

“We Bring Change to the People” or Not: Understanding Librarians’ Views on Reference and Information Service as Social Justice Work

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative secondary analysis reanalyzes data from a Q methodology study with 66 participants from a variety of library types in Slovenia, South Africa, and the United States. In the original Q methodology study, many participants ranked the statement “librarian as agent of change” as an important conceptualization of reference and information service (RIS). To elucidate and expand this finding, the qualitative data surrounding “librarian as agent of change” were analyzed thematically to understand how participants viewed, or did not view, RIS as making change. Results show that for librarians who perceive themselves as agents of change, making change is an obligation that librarians are particularly suited to do. In addition, change can be viewed on different levels—individual, organizational, and societal. Results show that the pervasiveness of neutrality in RIS prevents some librarians from taking on a role supporting social change and advocacy.

Information professionals are increasingly positioning themselves as advocates for social justice (e.g., Mathuews 2016; Garnar 2019). *Social justice*, a frequently used but rarely explained term, refers to a society that is fair and equitable. When used in reference to library and information science (LIS), there tends to be a nuance of progressive social change. Bharat Mehra, Kevin S. Rioux, and Kendra S. Albright (2018), who have written extensively on social justice in LIS, state that “social justice initiatives have recently emphasized progressive actions to bring positive changes in society that implement the abstract elements of justice” (4219).

Historically, librarians have demonstrated social justice values by supporting freedom of access to information and by serving diverse users. Conversely, librarians—working in institutions of power—have supported the status quo by selecting the “right” materials and determining who should be served and how (Mehra et al. 2018; Mehra and Gray 2020). For the past several years, there have been calls for librarians to take more action. Mehra (2021) even recommends

that librarians reclaim the maligned term “social justice warriors” to describe and further their activist work. But in the everyday work of reference and information service (RIS), how fundamental is the role of “warriors” for social justice?

In a previous study examining librarians’ conceptualizations of RIS (VanScoy 2021), the conceptualization of “librarian as agent of change” was highly ranked. Other highly ranked conceptualizations, such as “information provision” or “instruction,” are common in the literature or RIS work, but “agent of change” is not. This study used qualitative secondary analysis to delve deeper into the findings of the previous study, responding to the following questions: How do librarians interpret the statement “librarian as agent of change” in the context of their RIS work? How do these interpretations of RIS contribute to the positioning of librarians as advocates for social change? This in-depth analysis of what librarians mean when they say that in practicing RIS, librarians are agents of change—and of those who do not agree with this concept—provides the profession with a better understanding of how RIS relates to making change and, more specifically, if and how RIS can be conceptualized as social justice work.

Literature Review

As previously mentioned, social justice in LIS involves “progressive actions” and “changes in society” (Mehra et al. 2018). Concerning RIS, specifically, the small body of literature related to these concepts includes studies of librarians as “change agents” and some recent conceptual and practical work surrounding social justice in RIS.

Change Agents in RIS Work

When change is discussed in the context of RIS, the focus is generally on how the role of librarians has changed (e.g., Bandyopadhyay and Boyd-Byrnes 2016; Johnson 2018). Less attention is given to how librarians themselves can make change. Many articles have advocated for librarians positioning themselves as change agents (e.g., Harada and Hughes-Hassell 2007; Detmering and Payette 2021). Of the rigorous studies that explore the issue of librarians making change, some relate specifically to RIS work in some way. Tiffini A. Travis (2008) discussed change agency theory as a framework for promoting integration of information literacy into the university curriculum. Daniel G. Dorner and James Revell (2012) use E. M. Rogers’s diffusion of innovation theory to study how librarians are promoting institutional repositories to their clients. Similarly, Alesha Baker, Kelli Carney, and Cates Schwark (2019) used diffusion of innovation theory to understand the role of the school librarian in the adoption of open educational resources. Meredith G. Farkas and Lisa J. Hinchliffe (2013) discussed John Kotter’s eight-step model for change leadership as a model for development of a culture of assessment. Although these studies demonstrate the potential for reference librarians to enact change, they do not specifically address how RIS work itself can be a vehicle for enacting change. More important, the change described in these studies is not social change but rather the adoption of useful resources and services.

Social Justice in RIS Work

The recent text *Reference Librarianship and Justice* (Adler, Beilin, and Tewell 2018) provides much needed discussion on conceptual approaches to social justice in RIS, as well as examples of the application of such approaches to practice. In her forward to that book, Maria T. Accardi (2018) states, “I think we can see the work of advancing social justice through reference as a way of correcting and overwriting negative, demeaning, and dehumanizing experiences faced by our patrons with more positive, humanizing, and affirming ones” (7).

Before Adler and colleagues’ (2018) publication, a few key papers surfaced the need for reference practices to be examined through a social justice lens. John J. Doherty (2006) argued that there is a power imbalance in the traditional reference interview and called for reframing it as a “reference dialogue.” Prina Shachaf and others (Shachaf and Horowitz 2006; Shachaf, Oltmann, and Horowitz 2008) demonstrated that racial bias is pervasive in reference service and highlighted the need for RIS providers to examine their implicit biases. Some studies have also highlighted issues in RIS with language or cultural barriers involving international students (e.g., Curry and Copeman 2005). Viewing RIS work through the lenses of critical race theory and White institutional presence, Freeda Brook, Dave Ellenwood, and Althea Eannace Lazzaro (2015) challenged the traditional concepts of approachability, responsiveness, and objectivity. They explain how the practice of these concepts in RIS reflects White culture and ignores the oppression and racism experienced by those whom librarians aim to serve. They advocate for “a fundamental shift toward an antiracist reference services approach that reframes reference as a collective process of inquiry for social justice action to redress racist oppression” (276). The current spotlight on racial bias and a culture of whiteness in librarianship make it even more important to pay attention to calls to interpret RIS as a vehicle for social justice and advocacy.

Two frameworks have been proposed for reconceiving RIS as social justice work. Kate Adler (2018) advocates for “critical reference librarianship,” which she describes as “affective care work” (104) that focuses on recognizing the humanity of the user and respect for the user’s ideas. Adler summarizes her vision for this approach in this way: “In our tiny, local corners, a Critical Reference Librarianship can seek authentic modes of connection and dialogue and strive for social, emotional, and intellectual justice” (111). Veronica Arrellano-Douglas (2018) proposes “intersubjective mutuality,” a perspective from social work, which focuses on empathy and on building an authentic relationship with users. She stresses the importance of engaging with users rather than simply performing reference. Practicing RIS with intersubjective mutuality makes the librarian and the user “more open to sharing, listening, and learning from one another” (237). Adler’s critical reference librarianship and Arrellano-Douglas’s intersubjective mutuality could provide much needed theoretical and conceptual framing to RIS in addition to improving its equity and inclusion. Although both approaches have been mentioned in a chapter about supporting college students’ mental health during reference practice (Beuoy 2020), neither approach has been developed further by RIS scholars.

Among authors who have called for reexamining the LIS curriculum through a social justice lens (e.g., Gibson, Hughes-Hassell, and Threats 2018; Jones 2020), only Lorie Roy and Elisabeth Long (2019) have specifically addressed RIS. With the attitude that “reference instruction courses are rich sites for the development of social justice consciousness” (227), Roy and Long provide concrete examples for incorporating social justice into professional education for RIS, such as reflecting on one’s positionality and how it affects the reference interview and discussing bias in search engines.

This small body of literature calls for librarians to consider social justice issues in their reference practice and in reference professional education. In addition, an argument is made that RIS can be conceptualized as social justice work. The current study builds on this literature by examining existing data for evidence of whether or not librarians perceive their RIS practice as social justice work.

Methodology

This study used qualitative secondary analysis to better understand unexpected results from a previous study (VanScoy 2021). *Qualitative secondary analysis* is a broad umbrella term for a variety of approaches to reanalyzing existing data (e.g., Thorne 1998; Heaton 2004; Corti and Thompson 2007). Suggested by Melissa P. Johnston (2014) as a useful methodological tool for LIS, it has been used to study RIS (Bossaller, Burns, and VanScoy 2017) and youth information behavior (Bowler, Julien, and Haddon 2018). It ranks low on lists of frequently used methods in the field (e.g., Hider and Pimm 2008), but this may be due to the fact that researchers do not always explicitly use the term, emphasizing the method used in the secondary analysis without mentioning the data reuse (Heaton 2004).

Qualitative secondary analysis can differ by the purpose of the secondary analysis and by the source of the data. In this study, the purpose of the reanalysis was to ask deeper questions of data collected by the original researcher. Typical challenges of qualitative secondary analysis—problems of “data fit” (Heaton 2004; Thorne 2013), lack of “proximate knowledge” (Coltart, Henwood, and Shirani 2013), and violation of participant trust (Thorne 2013)—did not interfere with this study, as the new research questions were a narrower subset of the original ones and the same researcher conducted the secondary analysis. This study reflects a common benefit of qualitative secondary analysis: reuse of existing data provides greater insights from existing data, increasing the value of the contributions made by participants (e.g., Corti and Thompson 2007; Irwin and Winterton 2011; Thorne 2013).

The Original Data

The Q methodology study from which the data for this current study are drawn (VanScoy 2021) was conducted to make sense of the variety of conflicting conceptualizations of RIS in the literature, such as information provision, instruction, and “relationship building.” In this research, RIS

was defined as “interaction between librarians and users/clients/patrons in an information context”—thus, including in-person or online interaction at a reference desk or other location but not including other facets of a reference librarian’s job, such as classroom instruction or collection development. In other words, among many ways to think of RIS work (e.g., a one-on-one instructional opportunity or information provision), some librarians see it as an opportunity to make change. Participants sorted cards containing statements about the meaning and importance of RIS. They sorted the cards according to which statements most and least reflected how they think. They were then asked to elaborate on why they placed cards in these positions. These elaborations are the data reanalyzed for this study.

The 66 participants in the original study were from Slovenia, South Africa, and the United States and represented different institutional contexts, including academic, public, school, and special libraries. The card sort involved 35 cards, each with statements about RIS that provided slightly different ways to view it. One of the statements, “librarian as agent of change,” was highly rated by 20 of the 66 participants but rated low by 6 of them. These extreme reactions to this statement, along with the ambiguous nature of the statement itself, indicated that the meaning of this statement merited further study.

The Secondary Analysis

The qualitative interview data collected about this statement were used for this current study. The study focuses on the 20 participants who placed the statement “librarian as agent of change” in the three columns that represented concepts that were most like how they think and the 6 who placed it in the columns that are least like how they think. Focusing on the three highest and lowest ranked statements is methodologically sound. Q methodology focuses on extremes of opinion, usually defined as statements ranked in the three highest or three lowest positions on a quasinormal distribution. Following the sorting of the statements, participants were interviewed briefly and asked to elaborate on the rationale behind their sorting. The postsorting interviews ranged from 10 to 30 minutes.

The interview data were analyzed thematically, aiming for Lydia DeSantis and Doris Noel Ugarriza’s (2000) comprehensive definition of a *theme*: “A theme is an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole” (362). This definition, created from an extensive review of qualitative research in nursing, suggests that a theme should create meaning based on experience and include attention to convergence and divergence and to patterns. To attend to this definition, the data surrounding the statement “librarian as agent of change” for the 20 participants who ranked it highly were excerpted from the interviews and printed to allow for physical manipulation. The excerpts were read and re-read, and then grouped according to similarities or differences. As patterns became apparent, they were noted. Then the excerpts were grouped again and regrouped to identify different

patterns. When no new patterns emerged, the process was repeated with the data from the six participants who ranked the statement very low.

Results

Twenty participants ranked “librarian as agent of change” as one of their most highly ranked statements. One of the participants, a South African academic librarian, said, “We bring change to the people.” An American school librarian explained, “I think it’s kind of the foundation of my practice. . . . It’s a statement of how I approach my practice and every day of what I’m doing.” Participants who ranked “librarian as agent of change” as most like how they think described RIS as a way to make change but, more important, as a role for which librarians had a responsibility and were uniquely positioned to make change. They differed, however, on the context or scale of the change. Some participants viewed RIS as changing how individual users think or making their lives better. Others saw it this change occurring on a larger scale through change in their organization. Still others saw RIS as contributing to social change, equity, and social justice. In contrast, six participants ranked this statement among their lowest ranking statements. Some simply did not see themselves this way, and others insisted that librarians should be neutral and objective rather than trying to change how people think.

Responsibility and Unique Positioning

Some participants asserted that librarians have a responsibility or an obligation to implement change through RIS. A Slovenian special librarian said that some librarians talk about RIS as merely service, but she disagreed with that approach. She felt that librarians needed to take a proactive role in creating change: “We have to see ourselves as somebody who is walking in front of the people as a leader, not as the follower.” She added, “It’s very important to be where things change when there are new things.” A Slovenian public librarian had a similar reaction to the concept, stating that “the most important thing . . . as librarians, we also have to create the change in the community. We have to be creators of change. So, we cannot be afraid of changes in the community . . . how to predict the future is to create it.”

A few participants positioned librarians as uniquely situated to help with change. One American school librarian said, “I feel like I’m always like, ‘Try this! Try that!’ Like I’m handing out candy. ‘Hey, have you ever heard of this? Let’s do this because I want it to be fun and exciting and new learning!’” Several talked about the knowledge and skills that librarians possess, as in this example from a Slovenian school librarian: “Librarians, we have a lot of tools through which we get information, and we share this information. . . . If you have the information, if you have knowledge, what to do with this information? I think you have the strength to make some changes. We librarians, we’re special sort of people.”

Some participants were impassioned by the idea of creating change in the community. They saw it as a calling or a mission. They sometimes talked about the agent of change statement along

with other statements that they saw as related—statements that included the phrases “passion for the library,” “empower them,” and “meaningful work,” as in the example, “We don’t want just to serve them. . . . We empower them. And in that meaning, you can influence them maybe just for a short time, but maybe you can change some thoughts.” A Slovenian public librarian said, “This is what I’m passionate about. This is the most important thing, and I’m trying to give all of me to be a librarian.”

A Slovenian academic librarian saw being an agent of change as an aspirational goal. He acknowledged that it was not always easy and required going above and beyond: “The agent of change, it’s like the star at the end of the rainbow or something. It’s very hard to get there and it’s far, far away.”

Change at the Individual Level

The 20 participants who indicated that “librarian as agent of change” was most like how they think differed in their interpretation of the context or scale of change. For some participants, the change occurred on the individual level, in the mind of the user. An American public librarian clearly expressed this thought: “I feel like we can really make impacts on how people can live their life and, you know, how they think about things.” Similarly, an American public librarian said, “You’re giving them the power to change their—not thoughts, but the way they interact with the world.” A Slovenian public librarian, who saw this change in the mind of the user, said, “You can influence them maybe just for a short time. You can change some thoughts.”

The change inspired by the librarian might be personal, such as contributing to self-development, or academic, such as contributing to the user thinking differently about their research. A South African academic librarian felt that she did both. “We’re different things to different people when they come to us,” she explained. Sometimes students “just want to chat . . . they just want someone to listen,” and other times she helps them “move to the next level” with their research work. An American school librarian said that “libraries are places of self-exploration, and so, because of that, people change who they are. . . . Kids gain such a sense of themselves, they learn so much about themselves. Libraries . . . help facilitate that. They create a space where that can happen.”

Especially among school librarians, these participants saw RIS as a means to change student thinking, to broaden their horizons, and to expose them to new perspectives. A Slovenian school librarian felt that school librarians are in an ideal position to see the big picture of the curriculum. She said that “you can show them links between different subjects” but also links between concepts learned in different grade levels. A South African school librarian expressed concern about the narrow lives that her students lead. She felt passionate about “exposing children to the breadth of what is there” and inspiring them to see different perspectives and to question things. One American school librarian described students as extrinsically motivated by grades, and his goal was to “shift” their thinking “toward a more . . . intrinsically motivated orientation

toward learning." Another school librarian, from Slovenia, described the library as an informal learning space, in comparison to classrooms, and thus a space where change can occur, saying, "The climate is important." Several participants explained that users need someone to expose them to things they would not know existed in the library. A South African academic librarian mentioned that it is up to her to expose students to the variety of materials in her academic library collection, including magazines, newspapers, and even self-help books.

Change at the Organizational Level

Another context in which participants talked about making change was the level of the broader organization in which they worked. A South African school librarian described the changes in culture that she made when she arrived at her school. She changed the physical environment of the library so that students found it more welcoming and wanted to spend time there. She also changed the nature of the relationship between teachers and librarians by fostering collaboration and making herself a valued member of the school community. A Slovenian school librarian talked about her role in helping students and teachers as an agent of change. A Slovenian academic librarian felt that it was her mission to bring change to the institution: "It's very important to be in the wind of change . . . because they're [her faculty and administrative colleagues] not going to do it."

A Slovenian special librarian talked about making change, mostly technological change, in her organization. She and her fellow librarians had broad information skills and information technology skills that were respected by colleagues outside the library, so they were often consulted on changes to nonlibrary information systems. This participant noted that librarians do not often see themselves this way: "When we talk among ourselves, I think that, in most cases, we think we just serve the users. We provide them with the things they need and so on. But you have to think ahead from what you already learned about the whole process, the people, the setting where you work, and you have to proactively see things and provide them."

Change at the Social Level

Some participants interpreted change as applying to the context of society as a whole. Some claimed that librarians have the power to create social and economic change. A Slovenian academic librarian said, "I believe librarians are some kind of trans[ition]—in between the society as a whole, the way it develops—becoming more human, become more prosperous, taking care for democracy and the important values, making people think." A Slovenian public librarian felt that librarians could help ease the changes happening in society: "The world is changing. . . . I think [librarians] need to help teachers, students to go through these changes with books or with other sources." An American school librarian stated that "as someone in a position of privilege with an education, from the background that I have, that is my job, to be someone who lifts other people up and effectuates positive progress in our society." He continued to explain that

this change can come by giving people information literacy skills or by “creating a safe harbor for people in the community.” An American public librarian talked about the librarian’s role as a representative of civic institutions: “In public libraries, especially in lower economic areas or not in areas of opportunity . . . to them, you’re a public official and you’re listening to them. And sometimes there aren’t answers for what they’re looking for, or maybe they’re not asking the right questions, and what they need is someone to be engaging with them.”

Least Like How They Think

Six of the 66 participants indicated that “librarian as agent of change” was one of the statements that was least like how they think. This group of participants is small, but it is important to examine their perspectives. Some of these participants simply did not see themselves as agents of change. A South African academic librarian said that she cannot be considered an agent of change because she sees such a small group of users overall. An American special librarian had a negative reaction to the phrase, saying that she was “‘over’ the idea of change agents.”

Another theme in the data from participants who did not see themselves as agents of change was that the concept is antithetical to RIS. An American public librarian said that librarians are information providers, not agents of change. An American school librarian interpreted the statement with political or social overtones and felt strongly that this was not a role she should take: “I’m to help with the information need. I’m not to change the way people think. . . . I guess I read that almost, as like political, like I’m supposed to be making my library make people think a certain way.” She acknowledged that her own biases are apparent in her collection development work: “There’s always a certain element of you that’s reflected in there.” But overall, she feels that librarians should strive to be neutral and objective, concluding, “I think information should just be information, and then people do with it what they will.”

Discussion

The findings contribute to the small body of research on social justice in RIS by revealing librarians’ interpretations of how they make change or not through RIS work. The findings show that for some participants, being an agent of change is so important that they see RIS as a “calling.” This perspective has been criticized by Fobazi Ettarh (2018) as a symptom of “vocational awe.” Ettarh argues that discussing librarianship with “sacred language” leads to assumptions of its inherent good, to disinclination to examine it with a critical eye, and to a culture of unhealthy self-sacrifice. Some participants used dramatic language in trying to convey their values, such as, “There’s almost a fight going on. A kind of fight for the soul of—our patrons’ quote-unquote ‘soul,’ like, their well-being.” However, these librarians followed up their dramatic claims with concrete, realistic examples. It seemed that their words were intended metaphorically and that they put their own efforts into perspective. However, Ettarh’s (2018) criticism that vocational

awe can sustain inequities in the profession and be detrimental to workers when unquestioned is cautionary. Librarians can at once be inspired by the view that RIS work can be a powerful force for social justice and, at the same time, engage in critical practice.

The findings show that the context of change for RIS is not limited to one ideal context. Those who feel strongly about their social justice role may aim to change society or their organization; others may focus more narrowly on making change one user at a time. Librarians are likely to be motivated toward different goals. With a variety of perspectives, all may be able to find an aspect of change to embrace. Conversely, in light of the necessity of social justice reforms in society and in librarianship itself, one may question whether contributing to change in an individual or organization is enough. Are each of these contexts, or levels of change, of equal importance? Recent literature calls for reexamining LIS practice and professional education, charging librarians with a responsibility to challenge their traditional thinking and practice and to challenge the values and practices of society at large. Mehra (2021) calls for librarians to “mobilize to make a difference in our external communities” (388) and for “explicitly owning . . . social justice activism and confrontations of political agencies in positions of power” (389). Mehra’s vision is not satisfied by the level of change espoused by some librarians in this study. However, librarians who focus on change at the individual level may see empowering their users to make their own change as a social justice action. These librarians may perceive themselves as “agents of empowerment” as opposed to agents of change. Further discussion is needed about social justice goals for the profession and the responsibilities of individual librarians for achieving them.

In contrast to participants who saw themselves as agents of change, some participants firmly did not. One reason that some participants did not see themselves as agents of change was their value of neutrality and objectivity in their work with users. This value has come under fire as, more accurately, a privileging of whiteness in RIS (e.g., Brook et al. 2015; Hathcock and Sendaula 2017). Reconciling traditional, fundamental professional values of RIS with awakening values of social justice and inclusion is no easy task and one that requires serious discussion. These findings might serve as a structure for debate on this topic, providing evidence for both sides of the argument. Understanding the perspective of others is an important first step in finding common ground and stimulating productive dialogue.

For participants who felt that making change was an important component of RIS, this change tended to be vague. A few participants used terms such as “democracy,” “values,” “lower economic areas,” and “positive progress,” but specific issues such as racial equity, poverty, or gender equity were not explicitly discussed. It is possible that the evidence did not appear in the data because the study was not designed to surface these values. A limitation of qualitative secondary analysis is that the data were originally collected with a different research question in mind. In addition, the amount of qualitative data collected for a Q methodology study is small. Had participants been asked to elaborate extensively on the statement “librarian as agent of

change,” it is possible that more specific information would have been gathered. In interpreting these results, it is also important to consider the context in which the data were collected. The interviews were conducted in 2019 and early 2020, before the highly publicized incidents of anti-Black racism and the Black Lives Matter movement of 2020. This period of heightened awareness and reckoning in the United States led many librarians to reflect on their practice and become more vocal about their condemnation of social inequity (e.g., Gibson et al. 2020; Wheeler and Huderson-Poydras 2020). Professionals in the United States may be increasingly comfortable with openly discussing issues such as anti-Black racism or White privilege. It is possible that if American librarians were interviewed today about how they make change through their RIS work, they might discuss specific issues related to social change. Further research is needed to explore this question—particularly more current research and research specifically designed to explore this question.

Some participants clearly felt that RIS work was a way to do social justice, echoing Accardi’s (2018) claim that RIS is “valid and important and a means of bringing about social justice” (7). However, over the past few decades, the profession has tended to devalue traditional RIS, for example, removing professional librarians from point-of-need services in favor of more efficient and entrepreneurial activities, such as consultations by appointment or embedding librarians in community groups or in online course management sites. Although efficiency is an admirable goal, the neoliberal discourse used to discuss RIS (Sharpe 2019) may be overshadowing other ways to frame the work. For librarians to achieve their social justice goals, the profession may need to accept a slower RIS with fewer measurable and short-term outcomes.

The qualitative secondary analysis method of this study is limited in its ability to examine the second research question, “How do these interpretations of RIS contribute to the positioning of librarians as advocates for social change?” In this case, the extreme rankings of the ambiguous statement “librarian as agent of change” raised questions that needed deeper inquiry. A study should be designed to look at these issues more closely, including the questions, “What inspires librarians to use RIS practice to make a difference in people’s lives?” and “Where is the fine line between passion for social good and vocational awe?”

What does education for librarianship do to prepare students for making change? Roy and Long (2019) recommended ways to incorporate social justice into the reference courses, but no studies have examined how much diversity, equity, and inclusion or social justice content is included in these courses. Professional education might be an ideal safe space for the discussion of how to be an agent of change without falling into the trap of the “White savior” mentality (Galvan 2015). More attention might be paid in professional education to preparing students with the skills and knowledge they need to enact social change. Beyond integration of diversity, equity, and inclusion issues in LIS courses, research methods courses should include techniques for participatory or action research—methods advocated by Mehra and Laverne Gray (2020)—and management courses should include discussion of change leadership.

Conclusion

The findings of this qualitative secondary analysis reveal that in practicing RIS, some librarians perceive themselves as contributing to change on a variety of levels, whereas others do not. This analysis also demonstrates that conceptualizations of RIS practice as neutral and objective still exist. Understanding how practitioners conceive of their work helps the profession to clearly see differences of opinion and understand conflict; however, it also sets a challenge for the profession and for professional educators to take a stand. Will the profession of librarianship continue to insist on neutrality and objectivity, which has lately been identified as furthering a culture of whiteness? Or will it move beyond feel-good conference themes and embrace its power to “bring change to the people”?

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