
Pushing the Margins: Women of Color and Intersectionality in LIS

Chou, Rose L., ed. *Pushing the Margins: Women of Color and Intersectionality in LIS*. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2018. 488 pp. \$41.00. Paperback. ISBN: 97816340000529.

Pushing the Margins: Women of Color and Intersectionality in LIS is a potent and well-presented resource that serves as a guide into the world of marginality and oppression through the lens of intersectionality for Women of Color (WOC). The book is “a monograph that allows for conversations to pivot away from the traditional diversity paradigm by applying an explicit feminist and intersectional framework” (8). The various contributing author essays take on the challenge of oppression that Women of Color who have been historically overlooked in the Library and Information Science field have faced, and the contributors provide an opportunity long overdue to share their collective scholastic knowledge. *Pushing the Margins* is a safe space that allows for true expression of identity along with experiences encountered in a field that is overwhelmingly white, and the collection invites readers to obtain a greater understanding of how those challenges were met. The essays are living documents from Women of Color that can be used to break down barriers, provide real time reflections, and serve, as the editors explain, as “a platform for others who are interested in researching and writing about intersectionality within LIS” (6). While the intended audience of this resource is professionals in the Library and Information Science field, these principles can be adopted by other professional fields dealing with similar challenges.

The strengths of *Pushing the Margins* include not only the powerful essays themselves, but also the manner in which the editors organized the presentation of the content. Rose L. Chou and Annie Pho, both academic librarians and former Hack Library School editors, provide as Women of Color a window into their interpretation of intersectionality. They create an intentional path into the communal space where crucial dialogue can take place, while maintaining a necessary distance and allowing the contributing authors’ words to speak. For example, the editors write, “Within the chapters, the authors have chosen to identify, name, and capitalize social identities as they saw fit, and the only time that we tried to enforce edits was to change cisnormative language” (11). Use of personal voice and experience is a theme throughout the essays, enhanced by outstanding scholarship, a combination which makes this a refreshing read. The intentional use of the “consciousness-raising” technique is an excellent choice, as each essay shines a light on this ongoing, powerful, and diverse work, challenging readers to engage in their own journey of deep thought combined with action.

The choice to focus only on public services, though necessary to keep the book from becoming unwieldy, is disappointing. This decision mutes the voices and experiences of WOC who are part of the LIS world of cataloging and technical services, for example. Professionals in technical services share similarities but have unique challenges. I found hope in the acknowledgement of this missing segment when the editors concede, “We recognize we are missing many voices in this volume, but our hope is that this book is a beginning to many more works on examining the complexities of being a WOC working in LIS” (30).

It is clear that the editors’ and contributing authors’ goals have been achieved. Each clearly defines the focus as providing a safe space for WOC to share their research and encounters with oppression in ways that created and sustained action fueled by a sense of community. The book’s call to action encourages readers to break down the barriers of marginalization that are reinforced in silence. As LaVerne Gray, American

Library Association Spectrum Doctoral Fellow and contributing author, writes, “The text will not lay blame on the numerically dominant White professionals or assume support networks for Black and women of color librarians. However, the text seeks to reveal how macro-discriminatory and oppressive systems reinforce marginality and limit the use of voice” (148). This silence includes a gap in literature that the editors and authors have recognized needs to be addressed. With this volume, the gap is filled with excellent resources that can aid in a librarian’s discussion within his or her own institution and beyond.

The editors’ presentation of the essays is clearly explained as providing a space for expression according to the essays’ common themes. Thus, connected by way of intersectionality, they together acknowledge, “There is no one practical solution that could truly address the systemic underpinnings of oppression that frame our society at large and trickle into how libraries and archives operate” (4). In addition to providing this space for calling out, the essays unveil recent scholarly literature that discusses these issues. Through their clear, and at times painful, writing, these professional women share their interconnected findings that only reinforce the repeating theme of oppression and marginalization.

The volume is specifically focused on the discussion of intersectionality in the LIS field. As the editors write, “Intersectionality is a tool for studying, understanding, and responding to the ways in which axes of identities intersect and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of oppression and privilege” (5). There is no confusing the topic, nor its audience. The goal is not to be objective in the approach to oppression and marginality, but instead to be, as the editors express, “unapologetic in centering women of color and in making the statement that above all else, we matter, our experiences are valid, and that we will be heard” (12). This is a must-read for all who want to listen to Women of Color and their unique prophetic lens in the LIS field.

Pushing the Margins: Women of Color and Intersectionality in LIS is a worthwhile addition to any library’s collection and is recommended without reservation as a resource for every LIS professional.

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