Incorporating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) into Research

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Despite demographic changes which indicate larger numbers of racial and ethnic minorities make up most of American society, library and information science (LIS) research remains focused on majority groups. This work proposes ways in which researchers and LIS educators can incorporate more diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) into their research, especially by making racial and ethnic minorities more visible in it. The main ideas discussed in this regard deal with self-awareness, positionality, and sampling methods. While not exhaustive, the suggestions offered here are straightforward ways in which researchers can become more intentional in their inclusion of historically excluded populations into their research. The ideas shared in this work are aimed at aiding those who are considering the incorporation of DEI topics into their existing research agendas, as well as helping LIS educators set the foundation of sound research which values DEI when guiding students' research endeavors.

Keywords: diversity, LIS research, positionality, sampling, self-awareness

Work in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) has never been more important than in the current times. According to a *Brookings* report, "nearly four of 10 Americans identify with a race or ethnic group other than white" (Frey, 2020, para. 1). According to the demographic report, the white population has declined for the first time in US history. Since 2000, the groups that gained more numerical representation in the population were Latinx at 18.5% and Asian Americans at 6% of the population, while the number of African Americans remained stable at 12.1% (Frey, 2020). Despite these population gains, research related to ethnic or racial minorities remains stagnant. For example, in the field of psychology, research centered on cross-cultural and ethnic minority issues is still underrepresented in the field's literature, particularly in top-tier journals (Hartmann et al., 2013).

The library and information science (LIS) field is one which has, in principle, espoused the values of social justice based on the abundance of DEI topics both discussed in the published literature and found within conference themes; but this surface support suggests that much more still needs to be done to fully commit to the tenets of

KEY POINTS:

- LIS educators teaching research methods have a role in guiding students through the equitable and inclusive incorporation of diversity into research and assessment.
- Topic selection, self-awareness, positionality, and sampling approaches offer four approaches to incorporating diversity into research agendas.
- Instructors in LIS should normalize topics of DEI, including advancing areas of research that go beyond age, professional groups, and gender to those that tackle issues such as race and ethnicity.

social justice. One area or dimension in which the field demonstrates its interest in DEI work is through the published research that focuses on such issues as race and ethnicity, among other identity markers. However, research regarding the most common areas of DEI explored in the LIS literature is found to focus more on aspects such as age, professional groups, and gender. Topics related to ethnicity and race were represented at a much lower level in the list of areas covered in LIS research (Sung & Parboteeah, 2017).

Research on DEI topics—especially studies that address race and ethnicity—carries its own set of challenges. Work that truly embraces diversity, fights for equity among ethnic or racial groups, and champions inclusion of the underrepresented is work that needs to constantly reassess itself, re-evaluate its principles, and reconsider its most deeply held beliefs, as well as the origins of these beliefs. Research, on many occasions, forms the basics of how services and products in libraries and other information organizations are shaped. But in order to design and properly assess services and products, the ways in which these services and products account for the needs of all patrons, and not just a few groups or the most vocal constituencies, must be taken into consideration. A full accounting also includes asking such questions as "Who are we leaving out?" and "Why are these groups left out?" As pointed out by Green, Creswell, Shope, and Clark (2007), "By incorporating a diversity focus, the researcher guarantees that the racial/ethnic background, experiences, and perspectives of people of color will be valued and embraced rather than marginalized or ignored" (p. 473).

The "why" for incorporating DEI into research, evaluation, or assessment efforts is clear. However, the question remains: How can LIS professionals incorporate a DEI focus into their research, evaluation, and assessment efforts? And not only how is a DEI focus incorporated but also how can it be done in a manner that is responsible and honors the groups that are intended to be represented? Additionally, LIS educators must be prepared to guide students through research in a manner that encourages the incorporation of diversity, especially topics that directly address issues like race and ethnicity, in a way that represents those with whom they work, both patrons and colleagues. These questions are important for the development of DEI research in the LIS literature. This article, from the perspective of two racially and ethnically diverse (Latina and Black) women LIS researchers and faculty members who teach research methods, presents some areas of consideration for anyone venturing into incorporating DEI into their research agenda, especially those who choose to conduct research focused on racial and ethnic minorities.

Topic selection and self-awareness

An important first step in the journey of incorporating DEI into research is to consider the role of the researcher in relation to the topic and the intended population of the study. One aspect not often considered in the LIS field is that most of the research in library and information science is produced in the United States. This puts the researcher in danger of not even considering international, and most importantly non-Western, perspectives in the process of research creation; it also drives researchers to propose solutions to global problems based on a local focus and approach. As Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010)

describe, research conducted from the perspective of **w**estern, **e**ducated, **i**ndustrialized, **r**ich, and **d**emocratic (WEIRD) people is being generalized to all humans, when most of the people in the world do not live under these conditions. Therefore, it is imperative that LIS researchers take some time and consider the following:

- Which phenomenon to research?
  - Where does that phenomenon exist within the culture of those being studied?
- Which method is applied to the research of that phenomenon?
  - How does that method address concerns with issues such as ethnocentrism, privilege, and positionality?
- Do I know what I need to know about my research participants' experiences in terms of what may influence their worldviews?

An issue related to a researcher's knowledge of research participants is their self-awareness. This term is associated with both how people perceive themselves and how others perceive them and has been linked to a multitude of advantages and successful outcomes in an individual's professional and personal life, including confidence, creativity, and good decision making (Eurich, 2018). Interestingly, a national study by Eurich (2018) on this topic found that only 10%–15% of those who participated in the research fit the criteria of being self-aware. This suggests that most people are not fully informed in terms of internal self-awareness: that is, their own values, passions, and aspirations and how these fit into the environment. This internal self-awareness is complemented by what is referred to as external self-awareness, or the way in which individuals understand how others perceive them.

Both aspects of self-awareness are important when considering research endeavors, since it is through self-awareness that researchers are acquainted with their own biases and prejudices, which might affect and even hinder their ability to approach a topic in a fair and equitable manner. Self-awareness—although mostly unconscious—deeply influences what the researcher studies, how they approach that study, and what they choose to present as a focus of the phenomenon studied. There are, however, techniques in research methods that allow researchers to, if not fully eliminate, then at least control their own biases, whether they are aware of them or not. Two approaches for consideration include positionality and sampling methods.

Positionality

One approach related to self-awareness that is often overlooked in LIS research is researcher positionality. Positionality is "the stance or positioning of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study" (Rowe, 2014, p. 628). Because the stance of the researcher shapes all aspects of the study, it is highly important that a researcher not only be aware of their positionality but also express that positionality as part of their study. Failure to do so may be akin to an ethics violation, since positionality is the acknowledgment of the power dynamics inherent in research and the recognition that the potential for bias to influence research is an ever-present threat (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

Whether conducting DEI-related research or not, it is important for researchers to indicate their positionality so that others can understand their research and findings. But

it is of further importance for those conducting DEI-related research to acknowledge their positionality, especially if they are not a member of the group being studied. Brook, Ellenwood, and Lazzaro (2015) demonstrated this in their article "In Pursuit of Antiracist Social Justice: Denaturalizing Whiteness in the Academic Library," where they clearly identified their status as "three White librarians" with the privilege to write about social justice while acknowledging the prior work done by scholars of color (p. 248). Positionality can be expressed along various dimensions, but the most common are culture, class, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, and lived experiences (Rowe, 2014), along with race and ethnicity.

Sampling

Sampling is one of the most fundamental aspects of conducting valid and reliable research (Cohen et al., 2018). Especially in quantitative studies, the sample dictates many aspects of a study, including the fundamental empirical notion of whether the results can be generalized more broadly. Unfortunately, the most powerful sampling methods, those that arguably create representative samples, are the most difficult and expensive to rely on and not often used in LIS research. Instead, LIS research tends to fall back on convenience sampling that relies heavily on utilizing the researcher's own workplace and those in the field who are interested and available to participate in research (Lyons, 2011). An overabundance of convenience sampling in LIS research reduces the likelihood that the experiences of underrepresented populations in the field will be included or that the voices of the underrepresented will be heard, especially if the research topic is not focused on that specific population. To combat this, LIS researchers are encouraged to utilize sampling methods more likely to include diverse perspectives and voices.

Five suggested methods for including more diverse participants are selecting equal numbers of participants from all categories regardless of population representation, stratified random sampling, quota sampling, boosted sampling, and snowball sampling. Three of these sampling techniques are non-probability, which means a loss of the ability to generalize results of the research (often sought after in quantitative research). However, these methods can be valuable in both quantitative and qualitative research; and given the issues with probability samples when there is a lack of diversity in the field, the odds of being able to truly generalize with a probability sample are already decreased. It is also important to note that although these techniques come from a post-positivist grounding, they can be valuable for phenomenological and qualitative studies that are not centered on a specific historically excluded population but would benefit from a diverse group perspective depending on the topic under consideration.

Depending on the type of research being done and especially when conducting a quantitative study, one way to use sampling to increase diversity is to seek equal numbers of participants from all categories to participate in a study. Whether these categories are based on gender identity, racial or ethnic identity, or even political identity, the goal is to make sure the sample has the same number of participants in each group based on these categories, regardless of whether these groups are over- or underrepresented in the actual population. Stratified random sampling is a method of sampling where the population is divided into subgroups (i.e., strata, singular *stratum*) and then a sample is randomly selected

from each stratum in proportion to the size of that group within the entire population (Cohen et al., 2018). Depending on the purpose of the research and the research question being explored, the subgroups would be defined differently. Some DEI-related demographic aspects might include age, educational level, profession or occupation, and racial or ethnic group affiliation. There might also be a need to combine specific aspects to define the strata that best respond to the research question.

Quota sampling is a non-probability method of creating a stratified sample where the sample resembles the population based on some characteristic (Cohen et al., 2018). For example, the *2017 ALA Membership Demographic Study* indicates that the membership of the American Library Association (ALA) is 86.7% white, 4.4% Black or African American, 3.6% Asian, 1.2% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 0.2% Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and 4.0% Other (Rosa & Henke, 2017). To create a quota sample based on these percentages, participants need to be recruited until the sample percentages match the population percentages—that is, until 87% are white, 4% Black or African American, 4% Asian, and so on. Quota sampling differs from stratified random sampling in that participants are not being selected from these strata randomly; they are recruited, with the researcher determining which strata they fit into, and then stopping the recruitment of specific groups once the quota for that group is reached.

Another inclusive sampling approach is "boost" sampling, a purposive sampling technique where the researcher recognizes there may be a lack of diversity in a sample and makes an effort to purposefully seek participants from underrepresented groups to participate in a research study (McManus, Erens, & Bajekal, 2006). With boosted sampling there is no attempt to reach a specific quota or percentage, just an effort to ensure that there is some diversity in the sample when historically those participants may have been absent or excluded from the research.

A final, common sampling method that can be beneficial for identifying a diverse sample in research is snowball sampling. This method is a form of non-probability sampling that relies on participants to help identify and locate additional participants (Cohen et al., 2018). Snowball sampling is most beneficial when a researcher is struggling to identify potential participants for a study. This difficulty could be due to the topic of the research (e.g., the topic is considered niche or taboo), due to the lack of availability of participants (e.g., a phenomenon not experienced by many), or because the researcher may not be a part of the "group" being studied (Cohen et al., 2018). With snowball sampling, the researcher asks participants who are already part of the study to identify or suggest other potential participants. With this process, the researcher is relying on the probability that a participant will not only know others who fit the sample but also be willing and able to ask them to join the study. While this approach does have the potential of introducing bias into a research study, as initially identified participants may influence who participates and how they participate, researchers may find this bias worth the risk in order to reach the potential positive outcomes from conducting the study (Woodley & Lockard, 2016).

The need to rely on different sampling techniques, such as snowball sampling, demonstrates recognition that diverse participants may be difficult to reach, so extra effort is required. Researchers also need to acknowledge that the difficulty of locating and reaching

diverse participants for LIS research may be due to other factors as well, including distrust of the research process and diversity research fatigue. For example, a study focused on librarians of color might be more challenging due to the low numbers of people of color entering the profession, as exemplified by the ALA statistics (Rosa & Henke, 2017). With so few librarians of color, it is very easy to be asked too often to participate in studies, especially studies about diversity in librarianship. Diversity topics in LIS tend to ebb and flow in the literature, and when they are on the rise, librarians of color are sought after to participate. That is, librarians of color might experience research fatigue. In addition, when nothing comes of that research or these participants see no benefits from their participation, including the distribution of the burdens and benefits of the study not being equitably divided, they may become less likely to participate in future studies, thus making them even harder to identify and reach (Ashley, 2021).

Normalizing DEI through research examples

One final method for encouraging DEI in LIS research, and one that all LIS educators can work toward in their classrooms, is to normalize seeing DEI topics and methodologies when teaching about research methodologies. Having students review and evaluate published research studies and identify different aspects of the methodology being used is a common method used to teach research methods in LIS (Matusiak & Bright, 2020). As research methods used in LIS are not singular to the field, the topics of the example articles can run the gamut and some research methodologies are best shown from other fields. In the process of selecting these example articles, instructors can choose to select studies that focus on DEI-related topics, showcase DEI-related methodologies, or have findings that put emphasis on the importance of acknowledging DEI. This practice may help to normalize DEI topics within LIS research by showing students that these topics can and should be addressed via research.

Conclusion

Libraries and information organizations find themselves in the middle of the changing demographics of the United States. The profession has remained stubbornly homogenous, despite many calls for diversification throughout the years (Irvin, 2016; Jaeger, Sarin, & Peterson, 2015; Lee, Chancellor, Chu, Rodriguez-Mori, & Roy, 2015). In a new landscape in which those who identify as white will be less predominant as a demographic group, libraries and information organizations need to reconsider their priorities at the risk of becoming obsolete and irrelevant (Jaeger, Subramaniam, Jones, & Bertot, 2011). In the same way, LIS as a field needs to reconsider its priorities and foci, including the areas in which research is focused. Incorporating DEI into research is no longer a matter of preference; it is a way in which scholarship can keep up with the changes in society, including advancing areas of research on DEI that go beyond age, professional groups, and gender to those that tackle more complicated issues such as race and ethnicity. These changes need to be captured in multiple ways, including through research done by faculty and students in the field.

The ideas presented here focus on a few important starting points to consider when incorporating DEI topics into research, both for researchers and instructors teaching

and guiding students through the research process. These are not the only strategies for incorporating DEI into research, and following them is not a guarantee for successful representation of DEI in LIS research topics. But through application of these strategies, by considering aspects of our self-awareness, positionality, the sampling methods we employ in our research, and the examples we present to students in the LIS curriculum, we can accomplish our best work.

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