

## IJIDI: Book Review

Jones, S.D., & Murphy, B. (Eds.). (2019). *Diversity and inclusion in libraries: A call to action and strategies for success*. Rowman & Littlefield. ISBN 9781538114391. 192 pp. \$35 US.

**Reviewer:** Marcia K. Salmon, York University, Canada

**Book Review Editor:** Norda A. Bell, York University, Canada

**Keywords:** diversity; inclusion; libraries

**Publication Type:** book review

---

Academic, public, and research libraries in the U.S. serve a diverse community of library users and therefore it is imperative that diversity and inclusion practices are embedded in all aspects of librarianship, including collection development, cataloguing and classification, preservation, teaching, service delivery, and space planning. *Diversity and Inclusion in Libraries: A Call to Action and Strategies for Success*—part of the Medical Library Association’s book series *Library Management-Diversity and Inclusion*—provides strategies to create a more inclusive library for both staff and library users. The purpose of this book is to increase cultural awareness and sensitivity to diversity and inclusion issues in libraries as well as to issue a call to action for libraries to be more intentional and proactive with diversity and inclusion issues. The book editors argue that perpetuating stereotypes does not help the library profession and therefore increasing cultural awareness will better equip library staff to engage with diversity and inclusion in the library. The book’s target audience is professional librarians, library administrators, and paraprofessional library staff in general. Although *Diversity and Inclusion in Libraries* is published by the Medical Library Association the subject matter is not limited to those of specific interests to medical and health librarians as the book includes examples from public and academic libraries in addition to medical libraries. However, the book does emphasize the interplay between race and health.

*Diversity and Inclusion in Libraries: A Call to Action and Strategies for Success* is an edited collection of articles divided into three parts:

1. Part 1 sets the groundwork by addressing “Why Diversity and Inclusion Matter”;
2. Part 2 discusses “Equipping the Library Staff” for creating a more diverse and inclusive library; and
3. Part 3 provides “Voices from the Field”, diverse voices from library professionals discussing inclusion issues in libraries.

Part 1, “Why Diversity and Inclusion Matter”, sets the groundwork by providing an overview of diversity and inclusion in librarianship, and why it matters. The five chapters of this section include a historical perspective of African American contributions to librarianship; a literature review of diversity and inclusion in libraries; library policies that promote diversity and inclusion; the topics of implicit bias and microaggression; and a discussion of social justice and activism in

libraries. Chapter 4: “Implicit Bias and Microaggressions in Library and Information Sciences (LIS)” (Cooke and Sweeney) gives some practical suggestions for mitigating implicit bias and microaggression, including teaching about microaggression; conscious development of empathy and cultural sensitivity, and developing workplace policies or norms that prohibit microaggression. Part 1 concludes with Hankins’ discussion of subversive librarianship, social justice, and activism in libraries (“Subversive Librarianship as a Strategy for Social Justice and Activism”). This is a particularly interesting chapter which addresses subversive librarianship. Hankins states, “rarely do we look at librarians as heroes, but there have been some heroic stories of librarians who have used their skills to subvert and ultimately save libraries” (p.46). The Iraq National Libraries and Connecticut librarians are cited as examples of this heroism. During the 2003 Iraq and U.S. war many of the libraries and cultural institutions in Iraq were damaged by looting and vandalism. The Director of the National Library of Iraq publicly rebuked the looting to Iraq’s cultural institutions including libraries despite being criticized and receiving death threats for his position on the damage to Iraq’s cultural institutions. Another compelling example of subversive librarianship discussed was the four Connecticut librarians who fought and legally challenged the Patriot Act 2001 as unconstitutional to Americans. In addition to these cases, Hankins highlights several ways that librarians and archivist have demonstrated social justice principles in cataloguing or descriptive metadata and classification, such as using controlled vocabulary terms that are more inclusive. In particular, a push to change Indigenous-related headings that are respectful is still an ongoing concern.

Part 2, “Equipping the Library Staff”, offers guidance and practical strategies for recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce which is culturally sensitive and able to serve a diverse clientele. The core theme in part two of this book is about preparing library staff to work with diversity issues that are common in libraries. Some of the highlights of this part of the book include how to effectively lead a diverse and inclusive public library; guidance on aligning the libraries strategic direction with the strategic direction of the parent organization as it relates to diversity issues and how to recruit and retain a diverse library staff. This section offers suggestions for developing cultural competency and sensitivity in libraries, including providing training in this area. The final chapter in this section of the book deals with professional development in the area of diversity and inclusion training as a professional growth strategy.

Part 3, “Voices from the Field”, illustrates the experiences of library and information professionals in managing diversity and inclusion issues. This section provides a range of diverse “voices from the field” including the perspective of African American male librarians; African American women in leadership positions; Hispanic American women in public library administration; people with disabilities; and transgender people. This section also includes practical strategies on recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce in an academic library; how to effectively prepare a diversity plan; creating an education program for training culturally sensitive librarians; and advice on creating a successful task group on diversity. The book concludes with Railey’s chapter, “Prescription for Critical Consciousness, Courage, and Cultural Humility in Cross Cultural Communications”, and provides recommendations for achieving cultural humility and critical consciousness in cross-cultural communications. Cultural humility, as defined by Hook, Davis, Owen, Worthington and Utsey (2013), is the “ability to maintain an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented (or open to the other) in relation to aspects of cultural identity that are most important to the client” (p. 354). Cultural humility may be applied to librarianship in several ways, including being culturally sensitive and aware when providing services, building a library collection; and describing library materials or interpersonal interactions with colleagues. Railey’s specific recommendations for developing cultural humility

and critical consciousness are particularly useful to readers. These include consistently practicing cultural humility and critical consciousness; critically examining race; contemplating and self-reflecting on our implicit and cultural bias as well as actively working to overcome these biases; as well as contact and empathy.

*Diversity and Inclusion in Libraries: A Call to Action and Strategies for Success* fulfills its purpose of advancing cultural awareness and sensitivity to diversity and inclusion issues in libraries by giving a voice to information professionals with diverse perspectives on diversity and inclusion issues. Of value is the historical perspective of research on diversity and inclusion in library and information science literature from 1970 to 2017. However, there are several weaknesses. One such weakness of the book is that the examples and “voices from the field” were primarily taken from academic and public libraries. Unfortunately, diversity and inclusion issues in special and governmental libraries were not featured in this book.

Another weakness of the book is that the contributors were mostly visible racial minorities who, while writing from personal experiences, fell short on giving a broader perspective on issues of diversity and inclusion in libraries. Diverse ideas and opinions as well as diversity of library user groups have a place within this wider perspective. Whereas it appears there was a conscious attempt to reflect the views and experiences of racial groups of colour, a broader perspective would have added more weight to the argument of diversity and inclusion. A more balanced representation of perspectives throughout the entire book, not just the voices from the field section, would strengthen the text. In addition, sensitivity to the representation of voices is warranted. Chapter 17, “Say my Name: Transgender Acceptance Across Campus” discusses a program at the University of California Sacramento meant to improve the quality of educational experience for transgender students. This chapter was written by library administrators and does not necessarily reflect the opinions of transgendered individuals.

This book does a commendable job of providing a perspective of African American librarians working in public and academic libraries, which I can personally relate to as a Canadian academic librarian with Afro-Caribbean ancestry. It is noteworthy that this book provides some good practical strategies that could be implemented in libraries that would like to develop a diversity program. I would highly recommend this book for any library administrator interested in implementing a diversity program or any library staff member wanting to increase their cultural sensitivity to diversity issues.

## References

Hook, J. N., Davis, D. E., Owen, J., Worthington, E. L., Jr., & Utsey, S. O. (2013). Cultural humility: Measuring openness to culturally diverse clients. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 60*(3), 353-366. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0032595>

**Marcia K. Salmon** ([msalmon@yorku.ca](mailto:msalmon@yorku.ca)) is an Associate Librarian at York University, Toronto. She currently holds the position of Digital Scholarship Metadata Librarian and is a member of the Health, Sciences and Engineering Disciplinary Cluster.

