
Examining Youth Services Librarians' Perceptions of Cultural Knowledge as an Integral Part of Their Professional Practice

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Youth services librarians in the United States face the challenge of serving a growing population of youth from diverse cultural backgrounds. In the 2014-2015 school year, youth of color are projected to make up the majority of students attending American public schools. In order to effectively serve these youth, youth librarians need to be culturally competent and have an understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy. This paper reports the findings of an exploratory study designed to explore the extent to which youth services librarians, both public and school, prioritize the need for cultural knowledge and awareness in developing effective programs and services for today's youth.

Introduction

For the first time in U.S. history, youth of colour¹ are projected in the 2014-2015 school year to make up the majority of students attending American public schools (Krogstad & Fry, 2014). According to an analysis of the 2010 census data completed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, there are currently 74.2 million children under the age of eighteen in the United States; 46 percent of them are children of colour (O'Hare, 2011). All of the growth in the child population since 2000 has been among groups other than Non-Hispanic whites. Three major groups experienced significant increases between 2000 and 2010:

- Children of mixed race grew at a faster rate than any other group over the past decade, increasing by 46 percent.
- The number of Hispanic children grew by 39 percent.
- The number of non-Hispanic Asian and Pacific Islander children grew by 31 percent (O'Hare, 2011).

Today, more than one-fifth of America's children are immigrants or children of immigrants (O'Hare 2011). If these trends continue, demographers conclude that "soon there will be no majority racial or ethnic group in the United States—no one group that makes up more than fifty percent of the total population" (Crouch, Zakariya, & Jiandani, 2012).

These demographic changes have implications for school and public librarians in the United States, the majority of who are middle aged, white, English speaking females (ALA, 2012). As Mestre (2009) notes, "many librarians are now struggling to connect with a completely new set of learners, with cultural backgrounds distinctly different from each other and from their teachers. It may be a challenge for the [librarian] who has only used teaching strategies and examples based

¹ The researchers prefer the terms *youth of color* or *people of color* to refer to people of African descent, people of Asian descent, people of Latin American descent, and Indigenous peoples, as opposed to the terms non-White or minority. The term non-White normalizes whiteness and reinforces the privileged position of whites in the U.S. As the demographic data shows, the term minority is inaccurate.

on his or her life experiences" (p. 9). Marcoux (2009) agrees, stressing that the "tension between groups with an idea of 'us and them'" has the potential to negatively impact the ability of librarians to work effectively with youth with different culture, language, learning styles, and backgrounds (p. 6). In fact, Kumasi (2012) found that many youth of colour do "feel like outsiders in library spaces and deem the school library as sole 'property' of the school librarian" (p. 36). She argues that these feelings of disconnect and exclusion must be attended to if librarians want to make all of their students feel welcome.

Adding to the challenge of working with youth of colour is the fact that much of the public discourse concerning these young people is based on a cultural deficit model of thinking – a stance that minimizes, or even ignores, the structural forces that have led to the unequal distribution of resources, lack of opportunity, and other forms of oppression and discrimination that negatively affect the lived experiences of these youth and their communities (Cabrera, 2013; Kumasi, 2012). Youth of colour report significant ethnic and racial stereotyping by teachers, administrators, and their school peers (Foxen, 2010). They often feel overlooked or excluded, and are tracked frequently into remedial and special education classes (Foxen, 2010). Less than one-third of schools with the highest percentages of African American and Hispanic students offer calculus, and only 40 percent offer physics (United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2009-2010). About one in three African American and Native students and about one in four Latino students do not graduate high school on time, as compared to one in seven white students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014). Cabrera (2014) argues that educators and policy-makers who do not recognize the systemic nature of the racial disparities that exist in American society, who buy into this cultural deficit viewpoint, contribute to the continued marginalization of these youth.

Research exists that disrupts the cultural deficit narrative. Numerous studies have shown that youth of colour bring important cultural strengths to the table that when capitalized on can lead to increased academic achievement, positive racial identity development, improved self-confidence and self-esteem, and increased resiliency (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Edwards, McMillon, & Turner, 2010; Foxen, 2010; Hanley & Noblit, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Padrón, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002; Rivera & Zehler, 1991). Librarians who serve youth of colour and their families need to "consider these strengths alongside the challenges to get a full and comprehensive picture" of the youth of colour in their communities (Cabrera, 2013, p. 7). We argue that to do this requires cultural competence and an understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy. Both of these terms will be defined in the review of literature section of this paper.

This paper reports on an exploratory study designed to investigate the extent to which practicing school and public librarians perceive cultural awareness and cultural competence as key to providing library services to the increasingly racially and ethnically diverse populations they serve. While there is much LIS literature that calls for librarians to be culturally competent (see e.g., Allard, Mehra, & Qayyum, 2007; Elturk, 2003; Jaeger, Bertot, & Subramaniam, 2013; Marcoux, 2009; Mestre, 2009; Overall, 2009), the researchers could find no research studies that looked at whether practicing librarians have internalized that need as part of their professional knowledge. Do they recognize the need to know and respect the diverse cultural backgrounds and characteristics of the youth of colour that are projected to make up the majority of students attending American public schools this academic year? Do they understand that in order to meet these student's needs it is necessary to integrate the culture of these youth into library services, programs, and collections? Through this study, the researchers are interested in identifying any needs for increased awareness of cultural competence and how this issue affects all aspects of youth librarianship. Additionally, data on this issue could provide a baseline for measuring the LIS profession's understanding of the necessity for cultural competence in their libraries. With this

knowledge, the profession would be better situated to move forward with education and advocacy plans.

Review of Related Literature

This section presents research related to the major conceptual areas associated with the current study: cultural competence and culturally relevant pedagogy.

Cultural Competence in LIS Defined

For decades, library and information science (LIS) professionals have advocated for greater cultural awareness within the library profession to meet the needs of a growing population of diverse library users. Discussions have focused on the need to better prepare current staff to meet the demands of demographic shifts, and to recruit a more diverse library workforce, one that is representative of the communities served by all libraries (Kim & Sin, 2008; Pawley, 2006; Winston & Walstad, 2006). Cultural competence has also become a valued component of LIS education with more faculty incorporating topics related to diversity and multiculturalism into their courses (Goldberg, 2012; Jaeger, Bertot, & Subramaniam, 2013; Kumasi & Franklin, 2011; Mehra, Olsen, & Ahmad, 2011).

While a number of researchers have explored what cultural competence looks like in the context of LIS practice, Overall (2009) has produced the most comprehensive conceptual framework for the LIS profession to date. She defines *cultural competence* as:

the ability to recognize the significance of culture in ones' own life and in the lives of others; and to come to know and respect diverse cultural backgrounds and characteristics through interaction with individuals from diverse linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic groups; and to fully integrate the culture of diverse groups into services, work, and institutions in order to enhance the lives of those being served by the library profession and those engaged in service (2009, p. 189-190).

Her framework, an asset-based approach, identifies three critical domains of cultural competence – domains she asserts are necessary to fully understand and appreciate diverse cultural groups and underserved populations: the cognitive, interpersonal, and environmental, as show in Table 1.

Table 1: Overall's Cultural Domains (2009, p. 191-198).

Domain	Definition
Cognitive domain	Refers to individual perceptions of one's own culture and the culture of others Involves self-examination and identification of underlying and often unconscious cultural knowledge, assumptions, and biases Developed through personal encounters, building trusting relationships with community members, and professional development
Interpersonal domain	Refers to cultural appreciation and caring about diverse populations Involves cultivation of voice, appreciation of diverse learning styles, and incorporation of cultural experiences Developed through interactions, communication, and tailoring practices to the expressed values of the community
Environmental domain	Refers to knowledge of the environment in which individuals and communities live Includes an awareness and understanding of the assets of a community (such as languages, dialects, etc.), and social issues that affect the community (such as lack of transportation, poor educational opportunities, safety concerns, etc.) Developed through interaction, communication, personal encounters, and research

Overall (2009) argues that cultural competence is a process that “does not end with knowledge about diverse cultures” (p. 200). It involves action: creating and maintaining more equitable environments for diverse populations, establishing and maintaining relationships among diverse cultural, racial, and ethnic communities, and “developing the ability to seamlessly weave culture into the fabric of all LIS endeavours” (p. 199). She concludes that greater understanding of cultural issues will result in improved services to and increased library use among diverse populations. As she states, “having culturally competent LIS professionals who know how to effectively integrate social, cultural, and linguistic information into LIS services is essential to meeting this goal” (p. 190).

Cultural Competence and LIS Students

Several studies have looked at LIS students' perceptions of their level of cultural competence. In Kumasi & Hill's (2011) study, which was informed by Overall's conceptual framework, LIS students at two ALA accredited institutions participated in an electronic survey that asked them to rate on a Likert scale the “depth of their self-awareness, education (or knowledge), and personal interactions before and after entering an LIS master's program” (p. 256). They were also given the opportunity to respond to open-ended questions. In their analysis, Kumasi & Hill focused on the education section of the questionnaire, finding that students believed the eight concepts presented in this section, as shown in Table 2, were important, but their level of knowledge gained through their coursework varied from no or low levels to moderate levels of actual learning. The researchers concluded that cultural competence learning objectives must be more clearly articulated and better integrated into the LIS curriculum so that student-learning outcomes can improve and be measured more effectively.

Table 2. Cultural Competence: Education Area Topics (Kumasi & Hill, 2011, p. 257)

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- Understanding of the term ‘literacy’ including cognitive and socio-cultural perspectives
 - Knowledge of cultural differences among ethnic populations in the U.S.
 - Recognition of how individuals from various cultures access information.
 - Recognition of the barriers to information access and use that may exist for individuals from various cultures.
 - Collection development strategies that reflect the information wants and needs of individuals from various cultures.
 - Recognition of the role libraries play in providing outreach and specialized services to various cultural groups in the U.S.
 - Considering the impact that recruiting library professionals from various cultural backgrounds has on library service.
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Using a qualitative research design in 2010, Overall examined the extent to which required service learning experiences affected LIS graduate students' understanding of equity of access issues. As part of a 15-week long course, students completed 30 hours of service learning with librarians at eleven elementary schools or public libraries serving large populations of Latinos. Multiple data collection methods were used, including log and field notes of the students' service learning experiences, self-reflections, pre- and post-surveys on service learning, and individual interviews. The students reported that working with Latino patrons helped improve their cultural awareness and fostered the development of empathy. They demonstrated a broader understanding of the limited access to information and technology many Latino communities have, the reasons for this limited access, and the need for improvements to library services for them. They also recognized the need to provide Latino library patrons with networking opportunities, to

build trust among community members and library patrons, and to cooperate with individuals served. Overall concluded that service learning can help improve students' cultural awareness and understanding, specifically as it relates to equity of access issues for Latinos.

Cultural Competence and LIS Practitioner Literature

As noted in the introduction, while no research studies have explored the extent to which practicing librarians have internalized cultural competency as an integral part of their professional knowledge, cultural competency has been the topic of a number of articles in the LIS practitioner literature. Key themes identified in these articles include:

1. The need for youth services librarians to explore issues related to race, power and privilege in the U.S., including the concept of whiteness and "the ways in which it might function (either implicitly or overtly)" in library practice and in the belief systems of librarians (Kumasi, 2012, p. 36), and to recognize the structures of inequality that result from institutionalized racism (Elturk, 2003; Kumasi, 2012).
2. The need for librarians to adopt an asset-based approach to their work with youth of colour, one that disrupts cultural deficit views and honors these youth's voices and lived experiences (Elturk, 2003; Kumasi, 2012; Mestre, 2009).
3. The need for librarians to become informed about cultural differences among and within the cultural groups served by their libraries (Allard, S., Mehra, & Qayyum, 2007; Mestre, 2009; Overall, 2014).
4. The need for libraries to create culturally responsive, positive and affirming environments (Elturk, 2003; Kumasi, 2012; Mestre, 2009).
5. The importance of culturally relevant literature as a tool for enabling librarians to both understand the cultural experiences of the youth they serve and to motivate youth of colour to develop literacy and become lifelong library users (Overall, 2014).
6. The need for youth services librarians to be sensitive to different learning and engagement styles among the youth they serve and to utilize instructional strategies that accommodate those styles (Mestre, 2009).

Cultural Competence and Education

Cultural competence is critical to culturally relevant teaching, which Ladson-Billings (2009) defines as a pedagogy that "empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 20). Culturally relevant teaching recognizes the linguistic, literate, and cultural practices of communities of colour as resources to honour, explore, extend, and build on in formal educational settings. In practice, culturally relevant pedagogy uses the "cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles" of students of colour to make learning more relevant, meaningful, and validating (Gay, 2000, p. 29). Key principles of culturally relevant pedagogy include:

1. An authentic belief that students from culturally diverse backgrounds are capable learners and can become intellectual leaders
2. Legitimization of students' real-life experiences as part of the curriculum
3. A commitment to enabling students to explore and make connections between their multiple identities
4. The creation of a community of learners
5. Engagement of students and teachers in a collective struggle against the status quo
6. The recognition of the political nature of teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 126-128).

Culturally relevant pedagogy has been shown to increase student achievement (see Edwards, McMillon, & Turner, 2010 for a discussion of relevant research).

Mestre (2009) argues that developing culturally responsive instruction is one way librarians can support diverse learners. She provides specific examples of what culturally responsive instruction might look like in the school library including identifying authors, sources or topics with specific cultures associated, adapting instruction to reflect the ways diverse learners acquire and display knowledge, providing opportunities for students to examine issues from multiple perspectives, allowing students to work collaboratively, and engaging students by asking open-ended questions. Mestre concludes that "creating culturally inclusive teaching/learning events will not only enhance the experience of students but is one step in providing an environment that affirms, respects, and acknowledges differences in individuals and in groups" (p. 11).

Research Design

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected via an electronic survey questionnaire that was distributed through three professional library email lists during the fall of 2014 (AASL Forum, ALSC-L, and YALSA-Bk). Over 6,000 individuals subscribe to these three email lists, including public and school librarians who serve youth. The text of the recruitment letter noted that school and public libraries are impacted by societal changes, and invited youth librarians to share their perceptions of the key factors they believe affect their current library practice.

The survey instrument, adapted from one used by Juliá (2000) to look at social work student perceptions of culture as integral to social work practice, contained two sections (see the Appendix). The first section consisted of six open-ended questions devised to explore the participants' level of awareness and recognition of the need for cultural competence in their professional practice. Since our intent was to determine the degree to which librarians independently perceive and prioritize issues of cultural competence in their work environments, none of the questions specifically asked about cultural issues. Instead, the extent to which the librarians recognized the need for knowledge of cultural awareness and competence was gauged by their responses to questions that addressed the following categories: recognition of the factors affecting youth (0-18) and their parents/caregivers' perceptions and attitudes about the value of libraries and their willingness to utilize library services, collections and programs; the characteristics librarians should possess in order to be responsive to the needs of youth (0-18) and their parents/caregivers; and the biggest challenges youth services librarians face in delivering library programs, services, and materials to youth (0-18) and their parents/caregivers. The survey also asked participants to define the role of youth services librarians.

A section on demographic information included factors that might influence their awareness and perceptions of cultural competence such as race or ethnicity, age, gender, number of years of professional practice, and whether or not they had an MLS. Participants were also asked to indicate the type of library in which they worked (school or public), or if they were currently in a library science program, and which term best described the community served by their library (rural, suburban, or urban), if applicable.

Data Analysis

The researchers used the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the most common method for analyzing qualitative data, to code the responses for evidence of cultural awareness and cultural competence. The researchers independently coded the data, specifically looking for

references to the concepts identified by Overall (2009) and Kumasi & Hill (2011), as well as specific words such as race, ethnicity, diversity, ELL or English as a Second Language, and multiculturalism. Using Holsti's (1969) formula, inter-coder reliability was calculated to be 94.3%, well above the commonly accepted 80% benchmark.

Findings

Eighty-seven of the 338 participants who began the survey completed it. While this number is admittedly low, the researchers believe it is sufficient given the exploratory nature of the study. Forty-three of the respondents (49%) were public librarians serving children and/or teens and 33 (38%) were school librarians ranging from elementary to high school. Five respondents (6%) who indicated "other" were public library administrators. Four respondents (5%) were students enrolled currently in an LIS program. Sixty-five (79%) of the respondents had earned an MLS degree; over one-third had received their degree in the past five years. Participants were asked to describe the type of community they served. Forty-four selected suburban (54%), 24 chose urban (30%), and 13 (16%) indicated rural.

Of the 81 respondents who answered the race/ethnicity question, seventy (86%) respondents identified as White, three (4%) as Hispanic/Latino, three (4%) as two or more races, and one as African-American. Four (5%) chose not to identify their race or ethnicity. Eighty-one participants answered the question asking for age. The majority (55%) were 40 or over. For the 82 respondents who answered the question regarding gender, 73 identified as female (89%), 8 as male (10%), and 1 as other (1%). Table 3 summarizes participants' demographic data.

Table 3: Demographic Data for Respondents

Race/Ethnicity (n=82)	Gender (n=82)	Age (n=81)
White 70 (86%)	Female 73(89%)	20-29 14 (17%)
African American 1(1%)	Male 8(10%)	30-39 20 (25%)
Latino/Hispanic 3(4%)	Other 1(1%)	40-49 18 (22%)
Two or more races 3(4%)		50+ 28 (35%)
Prefer not to report 4 (5%)		Prefer not to report 1 (1%)

The respondents were given the opportunity to address elements of cultural awareness, cultural competence, and culturally relevant pedagogy in six questions. Table 4 reflects the answers to the following survey questions:

1. Define the role of youth services librarians.
2. List the most important characteristics you believe a librarian should possess in order to be responsive to the needs of youth and their parents/caregivers.
3. List the factors that you believe impact youth and their parents/caregivers' perceptions and attitudes about the value of libraries.
4. List the factors that you believe influence youth and their parents/caregivers' utilization of library programs, services, and materials.
5. What do you think is the biggest challenge youth services librarians face in delivering library programs, services, and materials to youth and their parents/caregivers?
6. List the changes you believe are needed to make library programs, services, and materials more responsive to youth and their parents/caregivers.

Table 4: Culture Related Responses

Participant	Responses
1	youth services librarians provide relative outreach and programming to the diverse groups of children that patron a library ¹
2	librarian recognizes the culture of the community and blends in the needs of the community into the collection and programming ¹
3	open to diversity ²
4	so often librarians overlook the population of immigrants ²
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ respectful of different cultural standards² ▪ multi-cultural understanding⁴
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ feeling welcomed into an institution, regardless of background, literacy, language, affluence, experience is critical³ ▪ language levels⁴
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ materials that reflect the needs and diversity in community³ ▪ reach all socio-economic, cultural, and other diverse backgrounds with materials and programming⁴ ▪ not enough staff to serve all segments of our communities⁵ ▪ publishers need to realize the diverse segments of populations and need to publish books that reflect that diversity⁶
8	expressions of sincere concern for learning...no matter their educational, religious, or ethnic backgrounds ³
9	culturally-aware collection and programming ³
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ language barriers can be a challenge as well⁴ ▪ more collaboration with underserved populations (...ESL speakers)⁶
11	cultural awareness ⁴
12	language and cultural barriers ⁵
13	language barriers-not enough staff are bilingual ⁵
14	more multicultural offerings ⁶
15	community awareness and embeddedness; know your community well, be connected to the people who drive it, whether church leaders, business owners, tribal leaders... ⁶

As Table 4 shows, only 15 of the 87 respondents, or 17%, included any culture-related reference in their answers to any of the six questions designed to elicit this information. Eleven participants provided one response that included some specific indication of cultural awareness, three participants provided two culture-related responses, and one participant answered four questions with responses containing cultural content. Although outside the scope of this paper, the researchers thought it was noteworthy that there were other omissions in terms of inclusivity. No study participants mentioned any issues related to LGBTQ youth or patrons with disabilities in response to any of the study questions.

Although the researchers collected data on factors that might influence the participants' awareness and perceptions of cultural competence such as race or ethnicity, age, gender, number of years of professional practice, and whether or not they had an MLS, only race/ethnicity emerged as noteworthy. Of the seven participants who identified as African American, Hispanic/Latino, or Two or More Races, 43% (n=3) answered a question with an answer that included multicultural content. Of the 70 participants who identified as White, only 17% (n=12) answered with any multicultural content. This finding is consistent with research that shows that white librarians tend not to raise issues of diversity or to discuss race (Pawley, 2009). Age and gender seemed to have no effect on cultural awareness. Likewise, participants without an MLS, were just as likely as those with an MLS to include some specific indication of cultural awareness. The only outlier related to professional level. None of the elementary school librarians (9% of respondents) offered multicultural content in their answers.

When the data are examined at the question level, the lack of cultural awareness or competence becomes even more visible. The survey's six questions generated 512 responses, yet only 21 responses (4%) contained any reference to culture and 10 of those 21 responses, or 48%, were from the same four participants. Only one response mentioned a specific racial or ethnic community (Tribal.); only one response included the word ethnic; only one used the word immigrant; and only five mentioned language differences (four including "language" in the response and one mentioning "ESL speakers").

In the first open-ended question, participants were asked to define the role of youth services librarians. Empowering youth, supporting young adult development, promoting literacy development, and providing innovative programming, research assistance, technology instruction, and outreach to youth and their families were all recognized, as was providing informational and leisure reading materials in multiple formats. However, only two participants mentioned the need to consider the culture of community members in developing these programs and services.

Question two specifically asked the respondents to list the most important characteristics a librarian must possess to be responsive to the needs of youth. Eighty-eight separate responses were provided. Only three (3%) included any reference to cultural awareness. As a point of comparison, the researchers checked to see how frequently knowledge of the developmental needs of youth, another important consideration identified by the profession as central to developing responsive library programs for youth (c.f. Jones & Shoemaker, 2001; Walter & Meyers, 2003), was mentioned in this question's responses. Twenty-one of the 88 responses (24%) indicated the need for an understanding of youth developmental characteristics.

Question three asked participants to list the factors they believe impact youth and their parents/caregivers' perceptions and attitudes about libraries. Respondents included in their responses knowledge about what libraries have to offer, previous experience with libraries, whether libraries and librarians are welcoming, inviting, and friendly, and patrons' socioeconomic status; but again, reference to culture was virtually absent.

When asked in question four to list the factors that influenced youth and their parents/caregivers utilizations of library programs, services, and materials in question four, culture-related responses were minimal. Again, factors related to socioeconomic status were mentioned such as "the digital divide", "poverty," and "lack of money."

In question five, the participants were asked to indicate the biggest challenge youth services librarians are facing. Even though the question asked for the "biggest challenge," survey responses were broad, with a majority of participants including at least three issues in their response. Eighty-five total responses were provided; 39 (46%) listed budget or funding issues as compared to only three (4%) responses mentioning culture.

The final question asked participants to list the changes that are most needed to make library programs, services, and materials more responsive to youth and their caregivers. As with previous questions, the responses drew relatively little evidence that the participants prioritized cultural awareness. The most frequent answers were related to marketing and increased funding as compared to only four (5%) with any mention of culture.

Discussion

The most prominent and revealing finding of this study was the apparent lack of cultural awareness and competence reflected by the responses. In this section of the paper, the researchers offer possible explanations for the relatively few culture-related responses by the participants. Each of the explanations, while not generalizable, warrants further exploration and raises issues for the LIS professional community to consider.

One possible explanation for the findings is the "implicit pervasiveness of cultural ethnocentrism," which is defined as the unconscious tendency to view one's ethnic or cultural

group as centrally important, and to measure all other groups in relation to one's own (Juliá, 2000, p. 286). The majority of our study participants, like the majority of librarians, were white. Unless these librarians had engaged in meaningful and reflective study of the historical and contemporary impact of race, racism, power, and privilege in the U.S., they may not understand how their ethnic, cultural, and linguistic background guides their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours. Unaware of the historical privileges associated with whiteness, including access to employment, housing, health care, education, and even library services, they may have a minimal understanding, or even ignorance, of how cultural differences "make radical differences to the ways people experience and understand the world" (Segall & Garrett, 2013, p. 286). The normativeness of their race, their whiteness, thus, may be one factor contributing to their apparent lack of understanding of the importance of cultural considerations in the design and delivery of library services to diverse communities. This explanation is further supported by research that shows that "the current culture represented in many libraries is the culture of mainstream communities, even when those libraries are located in areas that are distinctly different from mainstream communities" (Overall, 2009, p. 199).

Another possible explanation for the findings is the reluctance, and even discomfort, the vast majority of Americans have about discussing issues related to race and ethnicity – two dimensions that are central to any discussion or consideration of culture in the U.S. (Segall & Garrett, 2013). As Pawley (2009) noted, "LIS practitioners and educators tend to avoid the *R* word" (p. 151). This tendency to avoid discussions about race or ethnicity has been attributed to "fear of controversy and attempting to avoid community criticism, the desire not to be considered racist;" (Segall & Garret, 2013, p. 267), the belief that we live in a post-racial society (Hsu, 2009), or the belief that colorblindness, or not seeing race, is a "graceful, even generous, liberal gesture" (Morrison, 1992, p. 9). The plausibility of this explanation is supported by two trends the researchers noticed in the data. First, none of the participants mentioned the word race and only one the word ethnic in their responses; this despite the fact that 30 percent of the respondents worked in urban communities where it is likely that many of their patrons are youth and families of colour. Instead, neutral words like "multicultural," "cultural awareness" or "diversity" were used. As Pawley (2006) noted, these words are often "used as a way of referring, in particular to race and ethnicity" although the terms are far from equivalent (p. 151-152). Second, the frequency with which the participants mentioned socioeconomic factors as an important factor to consider in developing programs and services shows that the participants do understand the impact community demographics have on libraries. For example, one participant noted, "*Some [patrons] would like to utilize the library's services but don't have the transportation or Internet access to do it remotely. Some may have old fines – or perceived old fines- and depending on that library's policies may not be able to access materials or services or think they cannot.*" Another said, "*Many of these families often lack access to the internet as well because...of lack of money for home internet service in poor urban areas.*" Talking about poverty and low-wealth is often seen, especially by people from the dominant culture in the U.S., as safer than raising issues related to race or ethnicity (Sue, 2013).

Another explanation for the findings of this study may be the lack of LIS coursework related to diversity and inclusion. Although the 2008 American Library Association's "Standards for Accreditation of Master's Programs in Library and Information Studies" require that program objectives reflect "the role of the library and information services in a diverse, global society, including the role of serving the needs of underserved groups" (p. 6), research has shown that students graduating from LIS programs have taken few, if any, classes related to diversity. The availability of diversity-related courses varies from one LIS program to another, with iSchools offering the fewest (Subramaniam & Jaeger, 2010). Across all types of LIS programs, the vast majority of diversity-related courses were electives that were offered infrequently, if at all

(Subramaniam & Jaeger, 2011). Mestre (2010) found that nearly 80 percent of the students graduating from LIS programs indicated that they had not taken even one class related to diversity. Thus, despite the fact that 33% of the respondents had received their MLS degree in the last five years, it is likely that few of them, if any, had taken an academic or formal course on serving diverse populations. Their lack of culture-related responses may, thus, be attributed to the library field's apparent unwillingness to mandate diversity-related coursework for all LIS students.

One final explanation may be historical. As Berry (1999) explained, the history of the profession has shown that

cultural competence has rarely blessed our professional practice or even penetrated our professional consciousness. Librarians seldom learn the language, collect the literatures, or understand in any way the beliefs, traditions, morals and mores, lifestyles, or aspirations and expectations of the minority cultures in their midst. We reach out to hand them only our culture and heritage, rather than receiving and learning about theirs and respectfully adding them to our collections and personal service (p. 14).

Study Limitations

One perceived limitation of the study might be the open-endedness of the questions; however, this was an intentional decision on the part of the researchers and directly related to the purpose of the study. Given the demographic shifts occurring among the youth population in the U.S. (i.e. the large increases in the numbers of youth of colour), the researchers were interested in whether practicing youth services librarians would, without prompting (i.e. being asked questions directly focused on or containing the words race, ethnicity, diversity, English as a Second Language, or multiculturalism), include cultural considerations in their discussion of the factors that affect the delivery of library services and programs to today's multicultural communities. They were not interested in asking respondents to rank themselves in terms of their cultural competence knowledge.

Another related limitation might be the lack of follow-up interviews to unpack ambiguous responses where the respondent may have been thinking about culture but did not make this explicit to a degree that the response was coded as cultural. For example, there were a number of instances where respondents made comments such as, "provide valuable, relevant programming opportunities catering to the interests and needs of the young adults in their community" or "connect with and understand the patrons/community served"- statements not coded as culture-related. Follow-up interviews were not possible, however, due to IRB restrictions on collecting identifying participant information such as names or email addresses.

Finally, the small sample size might also be considered a limitation. The study, however, was intended as an exploratory study, one conducted to identify potential issues and to provide guidance for further discussion in the LIS community. It was not intended to be generalizable and is the first step in a series of studies the researchers plan to conduct in this area.

Conclusions and Implications

The lack of culture-related responses was surprising and discouraging, especially given the recent national focus on issues related to race and diversity in the U.S. In April 2014 the death of Michael Brown, the unarmed African American teenager killed by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, brought national attention to disparities in the American justice system. One of the overriding themes that emerged in the aftermath of this tragedy was the disconnect between the local predominantly white police force and the African American community of Ferguson. In the spring of 2014, the Twitter sphere erupted with discussions of the lack of diverse, non-

dominant cultural narratives in children's literature. Fueled by the We Need Diverse Books campaign and the twitter hashtag #WeNeedDiverseBooks, this discussion brought the need for books by and about people of colour to the consciousness, once again,² of librarians, teachers, parents, and publishers. Professional journals like *School Library Journal*, one of the journals most frequently read by youth services librarians, joined the conversation, devoting an entire issue in May to the topic of diversity (c.f. <http://www.slj.com/features/the-diversity-issue-slj-2014/>). Additionally, two of the national professional associations serving youth services librarians released white papers in 2014 that focused on the need for greater cultural awareness among librarians. *The Future of Library Services For and With Teens: A Call to Action* (Braun, Hartman, Hughes-Hassell, & Kumasi, 2014) released in January, specifically recognizes the demographic shift that is occurring in the United States and notes, "Now is the time for the field of librarianship, the population of which is overwhelmingly Caucasian, to consider what these demographic changes mean to school and public library services and programs for and with teens (p. 2)." In April, ALSC released *The Importance of Diversity in Library Programs and Material Collections for Children* (Naidoo, 2014) white paper, which explores the critical role libraries play in helping children make cross-cultural connections and develop skills necessary to function in a culturally pluralistic society. Finally, in 2014 AASL formed a task force on serving underserved populations. Clearly, conversations about diversity and its impact on society are occurring in the U.S and in the youth services profession itself. The basic question, then, is how do we encourage youth services librarians to become more active participants in these conversations, and to consider the implications cultural differences have for their work with youth of colour?

There were encouraging themes apparent in the data. These included the need for librarians to be aware of the developmental needs of youth, to focus on youth engagement, to understand youth culture, to provide outreach, and to collaborate with other community agencies to better meet the needs of youth. Words like empathy, warmth, caring, open minded, non-judgmental, accepting, compassionate, and a willingness to advocate for youth were used repeatedly to describe the most important characteristics librarians who serve youth should possess. Clearly, the librarians who responded to the survey care deeply about youth and their families. Another basic question then becomes, how do we get youth services librarians to consider the culture of the communities they serve as readily as they do other aspects of youth development as critical to providing exemplary services for youth?

Finally, the lack of cultural awareness and competence illustrated by the survey responses suggests that LIS schools and professional associations need to intensify their efforts to help youth librarians effectively meet the needs of youth of colour. Clearly there needs to be more emphasis on serving diverse communities in the LIS curriculum; however, just providing diversity-related coursework does not guarantee the integration of cultural awareness or cultural competence into practice (Kumasi & Hill, 2011; Overall, 2010). Careful consideration needs to be given to how this coursework is structured, and whether the coursework is voluntary or is required as part of the core curriculum. Research in LIS and in other fields suggests that whether cultural competence is integrated across the curriculum or addressed in stand-alone courses, instruction must:

- Include a deliberate and streamlined set of cultural competence standards (Kumasi & Hill, 2011),
- Move beyond the theoretical to provide opportunity for firsthand experiences with diverse populations, perhaps in the form of service learning (Jaeger, Bertot, & Subramaniam, 2013; Overall, 2010)

² The lack of diverse titles and the implications this has for youth of color, as well as white youth, first received national attention in 1965 when Nancy Larrick published her landmark article, "The All-White World of Children's Books."

- Provide opportunities for students to experience diversity in a way that “personalizes the learning by furthering self-awareness, discovering new social realities, and translating knowledge into effective practice” (Juliá, 2000, p. 286).
- Focus on sociocultural consciousness and culturally responsive teaching practices (Josey & Abdullahi, 2002)
- Include difficult conversations about race, racism, power, and privilege (Pawley, 2006).
- Include an exit interview or assessment to determine whether students have developed adequate cultural competencies (Mestre, 2010).

These same characteristics apply to continuing education opportunities.

Even more important is the need for LIS schools and professional associations to develop a comprehensive approach to preparing youth services librarians to effectively serve their increasingly diverse communities – to move beyond requiring a diversity-related course or providing an occasional conference session or webinar, for example, to developing a strategic plan that infuses cultural competence and inclusion into the culture of youth librarianship. As Jaeger, Bertot, & Subramaniam (2013) argue, if the library community “does not evolve along with the demographic evolution of our nation, the real threat to the future of libraries...will be the library becoming an organization that is ossified and irrelevant to much of society” (p. 246). The results of this study suggest that there is much work to be done to ensure that all young people and their families, including people of colour, “see themselves in the information resources, services, and programs being made available” (Jaeger, Bertot, & Subramaniam, 2013, p. 246).

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Appendix. Survey Instrument

Youth Librarians' Perceptions of the Factors that Impact Their Library Practice

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our survey. Please answer each of the following six open-ended questions as completely as possible. Demographic data will be collected at the end of the survey.

Remember: You are free to answer or not answer any particular question and have no obligation to complete answering the questions once you begin. Completion of the survey should take approximately 15-20 minutes.

1. Define the role of youth services librarians.
2. List the most important characteristics you believe a librarian should possess in order to be responsive to the needs of youth (0-18) and their parents/caregivers.
3. List the factors that you believe impact youth (0-18) and their parents/caregivers' perceptions and attitudes about the value of libraries.
4. List the factors that you believe influence youth (0-18) and their parents/caregivers' utilization of library programs, services, and materials.
5. What do you think is the biggest challenge youth services librarians face in delivering library programs, services, and materials to youth (0-18) and their parents/caregivers?
6. List the changes you believe are needed to make library programs, services, and materials more responsive to youth (0-18) and their parents/caregivers.