Understanding Barriers and Experiences of Library Advocacy Work by Library Workers of Color:

An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

This exploratory research highlighted experiences and stories of library workers of color who participate in library advocacy work at the local and/or national levels. What are their priorities and interests, and how do they get involved in advocacy work in a profession that is predominantly white? The study applied critical race theory (CRT) to frame the social relationships and the structure of inequities inherent in library advocacy work by exploring the counter stories, narratives, and perspectives of library workers of color.

Introduction

Advocacy work for library issues is incredibly important and difficult, particularly because of COVID-19 when there were fears that the economy may collapse. Engagement with legislative members at all levels on library matters such as funding, fair use, open access, net neutrality, or broadband equity has been important to support communities and libraries at large. Advocacy is defined as "a kind of political action addressed to a governing body with the aim of influencing public policy outputs" (von Winter, 2011, p. 29). Library advocacy work is generally led and coordinated by organizations and associations in coalition with many groups and individuals from grassroots efforts. Library associations such as the American Library Association (ALA) advocate for libraries and library workers at the federal level. State library chapters/associations focus advocacy work for libraries and library workers at the regional, state, county, city, or local levels.

Members of ALA or state chapters may participate in advocacy work for libraries on behalf of such associations. One important factor to consider is that the demographics in communities are changing and becoming more diverse across the United States (Fry&

Parker, 2018). However, the library profession itself has been 85 % white since 2017. There is limited research on demographics and on the backgrounds of those conducting library advocacy work. To increase policy and advocacy training opportunities, ALA created the ALA Policy Corps, a national library initiative, to expand, prepare and train library advocates on "key policy issues on behalf of the library" community in 2017 (ALA Policy Corps, 2020, para. 1). In addition, state associations may organize their own legislative training or support for members interested in library advocacy work.

This exploratory research examined the roles for library workers from racially and ethnically underrepresented groups in library advocacy work. Library advocacy work is broadly defined in this study. The range of advocacy work performed by library workers of color may include participating in National Library Legislative Day (NLLD), lobbying for library issues nationally or locally by contacting U.S. congress or state legislative members, serving on library advocacy committees or groups, and organizing grassroots activities to raise community awareness of library issues.

Using critical race theory (CRT), this study highlights the roles, common characteristics, and shared values of, and barriers experienced by library workers of color who participate in library advocacy work. CRT is a theoretical framework that posits the notion "that race is a socially constructed category that is deeply implicated in the use, and circulation of power in society. Thus, its two principal objects of analysis are race and power" (Torres, 2013, para. 2). Originally a movement and a legal concept by scholars such as Derrick A. Bell (1980), Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (2010), and Richard Delgado (1995), CRT was a response to "mid-1970s conservative, reactionary attack on the achievements on

the civil rights struggle" (Simba, 2019, para. 1). Race plays a central role in our history, communities and everyday interactions. To understand the advocacy work by library workers of color, CRT is a necessary framework to underscore the relationships between positions of power in systems, in institutions, and in the field at large. One core tenet of CRT is storytelling and counter storytelling, which amplifies marginalized voices to "communicate to their white counterparts matters that the whites are unlikely to know'" (Delgado & Sefancic, 2012, p. 9). Counter storytelling is a critical tool in telling the stories and experiences of those whose stories are often not told. It is a tool that "expos[es], analyz[es] and challeng[es] the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. Counter stories shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race and further struggle for racial reform" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). The purpose of this study was to gather and highlight the voices and stories of those who are racially underrepresented in the field of librarianship and to understand the barriers and perceptions in library advocacy work in a white majority profession. This study used the term "library worker" to denote librarians and other types of workers in the library that may not necessarily hold the title "librarian."

The research gathered qualitative data through interviews with library workers of color who actively engaged in library advocacy work at local and national levels. The research was guided by the following questions:

1. Are there common characteristics and shared values of library workers of color who are involved in library advocacy work?
2. What are the potential barriers experienced by library workers of color participating in library advocacy work?

To address these two questions, the researchers conducted a qualitative study that utilizes CRT as a framework in understanding the experiences of library advocacy work by library workers of color. The lack of research on library advocacy work performed by library workers of color reveals the lack of

understanding in the field, and the critical roles that library workers of color play in advocating for their communities, libraries and for themselves. Advocacy work can help us better understand the experiences of library workers of color in the profession at large.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research method based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with fourteen library workers of color who actively participate in library advocacy work in the United States. Library workers of color are defined as any current library worker (librarian or library staff) employed at a library (e.g., public, school, academic, special libraries). The project gathered experiences from those who are racially and ethnically underrepresented in the profession (e.g., Identify as American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Middle Eastern/North African, and/or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander). CRT's storytelling engages with newly emergent voices that offer much needed perspective to counter the dominant narrative. Furthermore, storytelling proposes how to address the concerns or issues raised in the narratives of those who are underrepresented by illuminating new solutions and possibilities as well. Through in depth interviews, participants recounted their stories and experiences in library advocacy work.

First, the study conducted a brief online survey sent to all of the listservs of National Associations of Librarians of Color (e.g., American Indian Library Association, Asian Pacific American Librarians Association, Black Caucus of the American Library Association, Chinese American Librarians Association and REFORMA – National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and Spanish-Speaking). The survey requested potential interviewees, who identify as a library worker of color and are active in library advocacy work, to participate in a virtual interview with a researcher. Second, a researcher prepared a series of questions and each interview lasted ninety-minutes. The study gathered fourteen participants to explore their experiences, barriers and perceptions in participating in library advocacy work. To protect

participants' identities, their names and affiliations are anonymized in the study, and only their types of libraries, and years of experiences are shown.

Prior to the interview, a researcher read a notice to each participant to ensure that they knew their participation was voluntary and asked for their consent in recording the interview. The researcher secured consent from each interviewee. During the interview participants were asked a series of questions, where they reflected on their experiences in advocacy work (see Appendix A). After each interview, the researchers transcribed the conversations using Otter.ai. Each transcription was sent back to participants to ensure that they were able to correct or redact anything that they said. The researchers performed an open coding analysis to identify emerging themes and common responses from participants using Dedoose, a collaborative qualitative analysis program to confirm the coding process. These findings illuminated the feelings, voices, stories and experiences of library workers of color participating in library advocacy work that are often not covered in library advocacy literature.

Table 1. Participants

Participants	Library Type	Gender	Years of Experiences
1	Public	Female	12-17
2	Public	Female	6-11
3	Public	Female	6-11
4	Public	Female	18+
5	Public	Female	0-5
6	Public	Male	6-11
7	Academic	Female	18+
8	Academic	Male	6-11
9	Academic	Male	6-11
10	Academic	Male	18+
11	Academic	Female	12-17
12	School	Female	12-17
13	School	Female	18+
14	School	Female	0-5

Findings and Results: Themes

This research is focused on answering two questions: 1. Are there common characteristics and shared values of library workers of color who are involved in library advocacy work? 2. What are the potential barriers experienced by library workers of color participating in library advocacy work?

For each participant, the researchers coded conversations that highlighted their experiences and gave perspective to their experiences as library advocates. The chart below demonstrates the codes and themes involved. The research of coding the participants experienced emerged in three major themes based on the coded qualitative responses. To understand the common characteristics and shared values of participants, the study highlighted frequently repeated characteristics, values, and barriers from the interviews. Through CRT, participants' stories reveal how their experiences as a library worker of color enable them to navigate in such spaces that are not reflective of their backgrounds. The researchers created three important themes that captured the codes from the qualitative data. These are the themes: 1. external support and engagement; 2. personalities and experiences; and 3. internal barriers and external barriers.

Table 2. Themes and Select Codes

Themes	Select Codes
External Support and Engagement	Positive interactions and support from mentors, supervisors, and the workplace; positive training experiences from American Library Association, and state library associations.
Personalities and Experiences	Personality traits like passionate, outgoing and being social, extroverted, charismatic, fun, comfortable to be around; persistent; and effective communication skills; shared values including equity, diversity and inclusion; our stories and lived experiences; community and relationships; access to information; lifelong learning; and opportunity cost.
Internal and External Barriers	Lack of mentorship; lack of support from institutions; or lack of trusts; experiencing burnout and fatigue; stereotypes of librarians; directly and or systemically experiencing racism, sexism, misogyny, and/or ageism; and experiencing imposter syndrome.

Theme 1: External Support and Engagement

All participants expressed external support and engagement in their activities related to advocacy. One major external support is from their supervisors. Several participants described a supportive supervisor or mentor who guided their work and supported them in the process, and sometimes explained the origins of their collaboration. When asked about how they have been supported in library advocacy work at the state and/or national levels, participants shared that their supervisors and mentors were instrumental along the way.

Participant 1, a public librarian, shared, "Yeah, so [my branch manager] definitely was a first step. And I don't think I would have even...I didn't even know [state association] really did like...I didn't know the extent of the work that they did until I became [involved]. Now that's not to say that everyone will get that chance. You should really have a question around that! That kind of comes with that job." Participant 6, another public librarian, responded, "A big part of it was my supervisor … Luckily my bosses were just great about you know, understanding that. And my main boss who hired me, like I said, she's a Mexican American woman. She's been working in this community…. Whereas my bosses and a couple other people in my department, they are actively working on Colorado's legislative committee work, you know, so they are the ones who are doing more of that direct advocacy." Participant 4, another public librarian, commented that her supervisor encouraged her to do this work, "I got involved in library advocacy work because when I became a branch manager of a public library here, my supervisor took me along for the ride. She was a big proponent of advocacy [and] and she was a part of the advocacy committee. And so, she took me to the meetings. She took me to Legislative Day. My coordinator did...our assistant director did. They were the ones that got me involved." Participant 10, also a.public librarian, explained from her experiences, "the supervisors I have had, they've always been encouraging, and when they get staff involved, and things like that. So, I know even when we went [to legislative meetings], it was like a thing of, oh

everybody speaks … So, given the chance, there's always different opportunities like that."

Participant 11, an academic librarian, described, "I had let my boss know I was applying to this [advocacy work] ...My immediate supervisor was really excited about it. My head of my library was really excited about it. Yeah, I think it was very much the recognition of the, 'Yeah, this probably won't benefit us any, but it benefits the profession and we're willing to give you the time and resources to do this, even if it's not going to selfishly help us.'"

Although supervisors may not have been described by all participants, mentors and mentorship were mentioned by select participants. Participant 12, a school librarian, shared, "Librarians of color who already were active in the profession for many years that I, you know, took on as mentors whether they knew it or not. They helped, you know, shape the way…" Participant 1, a public librarian, described the challenge of not having a mentor and how she would have experienced advocacy training differently based on her identity, "I don't know if the [advocacy] experience would be different if I wasn't of color and like if I would already be in a track with a group of people. Like...oh! When you look for some of the mentors who already know of these things [who could guide you]. Again, I was very lucky that just the branch manager...she felt like the council should see her staff. But I know that's not the case with a lot of librarians out there and so I think even just getting your face out there is hard." A mentorship program for advocacy work was mentioned by participant 8, an academic librarian, "I got mentorship more broadly in terms of like when I started academic library. I didn't know what I was doing and if they had set me up with a mentor who was involved with advocacy, I think that I could have started earlier or something like that."

Another major external support is their work-connected library association work, whether it is for ALA or the state library association. Library association is key in developing advocacy training skills. Participants 1, 5, and 11 mentioned their work in state library associations and how it was helpful in developing advocacy skills. They were able to connect with more people, establish

more opportunities for their association members, and mobilize and get the word out on issues affecting their libraries. Participant 11, an academic librarian, shared, "[advocacy] doesn't have to be huge federal work but getting to the state library advocacy [work or], news alert, [and understand how] it could impact libraries." Participant 4, a public librarian, recounted how she was able to get advocacy training through the Public Library Association from 10 years ago, but felt, "they let their president and officers do a lot of advocacy work, but I don't think it trickles down like it should to the public." The advocacy training from associations may be helpful or irrelevant depending on when the participants took the workshop. National and state associations that organized legislative days were also helpful to introduce advocacy work for participants. Participant 3, a public librarian, shared about National Library Legislative Day, "We basically go to our [congress representatives], our delegates, and we just explain, give background, to all the work that the library has been doing...has done. We usually kind of give short presentations, where we kind of recap things we've done that past year or current things that the library is doing too, so that we can advocate for the library to let our people represent us…" For participant 1, another public librarian, "I also participated in National Library Legislative Day and that was actually going into the Capitol and going to get the lessons with ALA, as well as going on site to talk to our representatives in our districts that are where we are." These in-person opportunities to do advocacy work from external support can be instrumental to support library advocates.

Theme 2: Personalities and Experiences

For this theme, personalities and experiences were captured from the responses. Codes generated from participants' interviews included personality traits like passionate, outgoing and social, and communication skills; shared values and experiences such as equity, diversity and inclusion; our stories and lived experiences; community and relationships; access to information; and lifelong learning. Participants shared how their personalities may align

with advocacy when asked, "what strengths do you bring to library advocacy?"

Participant 13, a school librarian remarked, "Libraries have changed my personality -- I was always withdrawn, but I have trained myself to be outspoken…" Participant 7, an academic librarian, shared this response, "I am very charismatic, I have good people relations, you know. I come across as someone who is knowledgeable and kind. And, you know, I am willing to listen. So, I think a lot of it is because of my personality … I have a vision, and I translate that vision into reality through the way I communicate with different stakeholders." Participant 2, a public librarian, described, "I am passionate about things I care about - it can go against me, or it can be helpful and get people excited about libraries, and I thrive in communication." Participant 14, a school librarian, mentioned that she is bilingual, "and that it could reach to a broader audience" and she described herself as easygoing and someone who loves to be honest with community members, "So I think just advocating for the community. Just being able to build those relationships where otherwise people might not, you know, think that there is a relationship." When thinking about advocacy, participant 5, a public librarian, described her strength as being reflective, "I have the ability to be more reflective, and stop and think, am I including the right people? Am I thinking in the right groups and being reflective?" Participant 9, an academic librarian, contemplated on this question and how he shifts his behaviors depending on the advocacy work, "I still think that I'm a little bit more of an introvert at the end of the day. But I do feel like I'm that kind of introvert that I can become extroverted and give a good presentation. I don't really get too nervous when it comes to public speaking. I feel like my personality and that type of social aptitude does help me. And I tend to channel my own persona as someone who is accessible and friendly, and like open minded. But at the same time, I want to be focused on the values that I want to push for, right?"

Another characteristic is persistence as echoed by select participants. Participant 10, an academic librarian, shared, "You're constantly, you know, if you're doing at

the local level, people change. It's this constant, that's an important point, actually, is this constant, introducing yourself to new people in your local politics at the national level. It's just constantly like, you're always on a job, and you think you're always like introducing yourself." Participant 5, a public librarian, revealed, "I think [advocacy] really just is lifelong work and we're always kind of working toward moving the needle forward and kind of pushing advocacy work forward. It's just always making sure that people have a seat at the table and building a bigger table and increasing that space. So, tenacity would be one word." For participant 13, a school librarian, she remarked how "behind closed doors, I'm always the last one at the table to speak up on things and I have to push myself. So, one way of pushing myself is, I've learned that when I start getting angry about how librarians are treated or kids have lack of programming, I have learned how to productively flip that into articulating a very sound argument in terms of why library programming should be in place for kids. Instead of getting mad and cursing [at] them, like you know, that it's simpler to do. You're tempted to do that." These participants exhibited perseverance and described advocacy work as such.

These personality traits are important to note because they reveal how library workers of color consider their advocacy practice in relation to who they are as individuals and as professionals. Personality traits that include approachability, easygoing, outgoing, sociable or able to be extroverts were common characteristics from select participants. Although they are not necessary advocacy for libraries successfully, they were noted by participants who reflected on the question. In addition, participants shared their experiences and thoughts connecting to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) values. These values were described to be important as shared by many participants. DEI values emerged as important areas for library workers of color when performing advocacy work. Such shared values also lead to a better understanding of the profession. When asked what their priorities and values are, equity, diversity and inclusion often came up. Participant 7, an academic librarian, shared, "we espouse diversity and equity and inclusion…Diversity is problematic if not interrogated … So, for me, I really strive for inclusion so being more inclusive across different spectrums." For participant 12, a school librarian, it is important to ensure that, "every school has a certified librarian and retaining school librarians. Always having a school librarian at any library table discussion. … Allowing students to see librarians that look like them. So, you know, promoting diversity within the organization for librarians."

On the issue of diversity and inclusion, participant 1, a public librarian, shared how it was critical to recruit new professionals but also to bring them into advocacy work, "for new people in the profession just to know how to advocate. And we already have a concern for having more people, more diversity in our profession for people of color. But it's that next step. Okay, we got them. Now, how are we, integrating them into this kind of world where they're going to have to advocate themselves?" For participant 14, another school librarian, she shared how relevant and needed it is to connect with your users, to advocate for their needs by being reflective, "regardless your race or your gender, anyone could be a librarian as long as you're passionate and you love what the library stands for. And I think by, you know, calling these kids, 'mijo' or 'mija', you know the type of endearment that you know, 'you are my son or my daughter in spirit', I feel like they understand that you know I'm really...I'm trying to build connections with them. And also, because even throwing that one simple word, they understand oh, she's not...she's definitely Latina, like I can relate to her." Participant 10, an academic librarian, described why diversity is important to advocacy work, "I think people may, again, forget that they need to diversify stories. It's all about stories. When it comes down to it, you're gonna go in there to tell stories, and your stories are not going to be diverse. It's just, you know, a bunch of white people." These examples shared and experienced by participants generate an important need to embrace and advocate for DEI values within the profession and in advocacy work.

Theme 3: Internal Barriers and External Barriers

Another important theme that emerged based on the qualitative coded responses focused on barriers. A

researcher asked these questions to participants regarding barriers, "what barriers have you encountered when doing library advocacy work? As a library worker of color, what are some challenges and opportunities you see in doing this kind of work?" Internal and external barriers were two types of overlapping barriers that emerged from this study.

First, internal barriers were understood as supervisors, departments, institutions; these factors prevented support for participants in engaging in advocacy work. As the first theme uncovered, participants who received support from mentors, supervisors, and institutions were enabled to learn and perform advocacy work. However, the lack of support can constrain participants. Participant 8, an academic librarian, shared, "So I think one barrier is like, lack of mentorship or involving advocacy as part of our strategic plan or mission or...I don't see it showing up in those kinds of discussions." Participant 9, another academic librarian, shared his challenges, "So … one of the challenges that I faced within my own department [is the] lack of support, lack of collaboration, which is really sad because I've always imagined librarians to be very collaborative and very social justice driven. But maybe I've just fallen into a library that just doesn't have those types of minds. So, I'm sorry, which is why I also try to share my time and my advocacy work outside of my library department and, you know, a statewide association, or other library organizations. Because I do feel slightly isolated in my library. And so, I feel like I need to work with other people who are equity minded, or social justice for them outside of my own institution."

For participant 7, academic librarian, she described the importance of having administrative backing in doing advocacy work, "[Library advocates] have to be sure that they are empowered to do so. That they have the support of their, you know, libraries, their administration, their institution to do that. Because if you don't have that support, how can you effectively advocate something?... Then your advocacy work is not that strong because then you don't have the backing. You know, to follow up on the things that would support your advocacy. So, I think they have to

feel that they are empowered to make decisions, or to influence the decision related to what they are advocating for. Because the worst thing is like you are doing this advocacy work and then you get questioned, and then you will say, 'Oh, I'm not sure about that. I don't know, or I don't have any authority.'"

In addition, there were experiences of and references to fatigue and burnt out that select participants shared. These types of emotions constrained participants from engaging in advocacy work and can be perceived as internal barriers for participants. Participant 9, an academic librarian, shared, "I am tired and frustrated of institutions only using the language to promote the values but when we see how campuses are run, you don't see those values manifested in conspicuous ways."

When it comes to advocacy work, participant 5, a public librarian, described, "I think people get tired of teaching other people. Sometimes I think that comes up a lot. It's like I'm the go to or I'm the person that gets to run the list by." In a more specific point, participant 11, an academic librarian, shared that the encounters of doing advocacy work can lead to burn out, "Just the time that it takes, because yeah, there was just always the...being one of perhaps five librarians of color just in my institution. Then you get asked to do lots of things partly...and I don't mean this in a bad way, but partly to be a face to a particular project or initiative...ways to encourage others to participate. But then you then get put on every single committee and it's just a lot of burn outs. So, there's the internal work that you need to do. There's probably also the concern of whether it's right or wrong. Will your elected officials listen to you as a person of color librarian?" Participant 3, a public librarian, shared an important tip related to feeling burnt out. "Don't get lost in, well, I'm gonna say it like this, in advocating for the library, don't get lost in advocating for yourself. Don't get so caught up in always working, working, that you get burnt out. So always make sure to show up and advocate for yourself first." These internal barriers as shared by select participants reveal the struggle of advocating for libraries as a library worker of color.

For external barriers, there were experiences and mentions of racism, sexism, and/or ageism from

participants while doing advocacy work in their community, at an event and/or within their own workplaces; These discriminatory and destructive forces and barriers can severely hamper and demoralize library advocates of color. Participant 6, a public librarian, recalled an incident where he was meeting with a community member, someone important for advocacy related matters but the encounter turned out negative and participant 6 felt it was a combination of racism and ageism. "Like I introduced myself and [the community member] was kind of standoffish, and we talked for just very briefly and it was just like, I mean, you can tell when somebody's not listening to you, right? Or somebody who's not like paying attention, and it was just so weird because I was like, watching the interaction between my colleague and them just moments before and it was entirely different. And it's not like he was being called by somebody else. He didn't shuffle off to go and talk to somebody right away. He just kind of like...he left our table. He just kind of like sauntered around and eventually made his way back to the bar to get in a different drink. So, it was like, I don't know, it was strange." When asked to describe the community member, participant 6 shared the context, "he was an old white male. You know, probably, I guess probably in the 70s or 80s. He's no longer on the board. And that was...it was weird because I had talked to three other board members that day, and all of them were so interested and engaged." Participant 6's encounter connects to ageism and racism.

Participant 12, a school librarian, reflected on her own experiences encountering microaggressions within events such as the National Library Legislative Day, "it's almost like when you're walking into the venue. And you know, you're probably looking confused. Because the first time I went, I didn't know where to go. You know what I mean? So, there's this confusion because you don't know where to go. I remember my first ALA and someone saying you can always tell the librarians because they just, you know, kind of have a look. And so, I can tell I was in the right place, you know, because I can see other librarians walking around. But you know, we're positioned in a particular place in the hotel. And so, when you're asking, it's like,

'oh, you're here for that?' And then when you go into the space, there's nothing but white faces, except for literally one or two ALA staff members who are taking names. So that's two people of color. And then when you get your ID and your badge, and then you may be off. Because, you know, … I was a member enough to where they were like, oh yeah...don't forget...we got it, you know? […] So even when you go, you find a place to probably, maybe, put your stuff safely and then you're like, okay I'm gonna go get something to eat. You're like, the person of color grabbing food and it's almost like, are you supposed to be here? Like do you know that this is Day of Advocacy for librarians?" This story by participant 12 revealed that the colleagues at such an event may have suspected her as an outsider and not as a librarian. Participant 12 felt as a person of color, it drew unfortunate attention. Participant 12 shared that she had her badge which stopped the inquiries, however, the microaggressions were already enacted.

Participant 13, another school librarian, described the lack of trust and shared how her experiences are invalidated until a white colleague speaks up about these issues, "Sometimes it's white people. But then I also find, even within my community and it goes back to a slave mentality of if it's not right, or it's not accurate until somebody that's white speaks on it, you know. You know I would say this as another frustrating thing is that sometimes I can be fussing about something, until one of my white colleagues jumps on board and agrees with me, then it becomes almost a valid issue, you know? Can't take my word for it…" Being undermined as a librarian was also participant 13's experience, "So, barriers include, sometimes it's like you're a Black librarian, did you really graduate from library school? I've gotten that question asked to me, many times. Even my colleagues I work with, they're like, 'oh, I didn't know you had a degree. I just thought you were really smart.' So those are some barriers that...you have to deal with that mentality of thinking…"

Another external barrier that was echoed by participants is the perpetual myth or stereotypical image of a librarian that the public sees which has posed challenges for librarians of color in conducting advocacy work; as a

result, participants have expressed that they have experienced imposter syndrome because they are undermined by those they meet when advocating for libraries; they may feel that they "don't look the part."

Participant 12, a school librarian, shared that she knows she does not look like a librarian and as a result, may have been questioned during the National Library Legislative Day, "I know that I don't look like a librarian. So, you can tell that I have my proper slacks and my nice shirt and my cardigan. You know, the library stereotypes gear on and, but you still kind of get the look like, no, you no, this is not, you're not supposed to be here. Like, did you know this is the conference and you're not allowed to get the free food or something? But thank God for the badge. I noticed, like, I should always put my little badge on so that they can see like, I'm official…"

Participant 10, an academic librarian, shared a perceived expectation that he hadn't considered, "This is how you do [advocacy work]? And there's really no right way to do it. So, my experience is I still feel like I'm still learning. It's been now like, I've been doing this for 15-16 years. And, you know … at the national level, with every year, we know, we have a new slate. We have a new agenda, legislative agenda. And so, if you're constantly just like, learning, and I find it extremely rewarding when you're speaking with...when I'm doing advocacy, at the national level, I feel very rewarding, but also sometimes feel like 'oh my god, like', am I representing libraries correctly? Am I, you know? But I think at the end of the day, we're like storytellers... You're trying to tell a story of what your library does…" To represent libraries, the association and the profession at large, while telling the story and being reflective of such a role can be challenging, particularly for this individual.

Challenging the librarian stereotype has been also difficult and part of advocacy work. Participant 14, a school librarian, reflected that, "people think of a librarian as an old white lady. And that's always like, you always think of that librarian. But like me, I think I'm different… "She described how she had to push back against the stereotypes and advocate for her

library internally, "[teachers] just think that I just provide a space where it's books and quiet. And it's not that at all, so I'm just trying to get that stereotype away. The other thing is that working at the school library, I completely fought this, it was an idea of having the kids after school detention, having it at the library. And I didn't like that because I didn't want kids to think the libraries were a bad place, like a punishment right. So, I fought that. I'm like we are absolutely not having detention kids in here." Participant 7, an academic librarian, explained how she pushed back against the stereotype, "I defied the stereotype of a quiet Asian woman, just be a wallflower. Because I am vocal, you know. I speak my mind and so I think that also kind of plays to why I became sought after. Because yes, this is a person who … speaks well and has this engaging dynamic personality and so I think that defiance of the stereotype is also the thing that allowed me to be successful in my advocacy, but not everyone has that agency to do that."

Participant 13, a public librarian, described her own experiences as a woman of color when advocating for libraries, "I hate to say it like this, but it sometimes feels like this, as a woman of color, that we have to work a little harder to make sure that people are seeing past, you know, those kinds of stereotypes and that like, you know, the very obvious brownness of our skin and whatever gender is. But you know, making sure that whatever you're doing that, as far as advocacy work, that you're doing it really well and that you have passion behind it and that you make way for your legislators to ask you questions and that you're, you know, just the best at what you do. But I would say that the first step to that is to get involved." Participant 13 also described her encounters with sexism when advocating for libraries, "So when I was introducing myself [to the legislator] I also was told one of the lines that I've heard a lot [and] to me, it brings just [an] innately sexist [tone],'oh my mother, oh my grandmother was a librarian' or 'that, that, and that.'" She reflected how it felt to her to experience such encounters, "I feel kind of petty to even bring it up, but it's one of the things that I'll always carry with me because I had a moment of, I think really seeing what sexism can look like when you are a young woman and how it can really fail So I actually had to, I brought it to

a friend of mine because I was kind of confused about that like, just as it always is. When you're a minority or you're in any type of a marginalized population, and that happens, it's like you innately feel what it actually is, but it's hard to define and it's and it's even hard to make sense in your own head like, and you lean towards questioning yourself rather than calling it what it is."

Participant 1, a public librarian also shared that she had encountered sexism by a state librarian. Participant 1 questioned whether it was the state librarian's personality or behavior, "I feel like conversations in general I haven't felt uncomfortable in any way. But it's just that, just getting past the...the sections of it, and his personality." The stereotypes of librarians may also contribute to the challenges in advocating for libraries as expressed by select participants. Participant 6, another public librarian, described how he encounters imposter syndrome as a result of advocating for libraries, "I'm starting to get the imposter syndrome, you know, because I'm pretty young compared to all of my colleagues too, you know. So, when I go into these large committees, especially for city or county wide committees, it's hard to feel like I actually deserve a place at the table, you know, that I'm there and actually able to offer something that's worthwhile. So, although I have experienced some social resistance from different people…"

When library workers of color do not feel like they "look the part" or are stereotyped, they may encounter racism, sexism, microaggression or ageism. Both internal and external barriers were placed in the same theme because they intersect with one another. Participants may experience both internal and external barriers because of their advocacy work.

Discussions

The themes reveal the unique experiences and counter stories from participants and how they come to understand advocacy and their work and experiences as library workers of color. In this study, their backgrounds are completely different from one another

based on years of experience, library type, gender, race/ethnicity and regions. Their responses answered two research questions in this study: 1. Are there common characteristics and shared values of library workers of color who are involved in library advocacy work? 2. What are the potential barriers experienced by library workers of color participating in library advocacy work?

Common characteristics of library workers of color who are involved in advocacy work may be specific personality traits and current support systems. First, select participants described having personality traits that allow them to connect with their users, community members or stakeholders. These personality traits may include being outgoing, communicative, sociable and passionate about their work and values. Those who did not describe these traits shared how they were observant, proactive, a good listener, and an effective communicator. These characteristics offer an opportunity to understand how library workers of color describe themselves when thinking about advocacy work.

A critical characteristic is having a supportive network whether it consists of supervisors, mentors, or exists in the workplace in general or library association. As shared by select participants, having a supervisor who was supportive of advocacy work could enhance the experiences for librarians who are unfamiliar or new to advocacy work. Whether they are supervisors or mentors, they can encourage their library colleagues to pursue opportunities in state/national association work and/or directly take them by the hand to meetings. As revealed by a few of participants, these supervisors recognized how important funding issues can impact their libraries, and so they supported their employees (the participants) in building important experiences in advocacy work. In a follow up question with select participants on this issue, when asked if their supervisors were also a Black/Indigenous/Person of Color (BIPOC), the responses varied from participants.

For shared values, the responses often focused on equity, diversity and inclusion; and the greater causes impacting

libraries such as funding, access to information, lifelong learning, community building and relationships. Select participants recalled their experiences in interacting with the public, particularly with legislators, but also the challenges and experiences with microaggressions, racism, and sexism. For participant 2, a public librarian, reflected, "I live in a very, like, in, Spanish, we call it, "machismo" and it's like, it is the idea that, like, you know, the man is the head of the household, and you know, we are in our culture, [it] is very, very much embedded in, you know, Catholicism or that is there. And so, there's, so yeah, I would say that might be one of [the challenges] that, you walk into a legislator's office and, you know, it's an older gentleman who's been there forever…." The intersectional identities by participant 2 and others who identify as women of color in this study, encounter additional barriers and challenges in doing advocacy work based on their gender, racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Library workers of color have to navigate such spaces to interact with these important community members to support their libraries. Participant 12, a school librarian, revealed, "I totally believe that legislation is a different type of librarianship. You have a different mindset. It's a wonderful type of librarianship, but it's different. And it wasn't something that I was used to, it wasn't something that I knew about…" Interacting with legislators and doing advocacy work is important work and highly valued by select participants despite present or unknown challenges.

The internal and external barriers experienced by library workers of color participating in advocacy work varied. Through critical race theory, their stories and perspectives regarding advocacy work are now told, to be shared and to be validated. The barriers that they have experienced internally and externally amplify the inherent issue that library workers of color experience when advocating for their libraries. Internally, select participants shared how they did not have a supportive work environment and cannot do their advocacy work. As shared by other participants, when there are supportive workplaces, advocacy work becomes clearer for participants. In addition, participants may

experience may include fatigue, imposter syndrome and burnout when doing advocacy work. This can be due to the fact that there are external barriers that prevent participants from fully engaging with the work.

These external barriers include sexism, racism and ageism, which were experienced by select participants in varying degrees when doing advocacy work. Select participants have experienced ageism in doing advocacy work. Select participants referenced sexism that makes it challenging for them to do advocacy work. Participants also added difficulty to perform advocacy work due to their white colleagues whether they are fellow librarians, colleagues, legislators or community members.

Participant 13, a school librarian, reflected, "I think sometimes our white colleagues don't realize how difficult it is for librarians of color to speak up, because sometimes the spaces that we are in, are not very well for [us] to do so. And historically, they've never been very welcoming. There's been a shift, mainly because we're in this pandemic and we're forced to look at things. And in looking at things and analyzing them, you know, there's a shift that people are starting to be a little more empathetic and looking deeper beneath the surface on issues. But right now, I just think this is the moment, especially as librarians of color, to really get our message out there, and we need to take advantage of it."

Navigating such spaces can be challenging for library workers of color. These spaces can be viewed as "a world that is orientated around whiteness" (Ahmed, 2007, p. 160). Participants may not feel like they belong in such spaces or professions. Thus, the advocacy work itself can potentially make them experience a range of emotions such as fatigue, burnout, or imposter syndrome. These important factors have not been documented in the advocacy literature before, but they have been documented in the profession at large (Linares & Cunningham, 2018; Santamaria, 2020; Schlesselman-Tarango, 2017). This exploratory research raises awareness of the challenges experienced by library workers of color and highlights their advocacy stories in the process. In the fifth tenet of critical race theory, storytelling, and counter storytelling are approaches that amplify oppressed voices and to engage white colleagues

about issues they are unlikely to be aware of (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Thus, participants' stories and counter stories deconstruct the normative experiences and stories and offer a critical voice to those who may feel marginalized. By engaging and allowing new voices to emerge on this topic, these much-needed perspectives dismantle the singular viewpoint held by the predominant group, and address concerns and issues raised in the narratives by proposing alternative solutions or ideas.

To support library workers of color doing advocacy work effectively, this study also documented recommendations from participants. These suggestions include becoming involved in national or state level associations and connecting with community groups. Participant 2, a public librarian, shared, "I would say that representation matters, and I believe that in all facets of my life. So, get out there and do it on the national platform if you can. "Being involved in such associations provides training opportunities, networking and resources to build an advocacy strategy. When speaking with legislators, participant 3, another public librarian, remarked, "Don't be nervous to talk to people. I know sometimes people are nervous about public speaking and speaking to what are like, high profile people. But you talk to them like you talk to anybody else, cause it's really about the connection." A strategy for those who aren't sure how to engage with officials or community members on library advocacy issues may consider this kind of tip. Participant 14, a school librarian, echoed, "You just have to get it out there. You just have to plan. Think of a program that would attract more people, and just go for it, and if it's successful, do it again and do another repeat session."

For associations and institutions thinking about advocacy work in the future, participant 4, another public librarian, offered this advice: "Please go ahead and start training the next generation, or you will lose that institutional knowledge that can be so helpful to younger librarians doing advocacy work. I think that the most important thing is that one on one training, and that personal knowledge that you gain doing advocacy." Associations may consider creating

mentorship programs in advocacy work. Participant 1, another public librarian, shared, "Just browse, like, kind of the policy advocacy [in state library associations]. Like, see what is out there. There's so much though. I don't know if there's like a mentoring type of program where you can pull yourself up with somebody to just learn more about what they do. I think local chapters are also helpful to join, your local affiliates and the national affiliates. I mean, I think that's helpful. Just to know what, like, there might be some people who are more in tune. So, when you're building and networking, to know what they're doing."

As this study showed, advocacy work can be done effectively when supported by the workplace environments according to select participants. Advocacy is a type of work that should not be done by one person, but by a collective group. Participant 9, an academic librarian, shared, "stay active in the community. … We do need that support system to keep us motivated and accountable, and it's more fun…. It feels more impactful when it's a group of people pushing something, as opposed to just one person." Advocacy work is a collective practice and requires everyone regardless of library type or years of experiences involved in the process.

Conclusion

This exploratory study was guided by two questions: 1. Are there common characteristics and shared values of library workers of color who are involved in library advocacy work? 2. What are the potential barriers experienced by library workers of color participating in library advocacy work? The study highlighted many important elements to consider from the experiences of library workers of color across public schools, and academic and public libraries. These counter stories revealed the deepening issues of advocacy work that need to be told and heard in the field.

It's important to note that their experiences and stories are not meant to be compared or generalized, but to raise awareness of such issues that may not have been captured or highlighted before in the literature. By revealing their stories, we learn about the opportunities

and systemic barriers as experienced by these participants, and how institutions and associations focused on advocacy work (for library funding purposes) may want to devise strategies to create a more inclusive environment for library workers of color advocating for their libraries and communities at large. We learn that from such perspectives that advocacy work can be challenging work with further layers of challenges connected to one's racial, ethnic, and gender backgrounds. In addition, their stories and advice can be uplifting and inspiring to those who are new to library advocacy work and identify as a person of color. They share with us the authentic stories of struggle but also the stories of perseverance.

It is also important to note that this study was conducted during two ongoing events in the library science field. The first ongoing event that impacted the field is the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused systems and services to be online. This shift caused barriers in accessibility to materials and services, but participants in the study touched on how they were able to advocate for things such as broadband internet for students during the school year and to strive for open access of materials for colleges at a higher level. The second ongoing event that impacted the librarian field was the Black Lives Matter movement that gained national traction in the summer of 2020. This shift in wanting to prioritize Black voices was noted in interviews as being a change in the field for advocating for oneself and for other people of color. These two events also caused participants to also discuss a wave of social justice desires in their communities and to highlight ways in which their advocacy can reach more outlets and communities in their work.

Future studies may wish to consider how these experiences have been impacted by ongoing critical events. In addition, a future study may explore how library associations can better prepare and support library workers of color in advocacy work. Advocacy work is for everyone. When we work to advocate for libraries, we work to advocate for our communities, whether they are students, teachers, or the general public. As revealed by participants, advocating for specific library issues and opportunities for

communities with the support of mentors, supervisors and institutions, can be effective. When they experience setbacks and systemic oppression, their issues must be heard and revealed, and new strategies deployed and considered in order to dismantle systemic oppression experienced through advocacy work for libraries.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

● Please describe your experiences with library advocacy work.
● Why and how did you get involved in library advocacy work?
● What are your library priorities when it comes to library advocacy work?
● What advocacy values come to mind when you think about this work?
● What strengths do you bring to library advocacy?
● Can you share an example when you felt like you made a difference to your community through this work?
● What barriers have you encountered when doing library advocacy work?
.● As a library worker of color, what are some challenges and opportunities you see in doing this kind of work?
● What would you like to have known about advocacy work before doing it?
● What advocacy related resources have helped you along the way?

● Do you have any recommendations for library workers of color doing advocacy work?

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