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Review of Pushing the Margins: Women of Color and Intersectionality in LIS

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Rose L. Chou and Annie Pho. *Pushing the Margins: Women of Color and Intersectionality in LIS*. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2018.

Rose L. Chou and Annie Pho have assembled seventeen chapters of critical observation to describe, decry, and offer solutions to the persistent problems presented by racism, sexism, and heteronormativity in the library and information science profession. The collection of essays follows the approach of the social scientist—who gathers information, examines the data for specific trends, and makes conclusions based on those findings—but the book does not privilege that method alone. The editors deliberately include personal narratives within the collection, the presence of which seeks to restore the voice and agency of librarians and archivists of color, which, the authors contend, has been ignored, omitted, and even silenced—both in daily professional practice and within the history of the field. The book advocates restoring those voices, centering them, and utilizing their insights to reframe the discussion of the goals of librarianship to focus on inclusion and social justice within its own ranks. The tone of the volume is informed both by the theory of intersectionality—which recognizes the combined effects of racism and sexism, rather than the privileging of one over the other—and the foundational feminist practice of consciousness-raising, whose paradigm features women coming together to create a safe space to share their experiences around sexism and to collaborate with each other to address its injuries.

The editors have organized *Pushing the Margins* around the central question: “what does it mean to be a woman of color in librarianship?” The essays reveal responses that range from the pride and satisfaction that comes from helping others and from acting as role models for underrepresented groups, to using collection development to diversify a specific library’s holdings, to spearheading targeted programs for overlooked members of the community. However, the respondents also cite painful recollections that include racial microaggressions, unpaid diversity work (such as that performed in academic settings on diversity committees), undisguised insults, sexual harassment, emotional and invisible labor, and a sense of cultural isolation. The authors put forward a number of suggestions for transforming the profession from within, such as: acknowledging the significant contributions women of color have made to the profession (Alexandra Mitchell’s “Sisters of the Stacks”); recognizing the importance of mentorship and peer support to retention and career success (“Small Brown Faces in Large White Spaces” by Rosalinda Hernandez Linares and Sojourna J. Cunningham); and providing more representation in collection development and programming (“Self-Selection and Self-Identity” by Robin Bradford and Stephanie Sendaula). Jennifer Brown and Sofia Leung (“Authenticity vs. Professionalism: Being True to Ourselves at Work”) explain how white librarians can improve the profession by actively sharing the burden of working to eliminate discriminatory practices, rather than allowing such work—described by the authors as “planning, promoting, defending, and/or assessing the work of social justice” (329)—to be performed primarily by librarians of color. Notably, Alanna Aiko Moore and Jan E. Estrellado (“Identity, Activism, Self-Care, and Women of Color Librarians”) emphasize the need for librarians of color to practice self-care—particularly by coming together to share their difficulties with one another—in order to prevent burnout and career abandonment.

Each essay presents a convincing argument for the authenticity of the challenges faced by its author or authors, but at least four of these discussions are exceptionally effective. Fobazi

Ettarh's foreword breaks down the complex elements of intersectionality and why awareness of all its aspects—structural (how social systems influence individuals and the culture at large), political (how social justice movements can reinforce the oppression of subgroups), and representational (the manner in which mass media images are mistaken for accurate depictions of a specific group)—is key to broadening understanding of the pressures faced by women librarians of color. Chou and Pho's introduction masterfully explains the background, rationale, and epistemological theories that inform the volume. Charlotte Roh's observations on the way that women of color and librarianship interact with decisions made in the publishing world are remarkably cogent and enlightening. Roh argues that the absence of librarians of color working with publishers on projects such as scholarships, focus groups, conferences, consulting, and book reviews can lead to serious consequences—such as the book review written by a white supremacist, or the multiple resignations one editorial board suffered after its journal published a paper promoting the resurgence of colonialism. Lastly, the concluding interview between Todd Honma and Clara Chu serves as an elegant coda that ties the book's themes together, offers concrete examples of positive change, and places the movement toward racial justice in librarianship into contemporary historical context.

Although there are three archivists on the slate of writers, only one them—JoyEllen Freeman of Kennesaw State University—has written specifically about working as a woman of color with an archival collection. Her literature review concerning the absence of people of color from the historical record ties in convincingly with the explanation of her motivation to use the Kennesaw State archive to conduct a case study for how an archive can diversify its holdings. Her paper further explores how users find information within the archives, and how the subjects of the study—a group of students who are women of color—respond to efforts to document the experiences of underrepresented groups. Freeman remarks positively on the work that has been done since the seventies to add more such voices to archival collections but notes that much more needs to be done. She emphasizes the need for purposeful action and outreach to partner with minority groups for collaboration. This represents an important trend in archival work and scholarship and more essays on the topic would have been a valuable addition to the volume.

In addition to the minimal discussion of women of color in archives, there is also a notable absence of conversation about women librarians of color that work behind the scenes in technical services. Contributions from catalogers struggling to change outdated (or create currently non-existent) descriptors for underrepresented groups, for example, would have been a useful addition to the collection. Moreover, *Pushing the Margins* could have benefitted from more effective organization. Perhaps the editors could have organized the text in thematic sections with a brief introduction to each new concept and eliminated essays with overlapping subject matter. Without some device around which to arrange the essays, the book suffers from excessive repetition. Nevertheless, the text constitutes mandatory reading for anyone in the information sciences field seeking a clearer understanding of the issues it raises. *Pushing the Margins* does not present neatly packaged solutions; rather, its goal is to open a dialogue by listening for—and encouraging constructive responses to—the marginalized voices that are demanding change.