

The Non-White Man's Burden in LIS Education: Critical Constructive Nudges

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Traditionally, American library and information science (LIS) education and librarianship have been predominantly white and female-oriented professions. As an international gay male person of color (originally from India) in its ranks, I have embraced social justice scholarship outside and within our bastion institutions of higher learning during a 14.5-year tenure as an LIS educator in the United States. This article reflects on select experiences as a minority along multiple intersectional dimensions of human experience and socially constructed identity markers, including race/ethnicity, national origins, sex, gender, and sexual orientation. Indulging in these musings allows me to decipher layers of complexities shaping faculty interpersonal microaggressions, a perceived lack of equal/equitable recognition of contributions, and limited comparable administrative growth/opportunities. These are discussed as hypothesized encounters in the form of few imagined scenarios or key episodes connected in the form of a searching narrative. It develops an alternative "voice" to identify possible directions that might transform LIS education beyond its "feel good" practices/policies surrounding diversity, inclusion, and collegiality and give it greater relevance in the twenty-first century. The goal is to engage authentic conversations that address behaviors of perceived prejudice, bias, abuse, and discrimination (intentional or unintentional) by LIS faculty/administrators targeting male faculty of color and "marginalized" others (e.g., first-generation graduates) in academic and professional networks.

Keywords: critical perspective, invisibility, LIS education, non-white man's burden, race-/ethnicity-/gender-/sexuality-biased microaggressions

Traditionally, American library and information science (LIS) education and librarianship have been predominantly white and female-oriented professions (Branche, 2012; Galvan, 2015; Honma, 2005; Mehra, 2014). As an international gay male person of color (originally from India) within the LIS ranks, I have embraced social justice scholarship outside and within our bastion institutions of higher learning during a 14.5-year tenure as an LIS educator in the United States. This article reflects on my select experiences as a minority along multiple intersectional dimensions of human experience and socially constructed identity markers, including race/ethnicity, national origins, sex, gender, and sexual orientation (Anthias, Yuval-Davis, & Cain, 1992; Barajas & Ronnkvist, 2007). Indulging in these musings allows me to decipher layers of complexities shaping faculty interpersonal microaggressions, perceived lack of equal/equitable recognition of contributions, and limited comparable administrative growth/opportunities.

This discerning narrative has emerged from my idiosyncratic sociocultural perspective, conditioned and constructed from a gay male person of color's gaze of a hegemonically dysfunctional (i.e., toxic) LIS work environment of a bygone past. It represents race-ethnicity-gender/sex-sexuality, and personality intersections in my professional journey to critique traumatic faculty microaggressions and biased administration/leadership decision making (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 2019). An intersectional lens of analysis provides insightful self-and-social realizations. For example, I see the relationship of my confrontations with corrupt and toxic administrators to my humble origins of everyday child abuse and domestic violence in India, and to my marginalizing experiences in the process of establishing an academic career as a gay man of color in an imbalanced white culture (Mehra, 2016). Further, intersectionality also helps me ponder whether it is race-gender/sexuality junctions, my name, work type, lack of privileged professional visibilities, and/or unique "non-Anglo" communication personality inflections that attract faculty's behavioral prejudice, misspellings/mix-ups of my non-Western name, faculty microaggressions, or my efforts being overlooked in professional circles. Such intersectional experiences have shaped my interpersonal communication, behavior of others toward me as a faculty member, and professional interactions. They are not easily packaged, precisely or conveniently fitting categories and boxes of linear cause and effect. However, several LIS educators, administrators, and others in positions of professional leadership have often used biased correlations among these and other aspects to develop simplistic judgements to

KEY POINTS

- This article reflects on select experiences of the author as a minority along multiple intersectional dimensions, including race/ethnicity, national origins, sex, gender, and sexual orientation, in the process drawing attention of readers to the non-white man's burden that "people like us" have to carry in a predominantly white and/or female profession.
- Indulging in these musings allows the author to decipher layers of complexities shaping faculty interpersonal microaggressions, a perceived lack of equal/equitable recognition of contributions, and limited comparable administrative growth/opportunities.
- The article presents hypothesized encounters in the form of a few imagined scenarios or key episodes connected in the form of a searching narrative, an alternative "voice" to identify possible directions that might transform LIS education beyond its "feel good" practices/policies surrounding diversity, inclusion, and collegiality and give it greater relevance in the twenty-first century.

rationalize and justify their implementations of dubiously well-intentioned yet limited policies and practices, especially surrounding diversity, inclusion, collegiality, and codes of conduct to cover-up of their lapses.

This article presents such hypothesized encounters in the form of a few imagined scenarios or key episodes, developing an alternative “voice” to identify possible directions that might transform LIS education beyond its “feel good” practices/policies surrounding diversity, inclusion, and collegiality and give it greater relevance in the twenty-first century (Jaeger, Sarin, & Peterson, 2015; Jaeger, Subramaniam, Jones, & Bertot, 2011). The assumed stories become a tool in promoting intellectualized discourse and positive actions to nudge the profession beyond its past and contemporary lip service (Adkins, Virden, & Yier, 2015). The goal is to engage in authentic conversations that address behaviors of perceived prejudice, bias, abuse, and discrimination (intentional or unintentional) by LIS faculty/administrators targeting male faculty of color and “marginalized” others (e.g., first-generation graduates) in academic and professional networks (Cooke, 2017).

In the process, the article draws the attention of readers to the non-white man’s burden that we carry as male persons of color in a predominantly white and/or female profession. Our very presence, behavior, and communication serve as divergence (and deviance) from the expected norms, and, that surely is a “non-white man’s burden” to carry. The act of “speaking up” for a male person of color, especially while disagreeing, is then labeled as “confrontational,” “angry,” “getting upset,” or related terms and constructs, to justify retaliation, place in a categorized box, and/or deflect attention from the LIS administrator/faculty’s own imbalanced policies and practices.

This reality of experience, then, requires us to be vigilant and think deeply about implications of “speaking out” against verbiage, policies, and practices that might in fact not be the experiences of administrative abuse (or corruption) that people actually face, contrary to the administrator’s self-glorifying (yet untrue) representations. It also implies constantly juggling tensions between represented and real experiences (and their wide gaps) while being oppressed by perspectives emerging from multiple majorities (e.g., white or female) of which we are not a part. Whether we like it or not, as male people of color we stand out in LIS education and communication professions, perceived as such by all others, be they white or non-white, female or male, colleagues and administrators (Gibson, Hughes-Hassell, & Threats, 2018). Readers might empathize with these internalized-and-external pressures as dual minorities that require us to be “in our place” and “controlled” in tone and/or voice, concerning what and how we speak, write, and behave, which is particularly relevant when challenging administrative malpractices in terms of what is palatable or acceptable to white (or non-white) leadership and majority female colleagues in LIS-related fields. This is contrary to policies that allow for freedom of

speech and expression and the obligation of faculty to draw attention to allegations of misconduct without retaliation.

In recent years, LIS education has taken a proactive stance to adopt lip service vocabulary and policies in recognizing both its past shortcomings regarding issues of diversity and inclusion and a need to show support of collegial, positive behaviors toward its minority and underrepresented professionals (Julien & Wolfram, 2018). However, the 2017 Association of Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) Statistical Report (Faculty Section) dataset is indicative of a dismal representation of men of color. The percentage male–female ratio of full-time faculty for 2016–17 is indicated as 50:50 (ALISE, 2017, Table I-3). The totals and percentage of ethnicity and race of full-time faculty for 2017 are also provided (ALISE, 2017, Table I-17). The first non-white man's burden in LIS education is that, according to ALISE, we do not exist. This sheer absence of representative numbers based on race–gender intersections can be perceived as poor awareness of intersectionality in LIS education, and/or as a “cover-up” of the poor “minority-within-a-minority” status in a white/female collegiate. Further, an analysis of categorized listing of ethnicity and race of full-time faculty (ALISE, 2017, Table I-17) (the numbers indicative of total for all ranks, plus percentages) includes Hispanic of Any Race ($n = 37$, 2%), American Indian or Alaskan Native ($n = 4$, 0%), Asian ($n = 156$, 13%), Black or African American ($n = 51$, 4%), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander ($n = 3$, 0%), White ($n = 745$, 63%), Two or More Races ($n = 9$, 1%), International ($n = 58$, 5%), Race or Ethnicity Unknown ($n = 112$; 10%), and Total ($N = 1175$). The data confusingly show there are 156 “Asian” in a narrower category domain, with 58 in the broader category of “International.” This seems to indicate that these counts consider the categories of race/ethnicity as mutually exclusive with the “International” category. It is another limitation/problem for “colored” people like me, originally from India, which is part of Asia, which is international in a North American context.

It is important to “make visible” such gaps in the historical and contemporary practice of LIS education, for communicating about them makes them real, concrete, and tangible in order to address them and make any progress, instead of ignoring or pretending they do not exist. Irrespective of readers' political affiliations, all must agree that President Donald Trump has opened the proverbial “Pandora's box” in publicly exposing the “ugliness” of what it means to be American from a minority experience (Mehra, 2017, p. 384). This article presents one minority “voice” of scenarios along the range of intersectional constructed “-isms” (namely, racism-sexism-heterosexism) (Frame, 2012; Grillo & Wildman, 1991), following the lead of a heterosexual “good ole' white boy” occupying the nation's highest office, in critiquing “ugly” aspects of LIS education so that it confronts its own demons to improve faculty behaviors toward male people of color and “marginalized” others in its midst.

All characters and conceptualized incidents portrayed in the article's scenarios can be deemed fictitious, with no resemblance to real people. Similarities can be considered unintentional. Is identification with actual persons (living or deceased) and organizations unintended? If a person identifies aspects of their own or others' behaviors in these stories, it is life's coincidence.

Faculty race-/gender-biased microaggressions

Nearly all universities in the United States have policies that pay lip service commitment to an expectation of faculty collegiality and civility. Are consistent patterns of microaggressions—verbal and behavioral—toward a male faculty of color collegial or conducive to a positive work environment (Sweeney & Cooke, 2018)? Scenarios might include a white female faculty member complimenting her male faculty of color that he is “like a dog that needs to be leashed,” based on a perceived high level of energy. When confronted about the remark's inappropriateness, she indicates that she is sorry he “feels this way,” not that she made the racist-sexist remark. Past anthropology and psychology research attributed emotions and feelings to the “primitives” stigmatized from Asia, Africa, and other parts, while white colonialists/imperialists prided themselves on their rational thoughts and logical thinking emerging from Greco-Roman traditions (Durkheim & Mauss, 1967). Being called out as “people like you” by one search committee member during an interview at the ALISE conference when I was applying for my first LIS faculty position exemplified “othering” by a white administrator.

Other situations might involve a female faculty member coming late to several meetings, providing reasons such as she thought the meeting was half an hour later than scheduled/recorded, she was tired while cycling and had to rest, she was reading a dissertation and lost track of time, or she forgot to fill up her car with gas the night before. Another faculty member might make grimaces and twisted facial expressions several different times only when her male colleague of color is speaking and raising questions. She snaps at him during discussion to keep quiet, indicating that she is the chair of the committee in question when he tries to contribute. Or she laughs condescendingly when he speaks, and then apologizes mockingly, clearly indicating that she is not sincere, when asked to communicate collegially.

What actions might an earnest, proactive LIS administrator consider to publicly address such microaggressions during a meeting they are leading? Obviously, these incidents are NOT acts of inclusion. Addressing the collective group in the public forum where the communicative/behavioral microaggressions take place has the following benefits: (1) it will publicly provide a common message to the entire group that such behaviors are unacceptable; (2) it will also acknowledge publicly that the “damage” is experienced by the targeted person as well as by people who witness these

occurrences. An administrative, non-public action will simply imply that it is okay to behave in such a manner. It becomes lip service and hypocrisy when leaders adopt diversity and collegiality language but actually do not take action publicly when the situation confronts them. LIS administrators might present a defense for a no public action by indicating that these behaviors are a personality trait of the individual. In the workplace, microaggressions, whether race-/gender-biased or otherwise, targeting women or men, publicly enacted (or otherwise) are NOT acceptable, even if they are a personality characteristic. LIS administrators should refrain from using such excuses to justify their public inaction (Blackburn, 2015).

Faculty gay-biased microaggressions

Do the following scenarios of gay-biased microaggressions create a healthy collegial environment of respect where each person is valued? Or are they expressive of interpersonal difficulties with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning people, reflecting faculty biases and attempts to manipulate these to further their academic careers (Kuecker, 2017)? A faculty member communicates with her gay male colleague's ex-partner, inquiring at his public-service job (outside the academy) whether her colleague had an affair with an administrative superior and whether their relationship soured because she knows both are gay and her male colleague publicly started speaking up against the superior's policies. Other LIS educators habitually embarrass their gay male colleague by telling him that they recognize him as a favorite of their director (who is also gay). It is not clear what they expect their colleague to do about it, maybe expressed as a marker of passive-aggressive jealousy, to make him guilty about it, provoke him so that he acts not to remain a "favorite," or something else not so transparent. The assumption in making these remarks of favoritism is based on their both being gay and is not related to their colleague's quality of work or positive efforts. Such professional settings symbolize a place of toxicity and embedded prejudice, perpetuated in limited actions to address these microaggressions when complaints are made. There should be policies, practices, and administrative actions that directly address these lapses when they are reported.

Treatment and exclusion of "invisibles"

A group of "invisibles" (e.g., structural engineers, fact-checkers, UN interpreters) across diverse industries are skilled professionals whose role is critical to whatever organization they are part of, yet they often go unnoticed until something goes wrong (Zweig, 2015). Historically (and even today in some cultural circles), women's contribution in domestic spheres is a prime example of invisible work that is devalued, "for it is either unpaid or limited by the demands of the unpaid work in the home" (Daniels, 1987, p. 403). One non-white man's burden in LIS education concerns similar invisibility and limited recognition in professional circles, compared to

whites or females who make equal or lesser contributions. An example might include a white female administrator assigning leadership of student programs to another in her image, while unconsciously overlooking a male person of color who has been leading student activities for many years.

A non-American male LIS faculty member might not have the same gender-and-ethnicity socialization access and networking or behavior interactions that influence perceptions when educators make their selection to bestow visibility and public recognition on their peers, including some and leaving out others. Maybe they are unfamiliar with how his name sounds. One scenario is when he leads grunt conference committee work but does not receive the same privilege as others, in a similar role, to announce the work outcomes. Being unintentionally left out of public visibility displays conferred on conference-planning team members is another example.

Conclusion

In a disguised “feminized” voice to highlight some concerns raised here, I began my portion of the ALISE panel that inspired this short piece (Cooke, Sutherland, & Patin, 2018; Neigel, 2015). Authoring the article involved weighty concerns (e.g., evaluating the risk of getting labeled as a “problem person” for bringing up matters of discomfort). Readers should recognize that the decision was not made lightly and that the narrative is not a “complaining-fest” about particular individuals. The focus is not on persons but on their questionable, problematic behaviors.

The scenarios integrate threads of race-ethnicity-gender/sex-sexuality intersections without always teasing them apart separately (Chou & Pho, 2018). Sectional categorization and analytical separation were strategic in order to facilitate legibility and intersectional sense making. What life characteristics of identity markers (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, etc.) shape professional (e.g., being a social justice advocate in LIS education) or personal (e.g., being outspoken regarding prejudicial incidents, having unique non-Western diction) attributes, and how these influence inter-personal faculty interactions, are difficult to ascertain. For example, does a male LIS administrator get “touchy-feely” with a junior male faculty of color because the subordinate is gay and/or international, dependent on the superior for his H1-B visa and not in a situation to speak up? Is such behavior excusable since it is a temperamental administrator’s behavioral personality trait when he consumes alcohol? Hypothetically, does a white administrator retaliate because a male person of color’s tone or content is not appropriate when he draws attention to leadership’s perceived misuse of power or exclusionary hiring practices? Or is it because the pretense of power and control and the public façade of the department—as “one big happy family” celebrating international lunches to mark their diversity—have been broken? Does a female LIS faculty member make faces often when a male person of color speaks because she does not like what he is saying, how he is speaking, and/or because he is a minority male and/or

gay? These are difficult questions that might be considered irrelevant since they have no easily identifiable straightforward answers.

American society and the world in general are hegemonically patriarchal and sexist toward women. But microaggressions of women (and others) toward men of color is not the solution. Another non-white man's burden in LIS education has meant bringing attention to oneself as a "whole person," simultaneously as a minority along various social/cultural categorizations. A selective discourse analysis of LIS faculty's anecdotal communications and behaviors expressed views about men of color in terms of their fragmented identities based on race-and-gender minority status, while members of the majority (white and/or women) and their experiences were deemed "whole," not subjected to similar judgments. This article's critical short threads are a mark of resistance to these notions and also might provide insights to other male faculty of color who experience similar unprofessionalism and struggle to cope without lashing out.

Change needs to happen soon, for current efforts to diversify the professions are obviously not working. I write this piece from a balanced perspective, not as a victim in any real or imagined situations, and will continue addressing bias/prejudice in its various forms. This critical "voice" is from the margins in LIS education, as an instance of trying to promote positive changes that truly further diversity, inclusion, collegiality, and progressive actions to make the world better for all.

During a recent mentoring event for minority faculty, I was surprised to hear a top university administrator at a mid-Southern land-grant university indicate that the university had "warts" and that we all had to work together to acknowledge them in order to move forward. The use of the word "warts" brought a mental image of "ugly blemishes on the skin," problematic in reflecting a biased sense of aesthetic beauty yet one that resonates with some aspects explored in this article. Coming from an administrator from the university's highest echelons, the honesty was pleasantly refreshing in recognizing an authentic reality, compared to pretending that all was fine when actually it was not. It is similar to Trump's "ugly" behaviors and communication that have forced the public to recognize and accept that the "-isms" (racism, sexism, heterosexism, etc.) and xenophobia do exist, instead of lying otherwise in mainstream society.

Moving forward, as a male person of color and social justice advocate in LIS education, I see my role as continuing to bridge gaps between lip service vocabularies that institutions present regarding diversity, inclusivity, collegiality, and the like, on the one hand, and the reality of toxicity (i.e., the "warts") that minorities experience, on the other. Only by speaking up, here and elsewhere, can we address the dysfunctional behaviors (e.g., microaggressions, power abuse) and grow stronger as academic institutions and the profession. First, LIS education in the United States must honestly recognize its own "warts," so to speak. These include race-/gender-/sexuality-biased behaviors and other invisibilities imposed upon

male faculty of color and disenfranchised others. Only then will we be able to really address the malaise and problematics in order to expand the diversity in our fold. I hope this narrative provides a small step in that direction.

In January 2019, [Bharat Mehra](#) accepted the position of EBSCO Endowed Chair in Social Justice and Professor in the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Alabama. From January 2005 to December 2018 he was a faculty member in the School of Information Sciences at the University of Tennessee. His research focuses on diversity and social justice in LIS and community informatics or the use of information and communication technologies to empower minority and underserved populations to make meaningful changes in their everyday lives. He has applied action research to further engaged scholarship and community engagement while collaborating with racial/ethnic groups, international diaspora, sexual minorities, rural communities, low-income families, small businesses, and others, to represent their experiences and perspectives in the design of community-based information systems and services.

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