Introduction

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Introduction

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When I began teaching graduate-level library and information sciences (LIS) courses in the areas of diversity and social justice, among the resources I relied upon was Dr. Kathleen de la Peña McCook's issue of *Library Trends* published in 2000.[1] This issue, devoted to ethnic diversity in LIS, honored and gave voice to an important part of the LIS landscape: minority communities and minority library professionals. Of particular significance is Sandra Rios Balderrama's piece in this issue, "This Trend Called Diversity." As the title implies, Balderrama says that diversity is trendy, and more importantly, it means different things to different people. She states:

> "Diversity" is fiery and tame depending on one's perspective, the context, the issue at hand, and one's own energy flow for the day. Sometimes the definitions and visualizations are sharp and explicit: racism, white privilege, homophobia, heterosexual privilege, inequity of access, institutional racism, organizational barriers, apologies and reparation, "illegal" aliens, non-English speaking, non-white, non-user, old boys' network, and old girls' network. Sometimes the definitions and visualizations are easier on the senses and perhaps more elusive: celebration of difference, internationalism, intellectual diversity, global village, multiculturalism, organizational cultures, pluralism, diversity of work style, and diversity of learning styles. At times the term is simply empty and unfulfilling and has not earned its credibility. (2000, 195)

She goes on to suggest that in our conversations, some of us speak too strongly and others may be speaking too softly, all of which contributes to cyclical conversations. Cyclical does not imply unproductive, but it does relate directly to Balderamma's assertion that these conversations are "trendy." In 2018, we are currently engaged in a trendy phase, exacerbated by our societal and political climate characterized by renewed conversations about diversity, oppression, equity, racism, and social justice.

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There are also a variety of factors that have not changed and that push back against the question of "why are we still talking about this?" Among the constants that require us to continue these conversations are things pointed out in "This Trend Called Diversity," compounded by the following:

- Our terms and definitions keep changing (Peterson 1999) and semantics often prevent people from having the same conversation.
- These conversations are uncomfortable and hard to have, and thereby easy to dismiss.
- New professionals, scholars, and ideas continue to enter the landscape.
- Our profession remains pathetically nondiverse.
- The discussions being had are often devoid of context.
- Diversity rhetoric does not consistently equate to action, nor does it spur lasting change.

Librarianship in the United States has long been a profession characterized by women, specifically white women, though the field was previously dominated by white men (Keer and Carlos 2015). The field continues to not reflect, and perhaps not fully understand, the diverse and dynamic communities it serves (ALA 2012a, 2012b). Our profession may be notoriously white, but our communities are not. In fact, "our communities are increasingly pluralistic and intersectional" (Apple 2006, 61–62), yet they are still considered the "other" and not served in the manner they deserve, with staff and resources that look like them or represent their experiences and information needs. To this end, the American Library Association *Diversity Counts* report points out that Latinos compose 16.3% of the population, but just 3.1% of credentialed librarians; African Americans compose 12.6% of the population, but just 5.1% of credentialed librarians; Asian and Pacific Islanders compose 5% of the population, but just 2.7% of credentialed librarians; and, Native American / Indigenous people are less than 1% of the population and just 0.2% of credentialed librarians (ALA 2012a, 2012b).

The workforce issue is a more complicated phenomenon that involves issues of recruitment, retention, low wages, and competition for professional positions. Graduate LIS curricula are another dimension of the problem as they may not be reflective of changing society, and are therefore not attractive to potential librarians who don't see themselves reflected in the profession (which is part of the larger recruitment and retention problem).

Another important dynamic of our cyclical discussions is the content itself; sensitive and/or "taboo" topics such as racism and privilege can create "cognitive dissonance" as participants from different backgrounds begin to digest and understand the difference between their lives and

experiences and that of other groups. Conversations become even more difficult when guilt, anger, shame, despair, and other emotions are woven throughout (Tatum 1994) and create hostility and environments of resistance (Bell, Morrow, and Tastsoglou 1999) in our libraries, organizations, and classrooms. It is also imperative that these conversations happen in context. We have to be willing and able to relate the diversity issues within LIS to our larger society, otherwise the urgency and relevance are lost. For example, our libraries are not immune to systemic racism because they are organizations like any others (Ahmed 2012); libraries are just microcosms of the society in which they exist. So, it can indeed be timely, appropriate, and necessary for libraries to have programs and collections devoted to Black Lives Matter, the myth of library neutrality (Gibson et al. 2017), and the racial and socioeconomic implications of the loss of net neutrality. This dissonance wrought by hard conversations can be overcome with care, empathy, persistence, dialogue skills (Sue 2016; Sue et al. 2009.), and the literature, such as the articles in this issue of *Library Trends*.

With this in mind, my hope for this issue, in addition to showcasing brilliant thinkers, is to productively add to the conversations we've been having and also spur readers towards *action*. Library professionals should be culturally responsive (Tatum 1994, 1992) and critically self-reflective (Rychly and Graves 2012). Culturally responsive practitioners should be engaging with patrons and students, addressing race and other difficult issues in our libraries and classrooms. Additionally, culturally responsive practitioners should comprehend the fluid relationships between identity, culture, and information; they should be knowledgeable of how socioeconomic status impacts information needs, information seeking, and information use; they should provide information that creates bridges between the schools, homes, and communities of those they serve; and they should understand the importance of the community to the lifelong learning process. Being culturally responsive moves us toward action and social justice—what are we *doing* with the knowledge and understanding we have of diverse populations? As practitioners engaging in critical practice and empathetic service, are we doing anything inside *and* outside our libraries to enhance our communities (this goes beyond serving people within our organizations)? Are we promoting, celebrating, and increasing diversity and social justice in the profession? We have work to do so diversity is no longer considered "trendy" but a natural and important part of our regular discussions about the field.

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This issue of *Library Trends*—"Race and Ethnicity in Library and Information Science: An Update"—will revisit the conversations started in the Summer of 2000 by McCook and Balderamma, update several other seminal articles published around that time, assess the status of race and

ethnicity in LIS some twenty years later, and hopefully incite readers to social justice advocacy and action.

Falling into three categories—diversity in the history of LIS and updates to seminal articles; current diversity issues in LIS; and, new voices in the ongoing conversation—the articles in this issue are honest, insightful, and necessary. Foster begins the issue with a discussion of the *Green Book*, an annual publication that guided black motorists to safe places to stay and eat from the 1930s through the 1960s. Now digitized as a valuable historical resource, the *Green Book* has stark relevance to currents times. Wheeler and Smith discuss the difficult and sparse path of African-Americans in LIS leadership, and emphasize why such leadership is important. Rounding out the first section of history and updates, Collins updates and pays homage to Lorna Peterson's 1999 article "The Definition of Diversity: Two Views. A More Specific Definition." Language was and is crucially important to discussions of diversity, race, power, and oppression, yet is often lost in an LIS void.

Issues related to diversity, race, and ethnicity permeate LIS, particularly our cataloging and metadata. Legacies of racist and oppressive subject headings still exist and prevent full and equitable access to collections. Adler and Harper discuss the entrenchment of race in our modern classification systems, and Howard and Knowlton continue the conversation by elucidating how these systems particularly inhibit African American and LGBTQIA studies. Wickham and Sweeney add to this discussion by highlighting how the legacies of racism and whiteness are transmitted through our collection development practices, particularly in children's literature. The team of Arroyo-Ramirez, Chou, Freedman, Fujita, and Orozco introduce the concept of microaggressions, explain why they are so damaging to librarians of color, and elucidate how they creatively and radically combat microaggressions through the art of zine making.

The articles in the third section are calls-to-action and really give a sense of the current LIS landscape and provided solid suggestions and hopes for moving forward. Alabi furthers the discussion of microaggressions and contends that they are damaging to professionals of color in libraries. Alabi suggests that white librarians become allies and work toward creating inclusive, instead of hostile, environments. Espinal, Sutherland, and Roh provide an update to Espinal's formative 2001 article and appeal to the profession to "love librarians of color" (Espinal 2001). Finally, Brown, Ferretti, Leung, and Méndez-Brady share their already challenging experiences as young librarians of color and detail how they began to support and mentor each other. The community they have created for themselves and others is a model for the entire profession.

It's likely that the LIS profession will always need to be engaging in substantive and productive conversations about race, ethnicity, diversity, and related issues. But we also need to act before, during, and after our

consistent conversations. Our conversations and actions need to be sustained and have the added benefit of creating and maintaining welcoming environments that will enable minority populations and LIS professionals to flourish. Minority and otherwise oppressed populations need to be encouraged and retained, not just tolerated (Cooke 2017). Our profession will be better as a result of this work.

Acknowledgement

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Note

1. A supplemental list of related articles is provided after this introduction and its reference list.

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