trauma and emotions in archival work, and web archiving labor and maintenance.