We Here, Now What?
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Music Technical Spaces

Music Library Association 2019 Annual Meeting
Panelists

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treshani Perera</td>
<td>Music and Fine Arts Cataloging Librarian</td>
<td>University of Kentucky</td>
<td><a href="mailto:treshani.perera@uky.edu">treshani.perera@uky.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy Rodriguez</td>
<td>Assistant Dean of Special Collections and Archives</td>
<td>University of Missouri--Kansas City</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rodriguezsan@umkc.edu">rodriguezsan@umkc.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monica Figueroa</td>
<td>Music Cataloging Librarian</td>
<td>University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill</td>
<td><a href="mailto:monica@unc.edu">monica@unc.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rahni Kennedy</td>
<td>Music and Media Catalog/Metadata Librarian</td>
<td>Southern Methodist University</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rbkennedy@smu.edu">rbkennedy@smu.edu</a></td>
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<td><strong>Diversity:</strong> recognizing the value of the perspectives of community members of varying backgrounds and identities</td>
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<td><strong>Equity:</strong> creating and supporting systems and behaviors that promote equality, fairness, and justice</td>
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<td><strong>Inclusion:</strong> creating an environment of equal access, belonging, respect, opportunity, and empowerment</td>
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Borrowed from Duke University’s Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Council or DivE-In. For this presentation, we’re defining each of these terms as follows:
Racial Equity in the Workplace

White Supremacy Culture
Perfectionism
Sense of Urgency
Paternalism
Either/Or Thinking
Power Hoarding
Fear of Open Conflict
Individualism
Objectivity
Right to Comfort

In addition to understanding some key terms, we’d like to ground our discussion by acknowledging the structure and culture that we move through as people of color. This culture is often not explicitly named and interrogated because it is far more comfortable to participate in the feel-good diversity rhetoric of our institutions than to do the difficult but necessary work of locating ourselves in reproducing and reinforcing cultural oppression in the workplace.

But...If we truly want racial equity in our institutions and in libraries, then we must not solely focus on acknowledging and addressing structural barriers for POC but must also dig deep to confront and disrupt the structural advantages white people hold in the workplace. We should interrogate why we keep framing our failure to recruit and retain POC in our place of work as a diversity problem rather than a whiteness problem. Framing it this way would force us to acknowledge that white cultural norms, many of which are listed here, pervade our work environments, the way we expect business to be conducted, what we value, the way we make decisions, the qualities we expect in leadership, etc. If we don’t name it or make this visible, then it’s easy to conclude that white people are simply superior or that they simply tend to more often exhibit those qualities we see as “what it takes to make it;” when in fact it’s that our cultural norms, which reflect whiteness, predict or reinforce who succeeds or who we perceive as successful, and consequently, who more often is provided greater support and has access to opportunities for growth and advancement. That is white
supremacy culture. I’m setting a strong tone here because identifying whiteness and culture is critical to understanding what we need to do to improve and sustain diversity in our profession.
THE WORK OF DIVERSITY IN LIBRARIES BEGINS at the crossroad where superiority, inaction, and denial become intolerable. Yet in working toward true diversity, we work without the familiar construct of a mainstream. We respond to, or ignore, repetitive critique of being too exclusive or not inclusive enough. We decide whether it is appropriate to quantify the existence of a people or to trust what we know intuitively. These paradoxes present us with questions that serve as teachable moments or paralyzing hurdles. Once at the crossroads, however, there are systematic strategies and operating principles for bringing significance, meaning, and action to this trend called diversity.

Sandra Rios Balderrama, “This Trend Called Diversity.” (2000)

Nearly 20 years ago, and yet, “this trend called diversity” still resonates and perhaps even more so today. As Jennifer Vinopal touches on in her January 2013 article, “The quest for diversity in library staffing: from awareness to action,” despite our ongoing work towards building a more diverse and inclusive profession, the demographics have remained the same.
Our presentation will primarily focus on four broad topics related to music technical spaces: DEI, labor, practice and conventions unique to technical work, and recruitment and retention of library workers of color.

When we begin to look at how DEI appears in technical spaces in libraries, and more specifically in music technical spaces, we have to begin with some demographic data. It’s important to address the personnel and associated characteristics when it comes to who’s performing labor in technical spaces.

According to the 2016 Personnel Characteristics Survey, a study conducted by then MLA Diversity Committee Chair Jonathan Sauceda and then MLA Placement Officer Joe Clark, music librarianship is a predominantly white, straight, cis-gender profession. While non-white race/ethnicity data has slightly improved since the 2009 survey, which was conducted by Mark Puente and Susannah Cleveland, we, as a profession, still has a higher percentage of white representation - 90% - compared to overall librarianship, which is 87% white.

From the same survey raw data obtained from the researchers:

For areas of responsibility, 40.4% of survey respondents said they had cataloging/DB maintenance responsibilities, nearly 25% had Systems responsibility, and about 33% had acquisitions responsibilities. There are primary AND secondary responsibilities. There is certainly a gap in research data for demographics related to areas of responsibility, but it’s important to reflect and carefully consider the context in which this discussion is taking place today.
And so, where can we find opportunities for change in music technical spaces and more broadly within music librarianship, especially if we want to see real change in our demographics? So, in a sense, we must ask ourselves: why diversity, equity, and inclusion in music technical spaces? I believe we can all speak on this matter, but for me, embracing DEI in all library spaces - technical or otherwise - creates an environment and culture where we foster a genuine recognition of perspective, lived experiences, and pathways to the profession. In doing this, we break the mold of homogeneity, in thought and in action. And, library technical spaces are far too often left out of conversations centered around the potentialities of working towards transforming academic libraries into more equitable and inclusive spaces for all library workers, faculty, and students, which is disappointing and frustrating. Because the very work we do in our technical spaces is forward-thinking and public oriented, as it allows users to access comprehensive information, which then leads to greater student/research success.
Visibility within/outside institution

The mission of the SMU Black Faculty and Staff Association is to partner with the University to ensure the support, inclusion and success of Black faculty, staff, and students at SMU. This is accomplished through our fundamental pillars: Professional Learning, Community Advocacy, Student Support, Public Relations, and Assessment.

The SMU Black Faculty & Staff Association was started a year ago with the mission statement displayed here. The SMU BFSA for me serves as a way to get outside the technical services unit (and the SMU Libraries) and a safe space to converse with other black employees. The space also helps with dealing with issues being the only male person of color working for the SMU Libraries as I hear similar experiences of isolation, microaggressions, covert racism, and other related struggles.
Resisting the devaluation of labor identified as “behind-the-scenes” work

This tendency to devalue “behind-the-scenes” work often exists in organizational cultures which have narrow vision, siloed spaces, lack of job security, or increasing pressure to innovate. In these conditions, there’s a tendency to focus reductively on valuing those services delivered for which we receive instant feedback (for instance, successful reference transaction with a satisfied patron) or those which we can easily package as a metric demonstrating value (neoliberalism) without recognizing all of the critical operational work that enables our library services to be successful. In fact, technical services workers tend to be only seen and acknowledged when problems arise. The way we combat that is to consciously build culture that approaches services holistically-- one which recognizes that it’s our interconnections and relationships that enable sustainable infrastructure as well as growth and innovation.

In addition to this visibility layer, as a woman of color in a grant-funded position working on cataloging project (several years back), I had to navigate additional layers--

- Position Classification and Precarity: Grant-funded positions at my institution are in a temporary academic appointment status. This is not aligned with colleagues with same credentials who are classified as non-tenure track faculty. My status was not made clear to me when I left my tenure-track faculty position. I had to navigate a lower status position that had higher expectations than my colleagues without the same kind of infrastructural support (faculty
- governance) and access to service opportunities (grant takes priority).
- Identity: What is not visible is that I also had to navigate the perceived lower status of being a woman of color, putting me in a perpetual state of having to prove myself over and over again throughout my career in addition to receiving microaggressions that suggested my success was only due to my token status.
- These experiences have had such a big impact on me in my career that I am engaging each of these in various ways - participation in DLF Labor Working Group and IMLS national forum grant on labor - but I’m also locally pushing for holistic approaches in my organization which recognizes less visible structure; showing up for dismantling the system - advocacy, mentoring, engaging in learning opportunities; etc.
Challenges faced by technical services librarians when working to incorporate DEI in their work

As we look at typical work performed by technical services library workers, we have to acknowledge that our systems of classification and knowledge organization is full of bias. For library worker of color, this could also make technical work spaces be difficult to navigate and inhabit. This slide focuses on the bigger picture of bias and dated language in our classification and controlled vocabulary systems.

If you're a person from dominant culture, you may not encounter a moral or ethical dilemma in seeing these labels and insensitive language while performing work. For a person of color, the knee-jerk reaction could be quite different, and often a recurring reminder that we continue to occupy spaces where the accepted lexicon perpetuates "othering".

For library workers of color, this could also mean that our lived experiences and microaggressions faced are to be ignored when adhering to professional standards and expectations. The two examples here are specific to what a cataloger may encounter, but there are plenty of reminders and similar examples across technical spaces in libraries, whether they are in acquisitions workflows, systems, digital scholarship and stewardship, to name a few.

Headings and terminology in music librarianship has an inherent Western bias, which
is necessary to accurately describe the majority of our collections, but this professional bias sometimes reduces the role of library workers of color to observing and following rules and standards with no opportunity to bring their true and authentic self into a professional space.

Folks from dominant culture has a crucial role to play as allies in helping to create workspaces where a library worker of color can bring their expertise to the table. Who gets an invitation to be involved in policy decision making? Whose expertise is being consulted and for which heading creation? How can one’s lived experiences be considered an asset in knowledge organization? These are some questions to consider when looking to create a welcoming space for library workers of color to perform meaningful work beyond routine operational procedures in technical spaces.

In the spirit of inclusion and creating space for agency and authority, I want to highlight the Cataloging Lab, which is a web-based wiki that is available to ALL library worker for creating better controlled vocabulary terms. While music headings aren’t being considered here, the platform encourages heading creation and revision based on shared experiences and expertise.

[segue]: Before we move onto the next topic, it’s important to acknowledge that these challenges continue to exist when our workforce demographics remains the same. When the path to technical services work is still left to chance and accidental discovery, it becomes much more important to be intentional about HOW library workers of color are recruited and retained in technical spaces in librarianship.
This is the way I see how a mentor may want to approach guiding a person of color from interest in the profession to getting a professional position (or at least the way I would have liked it to happen for me). Many other might present this in a different way, but the point is that all of these points need to happen for success. What happens most of the time is that part does not happen and then everything falls apart. This normally leads to leaving the profession since there can be a lack of support for people of color on top just getting through an MLS program and searching for employment.

Often our workplaces, especially technical services departments, lack leadership pipelines for library workers of color. Leadership opportunities exist, training opportunities exist, but without mentorship and guidance the pathway to leadership continues to remain aspirational and not attainable. Perhaps the bigger issue here, and one that needs to be addressed at LIS level, is the lack of library workers of color in leadership positions, which further creates barriers for those that aspire to see themselves in those positions.
Addressing broader issues related to recruitment and retention--

Despite all of the recruitment initiatives, we’ve made very little headway in diversifying our profession because we’re struggling with retention. This signals something about our need to address the environments, culture, and climate for people from underrepresented and marginalized groups. We are not sufficiently addressing equity.

Hostile work environments so forming communities or spaces where we can center our experiences has become critical to our sense of belonging. When we try to address equity issues, we often experience white fragility, extreme pushback, and real risk. (See “Problem woman of colour in the workplace” graphic).

Who is doing the work to dismantle white normativity in the workplace?

- Consider how material determinism shows up. Material determinism: racism advances the interests of the privileged therefore there is no incentive to disrupt it.
- People of color often “perform whiteness” in order to achieve advancement (e.g., individualism and self-advocacy). When we do, we can work on advancing equity by dismantling white cultural norms, but we still carry the associated risk despite positionality.
Commitment to DEI requires the will to form new habits

“An institutional commitment is thus how the organization has already acted such that it is committed to a series of actions.”

“An institutional will is needed to transform a situation in order not to reproduce what would habitually be produced.”

“A habit is a continuation of willing what no longer needs to be willed.”

--Sara Ahmed in On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life

Sara Ahmed, the author of On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life talks about how as people we build personal habits in our bodies, and how the concept of habits can be transferred to the institutional body, saying “An institutional commitment is thus how the organization has already acted such that it is committed to a series of actions.” In other words, our commitments are demonstrated by our actions not by our stated intentions. In order to bring about the change we need, she speaks of “institutional will” and how it is “needed to transform a situation in order not to reproduce what would habitually be produced.” In other words, we need to break our institutional habits to create new ones. “A habit is a continuation of willing what no longer needs to be willed.”

What we can do: Identify what values we are enacting rather than what stated intentions we’ve pulled together in mission and values statements, address the gap, make new habits and reinforce them.
Finally, we wanted to touch on a few platforms and outlets geared towards library workers of color. We Here is a supportive collaboration and mentorship platform specifically for people of color in the library and information science (LIS) professions. The result, as they mention on their webpage, is working toward retaining people of color in LIS. This community shares jobs, articles, and more on social media channel, including Twitter. As you may have noticed, the title of our panel today, takes a nod from this supportive community, a space where many of us have gone to for encouragement, venting, and solidarity. If you are a person color, we hope you will join our We Here Meetup tomorrow night at 6pm at Mango Restaurant. For more information check out our Facebook event page.

In addition to We Here, library and information science conferences (Joint Conference of Librarians of Color, also IDEAL, formerly known as the National Diversity in Libraries Conference) geared towards POC also provide folks with outlets for mentoring and communion. Informal meetups (often with food and/or drink) frequently occur at these conferences.

Additionally, institutes geared towards early career professional of color, such as the ARL Leadership Symposium and the Minnesota Institute for Early Career Librarians from Underrepresented Groups, provide participants with the opportunity to build mentorship and peer networks as well as the ability to reflect on and fine tune leadership skills.
But, within institutions, how might we foster inclusive and equitable environments? Implicit or unconscious bias training for search committees (and on all levels, not just upper administrative positions) is but one way to achieve this. Targeted opportunities for POC library professionals also works towards recruiting and hiring a more diverse workforce. Along those lines, how might we better grow the pathway to librarianship for students of color? Undergraduate programs in LIS, job shadowing, career fair booths, and reaching out to and building relationships with campus affinity groups.
Discussion Q1 (6 mins)
1-minute self reflection + 5-minute group discussion

What are some strategies for recruitment and retention of library workers of color that you will take back to your institutions?
What ideas do you have as mentoring initiatives to diversify music librarianship and/or music technical spaces?
Thank you for attending.

Link to session notes and discussion comments: goo.gl/6afvey
**We Here. Now What? : Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Music Technical Spaces**  
Figueroa, Kennedy, Perera, Rodriguez

88th Annual MLA Meeting  
St. Louis, Missouri  
Thursday, Feb. 21, 2:30-3:55 p.m.  
Grand Ballroom ABC


Discussion:  
**Q1: What are some strategies for recruitment and retention of library workers of color that you will take back to your institutions?**

Implicit bias training for the search committee before review of applications begins. Discuss biases openly, acknowledge them, move through it. Require bias training for all library staff (including deans)

How can we rewrite job descriptions for technical service positions (librarians, staff, students) to attract a more diverse workforce?

One positive approach at home institution- being less rigid about what knocks a candidate out of a job search; look for transferable skills, what translates to library work.

Reevaluate posted job requirements (more flexibility). Don't look for perfection in application materials

Undergraduate internship program to let students explore future careers in librarianship

Adjusting habits  
Recruitment of interns/fellows of color - Have paid internships  
Laying out specific guidelines  
Job shadowing opportunities

Talking to those in leadership to advocate for them. This take away the onus from the individual to self-promote.

Since recruitment pool is low, it’s important to start talking to folks in undergrad to cultivate interest the profession.

Some people of color have talked about the need for skills to navigate institutional structures.

Again, being advocates for others, taking the pressure off of them to do it solely for themselves.
Identify more avenues for advertising open positions (list-servs, social media, organizations)

Talk about whiteness and how this is used to disqualify diverse candidates due to “fit”.

Direct asks, intentionality in engagement, needs to follow-up institutional “commitments.”

Q2: What ideas do you have as mentoring initiatives to diversify music librarianship and/or music technical spaces?

Long-term program or relationship important.

Have dedicated mentors for new librarians.

As a mentor, know what resources are available on campus and in the city/region

Canvassing mentorship program to share emotional/interpersonal burden of being the only you.

Being willing to put yourself out there, be available and check in with people, open up your own ideas of what others interests are

Bringing broader concepts of what constitutes Music Librarianship, be open to a broader definition, not be as insulated.

Mentorship within library and in univ/community. Issues for people taking jobs in geog areas where their ethnic group is not very represented. Acknowledge that this is an issue for them and has emotional burden.

Reach out to mentor students at area HBCUs without library programs
We Here, Now What? Bibliography


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