


Trans and Gender Diverse Voices in Libraries, edited by Kalani Keahi Adolpho, Stephen G. Krueger, and Krista McCracken

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Book Review: *Trans and Gender Diverse Voices in Libraries*

Kalani Keahi Adolpho, Stephen G. Krueger, and Krista McCracken eds., *Trans and Gender Diverse Voices in Libraries*. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2023, 547pp, \$77.40.

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Who has the right to exist within library spaces and shelves? In contemporary discourse, this question increasingly centers trans and gender diverse individuals, as well as those who oppress them. However, trans-exclusionism and gender critical rhetoric are ideologies; trans and gender diverse personhood are not. Collecting the writings of students and professionals from across the North American Library and Information Science (LIS) landscape,¹ *Trans and Gender Diverse Voices in Libraries* rejects the relegation of trans and gender diverse existence to a matter of ideological debate. The book's stated purpose is to show trans and gender diverse LIS community members that they are not alone, to illuminate their struggles to cis colleagues, and to provide readers with tools to work towards greater gender inclusivity within the field. The closing sentence of the introduction makes further action a requirement: "So read, and reflect, and then go forth and do the work. It is not optional" (13).

The editors of *Trans and Gender Diverse Voices* are trans archivists and library professionals from Canada and the United States experienced in inclusivity work. To prevent the deeply personal submissions from being judged against the oft-exclusionary standards of academia, the editors did not submit the book for peer review, nor did they require contributors to cite scholarly sources. In this choice lies an implicit call to action for readers: be prepared to depart from traditional academic structures to ensure that trans and gender diverse voices are heard. For this reason, I will not aim for complete objectivity within this review and will instead leverage my positionality as a non-binary librarian.

1. With the exception of one author writing from Australia, as noted on page 9.

Trans and Gender Diverse Voices consists of fifty-three chapters divided into seven sections. Section 1, *Personal Experiences*, begins with Alvina Lai's reflection on being non-binary and Asian-American in LIS. In the introduction, the editors note that most contributors are white, inadvertently reflecting "the demographics of our field" (9). Beginning the book with Lai signals to racialized trans and gender diverse readers that they nonetheless have a place in this conversation and in this volume. As a non-binary librarian of colour, the first chapter immediately succeeded in making me feel less alone. My emotive response echoed Lai's reflections on the importance of finding community for queer and BIPOC LIS professionals.

Section 2, *LIS Education*, and Section 3, *Public Libraries*, provide varying experiences of being "out" as trans or gender diverse in LIS. For example, in chapter 11, Calvin Cantina writes of the isolation and academic harm caused when faced with an instructor and classmates that devalued queer research and existence. In contrast, Zara Offner-Hernandez in chapter 14 writes about feeling supported as a non-binary student by instructors and peers, but actively harmed by transphobia within course literature. The range of perspectives are a key strength of the book, increasing the likelihood that trans and gender diverse readers will encounter an experience that resonates with them. Additionally, by documenting the diverse challenges faced by the community, the book provides readers with a more comprehensive understanding of how they may have been complicit in harm, and a stronger awareness of the work that needs to be done to transform LIS into a truly gender inclusive field.

Section 4, *Academic Libraries*, and Section 5, *Archives and Special Collections*, explore the challenges trans and gender diverse LIS members face within institutional and socio-cultural structures. Chapter 28 opens Section 4 with Hazel Jane Plante's reflection on transitioning while working in an academic library, and her highly relevant account of the pain caused when libraries platform transphobic events. Plante details adhering to bureaucratic methods of complaint and appeal to try and stop these events, without success. She later states, "I think my anger is healthy and legitimate, because I feel forsaken by my institution and my profession" (265). In contrast, later chapters in Section 4 address the potential to work within institutional structures to enact change. In chapter 38, Kylie Terra Burnham provides a detailed appendix for running gender inclusivity training. In chapter 39, Debbie Kraemer urges trans librarians to leverage their "disruption of the 'norm'" (377) to create a classroom that is "open to anything" (379). Similarly, in Section 5, chapter 41, Aiden Faust explores the potential of transness to disrupt other restrictive binaries for the benefit of LIS and associated fields. Subsequent chapters include reflections by those who feel personally displaced and/or professionally insecure when existing as a 'disruption' to the institutional and socio-cultural norms. Sections 4 and 5 both include chapters that will resonate with those failed by LIS institutional structures

and chapters that provide inspiration for those hoping to work within their institutions to make change.

Chapters in Section 6, *Professional Reflections*, directly challenge the perception of LIS as progressive and trans-friendly. In chapters 46 and 50, Jordan Dias Correia and kas² each respectively discuss the harm caused by platforming transphobic creators, arguing that libraries often seem more concerned with how they are perceived than with supporting trans and gender diverse communities. Other chapters in Section 6 discuss the microaggressions and oppression faced by LGBTQ+ and BIPOC LIS workers. In chapter 47, kynita stringer-stanback³ and Lorin K. Jackson suggest marginalized LIS workers be “shame resilient” and “name the trauma” to begin the path of rectifying harm (457). However, Magnus Berg in chapter 48 argues that “Resiliency’ is implicitly ableist” and puts “the responsibility on LIS workers to accept precarious, abusive, and/or toxic work environments with a smile” (475-476). Trans and gender diverse readers who hold either opinion may leave the book feeling like their struggle has been recognized. The range of experiences proves that there is no one-size-fits-all for making LIS gender inclusive. Reading this book is not enough; to identify the steps needed for actionable change within their institutions, cis colleagues must listen to the trans and gender diverse individuals within their specific context.

There are two chapters in the final section, *Leaving Libraries*. Evan Held reflects on voluntarily choosing to leave LIS because of structural issues within the field, while their partner was fired from a library for being non-binary. Loren R. Klein recounts being pushed out of the job after coming out as trans. Both Held and Klein argue that trans library workers need to be actively fought for, particularly by “allies with institutional power” (534). Additional chapters in this section would have implicitly emphasized the need for change in LIS and ended the book on a stronger note.

Nonetheless, *Trans and Gender Diverse Voices in Libraries* successfully uses unapologetically personal reflections to provide compelling evidence for the need for change within LIS, while simultaneously demonstrating that trans and gender diverse individuals are more than a topic of debate and equipping cis colleagues with resources to support the community. While some of the chapters include their own in-text definitions, a glossary would improve the volume’s ability to educate cis audiences unfamiliar with gender and sexuality discourse and would enhance the book’s utility in education settings where only select chapters may be assigned. For trans and gender diverse readers, the collection’s commitment to sharing a range of perspectives makes it likely that they will find a chapter to connect with. While it is impossible to know if the book succeeds in making each of those readers feel less alone, it certainly succeeded with me.

2. Respecting the author’s choice to leave the name uncapitalized.

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