The Low-Morale Experience of Minority Academic Librarians: A Review

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Let's...

- Review the original low morale study
- Share established and nascent frameworks
- Summarize the LME development and impacts
- Introduce PoC-centric low morale data
- Discuss emerging countermeasures
- Share ongoing work
What is "low morale"?
Traditional Markers

- respect
- lack of recognition
- unclear expectations
- leadership problems
- poor communication
- organizational changes

(Brun & Cooper, 2009)
Updated Links

- incivility/toxicity
- bullying/mobbing
- Resilience narratives
- Vocational Awe
- Job precarity*
Low morale is the result of repeated and protracted exposure to emotional, verbal/written, and system abuse or negligence in the workplace.

(Kendrick, 2017)
Frameworks
Resilience narratives

- encourage individualization
- depoliticizes structures
- normalize insecurity
- additional labor on traditionally marginalized groups

(Berg, Galvan & Tewell, 2017)
Vocational Awe

"The idea that libraries as institutions are inherently good. It assumes that some or all core aspects of the profession are beyond critique, and it, in turn, underpins many librarians' sense of identity and emotional investment in the profession."

(Ettarh, 2017)
Job Precarity

Contractual, ambiguous, insecure, unprotected, & poorly paid labor/work/employment.

- emerging area
- correlates with mental health impacts
- more likely to impact already marginalized people
- negative impact on library structure, operations, and development

(Brons, Riley, Yin & Henninger 2018)
The General Low-Morale Experience

- Starts with Trigger Event
  - unexpected
  - identifies co-worker as abuser
  - short-term affective and physiological effects

- Repeated, Protracted Exposure to Abuse/Neglect
  - emotional, verbal/written, system, negligence
  - compounded affective, physiological, and cognitive responses
  - negative outlook on LIS career and outlook

- Negative LIS Practice Impacts
  - reduced collegiality
  - reduced professional confidence
  - increased procrastination
  - increased absenteeism/tardiness
  - reduced professional engagement

- Impact Factors (2)
  - Invisibility
  - Contagion

- Enabling Systems (6)
  - Promotion and Tenure
  - Human Resources Limitations
  - Staffing & Employment
  - LIS Perceptions
  - Leadership
  - Uncertainty & Mistrust

- Recovery
  - long-term
  - unresolved
  - physical/mental health implications
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Why?

- lack of PoC voices in original study
- persistent LIS recruitment/retention issues
- EDI concerns
- recent past re: PoC welcomeness in libraries & in LIS
Our Questions

- What is the low morale trajectory for racial/ethnic minority academic librarians?

- How does holding a racialized identity impact the low-morale experience for this group?
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Research Frameworks

- Critical Race Theory (Solorzano 1998)
- Counternarratives (Solorzano & Yosso 2002)
- Negative Workplace Behaviors (Freedmen & Vreven 2016; Ortega 2017)
- [Historical and persistent] Whiteness in LIS (Hathcock 2015; ALA 2017; Cooke 2018)
- EDI (Davis & Hall 2007; ALA 2017)
- Emotional Labor (Hochschild 1983; Evans & Moore 2015)
Methodology & Participants

- qualitative (phenomenology)
- 17 participants
- deep interviews (286 pages of rich data)
• 39% from the Southern region of the U.S.
• 90% female
• 48% 26 -35 years old
• 48% new librarians (0 - 5 years of experience)
Results Summary

• **Low morale experience validated**
  - all types of abuse/negligence reported
  - physiological, affective, and cognitive responses
  - impact factors
  - enabling systems (except staffing/employment)
  - recovery (attempts)

• **More likely to:**
  - experience emotional & system abuse during trigger events
  - experience system abuse & negligence during low morale development (feeling "tricked" or baited-and-switched; more likely to block memory of instances of abuse)
Results Summary

• New (and additional) Impact Factors
  - stereotype threat
  - deauthenticity
    - internally motivated
    - cautionary/defensive behaviors against hostile/unwelcoming workplaces

• New (and additional) Enabling Systems
  - Diversity rhetoric (cognitive dissonance; superficiality; pushback, tokenism; scholarship devaluation)
  - Whiteness (white women abusers; white privilege; lack of intersectionality)
  - White supremacy (paternalism, whitewashing of institutions role in historical/current racism; reductionism of accomplishments)
  - Racism (stereotyping, microaggressions, oppression, phenotype reliance)

• New (and additional) Enabling Systems
  - Career/environmental landscapes (hostile campus or living communities; racially homogeneous workplaces; dissonance between student body/faculty)
  - Politics (results of 2016 U.S. Presidential election and subsequent education, social, and civil rights assaults)
  - Collegiality (collaborations, support, credit-stealing)
  - Oppressed group behavior (hazing or lack of assistance due to newness in workplace or in the field)
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Grand Total:

4 Impact Factors
14 Enabling Systems
Countermeasures? Let's Talk...

- Assertive Communication
- (In)formal Leadership
- Reducing Shame
- Boundaries
- Taking care
- Others?
Ongoing Work: Academic Librarians

Ongoing Work: Racial/Ethnic Minority Academic Librarians
Study: Forthcoming Fall 2019
Deauthenticity survey: https://bit.ly/2NHvg5v

Ongoing Work: Public Librarians
Spot-check: https://bit.ly/2Tjb5AV

ALL
Facebook Community: Renewers
Blog: Renewals (renewerslis.wordpress.com)
The Renewal Seminar / The Renewal Workshop
Works Cited


Works Cited (cont'd)


