

Symposia influencing LIS curriculum and society

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of Heritage Month symposia hosted by the School of Information at San José State University since 2021 on the library and information science (LIS) curriculum and society and through thematic analysis of transcripts from 21 events, the research team, comprising two LIS faculty and two graduate assistants, identified common themes and differences across various heritage celebrations, including AANHPI, Black/African American, Disability, Hispanic, LGBTQ+, Deaf, and Native American/Alaskan Native communities. The findings highlight the importance of identity, representation, and cultural heritage in LIS, emphasizing the need for proactive diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. The study underscores the necessity for structural changes within the LIS field to support underrepresented groups and foster a more inclusive profession. This research provides a foundation for future efforts to diversify LIS beyond the classroom and into broader societal contexts.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Academic libraries; Education; Pedagogy; Public libraries; Social justice.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Heritage; Diversity; Library Science; Storytelling; Change.

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INTRODUCTION

Since 2021, the School of Information at San José State University (SJSU) has hosted an online Heritage Month symposium via Zoom focused on library and information science. Prominent information professionals have been invited to be panelists at every hosted Zoom event. Each seminar provides an opportunity to contribute to the counter-storytelling (Yosso, 2006) and digital storytelling (Lambert & Hessler, 2018) methods of understanding each heritage month's significance. The representation from each celebration represents the perspective of the library and information science field and how it relates to society. These symposia aim to share successes and learn from changes that contribute to achieving equity for all.

The variety of symposia hosted by SJSU showcases the similarities and differences that the presenters have articulated. Discussions from each session provided synchronous and asynchronous attendees with an opportunity to learn and discover what still needs to change within the profession and society. By increasing awareness of past developments in the library and information science field and theorizing what should change, a vast opportunity arises to address ways to welcome more people into the profession.

This sampling study presents a thematic analysis of transcripts from sessions hosted since 2021. The literature review section provides an overview that highlights key points articulated at each symposium. The preliminary findings section discusses common themes and differences between sessions. Finally, the conclusion section focuses on understanding the next steps.

If the library and information science field desires to diversify, change is needed beyond the LIS classroom. The research team for this study includes two LIS faculty and two LIS graduate assistants who analyzed the themes from the symposia. The Heritage Months transcripts that were analyzed consisted of the following celebrations: American Asian and Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander Heritage Month (AANHPI); Black/African American History Month; Disability History Month; Hispanic Heritage Month; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History Month (LGBTQ+); National Deaf History Month; and National Native American & Alaskan Native Heritage Month. This study's findings are just the beginning, and the research questions articulated provide the following context.

Research Questions

The research team created a series of questions that guided the study, design, and implementation:

- RQ1. What challenges and barriers do people from underrepresented groups experience in LIS? Culture, lived context, best practices.
 - RQ1a. What are some of the challenges experienced within the lived context of underrepresented minorities?
- RQ2. How do leaders and coworkers best support underrepresented minorities in the workforce?
 - RQ2a. How do libraries and LIS professionals best support members of

underrepresented communities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

To provide context for this study, we present an overview of each Heritage Month, drawing on the library and information science literature and other related scholarly works. The shared commonalities and differences highlight the richness of inclusivity and the potential for future growth for information professionals and society.

American Asian & Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander (AANHPI)

Chancellor (2019) posits that women of color are vital, but their numbers do not replicate the demographics of the communities they serve. Based on this summary, information professionals from the AANHPI community are steadfast contributors who demonstrate the value of inclusion (Le, 2021). In another study, Ruan and Liu (2017) discuss seven themes from their interviews with AANHPI librarians. These themes are creating leadership opportunities, communication skills, mentorship, partnerships, learning cultural identities, developing professional development opportunities, and enhancing recruitment and retention. This initial analysis of the AANHPI community also must consider what other scholars have researched.

Alt, Wax, Brush, and Magalona (2024) discuss the work experience of Asian American women. Their study examined the intersectional forms of workplace discrimination and bias faced by minorities. This phenomenon applies from the recruitment to the hiring phase of employment. One way AANHPI information professionals can counter such workplace situations is to have coping strategies to alleviate past and current workplace environments (Huang, 2021). Arroyo-Ramirez, Chou, Freedman, Fujita, and Mari-Orozco (2018) opine that actionable steps have to counter microaggressions in the LIS field.

Black/African American

Ndumu (2021) provides an excellent overview of Black librarians in the LIS field. The findings show that most Blacks tend to hold library paraprofessional positions. Understanding this phenomenon is paramount to finding other solutions to increase equal representation within the librarian ranks for any library (Ndumu & Chancellor, 2021). Another literature contribution comes from Ossom-Williamson et al. (2021). These scholars provide steps for achieving the change that is necessary in LIS. Overcoming the microaggressions within the library field is the initial step (Ndumu, 2021). For an effective and equitable change, each library must have an authentic institutional analysis encompassing strategic plans and ongoing assessments that provide a reflective practice (Ossom-Williamson et al., 2021).

Deaf History

Punch (2016) highlights the numerous barriers that deaf and hard-of-hearing (DHH)

individuals encounter daily. Not only are barriers present, but stress levels for DHH individuals also need to be addressed. The implications of the present research underscore the need for libraries to be proactive in creating accommodations necessary for new librarians and community members who engage with the physical or online library (Punch, 2016).

Disability History

Moeller discusses the lack of research regarding the experience of library workers. Libraries tend to be reactive and not proactive in addressing the needs of their library employees (Moeller, 2019). This action can be examined in Oud's (2018) study. The mixed-methods study provides us with the lack of inclusion in the library workplace and having empathic values as an organization. Pionke (2020) summarizes what libraries need to do: act on their diversity, inclusion, and equity principles and apply them in daily practice.

Hispanic Heritage

Following Poinke's recommendations, Adkins (2004) advocates for LIS programs to reach out to Latino organizations outside the academy community to enhance the curriculum and gain a better understanding of the Latinx communities. Additionally, strong recommendations came from Adkins's (2004) study. Starting with the active, authentic recruitment of LIS faculty from Latinx backgrounds. Faculty from this ethnic community are a small percentage. Beyond these recommendations, Vega Garcia (2000) discusses the importance of academic library collections representing the Latinx community. A common theme that continues with each ethnicity per Chancellor (2019) is that faculty from these ethnicities only equate to a small portion of the LIS professionals.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+)

A significant theme is understanding how LGBTQ+ colleagues receive support at their respective work locations, which is the essence of Fletcher and Everly (2021). This kind of employment practice is applicable in the LIS field. Promoting and providing space for work-related initiatives demonstrates inclusionary practices (Fletcher & Everly, 2021). Employers such as libraries that offer these authentic practices for the employees and communities enhance the morale and abilities of the organization (Webster et al., 2018). The result of authentic practices in any type of library equates to welcoming all to a learning environment (Jaeger, 2025). Continuing this inclusive, welcoming practice is needed for all visiting the library in person or online.

Native American/Alaskan Native

This community has been underserved and underrepresented in the LIS field (Patterson, 2000). The Knowledge River initiative at the University of Arizona has brought opportunities for the underrepresentation of the Native American/Alaskan Native community (Littletree & Overall-Montiel, 2010). Augmenting the number of librarians from these communities is crucial

for preserving their heritage (Chen & Ducheneaux, 2017). The ability to address the needs of the Native Alaskan community is comparable to the issues with the Native American community (Bishop & Wright, 2023). Integrating local libraries to assist in preserving and restoring vital heritage resources facilitates greater interest from members of these communities in becoming LIS professionals (Bishop & Wright, 2023).

METHODS

Data Collection

Based on the literature review section, themes emerged from the thematic analysis of 21 events from 2021 to 2024. A total of 113 panelists participated in these online events. For each of the 21 sessions, keynote speakers began each session, followed by panelists. The research team reviewed the transcripts from each Zoom session and decided to start the systematic thematic analysis (Naeem, Ozuem, Howell, and Ranfagni, 2023) of each event. All participants received an honorarium from the School of Information at San José State University. Additionally, each session was recorded and archived for asynchronous viewing.

Data Analysis

Researchers used systematic thematic analysis to understand the concepts from each session per group identified in the literature review (Naeem, Ozuem, Howell, and Ranfagni, 2023). Each transcript was evaluated according to the research questions and then assessed for the emerging keywords, leading to the themes from each transcript. Additionally, the research team used ChatGPT 4.0 to determine each transcript. Analyzing each event in multiple ways provided commonalities and differences regarding the qualitative data.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The heritage celebrations for *AANHPI, Black, and Hispanic* communities highlight the importance of identity, representation, and cultural heritage. Speakers across these events emphasized the need to preserve and celebrate diverse narratives in literature, libraries, and media. Many shared personal stories of growing up in underrepresented communities, facing cultural erasure, and working to reclaim their histories. The role of food, language, and traditions was a recurring theme, illustrating how cultural heritage shapes both individual and collective identities. Representation in educational spaces and leadership positions is a critical step toward greater inclusion.

The ongoing struggle against discrimination and systemic barriers was common throughout the events. Many speakers recounted personal experiences of racism, bias, and exclusion, both in their personal lives and professional careers. These discussions highlighted the need for continued advocacy and solidarity among marginalized groups. Panelists frequently mentioned Libraries, museums, and archives as essential in combating misinformation, preserving histories, and providing safe spaces for dialogue and learning. Institutions were strongly called to actively support equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives that empower these communities.

National Deaf History Month symposiums have consistently emphasized the richness and diversity of Deaf culture and identity. Discussions have highlighted the importance of recognizing Deafness not as a disability but as a linguistic and cultural distinction, with American Sign Language (ASL) as a vital component of Deaf heritage. The concept of Deaf Gain has been a recurring theme, reframing Deafness as a unique advantage that contributes to society through visual communication, storytelling, and innovation. Representation in literature, film, and the arts has also been a key focus, with calls for more Deaf-led storytelling to ensure authentic portrayals in mainstream media (OpenAI, 2025).

The historical struggles and advocacy efforts of the Deaf community have been central to these discussions, including the impact of the Milan Conference of 1880, which promoted Oralism and marginalized sign language, and the Deaf President Now (DPN) movement, which led to the appointment of Gallaudet University's first Deaf president. Legal advancements such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 have been celebrated, though challenges in education, employment, and public accessibility remain.

Libraries have been recognized as crucial spaces for Deaf literacy programs and inclusive resources, offering bilingual (ASL and English) support to bridge the literacy gap for Deaf children and adults (OpenAI, 2025).

The *Pride* symposiums from 2022 to 2024 highlight the evolving role of LGBTQ+ librarians in shaping libraries as inclusive, diverse, and equitable spaces. A key theme is the importance of representation, both in library collections and among library professionals.

Ensuring access to LGBTQ+ resources, programming, and services supports those within the community and fosters understanding and allyship among broader audiences. Discussions emphasized that libraries should not just house materials on LGBTQ+ topics but actively incorporate them into year-round programming and collection development, ensuring that queer stories and histories remain visible (OpenAI, 2025).

Another pressing issue has been the rise in book challenges and censorship, mainly targeting LGBTQ+ materials. The symposiums underscored the need for strong intellectual freedom policies and proactive advocacy to counter these attacks. Librarians play a crucial role in upholding the principles of access and diversity, yet many face harassment and institutional barriers when defending inclusive collections. The discussion extended beyond books, addressing the broader implications of metadata and cataloging practices that have historically marginalized queer identities. Efforts like the Queer Metadata Collective are working to ensure that library classification systems better reflect and respect LGBTQ+ identities (OpenAI, 2025).

Native American and Alaskan native Heritage Month celebrations from 2021 to 2024 emphasize the importance of recognition and visibility for indigenous communities. Land acknowledgments are crucial reminders of Native sovereignty and presence, countering historical erasure. Discussions highlight the need for accurate representation in education, as many Americans lack knowledge of Native history beyond the 19th century. Libraries and museums significantly address these gaps by preserving indigenous knowledge and ensuring that Native voices shape their narratives (OpenAI, 2025).

The *Disability Pride 2024* event centered on celebrating disability as a source of strength, resilience, and community wisdom, rather than a deficit. Speakers emphasized that Disability Pride Month is not solely about raising awareness for non-disabled audiences, but about affirming the creativity, adaptability, and self-advocacy within disabled communities. A key theme was the transformative role of libraries as inclusive spaces where access to technology, information, and community-led programming can empower disabled patrons. Through initiatives like peer-led tech coaching, tactile drawing workshops, and adaptive literacy programs, libraries are influential hubs for equity and innovation, especially when the lived experience informs them of disabled people (OpenAI, 2025).

The event also highlighted the barriers that persist beyond physical access, including ableist assumptions, exclusionary institutional practices, and a narrow focus on disability services tied to employment. Panelists called for a shift toward intersectional, community-driven approaches to accessibility, where programs are created by disabled people, not merely for them. There was a strong focus on the need for structural change, from inclusive hiring practices to universal design in programming, all anchored in a culture of trust, representation, and mutual support. Ultimately, the event celebrated progress and the joy and solidarity in disabled communities, urging institutions to evolve through collaboration, compassion, and systemic awareness (OpenAI, 2025).

LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This systematic thematic analysis from these symposium events demonstrates the value and necessity for change to continue in our communities. The LIS professionals from any community mentioned in this study are a sample of the entire field as practitioners or faculty. A recent Gallup report (2025), commissioned by the American Library Association and titled "*Empowering Voices, Inspiring Change: Advancing Diversity Within Librarianship*," states that more proactive steps are needed to achieve representation as LIS professionals. Hulbert and Kendrick (2023) opine that 500 to 1100 more BIPOC librarians per year would need to gain their MLIS over 10 years to have a diversity threshold of 25% in the LIS field. This shocking assessment will take creativity and strong outreach efforts to reach this goal. Efforts from the accredited library schools and current LIS professionals are a part of the answer to have librarians who represent their respective communities (Ettarh, 2018). Beyond what has changed, ongoing enlightenment must continue in the academy and society.

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