In Pursuit of Antiracist Social Justice: Denaturalizing Whiteness in the Academic Library

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ABSTRACT

This article examines racism and the culture of Whiteness in academic libraries in three major areas of public services: space, staffing, and reference service delivery. The authors perform a critical discourse analysis, drawing on critical race theory, critical geography, critical education, and social psychology to examine foundational library scholarship and professional standards. Academic libraries, as products and representations of their parent institutions, are situated within the well-documented systemic and institutional racism of higher education in the United States. This is reflected in the monocultural geography and spaces of academic libraries. It is seen in the organizational culture and hiring practices of libraries, which are overwhelmingly staffed by White workers, while serving an increasingly diverse student body. Finally, it is reflected in the traditional tenets of reference service delivery, including approachability, responsiveness, and objectivity. The authors argue that racism is embedded in academic libraries through a culture of Whiteness. Consistent with social justice traditions in librarianship, they offer tools and suggestions to realign the profession with antiracist values and practices that will enable libraries to better serve their communities.

INTRODUCTION

> 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, 2005, p. 2

There is a long and sometimes complex history of social justice work within the library profession (Mehra, Rioux, & Albright, 2009). Racial justice is a central aspect of social justice work in libraries (Gregory & Higgins, 2013), and critical race theory (CRT) is one of the guiding scholarly traditions of this work (Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2011). Yet, when viewed through the lens of CRT, academic libraries still fall short of their intention to be spaces of empowerment and growth for marginalized community members, especially people of color. As Todd Honma (2005) suggests in the epigraph, the ideal mission of libraries is perverted by racist structures that are endemic to American society. Likewise, the educational missions of academic libraries are curtailed by institutional racism found within the American system of higher education. CRT scholars have documented the detrimental effects of overt and covert interpersonal discrimination in higher education (Davis et al., 2004; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Huntt, 2012; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009). Beyond the interpersonal level, Diane Lynn Gusa (2010) describes a systemic integration of White values, cultures, and practices in higher education, which she calls White Institutional Presence, or WIP. This article demonstrates how academic libraries, operating within this system, reflect and uphold this culture of Whiteness as seen throughout the profession: from the people who work in libraries and the ways in which services are offered, to how library spaces are constructed, regulated, and occupied. Through an examination of the culture of Whiteness within academic libraries and the harm caused by this unjust system, this article points toward possible methods of resistance and change.

Library and information scholars and practitioners have attempted to bring the concepts of diversity and multiculturalism to a more central place in the profession. Beginning in the 1980s and 1990s, these terms became buzzwords in efforts to attract more people of color to the profession and better serve the increasing number of racial and ethnic minorities in library user communities (Neely & Peterson, 2007). However, the ways in which these discussions have taken place are problematic. Though well-meaning, celebrations of "diversity" and "multiculturalism" can be ways of ascribing difference and otherness among both library patrons and library workers, once again affirming that Whiteness is the neutral, normal way of being in libraries (Hussey, 2010). Employing these terms in this ambiguous manner can also obscure and suppress resistance to the real and continued reproduction of racism in workplaces (Kaiser et al., 2013). Though it nods toward an idea of equality, such "careless language" fails to actually address underlying and ongoing power imbalances in American society, leading to "library policy weak on equity . . . [and] trivializ[ing] injustice experienced by the oppressed" (Peterson, 1995, p. 30).

To address the limited scope of change based solely on recruitment of

minority workers, this article draws on CRT to argue for an antiracist re-examination of central aspects of library work. An antiracist approach is one that openly acknowledges the system of racial oppression in this country and actively works to counteract and subvert it (Bonnett, 1999). By acknowledging the centrality of race to aspects of library work beyond the level of recruitment, this approach rejects most examples of "neutrality" and "objectivity" as coded instances of the integration of normative Whiteness into the profession. An antiracist approach, instead, requires honest, personal, and subjective examinations of library work on individual, collective, and institutional levels.

This article identifies and discusses some ways in which racism, through the presumed and oppressive "neutrality" of Whiteness, is embedded in three particular aspects of public services in academic libraries: the physical spaces of service delivery, public services staff, and service delivery methods and values. The article begins with a review of the literature on race in higher education to show the context in which academic libraries, as the repositories of academic knowledge and reflections of their parent institutions, necessarily operate. Then, through a historical account of the influence of race on college campus architecture, it analyzes the current prevalence of monocultural library geography and spaces. Following this is an examination of how professional guidelines shape weak hiring practices and how the over-representation of White workers in the profession has a negative impact on users, staff, and organizations. Finally, a critique of the limitations of current notions of approachability, responsiveness, and objectivity in reference service delivery is provided, demonstrating how they each perpetuate racism at the reference desk. The article ultimately demonstrates that racism is embedded in academic libraries and that realigning librarianship with antiracist values and practices will enable libraries to better serve their communities by working for the collective goal of antiracist social justice.

This article is written by three White librarians who have done reference and instruction work in several two-year colleges and university libraries. Over two decades ago, African American librarian Deborah A. Curry asserted that "if [our White colleagues] are serious about challenging institutional and individual racism, [they] must begin to see how the dynamics of white privilege have afforded them opportunities not available to people of color" (1994, p. 307). The authors acknowledge that as White, employed librarians who have had virtually unfettered access to higher education, privilege shapes their ability to write this article. They are highly indebted to the many scholars of color who have thought and written about these issues and whose thinking has so profoundly shaped their own work. The intention in writing this is not to take credit for recognizing these harms but to be a part of this ongoing conversation. It is not solely the responsibility or the burden of library workers of color to

call attention to these issues and to do the work of addressing them. To that end, the authors hope that this article can contribute to the growing body of social justice–oriented thought and practice that resists normative notions in librarianship that uphold racist, classist, transphobic, sexist, ableist, and heterosexist practices.

METHOD AND THEORY

To demystify the ways in which racism operates on the spaces, people, and public service practices of academic libraries, this article examines specific academic library texts by employing critical discourse analysis, as defined by Chouliaraki & Fairclough (1999). This method involves identifying texts to be interpreted, offering description and analysis of the social phenomenon being documented and enacted by the text, the identification of pertinent theories to explain that phenomenon, and suggestions for change based on the new understanding that has been constructed through the preceding analysis (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Closet-Crane, 2009). Its emphasis on action as its end result makes critical discourse analysis an appropriate method for this social justice project, because social justice has been defined as a movement for "progressive actions to bring positive changes in society" (Mehra, Rioux, & Albright, 2009, p. 4821).

The texts under analysis in this project are several sets of professional standards from the American Library Association (ALA) and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) as well as recent (within the last ten years) or influential library and information science (LIS) books and articles that pertain to spaces, hiring, and reference work in academic libraries. These texts were chosen as representative of predominant professional discourses on the subjects of space, hiring, and reference work on the basis of their endorsement by two primary professional associations of librarianship (as either authors or publishers of the texts), their publication by primary LIS publishers, their influence on the field, or their timeliness. To support the analysis of these texts, this article ventures outside the literature of the LIS field and into other disciplines and bodies of knowledge to find pertinent texts, theories, and experiential knowledge that explain some specific elements and nuances of space, hiring, and reference work.

The use of critical discourse analysis is an attempt to deepen and broaden the set of theoretical tools that library workers can apply to their lived experiences in their particular libraries, with their specific user communities. Some of the analysis of texts and phenomena in this article is kept intentionally broad in order to leave room for the reader's own distinct context. Ideally, a library worker could use the theoretical understandings developed in this article as a guide to analyzing her own academic library's spaces, people, and practices.

Critical race theory (CRT) is a productive and prudent lens through

which to analyze the professional texts chosen for each section of this article, because this approach disrupts common understandings and discourses of race/racism both by unearthing complexities of the concept of race and by delineating the intractability of racism (Valdes et al., 2011). CRT is a body of work that recognizes the complexities of race "as simultaneously socially constructed and deeply material, at least in its lived experience and its effects" (Flores, 2009). Although race is still popularly conceived of as a biological category, critical race theorists reject this notion and describe race as constructed through social processes (Yancey, 2003).

Omi & Winant (1994) use the term "racial formation" to describe the process by which groups are organized into racial subgroupings based on cultural, historical, geographic, and economic factors. Racialized groups have attendant social experiences, stigmas, and stereotypes and experience racism in different ways and to varying degrees. While the terms "White" librarians and "faculty and students of color" are used in this article, this is not to suggest that the experience of Whiteness is absolutely consistent among all those labeled as such, nor that there is consistency to the experience of being "of color" regardless of how one's racial identity is constructed or lived. Rather, these terms are meant to highlight the institutional privileges *afforded* on the basis of being White to those constructed as White, and the institutional privileges *denied* on the basis of not being White to those constructed as being "of color."

Popular discourse and scholarship have simplified racism to a Black/White phenomenon that suggests the immutability of racial categories and eschews the complex and changing mechanisms of racism. Moving away from this paradigm, critical race geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore defines racism as "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (Gilmore, 2007, p. 28). Noticeably absent from this definition is any mention of White or Black, while the process of creating hierarchy for the purpose of exploitation at the cost of groups' well-being is highlighted. Similarly to the ways in which racial formations are complex and changing, racism changes shape across time and space (Darder & Torres, 2004). For example, Fredrickson (2002) argues that anti-Semitism was the first form of what is now understood as racism, beginning in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with the burgeoning understandings of biology and race that eventually made their way to the Americas. Anti-Black racism has shifted over time from slavery, to the apartheid of the Jim Crow South, to "colorblindness" and the New Jim Crow (M. Alexander, 2010).

Beyond a critical lens for the analysis of academic librarianship's constitutive documents, CRT offers a unique approach to analyzing narrative as socially situated knowledge (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Narratives are central to CRT methods because they provide opportunities for marginalized people to fight silencing by telling counter-stories and by dislodging

readers/listeners (particularly of dominant groups) from the normative reality in which they participate (Delgado, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). For these reasons, this study supplements its analysis of documents through a CRT lens by drawing upon the voices of people of color recounting varying experiences in libraries.

Though it originated in the field of law, CRT has been expanded and transformed in other disciplines. In education, the epistemological foundations of CRT include the recognition that racism is central, permanent, and endemic to explaining individual experience in higher education. CRT scholars challenge the traditional claims by the education system to objectivity, neutrality, meritocracy, and equal opportunity (Solorzano, 1998). Gusa (2010) furthered the examination of race in higher education through the concept of White Institutional Presence (WIP). WIP is the multifaceted and often overlooked cultural domination of Whites and Whiteness in institutions of higher education that lead to discrimination and marginalization for students of color. In the context of CRT and WIP, Whiteness is defined as normative and persistent cultural characteristics associated with Western and Northern Europe, including language (e.g., English) and worldview (e.g., meritocracy, individualism) (Gusa, 2010).

Additionally, Whiteness is imbued with conceptions of racialized hierarchy characterized by White domination, and is "decisively shaped by the exercise of power and the expectation of advantages in acquiring property" (Roediger, 2002, p. 23; Yancey, 2003). Whites are those individuals who both self-identify as White and who are, through the complex social process of racial formation, socially determined to be White. The economic and social domination of Whites has shaped and continues to shape the development, policies, and practices of higher education in this country. Gusa (2010) identifies four ways in which WIP manifests in colleges and universities:

- *White ascendency*, the system of "thinking and behavior that arise from White mainstream authority and advantage, which in turn are generated from Whiteness's historical position of power and domination" (p. 472). This leads to a sense of White entitlement, the notion that it is right and natural for Whites to maintain control over spaces, discourses, and outcomes.
- *Monoculturalism*, "the expectation that all individuals conform to one 'scholarly' worldview, which stems from the aforementioned beliefs in the superiority and normalcy of White culture" (pp. 474–475). This is seen in everything from the epistemologies and curriculum to the physical spaces of academia.
- *White blindness*, which is an ideology that obscures or ignores White identity and privilege while simultaneously espousing the "neutral" concept of color blindness (p. 477).

- *White estrangement*, which sustains WIP by "distancing Whites physically and socially from people of color" (p. 478). White people spend much of their lives segregated from people of color, and when they arrive in the potentially more diverse spaces of higher education, they are unable to conceive of how to create a truly multicultural environment or even to initiate genuine contact and dialogue with their peers of color.

Taken together, these mechanisms result in a White cultural domination of higher education that is neglectful or even abusive to people of color within the institution, yet, with devastating effect, is often unnoticed by those in the cultural majority. As Gusa notes,

> When Whites neglect to identify the ways in which White ideological homogenizing practices sustain the structure of domination and oppression, they allow institutional policies and practices to be seen as unproblematic or inevitable and thereby perpetuate hostile racial climates. (2010, p. 465)

When viewed in this light, the perceived "neutrality" of academic library policies and practices begins to appear dangerously deceptive. Using the frameworks and language of CRT and WIP, this article will attempt to denaturalize the White, racist underpinnings of academic libraries, beginning with a discussion of the ways in which racism operates in American higher education.

Higher Education as the Context of Academic Libraries

Before they reach the doors of the academic library, users will first progress through the gates of primary and secondary school, the college admission process, and the college classroom experience, all of which put faculty and students of color at a disadvantage (Solorzano, 1998; Solorzano et al., 2000; Davis et al., 2004; Rovai, Gallien, & Wighting, 2005; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Yosso et al., 2009; Gusa, 2010; Yosso & Lopez, 2010). Helen A. Moore (2005) argues that universal testing under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is racially biased, widening the gap between disadvantaged students and their more privileged peers. Standardized testing reduces diversity in the curriculum, restrains pedagogical choices for teachers, and disincentivizes genuine reform efforts. High-stakes testing itself is rooted in the values of individualism, competition, and meritocracy, which are all culturally White values as opposed to traditionally African American values such as cooperation, collaboration, and socialization (Rovai et al., 2005). Studies show that public schools are still greatly segregated, while funding and resources are unequally distributed (Spatig-Amerikaner, 2012; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2009). Among those students who complete high school and pursue higher education, students of color are more likely to attend for-profit institutions and two-year institutions, less likely

to graduate, and more likely to accrue unsustainable levels of student-loan debt (Rooks, 2013). While the structural racism of the American primary and secondary school system and the college admission process is outside the scope of this article, it is important to acknowledge that racism in higher education does not occur in a vacuum, and that many students of color are not entering the halls of academe on an equal playing field.

Students of color at colleges and universities in the United States, especially predominantly White institutions, report frequently encountering discrimination and racism. Often these are in the form of microaggressions, "subtle, stunning, often automatic" acts of disregard or contempt directed toward a member of a minority group (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Wills, 1978, p. 66). Students of color are ignored or excluded by their professors and classmates. In a typical example, one student reported: "I felt alienated from the other students and faculty. They would avoid me, ignore me. It's as if I wasn't even there . . . sort of invisible" (Solorzano, 1998, p. 128). Others have described how their professors and fellow students disregard their opinions or exclude them from group projects (Solorzano et al., 2000; Davis et al., 2004). White faculty and students project stereotypes and misconceptions onto students of color, often oblivious to the harm caused by their assumptions. Black students often struggle against the presumption that they are not serious or hard-working (Solorzano et al., 2000; Davis et al., 2004; Solorzano, 1998). One Black student described his experience with racial stereotypes in an engineering program:

> [In] a technical field, [as] an engineer, oftentimes you'll feel like other students don't want to approach Black students for their groups, especially when [they think the Blacks are] just not technically smart . . . as maybe an Asian student. And, I'll notice they'll make some [study] groups [and] maybe you'll be the last one asked. So you feel more of a need to establish yourself . . . you need to prove yourself. (Qtd. in Solorzano et al., 2000, p. 67)

Students also report more overt forms of racism, such as racial slurs, swastikas scrawled in dorms, or people dressed in KKK outfits (Davis et al., 2004). In February 2014 two White male students at the University of Mississippi were seen hanging a noose around the neck of a statue of James Meredith, the first Black student to attend the university. In commenting on the incident, university officials acknowledged that the institution is "still struggling to overcome its racially tumultuous past" (Le Coz, 2014, sec. 5). Cases such as these contribute to a negative or outright hostile environment for minority students. In such environments, students experience self-doubt, isolation, anger, stress, and emotional exhaustion that impact upon their academic, social, and psychological performance and well-being (Davis et al., 2004; Solorzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2009).

Compounding the negative effects of the daily interactions that stu-

dents of color experience, the dominance of White culture in higher education is also evident in curriculum and pedagogy. Syllabi and courses largely focus on texts written by and about White people, relegating non-Eurocentric readings to specifically designated courses (Gusa, 2010, p. 476).

Student experiences on campus and their perceptions about the racial climate at institutions of higher education vary significantly by race (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Harper & Hurtado, 2007). In a meta-analysis of studies on campus racial climate, Harper & Hurtado (2007) found research consistently showing that White students find their campuses to be more accepting and perceive less racism than do students of color. In contrast, Black students have lower satisfaction with their campus racial climates and report more biased treatment than their Asian American, Latino/a, Native American, and White peers (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Rankin and Reason (2005) found that while a majority of students (84 percent) experience harassment on campus, White students most often experience harassment based on gender, while students of color most often report harassment based on race or ethnicity (p. 49). Students of color are more likely to report the campus racial climate as "hostile," "racist," or "unfriendly," while a greater proportion of White students suggest that their campus racial climate is "improving" (pp. 51–52). African American, Asian American, and Latino/a students were all more likely than White students to report experiencing pressure to conform to racial or ethnic stereotypes regarding their academic performance and behavior. African American and Asian American students were also more likely to report bias and racism from faculty members (Ancis et al., 2000). Studies consistently show these differences in experiences and perceptions, with the greatest gap occurring between Black and White students (Ancis et al., 2000; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

Naturally, experiences of racial discrimination affect the academic performance and persistence of students of color. In a series of studies, Steele & Aronson (1995) found that "stereotype threat"—fear of confirming a negative stereotype about your group—has a negative impact on test performance among African Americans, especially when the test was presented as a measure of intellectual ability. Students of color at predominantly White institutions describe a variety of coping mechanisms. When empowered to do so, some students create *counterspaces*: they "seek out safe campus spaces and communities where they can process and respond to the rejection that they experience attending a historically White college" (Yosso & Lopez, 2010, p. 94). Unfortunately, tired of coping with the daily affronts, many students choose to switch to a more accepting major, transfer to an institution where they are not in the minority, or simply drop out of school (Solorzano et al., 2000). Poor campus racial climate can be

linked to higher dropout rates among students of color (Yosso & Lopez, 2010; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1998).

Students' myriad experiences of race in higher education—whether privileged or discriminatory—happen on campuses and within physical contexts that have racist histories, associations, and performative influences. The following section will examine the construction of environments and spaces of higher education and academic libraries, and the ways in which they subtly influence how library work is performed and who is allowed to perform it.

The Racialized Space of the Academic Library

While the spaces of academic libraries are treated day to day as nothing more than an environmental context for the activities carried out within them, this section will describe some of the ways in which the spaces of academic libraries actively communicate certain (usually dominant) ideologies (O'Gorman, 1998). Spatial theorists and researchers have revealed the intimate relationship between the construction, distribution, and composition of space and the behaviors, opportunities, and well-being of those who occupy it (Hankins, Cochrane, & Derickson, 2012; Lipsitz, 2011; Sailer & McCulloh, 2012). Despite their apparent immutability, spaces are socially constructed moment to moment by those who occupy them, while simultaneously bearing the physical evidence of those who have exerted power over them in the past (Lefebvre, 1991). In this way, the present and the past coarticulate the meaning that a space has for those who would use it, take shelter in it, or be excluded from it (Costello, 2001, p. 45), and this is especially true for spaces imbued with as much cultural meaning and significance as libraries.

Of course, any academic library is situated within the larger context of the campus of which it is a part, and college campuses are imbued with all of the same assumptions, imaginations, fantasies, and intentions as academic libraries. The mythical, imaginary American college campus is the result of very intentional architectural strategizing on the part of generations of college presidents, college architects, and the wealthy alumni and business magnates who have funded American college campus construction over the past four hundred years (Thelin, 2004). It is no accident, for example, that the "ivy" of the American Ivy League refers to an architectural adornment cultivated to mirror the most venerable campus buildings of Oxford and Cambridge (using, in some cases, the very same British species of the plant) (Maynard, 2012). College campuses that wish to suggest venerable age will communicate this through "legible historical metaphors" such as gothic or classical architectural forms (O'Gorman, 1998, p. 97). Colleges that wish to highlight their intellectual edginess may choose hypermodern architecture that suggests a departure from the past

and an emergence into the future (O'Gorman, 1998, p. 98). As Robinson Meyer put it in *The Atlantic*,

> We know what elite American colleges should look like. Tall Gothic towers, Georgian angles and radii, and the few massive, newer slopes of Cold War modernism: It's a collage recognizable as "college." (2013)

The impression that a college campus gives—be it one of pseudo-classical prestige or of visionary modernity—is invariably a play for conceptual power (O'Gorman, 1998, pp. 97–98). Through what Henri Lefebvre (1991) calls the representation or conceptualization of its space, an institution of higher education attempts to impress the viewer with a sense of its access to, and creation of, power and powerful individuals. Because of the systems of oppression that still play a major role in American life, that power is invariably connected to a normative (male, able-bodied, upwardly mobile) Whiteness. Lefebvre describes one of the ways in which built environments are socially produced: "by way of construction—in other words, by way of architecture, conceived of not as the building of a particular structure, palace, or monument, but rather as a project embedded in a spatial context" (1991, p. 42).

While racial spatial projects can be found on campuses across the United States, a brief look at the history of Princeton University's architecture (which has served as an American academic architectural icon) provides a particularly explicit example. Ralph Adams Cram, the university's chief architect, and Woodrow Wilson, its president, explicitly inscribed racial messages into the buildings that they constructed. When describing Princeton's campus and his plan for continuing to use the gothic style, Cram used phrases like "racial" and "logical" to express an "inextinguishable race-memory" that represented "nationality, for ethnic continuity and for the impulses of Christian civilization" (Maynard, 2012, p. 81). Wilson, in a speech describing the spatial projects under his direction, elaborated on the relationship between the conceived space of the campus and the intellectual practices suggested by its relationship to history and race:

> By the very simple device of building our new buildings in the Tudor Gothic style we seem to have added to Princeton the age of Oxford and of Cambridge; we have added a thousand years to the history of Princeton by merely putting those lines in our buildings which point every man's imagination to the historic traditions of learning in the English-speaking race. We have declared and acknowledged our derivation and lineage; we have said "This is the spirit in which we have been bred," and as the imagination, as the recollection of the classes yet to be graduated from Princeton are affected by the suggestions of that architecture, we shall find the past of this country married with the past of the world. (Wilson, 1902, pp. 199–200)

The Princeton example, while extreme, is by no means unique, as evidenced by its architectural echoes on campuses nationwide. What this

Eurocentric ascendancy and monoculturalism amount to for students and faculty of color entering the academy is an "alienating space of hegemonic power" that is expressed through the physical make-up of the academic environment and the spatial practices that make and are made by that environment (Gusa, 2010, p. 476). This environment is composed of classrooms, buildings, hallways, works of art, library collections, and the ways in which people inhabit and regulate that environment, that reflect the architecture, attitudes, achievements, and ideals of "the historic White legacy of PWIs [Predominantly White Institutions]" (Gusa, 2010, p. 476). Writing about the experience of Chicana/o students in higher education, Yosso and Lopez (2010) elaborate on this idea: "A student's physical world also elicits cultural alienation, featuring campus sculptures, buildings, flyers, and office postings that do not reflect Chicana/o histories or experiences. The cars and clothes of the predominantly White student body further evidence the physical reproduction of White middle-class culture" (p. 87).

Of course, the phenomenon that Yosso and Lopez describe is not limited to Chicana/o students but could be said of almost any population that does not fit within the ambiguous but narrow confines of mainstream Whiteness. Defined by Sue et al. (2007) as an "environmental microaggression," this under-representation of cultures that are not White sends an implicit message to students of color that their culture is neither understood nor valued, and to White students that any culture other than their own is unimportant. It further suggests that White cultural norms are something to be aspired to if students and faculty of color are to succeed in higher education. While students and faculty of color frequently subvert those norms, and make spaces their own, such actions are frequently in opposition to a White norm and entail the duress of opposition to accepted ways of being.

Library spaces fit well within this discursive tradition of setting up, and enforcing, intellectual expectations and norms through space. Library leaders design, inhabit, and remake library spaces with the earnest intention of facilitating the work of students and faculty (see ACRL, "Guidelines for University Library Services to Undergraduate Students," 2013; ACRL, "Standards for Libraries in Higher Education," 2011). Unfortunately, with a cultural history of excluding people of color from positions of power and decision making, and a profession that continues to be extremely racially homogenous, those who have made decisions about library spaces in the past and those who continue to make them in the present tend to have a shared cultural understanding of what the work of faculty and students is and should be. Such an understanding may be very different from the realities of library staff and students of color (Adkins & Hussey, 2006). As a result, many library spaces embody the values and habits of the past in their architecture—forming spaces that communicate the correctness of

some ways of behaving, learning, and producing knowledge while they discourage others (Lipsitz, 2011, p. 14).

Take, for example, the type of academic library with cathedral-like ceilings (suggesting the European model of monastic study), in which quiet or silence is actively enforced by staff and passively enforced by space. A space like this privileges individual, quiet study, while it has been demonstrated that many non-White racial and ethnic groups are more academically successful when they can construct knowledge in groups where study and socializing happen simultaneously (Gay, 2010). In this example, the structure of a particular kind of library space, in collusion with the spatial practices of the library staff who regulate it, impedes certain modes of action and thought. Library spaces such as this continue to produce and reproduce a narrowed field of possibility for students, faculty, and librarians of color through three primary spatial mechanisms:

- The physical, (mostly) permanent features that make up the walls, roof, facade, windows, pillars, and beams of its structure
- The semipermanent features that make up the decorations and physical configuration of the library: the furniture, carpets, art, wall colors, signage, banners, handouts, and information technologies
- The spatial practices, or ways of being in a space, governed by implicit and explicit rules and those who enforce them (LeFebvre, 1991).

The evidence of these practices in libraries can come in many forms, and how they are manifested and experienced will depend largely on the unique interactions of the building, staff, and students who compose a particular library space and community. A few common features, though, might help to illuminate the concrete ways in which library spaces perpetuate cultural hegemony within academic institutions:

- Library spaces that incorporate classical architectural features—suggesting modes of thought that fit with the Western tradition of learning that dates back to Ancient Greece, with its attendant valuing of linear, logical, oppositional thinking done by men in hierarchical learning environments (Frampton, 1985, p. 10)
- Spaces that contain representations (statues, portraits, plaques) of wealthy, usually White, often male, patrons, or spaces that are named after those benefactors, suggesting that the kind of wealth and status that would allow one to earn or own a space is to be recognized, valued, and striven for (Costello, 2001)
- Works of art, donated to the library by wealthy patrons, that originate from non-White cultures and are not contextualized (Seip, 1999) in terms of how they relate to the present population of the school, suggesting, instead, a decontextualized imperialist desire to know and gather the cultural artifacts of marginalized cultures

- Expectations such as quiet, individual study (Gay, 2010), and polite, depersonalized interactions between library workers and library users expressed through common spatial practices (imagine the mythical shushing of the librarian, within the echoing walls of a reading room)
- Reference spaces that prioritize height or clear lines of sight that put the librarian or occupant of the desk in a disciplinary role of surveillance over a particular space when the bodies that occupy that supervisory position are consistently White, and the bodies under surveillance are expected to be docile (Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Randall & Newell, 2014).

While each of these examples has multiple meanings—some desirable, beautiful, or functional—they each communicate something specific about the anticipated users, behaviors, and cultural histories of those in that space, and, by omission, they exclude those who are not anticipated (O'Gorman, 1998, pp. 95–96). For example, in her study of the relationship that graduates of the all-female Mount Holyoke College have to their campus, Gieseking (2007) quotes the recollection of one alumna from the Class of 1937 (presumably White, based on her overwhelmingly White sample) regarding the reading room of the college's library:

> I have always been crazy about the reading room. As you know it's a replica of Westminster Hall in London, on a somewhat smaller scale. . . . I was thrilled when I was given a carrel. Honor students were allowed to have carrels in the stacks. I loved it because it made me feel like a scholar. (p. 283)

In this passage, the alumna draws an implicit connection between the resemblance of the library's reading room to an iconic space of White, male power and privilege (Westminster Hall is the historic seat of the British Parliament), and her identity as a scholar who would access power and privilege through her education. While the traditional architecture and design of the Mount Holyoke College library empowered this student, who could identify a racial (if not a gendered) connection to the architectural history that the reading room represented, it is possible to imagine how the connection of the reading room to a historical center of imperial power might alienate rather than empower students who are excluded from that racial relationship.

In contrast, high-achieving Latino/a college students interviewed by Adkins & Hussey (2006) expressed conflicted responses to the size and grandeur of their college libraries, saying that the library was "overwhelming," that it "scare[d]" them, and that they preferred not to go there, despite reporting that they almost universally found the library useful for their academic needs (p. 472). While feeling intimidated in spaces of higher education is a common experience for many students, this feeling may be compounded for students who already feel that they do not belong on campus on the basis of their race. Interestingly, several of the

students interviewed reported that they preferred their local public libraries because they were smaller, more spatially legible, and had more visible culturally responsive material (p. 472).

Looking to the professional literature for advice on how to redress this spatial disjuncture meets with an unfortunate absence. This absence is entirely consistent with what geographers Audrey Kobayashi and Linda Peake, in "Racism Out of Place: Thoughts on Whiteness and an Antiracist Geography in the New Millennium" (2000), call the "'empty spaces' that result from silence, exclusion, and denial, and that serve as a basis for reproducing normative whiteness" in space (p. 400). Recent library literature on space (Edwards, Robinson, & Unger, 2013; Leighton & Weber, 1999; Library Leadership and Management Association, 2011; Lushington, 2002; Sannwald, 2001; Staines, 2012) contains no substantive discussion of the systematic exclusions of non-White notions of space, study, navigation, language, signage, and architecture that have constituted the construction of library spaces. Instead, the few mentions of culture, race, or ethnicity that do appear are gestures toward a bland multiculturalism that does not explicitly take discrimination and racism into account (Edwards, Robinson, & Unger, 2013; Lushington, 2002).

Professional standards from the ACRL perpetuate this notion—that there is a neutral one-size-fits-all type of space that will serve all users equally—by using culturally relative terms without specific qualifications. Terms such as "intuitive navigation," "intellectual commons," "inviting," and even "accessible" (ACRL, 2013; ACRL, 2011) appear with no discussion of how these concepts are culturally specific and not universally achievable. Truly taking into account the ways in which spaces can empower or disempower specific groups of users would require an examination of how navigation may be "intuitive" to one group of students, depending upon the language that they commonly use, and indecipherable to another group for the same reason; how a space that is "inviting" to one group of students might feel alienating or irrelevant to another depending upon their cultural norms and expectations.

While such considerations are not yet in practice in most libraries, they have been taken up and achieved by culturally responsive spaces on college campuses nationwide, leading to the development of campus "counterspaces." The concept of the empowering counterspace comes up often in literature about under-represented racial and ethnic groups on college campuses. Counterspaces are "safe campus spaces and communities where [students of color] can process and respond to the rejection that they experience attending a historically White college" (Yosso & Lopez, 2010, p. 94). In these spaces, which often take the form of clubs, themed housing, or cultural centers, students "can establish culturally affirming places within larger, exclusionary public universities" (Nuñez, 2011, p. 643). Taking into account the injustice, or the environmental microaggression (Sue

et al., 2007), of the over-representation of one culture in library spaces to the exclusion of other cultures, and the related need for cultural counterspaces, academic libraries have the opportunity to practice a form of spatial justice that responds to the multiple, sometimes conflicting but often complementary, needs of its many constituents (Whitmire, 2003).

While the way in which space is occupied is largely influenced by inherited physical structures, it is also influenced by what is put in that space (Costello, 2001), how it is configured, how it is regulated, and how it is resisted. Many library workers have daily decision-making power over at least some of these spatial practices, and without critical antiracist spatial consciousness, they are likely to reproduce monocultural spaces. Learning about the communities that should be served by those spaces—what their needs, histories, and experiences are—and including them in decision-making processes over library spaces will help to transform academic library spaces into ones that reflect and support the work and contributions of the communities of color that should be served. By learning about the study habits, architectures, and ideal learning environments of marginalized students, and being invested in the constant transformation and change of library spaces, library workers can create spatial responsiveness. This will require, however, that they relinquish the notion of total control over space and instead empower students, faculty, and community members to take ownership of academic libraries and use them as sites of social justice. This inclusion could take many forms, such as

- inviting students and faculty to suggest (or create) art, decorations, flyers, or names of rooms that affirm their cultural identities or represent their ideals of knowledge and wisdom;
- choosing architectural and spatial styles during rebuilding, remodeling, or redecorating that reference spatial traditions beyond the common European architectural tradition; and
- reviewing the policies that guide spatial practices with an eye to those whom they target and control, and what behaviors are allowed and facilitated in library spaces to affirm as many ways of being a scholar as possible.

More broadly than these few suggestions, working toward spatial justice with an antiracist approach means desiring the imprint of library users on the spaces themselves. Rather than asking students to conform to traditional spatial practices to the detriment of their own ways of being, evidence of their use and constant remaking of shared space should be welcomed and encouraged.

Racial Diversity among Academic Library Workers

The library profession is amply aware that White librarians are over-represented among its workers (Neely & Peterson, 2007). While this racial gap

is striking, focusing solely on these numbers in and of themselves ignores both the causes and the implications of the situation. This section will explore how the lack of a diverse staff affects library users, workers, and organizations in real and important ways. The section goes on to critically analyze the key professional documents that speak to staffing, personnel, and diversity in academic libraries with an eye toward how to create more just and sustainable policies and work environments.

As demonstrated above, students of color often feel marginalized and unwelcome by the institutions they attend, and those feelings can extend to their campus libraries. While there are some studies that have found greater or more consistent use of the library by students of color (Whitmire, 2003), there are numerous studies across many institutions that find evidence of disparate library experiences for students of color. Students from marginalized communities often gravitate toward staff members who offer the comfort and familiarity of a shared background or a common language other than English, while a lack of diversity among the staff sometimes inhibits these students from seeking help or even using the library (Bonnet & McAlexander, 2012; Elteto & Jackson, 2008; Long, 2011). It isn't the case, of course, that only Black librarians can help Black students, or that only Latino/a librarians can help Latino/a students. However, when students cannot see themselves and their values represented in the library, be that in the staff, the policies, the services, or the space, then it is easy to understand why they might not use the library. In his study of Latino/a students' perceptions and use of the academic library, Long (2011) found that many participants had positive associations with public libraries from their youth as places of cultural and social value. Yet in college those same students expressed confusion or ambivalence about the purpose and value of academic libraries. For a variety of reasons, the students "use[d] the library relatively late in their academic experience and arguably [did] not utilize the library's resources to their full advantage" (p. 510). If students cannot see libraries as relevant to their lives or their education, this has clear implications for the academic library's educational mission and, more alarmingly, for the educational outcomes of those marginalized students.

Despite the broad body of research on campus racial climate (discussed above), there has been less research focused on how academic libraries contribute to that environment (Whitemire, 2004). However, given that academic libraries exist within their larger institutional climate, it is reasonable to assume that the library, like other spaces on campus, is sometimes a space where racism and stereotypes play out. As one student reported,

> Last time we went to the library . . . to study . . . obviously, it's finals time . . . people are going to study. But when we walked in there looking for somewhere to sit down, it's like . . . they've never seen Black

people before in their lives, or they've never seen Black people study before! (Qtd. in Solorzano et al., 2000, p. 68)

Another example, the Tumblr page entitled *Asians Sleeping in the Library*, is no longer active, but as the name suggests, it was a place where people posted pictures singling out Asian and Asian American students for how they chose to use library spaces. White Institutional Presence proscribes certain modes of behavior for libraries, alienating students of color and contributing to the estrangement between White students and their peers of color. Libraries, like other spaces on campus, can become the grounds where students enforce racial boundaries and stereotypes.

Finding ways to address such instances can be challenging for library workers. Social psychology literature on bystander intervention suggests that there are several obstacles to observers responding to incidents of discrimination, including identifying it as discrimination, determining whether it is serious enough to respond, and taking responsibility for the response (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin, 2008). In the case of libraries, the lack of racial and ethnic diversity among the workers can further complicate responding to bias and discrimination. Working within Penn State University Libraries, Knapp, Snavely, & Klimczyk (2012) found that 30 percent of staff members reported experiencing or observing derogatory remarks or "jokes," yet most respondents did not directly address the negative behavior, instead avoiding the issue or feeling embarrassed. They connect this to the concept of "cross-race interpersonal efficacy": in other words, that people are not comfortable or proficient at interacting with people outside of their own racial or ethnic group, which can lead to poor conflict resolution around issues relating to race. Whites in particular show more anxiety than Blacks around inter-racial interactions (Avery, Richeson, Hebl, & Ambady, 2009). Knapp et al. (2012) developed specific trainings to help staff members feel empowered to speak up when they observed discriminatory remarks or actions within the library. This approach is supported by human resource development literature, which suggests that employees need training to develop their cross-race interpersonal efficacy (Combs & Griffith, 2007). Without training and support, it is difficult for library workers to identify and address instances of racism and discrimination, which in turn can create hostile climates for students and other library users.

White Institutional Presence in libraries also works against library workers, undoubtedly contributing to the profession's persistent problems with recruiting, retaining, and providing healthy working environments for staff of color. The pernicious, intertwining effects of White blindness and White ascendency prevent the profession from meaningfully incorporating alternate perspectives and truths. Academic librarians of color report experiences similar to those of students of color, including tokenization, alienation, being doubted and undervalued, isolation, and outright preju-

dice and hostility (Curry, 1994; Espinal, 2001). Though often unacknowl-
edged in professional literature, librarians of color long ago identified
that endemic racism in the profession is a crucial barrier to recruitment,
retention, and job satisfaction (Curry, 1994). Downing (2009) found that
for librarians of color race is the most salient aspect of their identity when
approaching their work. Yet the opposite is true for White librarians, for
most of whom race held little or no bearing on their professional work.
This may be a reflection of the perceived neutrality of Whiteness in librari-
anship and in higher education. Similarly, Thornton (2001) examined the
job satisfaction of female African American librarians and found that they
experienced isolation and racial discrimination, and that the combination
of race and gender made these librarians the least satisfied of any group
in the profession. Gregory Reese described chilly interactions with co-
workers and almost unbelievable interactions with patrons in a predomi-
nantly White community, including being described by an older patron as
"a well-behaved" "colored guy" and being asked by a fifteen-year-old stu-
dent page if she could touch his skin (Reese & Hawkins, 1999, pp. 21–22).
Reese was so worn out by these daily encounters that he ultimately left to
find work in a library serving a majority–African American community.

While the anecdotal evidence is often the most compelling, the statisti-
cal evidence from across the country makes it clear that the problem does
not lie only in certain communities or institutions but at the heart of the
profession, encoded into its standards, expectations, and behaviors. Espi-
nal (2001) asks this important question:

> What makes a good librarian? We need to look at the established defi-
> nitions closely to see to what extent a definition is culturally or racially
> bound. . . . In a white-dominated society, standards are applied and are
> described as neutral, universal, and true for all people. But in fact the
> criteria are not universal. They come from a white perspective. (p. 141)

While there are many formal and informal means through which the stan-
dards of librarianship are established, recorded, and enforced, ACRL is
the primary guardian of the professional standards. The remainder of
this section analyzes documents that specifically address hiring, person-
nel, and diversity. It shows how these seemingly neutral documents in fact
uphold White ascendency in library staffing practices. Finally, it looks at
the recently released standard on cultural competency and its relation to
the other professional guidelines.

The first standard, "A Guideline for the Screening and Appointment of
Academic Librarians" (ACRL, 2009), covers the formation of the search
committee, the position description, posting the position, the selection
and interview procedures, and communications with the candidate. While
the document mentions affirmative action three times, it does so in the
earlier stages of the process, such as writing and advertising the position,

primarily with an eye toward meeting federal and state regulations. It does not mention affirmative action under the section on "Selection Procedures," which merely recommends that "fair, objective, and consistent procedures should be used to narrow the field of candidates to the desired number of finalists, whom the committee will invite for interviews."

These guidelines are an example of Espinal's (2001) assertion that the profession appears neutral and objective, yet is in fact coded White. Through a critical lens, they seem ineffective at best, and they are entirely inconsistent with an antiracist approach to developing a vibrant and diverse workforce. They take a *process-orientated* approach to affirmative action, which assumes that creating a fair application process will result in equitable outcomes (Tatum, 1999). This fair process means that the job position is publically posted, anyone interested in the position is free to apply, and candidates receive equal treatment. If the process is fair, this logic goes, then the search committee is free to choose the "best" candidate without concerns of hiring discrimination. However, it is important to recognize that there is not a level playing field in terms of access to information, and "fairness" in the process as described above would not result in a diverse candidate pool. A second approach to affirmative action, called a *goal-oriented* approach, is more consistent with an antiracist commitment to hiring and creating a diverse profession. In this type of approach, organizations can seek to create a more diverse candidate pool by actively advertising and recruiting in racial minority–focused publications, universities, and networks. Further, an organization can direct its hiring committee to favor any qualified candidates who are also aligned with the organizations' diversity hiring goals (Tatum, 1999). The process-oriented approach is often favored by hiring managers (Davis & West, 1984), and it is more consistent with the White cultural notions of meritocracy. However, in practice the process-oriented approach is simply not as effective as goal-oriented programs (Tatum, 1999), because the presumption of fairness in the process entirely ignores the system of racial oppression in society.

There is evidence of the ineffectiveness of process-oriented affirmative action in librarianship. A study of upper-level library positions in academic libraries showed that while more minority candidates were likely to apply for a job with an affirmative action statement, having the statement attached to a job description was in no way predictive of whether a minority candidate would be selected for the position. Rather, "the gender and ethnicity of the candidates finally selected for these management positions strongly resembled those of their predecessors" (Altman & Promis, 1994, p. 20).

Here again, social psychology can help explain this disconnect between stated values of equality and fairness, but unequal outcomes in hiring, using the framework of "aversive racism." This framework holds that most

American values include fairness and equality, yet at the same time, "cognitive (e.g. in-group favoritism), motivational (e.g. personal or in-group interest), and sociocultural processes (e.g. historically racist traditions) have led most White Americans to develop negative feelings and beliefs about Blacks" (Murrell, Dietz-Uhler, Dovidio, Gaertner, & Drout, 1994, p. 72). The result is that many White Americans have subtle biases that are only exhibited in situations that do not directly contradict their egalitarian values. These biases manifest themselves in surprising ways. In one study, White participants were presented with interview excerpts and asked to rank White and Black job candidates. When applicants were either very weak or very strong, the participants did not exhibit any discrimination against the Black candidates. Yet in less clear situations, when candidates were moderately qualified, the White study participants recommended Black candidates significantly less often than they did White candidates (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005). Tatum (1999) connects aversive racism to the poor outcomes of a process-orientated approach to affirmative action: "There are too many opportunities for evaluator bias to manifest itself. . . . Competent candidates of color are likely to be weeded out along the way" (p. 121).

Beyond the hiring process, the library profession needs to examine and clarify what it means by *diversity* and how the term is used in professional documentation. The vague deployment of the term *diversity* is not unique to the library profession. Selden & Selden (2001), drawing on the work of Thomas & Ely (1996), describe four paradigms of diversity and multiculturalism within organizations that can be used to examine how librarianship conceptualizes diversity in its professional documentation:

- *Discrimination and Fairness*: This approach is primarily concerned with compliance with affirmative action and equal employment opportunity policies. Organizations seek to ensure that minority candidates have equal opportunity and access to jobs, and they measure success by the number of women and minorities employed within the organization. This approach often fails to address retention and advancement, resulting in a concentration of women and minorities at lower levels of the organization.
- *Access and Legitimacy*: Organizations adopting this approach believe that constituents from a particular background are best served by employees from the same background. This approach emphasizes cultural differences, but is less concerned with how those differences impact upon service delivery.
- *Learning and Effectiveness*: This approach combines elements of the previous two. Organizations value diversity because it incorporates different perspectives and improves services. This approach can be seen through such steps as implementing diversity training programs; however, these programs often have had limited success.

- *Valuing and Integrating*: This approach inverts the perspective of the other models, by examining how diversity at an individual level contributes to the organization as a whole. This perspective recognizes the complex, multifaceted nature of an individual's background and culture, and rather than favoring assimilation, the organization believes that these individual characteristics should contribute to its vision, mission, and strategies.

An antiracist paradigm for diversity in hiring and staffing might take this one step further to include an investment (and potential redistribution) of resources to support workers from historically marginalized communities (Ferguson, 2012; Melamed, 2014). This could include such actions as promoting workers to positions in which they can take part in decision making, reevaluating salaries and benefits to better support workers who come from financially impoverished communities, or dedicated funding for workers to develop their perspective through research and scholarship.

With these paradigms in mind, then, what values do professional documents ascribe to diversity in staffing and personnel?

The Staff section of "Guidelines for University Library Services to Undergraduate Students" (ACRL, 2013) addresses the issue of diversity twice. First, it states that "the ability to interact on a one-to-one basis with a diverse clientele in a friendly and instructive manner is essential" (para. 31). The guidelines go on to say, "Personnel serving undergraduate students require diverse backgrounds in order to meet the teaching and learning needs of users" (para. 32). This falls within the Access and Legitimacy paradigm described by Selden & Selden (2001), using the basic logic that because libraries have diverse clientele, they need diverse staff to meet their needs. "Services to Undergraduate Students" is designed for assessment purposes, so it includes potential assessment questions for the Staff section. These questions, however, do not address diversity of staff, focusing instead on adequate training and the ratio of students to library staff.

The "Standards for Libraries in Higher Education" (ACRL, 2011) section on Personnel lays out the basic principles and related performance indicators for library staff. The performance indicators cover areas such as quantity, training, and professional development (indicator 8.6). Diversity is only mentioned once, in a performance indicator that says library staff should be "professionally competent, diverse, and empowered" (indicator 8.5). While it may indicate cultural diversity, this performance indicator mixes substantially different concepts without fully defining any of them, leaving each reader to interpret the standard at will. This document does not present a clear enough concept of diversity to determine under which of Selden & Selden's (2001) paradigms it would fall. Given that this is a major standard used for guiding library services and assessment, it is a significant failing that its model of diversity in libraries is essentially nonexistent.

In 2012 ACRL adopted the "Diversity Standards: Cultural Competency for Academic Libraries." These standards lay out a framework for integrating diversity across library staff and services. The first standard states that library staff shall develop an understanding of their own values and beliefs, and the second standard prompts staff to develop understanding of other cultures, beliefs, and values. The third through fifth standards go on to cover organizational values, collections, and services. The "Diversity Standards" then address language, workforce, organizational dynamics, leadership, professional development, and research. This set of standards clearly exhibits a far more nuanced and holistic sense of diversity than do the other ACRL documents. Like the Valuing and Integrating paradigm, it starts with recognizing individual diversity and how that contributes to and even shapes organizational values and services. While one can hope that libraries and librarians will use these standards as a framework to create more inclusive and robust organizations, relegating the concept of diversity to its own set of standards potentially allows other documents to ignore or sideline diversity issues. For instance, "Services to Undergraduate Students" was revised in 2013, after the "Diversity Standards" were passed, and yet it is clearly offering a limited perspective on diversity, as shown above.

Diversity in the library workforce is worth striving for not just because it will make the profession better, but because a robust sense of social justice requires it (Peterson, 1995). Libraries in the twenty-first century should and must represent the vibrant, messy, beautiful, complicated, and diverse communities they serve. It is the responsibility of this profession to support marginalized voices and perspectives within its institutions, to be challenged by those voices, and to be changed by them. There are many ways to go about this, and as discussed above, the lack of people of color in the profession is not simply a problem with hiring, but with retention as well (Reese & Hawkins, 1999). In order to retain workers of color, libraries must be welcoming spaces for staff as well as for users, and this requires a fundamental change in the way libraries function (Peterson, 1995; Knapp et al., 2012; Alabi, 2015). That said, drawing on the discussion and sources above, here are some concrete ways in which libraries and library workers can begin to create an antiracist approach to hiring and retention:

- Examine recruitment, hiring, and promotion policies within the library for areas of unintentional bias, discrimination, or barriers that may adversely impact upon workers of color.
- Identify areas of under-representation in the library staff and work to understand reasons for those deficiencies.
- Post position announcements beyond the usual job boards. Seek out a widespread and diverse network of places and groups to make job announcements, including professional organizations, library schools, and student groups.
- Develop a goal-oriented affirmative action plan for hiring. When a qual-

ified pool of applicants has been selected, favor candidates who meet the library's diversity goals.

• Ensure that library staff members have fair and equitable access to professional development, and especially consider ways to dismantle cultural or social barriers to advancement for under-represented workers.

• Develop training programs to increase cross-race interpersonal efficacy for all staff members.

• Welcome and include library workers from nondominant groups in the development of library missions, programs, policies, and decision-making processes, regardless of their position within the organizational hierarchy.

A diverse and culturally competent staff is perhaps the only way to create safe, welcoming spaces and to develop the services that students need and want. The following section expands and explores cultural competency in the development and deployment of reference services.

The Racialized Dimensions of Reference Work

Among the primary responsibilities of library workers, reference services offer a unique opportunity to connect directly with academic user communities through verbal and nonverbal communication. In these intimate interactions, communication is always imbued with power dynamics, which are shaped by racialized identity (Hill, 2008; Kochman, 1981) and cultural practices (Jackson, 2014, p. 217; Kubota, 2012). Library staff, however, are typically not asked to be cognizant of these dynamics (RUSA, 2003; RUSA, 2013). This section will examine the implications for addressing racism in three central principles of reference service provision: approachability, responsiveness, and objectivity. Re-examining these principles through the lens of CRT and White Institutional Presence reveals the ways in which contemporary reference practices reinforce racism through communication processes and encoded restrictions on building antiracist solidarity. However, by identifying the limitations of current conceptions of these principles and by applying social justice–oriented communication and service models, this section will articulate the foundations of an antiracist reference practice.

The current model of reference service delivery may unjustly underserve patrons of color. Some studies suggest that patrons of color may receive lower-quality reference service than do their White counterparts. Curry & Copeman's study (2005) showed that "heavily accented" international students may be rushed through reference interactions with very little follow-up. Furthermore, the work of Shachaf, Oltmann, & Horowitz (2008) and Shachaf & Horowitz (2006) on racialized bias in virtual reference demonstrates that under-serving patrons of color extends to online environments, showing that the disembodied and abstracted nature of online service delivery is not a corrective for racialized bias (Milkman,

Akinola, & Chugh, 2012). Unequally distributing the benefits of reference services means that library workers may be bolstering the academic success of White students while hindering the success of students of color.

Observing that marginalized communities are not receiving equal-quality reference services, some librarians have called for more developed understandings of the political and cultural histories of academic communities. Lam (1988) advocates taking "the initiative to understand, empathize, and deal more effectively with black students during the reference interview" (p. 392). David Alexander (2013) argues that library workers should recognize the ways in which educational policy has historically hindered American Indian students. Librarians working with American Indians "should at least be aware that distinct historical context and student backgrounds may complicate American Indian students' educational experience, but the librarians should not assume that is true of all American Indian students" (p. 66). In order to develop an understanding of how to build antiracist solidarity through reference practices and to better respond to marginalized groups in ways that are culturally responsive, but not essentializing, it is important to analyze the ways in which reference librarians' professional guidelines reinforce Whiteness and limit solidarity. The reference practices and principles of approachability, responsiveness, and objectivity were chosen as sites of analysis in the following sections because of their centrality to reference work and illuminating connection to Whiteness.

Approachability
Beyond the implications that diverse reference desk employee representation has for approachability, the body language of reference staff can communicate a range of welcoming and unwelcoming messages. The "Guidelines for Behavioral Performance" (GBP) was developed by the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) with considerable input from reference practitioners. The GBP, which boasts substantial normative influence on the provision of reference services (Rubin, 2011), directs librarians on how to be approachable (RUSA, 2013). However, the document employs what Gusa (2010) calls monoculturalism and White blindness by ignoring both the plurality of cultures and the dominance of White perspectives and influence upon the field. For example, reference librarians are expected to "acknowledge patrons by using a friendly greeting to initiate conversation," but this directive is not accompanied by any indication of how power and culture may influence the performance of "friendliness," nor does it recommend that librarians work toward understanding the historical and political implications that might influence the reception of their overtures across racial boundaries or any other dimensions of social inequality.

The transmission of messages through body language is contingent

upon and shaped by the context and identities of the library workers and patrons participating in the reference interaction. Something that might seem as routine and apolitical as smiling at a patron may actually be received differently in inter-racial communication. The rapper Chuck D eloquently described the contrast between individuals' intentions and the structures they represent in "By the Time I Get to Arizona" (Public Enemy, 1991), a song about the Arizona state legislature's refusal to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day. In the song he rhetorically asks, "What's a smiling face when the whole state is racist?" In other words, people in the state may have made what are typically thought of as welcoming body language overtures, but these were not received as welcoming because of the overarching racial politics of the state. Given the privilege that Whites receive and the marginalization of people of color in academic spaces, a smile may not be as simple or as impactful as library workers intend it to be (Lam, 1988).

This is not to suggest that librarians should not smile at patrons of different racialized identities who approach the desk. Complex social situations like these may be unavoidable in the context of a society structured by racialized hierarchies. However, an antiracist approach to these routine interpersonal processes would ask librarians to consider and act upon the historical context and power dynamics that shape the meaning of body-language communication. There are a range of practical implications and potential lines of inquiry stemming from this assertion. For example, in light of the initial studies on racialized bias in reference services mentioned above (A. Curry & Copeman, 2005; Shachaf & Horowitz, 2006; Shachaf et al., 2008), it appears that differing communication expectations across racialized and power-differentiated identities can lead to deficient service outcomes. Service outcomes might be improved when librarians recognize discord in these interactions and employ multiple strategies to ensure that patrons of color still get what they need from the interaction: for example, employing extra persistence through potentially uncomfortable (mis)communications, such as a patron not being put at ease by a smile or another common friendly greeting. This also opens up new lines of inquiry about communication in reference interactions. What are the primary causes of "giving up" on challenging interactions? What strategies could librarians employ to continuously ensure that patrons are getting their needs met?

Ultimately, there is no formula for how to position one's body to be welcoming toward each and every patron. The appropriateness of such actions must be determined in the moment with each individual and with an ever-increasing knowledge of the political histories of racial inequity and cultural communication styles represented in the academic community. Couched in terms of universality and neutrality, the language of approach-ability in the GBP limits library workers' ability to recognize how overt and

subtle overtures are experienced differently by each patron. Recognizing the ways in which racism shapes patron experience may ultimately make reference service workers more approachable.

Responsiveness
In a second influential RUSA document, the "Professional Competencies for Reference and User Services Librarians" (2003), ways in which a librarian can be "responsive" during reference interactions are described without any indication of the role of culture. As part of the requirement to be "responsive," this document suggests that a successful librarian "determines the situational context of the individual information needs of users when interacting with each user in person or through another communication channel." This statement acknowledges difference, or situational context, but does not acknowledge the likelihood that users enter reference desk interactions with the lived experiences of oppression, privilege, and racism. Not acknowledging that each individual's experience is shaped by structural oppression both demonstrates the profession's inadequate analysis in this area and leaves reference librarians with a "colorblind" and neutral guiding document with few tools for addressing service disparities. Ultimately, this apolitical conception of responsiveness limits reference librarians' ability to serve patrons of diverse racial backgrounds because it does not guide us toward a more nuanced, political assessment of individual and collective needs.

In building toward an antiracist reference services model, it is important to develop a conception of responsiveness to include social justice–oriented notions of *care*. Gay (2010) argues that in an educational setting dedicated to racial and cultural justice, there are four attributes of what she calls "culturally responsive caring." While care is grounded in emotion, emotional care alone lacks the "behavioral embodiments that are fundamental to facilitating" success for students (p. 53). In addition to its emotional aspects, culturally responsive caring has active components that Gay describes in four parts:

- Attention to individuals' overall wellbeing and performance
- Active engagement that provokes reciprocity
- Actions that prompt effort and achievement
- Multidimensional responsiveness or understanding and responding to individuals' cultural contexts (pp. 49–53)

Chu (1999) emphasizes the need to transform library services through another form of care that translates to cultural understanding, cultural respect, and attitudinal changes. Chu's model should be used by librarians to "understand the social reality in which they work and to consider information service as a tool for users in the process of self-empowerment and

self-learning" (p. 6). Overall (2009) further emphasizes care as a transformational tool in service delivery. She argues that "caring is central to building relationships," and that "the ability to establish and maintain relationships among diverse cultural and ethnic groups" is pivotal to a strong service model (p. 195).

Some might be concerned that explicitly recognizing race and the assumptions that go along with it during reference interactions would create an even more biased service. Chu (2014) challenged this line of thinking when she asserted the following in a talk she delivered on cultural competence: "Some say 'never make assumptions.' I say that is wrong. Instead, we should *recognize and manage* assumptions." One step toward counteracting racism in library spaces is to recognize assumptions and then employ a transformational ethic of care that explicitly takes into account patrons' experiences of race and racism.

By ignoring assumptions operating in reference interactions, library workers are at greater risk of committing racial microaggressions. As demonstrated by the work on microaggressions in service delivery by Sue et al. (2007), White people are often unaware of these continuous harmful psychological messages of insult and invalidation experienced by people of color in everyday communication. Lam (theasianc, 2010), who is Asian-Caribbean American, describes a microaggression he experienced after his first year of working as a reference librarian. Even though English is his first and only language, Lam's year-end evaluation noted that his English language abilities were insufficient and that it was difficult for his colleagues and patrons to understand him. Because others viewed him as a racialized other, this censure communicated to Lam that he was what Sue et al. call a "stranger in his own land" (2007, p. 276). If library workers do not recognize microaggressions that they enact or see enacted in the reference desk space and work to decrease them and to mitigate their impact, then they are failing to be culturally responsive and may be further perpetuating racist practices.

To address these challenges, beyond adding more complex language to professional guidelines, libraries could begin filling knowledge gaps by conducting trainings on intercultural communication and power. Mestre (2010) argues that librarians may "acknowledge that one size does not fit all and may actively try to be friendly and helpful to all users. However, they may not have the intensive inner knowledge and experience to understand how to modify their approach or how to read cultural cues to effectively work with and advance the knowledge quests of others" (pp. 485–486). Some libraries have begun engaging in professional development opportunities that build reference workers' knowledge of their own cultural backgrounds, the racial and ethnic diversity of the campus community, and the history of oppression, power, and privilege experienced by

various groups (Knapp et al., 2012; Lazzaro et al., 2014). Similar professional development models could be adopted by other libraries in order to further an antiracist approach to service delivery.

Objectivity

When engaging the specific content of reference queries, librarians are generally encouraged to take an objective or neutral approach to assisting patrons. This principle, which has not been consistent throughout the history of librarianship, also helps to reinforce the racialized power-dynamic status quo. The GBP directs librarians to keep "a high degree of objective, non-judgmental interest" in patrons' questions. A successful librarian maintains objectivity and "does not interject value judgments about the subject matter or the nature of the question into the transaction." This type of hands-off approach is a newer development in reference services. Around the turn of the twentieth century, reference librarianship took a more blatantly moralistic tone. As Rubin (2011) notes, "It was not uncommon to read or hear public leaders, such as Andrew Carnegie, speak of the need for moral development among citizenry and the obligation of those with wealth or power to direct this moral development," in part through the provision of library services (p. 30). But as Honma (2005) argues, these efforts were part of broader racist projects, which sought to assimilate Western European immigrant groups while excluding others from full participation in the rights of US citizenship.

Though a well-intentioned corrective for this openly moralistic tone, the current neutral reference service model has the unintended effect of limiting librarians' ability to combat racism and other structural oppressions. Iverson (2008) argues that "while librarians have been avidly anti-censorship, they have not been avidly anti-racist and they do not acknowledge the inherent racism within the discourse of anti-censorship" (p. 27). Too much interjection of a librarian's thoughts or feelings about a user's research could be overwhelming, and as Gay (2010) notes, caring does not include controlling. However, objectivity, when taken too far, is interpreted by some users as a lack of care or commitment to their circumstances (p. 49).

Building upon an active notion of caring for patrons and critical pedagogy, antiracist reference services would ask librarians to be politically "bound up" with users' struggles against racism through their assistance with research. Structural racism is complex, and individuals experience it in a range of ways; therefore, there is no one particular strategy for partnering with students with different racial identities in order to challenge racism. Instead, being bound up with users' struggles against racism entails emphasizing the teaching dimensions of reference work and deploying concepts of critical pedagogy and critical questioning (Freire, 2000; Elmborg, 2002). In a reciprocal, dialogic process, librarians and patrons

would share and be affected by each others' knowledge, care, and actions. In addition to asking questions with an emphasis on liberation, reference workers could be explicitly antiracist and manage their own historical, political, and social knowledge and assumptions in thoughtful and supportive ways while assisting patrons through inquiry. The goal here is for reference workers to build lasting and impactful relationships and antiracist solidarities with patrons. Taking these antiracist steps toward caring for academic communities in this manner will contribute to distributing the impact of reference services more equitably in these communities. This approach to partnering with students is already successful in higher-education environments with explicit social justice aims (Adler, 2013). For institutions without explicit social justice aims, this assertion opens new lines of inquiry into the process of asking liberatory questions in reference interactions and also pushes reference workers to establish policies and learning outcomes that address racism and social justice.

Broadly applied, the principle of objectivity becomes an apolitical stance, but library users live politicized lives. This stance not only limits library workers' abilities to participate in antiracist reference practices, but it also reinforces the status quo. In other words, apoliticism in a political world actually performs a certain type of political work. In a parallel argument about ACRL's "Information Literacy Standards," Maura Seale (2013) states that the apolitical tone in that particular document "performs political work by propagating dominant discourses around the information society, which erase real inequities in information access and creation" (p. 156). Similarly, not taking a political stance in reference services contributes to the erasure of racial inequities that have consequences for educational attainment. If reference librarians do not have a collective antiracist stance, then they send a message to their user communities that racial injustice is not of primary concern, or that they have transcended racism as a profession. This position both stems from and supports inaccurate mainstream depictions of racism, and it leads to a service model that perpetuates structural racism.

Reference librarians' apolitical stance toward race in reference work might suggest that library workers are entirely unconcerned with ethical situations that crop up in reference interactions, but this is not true. Rubin (2011) cites the sensationalist question of anticensorship in the face of a dangerous reference question, such as whether or not to assist patrons with questions about how to use drugs or how to build bombs that might blow up a suburban home. While questions like these may arise occasionally, questions that have consequences on the lived, racialized lives of users come up constantly, which begs the question: Why have the latter questions not been at the center of ethical debates? As the influential African American librarian and scholar E. J. Josey once noted, "He who defines the terms wins the argument" (1973, p. 32). In order to begin building a

broad base of antiracist reference practitioners, library workers need to move beyond the terms of these individualistic and paranoid concerns toward the pressing issues that are affecting the lives and well-being of the people in libraries.

To assist in moving beyond the reproduction of racism through reference service delivery, the following represent concrete suggestions for an antiracist reference practice:

- Revise reference service delivery guidelines (profession-wide and local) to include the recommendation that library staff learn about, consider, and act upon the historical context and power dynamics that shape racialized communication and racialized lives.
- Provide library staff with ongoing opportunities to participate in trainings and other professional development activities that build knowledge of their own cultural backgrounds and assumptions, the racial and ethnic diversity of the campus community, and the history of oppression, power, and privilege experienced by various groups.
- Provide library staff with the opportunity to work collectively to understand racial microaggressions and to mitigate their impact.
- Train reference staff to employ the problem-posing methods of critical pedagogy in reference interactions in order to draw out patrons' struggles against oppression and to help build strong and lasting solidarities with patrons.

These suggestions represent a fundamental shift toward an antiracist reference services approach that reframes reference as a collective process of inquiry for social justice action to redress racist oppression. However, these suggestions are not meant to be comprehensive. Again, the focus on approachability, responsiveness, and objectivity in this section is meant to provide illuminating examples of the ways in which WIP manifests in reference service delivery. This analysis can be extended to other aspects of reference service delivery. Ideally, through future research and practice, this analysis will be revised and expanded to include the new lines of inquiry mentioned throughout this section's discussion.

Conclusion: Resisting Dominant Paradigms

The overwhelming Whiteness of the academic library profession compels library workers to apply an antiracist lens to the possibility of White Institutional Presence in their libraries, and how WIP can force out the experiences and traditions of those who don't identify with Whiteness. The value of this awareness lies in the ways in which it can begin to explain why students of color report feeling alienated in their academic library spaces and why retention of librarians of color is so unsuccessful. Bringing awareness of these phenomena provides tools for the social justice work

of making academic libraries spaces of resistance to dominant paradigms of societal oppression.

Radical scholar, poet, and one-time librarian Audre Lorde (2007) provides a framework for realigning the library profession's relationship to difference: from one that attempts to minimize racial inequality by ignoring the significance of racial difference, to one that works in and through difference in all of its difficulty and creative potential. She says:

> Tolerance . . . is the grossest reformism. It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives. Difference must not be merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependence become unthreatening. Only within the interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters. (p. 111)

To reach a place where library workers can use "the creative potential of difference" to transform academic libraries, all fronts must be acted on simultaneously, because just as the mechanisms of oppression are interlocking, resistance to them must also be complex and interwoven. Students and faculty will study, interact, socialize, learn, and contribute differently and will require a diversity of spaces, rules, personalities, techniques, and materials to support them. To be truly responsive to these real and welcome differences, more and diverse voices must be present in the conversations that determine library policy and practice, and those voices need to be invested with the power to be heard. This will require radical changes in the way that hiring and merit are determined, and an environment that will not alienate antiracist colleagues and colleagues of color, but give them room to flourish.

Once the library profession has accepted the *real* value of difference—as something more substantial than symbolic inclusion—then the "interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal" will allow academic libraries to change in ways that will be painful and exhilarating. Based on the suggestions presented in the earlier sections of this article, the following are particular circumstances and select efforts that will facilitate change in the direction of justice:

- Academic library spaces and the spatial practices (both explicit and implicit) within them should be carefully analyzed in terms of what they represent, what they communicate, and how they are policed. Library workers should ask themselves how to include their community in the shaping of a space that empowers them, and should actively advocate for the needs of those library users who are otherwise alienated in their institutions of higher education.
- The inherent biases in hiring, retention, and promotion that benefit

White workers to the detriment of their non-White colleagues must be examined in depth and systematically dismantled. Library leaders should develop decision-making policies that seek out and respect the input of library workers from marginalized communities. Without integrating and valuing nondominant perspectives, libraries will continue to have difficulty retaining workers of color and will continue to reflect and uphold White culture.

- The practices of culturally responsive caring that have been developed in the field of education (Gay, 2010) and that are beginning to be elaborated in library literature (Chu, 1999, 2014) need to be an active and intentional dimension of reference work. Only through trainings in cultural competence that emphasize power differentials and microaggressions, as well as the application of critical pedagogical methods in reference interactions, will library workers begin to build transformative antiracist solidarities based on authentic mutual care and aid.
- As a conflict-averse profession, librarianship must begin to recognize conflict as potentially productive, and not only as bare antagonism (Honma, 2005). Real diversity will lead to differences of opinion and will likely require the relinquishing of long-held privilege; discord is painful, but it can also be transformative.

Users of academic libraries whose needs are not being met have found ways around the barriers that library workers unintentionally construct. Resistance can be read in the graffiti on library walls, clandestine meetings in the study rooms, raucous study groups, pieces of book art hidden in the stacks, the camaraderie that forms between the unlikeliest students, and the loud and joyful greetings that students exchange with friends (or librarians) in otherwise quiet spaces. While these practices are not always approved, productive, sanitary, or safe, they undeniably strain the seams of tightly controlled library spaces. And while library workers may never choose to endorse these practices, they show that life for library users doesn't begin and end with the walls of the library. Library workers can learn from the small acts of resistance performed by users, and enact a new academic library that is more socially just and more responsive than it is now.

Acknowledgments

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