

Going Against the Current of Hegemonic “White-IST” Discourse: A Doctoral Program Journey from Critical Student + Guide Perspectives

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This article presents a critique of systemic library and information science (LIS) education and its hegemonic “White-IST” (White + elitist) discourse prevalent across the conceptualization and implementation of doctoral programs in the United States. The text illuminates the structural aspects of the doctoral experience embedded in (yet beyond) a shared narrative, to present implications for doctoral education for LIS students of color. The article extends an autoethnographic approach to personal narrative and storytelling from the critical perspectives of a student + guide. It identifies challenges to overcome barriers in achieving milestones in the LIS doctoral journey while critiquing programmatic issues in the process.

Keywords: critical perspectives, doctoral LIS education, narrative, student + guide, White-IST

This article presents a critique of systemic library and information science (LIS) education and its hegemonic “White-IST” discourse prevalent across the conceptualization and implementation of doctoral programs in the United States. The representational form of the

term “White [hyphen] IST” (in ALL CAPS) in this article further develops the construct introduced earlier by the authors as an amalgamation of “White + elitist” practices prevalent in historical and contemporary phases of all aspects in the LIS professions (Mehra & Gray, 2020). The text illuminates structural aspects of the doctoral experience beyond a singular narrative, to present implications for critical educational practice. The article extends an autoethnographic approach to personal narrative and storytelling from the critical perspectives of a student + guide. It identifies challenges to overcome barriers in achieving milestones in the doctoral journey while exposing programmatic deficiencies in the process.

The work adopts a discursive approach steeped in critical narratology (Fairclough, 2001; Gee and Handford, 2012) to discuss

KEY POINTS:

- LIS education needs to systemically evaluate its hegemonic “White-IST” (White + elitist) discourse prevalent across the conceptualization and implementation of doctoral programs in the United States.
- A critique of the structural aspects of the doctoral experience embedded in a shared narrative highlights broad implications for progressive changes in doctoral education, especially for LIS students of color.
- An autoethnographic approach to personal narrative and storytelling from the critical perspectives of a student + guide identifies challenges to overcome barriers in achieving milestones in the LIS doctoral journey while critiquing programmatic issues in the process.

strategies that we adopted as an LIS student + guide in navigating and circumventing a “White-IST” hegemonic discourse (Fehn, Hoesterey, & Tatar, 2014; Mehra, 2021a). Mehra and Gray (2020) examine these trends for real transformations to occur. They define “White-IST” also in terms of a hegemonic immersion in an anglo-/Eurocentric LIS education and its “closed-box” knowledge permeating and dominating all areas of academic experience and reality (Mehra, 2016). Examples include obliteration of indigenous oral histories, resistance to an integration of critical race theory and scholarship, and marginalization of action research, among others. The meaning of the word “hegemonic” is related to imbalanced power and suppression of everything outside established anglo/Euro knowledge domains discounting other philosophical and methodological pathways (Flank, 2009).

The article uses “student + guide” to represent a collaborative partnership and intentionally avoids use of terms like “advisor” and “chair,” which often occur in LIS doctoral program policies. These signify a top-down relationship promoting condescension and ignoring a mutually symbiotic and shared vision between the student + guide. The specific form of the term “student + guide” with the plus sign (“+”) is used to symbolize a defiance to hegemonic Anglo-/Eurocentricity that is assumed “normative” in English language use in LIS scholarship. For instance, such an LIS aversion is reflected in its “colonial” disdain toward and exclusion of World Englishes, with their prolific sociolinguistic traditions, history, and milieu (Kachru & Nelson 2006). The “+” marks a cultural and linguistic statement toward the limitations of the formal “Queen’s English” in LIS scholarship and its internalized colonialism, resistance to change, and continuation to stifle creativity in written expression to generate the most impact (Buripakdi, 2012). In its lack of inclusivity toward minority language or people-centered communication patterns, the use of English in mainstream LIS scholarship continues to hold on to boxed use of standards tied to European or American culture. For example, it promotes stiffness and rigidity, even in contemporary times when the public communicates in non-traditional ways via social media in their tweets, hashtags, and so on (McKenzie, 1987; Rendall, Vasey, & McKenzie, 2008). A reliance on solely “normative” English is also reflected in a tendency within library bibliographic and cataloging practices to regard exact meanings of terms, keywords, phrases, and categories as closed-box, black or white rigid classifications.

The “telling” of glimpses from the student + guide journey coming together in this article draws attention to the “voice” construct from critical multiculturalism in the spirit driving the narrative (Giroux & McLaren, 1986). “Voice” is tied to the seemingly contradictory “concordant and disruptive” dialogic (Sharma, 2004, p. 114) located and performed specific to particular settings, “rooted in space, time, and interactional contexts” to access these “insider perspectives” that have been “excluded during the political and social construction of mainstream curriculum” (DePalma, 2008, p. 770). In representing the “voices” of two people of color in LIS education within its placement in a “White-IST” discourse in the American academy, the article highlights intersections of racism intertwined with power and abuse within our privileged spaces, imbalanced scholarship policies and procedures, and “pedestalizing” of specific canons in LIS research (i.e., privileging with honor, like placing on a pedestal). In the process, we engage in narratology (i.e., narrative-building) and storytelling (H. Lee, 2015). We amalgamate autobiographical and ethnographic approaches

to critically push the legitimate expectations of what is considered “normative” practice in LIS scholarship (Fludernik, 1993; Frank, 2010). The capitalization of the color *white* in the term “White-IST” reflects an overbearingness and pomposity of racist practices in LIS and the entrenched nature of racism in nearly every aspect of the professions (Cooke & Sánchez, 2019). We chose not to capitalize the word when used in reference to people (e.g., white faculty).

With the two unique perspectives of the student + guide woven through the narrative, we intentionally go back and forth in our choice to represent our “voices” in the first person and third person pronouns. It helps us provide abstracted statements as well as personalized accounts in the storytelling process (Sturm, 2009). This also draws attention to the tensions of responding to the structurally and administratively hegemonic processes while resisting and creating intellectual space for the non-normative. Experiential excerpts of the student + guide are italicized to illustrate themes as autoethnographic elements or tools in the narrative. These serve as evidence to engage in autoethnographic dialog in the form of “snippets” (i.e., snips), emerging from a critical paradigm and narrative inquiry.

Abstracted contextual environment

The hypothetical setting of a southern university campus forms the stage of this drama. The interdisciplinary college houses four distinct departments. This administrative representation is common across many LIS programs in North America. The student + guide inhabit the information science disciplinary area. The department awards Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in each disciplinary area, but the doctoral program is college wide with an interdisciplinary focus. The doctoral students concentrate or find a home in one of the disciplinary areas and are guided by faculty in that specific area.

Generally speaking (and in the hypothetical program under study), structural milestones in a doctoral journey include completion of coursework (theory, methods, specialization, cognate), qualifying examination, development of dissertation proposal (problem statement, literature review, research methods, potential pilot, timeline), data collection and data analysis, and dissertation defense (Mehra, 2008; Sugimoto, Russell, & Grant, 2009). Usually this journey begins in an immersive coursework experience where the philosophy of the discipline is framed in a way to encourage reproduction of knowledge through theory and method (Shu, Larivière, Mongeon, Julien, & Piper, 2016). This is problematic because higher-level philosophical thinking as an aspect of personal voice in scholarly development is de-emphasized and completely marginalized. Discouragement through limiting the practice of research is often reflected through language, communication, signals, and behaviors of faculty, course instructors, and administrators. The personal voice value is thus not acceptable because it is considered outside the realms of traditional academic discourse within anglo-/Eurocentric frameworks. Such behavior perpetuates violence against students’ basic humanity and human dignity, and to the personal voice that is intrinsic to who they are as human beings.

Experiences shared here are presented as hypothesized encounters. These take the form of select imagined scenarios, key episodes, or critical development of an alternative “voice” to identify traumatic episodes hegemonic in their nature. They help identify possible

directions that might transform LIS education beyond its “feel good” practices/policies surrounding diversity, inclusion, and collegiality and give it greater relevance in the twenty-first century (Jaeger, Sarin, & Peterson, 2015; Jaeger, Subramaniam, Jones, & Bertot, 2011). The assumed stories become a tool in promoting intellectualized discourse and positive actions to nudge the profession beyond its past and contemporary lip service (Adkins, Virden, & Yier, 2015). The goal is to engage in authentic conversations that address behaviors of perceived prejudice, bias, abuse, and discrimination (intentional or unintentional) by LIS faculty or administrators targeting doctoral students and other faculty, as well as “marginalized” others (e.g., first-generation graduates) in academic and professional networks (Cooke, 2014). Even though we are people of color, many elements in the journey are relatable to all doctoral students and faculty in LIS programs.

The choice of representing the contextual environment in a selectively hypothetical fashion provided an opportunity to address the problematic issues without naming. It is intentional and plays multiple roles. First, it draws attention to universal aspects of consideration. Second, it protects the student + guide from possible retaliation and professional persecution encountered in the past. Third, establishing a distance while identifying a specific location provides a freedom to highlight the universal dimensions of the doctoral student experience in LIS education. Fourth, in this process the authors are poking at the lapses in the LIS education domain in a tongue-and-cheek manner. In other places we personalize the two individual journeys. We consider it a privilege to engage in this critical discourse so as to provide engagement in discourse and to change people’s behavior, programs, and policies of practice in the LIS education that we are part and parcel of.

Shared journey

The journey in scholarly development for doctoral students in doctoral programs is a global phenomenon, grounded in the united expedition of student + guide. The lessons learned through the process articulated in the student + guide narratives have an impact across disciplines. The joint endeavor articulated here reveals opportunities and successes in achieving significant milestones. It offers clarity in the experiences that are often misguided through traditional approaches. These approaches often stunt the philosophical growth necessary for significant contributions and disciplinary expansion. Insights into how this student + guide collaboration works effectively while challenging the professions’ “White-IST” tendencies are relevant to both faculty members and doctoral students. The partnership features a reciprocity of mutual growth in the student + guide journey that is marked by the achievement of crafting a unique dissertation, the culminating product of doctoral education. The work earned an Outstanding Dissertation Award by faculty in the College of Communication and Information at the University of Tennessee and recognized as being of value by the 2019 Jean Tague-Sutcliffe Doctoral Student Research Poster Competition at the Association of Library and Information Science Education, earning second place.

This intellectual work undertaken during our process represents a strong and much-needed innovative gendered voice and critical perspective in the study of LIS. The dissertation is a one-of-a-kind exceptional gem of an example that applies critical race theory and social justice framework to push the boundaries of what we consider theory, methods, and

knowledge domains in the limited conceptualization and practice of our professions (Gray, 2015, 2018). The resulting model developed from the rigorous grounded theory application in analysis is ground-breaking. It serves as a foundation and paradigm for qualitative-historical research in LIS for years to come (Gray, 2019).

During the journey, the onus on the doctoral student is to contribute to the field with a complete understanding of disciplinary scholarship and how former successful students established their niche within the professional collegiate (Sugimoto et al., 2009). The philosophical task thus becomes an exercise of fitting into preceding works, rather than the elevation and critique of their own systems of knowledge and research practices (Powell, 1995). The guide is supposed to provide affirmation and support as well challenge and elevate, countering the limitations found in the anglo-/Eurocentric deified curriculum and the “White-IST” tendencies in specific cultural environments socialized within the toxic collegiate academy (Sugimoto, 2012). Further, their actions can assist in resisting stigmatization of notions of success by encouraging philosophical and intellectual rigor to develop scholarly thought.

Conceptual map/theoretical inspiration

Grounded in the philosophy of Michel Foucault’s (1983, 1986) philosophy of knowledge and power, this work critically examines the hegemonic propositions of scholarly knowledge of theoretical and methodological paradigmatic constraints that foster a culture of philosophical duplication of effort (Habermas, 1984). We address this in telling our story of the journey exploring the themes (i.e., speed bumps or barricades/hindrances) of countering hegemonic knowledge representation in both the course-based learning space and the preparation of the dissertation. The partnership of resistance represented by student + guide demonstrates the necessity of challenging the environmental constraints and the limitations of so-called acceptable forms of knowledge acquisition and philosophical boundaries that bind scholarly development in LIS and communication professions. The account of that journey reflectively and critically draws on the following “snips” (see Figure 1) that represent the White-IST hegemonic practices (Snips 1–4) in LIS doctoral education. Snip 5 is liberatory in that it accounts for an awakening of agency toward the successful end of the doctoral journey (Freire, 1970). This terminology replaces traditional application of “themes” in order to be more reflective of the shared journey of the student + guide. Following is a list of the snips:

White-IST Hegemonic Snip 1: *Paternalism* in student development and guidance

White-IST Hegemonic Snip 2: *Marginalization* of any deviance from the “traditional” path

White-IST Hegemonic Snip 3: *Hierarchy* of knowledge at the exclusion of critical and humanistic/interpretive thought

White-IST Hegemonic Snip 4: *Rigidity* in LIS canon and research practices

White-IST Hegemonic Snip 5: *Resistance* to hegemony and overcoming barriers as change agents toward success

Figure 1 represents these five snips in terms of our resistance to the traditional path stipulated in the doctoral program and journey. The critical narratives of student + guide

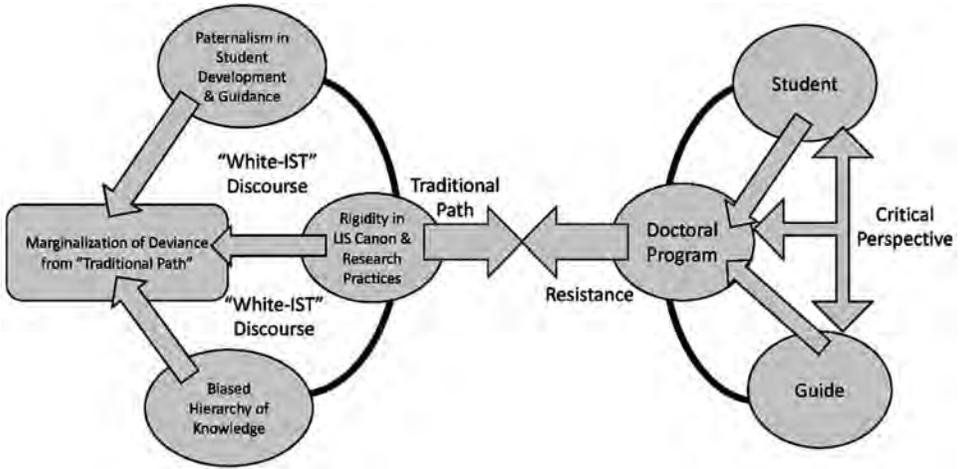


Figure 1: White-IST hegemonic snips and doctoral program journey

draw attention to an urgent need for LIS education to re-examine their rigidity of relevance to current and emerging issues in the twenty-first century, including their implementation of doctoral training and education processes, policies, and practices. This will help the professions develop resilience and further integrate diversity of discourse and social justice to stay relevant in the contemporary social, cultural, political, and economic landscape (Mehra, 2018). The text presents a frank and honest critique of select elements in LIS doctoral education. Such narratives need to come out of the closet for real and meaningful growth of the LIS professions. Review and references to significant scholarship are woven in through the narrative. These illustrate what informed and shaped our thinking during the process while also serving as tools to validate and provide authoritative sanction to our experiences.

White-IST hegemonic snip 1: Paternalism in student development and guidance

“Centralizing deficit” begins with the focus on what the student is not able to do or know (Valencia, 1997). Educators and administrators often create policies and curricula to encourage conformity in a perceived academic culture and climate of authority from the point of view of insider(s), which include both advanced peers and faculty (Collins, 2018). This stance makes allowance for the paternalistic posture in the LIS administration toward the learning and philosophical training environment of doctoral students. The adult student with some depth of understanding through assessment of the environment adjusts themselves to the demeaning climate—by clarifying the system.

The student’s entry as a doctoral student was after significant professional practice. She sought the doctoral degree in order to build upon knowledge gained through previous academic pursuits (Master’s degrees in both Education and Library and Information Science). She also had prior working experience in tenure-track faculty positions at two research

institutions, where research, service, and librarianship were counted toward rank elevation. This placed her in a precarious position of being demoted from faculty to graduate student status. However, this also motivated her need to explore research opportunities to apply toward the growth of the profession of librarianship and support life-long learning goals.

Student's experiential excerpt:

Initial course work introduced me to the philosophical world of the academy stressing paradigmatic structures and positions. This rightly disrupted my understating of the world, while helping clarify my worldview. The tension within the structure came with the devaluation of alternative or cultural modes of expression within an interdisciplinary program of study. I was held captive by the colleges' disciplinary limitations muting my expressions and exposure to critical gender and race knowledge domains. Faculty and administrators' subtle and direct critiques of the limiting effects of studying feminism and their adherence to privileged quantitative methods and invalidation of race-based analysis became a subjugation tool of power and control. I interpreted these restrictions as barriers to the pursuance of alternative knowledge areas. Gender and race were rendered invisible. The constant tension resulted in self-doubt surrounding my worldview whereby the system encouraged faculty to focus on what I did not know or understand about the Ph. D. enterprise.

The same paternalistic and condescending behaviors of white and non-white senior academics in the collegiate toward the student were also targeted toward curtailing the guide's role, broadly as an intellectual and specifically as a colored mentor of a colored student "dissertating" on non-normative content (J. Lee & Oh, 2018). These took form and were expressed as pressures, threats, and manipulation of tenure and promotion policies (Benoit, 2007). The administrative "housing" of the mid-level-ranked LIS unit in an interdisciplinary college was also a problem (Mon, 2011). Administratively, these academic departments currently housed in a college had their White-IST origins in areas like business, organizational management, education, social sciences, and the humanities (Abadal, 2015; Mehra & Gray, 2020). Their faculty had limited knowledge of the LIS professions and did not have any initial inclinations to develop interdisciplinary convergences beyond lip-service. Many of the white academics in these varied disciplines imposed their exclusionary and privileged canons, elitist scholarship, limited postpositivist methodologies, and value systems on LIS scholars who were already predominantly steeped in such exclusionary traditions. In their perpetuation of these they developed a closed-box understanding of "research" that inherently created a marriage of disjunct with LIS even in our current immersion together in a neoliberal capitalist society (Cope, 2014; Mehra & Gray, 2020).

Guide's experiential excerpt:

I share a few possible interrelated explanations and notes about biased motivations of college faculty underlying their perceived tangible toxicities. Operationalized and targeted towards my social justice and inclusion advocacy scholarship, the reactions of these faculty members reflected White-IST attributes during my tenure and promotion process as well as in their evaluation of my work for award selections. It resulted in a "double-layered" prejudice, towards my non-normative research and identity. Their internalization of the positivist/postpositivist paradigms and narrow definition of "research" emerging from an exclusionary white academy

was indeed troublesome. It was not acceptable for them to get challenged by a male person of color in propagating an alternate viewpoint of research. It got translated into actions and discriminatory efforts to “shut down” and “shut off” my “voice.” These biased judgements were meant to serve as censorship to limit the scope of my intellectual worth and pressurize to stifle my scholarship according to what they considered of value (label it as “service”). Thereby, attempting to influence my guidance in shaping the students’ directions and content she could or could not include in her dissertation.

It is a noteworthy point that once the dissertation process was complete and the exemplary quality of the work emerged in the success of the oral dissertation defense, the same college that chose not to reward the guide’s intellectual contributions and created biased hurdles in the student’s journey awarded the dissertation after the student accepted a faculty position in a higher-ranked school than the one she graduated from. This illustrates a hypocritical reflection on the college faculty that tried to curtail growth of knowledge emerging from the student + guide toward their independence as scholars. Instead, there is a paternalistic attitude toward students and their guides of color as if they are blank slates joining the program and a White-IST academy. A successful completion required absolute adherence to the divided student/faculty cultural camps that existed in the college, where student peers were more important sources of support. In this milieu, numerous attempts to sabotage the shared student + guide relationship were made.

White-IST hegemonic snip 2: Marginalization of any deviance from the “traditional” path

At the start of the doctoral program at a research-intensive institution, students assume that the traditional path communicated to them represents a trajectory of success toward job placement at a highly intensive research institution. The traditional path marketed to applicants includes academic normative structures that inhabit the educational training necessary for doctoral studies. These norms are introduced and reinforced in student orientation, interactions with faculty, and course work. The student is bound to this linear path and is unsure about deviation from the prescribed norms associated with the steps as they are outlined. Deviation from the path is resistance. Students rely on a track represented by the traditional path to gauge development through the program. It is a series of tasks that set a rubric of sorts to measure successful milestones toward completion. The guidance provided through such a system is both instructive and constrictive: instructive in that it provides a way forward through a scaffolding of educational progress, and constrictive in that the iterative philosophical development of a scholar is not taken into account.

Student’s experiential excerpt:

My goal without me understanding how to articulate it was to thoroughly situate my research philosophically in exploring the depth of discourse associated with race and gendered landscapes within information science. An early mishap was the framing of my exploration within the confines of the path laid before me. My voice resembled a whisper shaped through the lens of approval and acceptance. My presumption in seeking acknowledgement limited scholarly development and forced self-critique to the point of obsequiousness to the system. Servility rather than immersion of what intrigued me complicated self-definition and resulted in a limited view

of myself as a developing scholar. If I was to check each required box, how could my research which exists at the intersection of gender, justice, and information mature? I understood that my approach to scholarship explored the theoretical landscape in which all of the elements existing within my research inhabited. It was an interdisciplinary plan, located within a stifling postpositivist social science educational pathway influencing information science, which represented a mismatch of outlook of my educational pursuits.

To cope, self-blame along with resistance occurred in developing a clear, unique path defined on one's own terms. As a person of color, the student took on the adage that they must work doubly hard to achieve their goals, except in this case the doubling of effort came from understanding the world presented to them while constructing their own. This explosion of labor comes at a cost, with psychological and cognitive stress permeating every milestone. But the sustained persistence of a shared journeyman, in the embodiment of the guide, can manifest a mutual resistance to the path.

The structured journey laid out by the college was rigid and set in stone. This was reflected in the reaction of faculty across the schools toward the guide and the student when the student did not undergo the dissertation proposal oral defense according to the timeframe set by the college policies. An important point is that the university did not make the dissertation proposal oral defense a structured milestone, nor did it identify a particular temporal stage in their policies on that level. It was left up to an individual college to determine the time for that milestone owing to the diversity of knowledge domains and practice across different colleges. The college chose to create the requirement of dissertation proposal oral defense close to the completion date of the qualifying examination, based on a traditional postpositivist research norm.

Emphasizing a set notion of “process” limits scholarly development and growth. A linear vision of student aptitude (i.e., “courses–examination–proposal–dissertation”) applicable for all presented in a compressed time period sometimes forces a false sense of accomplishment privileging postpositivist research. Developing a sense of accomplishment is important, but not based on a “normative” definition, scope, and yardstick (Annamma, 2018; Derman-Sparks, Edwards, & Goins, 2020). Revisiting coursework at crucial points in the exploration of theoretical development after the examination required readjusting the scope of the project in response to these constraining circumstances. Staying authentic to the phenomenon under study meant shifting from a one-sided narrative representation of the data to a community analysis. This process integrated creative approaches to method and critique of existing LIS theories that became the focus of the journey, beyond discrete steps (Fleming-May and Yuro, 2009; Gray & Mehra, 2019; Mehra & Rioux, 2016).

Guide's experiential excerpt:

The student's non-traditional research did not have a typical “pilot” to report the testing of limited and narrowly understood methods, nor a standardized process to follow in adopting a “normative” timeline for the dissertation proposal oral defense and submission of the dissertation proposal to the entire committee. She was meeting and communicating with the individual committee members regularly. She was forced to defend her dissertation proposal via an oral defense only four months prior to her completion of the dissertation (that had its own defense)

owing to the pressures of expectations to have a dissertation proposal oral defense. This was in spite of the fact that she had made much more progress compared to what is usually achieved by the normative stage of the dissertation proposal oral defense. Both she and I were subjected to snide remarks and toxic sarcasm from the faculty across the college since they did not get to experience her dissertation proposal oral defense according to their traditional timelines.

The marginalization of any deviance from a normative doctoral journey does not take into account each student's past backgrounds and learning process, their lived experiences and knowledge internalization, or their unique content processing, theoretical and methodological reliance, and integration (Dempsey, 2018). In its regimented layout of rigid and structured milestones, the current doctoral journey as presented in the American academy is symptomatic of a White-IST discourse emerging from its privileged roots in following attempts to replicate positivist/postpositivist paradigms (Mehra, 2005; Mehra & Gray, 2020). The resistance to new types of content and topic areas is also noteworthy, irrespective of the verbiage (Sugimoto, Li, Russell, Finlay, & Ding, 2011). Internalization by white and non-white LIS and non-LIS faculty and its suffocating and overbearing application on white and non-white doctoral students reflect poorly in terms of humanistic and critical paradigms of emotion, thought, action, and human behavior (Hands, 2018).

White-IST hegemonic snip 3: Hierarchy of knowledge at the exclusion of critical and humanistic/interpretive thought

Students are trained to develop themselves through a lens based on the concept of "value" in academic research and philosophical spaces that prioritize objectivist approaches while at the same time demoting alternative paradigms (Klinger, 2006). Words used, like *rigor* and *subjective*, denote the othering of critical ethnic and cultural studies in LIS and communication professions (Kim & Sin, 2008; Pawley, 2006). This is apparent mostly through exclusion in the doctoral and graduate curriculum offered by the program. Race, gender, and culture are addendums to the knowledge structure as presented rather than a central tenet or component (Adkins, 2004; Gollop and Hughes-Hassell, 2016; Main, 2014). Besides coursework, another roadblock is more than just perceived lack of interest by faculty. When students choose to engage in research featuring marginalized communities and utilizing critical-cultural theories, they are proactively discouraged through the creation of fear that they will not get a job (Boyer & Davis, 2013).

Student's experiential excerpt:

My first encounter with the lack of engagement at the curricular level was at the point of choosing courses for the second semester of my first year and developing my program plan for subsequent years. The word in the street, or conversations between students around the water fountain, led me to discover the cultural studies in education, cognate area and certificate program. Although outside of disciplinary bounds, my experience with courses on social justice, feminism, and critical race theory helped me to develop a sense of myself outside the confines of the information and communications interdisciplinary world created by the department. This abandonment made clear the value of such knowledge and created complexities in my own fit in the department, which created both an obstacle and opportunity. The obstacle was the

constancy of interpretation/fusion of gender and race ideals in an information science frame. The opportunity created a space for the development of new theoretical pathways that steered away from defining color and gender in terms of deficits. So, my journey forced me to engage with faculty and students in the colleges of education, philosophy, sociology, and geography to find a new home. A point of discouragement came with the realization that my degree was rooted in information studies. The boomerang effect challenged me beyond the prescribed steps to completion, I had extra work to do. However, the constancy of doubt when attempting to engage with colleagues was persistent, but I found that higher level knowledge served me well.

The extra philosophical grounding of the student's work through an intersectional perspective presented a challenge (Bennett-Kapusniak, Glover, McCleer, Thiele, & Wolfram, 2017). Not only were the issues structural and administrative; the closed-mindedness of faculty toward alternative content and modes of thinking and practice in an institution of higher learning that purport freedom of thought, ethical actions, and academic freedom were also the problems (Weech, 2009).

Guide's experiential excerpt:

There was no curriculum support and courses in the college to provide a critical and humanistic and interpretive lens of analysis for the student to avail. I supported her to seek courses outside the college to develop theoretical and methodological knowledge in resistance to college faculty and administrators. It led to a longer timeframe to complete the dissertation than what was expected based on postpositivist research norms created in the college. Churning out doctoral graduates in a mechanistic and technocratic college under neoliberal forces were resisted in seeking outside financial support.

The problematic implications were manifold. First, the experience reflected the perpetuation of a privileged set of knowledge and methodological practices at the cost of any other (Dillon, 2012). As a cornerstone of a White-IST mindset, they were entrenched in the culture of the collegiate (Mehra & Gray, 2020). This was a mark of hypocrisy, since it seemed to contradict the public image of open discourse and interdisciplinary thought. Further, the arm-twisting and mafia-like behavior with threats to remove financial support were a truly traumatic form of censorship.

Administrative perceptions regarding the student's disregard of timeframe deadlines and policy non-compliance were added tools in the arsenal. It was difficult to witness the anxiety and stress caused by the administrative rejection and power abuse of the student within a harmful administration and hegemonic culture

White-IST hegemonic snip 4: Rigidity in LIS canon and research practices

Accompanying the theoretical struggle were the methodological templates presented as viable and acceptable paths for a qualitative study. The student struggled with the question of how to implement methods for the proposed study employing active qualitative analysis on an historical phenomenon. In a determined push for further learning, the student practiced the constancy of using a small evidence set to develop skills and pilot data. The resistance came in the acknowledgment of the struggle in the journey and the creative means used to engage with the evidence through a deconstruction of methods taught. The tutelage of the

guide emphasized creativity and a depth of theoretical knowledge in the employment of the method. The student stretched beyond the template to divert from the path constructed, in the hope of making a contribution to the field. Reliance on the LIS landscape of information-centered studies prompted an instinctive centering of the population for information discovery within the marginal community of research.

Student experiential excerpt:

My dissertation research began with telling of a historical episode unseen in the grand and accompanying narratives of people of color within the history of libraries. I initially believed that approaching the field of research using historical narrative, following the traditional path and treatment of historical documents, thus meeting the required demands of the program laid out before me. Further exploration of phenomena through coursework outside of LIS, in cultural and sociological studies, presented a complication in the LIS stratosphere of knowledge. The subjects came alive in the consideration of an infused critical-gender methodological and theoretical landscape. Using feminist epistemology, I understood that experience, collective resistance, and standpoint reflected through social theory, that was not simply adaptable the subjects from an information context. The structure of culturally based knowledge systems of information, neither recognized nor considered how information operated outside of Eurocentric confines. I understood that it would be an injustice to the subjects and against my worldview to limit the information environment to a bounded theoretical and methodological canon which excluded their presence. Therefore, my approach sought clarity through illumination of the subjects existence, countering deficit paradigms that amplify limitations.

Theoretical development in LIS research follows a path laid out in the social sciences and humanities that has internalized positivist/postpositivist legacies and colonial/imperialistic tendencies determining what knowledge is, what phenomena are worthy of study, and what approaches have been developed to study them (Grealy, 2008; Mehra & Gray, 2020; Strickland & Lawrence, 2015). This means either of two strategies in LIS regarding theory formulation. Extrapolated sociological/anthropological/psychological research strategies internalize approaches from the quantitative experimental scholarship, including developing and testing a hypothesis and drawing correlations between dependent and independent variables (Mehra, 2021b). LIS professionals over decades have made a choice to adopt these strategies as well as dictate their norms of imposing theoretical frameworks, theories, and constructs on a context or phenomenon under study (McGrath, 2002; Zuo, Zhao, & Ni, 2019). Truly “grounded theory” is not developed and applied in LIS in the sense of letting the theory emerge as “grounded” from the context or data (Mansourian, 2006).

Guide’s experiential excerpt:

The student’s dissertation research, however, involved creativity in utilizing interdisciplinary views of LIS theory and critical-qualitative methods and the coming together of the two. In resistance, there were then pressures on her and I to adopt normative practices of externally imposed theories to document a marginal community, instead of letting the theoretical assessment and analysis emerge from the different evidence related to the context. I observed similar strategies of imposing theory on the context under study that were imposed on other doctoral

students in the college compromising of a reproduction-of-sorts with copying application of theory and method from other researchers and sources. For the student, such attempts in this process translated in the form of pressures from college administrators and faculty to speed up towards dissertation completion. It also first led to threats followed by suspension of financial support to her. I had to fend off these intimidations and serve to support her during these trying times as best as I could.

Methodologically, this dissertation exemplifies the use of mixed methods (i.e., eclectic qualitative approaches including narrative inquiry, deconstructed grounded theory, and autoethnography). In LIS, a limited methodological inheritance from other disciplines has resulted in simple categories of quantitative or qualitative (Jaeger, 2010)—that too poor and limited understanding of qualitative methods as either interviews, focus groups, event analysis, and such. The student's dissertation challenged the use of varied methods and methodologies intersecting in unique and novel ways to gather evidence and analyze the story, narrating the experiences people of color.

Guide's experiential excerpt:

I provided the student feedback in developing faith towards the eclectic nature of data collection in this research and encouraged her to find her own ways of gathering evidence in traditional and nontraditional ways.

White-IST hegemonic snip 5: Resistance to hegemony and overcoming barriers as change agents toward success

The student's decision to embrace the formal and informal archives as part of the data sets in formulating the case study using creative and deconstructive qualitative approaches signified a resistance to normative White-IST research practices (Mehra & Gray, 2020). The self-liberation occurred in both the critique of systems that diminish voice and the acceptance of a unique research path (Peterson, 1996). The White-IST belief systems that permeate frames of scholarly conduct radicalized the student to take a road less traveled by connecting with the task at hand, exercising agency by operating outside of the scholarly establishment (Mehra & Gray, 2020).

The disciplinary challenges and immediate struggles transformed the opportunity to develop a creative and innovative product. The resulting study represented student empowerment as a human being and as a researcher, pushing the boundaries of LIS research and theory (Gray, 2019). The challenge countered conventional notions of what it means to accomplish research through crafting a dissertation. The iterative nature of the research allowed for a renaming of analysis processes with the goal of a true disciplinary contribution, beyond extending present theories and practices.

Student's experiential excerpt:

In the summer before my 5th year, in a meeting with the graduate studies dean to discuss the required forms and steps towards completion, I was told that my "folder was thick."

I said, "well okay."

The response was, "you've been here too long."

I was shocked at the audacity, and surprised that the burden of degree completion was solely placed on me. There was no reference to the program structure, collective faculty guidance, or the culture of the department. In their eyes, I was a problem, and viewed as so many African American students as lacking in ability. I knew what the associate dean meant. They believed that if I didn't do/perform the program in a prescribed way that I was unsuccessful. And by their measure, I was. My reply to the unsupportive language was, "I am right on schedule. I want to secure a position at an R1 institution, and I researched the new hires to see what type of qualifications they had, and many included a degree program of around 5 years, research experience, presentations, and publications." I could not possibly fully develop as a scholar in an abbreviated program.

The experiential significance of the challenge to the structural and process-based hegemony of the rigid doctoral program established a counter-narrative that emerged via the collaboration (Thomas & Leonard, 2014). The counter-narrative development of our "voice" took place in theory formulation, methodological application, and nontraditional content creation emerging from two non-White people (i.e., the student + guide) that was initially unacceptable in the college (Franklin & Jaeger, 2007; Gray & Mehra, 2019; Schlesselman-Tarango, 2017). Breaking the norm of sterile mechanics and preconceived LIS and communication-based theories and methods meant shifting the focus and readjusting the scope of the project. The guide witnessed the struggles of the student and had to provide support and patience, communicate the value of the journey to the student, and encourage faith in the process. The student had to find the way with these encouragements to seek strength and actually apply what the guide was nudging her toward.

Guide's Experiential Excerpt

As guide my role meant supporting the student to find her "voice" via the challenge and means to accomplish research through the crafting of a dissertation as a novel unique process and product that would push the envelope of what had been developed before. Our resistance and pushing back at the structural and administrative constraints were challenging but fruitful in the long run in developing a "voice" and emerging scholarly identity by establishing a niche in nurturing the growth of a flower amongst the weeds. For example, collecting evidence before the proposal defense became a natural part of the journey thanks to a fellowship. It provided an opportunity to develop glimpses of illustrative evidence in convincing the esteemed collegiate and polishing the rough diamond to shine amongst the harshness of the rocks.

The concept of a "change agent" applies to those who find the strength to question the way things are and follow their instincts even though it might mean going upstream against the torrential currents (Dali, 2018; Noble, Austin, Sweeney, McKeever, & Sullivan, 2014). Setting a precedent of a modified process was important for inspiring others, developing a sense among the community of practitioners (i.e., students, faculty, and administrators) that "something different" was possible, and "letting go" of rigid policies and troublesome practices. For both the student + guide, the experience as agents of change to develop a valuable product bestowed recognition, developed confidence, and inspired faith to continue resisting White-IST mechanisms that were detrimental to what they stated they were attempting as their purpose.

Conclusion: Takeaways from a shared journey

Experiences highlighted in this article have implications for faculty, administrators, and students. The following are some practical strategies that should be taken based on the themes of the shared journey.

Continuous orientation: A continuous orientation period surpassing the first year is beneficial for administrators, faculty, and students. The purpose of support scaffolded through time intervals, rather than check-listed accomplishments, fosters an awareness of student development. The reliance on accomplishments by date isolates emerging critical-humanistic scholars and helps to map out the shared journey. Continuous orientation arranged by administrators and involving faculty would enable students to express challenges at different points throughout their tenure in the program and receive support at times of uncertainty.

Transparent annual student reviews: The annual review should not just mimic a faculty review, as preparation for an academic career, but be situated as a growth and development opportunity. Transparency should involve discussions on setting personal academic goals and offer feedback through committee and collectives where students are involved. Transparency engages the student in clarifying theoretical and methodological challenges.

Culturally responsive curriculum: A curriculum that offers faculty-supported independent learning experiences in critical, cultural, feminist, and racial studies in LIS enriches the program of study. Integrating scholarship from those areas in survey theory and methods courses reaches students with those epistemic inclinations. Also, the development of seminar courses beyond the first year would avoid intellectual isolation.

Partnership focused advising and mentoring: The snips offered from both the student + guide demonstrate the need for a relational approach to advising and mentoring. There should be encouragement, training, and support for faculty to guide the whole student. Programs should enable listening partnerships where engagement nurtures students' development. This requires new thinking, language, and cultural practices to dismantle hegemonic White-IST discourse in the implementation of programmatic elements.

In conclusion, the intention of this narrative is to give others who are going through similar experiences the strength to challenge White-IST tactics and mechanisms that have stifled the growth of knowledge, scope of content, and practices in LIS education. The underlying message is to Speak-UP and Speak-OUT about their experiences to question the administrative and programmatic faculty within their home institutions. The danger of not voicing the "dirty linen" of racism in public has perpetuated the continued domination and assaults from the White-IST systems present in academia. Radicalizing oneself through "voice" empowerment enables confidence for students and faculty of color seeking to go beyond the canonical constraints that bind and restrict their opportunities.

The critical narratives of student + guide highlighted here draw attention to an urgent need for LIS education to re-examine its rigidity in terms of its relevance to current and emerging issues in the twenty-first century, including its implementation of doctoral training and education processes, policies, and practices. This will help the professions develop resilience and further integrate diversity of discourse and social justice to stay relevant in

the contemporary social, cultural, political, and economic landscape (Mehra, 2018). The text presents a frank and honest critique of select elements in dysfunctional LIS doctoral education. More such narratives need to come out of the closet for real and meaningful growth of the LIS professions.

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