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Providing care and community in times of crisis

The BIPOC in LIS Mental Health Summits

In mid-March 2020, the U.S. federal government officially recognized the COVID-19 Pandemic (coronavirus). As a result, the nation experienced a social and economic shutdown. The persistent public health emergency resulted in long-term interpersonal disconnections as people adhered to stay-at-home orders and associated pivots to remote teaching and working, while watching the development of an increasingly politicized response to the pandemic.

As the spring moved to summer, social justice and antiracism movements increased in response to heightened reports of police brutality and the murder of unarmed African Americans. These events were all compounded in the LIS field as libraries applied uneven responses to the pandemic—some remaining fully open during lockdowns, while others shuttered completely.

Writ large, these events had a negative impact on library employees, as revealed by Kaetrena Davis Kendrick's survey tracking libraries' COVID-19 responses on librarians already dealing with workplace abuse and neglect. Her research also showed that African American librarians were impacted more deeply. In order to help address these needs, Davis Kendrick, Twanna Hodge, Amanda M. Leftwich, and Rayna Smaller hosted a series of virtual sessions called the "Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in Library and Information Sciences Mental Health Summit" (BIPOC in LIS Mental Health Summit) starting on April 1, 2020.

The summits were a collaborative effort by the hosts to offer opportunities for BIPOC

to meet in a safe space and acknowledge the individual and shared impacts of numerous stressor events. Moreover, attendees would be able to discuss how these events are affecting their lived experiences as they engage in library practice and associated social-professional spheres and workplaces.

About the Summits

Rooted in collective care—which springs from community activism and focuses on providing access to quality expertise and authoritative information, while decentering the primacy of formally recognized channels of communication and commodification of well-being¹—the BIPOC in LIS Mental Health Summits were not predicated on formal funding nor were they connected formally to any organization. The events were open to members of the BIPOC community free of charge. The summits gave BIPOC LIS workers the chance to acknowledge their own stressors and move towards healing in solidarity.

The goals of the BIPOC in LIS Mental Health Summits were to:

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- engage with audiences in an authentic and care-centered manner;
- provide space for BIPOC LIS workers during the COVID-19 pandemic and intense racial climate;
- increase awareness of best practices for self-preservation and wellness tools; and
- share resources through a BIPOC in LIS Community Record² created by presenters with additions made (and welcome) by the community.

The hosts used institution-sanctioned and freely available platforms and tools to advertise, manage registrations for and host the event, and provide post-event resources, including an institutionally hosted Zoom account, PowerPoint, and Google Drive.

Another unique feature of the program was the inclusive nature of the facilitator pool, which included Rayna Smaller, an established social worker who focuses on mental health support and community building for BIPOC women.³ Her expertise in identifying BIPOC mental health practitioners, informational resources, and well-being activities added significant value to the events.

Summit activity

The summit was formatted as a panel divided into four sections focusing on low morale; equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDI/A); mindfulness; and mental health/emotional hygiene resources. Each host provided background information on their section, best practices for maintaining and acknowledging boundaries and care requirements during COVID-19, and a call to action following their talks.

Calls to action for the audience included:

- Davis Kendrick: participate in the COVID-19 Low Morale Survey;⁴
- Hodge: establish or maintain emotional support systems, identify allies and accomplices, contribute, and engage with others;⁵
- Leftwich: create a daily self-care activity, something just for you and identify barriers to boundaries needed for your own wellness;⁶ and

- Smaller: familiarize yourself with the BIPOC mental health resources in your community and seek a therapist or professional help.⁷

This format gave audiences the chance to not only learn from all hosts, but to connect one another with resources in a psychologically safe environment. Summit attendees were also encouraged to add information to the BIPOC LIS Mental Health Community Record⁸—an open Google document available to attendees at all events. Participants actively engaged with the document, adding more resources like meditation apps, therapy/counseling directories, articles, and videos.

Immediate results and feedback

The first event was very popular, with 391 registrants and 194 in attendance. The high interest and attendance numbers provided strong evidence that we were filling a much-needed gap. Due to the overwhelming positive responses during the first event, the hosts offered more events.

In addition to consistent attendance indicating high interest in these conversations, summit attendee responses to this event were extremely positive, particularly during the events. Attendees shared feedback on Twitter, offering their responses to the panel's discussions and suggestions, sharing their joy in finding community support, or noting the timeliness of the event in their lives.

The BIPOC in LIS Mental Health Summit this morning was something I didn't realize I really needed.—@AprilMuses⁹

This was fantastic. Thank you @Kaetrena, @thelibmaven, @tkhodge19, and @BrowngirlSpace for putting this together. It's helpful to know that we're not alone. #BIPOCMindsMatter—mimosaishere¹⁰

This event also spurred attendees to action in their immediate library workplaces. An attendee tweeted,

Inspired by @libmaven leading a 2 minute meditation yesterday at the #BIPOC in LIS Mental Health Summit, I offered a guided meditation for the All Library Personnel weekly zoom this morning.—@BiblioXica¹¹

The event, and the resources generated from the event, prompted the authors to move from community to praxis by providing the opportunity for attendees at the first summit to be able to reflect and share any progress and get further support.

Additionally, continuing developments during the summer of 2020—including the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor, along with associated increases in anti-racism activism—spawned a need for follow-up BIPOC Mental Health Summits for this community of LIS workers. As a result, more events were offered:

- BIPOC in LIS Mental Health Summit: (April 1, 2020): 391 registrants
- BIPOC in LIS Mental Health Summit: The Redux (April 22, 2020): 87 registrants
- BIPOC in LIS Mental Health: Call to Action Symposium (May 1, 2020): 158 registrants
- BIPOC in LIS Mental Health Black Lives Matter Symposium (June 19, 2020): 210 registrants.
- BIPOC in LIS Mental Health Summit: The Year in Review (April 12, 2021): 80 registrants.
- Total registrants for all sessions were 926.

Outcomes

The Summits generated critical and ongoing conversation about mental health and well-being in library workplaces and the LIS field in general, particularly as they relate and impact BIPOC workers. The Summits were the first of similar webinars and talks focused on actively gathering communities to discuss mental health care in library workplaces, including the African American Medical Librarian's Alliance Caucuses' (AAMLA) "Radical Self-Care and Wellness for Information Professionals Series"¹² and the National Library of Medicine's

(NNLM) "Putting the Self back in Self-Care: Wellness in the time of COVID-19."¹³

In April 2021, BIPOC in LIS Mental Health facilitators offered another event, "BIPOC in LIS Mental Health Summit: A Year Later." In May 2021, wehere¹⁴ offered a similarly structured event in response to upticks in Anti-Asian violence, in which two of the BIPOC in LIS Mental Health facilitators offered their expertise.

The authors, who are also BIPOC library workers, also gained the benefits of community. As a result, sharing knowledge with the collective was simultaneously an act of self-care and self-preservation. Recognizing that mental health support is ongoing and that collective care requires long-term cultivation, the hosts offered a follow-up event in April 2021, which gave attendees the opportunity to reflect on their longer-term experiences of a stressful year and, if needed, reconnect with an empathetic community and recommit to healthy mental and emotional hygiene practices.¹⁵

Conclusion

Caring for the community takes action, and sometimes these actions move outside of regular systems. Providing space for those in need doesn't require the formal backing of an institution or funding—only time and dedication, and a desire to offer excellent information, resources, and good best practices to those we support. Create and serve your community with intention and honesty—without the need for perfection. Offer it, and they will come.

Acknowledgements

To the BIPOC Library community, we thank you for your attendance and support for all our summits. Take care, and be well.

Notes

1. Rushdia Mehreen and David Gray-Donald. "Be careful with each other," *Briarpatch Magazine*, accessed May 25, 2021.
2. Kaetrena Davis Kendrick, Twanna Hodge, Amanda M. Leftwich, and Rayna Smaller, "BIPOC in LIS Mental Health Summit: Community

Record”, BIPOC in LIS Mental Health Summit, <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FNzclSLAIVxB3ClvJfFhXqMLRi3b-xKuvtoiqZnrA/edit?usp=sharing>, accessed May 25, 2021.

3. Brown Girl SPACE. (2021). <https://www.browngirlspace.com/>. Accessed May 27, 2021.

4. Kaetrena Davis Kendrick, “Low-Morale Experiences & COVID-19 (Coronavirus)”, Survey, <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc2ZFHFZ-HRQ2FUKrm-VGK6jWtp8P6WcpSiEQtMXyJ-mHTiOvA/viewform>, accessed June 28, 2021.

5. Kaetrena Davis Kendrick, et. al. pg. 1

6. Kaetrena Davis Kendrick, et. al., pg. 2.

7. Kaetrena Davis Kendrick, et. al., pg. 2.

8. Kaetrena Davis Kendrick, et. al., pg 3.

9. @AprilMuses, “BIPOC in LIS Mental Health Summit”, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/AprilMuses/status/1245431221464662016>, accessed May 20, 2021.

10. @Mimosaishere, “BIPOC in LIS Mental Health Summit”, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/mimosaishere/status/1245413713550573568>, accessed May 20, 2021.

11. @BiblioXica, “BIPOC in LIS Mental Health Summit”, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/BiblioXica/status/1245783243481214976>, accessed May 20, 2021.

12. African American Medical Librarian’s Alliance Caucus (AAMLA), “Radical Self-Care and Wellness for Information Professionals Series,” AAMLA, <https://sites.google.com/view/aamla-mla/events-meetings/spring-2021/radical-self-care-wellness>, accessed May 25, 2021.

13. National Library of Medicine (NNLM), “Putting the Self back in Self-Care: Wellness in the time of COVID-19”, NNLM, <https://nnlm.gov/class/putting-self-back-self-care-wellness-time-covid-19/24088>, accessed May 25, 2021.

14. wehere, “We Got Us: BIPOC Mental Health and Solidarity,” Twitter, <https://twitter.com/weherespace/status/1384544864843534339>, accessed May 27, 2021

15. @Kaetrena, “BIPOC in LIS Mental Health Summit: The Year in Review,” Twitter, <https://twitter.com/Kaetrena/status/1379252813419716622>, accessed May 27, 2021. *zz*

(“Unconventional collecting in extraordinary times,” continued from page 356)

2. As of June 2021, there are more than 8,000 posts on Instagram with the hashtag “#quaranzine”: <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/quaranzine/?hl=en>.

3. Examples include Ysabelle Cheung’s “Enter the ‘Quaranzine’: Zines That Boost Resistance, Mutual Aid, and Self-Care,” April 30, 2020, Hyperallergic, <https://hyperallergic.com/560443/enter-the-quaranzine-zines-that-boost-resistance-mutual-aid-and-self-care/>; Ashlie D. Stevens’s “Self-Published Zines Are Back As Artists Respond to Our Reality in Quarantine,” August 10, 2020, Salon, <https://www.salon.com/2020/08/10/zines-fan-magazine-comeback/>; Malaka Gharib’s “How to Make a Mini-Zine about Life during the Pandemic,” May 28, 2020, NPR, <https://www.npr.org/2020/05/28/863068957/how-to-make-a-mini-zine-about-life-during-the-pandemic>.

4. Sherwood Forest Zine Library, which offers hundreds of free, downloadable zines, is one example of a resource for finding digital zines: <https://www.sherwoodforestzinelibrary.org/>.

5. Usually the eight-page “mini-zines” as featured in the NPR article.

6. Examples include Pen Fight Distro (<https://penfightdistro.com/>) and Crapandemic Zine Distro (<https://crapandemic.storenvy.com/>).

7. Heidy Berthoud, et al., “Zine Librarian Code of Ethics,” ZineLibraries.info (2015), <https://www.zinelibraries.info/code-of-ethics/>.

8. Ciara Cordasco, Quarantimes 1 (2020).

9. Preliminary inventory for RBML’s COVID-19 Zine Collection: <https://library.osu.edu/finding-aids/ead/RARE/SPEC.RARE.0311.xml> (2021). *zz*