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Voices of Colour and the Scholarly Record

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ABSTRACT

Scholarly communication has been shaped by professions that are overwhelmingly white-academia, publishing, and librarianship. Gatekeeping practices, from peer review to library collection development, have marginalized contributions by and about communities of colour. This talk will examine how scholarly communication has excluded voices of colour from the scholarly record and explore the responsibility libraries have in centring the voices and stories of communities of colour.

Hello everyone, and thank you for being here. I'm excited to talk to you all about voices of colour and the scholarly record. Before I begin, I must thank IDEAS@UBC for inviting me. I greatly appreciate you and your efforts.

I also want to acknowledge that Iowa State University, where I am presenting from, is located on the ancestral lands and territory of the Boxoje, or Ioway Nation. The United States obtained the land from the Meskwaki and Sauk nations in the Treaty of 1842. We wish to recognize our obligations to this land and to the people who took care of it, as well as to the 17,000 Native people who live in Iowa today.

Because I am talking about race and systemic racism, I want to share some aspect of my identity with you. I am Asian American, with Okinawan, Japanese, and Chinese ancestry. I was born and raised in Honolulu, Hawaii and went to school in Stockton, California, and Vancouver, Columbia. Since graduating from the Dual MAS/MLIS program from UBC, I have worked at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa.

Telling you about my migration across the Pacific and the continent is important, because of the vast difference in racial and ethnic demographics in the place I am from, and the place I live now. This top picture is of the mountains in Hawaii, and the bottom is of a corn field in Iowa. I might've been subconsciously saying something when I selected a picture of the mountains instead of the ocean... but Iowa has neither. I grew up in the most racially diverse state in the United States, a state where I was not part of a racial or ethnic minority—I grew up with politicians, business leaders, and news anchors that look and speak like me. This isn't to say that holding racial and ethnic identities that are marginalized at the national level didn't impact me—it did, in significant ways. But in some ways, it felt like a distant future thing, "racism is something I need to deal with when I move to the continent. When I'm grown." I now live in the fifth least-diverse state in the country. What I'm trying to say is that as my lived experiences changed, my approach to diversity has changed. Basically, working in anti-racism has required a lot of learning. And as I begin this talk, I want to acknowledge Charlotte Roh, who got me started thinking about diversity and inclusion in scholarly communications and my many colleagues who have helped shape and focus my thinking on these issues.

Before I begin talking about systemic racism in scholarly publishing, I need to note that although my work focuses on race and racism, there are other identities that are marginalized in the scholarly record and the systemic biases in publishing can impact

those who hold intersectional marginalized identities in compounding ways. I am also speaking from what I know, which means I am speaking from a United States perspective, and from an academic library perspective.

Scholarly publishing is the publication and sharing of research and scholarship. In this talk, I'm situating scholarly publishing at the intersection of three professions: academia, publishing, and librarianship. Publishing decides what gets published and how it gets published. Academia provides authors, editors, and reviewers. And libraries are the major market for scholarly publishing, deciding whether and how publications are found by researchers.

All three professions that shape scholarly publishing are overwhelmingly white and lag the demographic proportions of indigenous and visible minorities in Canada and the United States as a whole. This slide shows the percentage of individuals who identified as indigenous or a visible minority in Canada, those who identified as non-White or Hispanic in the United States, and those who identified as IBPOC in scholarly publishing, faculty in the United States, university faculty in Canada, and librarians in higher education.

In looking at libraries in particular, library staff working in areas that help shape the scholarly record lag behind the demographics of the US, and the majority are less representative as Canada. Among Association of Research Libraries library staff, those working in the scholarly communication, which includes publishing, were the least diverse of job types listed, followed by Library Leadership, Subject Specialists, Subject Specialists, Collections, and Resource Description.

Gatekeeping in Scholarly Publishing

Submission

Review

Decision

Production

Publication

Considering that gatekeeping is a hallmark of scholarly publishing, and academia at large, the lack of diversity in these professions means that the policies and practices of scholarly publishing has been developed through a perspective of whiteness. How we judge and value scholarship, whether through peer review or purchasing, are grounded in practices that are held up as “objective,” but are not.

Systemic racism in scholarly publishing means that authors of colour can face significant barriers at each step of the publication process. This slide outlines the stages of publishing a journal article.

During submission, scholars of colour decide whether they should publish their research, and where they should publish it.

During review, editors do a first pass of an article and decide whether it meets the scope of the journal. If they feel it does, they assign the submission to others who evaluate the submission and make a recommendation on whether it should be published, revised, or rejected—this decision is made by the editor.

Production includes copyediting and typesetting, which, by changing the wording of a submission or introducing visual elements, can change its meaning.

Finally, the work is published. Which means it's distributed to readers and libraries.

Each of these steps can be barriers for authors of colour, and limit the voices of authors of colour in the scholarly record.

The scholarly record is, however, shaped by more than the publication process. Biases that exist in society create barriers for authors of colour as well. These include education (both K-12 and post-secondary education), mentorship, or the lack thereof, how research funding is directed, the hiring, tenure, and promotion processes at colleges and universities, the hostility of the author's environment, and societal and political discourse.

These biases, in and out of publishing, impact the scholarly record in numerous ways.

It determines what research topics and methodologies are deemed worthy of inclusion in the scholarly record. Many whites are uncomfortable talking about race and racism, which can lead to the dismissal of research that studies how IBPOC are treated.

Methodological norms in disciplines can hinder research on communities of colour. Research that focuses on marginalized communities may be called to include a “control group”—something that is not asked for research that focuses on dominant groups.

For scholars of color with a social justice orientation or who do research on race and racism, their work can be deemed to person, too activist—that scholars of color cannot be objective enough to do research on these topics. Instead, many scholars of colour are pressured to avoid race-based research, to avoid being “pigeon-holed”.

During editorial and peer review, the bias of editors can come into play in the initial review and the selection of reviewers who are assigned to review the submissions. The biases of reviewers can come into play when they recommend an article be accepted or rejected. This bias affects both individuals and topics as I talked about earlier, as reviewers may be biased against topics about race and racism and they may be biased against individuals with “ethnic” or “gendered” names.

A lot of reviews are done anonymously, where the identity of the reviewers are hidden from the public and the author, so if a review is submitted that is unprofessional, overly critical, or are biased, there is a lack of accountability there because people don’t know who has conducted these reviews.

Knowledge sharing, and this is one of the areas where librarians come into play, affects the scholarly record as well. Many publishers are driven by the perceived market and books by and about communities of colour may be deemed too niche or have too small of a market to be publishable.

Library collections have privileged white voices, perspectives, and experiences. The ability of researchers to locate publications is impacted by the way libraries catalog and describe their materials, and often libraries will rely on descriptive standards that are based in whiteness and minimize the knowledge and experiences of communities of colour. The standards, algorithms, and tools we use are not objective.

Faculty Evaluation, Promotion, and Tenure

- Faculty of color spend more time on service, nonmarginalized faculty are able to dedicate more time to research
- How research impact is defined and measured
- Lack of diversity among tenured faculty

Image: Goals calendar, tracking writing sessions and articles published. Photo by Isaac Smith on Unsplash.

GOAL REVIEW							
ARTICLES PUBLISHED							
WRITING SESSIONS							
3	2	2	3	3	1	2	
WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4	WEEK 5	WEEK 6	WEEK 7	WEEK 8
1	0	1	1	2	0	1	
ARTICLES PUBLISHED							

Faculty evaluation, promotion, and tenure are the processes that determine whether scholars of colour can exist in academia. Faculty of color spend more time on service than non-marginalized faculty, which means that white faculty are able to dedicate more of their time to research and scholarship. Often, research outcomes and impact is the key to obtaining tenure and promotion.

The university decides how research impact is defined and measured, and often this is done in ways that minimize the impact or devalues the contributions of scholars of colour. And this leads to a lack of diversity among tenured faculty, where the percentage of faculty who identify as IBPOC decreases as you move up faculty ranks.

Examples and Impacts

What do the impacts of systemic racism in scholarly publishing look like in the real world?

In 2018, Cambridge University Press published Roger W. Lotchin's *Japanese American Relocation in World War II: A Reconsideration*. In the book, the author argues that the

incarceration of Japanese Americans in World War II did not result from racism, but rather national security. Reviewers of the book called out the lack of vigor and quality in the author's research—with Lane Ryo Hirabayashi writing, “Methodologically, Lotchin trolls the evidentiary record very selectively, citing examples that illustrate his points from a very limited set of primary as well as largely secondary sources, eschewing diachronic examination of any specific WRA camp.”^[1]

It's also important to fit this book within the sociopolitical context in which it was published. Krystyn R. Moon writes, “the fact that [...] was published in 2018 reflects its political moment, one in which actions that target specific groups are excused using the rhetoric of national security. Border walls and Muslim bans, both of which conservatives argue protect Americans from criminals and terrorists, a products of much the same logic used in [the book].”^[2] The publication of this book not only calls into question how it was published, considering the critiques of the author's research, the legitimacy granted by scholarly publication means it can be weaponized in the greater sociopolitical context in which it was published.

American Archivist

“This article and the brown bag luncheon must be viewed as part of a pattern in which the construction of knowledge, through academic publishing and scholarly communication, continue to marginalize communities of color and the work of archivists of color in addressing these systemic issues.”

<https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc-82-02-24>

Image: Tweet from @_cageorge (Christine George), “Yeah no. I don’t say that in the article. Boles may choose to believe that’s what I thought. But again notice how there isn’t a citation. That’s because there isn’t something to directly cite to. Sloppy. @archivists_org. Very sloppy. 11/ [screenshot of portion of article]”

In 2019, the *American Archivist* published an article by former Society of American Archivists president Frank Boles that argues that a social justice approach to archival acquisition is not useful to archives. The article was selected to be the focus of discussion during a brown bag session at the Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting, which was cancelled after the uproar following the release of the article

preprint. There was also heated discussion about the article on arcan-L, the Canadian archival listserv.

Like Lotchin's work, Bole's article has been criticized for the quality of the scholarship, not just its viewpoint. Throughout the article, Boles conflates social justice and morality, indicating a lack of understanding of the very topic he is writing about. Christine George wrote about the author's misinterpretation of her work, tweeting, "Yeah no. I don't say that in the article. Boles may choose to believe that's what I thought. But again notice how there isn't a citation. That's because there isn't something to directly cite to. Sloppy." [3]

In writing a letter to the editor about this article, I said, "This article and the brown bag luncheon must be viewed as part of a pattern in which the construction of knowledge, through academic publishing and scholarly communication, continue to marginalize communities of colour and the work of archivists of color in addressing these systemic issues." [4] The publication of Bole's article necessarily calls into question the nature and rigor of the review practices of the *American Archivist*—how were the peer reviewers selected? Did any of the peer reviewers have expertise in social justice?

The slide features the word "Impacts" in a large, white, sans-serif font, centered on the left side. To its right is a bulleted list of four items in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. The slide is framed by two horizontal orange lines, one above and one below the text.

- Additional emotional labor for IBPOC who respond to publications
- Lack of accountability with anonymous peer review
- Legitimizing publications through peer review/publication/addition to library collections
- Influence on discourse outside academia (e.g., policy making)

These are two examples of how, through scholarly publishing, work that harms communities of colour are legitimized and distributed. There is emotional labor for

IBPOC who respond to these publications. The use of anonymous peer review can mean that the publication of these works can be scapegoated on anonymous reviewers, deflecting attention from the role of editors and publishers. The fact that these works have undergone peer review, have been published by reputable publishers, and included in library collections, grants these works legitimacy, although the methodological and theoretical research underpinning the works is flawed—which allows these works to have influence on discourse outside academia, for example, in policy making.

While the previous two examples demonstrated how scholarly publishing legitimized work that harms IBPOC, the next two demonstrate how scholarly publishing harms authors of colour. In 2018, Stirling Publishing published *The Colour of Madness*, a compilation of works edited and authored by individuals of colour on mental health in the United Kingdom. As the editors were preparing a second edition, a recording was released in which the publisher, “said she was anti-Islam, a Tommy Robinson supporter, and that she regretted publishing 2018 anthology *The Colour of Madness: Exploring BAME Mental Health in the UK*, saying she only did so to make money and get shortlisted for the Jhalak prize.”^[5] The publisher tokenized the editors and authors of the volume to gain money and attention—while harming the contributors of the volume who learned that they’ve been used by a publisher that holds racist viewpoints

and had to do additional work to cancel their publishing contract and find a new publisher.

In 2020, following the murder of George Floyd, five Black librarians were invited to publish an editorial in the *Journal of the Medical Library Association*. During the copyediting process, their language was changed in ways that changed the meaning of their editorial and diluted its message. In blogging about the experience, Christian I. J. Minter wrote, “It was obvious the copy editor did not have sufficient knowledge of the subject matter to engage in a fruitful conversation about the thoughtful and intentional choices we made in our writing. Instead of acknowledging this gap, the copy editor doubled down on wanting to keep her changes.”^[6]

Through copyediting, and a lack of intervention from journal editors, *JMLA* attempted to make the editorial more amenable to white fragility, with the copyeditor adhering to what’s written in style guides—a reminder that the policies and practices of scholarly publishing are not objective. The authors pulled their editorial from *JMLA* and published it elsewhere.

Impacts

- Harms IBPOC authors
- White publishers benefit from labour of IBPOC
- Negative experiences may discourage IBPOC from publishing
- Tenure and Promotion

These examples show how scholarly publishing can cause direct harm to IBPOC authors, while white publishers seek to benefit from their labour. The negative experiences of scholarly publishing for IBPOC may discourage them from publishing in the future. And these obstacles can harm the livelihood of IBPOC scholars, as hiring, retention, and promotion of faculty is often tied to research productivity.

So what can libraries do?

Interrogate identities

- Examine your identities and privilege
- Engage in education and critical self-reflection on diversity, inclusion, and social justice
- Understand how systemic racism impacts scholarly communication and publishing, and your role in it

Image: Fingerprints

First, you need to interrogate your identities—examine your identities and privilege. Engage in education and critical self-reflection on diversity, inclusion, and social

justice. Understand how systemic racism impacts scholarly communication and publishing, what role you play in upholding white supremacy in the scholarly record.

You must also interrogate publishing in our field. There is no shortage of examples of how scholarly publishing in library, archival, and information sciences have harmed communities of colour and authors of colour. In addition to the two I discussed before, I list three more here—the publication of a column in *Against the Grain* that uses the phrases “Wuhan virus” and “kung flu,” *College & Research Libraries’* publication of a review of *Pushing the Margins*, an edited volume of work by women of colour, that centered the perspective and defensiveness of the white reviewer, and the *School Library Journal’s* publication of an article that centered white children during Black History Month, featuring a cover that was criticized for portraying blackface.

If you want to disrupt systemic racism in scholarly publishing, you must dismantle it in your own house first.

Collections building

- Purchase books by authors of color
- Evaluate vendors on diversity policies and practices. If possible, purchase from independent bookstores and women- and minority-owned businesses.
- Examine descriptive practices

Image: A person browsing library shelves.

When building library collections, purchase books by authors of colour. Evaluate your vendors on their diversity policies and practices. Where your institution allows, purchase from independent bookstores and women- and minority-owned businesses. And examine how users search and discover your collections by interrogating your descriptive practices. Descriptive standards are not objective—revise them to make them more hospitable to communities of colour.

Library publishing is the area of librarianship I work in. We must publish and compensate IBPOC authors, but only if the publishing relationship benefits IBPOC authors. Promote the inclusion of IBPOC scholars in editorial boards and peer reviewer pools. And educate editors and reviewers on inclusive and anti-racist publishing practices.

Value and promote IBPOC authors

- Develop programming to highlight and celebrate the work of scholars of color
- Include discussions of bias and systemic racism in information literacy sessions
- Do intentional outreach to faculty of color. Work with them to demonstrate impact in ways other than impact factor and citation counts

Image: A group of people cheering.

Promote the work of IBPOC authors and emphasize that our work is valid, impactful, and valuable. Develop programming that highlights and celebrates IBPOC scholars. Educate our campuses on how systemic racism impacts scholars of colour. Include discussions of bias and oppression in information literacy session. And do intentional outreach to faculty of colour, helping them demonstrate to their departments, programs, and tenure and promotion committees the importance of their work.

Redirect spending

- Back up anti-racism statements with resources: money and people
- Work with service providers of color and vendors who value and enact anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices
- Support organizations that promote diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism, and/or publish authors of color

Image: Canadian and United States bank notes. Photo by [John McArthur](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Redirect spending to support organizations that promote diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism, and those that publish IBPOC authors. Back up your anti-racism statement with resources, money and people.

Hire and Promote IBPOC

- Ensure inclusive environments
- Actively recruit
- Don't expect IBPOC to fix racism
- Build relationships with communities of color
- Ensure IBPOC have access to mentoring, professional development, and pathways to advancement
- Support programs created for IBPOC (e.g., ALA Spectrum, ARL Kaleidoscope)

Hire and promote IBPOC. But first, ensure that they'll be entering an inclusive work environment, and don't expect them to fix your racial problems. Build relationships with communities of color, and ensure your IBPOC staff have access to mentoring, professional development, and pathways to advancement. And support programs that are already doing this, such as the ALA Spectrum program and the ARL Kaleidoscope program.

And finally, for IBPOC. Build a network that can support and uplift you as you work in librarianship. Find your space, your community. Find your voice. And finally, take care of yourself.

Thank you, I'm happy to take questions.

Resources

[Toolkits for Equity](#) (C4DISC)

[Creating a Social Justice Mindset: Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice in the Collections Directorate of MIT Libraries](#) (MIT Libraries)

[An Ethical Framework for Library Publishing](#) (Library Publishing Coalition)

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Slides

[UBCpresentation-2.pdf](#)

7 MB

“Voices of Colour and the Scholarly Record” was presented as part of [IDEAS@UBC](#)’s [IBPOC Voices Speaker Series](#).

IDEAS@UBC is a student group that seeks to provide a safe and productive community for IBPOC (Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour) students in departments and fields of study related to information, cultural, and memory work at the University of British Columbia’s School of Information. We aim to amplify IBPOC voices in information studies and encourage dialogue on topics such as anti-racism, Indigenous knowledge and information practices, and systemic barriers in library, archival and information studies. We also host social events and offer a safe space for IBPOC students in the iSchool programs to share resources on navigating underrepresentation in the GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) sector.

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3. Christine George (@_cageorge), “Yeah no, I don’t say that in the article. Boles may choose to believe that’s what I thought. But again notice how there isn’t a citation. That’s because there isn’t something to directly cite to. Sloppy, @archivists_org. Very sloppy. 11/” *Twitter*, August 1, 2019, https://twitter.com/_cageorge/status/1157103878774673408?s=20. ↵
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