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Always a Novice: Feminist Learning and Leadership Practice

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Always a Novice: Feminist Learning and Leadership Practice

Maura A. Smale

Learning about the theory and practice of intersectional feminism played an important role in my development as a librarian and a library director, and the ongoing study of feminism continues to be integral to my leadership work. The definition of feminism that I prefer is the concise and powerful statement by bell hooks: "feminism seeks to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression."[1] While I did not attend a library and information science graduate program with the express intention of becoming a library director, that is where I find myself. And while I have always considered myself a feminist, I had never studied feminism until recently and I am still new to feminist theory and practice. In sharing my experiences of embracing a novice mindset I hope to encourage others who support feminism—and especially intersectional feminist practice—to consider a leadership path in libraries.

From Academic Librarianship to Critical Pedagogy to Feminism

Like many librarians my path to this career was not direct. I returned to graduate school for my Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) after having worked as an archaeologist and in online publishing. While in graduate school I took on a few different

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1 bell hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000), vii.

internships—at a public research library, at a private university library, and at the library at Brooklyn College, part of the City University of New York (CUNY). Though by that time I had lived in New York City for fifteen years, I did not know much about CUNY before my internship at Brooklyn College. New York State education law states that the university has a "commitment to academic excellence and to the provision of equal access and opportunity for students, faculty and staff from all ethnic and racial groups and from both sexes," and that CUNY "is of vital importance as a vehicle for the upward mobility of the disadvantaged in the City of New York."[2] At Brooklyn College the library faculty and staff were dedicated and engaged, as were the students, drawn from across all boroughs of New York City. When I finished my degree and began to look for jobs I was especially interested in working at CUNY, and was delighted to be hired as Instruction Coordinator at New York City College of Technology (City Tech) in 2008.

As I immersed myself in instruction and reference in my new position, I also immersed myself in learning more about information literacy. In reading the professional literature, I found James Elmborg's and Michelle Holschuh-Simmons' articles about critical information literacy to be particularly compelling,[3] which encouraged me to create more opportunities for students to think critically about information in my instruction sessions. Reading Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* introduced me to critical pedagogy and I expanded my efforts to bring these ideas into my library classroom.[4] When I was approached by faculty in another department at City Tech who were developing a new degree program and were interested in a course on research and documentation for their students, I realized that this was an opportunity to develop a semester-length course with a focus on more than library skills. With the increased time with students we

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2 "Mission & History," City University of New York, accessed August 13, 2016, http://www2.cuny.edu/about/history.

3 James Elmborg, "Critical Information Literacy: Implications for Instructional Practice," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 32, no. 2 (2006): 192-199; and Michelle Holschuh-Simmons, "Librarians as Disciplinary Discourse Mediators: Using Genre Theory to Move Toward Critical Information Literacy," *portal: Libraries & the Academy* 5, no. 3 (2005): 297-311.

4 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000).

could explore information issues like access, privacy, and ethics, and bring in students' lived experiences with research and information use.[5] Valuing students' experiences, engaging in active learning and group work, and making space for students to contribute to and shape their classroom experiences—all are feminist pedagogical practices that I was developing.[6]

Reading, practicing, and thinking about critical information literacy led me to realize that, while I had long identified as a feminist, I had never engaged in any intentional learning about feminism or feminist theory. In early 2014, I picked up hooks' *Feminism Is For Everybody*. As hooks notes in its early pages, her intent in writing was to produce "a straightforward, clear book —easy to read without being simplistic,"[7] a promise to herself and her readers that she keeps. Many of my college and graduate courses in the social sciences and humanities had required me to read theoretical texts heavy with academic terminology and jargon, with which I had often struggled. While the value of theory I can apply to my practice is readily apparent, I have always found it more difficult to read and analyze theory that is more abstract. I prefer readings that consider practice along with theory more explicitly, and reading hooks' book was the first step in acknowledging and addressing the gap in my knowledge about feminist theory.

I began to learn more about critical librarianship, a topic that encompasses critical information literacy and feminist library practice among other themes. In April 2014, several librarians founded the #critlib chats on the social media platform Twitter to discuss topics in critical librarianship.[8] A Twitter chat, which typically consists of one or more moderators posting questions for participants to answer while using a hashtag to identify the conversation, can sometimes be a challenging venue for focused and involved discussion of a multifaceted topic like critical librarianship. However, Twitter chats

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5 Anne Leonard and Maura A. Smale, "The Three Credit Solution: Social Justice in an Information Literacy Course," in *Information Literacy and Social Justice*, ed. Lua Gregory and Shana Higgins (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2013), 143-161.

6 Maria T. Accardi, *Feminist Pedagogy for Library Instruction* (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2013), 50-52.

7 hooks, Feminism Is For Everybody, vii.

8 "Critlib Twitter Chats," accessed August 13, 2016, http://critlib.org/twitter-chats.

can be a valuable opportunity to engage in and follow the conversation with librarians across and beyond the U.S. and Canada, and I have been (and continue to be) an eager participant in the #critlib chats.[9] While I had been a Twitter user for several years, the #critlib chats mark the beginning of my own more intentional use of this social media platform as a professional development resource, especially for learning about feminism and anti-racism.

Around the same time, the U.S. and global news media increasingly began to report on the killings of people of color—especially black boys and men—by police and others. In the news and on Twitter, I followed the protests after the 2012 shooting of Trayvon Martin and the 2014 shooting of Michael Brown, sadly only two among many deaths, and the rise of the #BlackLivesMatter movement for racial justice. It became clear to me that as a white person in the United States I am complicit in what Mariana Ortega has called loving, knowing ignorance: "an ignorance of the thought and experience of women of color that is accompanied by both alleged love for and alleged knowledge about them."[10] My white privilege meant that I didn't know what I didn't know about the experiences of people of color, and I began to expand my study to include intersectional feminism, racism, and white supremacy.

Understanding Myself as a White Woman and a Feminist

I have identified as a feminist since my teen years, though throughout my early adulthood I was not drawn to feminism as a topic of academic (or extracurricular) study. I am sure that my privilege is the reason: I am a white, straight, cisgender, able-bodied, non-religious woman from a middle-class background. As a child I attended a mix of public, Catholic, and private schools, and my family and I predominantly lived in urban and suburban areas of the Northeastern U.S. in communities that were primarily though not exclusively white. I went directly

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9 Maura A. Smale, "Beyond Livetweeting: Twitter Chats for Professional Development," *ACRLog* (blog), April 21, 2014. http://acrlog.org/2014/04/21/beyond-livetweeting-twitter-chats-for-professional-development.

10 Mariana Ortega, "Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant: White Feminism and Women of Color," *Hypatia* 21, no. 3 (2006), 57.

from high school to college to a graduate program in anthropology, specializing in archaeology. After finishing my degree, I spent a few years working in online media before returning to graduate school for a Master of Library and Information Science, and have worked in academic libraries ever since. I was able to undertake several unpaid internships during my MLIS studies—essential experience, as I had not previously worked in a library—because I was fortunate enough to have a partner who could temporarily sustain our household on one income.

Though I have spent most of my life in academic environments, I have never taken a course in women's or gender studies and have not read most of the foundational feminist texts. My choice not to pursue coursework in feminism or feminist theory in college and graduate school was less a decision than a non-decision, and though it is something I regret, it is difficult to remember the specifics after twenty-five years. I suspect that my lack of engagement with feminist theory during my academic work stems from my experiences growing up in mostly white spaces in which I absorbed the lessons of white feminism from the 1960s and 1970s. I have never felt that I had to wear makeup or dress in an overtly feminine way if I preferred otherwise, and I was never dissuaded from studying archaeology, a predominantly male field. I think that I did not feel compelled to seek out intentional learning about feminism because as a white, middle-class woman, I was already benefitting from white feminism.

I also did not take courses in feminist theory in my library and information science program. More than two decades ago Jane Anne Hannigan stressed the value of studying feminist theory throughout the LIS curriculum, since the "basic premises upon which librarianship and information science have been built are structured on white, middle-class, male paradigms that have systematically, if unconsciously, silenced and excluded women."[11] The program I attended, like many programs, did not offer much LIS theory or history, which I now realize would have been especially valuable given the many problematic aspects of the history (and present state) of librarianship. As Todd Honma has noted, "from its very inception,

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11 Jane Anne Hannigan, "A Feminist Standpoint for Library and Information Science Education," *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 35, no. 4 (1994), 297.

the public library system was engaged in a racializing project, one whose purpose was to inculcate European ethnics into whiteness."[12] Maria Accardi, as interviewed by Robert Schroeder in *Critical Journeys*, suggests that lack of theory in graduate library programs may be because "the goal was to prepare you to be a practitioner."[13] It is perhaps not unusual for LIS programs that offer the master's degree exclusively rather than master's and doctoral degrees to not offer many courses in theory, though I have heard and read about many librarians who wish they had the opportunity to take theory courses.[14]

Despite my lack of training in feminist theory during my formal education, many of my education and work experiences prior to becoming a librarian (and then a library director) were informed by feminist practice. Archaeology is a collaborative discipline; it is not possible to do the work alone. Fieldwork and lab work in college and graduate school with teams of people of a range of ages, experiences, and backgrounds, as well as working with my cohort of graduate students in our student association and as research assistants, all offered the opportunity to learn with and from others as we worked toward a shared goal. In my work in online publishing I was often a member of teams with little hierarchy and lots of opportunities for everyone to contribute. When I was hired into my first full-time library position to coordinate library instruction, I was accustomed to working as part of a team. Working as Instruction Coordinator with my library faculty colleagues, faculty in other departments, and students, where I was untenured and had the least seniority, both within the library and at the college, required much collaboration, and I continued to draw on feminist practice in that role.

By the time I applied for the position of library director, my prior experiences had given me a firm, if shallow, grounding in feminist practice, providing a base from which I could continue to learn about feminist theory and build my knowledge of intersectional feminism.

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12 Todd Honma, "Trippin' Over the Color Line: The Invisibility of Race in Library and Information Studies," *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (2005), 6.

13 Maria Accardi interviewed by Robert Schroeder, *Critical Journeys: How 14 Librarians Came to Embrace Critical Practice*, (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2014), 8.

14 Ibid.

Bringing Feminism Into My Leadership Role

I would not have considered applying for a library director position if not for feminism. The statistics on diversity of all kinds in the library profession and among library leaders are disappointing, to say the least: 88% of librarians are white, as are 71% of students in MLIS programs.[15] Additionally, though 80% of all librarians identify as female, "only 58% of directors of ARL libraries are female."[16] Research by Christine L. Williams has shown that white, heterosexual men in feminized professions—of which librarianship is one—benefit from "the assumption that they are better suited than women for leadership positions."[17] And while many of the perceived attributes of management positions may discourage women and those in marginalized groups from seeking them out, as Chris Bourg has noted:

> If all of you who don't want to play politics, who don't want power & influence to change your values, and who want to have a healthy work life balance shy away from leadership positions; it might mean that you are leaving the leadership of our profession in the hands of those who aren't concerned about those things.[18]

When the former Library Director at City Tech announced his retirement in early 2014, I took seriously the disparity in men and women at the library director level. I applied for and accepted the position later that year.

My initial year as Chief Librarian was busy, with lots of change to manage both during and after the transition into my new role. During that time several library faculty and staff retired or moved to other positions, a few new staff positions were created and, as a

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15 Chris Bourg, "Lack of Diversity By the Numbers in Librarianship and in Book Stuff," *Feral Librarian* (blog), February 22, 2014. https://chrisbourg.wordpress. com/2014/02/22/lack-of-diversity-by-the-numbers-in-librarianship-and-in-book-stuff/.

16 Ibid.

17 Christine L. Williams, "The Glass Escalator, Revisited: Gender Inequality in Neoliberal Times," *Gender & Society* 27, no. 5 (2013), 609.

18 Chris Bourg, "Mentors, Gender, Reluctance: Notes from Taiga Panel on Leadership at ER&L," *Feral Librarian* (blog), March 24, 2014. https://chrisbourg. wordpress.com/2014/03/24/mentors-gender-reluctance-notes-from-taiga-panel-on-leadership-at-erl/.

result of these changes, many library faculty and staff responsibilities were reorganized. My predecessor had modeled transparency in his leadership work, sharing information with us from the meetings he attended with the administration or of various college and university committees. During the time of transition I felt that transparency was essential, and I continue to share as much information as I can with library faculty and staff, both via email and in person. I am in full agreement with other feminist leaders who have emphasized the value of transparency; as Baharak Yousefi reminds us, "do not assume that you know what others need/don't need to know."[19]

With so many transitions in the library, I spent much of my first year and a half as director recruiting and hiring to fill newly vacant positions. Much has been published in recent years on the search and interview process in library hiring as part of the ever-increasing conversation on the lack of diversity in libraries. Fobazi Ettarh stresses the importance of intersectionality in the profession of librarianship, and the need for librarians "to educate ourselves on how these intersecting oppressions affect our community."[20] April Hathcock considers the librarian job search and finds that "an application process rooted in whiteness can have a chilling effect on the types of applicants who actually apply, creating a self-selection process that further promotes whiteness in the profession."[21] Angela Galvan addresses librarian job interviews and also finds that "the interview process is a series of repetitive gestures designed to mimic and reinforce white middle class values."[22] The work of these scholars was foremost in my mind as I strove for a feminist and anti-racist hiring practice.

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19 Baharak Yousefi, "How to be a Good (Library) Boss," *Letters to a Young Librarian* (blog), May 19, 2016. https://letterstoayounglibrarian.blogspot.com/2016/05/how-to-be-good-library-boss-by-baharak.html.

20 Fobazi Ettarh, "Making a New Table: Intersectional Librarianship," *In the Library With the Lead Pipe*, July 2, 2014. http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2014/making-a-new-table-intersectional-librarianship-3/.

21 April Hathcock "White Librarianship in Blackface: Diversity Initiatives in LIS," *In the Library With the Lead Pipe*, October 7, 2015. http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/lis-diversity/.

22 Angela Galvan, "Soliciting Performance, Hiding Bias: Whiteness and Librarianship," *In the Library With the Lead Pipe,* June 3, 2015. http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/soliciting-performance-hiding-bias-whiteness-and-librarianship/.

I added our college's Equal Employment Opportunity statement at the beginning of each job ad we circulated, supplementing its usual appearance at the end of the ad. During search committee meetings we overtly discussed the diversity of the applicant pool for each position, in addition to considering the college-provided Affirmative Action statistics for the Library. These efforts are just a start; the next time we are able to hire I will continue to look for ways to increase the diversity of our applicant pool, including promoting positions via listservs and publications of the American Library Association ethnic caucuses.

I also bring feminism into my leadership practice by scheduling regular meetings with everyone who works in the library. While meetings are often reviled in libraries, academia, and other organizational settings for their potential to waste time, I appreciate meetings as a way to both discuss and work together towards shared goals, and I try to be mindful of others' time and commitments by planning (and following) an agenda. In my current role, this means regular meetings with all full-time library faculty and staff, both clerical and professional; with the library faculty and professional staff; and one-on-one meetings with each member of the library faculty and staff whom I supervise directly. Our all-library meeting is a dedicated time for us to share information with each other about regular library operations and projects. It is a useful opportunity for me as a leader and for all of our library workers—Public Services and Technical Services, faculty and staff—to stay informed about our experiences with our jobs and with members of the college community. I should note that at City Tech we have a relatively small library with a total of 24 full-time workers (myself included). I acknowledge that in a small library with a relatively flat hierarchy, transparency and communication via meetings and other means may be easier to implement than in a larger or multi-site library.

Continuing to Learn About Intersectional Feminism and Anti-Racism

As I have learned more about feminist theory, I have been led to the related themes of intersectionality, whiteness, and racism and continuing bias against marginalized peoples, and to striving for inclusive practice in my leadership work and beyond. The chapters on race and feminist class struggle in *Feminism Is For Everybody* were

my introduction to intersectionality, after which I read legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw's 1989 article in which she coined the term. In her analysis of several anti-discrimination cases, Crenshaw demonstrated that the use of a "single-axis framework" to keep gender and race separate rendered the experiences of black women invisible.[23] Given the continued whiteness of librarianship, taking action to make my feminism intersectional seems especially critical, following Crenshaw's assertion that "feminism must include an analysis of race if it hopes to express the aspirations of non-white women."[24] As Crenshaw and Ortega have noted, working with and learning about women of color forces white women to acknowledge their participation in the system of white privilege, which is difficult,[25] a reality that I continue to face in my own studies.

I have made it a priority to learn more about intersectional feminism. Many of the professional development opportunities available to me enable intentional learning about feminism and anti-racism. At conferences, I seek out sessions on topics in critical librarianship and diversity and inclusion in higher education, and I have also participated in anti-racism workshops outside of librarianship. Some provide opportunities for white people to work specifically with other white people. They provide a place for white people to learn more about dismantling white supremacy without requesting that people of color, who experience racism every day, take on the additional work of educating us. Face to face and interpersonal venues for learning are valuable because they offer a chance to listen to and learn from others and to work through difficult topics together. I also appreciate that attending conferences and workshops can provide dedicated time and space for learning and reflection. While I am an introvert, I work to push past the hesitation I can feel at the prospect of engaging in difficult discussions. It is important to do this work in conversation with others, since sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression are structural, persistent problems without easy solutions.

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23 Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1 (1989), 139-140.

24 Ibid.,166.

25 Ibid.,154; and FOrtega, "Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant," 68.

I have also continued to engage in self-directed learning about feminism and anti-racism. There is so much to read, from academic books and articles to magazine and newspaper pieces, and I have also changed my fiction reading habits to regularly scan the #weneeddiversebooks[26] lists for leisure reading suggestions. I am grateful to librarians and others who have created reading lists and collected resources on these topics.[27] Twitter remains one of my favorite venues for self-directed learning. Even as the social media platform has changed over the years to become more overtly corporate, and despite very real concerns about the environment of toxic harassment that many women, people of color, those who identify as LGBTQ+, and other marginalized people face, Twitter still represents a unique opportunity to listen and learn. Listening is key: by respectfully listening and giving space for those who do not share our identit(ies) to engage in discussion, we can learn much about how we can all work to resist sexism, racism, and oppression in all forms. And as Elvia Arroyo-Ramirez and Jenna Freedman emphasized in their workshop on microaggressions and zines at the LACUNY Institute in 2016, zines (and other media) produced by people of color are a terrific way for whites to self-educate without burdening people of color.[28]

Continued learning has made me more aware of the lack of intersectional feminist perspectives in events, programs, and conversations across my work in academic librarianship and as a library director. Two decades ago, Jane Anne Hannigan and Hilary Crew emphasized the need to question male-focused management models in LIS education, and wondered how librarianship "can resist the domination of male management models that encompass gender/power inequalities in their basic assumptions, especially when such inequalities are embedded in the rhetoric of texts used

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26 *We Need Diverse Books*, accessed August 13, 2016, http://weneeddiversebooks.org/.

27 Hathcock, "Recommended Reading," *At the Intersection*; Jessica Schomburg, "#CritLib and Diversity Related Books that I've Read," *Research about Cataloging and Assessment and More…* https://catassessmentresearch.blogspot.com/2016/02/critlib-and-diversity-related-books.html.

28 Elvia Arroyo-Ramirez and Jenna Freedman, "Offensive Mechanisms, Constructive Paths: How to Recognize and Deal with Microaggressions in the LIS Field" (presentation at the LACUNY Institute, Race Matters: Libraries, Racism, and Antiracism, Brooklyn, NY, June 2016).

in the educational process."[29] Beyond LIS graduate coursework there are many professional programs that focus on library leadership, in academic and other libraries, which often aim to develop management skills among librarians who are interested in leadership or who may have come into a leadership position without explicit training. However, as Jessica Olin and Michelle Millet have shared about their experiences "gender is barely mentioned, if at all, in such settings."[30] While I have found much of value in my own experiences with leadership development, I have found the lack of explicitly feminist and intersectional teachings on leadership to be all the more stark given the diversity expressed by my fellow attendees of these programs.

Though I did not learn more about intersectional feminism early in my education and careers, one advantage of my delay is that I have immediate contexts in which to apply theory to practice in my work. Scholars including Maria Accardi, Jane Anne Hannigan, and Jennifer Vinopal have offered concrete suggestions for feminist library leadership practice.[31] In the process of hiring several tenure-track library faculty, I have and continue to be mindful of not just recruitment, but also retention. Research has shown that the promotion and tenure process can be especially fraught for women, people of color, and other marginalized groups, both in academic libraries and academia more generally.[32] Karin Griffin notes that many of the usual tensions in the relationships between librarians and faculty "can exacerbate a sense of exclusion" for people of

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29 Jane Anne Hannigan and Hilary Crew, "A Feminist Paradigm for Library and Information Science," *Wilson Library Bulletin* 68, no. 2 (1993), 29.

30 Jessica Olin and Michelle Millet, "Gendered Expectations for Leadership in Libraries," *In the Library With the Lead Pipe*, November 4, 2015. http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/libleadgender/.

31 Hannigan, "A Feminist Standpoint;" Accardi, *Feminist Pedagogy for Library Instruction*; Jennifer Vinopal "The Quest for Diversity in Library Staffing: From Awareness to Action," *In the Library With the Lead Pipe,* January 13, 2016. http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2016/quest-for-diversity/.

32 Ione T. Damasco and Dracine Hodges, "Tenure and Promotion Experiences of Academic Librarians of Color," *College & Research Libraries* 73, no. 3 (2012): 279-301; and Tricia Matthew, "Here on the Margins: My Academic Home," *PMLA* 130, no. 5 (2015): 1510-1514.

color.[33] In their panel at the Association of College and Research Libraries Conference, Jaena Alabi, Bridget Farrell, Claudine Jenda, and Pambanisha Whaley discussed the importance of inclusivity in the library workplace, and shared details both on what to watch for—microaggressions, imposter syndrome, and burnout —and the value of mentoring.[34]

I appreciate the opportunity to learn more about intersectional feminism and to feed theory back into my practice. I may have come to theory late, but it is still very much of value to me as a library leader, for as Accardi notes in *Critical Journeys*: "you can practice feminist pedagogy without understanding or being aware of the theory, but in order for it to really transform you as a teacher, you need to know the theories or be aware of them."[35]

Embracing the Novice Mindset: Challenges and Opportunities

While I embrace the novice mindset and commit myself to continual learning, striving for intersectional feminist library leadership is not without challenges for me. Time is paramount: I must intentionally make time for this work though time can be in short supply as a director. I am not alone in this concern, as Jennifer Vinopal has asked: "How can leaders maintain a focus on these issues and hold themselves and the organization accountable, even while tending to all the other work of the organization?" I appreciate the suggestions that she offers in her article for actionable ways forward, which include recommendations for creating a diversity plan, recruitment, mentoring, and internships.[36]

The process of submitting a proposal for and then writing this essay has led me to read more, and to read with more purpose. And

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33 Karin Griffin, "Pursuing Tenure and Promotion in the Academy: A Librarian's Cautionary Tale," *Negro Educational Review* 64, no. 1-4 (2013): 95.

34 Jaena Alabi, Bridget Farrell, Claudine Jenda, and Pambanisha Whaley, "You Belong Here: The Importance of Cultivating an Inclusive Organizational Culture" (presentation, Association of College and Research Libraries Conference, Portland, OR, March 25-28, 2015).

35 Accardi, Schroeder, *Critical Journeys*, 12.

36 Vinopal, "The Quest for Diversity."

as I read and learn more I also wrestle with impostor syndrome, as I know others do. Have I missed out on too much by not studying feminist theory in college or graduate school? Have I learned enough—and have I put my new knowledge into practice enough—to call myself a feminist leader? Will I ever? I have worked with and through these feelings as I write this essay, uncertain that I have read enough to begin writing, an exercise in the discomfort of questioning what I know. I have pushed past this discomfort enough to get to this point, to a finished essay, and to an uneasy truce with the feeling that there will never be a finished state to this project, to research and learning about intersectional feminism. The work is ongoing, as much important work is, and I must embrace that if I am truly committed to the goal to "take every opportunity possible to interrogate the very systems and structures that gave you the aforementioned seat at the table."[37]

Much of what I have learned through my reading and professional development—both in library contexts and more broadly—has been directly relevant to my work as a library director, though finding ways to bring intersectional feminism to my work more overtly can be difficult. While many libraries have convened discussion groups or committees to read and learn about diversity and inclusion, as Bourg has noted, requiring library workers to attend a program, join a committee, or complete a shared reading does not feel like a feminist act.[38] I have also been concerned that an open invitation to participate may lead those who choose not to participate to be perceived negatively. However, as Annie Pho and Turner Masland have suggested, "we are now at a point where discussions about the intersectionality of gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity in librarianship are happening among a wider audience,"[39] which can lead us to initial conversations in our workplace. As well, Juleah Swanson, Ione Damasco, Isabel Gonzalez-Smith, Dracine Hodges, Todd Honma, and Azusa Tanaka remind us

37 Yousefi, "How to be a Good (Library) Boss."

38 Chris Bourg, "The Radicalism Is Coming from Inside the Library," *Feral Librarian* (blog), December 10, 2015. https://chrisbourg.wordpress.com/2015/12/10/the-radicalism-is-coming-from-inside-the-library/.

39 Annie Pho and Turner Masland, "The Revolution Will Not Be Stereotyped: Changing Perceptions through Diversity," in *The Librarian Stereotype: Deconstructing Perceptions and Presentations of Information Work*, ed. by Nicole Pagowsky and Miriam Rigby (Chicago, IL: Association of College & Research Libraries, 2015), 277.

that a focus on the reality of structural and institutional sexism, racism, and other discrimination may make it easier to discuss diversity and inclusion at work, and focus on what we as members of the organization can do to address these issues.[40]

As a white woman in a leadership position at a large, public, commuter college that enrolls a student population that is racially, ethnically, and economically diverse, I must also be mindful of the lure of white guilt and the white savior complex. The overt focus on social justice is one aspect of City Tech and CUNY that I admire and find meaningful. However, as Gina Schesselman-Tarango notes in her analysis of feminism and white supremacy in libraries, white women especially must be careful not to "conceive of those who benefit from our services—in particular, those who have historically been or are presently 'Othered'—as less-than, deficient, inherently needy, or in need of 'saving'."[41] Similarly, though it is easy to feel guilty about the ways in which I benefit from white privilege and white feminism, guilt is not productive. I have started with self-education and am not finished, and I must continue to look for opportunities to help dismantle systemic sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination.

Acknowledging and accepting that I will make mistakes as I work to incorporate intersectional feminism into my leadership practice is another challenge. I have made mistakes in the past and will certainly make them in the future, and it is important that I own and learn from them. Sometimes it means coming to recognize the difference between intent and impact, and other times it is realizing that I missed a chance to do or say something to disrupt the predominant discriminatory narrative, and vowing to do better in the future. The novice mindset can be valuable and push us to learn, but it is ultimately a vulnerable position, and it can be uncomfortable when asking questions reveals gaps in our knowledge. I acknowledge, too, that as a leader I am in a position of power and it is in many ways easier for me to make mistakes, though I also understand that if I

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40 Juleah Swanson, Ione Damasco, Isabel Gonzalez-Smith, Dracine Hodges, Todd Honma and Azusa Tanaka, "Why Diversity Matters: A Roundtable Discussion on Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Librarianship," *In the Library With the Lead Pipe,* July 29, 2015. http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/why-diversity-matters-a-roundtable-discussion-on-racial-and-ethnic-diversity-in-librarianship/.

41 Gina Schlesselman-Tarango, "The Legacy of Lady Bountiful: White Women in the Library," *Library Trends* 64, no. 4 (2016): 681.

make too many mistakes I risk losing trust. I work to remind myself that my vulnerability and occasional discomfort makes me a better leader and helps to foster a workplace environment that supports asking questions, making mistakes, learning, and growing. Further, I am cheered by the assertion by James Williams III and Jolanda-Pieta van Arnhem that "every interaction matters;" every day I have the opportunity to intentionally bring intersectional feminism to my practice.[42]

My travels on the road to feminist library leadership are not complete, and I take comfort in hooks' words when she reminds us that "There is no one path to feminism."[43] I hope that in sharing my winding and ongoing journey I can encourage others, whatever your stage of education or career or your aspirations towards leadership, to embrace the novice mindset and learn more about intersectional feminism. For me it is a worthwhile goal: working to help build the intersectional feminist library future I want to be a part of.

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42 James Williams III and Jolanda-Pieta van Arnhem, "But Then You Have to Make It Happen," *Code4Lib Journal* 28 (2015).

43 hooks, *Feminism Is For Everybody*, 116.

Selected Learning Resources

In addition to the articles, books, and websites cited above, I have found these resources useful in learning more about intersectional feminism, anti-racism, and resisting the oppression of marginalized people:

- The University of Minnesota Gender, Women & Sexuality Studies program has created downloadable online modules to provide an introduction to many of the topics covered in their courses: Empire, The Gaze, Gender, Intersectionality, and Whiteness.

  http://cla.umn.edu/gwss/research/digital-humanities-social-justice/elearning-modules

- Hunter College, CUNY Sociology professor Jessie Daniels studies racism and feminism; the series "Trouble with White Feminists" on the Racism Review blog collects her posts that explore white feminism specifically.

  http://www.racismreview.com/blog/2015/12/30/review-trouble-with-white-feminism/

- The critlib community of librarians interested in critical librarianship also maintains a website with information about the regular #critlib Twitter chats, upcoming and past unconferences and symposia, and recommended readings.

  http://critlib.org

- The Everyday Feminism website features articles and comics written for a general audience on feminism, anti-racism, and anti-LBGTQ+ discrimination.

  http://everydayfeminism.com/

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