



Diversity-related research reported in high-impact library and information science journal literature: A content analysis



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A B S T R A C T

This study reports a content analysis of the frequency distribution of diversity-related research in four high-impact Library and Information Science (LIS) journals published between 1995 and 2014. High-impact journals (with high rankings and impact factors) were chosen because empirically based articles from them are more likely to be able to influence future research direction. The journals chosen were published articles quarterly or bi-monthly, with an average of 5–6 articles per issue. A total of 1766 research articles were collected, with 28.71% determined to be related to diversity. Results show an increasing interest in diversity-related research in the LIS field, with a dramatic increase between 2010 and 2014. The majority of diversity-related research focuses on age, gender and ethnicity. Only a small portion of research discusses issues concerning specific populations and emphasizes diversity-related theoretical concepts. More efforts are needed to highlight the link in order to contribute to the diversity and inclusion agenda in LIS.

1. Introduction

Equal access to information is emphasized in the Library Bill of Rights (American Library Association [ALA], 1996), the Code of Ethics of the American Library Association (ALA, 2008), the Public Library Manifesto (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 1994), and the IFLA/UNESCO Multicultural Library Manifesto (2008). In line with these policies, it is not uncommon to see public library services offer targeted programs for children, young adults, the elderly, immigrants, ethnic groups, disadvantaged populations, and people with low literacy skills. Discussion of promoting diversity in library and information science (LIS) also emerges in education (Abdullahi, 2007; Jaeger, Subramaniam, Jones, & Bertot, 2011; Mehra, Olson, & Ahmad, 2011; Pawley, 2006; Subramaniam & Jaeger, 2010a; Subramaniam & Jaeger, 2010b) and research (Aabø & Audunson, 2012; Caidi & Allard, 2005; Franklin & Jaeger, 2007; Montiel-Overall, 2009; Subramaniam, Rodriguez-Mori, Jaeger, & Hill, 2012).

In the United States, LIS scholars have addressed diversity recruitment issues in response to the diverse populations served. Some scholars have suggested recruitment of librarians of color (Winston & Walstad, 2006; Zhang & Roy, 2011) and others have suggested recruitment of LIS students of color who have the potential of becoming future LIS faculty members or library administrators (Jaeger,

Bertot, & Franklin, 2010; Jaeger & Franklin, 2007; Jaeger et al., 2011; Kim & Sin, 2008; Roy, 2005). However, focusing on recruitment alone is arguably not an end to achieving diversity and inclusion in LIS. Partly due to this argument, Jaeger et al. (2011) and Subramaniam et al. (2012) stated that serving diverse patron communities has never been translated into widespread advancement of research in diversity-related areas in LIS or adequately reflected in LIS education. They further suggested that diversity needs to be truly integrated into LIS education, research, and practice.

Jaeger et al. (2011) and Subramaniam et al. (2012) reviewed the literature, and found that racial diversity has received most of the traditional focus in LIS, although there are many other forms of diversity, such as disability, age, gender, language, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. Although the term diversity itself may not be used, LIS scholars have engaged in research on underserved or marginalized groups, for example, the homeless (Kelleher, 2013; Muggleton, 2013; Willett & Broadley, 2011), lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals (Chapman, 2013; Greenblatt, 2003; Mehra & Braquet, 2007, 2011; Walker & Bates, 2016), and people with disabilities (Davies, 2007; Hill, 2013). It is, therefore, important to learn how the LIS research community conceptualizes diversity; this can then be used to inform education and practice. A content analysis of the LIS literature provides a broad perspective of viewpoints from researchers, as well as identifying major diversity issues and trends.

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2. Problem statement

Jaeger and Franklin (2007) suggested an integration of diversity into all aspects of LIS education and research in order to ensure that diversity is sufficiently foundational to the preparation of LIS graduates. Some research has examined diversity-related course offerings or curriculum reform (Chu, 2013; Cooke, Sweeney, & Noble, 2016; Mehra et al., 2011; Mestre, 2010; Pawley, 2006; Roy, 2001; Subramaniam & Jaeger, 2010a; Subramaniam & Jaeger, 2010b; Wheeler, 2005). Other scholars have examined diversity research using doctoral dissertations as data sources (Franklin & Jaeger, 2007; Subramaniam et al., 2012). Much of the literature emanates from North America. However, the phenomenon of diverse populations, along with changing demographics, exists in most countries. It is important to understand the breadth and scope of diversity in current high-impact LIS research, as it “is likely to influence future research directions” (Hider & Pymm, 2008, p. 110). High-impact research is defined as that published in core journals in LIS, the aims and scope of which match the topics under investigation in this study. Specifically, this study will address the following research questions:

- (1) How is diversity in high-impact LIS research articles distributed over time?
- (2) How is diversity in high-impact LIS research articles distributed by geography?
- (3) How is diversity in high-impact LIS research articles distributed by dimension of diversity?

Exploring these questions helps reveal the levels of interest in diversity topics and contexts being addressed by the LIS scholarly community. Since it highlights trends and dimensions, this study will be of value to researchers, policy makers, and practitioners interested in or concerned directly with diversity. In order to provide truly inclusive service, libraries need to engage with communities affected by all aspects of diversity.

3. Literature review

3.1. Definition of diversity

There are many definitions of diversity in LIS research; some focusing on listing groups, others taking a more holistic approach by emphasizing inclusiveness and not marginalizing groups. The first attempts at defining diversity focused solely on race and ethnic origin (Jaeger & Franklin, 2007), as those were the first groups to receive legal protection in the United States (Jaeger et al., 2011). Subramaniam and Jaeger (2010a) later added three more dimensions to extend the definition of diversity to include race, ethnicity, gender, disabilities, and sexual orientation.

Listing dimensions of diversity has the problem of potentially excluding an underserved or underrepresented group (Pruitt, 2010), so later definitions of diversity focused on being inclusive and serving populations that were underrepresented, disadvantaged, and underserved in terms of information (Jaeger et al., 2011). This definition is supported by Subramaniam et al. (2012) who argued that diversity definitions should encompass populations that have been marginalized in terms of information needs, regardless of their being a legally protected population or not. This research takes the position of Hastings (2015) who recognized the importance of inclusivity, stating that “inclusion is the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can feel welcomed, respected, supported and valued” (p. 134).

3.2. Diversity in LIS literature

A review of the literature identifies two fundamental elements

underpinning the diversity agenda in LIS: promoting social justice and meeting community needs. Kranich (2005) argued “there can be no equality without justice” (para. 5), implying that libraries should provide high quality services and improve opportunities for access for those unserved or underserved in order to help contribute to the equality agenda. In this respect, social justice provides a philosophical and theoretical foundation for some core values of librarianship, such as equal access, democracy, diversity, inclusion, human rights, and intellectual freedom. Arguably, if librarians do not fully understand social justice issues or truly embrace a social justice perspective, libraries will fail to uphold their core values. As Pateman (2000) suggested, “A library, library service or organisation which has issues of solidarity and social justice at its heart (and not at the margins) is likely to be a progressive and radical organisation” (para. 1).

The second element refers to the universal library mission of meeting community needs, which remains central to the social justice perspective. In their needs-based library service model, Pateman and Vincent (2010) advocated for public libraries as “targeted, focused and pro-poor” (p. 119). However, going too far towards the end of providing targeted programs means that libraries could run the risk of being accused of being unfair (Cronin, 2002; Kranich, 2005). It should be acknowledged that without engaging with marginalized or underrepresented groups in society, a library would fail to provide equal access for all. As Pateman and Vincent (2010) suggested, “it is not a case of developing universal or targeted services, but both simultaneously with a deliberate and sustained focus on community needs to create a win-win situation for the whole community” (p. 118).

When speaking to the desire for libraries to reflect diverse populations in order to meet community needs, LIS research has conceptualized diversity in different ways. For instance, Jaeger and Franklin's (2007) virtuous circle framework highlights the importance of increasing diversity among LIS faculties in terms of cultures and languages, which helps promote the inclusiveness of LIS education and prepare LIS graduates to offer inclusive services. Pawley (2006) identified an urgent need to prioritize the issue of race in the four paradigms of LIS research and teaching: science and technology, business and management, mission and service, and society and culture. In her cultural competence framework, Montiel-Overall (2009) discussed essential elements needed to develop cultural competence for LIS professionals with a focus on understanding and appreciating the culture of communities served. Common to the three models is an emphasis on promoting cultural awareness and social consciousness among LIS students, faculties, and professionals. To various extents, these scholars also looked at the connections among LIS education, research, and practice in promoting effective service to diverse populations.

4. Data collection and analysis

4.1. Selection of journal literature

This study examined research articles published in Library Quarterly (LQ), Library & Information Science Research (LISR), Journal of Librarianship and Information Science (JoLIS), and Journal of Documentation (JDoc) between 1995 and 2014. These four high-impact LIS journals were purposively selected as data sources based mainly on their profile and impact (Table 1). Their aims and scope match the topics under investigation and they are included in both Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) and Scopus in the Information Science & Library Science category in 2014. Both researchers had access to the full text of the four selected journals at the time the study was conducted.

The intention of selecting high-impact journals for analysis was to reasonably represent a current view of diversity in high-impact LIS research, which “is likely to influence future research directions” (Hider & Pymm, 2008, p. 110). However, such a selection process may result in bias in the reporting or interpretation of findings. For

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