Ethnic and Racial Diversity in Libraries: How White Allies Can Support Arguments for Decolonization

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ABSTRACT: Despite the claim to neutrality, a woeful lack of diversity has had, and continues to have, latent consequences within librarianship and the services we provide. Historically, libraries as a product of white (heterosexual, capitalist, middle-class) librarianship have unwittingly upheld dominant oppressive cultural values by adhering to the tenet of neutrality. Instead, librarians must radically begin supporting our communities by pushing for the removal of institutionalized barriers to entering the information science profession, and divorce ourselves from the notion of neutrality by supporting social justice and civil rights issues. Using discursive analysis as a way to highlight the major scholarly arguments regarding the state of diversity in LIS, I will highlight the ways in which white librarians can better cement ourselves as allies while remaining cognizant of our position as colonizers.

Keywords: decolonization, diversity, institutionalized oppression, social justice, whiteness

All too often the library is viewed as an egalitarian institution providing universal access to information for the general public. However, such idealized visions of a mythic benevolence tend to conveniently gloss over the library's susceptibility in reproducing and perpetuating racist social structures found throughout the rest of society.

- Todd Honma, Trippin' Over the Color Line: The Invisibility of Race in Library and Information Studies

If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor

- Desmond Tutu

Introduction

According to research, "African Americans and Hispanics are significantly more likely than whites to consider [libraries] 'very important' to the community," yet "among a total credentialed library population of 118,666, only 6,160 are black and 3,661 are Latino" (Kelley 2013a). The American Library Association (ALA) Core Values of Librarianship state that, "we value our nation's diversity and strive to reflect that diversity by providing a full spectrum of resources and services to the communities we serve," yet a comparison between ALA Diversity Counts data and US Census data paints a very different reality. Instead, Library and Information Service professionals are predominately white, and represent 85% of all library workers in 2013 (DPEAFLCIO 2015). Furthermore, "a disproportionate number of top managerial positions in the library profession are held by white men" (Shaw 2003, 1) and according to a list kept by the University of Kentucky Libraries, there are only 138 active African American library directors in the entire United States (Jones, 2017). In other words, although diversity is one of ALA's "five key action areas to ensure high-quality library services to all constituents," the reality is that current solutions to "diversifying" the profession "fail to fully understand how oppressions work in varying contexts" (Ettarh 2014) and how "race as a social system linked to issues of power, privilege, oppression, and exploitation" (Honma 2005, 14) has resulted in barriers to the librarianship of marginalized groups. As discussed extensively by Honma (2005), two problematic paradigms in LIS that must be addressed in order to resist the paternalistic history of libraries and remove the barriers to oppressed groups entering into librarianship and those already within the field are: unacknowledged whiteness,[1] and celebratory multiculturalism.

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1 Whiteness denotes not only the presence of white skin but also the privileging of certain epistemologies and structures of power that provide material and discursive benefit to white people while simultaneously disadvantaging persons of color.

"In an imperial culture, the belief systems and assumptions that make colonization possible, acceptable, desirable and justifiable become a part of the social environment to the extent that they are scarcely recognized. The violent erasures of other cultures has, far too often, happened without comment or censure, and gone unobserved and unremarked – or worse, been viewed with approval" (Dudley 2013). Because Western academic libraries in particular emerged from Enlightenment-derived epistemology and are premised on Euro- and Christian-centric knowledge structures, libraries have unwittingly participated in and supported this legacy of imperialism historically and contemporarily (e.g. biased Library of Congress classification and subject headings) (Dudley 2013). To explore these issues, arguments made by Honma, de jesus, Ettarh, and many other important voices within the growing discourse will be discussed at length as they represent what can be considered to be some of the most recent, intersectional, and crucial discussions on multiculturalism and diversity in Library and Information Science (LIS). Furthermore, I will argue that, as a librarian who mostly embodies the current hegemonic identity within the profession (i.e. white, female, middle class), it is imperative that those who share this identity familiarize ourselves with the literature on multiculturalism, inclusion, neutrality, and the production of knowledge, and also support dismantling current barriers and imperial projects that have largely excluded marginalized and oppressed groups, while remaining sensitive/aware of our positions as colonizers even though we are sympathetic to the cause. In other words, white librarians should begin to develop an analysis of racism and racialization in the field and begin actively engaging in practices that seek to dismantle this legacy while avoiding the reproduction of problematic paradigms.

Enlightenment Values and the Production of Knowledge

Libraries are institutions that embody, "a structured set of concepts, assumptions, and discursive practices that were used to produce, interpret, and evaluate knowledge about non-European peoples" (Kohn 2014). In other words, "knowledge" as produced/created by the "empire," or whiteness, "somehow manages to construct a reality wherein whiteness is default, normal, civilized and everything else is Other" (de jesus 2014). As noted in the Introduction, libraries embody enlightenment values that contribute to ongoing colonization by reinforcing white supremacist ideologies. Because libraries play an important role as public institutions, they often have little choice in challenging those democratic or governmental institutions to which they belong. As a result, libraries, their cultures, and their policies are defined and shaped by the historical and contemporary roots of the settler state to which they belong (which is informed through a global political system steeped in indigenous genocide, exploitation of the global south, orientalism, and more). Not only that, but this deeply rooted system of structural inequality necessitates conformity to the hegemonic worldview of the nation-state, which is that of the dominant ruling class (white heteropatriarchy). This view changes in relation to US (or other) imperial ambitions and

seeks to re-inform or redefine the structures, and underlying assumptions and ideologies, by which public institutions function. "Thus, libraries are implicated within institutional oppression in two ways: by having their genesis within the enlightenment ideology and by existing as a tool to perpetuate the state" (de jesus 2014).

By legitimizing knowledge produced under the context of a white worldview, libraries unwittingly frame themselves as an overtly political institution that supports oppressive ideologies via the stance of neutrality. In other words, neutrality directly engenders what Honma (2013) discusses as the problematic paradigm of unacknowledged, or going further, unchallenged whiteness. While this is certainly not the intention of many if not most libraries, the failure and/or unwillingness of LIS professionals and students to understand that knowledge is produced through a settler-state worldview, that the library as an institution is fundamentally non-neutral, and that the field itself is informed through the logic of white supremacy, is a symptom of the need for sweeping change in a hegemonic profession. "The framing of the library within the terms of 'democracy' and 'neutrality' conceals the covert structural forms of racial exclusion that protect white racial interests" (Honma 2005, 8). This racialization of libraries as a white institution and its perpetuation of hegemonic knowledge had and continues to have far-reaching ideological and material consequences masked through egalitarian rhetoric and self-presentation.

Unacknowledged Whiteness

As discussed by McIntosh (1989) "whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege" and to view their perspectives as objective and representative of reality. This white normativity occurs both societally and also in the Library and Information Sciences, as evidenced by our dominance within the institution. As a direct result of this dominance, white interests are embedded in the very foundation of the profession and its values. For example, white people largely benefit within the current hiring system as a result of other institutionalized privileges such as access to education. Thus, it's no surprise that arguments (made later in the paper) to change hiring requirements and practices within LIS make many librarians benefiting from privileged positionality react defensively in resistance to such changes. Threats to hegemony are subsequently threats to those with privilege, or rather, those with "something to lose" (i.e. unequal opportunities). The stereotype of the white bun lady librarian is accepted, sometimes celebrated, but never critically analyzed in terms of reproduction of racial hierarchies within LIS. While there may be a great number of individual librarians that are actively against racism, white librarians still benefit from a system which ensures unequal distribution of resources and opportunities between racial groups. "Whiteness is dynamic, relational, and operating at all times and on a myriad of levels. These processes and practices include basic rights, values, beliefs, perspectives and experiences purported to be commonly shared by all but which are actually only consistently afforded to white people" (DiAngelo 2011, 56).

Furthermore, society inculcates this white normativity through segregation across multiple levels, including representational and informational. "The belief in objectivity, coupled with positioning white people as outside of culture (and thus the norm for humanity), allows whites to view themselves as universal humans who can represent all of human experience" (DiAngelo 2011, 61). As a result, white people live in an environment where they are insulated from race-based stresses, and consequently have a lowered ability to tolerate challenges to their worldview. This concept is understood as White Fragility and serves to inform current practice via anxieties over loss of privilege or change to the status quo.

Institutionalized Racism

Race is a socially constructed, dynamic, and contextual classification system which operates on both personal and institutional levels, and is linked to intersectional issues of power and privilege that are determined by social, economic, and political forces. According to Omi and Winant (1994, 66), "racial meanings pervade US society, extending from the shaping of individual racial identities to the structuring of collective political action on the terrain of the state." In other words, race is understood and contextualized through the hegemonic collective and politically perpetuated through society and its institutions. Therefore, not only is the library not a neutral egalitarian institution, but, as a result of both its lack of professional diversity and its claim to neutrality, "has historically served the interests of a white racial project by aiding in the construction and maintenance of a white American citizenry as well as the perpetuation of white privilege in the structures of the field itself" (Honma 2005, 4).

"In any situation, there exists a distribution of power. To either overtly endorse or reject that distribution is, of course, a political choice; such positions are not neutral. To take no explicit position by claiming to be neutral is also a political choice, particularly when one is given the resources that make it easy to evaluate the consequences of that distribution of power and, at least potentially, affect its distribution" (Jensen 2005, 29). Similarly, Howard Zinn (1994) relates this concept of neutrality through the analogy that one can't pretend to sit still on a moving train because one will always be moving with the train. Librarians cannot claim to be neutral in an institution subject to the dominant society's ideologies and values, especially when these ideologies are disproportionately represented. To do so is the passive acceptance of the existing hierarchy and dominant culture. It is a detachment from social, political, and economic realities as fueled by white privilege and white normativity.

As discussed by Rosenblum, "libraries (along with other cultural institutions such as archives and museums, collectively referred to as LAMs) are embedded in larger social-historical contexts, inherit their values from those larger structures, and are constrained by them" (Rosenblum 2015). In other words, "they come to embody institutional oppression, rather than resist it" (de jesus 2014). To liberate libraries from ingrained principles of knowledge

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and understanding of how the world is and should be as determined by political and economic authorities historically, we must support greater visibility of under-represented groups in librarianship, but also critically engage with and resist imperial projects and the subsequent control of knowledge production. "The world we live today is the result of more than 500 years of Western colonial expansion and imperial designs…" which has "created a world system with unequal power relations" (Center of Study and Investigation for Decolonial Dialogues 2016). In libraries, this has manifested in various ways, through collection development (Manoff 1993), hiring practices (Galvan 2015), the organization of knowledge (Knowlton 2005), meritization (Kelley 2013a), and more.

Higher Education and Meritocracy

Article 26 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights states that, "Everyone has the right to education… [and that] technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit," yet educational inequality in the US disproportionately affects students with disabilities, students of color, and students belonging to marginalized and oppressed social groups (Mettler 2014). Despite the Declaration of Human Rights, institutionalized racism in the United States education system perpetuates existing power structures and creates disparate educational and professional realities and opportunities for marginalized groups. In turn, these educational inequalities (Lynch and O'neill 1994; Adams, Bell, and Griffin 2007) disproportionately affect the ability of oppressed and marginalized groups to practice librarianship and call into question the reliability and racialized understanding of "merit". In order to truly understand why librarianship lacks diversity, white librarians must critically examine these realities and how they affect the profession as a whole, especially as we move towards a greater reliance on online education in context of the growing digital divide.

To participate in higher education, a person must already be in possession of various social capitals that allow them to traverse the barriers into higher education in the first place. "Those with social capital are often able to decode and access new educational opportunities. Those without it can remain untouched by initiatives to facilitate their entry into the privileges that higher education can offer" (Morley and Lugg 2009, 37). Our current higher education system and systems of "opportunity" reflect traditional post-industrial beliefs that reproduce privilege and exclusion. In addition, in a society which functions around meritocracy, social status is highly dependent on a person's level of education. As noted by Liu (2011, 384), "colleges and universities that once reflected the status system of society are now the 'gatekeepers' of class position and access to them determines the future stratification of society." In other words, while meritocracy is often looked upon positively as a reflection of each individual person's level of achievement, this represents an uncritical and singular reality of meritocracy that fails to acknowledge greater intersecting structures of social inequality.

As a field that necessitates meritization via a higher education system based on institutionalized forms of intersecting oppressions (class, race, ethnicity, etc.) it is not surprising that minorities and marginalized groups are not represented within LIS fields. "Librarianship assumes access to wealth or tolerance for debt to afford tuition, professional membership, and service opportunities"(Galvan 2015). Thus, many of the barriers to librarianship for marginalized groups begin even before the MLIS, and are only exacerbated following graduation. Not only is the underlying culture of librarianship disproportionally representative of whiteness and necessitates conformity, but "competitiveness in the current job market requires at minimum a well-placed practicum experience conducting librarian level work, but only students with access to money can afford to take an unpaid internship. Galleries, libraries, archives, and museums throughout the United States continue exploiting unpaid labor, insuring the pool of well-qualified academic librarians skews white and middle class" (Galvan 2015).

Consider the idea of a "subject matter expert" in context of credentialism, and how a system based solely on a very narrow definition of what defines an "expert" essentially erases the important contributions of other forms of knowledge (amateur, indigenous, etc.). For example, amateur astronomers, many of whom are self-educated enthusiasts, have collected vast amounts of data for NASA and other space agencies that have had vast importance in the field of physics and astronomy. To argue that an MLIS is the only way to ensure a competently and fully "credentialed" librarian is a relic of capitalist, patriarchal, white supremacist, classist argument that fails to consider not only the changing landscape of education in the information age and the disproportionate threat of the digital divide, but also those skills that are not taught in library school. Thus, we must redefine what it means to practice "quality" librarianship outside of our current biased understanding of "merit."

Overview of Current Discourse

While the overwhelming whiteness of the "race-blind" LIS profession has been rendered invisible via colonialism and white normativity, multiculturalism within the profession has been "celebrated" and "discussed" at length. However, case studies and research and statistical data reports do little to address the deep-seated institutional structures of discrimination being perpetuated within libraries as a reflection of the society in which they operate, and their relationships to power and knowledge production. Calling for an increase in recruitment of minority librarians based on data generated through case studies focuses solely on the result of social, economic, and political inequalities within libraries rather than the underlying cause of these inequalities. Plainly, "diversity" rhetoric trivializes the injustices experienced by the oppressed and, in lieu of critical analysis and decolonization of the profession, is self-congratulatory.

While statistical demographics and case studies certainly have their place and importance in

the profession, they should serve as an indicator of even greater institutional changes that must occur and encourage exhaustive analysis and intervention. Thus, a shift in LIS diversity rhetoric to a "revolutionary multiculturalism" which McLaren (as cited in Honma 2005, 12) defines as "a socialist feminist multiculturalism that challenges the historically sedimented processes through which race, class, and gender identities are produced within capitalist society… [and is] dedicated to reconstituting the deep structures of political economy, culture, and power in contemporary social arrangements… [and] rebuilding the social order from the vantage point of the oppressed" is absolutely essential if the profession is to be truly diversified and dismantled. As nina de jesus (2014) suggests, "realizing the emancipatory potential of the library as institution would require breaking and disrupting the system of intellectual property and other aspects of capitalism, especially the publishing industry. It would require disrupting the empire's mechanisms for creating 'knowledge' by being more than a repository for imperial knowledge products. It would require supporting Indigenous resistance to the settler state and working towards dismantling anti-Blackness."

As discussed at length by Hathcock (2015), "white" diversity initiatives such as the ARL Career Enhancement Program, the Mosaic Program, the George A. Strait Minority Scholarship, and the Spectrum Scholars Program are failing to "increase diversity" because they themselves are rooted in whiteness and "assume that successful applicants possess the privileged free time, financial backing, and familial circumstances to allow them to relocate for these internships, residencies, or ALA-accredited library programs." In other words, the culture of librarianship itself necessitates that "diverse" applicants replicate "whiteness" (i.e. conforming to a certain ideology of what it means to be white which includes socio-economic status, etc.), to successfully integrate and function within a system that disproportionately represents and thus favors a single dominant group. "Integrate" being the key word in this context, which necessitates that individuals take on the characteristics already broadly represented within the profession, rather than the profession itself diversifying. Therefore, it is critical for librarians to stop considering barriers to librarianship solely through an explicitly racial/ethnic understanding of "diversity", but rather through a larger understanding of intersectionality and the concept of replicating whiteness. In other words, "white" diversity initiatives are rooted more broadly in class-based normativities that most often privilege whiteness as a function of its place within structural systems of power (read: systemic racism). "Whiteness" within the field is thus maintained through intersection with issues of class, or more specifically, white upper/middle class privileges that exclude working-class people of color from higher education. To attempt to solve issues of diversity through scholarships and initiatives only further reinforces the legitimacy of a race/class based meritocracy as a means of measuring "skill" and "ability", without calling into question the fundamental flaws surrounding merit and higher education and who it privileges.

Unfortunately, these barriers to librarianship do not end at educational attainment and meritization. As Swanson et. al (2015) address in the "Diversity Matters" roundtable

discussion on hiring practices in academic libraries, the "idea of 'organizational fit' is a problematic concept in terms of search committee discussions. While it is never an official criterion for an applicant… search committees reinforce the status quo when they use language to deny an applicant a position because of their perceived inability to fit the existing organizational culture." Again, people of color are expected to possess/replicate the same structural privileges (finance, etc.) that would allow white students to pursue higher education, but in addition they must also conform to social and cultural attitudes as defined through the predominantly white "culture" of librarianship once they begin the job hunt. So, despite these "well-intentioned" initiatives and opportunities for minorities, they exist behind the exact same barriers and assumptions that librarianship is attempting to divorce itself from – exactly because they don't seek to fix the problem by dismantling the system in which it is created, but rather function within and thus perpetuate deeply rooted structural inequalities that support white supremacy.

As Ettarh (2014) argues, "we need to go beyond the traditional diversity rhetoric and speak instead of intersectional librarianship." The LIS profession must move away from the idea of neutrality and begin to radically support social justice and civil rights issues both internally (within libraries) and externally (within society). Librarianship should be viewed through multiple intersecting lenses in order for any lasting or meaningful changes to occur. Although this paper argues that unacknowledged whiteness is the catalyst for problematic practices within LIS, it is important to note that identities are not monolithic. Instead, it is important, especially to the practice of librarianship, to consider intersecting identities (race, class, gender, ethnicity, disability status, etc.) of both our patrons as well as our colleagues, in addition to the ideologies and set of practices that have formed around these identities. That is, all people are not entirely representative of a single identity, but have multiple identities that inform how we produce and consume knowledge and also our individual worldviews determined by our positionality. Thus, how can librarians and libraries hope to serve our communities if the profession itself is only representative of a narrow set of identities and cultures?

Judging "diversity" within LIS based on demographic statistics is an indication that the profession is focused on "inclusion of tokenized bodies of color" rather than issues of race, racism, and marginalization mediated through current societal realities (Honma 2005, 13). Furthermore, it indicates an unwillingness to admit to a hegemonic production of knowledge, and how these intersectional issues result in racialized barriers into the LIS profession. Structural oppression will not end where diversity begins. Recruitment will not combat white privilege and normativity. Instead, LIS institutions and librarians must focus on, "the process of examining the limitations of representational politics, and its complicity in the commodification of identities and the advancement of neoliberal ideologies of difference," in order to truly and constructively "[advocate] for a multiracial LIS state" (Honma 2005, 13).

Call to action/Next steps

As part of the process as cementing ourselves as allies we must not only "be theorizing the social processes of racialization" and acknowledging our overwhelming privilege, but actively working to dismantle those very barriers created through institutionalized racism and unacknowledged whiteness. According to Davis and Hall (2007, 18), "in addition to the proliferation of new and the expansion of existing LIS diversity education and workforce recruitment programs, efforts must be made to provide accessible career ladders and opportunities for professional learning and development to current library staff." Returning to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26), "Everyone has the right to education… [and that] technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit." As it stands currently, the LIS field is not accessible to all people "on the basis of merit" as seen in earlier discussion surrounding issues of meritization in higher education. Traditional mechanisms, such as the MLS/MLIS (Masters of Library Science/ Masters of Library and Information Science), to determine merit within the profession are exclusionary at best.

Although offering scholarships and stipends is a necessary step to aid in bridging the gap between minority and white librarians enrolling in MLS programs, there are a myriad of unacknowledged systemic issues with this solution that do little to address institutional barriers. Academia in and of itself celebrates knowledge production that perpetuates exclusion of non-white thought as a result of its dominance by the Christian straight white male hegemony, and thus reproduction and entrenchment of the idea of the bourgeois subject. Furthermore there exists a racialized political economy of knowledge in academia. The colonization of higher education as a result of the Enlightenment, combined with socioeconomic realities of marginalized groups as created through a white supremacist society built on institutionalized inequality, cannot be dismantled and addressed though scholarships alone. Instead, the overall system is already foundationally structured to embody racist practice. In other words, solutions to "diversifying" LIS must go much farther than simple scholarships. The entire system must be dismantled and rebuilt in order to have any hope of supporting true accessibility and equality.

DiAngelo's (2011) concept of White Fragility, discussed earlier, is key to understanding the myth of neutrality and how/why librarians that ascribe to this concept as central to "good" librarianship only perpetuate institutionalized racism by upholding white hegemony and normalizing whiteness and the white experience. So to try and "solve" the problem of diversity within libraries through diversity initiatives and scholarships only, fails to recognize that the underlying issue is not disinterest on the part of the marginalized. Rather, it is rooted within the culture and structure of the field itself, which is inherently defined by and functions according to a white, unrepresentative worldview. "Our diversity programs do not work because they are themselves coded to promote whiteness as the norm in the profession

and unduly burden those individuals they are most intended to help" (Hathcock 2015). However, it is also critically important for white librarians to avoid action as informed through white guilt, as guilt is cheap and displaces responsibility. As white librarians who benefit from and function in a system which privileges our identities, we have a responsibility to the profession and to the communities we serve to dismantle the current hegemony.

To begin dismantling unequal institutionalized practices and accreditation within the profession, we must consider social processes of racialization and intersectional (having multiple marginalized and/or privileged) identities and how the MLS/MLIS has historically represented assimilation into "Angloconformity." Similarly, "not everyone has the wherewithal to serve an unpaid internship or pursue a master's degree. But there are library employees that come from disadvantaged groups that would conceivably welcome a better recognition, a fuller crediting, of homegrown experience and knowledge" (Kelley 2013). As suggested earlier by Davis and Hall (2007), it is not unreasonable to provide accommodation for marginalized groups interested in pursuing careers in LIS, which includes, but is certainly not limited to, changing accreditation and focusing on better acknowledgement of competencies in order to ensure "equal accessibility to all on the basis of merit." For example, "There are the 32,775 library assistants who either are African American, Latino, Asian Pacific Islander, Native American, or biracial. These workers, 27 percent of the 122,768 assistants overall according to the American Library Association (ALA), have duties and abilities that can overlap and even surpass those of MLS staff in key service areas (including speaking Spanish and other languages)" (Kelley 2013b).

Despite these figures, minority enrollment in MLS programs is staggeringly low in comparison, even though it is overwhelmingly demonstrated that these library professionals provide crucial services despite not possessing an MLS. In other words, diversity programs and scholarships are having little to no effect on "diversifying" the field, despite the optimistic rhetoric. Therefore, LIS must actively reject unacknowledged whiteness and celebratory multiculturalism and begin critically analyzing the underlying systemic issues that are creating these underwhelming demographics in the first place. "More effort should be made to promote these library assistants to librarians, where the ranks are now overwhelmingly credentialed, white, monolingual females. When merited, these assistants should receive expanded responsibilities, training, and higher salaries without requiring a master's degree. In such deserving cases, the MLS credential is a hindrance to diversity" (Kelley 2013b). Although the MLIS should not be done away with entirely, it is important that we recognize that offering multiple alternative paths to librarianship is critical to ensuring a more equal participation since, as discussed earlier, not all people, especially oppressed groups, have the ability to fully pursue or participate in the current meritocracy as informed via capitalism. Instead, hiring practices within libraries should be radically redefined to consider varying levels of equal but different education and experience.

"The point is that what we have right now isn't equality yet. It's nothing like equality. But it's still enough to enrage the old guard because when you've been used to privilege, equality feels like prejudice" (Penny 2015). It is understandable in this context that white librarians, or rather those that directly benefit from the current hegemonic structure, feel threatened when faced with deprofessionalization of librarianship through the proposed removal of the MLIS. However, while numerous benefits (Jordan 1948; Winter 1983) are often discussed in regards to meritization of LIS, it's important to consider that these benefits are only such because they operate in a system designed to directly support and uphold a particular hegemonic structure. For example, "bias against online MLIS students is especially harmful to rural and underfunded libraries, in light of the geography of MLIS-holders" (Galvan 2015). In other words, one could argue that the MLIS itself is symbolic of hegemonic knowledge under the veil of academia, and by extension ingrained systemic issues of exclusion within LIS.

When faced with changes that make white librarians uncomfortable or feel threatened, especially those changes that would obviously benefit underrepresented groups, it is important for us, as white librarians, to critically unpack these feelings and fears in the context of our current positions of privilege within the profession. While this paper certainly isn't arguing that white librarians haven't earned their accomplishments within the field (whiteness is not monolithic), what it's asking is that we consider that "when librarianship is viewed through a single-axis that is reflective of the dominant culture, certain values, such as individualism and assertiveness color the advice and practices deemed acceptable. These values and practices eventually become the norm. This, in turn, becomes the lens through which those within the profession discuss problems and subsequent change" (Ettarh 2014, 1). In other words, white librarians especially must not only be aware of our privilege and positionality, but also that our understanding and view of the profession, as it currently stands, is unrepresentative of the reality of how LIS can and should operate in order to truly become inclusive and representative. Currently, we are discussing ways to "diversify" the profession based on an inherently exclusionary point of view. White librarians must concede a certain amount of vulnerability and long held comfort to engage in active dismantling of an unfair system.

Conclusion

Amid intense political and social upheaval and injustice worldwide, it is critically important, now more than ever, for libraries and LIS professionals and students to radically support our communities by first acknowledging our own institutional issues, and then by actively seeking to dismantle and disrupt oppressive social structures. We must "create a space where we can discuss these concepts inside (and outside) of professional contexts with an eye toward dismantling those structures that work to keep our profession from diversifying" (Walker 2013). If we want our communities to feel safe, if we want to decolonize the production of

knowledge in order to represent more than a singular view of the world, then libraries as institutions, and librarians as individuals but also as a collective, must change the system.

White librarians should cement ourselves as allies and not only listen to the voices, experiences, and needs of oppressed and marginalized groups, but also constantly challenge harmful institutionalized practices, support and propose necessary institutional reforms, become more versed in critical perspectives around identity (and intersectionality), recognize our (white librarians') fear, anxiety and defensiveness as part of our privileged positionality, continually discuss and educate others, and challenge those who seek to reinforce and support the status quo.

In conclusion, outside of scholarship and diversity hiring practices that do little to change the state of diversity in LIS, there are a myriad of solutions to begin dismantling the structure and culture of libraries and librarianship. Some of the many changes that white librarians in particular can practice as allies include:

- Support dismantling the current system of accreditation for librarians by accounting for different combinations of skills and education;

- Reevaluate job descriptions and hiring practices to avoid playing toward a culture of exclusion (i.e. biased language, "doesn't fit with workplace culture", etc.);

- Being aware of and acknowledging structures and cultures within the LIS field that are exclusionary to those that are marginalized and underrepresented;

- Be aware of exclusionary practices, communication styles, and leadership and call attention to them;

- Critically unpack the anxieties, apprehension, and defensiveness that we (white librarians) may feel when faced with changes to the profession, and how these are rooted in our privileged positionality.

Finally, although this list may help us as white allies begin to critically examine ourselves and our institutions, these steps are only a small piece of a greater need for real change through self-awareness and action. To make real and important changes we need to work harder to be advocates and take real action on these issues. In doing so, we must avoid patting ourselves on the back for our "inclusive" efforts or just simply acknowledging the issues, we must avoid becoming comfortable with sugarcoated language of white fragility, we must be hyperaware of our implicit bias and the insidious ways that racism/classism/etc. manifests and adapts over time, we must go beyond basic personal cultural competency and put our knowledge to work (learning a second language, etc.), and we must hold each other and ourselves accountable for our roles in the current system.

As Vernã Myers (2012) says, "not enough White people have done their work… Stop trying to be good people. And start trying to be real people." Change will take work far beyond armchair advocacy, and it will require all of us to put in real physical and emotional time and effort regardless of our specialties and fields, because this is an issue that concerns all information professionals.

About the author

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