



THE CULTURE OF CARE IN LIBRARIANSHIP

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We would like to acknowledge that we live and work as uninvited settlers on the unceded territory of the Sylix Peoples.

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INTRODUCTION

Librarianship continues to be a highly feminized field where workers, especially marginalized folx, are often expected to provide an unhealthy and unsafe amount of emotional labour for their patrons and colleagues.

Extended emotional labour can lead to emotional exhaustion and burnout and is deeply connected to the vocational awe associated with librarianship and library work (Lowe & Reno, 2018; Ettarh, 2018).

LIBRARIES, EMPATHY, AND COVID-19

Despite these risks, the COVID-19 crisis highlights the importance of empathy, a kind of emotional labour, in building relationships with patrons and providing support that meets their needs (Bruce, 2020).

As we move our traditionally physical services to online, how can we extend empathy and consider the individual experiences of patrons' within the context of COVID-19?

OUR PATRONS

- Are they an essential worker or live with one?
- Are they taking care of or have a sick family member or friend that is immediately affected by COVID?
- Do they have children?
- Do they have access to reliable internet and technology?
- Is someone else in their household also working remotely?
- Have they lost their job or in a precarious position because of COVID-19?

The diverse platforms that we interact on (in person, blended, online etc.), especially in the context of COVID 19, informs, enables, and shifts how empathy is performed (Miller & Wallis, 2011).

Sharing “prevailing human occurrences,” such as the collective and shared experiences related to COVID-19, allows for a relational experience between us, our patrons, and our colleagues (Angell, 2011, p. 21).

CARE IS POLITICAL

How do we ensure that an ethic of care is not being used to enable and maintain systems that are inherently oppressive (McGregor, 2020)?

Care is enacted by individuals, not institutions (Clarke Gray, 2020). Care has been used to enact violence in the name of colonialism and white supremacy (McGregor, 2020).

Remembering that who is asked to provide that empathy and care, and who we extend empathy and care to, is inherently political (McGregor, 2020).

RESISTING BURNOUT

How can we extend empathy towards not only our patrons but also our colleagues and ourselves in ways that will resist burnout? (Tan, Muskat, & Johns, 2019; Badalamenti & Hardy, 2019; Zenasni, Boujut, Woerner, & Sultan, 2012)

Individualized attention where possible, and within reason, to both our colleagues and patrons

- Recognizing the contributions of yourself and others.
- Setting expectations within interactions.
- Leaving space to hear individual context

Setting boundaries in what we can and cannot provide within the context of our roles.

Self-reflection about individual emotions, frustrations, and perspectives that reflect and are parallel to that of our colleagues and patrons.

Removing ourselves from the narrative of vocational awe (Ettarh, 2018) and recognizing our own needs for boundaries is part of the empathy we can extend to ourselves (Angell, 2011).

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