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Introduction to Trans and Gender Diverse Voices in Libraries

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Introduction

**Kalani Keahi Adolpho, Stephen G. Krueger,
and Krista McCracken**

Who We Are

Krista McCracken (they/them) is a queer, non-binary, settler archivist and public historian. They are a Researcher/Curator at the Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre located at Algoma University in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Canada. Krista is passionate about trans and gender diverse inclusion in the Canadian library and archives context. They regularly speak, write, and stitch about gender identity.

Kalani Keahi Adolpho (they/them or he/him) is a mixed Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian), queer, and trans person living in Richmond, VA. They are a Processing Archivist at Virginia Commonwealth University, and a former diversity resident librarian at University of Wisconsin. They hold a B.A. in History and an MLIS from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Kalani writes and presents on diversity residencies, ethical description, and trans and gender diverse inclusion.

Stephen G. Krueger (ey/em or he/him) is a queer, white, trans person living in New Hampshire. In addition to being the Scholarly Publishing Librarian at Dartmouth College, he writes and presents on trans inclusion in libraries. Stephen holds a B.A. in English from Warren Wilson College and an MSLS from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His publications and opinions can be found at www.stephengkrueger.com.

What is This Book?

In the genre of professional literature for the library and information field, this book may seem a little unusual. We'll get into what it isn't shortly, but first we'll start with what it is. In essence, that's basically what it says on the tin: *Trans and Gender Diverse Voices in Libraries*. In the call for proposals, we had two requirements for potential authors. First, they needed to be involved in library and information science (LIS) work or study, or have previously been so. Second, all authors needed to be trans and/or gender diverse.

This seems like a good place to discuss our word choice, and whom it covers. "Cisgender" means a person whose gender matches the one legally assigned to them at birth; "trans" is often used as an umbrella term for everyone else. However, these definitions create a flawed binary, just as "male" and "female" do. Gender is far too complex and fluid for such concrete lines to accurately cover everyone's experience of it. There are many genders and individuals all over the world who do not fall under any of these binaries—male or female, trans or cis. We use "trans and gender diverse" in an attempt to cover the glorious range of gender diversity that exists without squashing anyone under terms that do not fit them. These few sentences are, of course, a vast oversimplification of an enormously complex and fascinating topic, and we encourage you to learn more about gender diversity on your own. But this is a book introduction, not a gender education workshop, and we must move on.

So in practice, all of the authors in this volume are people who self-identify as trans and/or gender diverse people in library work or LIS education. Beyond that, we had no set requirements. The purpose of this book is to be a space for sharing whatever the authors wanted to share about gender identity in this field of work. The book is not a scholarly collection, though some of the chapters lean in that direction; it includes personal reflections, anecdotes, and even some poetry. The authors are LIS students, library workers of all types, and a couple of

people who have left the profession entirely. The variety of perspectives and contents is not a mistake; it is the point.

Having briefly covered *what* the book is, we will now spend a little time on *why* the book is. One pragmatic answer is that as part of his 2019 book *Supporting Trans People in Libraries*, Stephen collected a few short pieces of writing from trans and gender diverse library workers, which he thought ended up being the most interesting element; this book is that concept expanded and given the attention it deserves. (An earlier book in the Series on Gender and Sexuality in Information Studies, *Out Behind the Desk: Workplace Issues for LGBTQ+ Librarians*, deserves credit for demonstrating the viability of this type of volume and serving as an inspiration for our own, gender-specific version.) A broader answer is that the book's intention is to begin to fill an enormous gap in the literature and, perhaps more importantly, in the awareness and understanding in the library field as a whole.

We do not know how many trans and gender diverse people are part of the library profession. The 2017 ALA Demographic Study includes only male and female in its gender options, which leaves out any number of people and gives no information at all on how many of the respondents are trans or gender diverse.¹ This book cannot begin to answer that question, and it does not try to. The point is that trans and gender diverse people exist, and we are not counted. But we are here. This book has fifty-three chapters and fifty-seven authors (plus three editors), and we are only a small representation of the uncounted numbers of us throughout the profession.

First and foremost, this book is for us: for all the trans and gender diverse library workers who are the only one they know of in a department, or a whole institution; for the LIS students who do not know if there is anyone like them in the profession they hope to join; for those who have been lucky enough to be welcomed, those who are surviving as best they can, and those who have been forced out of a field that

1. Kathy Rosa and Kelsey Henke, "2017 ALA Demographic Study" (Chicago, IL: ALA Office of Research and Statistics, 2017), <https://www.ala.org/tools/research/initiatives/membershipsurveys>, 1.

they loved (or at least that they were led to believe had a place for them). We aren't only invisible in the data—in a world and a profession that assumes that we don't exist and often punishes us for doing so, we are invisible to each other.

Secondarily, this book is for the rest of you. Perhaps you consider yourself an ally (which does not mean that the people you want to support feel the same); perhaps it has never occurred to you that trans and gender diverse people are your colleagues, your classmates, your employees, your supervisors, your students, your teachers. Perhaps you think that the profession is already as welcoming and supportive as it needs to be (it is not). This book is to show you a small part of the reality. You cannot read these chapters and claim that Safe Zone stickers and “libraries are for everyone” signs have done the job. You cannot assume that everything is fine in your workplace because nobody has spoken out. You can no longer pretend that we don't exist.

About the Editing Process

As editors, we centered values of inclusion and anti-oppression. We wanted to provide authors with space to express themselves, even—or especially—when the experiences and opinions did not reflect our own, with the exception of content that perpetuated the oppression of others.

We approached editing this book with a desire to include as many trans and gender diverse voices as possible. We wanted to break down some of the barriers that exist in publishing and offer space for people to speak their truths, and we wanted to demonstrate the extensive variety of experiences that trans and gender diverse people have in library work and LIS education.

Now that we've covered *what* this book is and *why* this book is, let's discuss what this book isn't. This book isn't peer reviewed. This was an intentional choice. We didn't want someone judging the experiences of trans and gender diverse people against an arbitrary academic standard. Likewise, we didn't want authors to feel as though they needed to justify their lived experiences by citing scholarly sources (especially when

academic materials that accurately reflect these lives do not, for the most part, actually exist). The experiences, feelings, and thoughts included in this book are hugely varied in form and content and represent individual lived realities. These realities are valid without peer review.

This is a book grounded in sharing personal experiences, in all of their messiness and glory. We didn't edit out personal feelings or personal anecdotes as they relate to trans and gender diverse identities and libraries. We also didn't edit the tone of the chapters. We let people say "fuck." Many of the chapters express anger and push back against the professional norm (and myth) of neutrality. We did ask authors to edit out identifiable references to people other than themselves: names of bystanders, coworkers, and others have been changed. Some authors also chose to anonymize themselves and their workplaces or schools to keep themselves safe.

As editors we worked to support authors through an editing process that included a lot of opportunities for engagement. Throughout this process, we held a number of information sessions with the authors, which led to the creation of a Discord group for those who were interested in sharing community and communication with one another. One of the best parts of editing this book was engaging with the authors and creating space for trans and gender diverse people in libraries to connect with each other. We hope that these types of connections can continue and grow following the book's publication.

Author Safety

One of the main concerns throughout this process, both of the editors and the individual authors of this volume, has been personal and professional safety. As you'll discover while reading this book, some of our authors are out at work and in their personal lives, while others are selectively out in specific contexts. While many authors in this volume have published under their names, others have published anonymously or under pseudonyms. We gave each author the choice of whether to include a bio statement with their chapter—some did and some did not,

and some of the former opted not to include identifiable information in their bios. The decision to publish under one's own name in a project such as this can be quite complex. On the one hand, it could be beneficial professionally to include authorship for a chapter in a book published by Library Juice Press on your curriculum vitae. On the other hand, authoring a chapter under your own name for a volume called *Trans and Gender Diverse Voices in Libraries* may make it difficult to go stealth in the field, or to pick and choose the contexts in which you're out (since simply being named as part of this volume publicly outs one as being trans or gender diverse). Even without naming names or workplaces, there are some experiences that cannot be fully anonymized if described accurately. Because of this reality, several prospective authors withdrew during the editing process. Some of them referenced concerns about professionally outing themselves while they are pre-tenure, or about how contributing to this volume may limit future career opportunities.

These concerns are not unfounded. According to a 2015 report from the National Center for Transgender Equality, 77% of trans or gender diverse survey respondents reported that, in the past year, they had to hide or delay their transition or quit their job in order to avoid workplace mistreatment. Nearly one quarter (23%) of survey respondents reported workplace mistreatment, such as being told they needed to present as the wrong gender in order to keep their job, or being outed at work. Overall, 67% of survey respondents reported that, in the past year, they were fired, denied a promotion, forced to resign, or not hired for a job they applied for due to their being trans or gender diverse. These statistics are higher for trans and gender diverse people who experience transmisogyny, and for people who are multiply marginalized along the lines of race and disability.² This book includes accounts of people who have been harassed and even forced out of the library profession after coming out at work. Concerns around safety not only limit who is able to contribute to this type of book, anonymously or otherwise, but also

2. Sandy E. James, et al., "The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey" (Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality, 2016), 148-150, <https://www.ustranssurvey.org/reports>.

how transparent someone can be about their experiences and the types of content they might include in their chapter.

Many chapters in this volume express frustration, burnout, despair, and anger. The possible consequences for contributing to this volume, and being honest about one's negative experiences in the field, are greater for trans and gender diverse authors who are marginalized in multiple ways. In a white supremacist culture, anger from BIPOC (especially Black people) is perceived as an overreaction or as a threat. In addition, the skewed racial demographics of library workers (according to the 2017 ALA Demographic Survey, 86.7% of respondents were white) mean that it is far more difficult for BIPOC authors to be anonymous, whether they publish under their own names or not.³

Prioritizing author safety means that this book is by nature incomplete. The fact that these safety considerations were necessary shows just how far the library profession has to go.

Patterns and Themes

One goal of this book is to show a wide variety of experiences and perspectives, and demonstrate that trans and gender diverse people can and do have lives as varied as anyone else's. That said, we observed a number of patterns as we read through the chapters—not necessarily universal, but recurring elements that we wanted to draw attention to. This section is not intended to claim that all trans and gender diverse people share these experiences or feelings; even within the book, this is demonstrably untrue, and perpetuating the myth of a monolithic trans and gender diverse community or universal trans or gender diverse experience is exactly what we want to avoid. Instead, consider the themes below as patterns that seem to be part of the library profession—ones that point to where the work of dismantling the oppression of trans and gender diverse people could start.

3. Rosa and Henke, "2017 ALA Demographic Study," 2.

The first of the recurring themes is anger. This is, in large part, not a happy book. It is full of rage, isolation, pain, frustration, fear, and exhaustion. Every one of these feelings is justified, and it is entirely appropriate to express them. These feelings are not inherently part of being a trans or gender diverse person, however; that is not the lesson. Often, these feelings come from being oppressed or helpless in a situation—whether in a classroom, conversation, workplace, meeting, or institution—where one’s identity is ignored or disrespected, or where there is active harm because of bigotry or ignorance around that identity. More accurately, the theme is the frequency with which these situations occur in the library field; the anger and pain and fear are one result. It is not our responsibility to hide those feelings; it is the responsibility of those with the power to eliminate the oppression, discrimination, and harassment that causes the feelings to do that work.

Another common theme is the ways in which library and LIS program diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives often focus on the appearance of inclusion, without making any lasting structural or systemic changes. This can be observed in the ways that, while pronouns in email signatures or on name tags have become more normalized, actually using trans and gender diverse people’s names and pronouns remains an issue. This book is full of stories about library administrators, LIS faculty, and others treating the oppression of trans and gender diverse library workers and LIS students as a patron-only issue or something for HR to deal with. Meanwhile, there are corresponding accounts of trans and gender diverse people being forced to defend their restroom use, fighting to be called by their name and pronouns, and ultimately leaving workplaces or the entire profession. It is clear that our profession needs to take gender diverse oppression and exclusion more seriously. It needs to invest in structural changes which acknowledge that trans and gender diverse people aren’t just our patrons; they’re also our employees, coworkers, students, teachers, and volunteers.

There are plenty of other themes we could discuss, but we’ll conclude with this one: regarding how trans and gender diverse people are treated in many workplaces and classrooms, the bar is appallingly low.

Many authors were relieved when they found a place where they could be out without fearing for their job; many others do not have even that. A classroom in which the professor respects students' names and pronouns is notable because of all the ones where this does not happen. Often, the hope is not for acceptance and true support but for survival. These expectations are not out of line with how library work and LIS education operates; on the contrary, this book demonstrates that for many people, this is the reality. From physical spaces to policies to interpersonal ignorance and bigotry, the experiences recounted in this book demonstrate that the library profession continues to fail its trans and gender diverse members over and over again.

What's Missing?

Despite the broad nature of our call for proposals, there are many voices and perspectives that are missing from this book. As noted above, there are issues around safety and the difficulty (perhaps the inability) to be truly anonymous and transparent about our experiences as trans and gender diverse people in libraries.

Some of the perspectives that are missing are related to the demographics of the field such as race, gender, and disability. While the profession does track the racial demographics of library workers, there is less detailed data around disability and none at all about transgender and gender diverse library workers. The racial demographics of our authors reflect the demographics of our field, with far more contributions from white trans and gender diverse people than from BIPOC. The experiences represented in this book are also all from majority white, English-speaking, settler-colonial countries, predominantly from the United States and Canada, with one author from Australia. It is difficult to say whether the gender demographics of the contributing authors of this book are representative of the field, given the lack of data available for us to compare. The majority of our authors are non-binary, trans masc, and trans men, with fewer contributions from trans women, trans femmes, and Two-Spirit people (we have no contributions

from authors who, in their chapters, explicitly self-identify outside of the colonial gender system beyond this).

Other gaps relate to who has the capacity to publish; plenty of potential authors with valuable experiences to share do not have time for such a project (the large number of chapters from academic librarians may be related to this, as such positions more often provide support for professional writing than non-librarian roles or other types of library work), and others may not have seen the call for proposals at all. We have a few chapters from people who have left the profession, but we assume there are many more such people whose voices are missing from this volume. The majority of our contributing authors are academic or public library workers or are LIS students. This book lacks the experiences of LIS faculty, library volunteers, and retired library workers, as well as employees from school libraries and many types of special libraries.

This book is not intended to be the definitive guide to trans and gender diverse experiences in libraries, but instead to start the conversation. It is our hope that this book will help trans and gender diverse people in libraries realize that they are not alone, and that their experiences are worth sharing.

How to Read This Book

We are delighted that this book has so many chapters and authors, and thus so many different perspectives on what it is to be trans or gender diverse in library work and education. The number of chapters may, however, make it tricky to navigate for readers. With that in mind, we have a few suggestions for how to approach this book.

1. **Everything.** Read it all, cover to cover. If you have time, or can make the time, please do this. Each chapter is important. Each one covers something different from the others. Do this especially if you are new to the idea that trans and gender diverse people are members of the library profession, since it will begin to demonstrate the range of identities, roles, and experiences. Reading each chapter will help break the

assumption that all trans and gender diverse people have similar backgrounds and opinions.

2. **Sections.** Read the section(s) most relevant to you. We have organized the chapters broadly by topic. That said, there is a great deal of overlap; the chapters all include personal experiences to some degree, and many touch on LIS education as well as professional work. The Personal Experiences section includes chapters in which the authors center their own thoughts and backgrounds rather than a specific type of library work or education. Professional Reflections contains chapters with a focus on theory or discussion of topics that are not limited to a particular aspect of the field.

3. **Index or keywords.** This book has an index, which can be used to identify particular chapters of interest. In addition, we asked each author to choose up to five keywords for their chapter. These are not standardized terms; they reflect what each person wanted to highlight for readers, as one goal of this book is to create space for authors to express themselves in their own words. Some authors used the keywords for identity terms (e.g., *BIPOC* or *trans woman*); others used them for work type or broad concepts. Skim the table of contents to identify the chapters you find most interesting.

Note: It is important to note that keywords are meant to describe chapter content, rather than the authors themselves. Keywords for identity terms around race, disability, gender, etc. have been used when these identities are a major theme of the chapter. This is one reason why there are more keywords for marginalized identities than privileged ones, because these chapters include content around being multiply marginalized. Authors should not be assumed to be white, neurotypical, or able-bodied because there is not a keyword indicating otherwise. That being said, we do encourage readers to reflect on what it means that some identities are normalized through not naming them explicitly.

After all, chapters may not be explicitly about privileged identities, but privilege impacts the kinds of experiences we do or do not have, in and outside of libraries.

What to Do Next

This book is not intended to be read and then forgotten. Our hope is that many readers will take what they learn and incorporate gender inclusion practices into their work in libraries and LIS programs moving forward. As stated previously, we also hope that this book can help foster community amongst trans and gender diverse people in LIS. With all that in mind, here are some tools to help begin or continue that work.

- **Trans Inclusion for Libraries** (www.zotero.org/groups/2412905/trans_inclusion_for_libraries/): An ever-growing list of resources on all aspects of the topic. It is an open Zotero group that anyone can access and add items to. Unlike this book, most of the resources in the collection are centered on research and recommended practices, so it's a good place to start learning more.
- **Trans Inclusion in LIS Presenter List** (bit.ly/trans-lis-presenters): A list of people who offer presentations, workshops, and consultations on gender inclusion in LIS. Different people offer different areas of expertise. Hire them for workplace trainings or class sessions.
- **The Trans and Gender Diverse LIS Network** (<https://www.stephengkrueger.com/trans-lis-network>): A closed support group for trans and gender diverse library workers and students. We appreciate the allyship of cis folks, but this one is not for you. Do tell your trans and gender diverse coworkers and students about it, though.

So read, and reflect, and then go forth and do the work. It is not optional.

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