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## The Revolution Will Not Be Stereotyped: Changing Perceptions through Diversity

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# The Revolution Will Not Be Stereotyped

## Changing Perceptions through Diversity

*Annie Pho and Turner Masland*

### Introduction

Librarianship has long had a complex relationship with professional image and identity.<sup>1</sup> Stereotypes about libraries and the people who work in them are often rooted in images of poor customer service, outdated materials, and lack of diversity.<sup>2</sup> Stereotypes can be indicators of cultural norms, portraying what people perceive to be a truth. For academic libraries, these stereotypes can influence and misinform the opinions of students who are not familiar with what the library can provide. We should ask ourselves what we can do to change how our patrons see us and how they understand the work that we do as librarians. Whether in “public service” or not, as much as librarians work with providing access to information, they also work with the public.

Providing our students with rich and dynamic experiences in our libraries will only help contribute to deconstructing stereotypes. Many academic libraries are striving to do so, adding innovative services, new uses of space, and new material types. However, a key factor, which may be overlooked in these efforts, is that in higher education, there is a widening gap between the rising number of diverse student populations and the hiring of minority librarians.<sup>3</sup> Diversity on college and university campuses allows for opportunities for students to learn from each other. Seeing diversity in faculty and staff is important on an academic campus because it communicates that

the institution is inclusive. The employees who work in an institution have a capacity to impact it, not just by sitting behind a desk as a face, but by changing structures and culture and atmosphere behind the scenes. Changing user perceptions about librarians is a long process and isn't solved with any quick answers. But having a diverse library workforce helps create an environment that is potentially more comfortable for a diverse community of patrons. The workforce shapes the leadership of the library, helps build a culture of inclusion, and educates our students on library research.

In this chapter, we examine the connection between increasing diversity in the library workplace and dispelling stereotypes. We explore how diversity in the academic library workforce can have positive effects in dispelling stereotypes through visibility, outreach, and education. We also want to rethink what we mean when we discuss diversity and what it entails. This is important to the process of examining library diversity initiatives and how they can fall short of complete inclusion. We also explore how activist librarians have defied the librarian stereotype and what we can learn from them. In order to create desired changes, we also need to see what the field is currently doing in terms of recruiting for diversity and what we can do to create a culture of inclusion at our institutions.

Academic libraries are in the position to reimagine their place on campus to be more than just a warehouse for books, and many are well along in this process. Librarians with different and diverse backgrounds, who are able to effectively communicate with a wide variety of individuals, will dispel antiquated library stereotypes. Students' perceptions will change once dynamic, diverse, and future-thinking librarians start working directly with them. The answer to dispelling stereotypes and increasing diversity in library staff is not simple, but by better understanding our past endeavors, we can create better steps for the future.

## **Complexities and Definitions of Diversity**

Discussions about diversity can be challenging due to the inconsistent understanding of what that means. In the existing literature on diversity in libraries, there are a variety of ways that researchers choose to define diversity, but most only look at visible group identities, excluding the invisible.

Therefore, many assume diversity to mean race and ethnicity, but as the researchers Jaeger, Bertot, and Franklin point out, diversity encompasses a wide spectrum: “Diversity is certainly about more than issues of ethnicity, encompassing gender and sexual orientation, for example. However, no meaningful attempts have been made to determine the representation in librarianship and LIS of many diverse populations—including persons with disabilities; the socioeconomically and geographically disadvantaged; and gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (GLBTQ) individuals, among others.”<sup>4</sup>

Going beyond racial and ethnic diversity, we want to look at other groups who have been marginalized throughout history. Instead of focusing on visible differences, we understand diversity to be more than what we can see. We want to focus on diversity as points of difference, and when we discuss “minorities,” we are focusing on factors that create a difference in treatment between a majority group and a minority group, in which the minority group can be viewed less favorably than the majority. This understanding of diversity also refers to differences that are not visible, such as sexual orientation or socioeconomic background. Other examples can include being a veteran, having a disability, being a first-generation American, belonging to a minority religion—the list is extensive. The focus we want the reader to consider is not just on these individual factors, but on the power dynamic between the majority and minority. How can we shift the power dynamics to balance out the inequalities between different groups? To confine diversity to a few labels denies the richness of the human condition and ignores the fact that people can have varied backgrounds. We must also consider the idea of intersectionality—how having multiple group identities shape one’s experiences in life.<sup>5</sup> Intersectionality has been a key theory in feminism as a way to explore the influence of multiple identities and provides a framework for understanding that diversity is complex. Intersectionality is an area that needs further research in our field, and many library diversity initiatives do not take these kinds of experiences into account. They instead focus on quantifiable quotas, which is easier to do when one recruits based on race and ethnicity. It is much harder to recruit for invisible diversity.

What makes increasing diversity in librarianship even more complicated is the role of gender in the profession. Librarianship has been (and still is) primarily made up of women, and there are many equity issues related to this situation.<sup>6</sup> Male librarians are more likely to move into leadership positions and be paid more than women.<sup>7</sup> Considering the fact that female librarians compose the majority, it is an indicator that sexism in the workplace is present in librarianship. Christine Williams, sociologist and professor at University of Texas at Austin, states, “Men take their gender privilege with them when they enter predominantly female occupations: this translates into an advantage in spite of their numerical rarity.”<sup>8</sup> Understanding gender inequality in librarianship is pertinent to understanding the climate for diversity in our field.

We are not arguing that our industry needs a certain number of men, or of racial or ethnic minorities, for librarian stereotypes to be lifted. Efforts to change stereotypes have to be multifold. If we want to change them through diversity, we have to understand what diversity is and how intersectionality shapes one’s experience in the field. Take, for example, the authors of this chapter—one is an Asian American woman who has experienced prejudice based on her gender and race while working at the reference desk. Once, when she referred a student to the IT help desk for a printing question, she received the sexist comment “I shouldn’t ask you about tech stuff, that’s too complicated. I should ask the guys.” Comments like this are an example of microaggression that she has faced while working in public services. The other author is an openly gay white man. As he was searching for his first professional job after library school, he was often told to remove his work with GLBT organizations from his resume. The justification was that anything “too gay” would alienate potential employers. This left him conflicted. Excluding it reinforces the privilege many gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals have: being able to hide their differences whereas members from other groups cannot. As a white gay man, he can easily “pass” in both gay and straight worlds, but he also understands the fear and anxiety that comes from being an “other.” Our experiences with intersectionality inform our understanding of how being different from the majority can affect our presence in the library world.

## Diversity and Visibility in Higher Education

The discussion of diversity in institutions of higher education often focuses on the student population while missing the importance of faculty populations. John Brooks Slaughter, president emeritus of Occidental College and CEO of the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering, agrees that recruiting and building a diverse student body is essential, but he argues that in order for true progress to be made, the students' education must be provided by a diverse faculty and supported by a diverse staff.<sup>9</sup> Robert Canida and Adriel Hilton continue the argument for more diverse faculty body in a recently released editorial in *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, making the case that without the presence of diverse faculty on campus, students from diverse backgrounds begin to feel alienated and are less likely to persist.<sup>10</sup>

Diverse faculty not only represent an opportunity for visibility, but also give students the opportunity to learn from someone who is different from them. These same arguments can be made for library faculty and staff as well. Professional organizations have also realized the importance of institutional diversity. In 2012, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) developed Diversity Standards: Cultural Competencies for Academic Libraries, which demonstrated the importance of diversity to academic libraries. It states in the guidelines: "ACRL understands that if libraries are to continue being indispensable organizations in their campus communities, they must reflect the communities they serve and provide quality services to their increasingly diverse constituencies."<sup>11</sup> If libraries want to remain relevant and important to their communities, they need to make sure their employees understand the needs of that community.

To promote the recruitment of diversity in the field, we need to assess what is currently happening. Since 2007, ALA's Office for Diversity has been tracking diversity statistics through its Diversity Counts Study, which includes both public and academic librarians. This study found that the number of minority librarians has gone up over the past few years, but that the majority of degreed librarians are still white and female.<sup>12</sup> Hui Feng Chang, associate professor and librarian at Oklahoma State University, reported, "Overall minority students have increased from 19.6 per-

cent in 1980 to almost 40 percent in 2010.”<sup>13</sup> Yet, academic libraries in the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) have seen a 4.2 percent increase in the hiring of minority librarians.<sup>14</sup> Four percent is a low rate of increase in comparison to the rise in diversity of student populations. Slaughter highlighted the fact that creating a more diverse student body in higher education is becoming a reality, but that these achievements are not reflected by the hiring of diverse faculty. The number of diverse faculty members in higher education has plateaued over the past two decades.<sup>15</sup> The diversity trends in academic librarianship mirror what is happening in higher education: there is an increasing gap between the numbers of diverse faculty members and of students.

The need for diverse faculty extends beyond teaching faculty and into libraries. Libraries often serve as the heart of the institution, playing an integral part in student success. Megan Oakleaf described student success as a combination of learning, engagement, and retention. Specifically on retention, she states, “Most retention and graduation rate studies have focused on explanations for student persistence or departure, either due to personal characteristics or institutional practices. . . . Because most librarians are not in positions that enable them to influence students’ personal traits, they can focus on creating institutional environments that foster retention and eventual graduation.”<sup>16</sup>

Diversity among library staff creates an institutional environment that supports student learning. A study on librarian approachability in academic libraries found that African American participants were more likely to rank African American and Asian American images of librarians as more approachable than images of white librarians. The researchers Bonnet and McAlexander concluded that “racially underrepresented populations in higher education may be better served when the librarian population is also racially diverse.”<sup>17</sup> This study supports the idea that racial and ethnic diversity behind a service desk can improve librarian approachability and ease library anxiety for underrepresented students. It’s a matter of having a choice of whom to approach, as some of the students in the study felt more comfortable approaching librarians who were from similar racial backgrounds.

The authors argue that this form of visibility extends beyond racial and ethnic diversity, and that what is visible to one group of people can be invisible to another. For example, transgender individuals can potentially go unnoticed by members of the cisgendered community, but can be beacons of inclusion for other members of the trans\* community.<sup>7</sup> The authors can also see how a conversation about visibility might be problematic. Ideally, we should be able to look past diversity and feel comfortable approaching those who are different from us. But we do not live in that reality. Visibility is still a factor when discussing diverse communities. It should also be noted that we are not arguing that black students should be helped by black librarians nor gay students by gay librarians. Rather, librarians should be prepared to effectively serve diverse communities and students should be able to see a variety of faces behind service desks. The librarian's role in a student's life is manifold: librarians are teachers, research counselors, and role models, making the importance of diversity in these supporting roles so significant. There are actions library professionals can take to include more diverse staff members in their organizations. But before we offer examples of how academic libraries can best support diverse communities, we should examine how stereotyping librarians affects our profession.

## Librarian Stereotypes

There is a major disconnect between how librarians view themselves and how the public perceives them, creating tension in the way students interact with libraries and librarians. Librarians in popular media are often portrayed as females who are “introverted, unmarried, prim, shy and young.”<sup>18</sup> Google image searches for *librarian* results in numerous pictures of females wearing buns and glasses with a finger raised to their lips. For individuals who have not stepped into a library in a long time, this imagery is what informs them about what a library is. These stereotypes are still quite present in media and applied to our profession. This cultural misunderstanding can be problematic for public service librarians who are working to build relationships with students and want to provide research

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\* *Cisgender* refers to a group of individuals whose self-identity conforms with the gender they were assigned at birth. *Trans\** refers to all identities under the gender spectrum.



help. It puts a predisposed negative connotation in a patron's head before they walk into the library, creating a hurdle for librarians before they interact with that patron. Gary P. Radford and Marie L. Radford have argued, "Fear is the fundamental organizing principle, or code, through which representations of libraries and librarians are manifest in modern popular cultural forms such as novels, movies, and television shows. Fear is the means by which the presence of the library setting, and the librarian characters within them, are to be understood."<sup>19</sup>

Students may approach the library with certain expectations because this imagery of library fear and anxiety is communicated to them through media. For example, students may have anxiety about approaching the reference desk for help or expect the library to have only books to aid them in research. Studies have shown library anxiety to be a real phenomenon among college students, and a lack of understanding of library resources can result in visiting the library less frequently.<sup>20</sup>

One way to change a stereotype is to reverse the stereotype itself and to "challenge the image of the librarian, by showing that the opposite is true. In the LIS context this would involve media images of librarians as the reverse of their stereotypical images that is, as young, cool, and hip."<sup>21</sup> However, this creates more stereotypes, which is not helpful or positive. In 2007, the *New York Times* featured an article on the new image of librarians, detailing how librarians now use technology, are younger, and are socially conscious.<sup>22</sup> The presentation of librarians in this way suggests that the *New York Times* and some portion of the collective unconscious have begun to see librarians in a new light. Stuart Hall, acclaimed cultural theorist, argues that there are benefits to using positive imagery in reversing stereotypes: "Underlying this approach is an acknowledgement and celebration of diversity and difference in the world."<sup>23</sup> This alternative image of "hip" librarians is the revelation that there are different kinds of people who work in this industry.

Yet Hall also notes that positive imagery alone is not enough to displace all negative connotations. While some might find this new "hip" librarian image to be a relief, there is still something problematic about this portrayal—the lack of diversity. The same *New York Times* article featured

pictures of librarians, but none of them were librarians of color. The lack of diversity can shut out those who do not fit into a mainstream, widely accepted profile. Flipping our professional image to be seen as cool or hip, as opposed to stuffy, is just a cosmetic change. Showing the public that our work has depth and that academic librarians are diverse will help dissolve harmful stereotypes altogether. The larger problem is that the public does not know what librarians do, which produces misconceptions about our professional image.

It is not easy to pinpoint the unease that stereotypes of librarians can evoke. It may seem trivial to discuss librarian stereotypes at all. Those who make up the majority of the profession (i.e., white, cisgender, and female) may feel that stereotypes of librarians are lighthearted or humorous and not view these stereotypes as harmful. Stereotypes affect the way that minority groups are treated by coworkers and patrons. For example, a student might approach the reference desk and not believe the person at the desk to be a librarian because he or she does not fit the stereotype. Stereotypes distill a few simple, widely recognized traits and erroneously simplify them to create a false representation.<sup>24</sup> They create the idea that there is a “normal” and that anything that deviates from that norm does not belong to that group. This creates tension between the majority group and the “other,” which produces inequality as a result of not understanding the “other.”<sup>25</sup>

The harmful impact of stereotypes derives from the fact that external groups pigeonhole the individual, removing the ability to create his or her own identity. While professional identity stereotypes do not seem as heavy as racial or gender stereotypes, they can be related. Librarians have an understanding of their professional duties but do not communicate outwardly what their job entails. Visual representation in popular culture and everyday life is a factor in the way stereotypes are formed and upheld. There is a need to get outside the echo chamber and show the public what librarians actually do for a living. By changing the public’s perception, we can cause these stereotypes to begin to dissipate. Librarians can work with the public to show that our profession is comprised of many dynamic individuals who are doing important work. If students see individuals from a

wide range of backgrounds in faculty roles, it is going to be much easier for them to have role models and envision themselves in similar positions.<sup>26</sup>

## **Going against the Grain: Activist Librarians**

Several groups of librarians have worked hard throughout the years to combat discrimination in librarianship and raise awareness of issues pertaining to underrepresented librarians. In the late 1960s through the 1970s, several groups began to form within ALA to address issues of diversity and social justice in the profession. Many of these groups now comprise the ethnic caucuses of ALA and the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT). The civil rights movement, the women's liberation movement, the gay rights movement, and many other activist movements during this period influenced how librarians shaped the future of their profession. Organizing these divisions was a way to increase visibility in libraries, create community with each other, and recruit other diverse candidates to the profession. Although librarianship has not always been a diverse profession in terms of race and ethnicity, there have been many diverse groups that have grown out of ALA and the library community. In fact, there have always been librarians in the margins who have organized themselves to bring the disparities experienced by minorities to the attention of the profession at large.

One interesting case was the formation of the Task Force on Gay Liberation, which was the foundation for the group now known as the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) Round Table. Round Tables are groups with a specialized focus that do not fall within a larger division of the American Library Association, but unlike a task force, they have a permanent stature. The Task Force on Gay Liberation was the first professional organization in the country to openly address issues of sexual orientation.<sup>27</sup> This group compiled the first GLBT bibliographies and gay book awards, brought awareness of GLBT issues to the public eye, fought discrimination in employment, and helped to create ways for other librarians to support GLBT initiatives in their own libraries through the collection of materials. This happened in the 1970s when the discussion of GLBT rights was not as prevalent in the mainstream as it is today. Activist

groups like this truly felt it was their responsibility as librarians to engage the profession and the public in these civil rights issues. Librarians have a professional duty to provide access to information, but they do not have to be neutral in their work. We can be social activists and librarians who incorporate our interests into our work.

Many of the founding leaders of these caucuses and round tables are role models for librarians today. Janet M. Suzuki was the cofounder of the Asian American Librarian Caucus, the first pan-Asian American librarian group. She took the responsibility of speaking out against social injustices very seriously. She saw the need to create a group for Asian American librarians that could meet and discuss issues related to their experiences in the profession. Additionally, her dedication to social justice went beyond librarianship. She was also an activist who spoke out against racism. In 1974, Suzuki worked with other Asian American activists “to convince the Pekin (Illinois) High School basketball team to change its name from the ‘Chinks’ to something less offensive.”<sup>28</sup> Suzuki used her leadership skills to improve librarianship and spoke out against the injustices experienced by the Asian American community.

The work these divisions have done within ALA, and for their communities, overwhelmingly shows that these librarians were critically engaged and outspoken. These were not meek, docile, shushing librarians. Barbara Gittings, one of the first founding organizers of ALA’s Task Force for Gay Liberation, described her work with the Task Force as “a heady time! We were activists. We were innovative, bold, imaginative, full of fun and energy, full of love for promoting our cause.”<sup>29</sup> Her self-description reflected the important groundbreaking work that she and others had accomplished in this time period. These librarians were asking for others to speak up and change the injustices of society. They have set the path for other underrepresented groups to have a place and community in the library profession.

There are many contemporary examples of librarians fighting for social justice. In 2011, during the Occupy Wall Street movement, an image of a woman holding a sign that said “You know things are messed up when librarians start marching” circulated online.<sup>30</sup> This single image suggested

that there is juxtaposition between being an activist and being a librarian, and that it is humorous that a librarian could be both. Yet it showed that librarians do take action and are involved in political movements. We do not have to march to promote social justice in our library communities. Librarians can incorporate critical pedagogy into their library instruction, work with underrepresented groups to help disseminate information to their communities, promote open access, or just be advocates for issues we deeply care about.

Despite the courageous actions that these activist librarians have taken, their passion and conviction for social change have somehow been lost in translation. Currently, library schools do not often focus on teaching their students library history; so new professionals start their careers without having background knowledge about how librarians have incorporated social justice into their everyday work. Knowing the profession's history helps guide its future. A clear understanding of the actions that librarians have taken and initiatives they are working on will diminish sweeping generalizations about librarians' work and roles. Looking at the work of these activist librarians, we see that they do not fit into the stereotype of the quiet librarian. They are not meek; they are outspoken and use their passion for social justice to organize their communities beyond the library realm. The way that these librarians have defined themselves and their work is far from cultural stereotypes, making it more important for current librarians to be aware of this part of library history. As a result, new professionals may lack the context for why so many diversity initiatives exist in our field. By understanding the relationship between social justice and libraries, we can fight for equality in our profession and for our students. For activist librarians like Gittings and Suzuki, creating social change went beyond librarianship; they were concerned about fighting for equal rights in society as well.

Working in libraries is not always easy for librarians from minority groups. Despite the trailblazing efforts of activist librarians in the 1960s and 1970s, issues of discrimination were still present, which created barriers in the hiring of diverse candidates in libraries. Minority librarians have experienced limited opportunities for growth once they were hired.<sup>31</sup> Ad-

ditionally, open acts of bigotry in the workplace and in job interviews have prevented those who might have been great candidates from moving further up in the field. John Barnett, in his discussion of interviewing at academic libraries as an openly gay man in the 1980s, wrote: "My experiences in interviewing at colleges and universities were overwhelmingly negative, cynical, and demoralizing events."<sup>32</sup> For Barnett, there was never any open indication that his sexual orientation was what barred him from getting certain jobs, but being different from the majority was enough to eliminate his candidacy during interviews. Colleagues advised him to blend in and not give any impression that he was different; however, a crucial part of one's self-identity like sexual orientation or cultural background is not something someone should have to hide or be ashamed of. Putting in effort to hide an individual's sexuality can be harmful and potentially lead to mental health issues and internalized homophobia. Recent studies claim that it is in our nature to be drawn to those who are like-minded or similar to us, which creates homogeneous work environments.<sup>33</sup> This is why it is important to be cognizant when trying to hire people who bring unique perspectives to our institutions.

Learning about the experiences of underrepresented librarians reveals the consequences of stereotypes: how they form the ideas of cultural norms and how that can create difficulties in the workplace. If someone does not fit the mold of the norm, then that person is subject to being treated differently. Although this situation has improved over the past few decades, there are still many ways to help ensure inclusivity and openness in the workplace for underrepresented librarians. We should examine what may contribute to the conditions that keep these numbers small and find ways to retain and encourage these librarians to succeed once they are in the field.

## **Supporting Diversity**

Despite years of effort of trying to recruit more underrepresented groups into libraries, libraries have still not come close to achieving equitable employment for all. There is much room for improvement in diversifying the workforce. We will not be changing any user perceptions if the stereotypes

of librarians still hold a grain of truth. It is not enough to collect data and notice discrepancies in hiring; we need to take action to seriously change our own demographics for the benefit of our industry. The level of change needed is not an easy process to undertake because there are many challenges in trying to increase diversity. Many of the programs we are going to discuss in this section explicitly state that they are geared for racial and ethnic minority groups, but we should consider those with invisible diversity. Diversity encompasses a wide range of characteristics, and there is no accurate way to determine how many librarians identify with any of these subcategories.

While hiring a diverse staff is a clear answer, there are many other approaches to supporting diversity in academic libraries. We have to consider creating a culture for diversity, mentoring and retaining underrepresented librarians, training employees to be sensitive to other cultures in the workplace, and building a bridge between the library and the campus. This section will highlight different actions libraries can consider to recruit more diverse employees and support more diverse student groups.

### *Before Library School*

When discussing the efforts to increase diverse communities, most practitioners talk about the need to start efforts early. A modern example is the Harlem Children's Zone, initiated by Geoffrey Canada, a social activist and leader in the American education reform movement.<sup>34</sup> While most education practitioners start with the problem and attempt to create a solution, Canada started with his ideal outcome and worked backwards. He wanted individuals from Harlem to escape from the cycles of poverty, violence, and crime endemic to their communities. Working from that goal, he created an organization that provides education, counseling, and health care for children and their families. The program has been so successful that President Obama incorporated it into his 2007 plan to end education disparity in the United States.<sup>35</sup> Taking a cue from Canada's outcome-based approach, managers of academic libraries should also think about sustainable solutions—such as reaching out to undergraduate students—to create a more diverse group of faculty and staff. By providing members

of diverse communities with opportunities to build their experience, hiring committees will have more candidates to select from.

For example, academic libraries can take Canada's approach by introducing librarianship to students before they enter a master's program. The Discovering Librarianship project, offered through ALA, was an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Laura Bush 21st-Century Librarian Program to fund a three-year project (2010–2013) to recruit ethnically diverse high school and college students to careers in libraries.<sup>36</sup> Early-career librarians who had graduated from previously successful diversity recruitment programs were enlisted in this program to go to speak to high school and college students and act as ambassadors for the profession. The hope was that early-career librarians from diverse backgrounds could plant a seed in the minds of these underrepresented students and convince them that librarianship is a viable career.

Work experience is a significant factor in making library school graduates competitive in the job market, so providing students from underrepresented groups the opportunity to work in academic libraries would aid them in their job search once they graduate. Academic libraries can provide internships specifically tailored to these individuals. Internships would allow undergraduate students from underrepresented communities (who might never have thought to become a librarian) to gain experience working in a library before entering an MLS/MLIS program, making them competitive candidates when applying for graduate programs and jobs. A few university libraries, like the Washington University Library and the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, provide these opportunities.<sup>37</sup> In the Washington University Libraries Diversity and Inclusion Grant program, undergraduate interns work in various areas of the library with assigned mentors and develop a research project based on aspects related to the University Library.<sup>38</sup> The University of Illinois Undergraduate Library hires interns from diverse backgrounds to work specifically on information technology/informatics projects. This practice is not limited to libraries, and is used in other professions as well, such as in medical education at Johns Hopkins and the National Park Service.<sup>39</sup>



Undergraduate outreach initiatives increase minority students' library usage and improve their attitudes toward the library. The University of Michigan Undergraduate Library created the Peer Information Counseling Program to aid in the retention of minority students, hiring undergraduates from underrepresented groups and training them in basic reference services.<sup>40</sup> These students worked at the reference desk, answered basic reference questions, and helped their peers with writing papers. The library's intent was for the peer counselors to "serve as role models for minority students who might initially feel more comfortable asking for assistance from another minority student than from a librarian."<sup>41</sup> This is a significant aspect of the peer counseling program, and one downside is that the students graduate after a few years. Libraries could also focus on hiring permanent library staff from minority groups, especially if they found the peer counseling program to aid in minority student retention. Having permanent staff would offer a sustainable option, as opposed to relying on student workers.

### *During Library School*

Recruiting diverse candidates to the field needs to start somewhere, and a critical examination of library and information science (LIS) education is a step in the right direction. Diversifying librarianship should begin with the recruitment of underrepresented groups into library school. Anajli Gulati, library science lecturer, argues that "increased levels of diversity among LIS faculty would also help to reinforce to Master's students from underrepresented populations that they too could become LIS faculty, leading to more diversity in LIS doctoral programs."<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, the *ALA Policy Manual* states, "The American Library Association, through the Committee on Accreditation, will encourage graduate programs in library and information studies seeking accreditation or re-accreditation to ensure that their student bodies, faculties, and curricular effect the diverse histories and information needs of all people in the United States," showing that diversity in LIS education is a high priority on a professional organizational level.<sup>43</sup> There are many programs in place to address diversity gaps in library and information science education.

Diversity initiatives like the Spectrum Scholarship Program and the ARL Initiative to Recruit a Diverse Workforce (IRDW) aim to recruit more underrepresented candidates into library school programs.<sup>44</sup> Targeting potential students who are identified as racial and ethnic minorities, these programs provide them with scholarships to attend library schools, leadership training, and career mentoring. The hope is that these programs will diversify LIS education and that program participants will be well prepared to be gainfully employed in the field upon graduation. We must note that these programs are focused solely on racial and ethnic minorities and not on other minority groups. Library school is the time for students to explore their interests in librarianship, gain work experience, and learn from experienced colleagues in the field. Several diversity initiatives provide students with gaining real-life experience, building their resumes, and increasing their employability.

For those who do not identify as underrepresented, there are still many ways to be an ally to those who are. Students can take classes in serving special populations, such as learning about accessibility and creating tailored online tools or developing resources for bilingual communities. Students can also volunteer to provide library services for underserved populations. The iDiversity program at University of Maryland is an example of how library school students can build a culture of inclusion. Its mission is to “create and maintain a dialogue between iSchool students, alumni, and faculty, as well as information professionals outside the university, to ensure that issues of diversity are addressed in practice, research, and technology.”<sup>45</sup> This project is just one of many examples of efforts that students can undertake to enrich their education.

### *After Library School*

Most diversity initiatives are focused on helping future librarians find employment in the field, which can be difficult any professional, particularly recent graduates. One way that academic libraries have striven to support diversity among new librarians is through residency programs. Geared toward new graduates, these programs hire individuals who “bring new perspectives, ideas, and training to jump start the academic library’s entry

into the twenty-first world [*sic*] of global scholarship, learning methods, and high tech means of communication."<sup>46</sup> Typically, these academic appointments are on a fixed term so that the residents can get a couple years of experience and explore academic librarianship. Positions that are focused on recruiting new professionals are rare, so these programs are competitive to get into but should provide the librarians with valuable experience. Ideally, these types of programs could extend job security beyond what is typically offered in a residency program. If we want to recruit more diversity, shouldn't these librarians be placed in permanent positions in libraries instead of temporary programs? On the other hand, residents leave their programs with employment experience that makes it much easier for them to find other positions down the road or find employment at the institution where they did their residency.

### *Training Programs*

Creating training programs and library services aimed at diverse populations are activities beyond hiring practices that libraries can implement. For example, SafeZone or Safe Space training, which aims to educate employees on GLBT issues, is found at many academic institutions.<sup>47</sup> This training enables employees to become allies and promotes openness about supporting GLBT individuals at work. Participants put up signs to indicate that their office or building is a designated SafeZone, a visual cue to GLBT individuals that they are welcome and should feel safe in that space. Employees usually go through an orientation to learn about the GLBT community in order to dispel stereotypes and misinformation that might be associated with those communities. As John Barnett explained in describing his experiences of being a gay librarian, feelings of displacement and being treated differently are problems in the workplace.<sup>48</sup> Providing diversity training promotes cultural competency and helps employees prepare to work with different groups. Increased sensitivity toward other cultures and groups assists in the retention of underrepresented librarians and allows us to learn from others, building social empathy toward colleagues from different backgrounds.

Because minority librarians still make up a small percentage of the profession, it's even more important that libraries provide opportunities

for these individuals to grow into leadership roles. Academic libraries can do this for underrepresented students, helping them gain work experience in order to be more marketable in the job hunt, creating inclusive environments for all librarians, and providing training for all staff members to be more aware of the issues of marginalized groups.

### *Creating a Culture for Inclusion*

Libraries should be creating a culture for inclusion and retention of diverse librarians: investing in long-term employment, providing mentors, being explicit in the hiring process that different backgrounds are valued. Academic institutions should have open lines of communication to foster honest relationships with all of their employees. In the best-case scenario, librarians wouldn't feel out of place in their institution. They would feel supported and, as a result, would have the freedom to express their individuality. This positive environment trickles down into all functions of the library. Creating this culture benefits the library employees, faculty, and students.

In terms of supporting students and other library professionals, we need to remember that diversity goes beyond race and ethnicity. Students may be dealing with issues pertaining to disability, sexuality and gender, being a nontraditional student, being a first-generation college student, etc. By being aware that diversity is inclusive and intersectional, our organizations will be better prepared to meet students' needs. Many of the examples in this chapter examined specific facets of diversity, but this does not get to the complex, rich nature of someone's identity. We are not defined by just one factor; we can identify with many, which is why the idea of intersectionality is important to the discussion of diversity initiatives. Intersectionality is defined as "the interactivity of social identity structures such as race, class, and gender in fostering life experiences, especially experiences of privilege and oppression."<sup>49</sup> For example, a student who is a woman of color might have life experiences shaped by her race and gender. Campuses should have centers for individuals with various cultural backgrounds so they have resources and a community to support them.

Cultural centers on campus provide students with programming, a safe space to hang out, academic support, and opportunities to meet others. There may be a number of separate offices for these centers, but there's potential for these places to better serve their students by combining forces. These offices for diversity often operate in competition for limited resources but often have common goals.<sup>50</sup> Instead of allowing them to compete with each other, colleges and universities could move toward combining these offices to support students' intersectional experiences.

Academic librarians can work closely with these diversity groups to develop relevant resources and promote library services to these students. By creating connections with these other offices and with their students, librarians can get out beyond the library and become more visible. As mentioned previously, if students see librarians who are from similar backgrounds, they may be more likely to see the library as a welcoming space, especially if the librarian makes an effort to create a relationship with that group of students.

## Conclusion

In order to change public perception of who we are, we need to take a critical look at the structures that contribute to these perceptions and work together to find solutions. Stereotypes work against librarians and influence the way that some students approach the academic library. Shifting the discourse of our professional identity must produce new "knowledge that shapes perceptions and practice. It is part of the way in which power operates. Therefore, it has consequences for both those who employ it and those who are subjected to it."<sup>51</sup> Redefining this conversation goes beyond showing patrons how we look: it includes how we act, how we teach, and how we reach out to those we help. As professionals, we need to tell our own stories and talk about social justice issues. We can work together to communicate to the public the dynamic aspects of our work. We should build strong relationships with our students to give them a better sense of how we can help them. By providing our communities with an understanding of our work, we can build public knowledge of what we do as librarians.

The way we approach diversity in our field is in need of a paradigm shift. Instead of focusing on inputs like recruitment, we should be look at outputs: determining how many underrepresented library school students get jobs, how many stay in the field, and what barriers are in place that continue to keep the numbers low for underrepresented librarians. By identifying the desired outcomes, we can manifest systems that help overcome current inequalities.

In an article on rethinking diversity in libraries, Yeo and Jacobs stated, “While recruitment is important, it is much more crucial to engage in and create space for dialog to challenge our consciousness and dominant ideas within the community—however uncomfortable this may be.”<sup>52</sup> This dialog is our opportunity to confront stereotypes head on, redefining our public representation and moving the spotlight from who we are to the innovative ways we serve our community in the 21st century. If discourse produces knowledge, then we need to have conversations about how we see ourselves and how we would like to be seen by others, and continue to find solutions to make our vision a reality.

We are now at a point where discussions about the intersectionality of gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity in librarianship are happening among a wider audience. Those who have historically been shut out of the conversation now have the chance to speak up and be heard. These difficult conversations about diversity are the first steps toward a plan of action. It is our duty as academic librarians to encourage our students and our peers to think critically and to support them no matter their background. Through open dialog and listening, we can all strive to be better allies for those whose voices are not often heard, for our students and our colleagues.

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