

A Loose Coupling: Aboriginal Participation in Library Education — A Selective Literature Review

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Abstract

The one constant of librarianship is the inevitability of interaction with diverse populations throughout all facets of the profession. This literature review critically examines works on the education and participation of North American Aboriginal people in the profession of librarianship and outlines the evolution of recruitment and retention strategies as they are addressed in scholarly literature. The authors pay particular attention to Canada where Aboriginal people have, historically, constituted an under-served and understudied demographic in the field of Library and Information Studies (LIS).

The authors note that much LIS literature on diversity tackles the subject in its broadest scope; even authors specifically addressing race tend to focus on all visible minorities and ignore those factors specific to Aboriginal people. Those who do examine the topic in a more targeted fashion discuss the barriers that discourage Aboriginal people from pursuing librarianship, and touch on the varying levels of success achieved by different recruitment strategies. As many of these recruitment tactics have proven inadequate, educators and academics are beginning to explore the benefits of infusing diversity education throughout LIS curricula and, going further, indigenizing academia. In more recent scholarship, the fundamental bias of Western education is increasingly discussed, and recruitment literature now reflects the need to foster an academic environment where alternate methodologies and epistemologies are used and respected, rather than studied as historic relics of a stagnant culture.

Keywords

Aboriginal librarianship, minority librarians, library and information studies, recruitment, diversity

Introduction

Discussing race is like clearing a field of landmines; regardless of good intentions, it is still a risky activity. In the field of Library and Information Studies (LIS), race is consistently understudied, even within broader library rhetoric on diversity (Honma, 2005; Pawley, 2006, p. 151). Addressing this issue challenges the construction of the library as a neutral space (Alexander, 2013, p. 60; Breu, 2003, pp. 254-257) and the core values of librarianship predicated on a democratic Western society (Becvar & Srinivasan, 2009, p. 437; Honma, 2005). In Canada, discussions of racial inequity undermine the federally enshrined tenet of multiculturalism and challenge the idealization of Canada as an egalitarian meritocracy (Lau, 2014, pp. 128-129; Schick & St. Denis, 2005, pp. 295-296 & 302-307).

Reluctance to address the issue of race is not limited to LIS education; majority members of any community have a vested interest in perpetuating the status quo and hesitate to question mainstream ideologies that, in North America at least, reinforce a white privilege informed by Eurocentric institutions (Iseke-Barnes, 2008, p. 125; Kimmel, 2002, p. 42; Lau, 2014, pp. 128-129; McIntosh, 1988, p. 4; St. Denis & Schick, 2003, pp. 55-69). This privilege allows non-marginalized populations “to pass invisibly for the norm” and perpetuates the myth that success is due to hard work and innate talent (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, p. 299). It ignores the possibility that access to success is often facilitated, at least in part, by skin colour (Majekodunmi, 2014, p. 201; McIntosh, 1988, p. 9).

Indigenous Librarianship

The failure to realistically assess the importance of race is evident in librarianship – a profession that has historically been influenced and guided by Eurocentric values. Indigenous librarianship has evolved to address this gap by approaching information management within an indigenous framework, guided by indigenous priorities and values (Callison, 2013, p. 143). Burns, Doyle, Joseph, and Krebs (2010) note that indigenous librarianship centers on the provision of culturally relevant collections and services for indigenous people, aiming to “honor and build bridges from existing knowledge and skills to strengthen Indigenous cultural identity, languages, and values” (p. 2339).

Indigenous librarianship is a unique branch of the library profession in that it emerged due to colonialism in civilizations where the dominant values of mainstream librarianship were imported by colonizing races and do not reflect the information management needs of the pre-existing culture. Indigenous librarianship provides unique and valuable approaches to research and methodology but, because of its existence outside the norm, struggles to maintain credibility within the broader profession (Burns, Doyle, Joseph, and Krebs, 2010). Although indigenous librarians are consistently identified as necessary to the library profession, their numbers in Canada remain low; data from the 8Rs research study estimates fewer than 25 Aboriginal librarians in all of Canada (Lee, 2008, p. 149). Worse yet, according to Kandiuk (2014), “there are currently no formal

initiatives in Canada to recruit Aboriginal and visible/racial minority librarians into LIS programs” (p. 516).

Terminology

Anuik and Gillies (2012) note that the deliberate and conscientious use of specific terminology wherever possible can mitigate the tendency to make broad assumptions based on uninformed cultural stereotypes (pp. 68-74). In Canada, Aboriginal identity and ancestry is complex and may or may not be self-reported. As a result, definitions of what constitutes “Aboriginal” can be somewhat nebulous. The most common labels applied to indigenous people in North America are relics of colonial oppression. Native American, American Indian, Aboriginal, and First Nations all denote an artificially imposed collectivity whose primary benefit is the increased capacity for collective negotiations with various levels of government (Iseke-Barnes, 2008, p. 124).

In this paper, the terms used reflect the choice(s) of the cited author(s); “American Indian” and “Native American” often reference dated or American research using these labels, despite their potential for offence. Otherwise, general discussions use the term “Aboriginal” and invoke the Statistics Canada definition¹. “Indigenous” is used as a global reference.

Characteristics of Available Research

This is not a comprehensive literature review. Rather, it is a brief survey of literature on the education and representation of Aboriginal people in librarianship, paying particular attention to Canada, where Aboriginal librarianship has been influenced by a notable lack of public libraries on Aboriginal lands. Articles and research papers were selected from more than 200 separate resources based on their relevance to the topic and, occasionally, their significance in the overall scholarship. Because of the notable shortage of Canadian materials on Aboriginal librarianship, American resources have been included, as well as those examining minority groups in general, with specific attention paid to information on Aboriginal populations².

Thews notes that the subject of Native Americans in librarianship did not appear in library indexes until 1964; prior to this, the literature more generally discussed minorities or disadvantaged people (as cited in Fisher, 1983, p. 25). A significant (though not extensive) body of work on Native American people and librarianship published between 1969 and 1976 appears to be linked to the availability of federal funding

¹ “Aboriginal identity refers to whether the person reported identifying with the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. This includes those who reported being an Aboriginal person, that is, First Nations (North American Indian), Métis or Inuk (Inuit) and/or those who reported Registered or Treaty Indian status, that is registered under the Indian Act of Canada, and/or those who reported membership in a First Nation or Indian band. Aboriginal peoples of Canada are defined in the Constitution Act, 1982, Section 35 (2) as including the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada” (Statistics Canada, 2015).

² The Employment Equity Act of Canada’s definition of visible minorities specifically excludes Aboriginal people, yet research on visible minority populations often fails to make this distinction (Lee & Kumaran, 2014, p. xiii; Stonepath Research Group, 2015, p. 7).

(Heyser as cited in Heyser & Smith, 1980, p. 353). Roy (2007) also discusses this historical lack of demonstrated interest in the subject; it is again mentioned as recently as 2013, indicating that the problem of limited scholarship persists (Al-Qallaf & Mika, 2013, p. 6).

Higgins (1979) is one of the first authors to provide recommendations expressly for American Indian recruitment into librarianship based on research (pp. 1-37). Smith (1983) touches on the lack of role models, paltry job opportunities on reserves, and a lack of academically qualified baccalaureates, going on to suggest recruitment strategies that could mitigate these problems (L. Smith, pp. 201-202). Guillory and Wolverton (2008) discuss collaboration, internships, role modeling, financial assistance, distance education, and family support as possible ways to increase Aboriginal recruitment and retention (p. 81). Other than these studies, anecdotal accounts, histories, opinion pieces, and case studies discuss the topic with recommendations to increase enrolment (for example, Abdoo, 2004, pp. 36-38; Biggs, 2004, pp. 41-43; Hall, 1977, pp. 751-754; Mclsaac, Quamahongnewa, & Finneman, 1984, pp. 38-41; Montiel-Overall & Littletree, 2010, pp. 67-87; Naumer, 1974, pp. 1-73; Roy & Cherian, 2006, pp. 48-52; J. Smith, 1971, pp. 223-238). Many works on minority recruitment into LIS also discuss recruitment strategies but do not address Aboriginal populations specifically (for example, Adkins & Hussey, 2005, pp. 229-233; Buttlar & Caynon, 1992, pp. 259-280; Kim & Sin, 2008, pp. 153-177; Neely, 2005, pp. 93-117).

From a Canadian perspective, research into LIS recruitment of Aboriginal people is almost nonexistent. After a period of scant coverage starting in 1967 (Adamson, 1969, pp. 48-54; Heyser & Smith, 1980, pp. 353-368; Joseph, 1980, pp. 1-18; Sparvier, 1967, pp. 15-18), Hills (1997) is the first author to thoroughly investigate the relationship between librarianship, library education, and Aboriginal people in Canada, directly endorsing the earlier work of Higgins (pp. 266-267). After Hills, discussion of the topic in Canada, like American writing of the time, is brief and heavily intertextual (for example, Bartleman, 2003, pp. 248-249; Breu, 2003, pp. 254-257; Crawford, 2011, pp. 54-56; Joseph & Lawson, 2003, pp. 245-247; Lawlor, 2003, pp. 240-244) and much of the available literature relies, perhaps more heavily than it should, on several relatively dated studies and articles.

Overgeneralization of the Issue

LIS literature on diversity generally tackles the subject from a broad perspective that addresses all special interest groups including, but not limited to, those defined by race, gender, disability, and sexual identity (for example, Adkins & Hussey, 2005, pp. 229-233; Allard, Mehra, & Qayyum, 2007, pp. 5-12; Brewer, 1997, pp. 528-537; Elteto, Jackson, & Lim, 2008, pp. 325-337; Jaeger, Bertot, & Franklin, 2010, pp. 175-181; Jaeger & Franklin, 2007, pp. 20-26; Kim & Sin, 2008, pp. 153-177; Love, 2007, pp. 13-19; Love, 2010, pp. 482-492; Martin, 1994, pp. 2-9; Stanley, 2007, pp. 83-89). Pawley (2006), however, notes that focusing on diversity as an umbrella topic can trivialize the

concerns of those social groups facing significant obstacles to education by including them with others whose struggles are fairly minimal³ (pp. 152-158).

Those authors who do specifically address race tend to focus on all visible minorities, ignoring factors specific to Aboriginals, such as their complicated relationship with the federal government, the legacy of residential schools, their possession of indigenous knowledge, and jurisdictional boundaries, to name a few (Heyser & Smith, 1980, p. 366; Becvar & Srinivasan, 2009, p. 426). This has resulted in the development of recruitment policies and standards based on overgeneralized LIS scholarship and may have contributed to the persistent lack of Aboriginal representation in the library profession, despite its rhetoric of diversity and inclusion.

Even within the smaller category of North American Aboriginals, overgeneralization remains an issue. As previously noted, the “pan-Indian” (Alexander, 2013, p. 63; Anuik & Gillies, 2012, p. 64) terms used to describe indigenous people are imposed colonial constructions that create a collective identity for legal and political purposes (Iseke-Barnes, 2008, p. 124). These labels create the impression of homogeneity where it does not necessarily exist. Since rural and urban people may draw from different experiences, and tribes have different cultures, histories, and levels of assimilation, it is impossible to make assumptions or sweeping statements that accurately apply to all Aboriginal people (Barber, 2009, p. 35; J. Mihesuah, 2004, p. 192; Wiseman, 2000, p. 623).

Why is the Topic Important?

The lack of public library service to Aboriginal people, particularly on reserves and Métis settlements in Canada, reflects funding problems and jurisdictional boundaries (Stonepath Research Group, 2015, p. 1). Dorr and Akeroyd (2001) note “it’s hard to make a case for libraries and public access to computing when issues such as healthcare, housing, drug and alcohol counseling – even telephone connectivity are pressing” (p. 38). Some literature suggests many Aboriginal people recognize the value of libraries and have repeatedly expressed a desire for library access (Ahenakew, 1978, p. 2; Edwards, 2005, p. 89-168; Hills, 1997, p. 255; Patterson, 1995, p. 40; Patterson, 2003, p. 158), so the question is not so much whether or not libraries are wanted, but rather, how to provide, staff, and fund them.

Because of the difficulties inherent in any approach that targets race or ethnicity, some institutions have attempted to promote diversity by encouraging a “trickle down” effect rather than tailoring policies and services to specific groups. This assumption – that addressing wide-reaching barriers will improve service to the few – can be a safe attempt to improve access without stereotyping or stigmatizing, but it is not always particularly effective. Given the significant differences between various cultures and demographics, this approach can simply perpetuate the status quo, rather than effect significant and meaningful change (Martin, 1994, pp. 6-7).

³ Pawley (2006) notes, for example, that in a workshop on multiculturalism, “knitters” were considered to comprise a special interest group in a diverse library (p. 152).

In contrast, outreach service results from the segregation of multiculturalism (i.e., creating a multicultural librarian) rather than the infusion of it throughout the profession. This fosters “racialized thinking” (Pawley, 2006, p. 158; Martin, 1994, p. 7) that emphasizes the dichotomy between marginal and core service recipients and normalizes white values and priorities (Breu, 2003, p. 255; McIntosh, 1988, p. 4). Miranda (2003) notes the particular insult felt when Native American people are relegated to peripheral services on their own land (p. 345). Further, the fundamental bias inherent in this style of service can dilute its effectiveness. Public library outreach services have targeted Aboriginal populations for many years (for example, Adamson, 1969, pp. 48-54; Heyser & Smith, 1980, pp. 353-368; Hollaran, 1990, pp. 31-48; Naumer, 1974, pp. 1-73; J. Smith, 1971, pp. 223-238), yet libraries are still often perceived as alien or uninviting environments for Aboriginal people (Lee, 2001, p. 271). Discontinuation of these programs then exacerbates this “othering” while sending mixed messages to minority populations about their value and priority within the library’s catchment (Lawson, 2004, pp. 27-29). This growing acknowledgement of the racism and paternalism that informed policies of assimilation and segregation has created a pressing need for collaborative services *with* Aboriginal governments and communities, rather than *to* them (Ahenakew, 1978, pp. 2-5; Cavanagh, 2009, pp. 10-28).

One constant of librarianship is the inevitability of interaction with diverse populations throughout all facets of the profession. Regardless of a student’s specific education track, LIS diversity training is both necessary and beneficial (Allard, Mehra, & Qayyum, 2007, pp. 5-12; Mestre, 2010, pp. 479-488) because the global exchange of information has prioritized the demand for cultural competencies in librarianship – a fact that is increasingly reflected in professional job postings requesting multilingualism, experience working in multicultural settings, and visible minority applicants (Al-Qallaf & Mika, 2013, p. 17). To remain relevant in a changing environment, LIS programs must develop multicultural curricula for students and encourage them to think beyond Western or Eurocentric ideas. The Canadian Library Association (CLA) recognizes this trend and advocates that librarians should “contribute to a culture that recognizes diversity and fosters social inclusion,” yet does not specifically mandate the cultivation of a diverse professional cohort (para.1).

Jaeger and Franklin’s (2007) virtuous circle models a proactive, self-perpetuating cycle of diversity in librarianship that positions recruitment as an integral cog in the larger mechanism of academia (pp. 20-26). According to their model, a diverse profession can influence the career choice of others through mentorship, role modeling, and advocacy, thus encouraging visible minorities to pursue a career in librarianship – historically a white, middle-class profession (Dilevko & Gottlieb, 2004, p. 56). Proportionate ethnic representation within the student cohort broadens the profession by encouraging new ideas and challenging mainstream, postcolonial assumptions, both professionally and academically. This graduating cohort in turn facilitates a more inclusive library environment, ideally eliminating the negative stigma that often attaches to outreach style librarianship performed by a predominantly Eurocentric institution in a multiethnic community. In academia, multiethnic LIS faculty can provide “intellectual and actualized ways to represent local knowledge, ontologies, conceptualizations, and experiences of

diverse multicultural populations” (Allard, Mehra, & Qayyum, 2007, p. 8). On the other hand, lack of minority presence in LIS faculty creates a vicious cycle of underrepresentation throughout the profession (Jaeger & Franklin, 2007, p. 22; de la Peña McCook & Lippincott, 1997, pp. 30-32). In essence, showing diversity encourages diversity (Davis-Kendrick, 2009, p. 47; Stanley, 2007, pp. 83-89).

The American Library Association’s (ALA) Standards for Accreditation of Master’s Programs in Library and Information Studies (2008) requires “policies to recruit and retain students who reflect the diversity of North America’s communities,” but fails to provide precise evaluative measures to determine the success of these policies (p. 9). Courses offered by ALA accredited schools must meet ALA requirements, which currently mandate diversity instruction in the broadest possible terms, a generalization that inevitably glosses over ideas that arise in more specific discussions (Al-Qallaf & Mika, 2007, pp. 2-4, 1-20; Honma, 2005; Pawley, 2006, p. 152). Diversity is either given a minimum quota of class time or offered as an elective rather than a required course (Al-Qallaf & Mika, 2007, p. 16; Subramaniam & Jaeger, 2010, p. 119). The net result of this cursory nod is a significant disconnect between the extent to which LIS educators feel they are teaching diversity and the extent to which graduating students feel prepared to work in multicultural environments upon graduation (Mestre, 2010, pp. 479-488; Jaeger, Bertot, & Franklin, 2010, pp. 175-181). Belay notes that “multiculturalism does not introduce new topics but rather new approaches to teaching old topics” (as cited in Chu, 1994, p. 142), suggesting that LIS could more effectively teach cultural competencies by integrating diversity training throughout LIS, rather than simply assigning it a defined time allotment (Alexander, 2013, p. 65; Hills, 1997, pp. 261-262; Jaeger & Franklin, 2007, p. 23; St. Denis & Schick, 2003, pp. 55-69; Subramaniam & Jaeger, 2010, pp. 109-127; Montiel-Overall, 2009, pp. 175-204).

Aboriginal Representation in the LIS Profession

Though they have the potential to offer cultural insight, Aboriginal library staff are rare, particularly in professional positions (Hills, 1997, p. 256; Ingles et al., 2005, p. 2; Joseph & Lawson, 2003, p. 244; Lee, 2008, p. 149; Loyer, 2014, p. 81; Roy & Hogan, 2010, p. 140). Even tribal colleges and universities, which must have libraries run by fully qualified librarians to meet accreditation requirements, are often staffed by non-Aboriginal librarians (Patterson & Taylor, 1996, pp. 319-322). This scarcity is not a new problem. As early as 1977, in his survey of 22 library schools, Totten found only one declared Native American student (p. 23). In his 1978 address to the CLA Conference, Chief David Ahenakew stated unequivocally, “there are not enough Indians with specialized training in this field” (p. 5), also noting that “Indian control of Indian information is every bit as important as control of education, economic development, [and] health services” (p. 2).

The absence of Aboriginal voices in professional literature results in a body of scholarly publications written primarily *about* Aboriginal people, rather than *by* them. This has significant consequences for the core values, collection policies, and classification systems that characterize the library (Alexander, 2013, pp. 61-65; Allard, Mehra, &

Qayyum, 2007, pp. 5-12; Becvar & Srinivasan, 2009, p. 437; Cooper, 2002, pp. 43-48; Lee, 2001, p. 282; Roy & Hogan, 2010, pp. 144-145), since control of information organization and access is directly related to the strength of a culture's presence in society (Allard, Mehra, & Qayyum, 2007, p. 8). Because privilege is often invisible and therefore taken for granted, non-Aboriginal librarians are often unaware of the ways in which libraries contribute to the dominant social narrative (Kimmel, 2002, p. 42; McIntosh, 1988, p. 10; Allard, Mehra, & Qayyum, 2007, pp. 5-12; Manoff as cited in Lee, 2001, p. 282).

Tokenism and Misinformation

Minority recruitment in general – and Aboriginal recruitment in particular – has high potential for tokenism, which is inversely predicated on the same stereotyping assumptions as overgeneralization (Brewer, 1997, p. 534; Currie, Wild, Schopflocher, Laing, & Veugelers, 2012, p. 623; Deloria Jr., 2004, p. 28; Hills, 1997, p. 257; Mestre, 2010, p. 486; Miranda, 2003, p. 338; Patterson, 2000, p. 188; Peterson, 2005, p. 167). Instead of broad assumptions applied to individuals, those individuals are expected to represent entire populations, and assumptions are made about the many based on the actions of a few. When racial minorities are underrepresented in academia or the workplace, assignments may be given based on ethnicity rather than interest, willingness, or qualifications, thereby increasing workloads disproportionately and pigeonholing visible minorities (Brewer, 1997, p. 534; Miranda, 2003, p. 338; Patterson, 2000, p. 188; Peterson, 2005, p. 167). For Aboriginal people, this may add to the pressure to be a “good Indian” who disproves negative stereotypes (Currie et al., 2012, p. 623). Miranda (2003) observes that as the only Native American (or even visible minority) student in many university classes, she was often considered “the sole representative of all Indians or even – incredibly – all people of color, sexual minorities, and disabled populations” (p. 338). Furthermore, Martin (1994) notes that fulfilling diversity mandates through the hiring of one individual can have a scapegoating effect which removes the obligation for other faculty and staff to address the issue, thus reinforcing marginalization (p. 7).

This subtext of racism, whether unintentional or deliberate, is informed in part by larger misconceptions about Aboriginal culture influenced by the notable absence of officially endorsed Aboriginal voices in non-Aboriginal institutions. Cooper (2002) refers to this skewed perception as a product of “American society’s master narrative” (p. 46) that presents indigenous culture as a homogenous, stagnant relic of a bygone era, rather than a relevant and dynamic way of life (Hudson, 2012, p. 80). Hagan (1978) neatly captures this disconnect between fact and myth, characterizing the American Indian as an “archival captive” and notes that “to be an Indian means having non-Indians control the documents from which other non-Indians write their version of your history” (p. 135). The stigma fostered by this misinformation contributes to a self-perpetuating cycle of negative stereotypes and low expectations that can adversely affect academic or professional performance (Currie et al., 2012, p. 618; Majekodunmi, 2014, p. 202; Steinhauer, 2001, pp. 183-188; Welburn, 2010, p. 359).

Recruitment

A 2005 survey of on-reserve First Nations people indicated that “70 percent of young people⁴ who responded to the survey, aspire to pursue higher education” (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009, p. 50). This desire, if pursued, could mutually benefit both Aboriginal students and educational institutions. Who, then, would be responsible for facilitating this relationship?

In the late 1970s, Higgins commented on the ineffective recruitment and training of American Indians in LIS programs⁵ (1979, pp. 1-2). Despite the fact that those factors which do foster an individual’s interest in librarianship⁶ appeared in recruitment literature as far back as 1977 (Naumer, 1977, pp. 1-12; Townley, 1977, pp. 19-27; Wood, 1977, pp.13-18), almost thirty years later, Higgins’ observations still held true. Adkins and Hussey (2005), for example, observe that scholarships, flexible course schedules, and distance education opportunities all benefit a student who has already chosen the LIS field, not one whose career choice is undecided (p. 230).

Many past recruitment initiatives have simply reinforced the status quo by assuming that the onus for adaptation lies with the student (Barnhardt, 1994, p. 129). Wells, for example, cites finances, a lack of preparation, inadequate student adjustment, and personal problems as the major factors contributing to a Native American student’s struggles at the collegiate level (as cited in Thomason & Thurber, 1999, p. 26). The assumptions that underlie this mentality have obvious flaws: racial classification is socially constructed, yet many factors perceived as barriers to Aboriginal education are attributed to a racial incompatibility with the university environment. Treating all Aboriginal students, let alone all visible minorities, as a homogenous group is insulting and results in inadequate broad-spectrum strategies (Alexander, 2013, pp. 65-66; Montiel-Overall & Littletree, 2010, pp. 67-87). Focusing on student barriers and deficiencies risks ghettoizing these populations and reinforces the pre-existing stigma suggesting that Aboriginal students are unsuited for academia (Brewer, 1997, p. 529; Currie et al., 2012, pp. 620). Further, student-focused recruitment policies tie incentives to the individual’s declaration of Aboriginal status, thus undermining the premise of choice that informs self-identification.

Some studies citing racial barriers attribute to ethnicity that which might rightfully result from socioeconomic or geographic influences. Kim and Sin (2008), for example, note that a 1992 US survey of factors influencing LIS as a chosen profession shows that only 15 percent of Native American participants travelled out of state to attend library school (this was the lowest of all ethnic minority groups polled) (p. 171). They attribute this to the value that Native Americans place on community, but neglect to consider financial or geographic trends as possible influences.

⁴ In this report, youth are defined as being between 6-18 years of age and young adults are defined as being between 19-34 years of age (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009, p. 31).

⁵ Higgins also included Spanish surnamed individuals in his study.

⁶ Familiarity with the profession, recognition of LIS service components, and the perception of LIS as a “respectful profession” (Adkins & Hussey, 2005, p. 230).

In Canada, the 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey shows that literacy levels, once adjusted for educational attainment, are similar when comparing urban Aboriginal with urban non-Aboriginal adults, indicating that educational lags among Aboriginal populations have origins other than race (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009, p. 58). Geographic barriers, for example, play a key role in determining Native American educational outcomes, given that many reserves and Métis settlements are small and distant from post-secondary institutions (Dilevko & Gottlieb, 2004, p. 44). The Canadian Council on Learning (2009) notes that based on 2006 Canadian Census responses, on-reserve First Nations and Inuit had the lowest university attainment levels (each had 4 percent) of all Aboriginal groups, while off-reserve First Nations and Métis had the highest (each had 9 percent) (p. 46). Of those Aboriginal people living in large urban areas, 12 percent had some form of university education, compared to 7 percent of those living in small towns and 6 percent of those in rural communities⁷, indicating the possibility that distance and rurality is a factor in post-secondary participation. The relatively recent online education trend in LIS holds promise, but for rural populations, it may not be the panacea it would seem (Adams & Evans, 2004, p. 11). In many rural Aboriginal communities, computer access and internet connectivity is limited, unreliable, and, in some cases, lacking altogether (Canadian Council on Learning, 2010; McMahon, O'Donnell, Smith, Walmark, & Beaton, 2011, pp. 1-15).

Socioeconomic factors have a definite influence on Aboriginal participation in education beyond high school: Statistics Canada's Aboriginal People's Survey shows that 27 percent of Aboriginal survey participants did not enrol in or complete post-secondary education because they chose to work instead (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009, p. 50). Further, an Aboriginal person's career choice may be directly related to professional opportunities in the individual's home community (Hills, 1997, pp. 255-257; Maina, 2012, p. 21; Patterson, 2000, pp. 182-193); a reserve resident, for example, might hesitate to choose a career in librarianship, knowing that on-reserve job prospects for that profession are limited at best.

Beyond the obvious problems inherent in focusing on individual access to post-secondary education lies a deeper and more difficult subtext: the displacement of onus onto the individual absolves the institution from any obligation to make significant or meaningful internal change. Recruitment strategies that focus on student adaptation ignore fundamental cultural differences, repeating a pattern that has characterized the history of Aboriginal education in non-Aboriginal institutions, and culminating – but not ending – in the residential school travesty of the 19th and 20th centuries. The residential school mandate of assimilation and cultural genocide fostered the current culture of Aboriginal suspicion toward Eurocentric institutions (Tharp et al., 1999, pp. 5-25). Because this “legacy of colonization” forms the substrate for mainstream social and educational infrastructure, colonization continues to be a current, lived reality for Aboriginal people today (Alexander, 2013, p. 63; D. Mihesuah, 2004, pp. 145-146; Miranda, 2003, p. 334).

⁷ It is unclear whether these numbers indicate that higher numbers of urban Aboriginal people enrol in university compared to rural and small town Aboriginal people, or if Aboriginal people with university education are more likely to settle in urban areas after leaving school. Regardless, at the time the survey was conducted, the number indicates fewer university educated Aboriginal individuals living on reserves or in rural communities.

In 2002, Raphael Guillory conducted a study to examine discrepancies between Native American identified barriers to academic success and those identified by university administrators (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008, pp. 58-87). The results indicate that encouraging Native American enrolment and retention requires a shift away from the usual ad hoc, reactionary strategies that focus solely on individual need. Instead, creating a more inclusive environment that incorporates alternative cultures and epistemologies throughout the institution would facilitate connections and relevance for Native American students. Guillory and Wolverton caution, however, that approaching diversity as an end result of institutional change does not remove the need for support, be it financial or otherwise, on an individual basis (2008, p. 81). Financial assistance, Aboriginal student services, childcare, and online access are still necessary and helpful initiatives (Barnhardt, 1994, pp. 115-139; Currie et al., 2012, pp. 620-622; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008, p. 81; J. Miheuah, 2004, p. 195).

Literature on diversity recruitment and Aboriginal participation in post-secondary education is beginning to focus on the possible benefits of infusing diversity education in general (Al-Qallaf & Mika, 2013, pp. 1-20) and indigenous cultures and epistemologies⁸ in particular throughout academia (Jaeger, Bertot & Franklin, 2010, p. 177; Maina, 2012, pp. 13-27; Steinhauer, 2001, pp. 183-188; Thomason & Thurber, 1999, p. 26). Wollock notes that the transition from compulsory to non-compulsory schooling (i.e., high school to university) is the weakest link of Aboriginal education, exposing the “loose coupling” of indigenous culture and Western education (as cited in Wiseman, 2000, p. 622) where Aboriginal enrolment rates decline dramatically. However, diversity recruitment alone is insufficient to change the climate of academia and can in fact damage campus race relations if it does not accompany broader institutional change (Barnhardt, 1994, pp. 115-139; Lee, 2008, pp. 149-161; Sidanius as cited in Welburn, p. 359; St. Denis & Schick, 2003, pp. 55-69). In a study examining Aboriginal experiences of racism at the University of Alberta, for example, researchers found that while Aboriginal students appreciated efforts made by the university to respect and include them, they still experienced persistent and even violent acts of racism, some specifically questioning their academic legitimacy – again highlighting the unintended potential for negative consequences from student-focused recruitment initiatives (Currie et al., 2012, p. 620).

Lareau and Horvat note that this “independent power of race” permeates Western institutions, privileging the white and alienating the non-white (as cited in Elteto, Jackson & Lim, 2008, p. 331; Huffman, Sill & Brokenleg, 1986; Kimmel, 2002, p. 42). Native American students, in particular, frequently comment on the sensation of “cultural loneliness” and duality experienced while living in an alien and sometimes even hostile environment (Lowery as cited in Patterson, 2000, p. 187; Alfred, 2004, p. 88; Barnhardt, 1994, pp. 115-139; Currie et al., 2012, p. 620; Huffman, Sill, & Brokenleg, 1986; Thomason & Thurber, 1999, p. 5; Wilson, 1997, pp. 535-544). At its most extreme, this incompatibility forces Native American students to choose between “cultural suicide” and “intellectual suicide” (Tierney as cited in Barnhardt, 1994, p. 129).

⁸ For a thorough discussion of indigenous methodologies and the importance of infusing indigenous knowledge systems into academia, please refer to Kovach’s *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (2009).

Universities have made superficial attempts to address this growing awareness through diversity courses, Aboriginal programs, and requirements for diversity teaching during class time. A growing body of literature, however, recognizes how these initiatives continue to “other” already marginalized populations and argues that academia should focus on the decolonization of pedagogy and policy rather than patronizing attempts to integrate Aboriginal content through token gestures (Alexander, 2013, p. 65; Breu, 2003, p. 255; Anuik & Gillies, 2012, pp. 63-79; Hudson, 2012, pp. 69-87; Iseke-Barnes, 2008, pp. 123-148; St. Denis & Schick, 2003 pp. 55-69). Decolonization involves acknowledging, in Visvanathan’s words, “the right of many forms of knowledge to exist” and recognizes the loss of knowledge that has occurred through the homogenization of mainstream culture (as cited in Hudson, 2012, p. 77)⁹. Further, it defies the dominant perception of indigenous knowledge as a static epistemology, stalled in history and no longer relevant (Becvar & Srinivasan, 2009, pp. 421-441; Hudson, 2012, p. 80).

Positive Developments

Despite the challenges inherent in Aboriginal recruitment, several developments indicate positive changes are on the horizon. Several Canadian provinces have investigated the issue of library access for Aboriginal people. The recommendations of various task force reports¹⁰ entwine recruitment strategies with suggested service improvements, highlighting the intrinsic relationship between adequate professional representation and the provision of equitable, collaborative service. These reports provide many significant and meaningful recommendations for improved service to Aboriginal populations, some of which have been approved and acted upon.

More recently, the Canadian Council on Learning developed a holistic learning measurement framework based on the lifelong learning models of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people, reflecting a broad move toward an indigenous educational paradigm that will hopefully provide a less biased picture of Aboriginal learning. In post-secondary education, Trent University recently adopted a mandate to formally recognize the validity of indigenous knowledge (Stewart, 2010)¹¹. This growing appreciation and respect for Aboriginal studies is also evident in the Tribal Libraries, Archives, and Museums (TLAM) course offered at Madison’s School of Library and Information Studies (University of Wisconsin). Other library schools have gone one step further and developed entire curricula that integrate LIS education and indigenous studies: the First

⁹ For example, Brian Deer, one of the first Aboriginal MLS educated librarians in Canada, developed classification systems that reflect indigenous epistemology, rather than the Eurocentric priorities encoded in Dewey Decimal classification (Doyle, 2006, pp. 435-442; Tomren, 2003).

¹⁰ These task force reports include:

- Saskatchewan’s [Information Is For Everyone](#) (2001)
- British Columbia’s [Libraries Without Walls: The World Within Your Reach](#) (2004)
- Ontario’s [Our Way Forward: A Strategic Plan for Ontario First Nation Public Libraries](#) (2004)
- Edmonton Public Library’s [Library Services to Aboriginal Peoples: Task Force Report](#) (2005)

¹¹ Stewart acknowledges that Elders were deprived of the right to hold tenure-track positions at the university in 2008, but suggests that the new vision statement is an inspirational move toward rectifying the situation.

Nations curriculum concentration at the University of British Columbia's School of Library, Archival, and Information Studies, the Knowledge River program offered at the University of Arizona (Tucson), and the Circle of Learning American Indian Library Association / San José School of Library and Information Studies partnership all demonstrate positive and collaborative efforts to springboard Aboriginal participation in LIS education.

Conclusion

Though Canadian Aboriginal people have historically constituted an underserved and understudied demographic in the LIS field, this destructive pattern can be remedied. Libraries and LIS education must deconstruct the familiar outreach paradigm that manifests an insulting and patronizing paternalism and focus instead on meaningful and equal relationships characterized by respect and reciprocity (Becvar & Srinivasan, 2009, p. 429; Cavanagh, 2009, p. 5; Lee, 2001, p. 265; Pidgeon, 2008, pp. 161-174; Sinclair-Sparvier, 2002; Wilson, 1997, pp. 535-544). These specific characteristics are essential in cultivating mutually beneficial partnerships that empower Aboriginal people to shed the residue of oppression and to participate successfully in educational institutions.

Moving beyond librarianship in Canada and further into the 21st century, a digital revolution "characterized as much by information loss as gain" (Visvanathan as cited in Hudson, 2012, p. 77) puts indigenous cultures in a precarious position that presents a particular urgency for the LIS profession (Maina, 2012, p. 14; Nickerson, 2008, p. 1; Cavender Wilson, 2004, p. 81). Traditional knowledge loss is a global issue that requires redress. Libraries and archives are ideally situated to assist with this pressing need, but cannot do so effectively within the current Eurocentric paradigm (Callison, 2014, p. 139, pp. 144-145; Cooper, 2002, p. 48; Hudson, 2012, pp. 69-87; Maina, 2012, p. 14). Perceptions within LIS must be broadened to include indigenous librarianship and the sustainable, culturally appropriate methodologies it embraces. Roy and Hogan (2010) note "libraries cannot support indigenous peoples' cultural rights without including indigenous librarians and library consultants in shaping the space and work of the library" (p. 137). This involves unpacking the "invisible weightless knapsack" of white privilege and the assumptions and myths it perpetuates (McIntosh, 1988, p. 2), and acknowledging that the missionary mentality that characterized the residential school system was a complete failure.

Aboriginal people must participate in the practice, scholarship, and instruction of librarianship in order to inform and transform the profession. By applying Jaeger and Franklin's virtuous circle model (2007), it is evident that the first step involves recruitment. Practical measures must be adopted that ensure Aboriginal people have equitable access and exposure to LIS education: financial support for Aboriginal LIS students, employment equity training programs, and more robust Aboriginal recruitment and retention policies, to name a few.

Information and communications technology have vast potential for Aboriginal cultural preservation and renewal (Nickerson, 2008, pp. 1-8). To facilitate this, libraries and LIS

educators must challenge essentially racist notions of civilization to include experiences that contradict the commonly accepted narrative of colonization (Hudson, 2012, p. 77). More often than not, balanced education involves unlearning as much as it involves learning, but this critical deconstruction only occurs when students are presented with challenges that cannot be easily reconciled with cherished ideas and preconceptions. This process is uncomfortable – rigorous, hard wrought, and life changing – *and it should be*.

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