There Will Be No Crying Here: Privilege and Power in Libraries

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INTRODUCTION

Bullying is **three times more** likely to occur in "education, social service, and healthcare professions" (as cited in Freedman & Vreven, 2016, p. 727).

40% of librarians are bullied and **49%** have witnessed others being bullied (Henry, Eshleman, Croxton, & Moniz, 2018).

Librarians experience incivility on a **regular basis** (Henry et al., 2018).

Bullying occurs **more often** to academic and special librarians than librarians in other disciplines(Hak Joon, Geary, & Bielefield, 2018).

Health issues as a result of bullying are common with the highest reported health issues being "stress, anxiety, and depression" (Hak Joon et al., 2018, p.9).

It is not uncommon for librarians who experience harassment to **leave** for another job (Hak Joon et al., 2018).

Librarians between the ages of **35 to 54** reported more instances of bullying. (Hak Joon et al., 2018, p.9).

SUGGESTIONS AND STRATEGIES

How Can Librarians Improve their Workplace?
• Build a network of support
   • Building a network of people in your workplace, both in the library and outside of it
   • Build a network of people who don't work in your library/facility
   • Work with your personal support network
• Don't remain silent
• Take care of yourself, find what works for you and take the time you need to take care of yourself.

How can Librarians Improve the Profession?
• Expand your networks to include people in other libraries
• Self reflect and hold yourself accountable
• Support other librarians, including those that are just starting or want to change
• Respect other librarians and library staff, acknowledge that everyone has skills and experiences that can contribute to the profession
• Career paths
• Participate in advancing the profession – consider mentoring, consider donating to scholarships, especially for underrepresented librarians
• Before you speak, consider letting those with less power and privilege speak instead

Race and gender in librarianship
Libraries still struggle with a majority white, majority female, majority male leadership dynamic. The structural racism and gender disparities in the profession must be fully acknowledged by all levels of the profession, and active work must be done to address the ways that these structures still disempower members of the profession.

Power and Status
There needs to be more research into the way that tenure and length of time as a librarian affects librarian attitudes towards power, status, and work. There needs to be an acknowledgment of the deterrents of tenure and an examination of how librarians do or don't share their power and use their status to maintain an unequal profession.

How Does Power and Privilege Affect Librarians?
Similarly to many female dominated allied health professions, librarians have a historical culture of servitude, dedication, and in many instances, vocational awe. These developed into a rigid hierarchical structure that can lead to inequality in many areas of practice, including workload and treatment of new and incoming librarians.

SOLUTIONS

Indifferent leadership passively promotes a toxic environment. Managerial training and support in conflict resolution as well as professional development in ethics, leadership, and mentoring are possible solutions (Henry et al., 2018; Kendrick, 2017).

Fewer than 10% of public and academic libraries surveyed have anti-bullying policies (Hak Joon et al., 2018). A solution is to create an anti-bullying and incivility policies (Freedman & Vreven, 2016; Hak Joon et al., 2018).

The University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Campus, Central Florida University, Loyola University, Penn State University, Oregon State University, State University of New York, and University of Maryland have civility policies and initiatives (Freedman & Vreven, 2016).

Look to these for guidance for creation of new policies at your institution.

LESSONS FROM ALLIED HEALTH

• **Take action by calling out the behavior.** If you feel intimidated, try practicing a script first (Danza, 2018).
• Keep records by documenting each incident. Include: time, date, facts, and witnesses (Danza, 2018).
• **Have mandatory education sessions to set expectations of workplace incivility and bullying** (Cohen, 2014; Danza, 2018). Professional development education sessions on "assertiveness, conflict management, EI skills, relationship building, and open dialogue" are helpful as well (Crawford et al., 2019, p.154). Incorporate assessment with pre and post education session surveys (Cohen, 2014).
• **Start a healthy workplace committee**, write anti-bullying organizational policies based on the ANA Code of Ethics, and create procedures for reporting bullying behavior (Cohen, 2014; Crawford et al., 2019)
• **Incorporate processes for fair and unbiased performance reviews and give constructive** instead of destructive feedback (Johnson, 2019).
• The ANA has created a position statement on incivility, bullying, workplace violence to **create a culture of respect and a healthy environment for nursing staff and patients.**
• A Cochrane Review of interventions, for prevention of bullying in the workplace, found inadequate evidence of organizational and individual interventions to prevent bullying (Gillen, Sinclair, Kernohan, Begley, & Luyben, 2017).
• **Emotional Intelligence can help** limit bullying by providing awareness and demonstrating professional behavior (Meires, 2018).

MOVING FORWARD

The allied health literature, especially nursing literature, can offer many insights for librarians to consider as they consider ways to study power and privilege in libraries.

The allied health literature also offers examples of how to address bullying and mobbing in a female dominated professional field.

Librarians need to examine their personal practices to better understand how they can build the profession into one that is more open, more supportive, and more diverse.

Library leadership has a major role to play in creating equitable and welcoming working environments and needs to do the necessary work to improve the workplace, and hold themselves accountable.

It is not enough for librarians, and library leadership, to discuss and write about the negative affects of power and privilege there needs to be bold movement within the profession from all levels to not just address these issues, but also to ensure that the profession becomes a profession that is open to everyone and can sustain the diversity and openness the profession needs.

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