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Claiming Our Place in the Center: Counterstories of Women of Color Open Educational Resources (OER) Librarians

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Description, Abstract, or Artist's Statement

Research has recognized the importance of libraries and librarians in supporting, managing, and sustaining open educational resources (OER) programs in postsecondary institutions. Open education initiatives generally align with social justice aspirations and should be open and inclusive to everyone. Yet, in practice, this has not always been the case. While librarians are considered critical partners in the leadership and management of OER programs and are often heralded as heroes and champions of these initiatives, research has failed to interrogate and discuss the experiences of Women of Color (WOC) doing OER work. In particular, the challenges and often invisible labor that librarians face, especially those who are historically marginalized.

Furthermore, although librarians have been at the forefront of OER initiatives on college campuses, there has been a glaring lack of representation and presence of WOC doing this work, even as the students served by OER librarians are growing ever more diverse. This study fills the gap in the literature using counter-storytelling as a methodological tool to center and highlight the lived experiences of WOC not just in OER work but as they navigate the marginalizing practices and unwelcoming spaces in academic libraries. Drawing on Critical Librarianship (CL) and Critical Race Feminism (CRF) as conceptual lenses, this study seeks to interrogate and understand the lived experiences of WOC in OER and collectively reimagine how the field can be transformed for the better. Findings from the study revealed that WOC experienced racial microaggressions in academic libraries. The lack of diversity in academic libraries made them feel lonely, isolated and tokenized. Their experiences with OER work uncovered the myriad ways they felt simultaneously valued and devalued. Role overload, role ambiguity, and lack of institutional support and infrastructure were challenges that impacted their capacity to perform the complex and complicated tasks of coordinating and managing OER programs. The stories WOC participants shared illuminated their unique contributions to the OER community. Foremost is their commitment to social justice, equity, and representation in the OER content that faculty creates. They also bring a critical perspective to OER work by interrogating how open education can be more inclusive, liberatory, democratic, and equitable for all.

Keywords

Open educational resources, OER, academic librarians, Women of Color, open education, academic librarianship, critical librarianship, critical race feminism

Disciplines

Educational Leadership | Higher Education and Teaching | Library and Information Science | Other Education

CLAIMING OUR PLACE IN THE CENTER: COUNTERSTORIES OF WOMEN OF COLOR OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES (OER) LIBRARIANS

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Regina Gong

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ABSTRACT

Research has recognized the importance of libraries and librarians in supporting, managing, and sustaining open educational resources (OER) programs in postsecondary institutions. Open education initiatives generally align with social justice aspirations and should be open and inclusive to everyone. Yet, in practice, this has not always been the case. While librarians are considered critical partners in the leadership and management of OER programs and are often heralded as heroes and champions of these initiatives, research has failed to interrogate and discuss the experiences of Women of Color (WOC) doing OER work. In particular, the challenges and often invisible labor that librarians face, especially those who are historically marginalized.

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the complex and complicated tasks of coordinating and managing OER programs. The stories WOC participants shared illuminated their unique contributions to the OER community. Foremost is their commitment to social justice, equity, and representation in the OER content that faculty creates. They also bring a critical perspective to OER work by interrogating how open education can be more inclusive, liberatory, democratic, and equitable for all.

For Danella and Dylan who I love with my whole heart and soul.

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Getting a doctoral degree has always been on my bucket list. I dreamed of pursuing it after completing my graduate degree in library and information science in 2009. Given all the things that were going on in my life, I thought then that I could not possibly do it. But here I am, nine years after my MLIS and five years after I started my Ph.D. program in the fall of 2018, joyfully proclaiming that I did it.

This doctoral journey would not have been possible without my faith in the goodness of God, who gave me the strength and fortitude to persevere despite the challenges of the last five years. I would not have been able to do this without my family–Dao, Danella, and Dylan, who extended their all-out support, love, care, understanding, and grace each and every day, especially during the dissertation writing process. I do not know how I could have done all that I needed without the three of you rallying behind me, cheering me on, and encouraging me to continue despite the difficulties I have experienced.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Beginning

During the 2019 Open Education (OpenEd) conference, alongside two other academic librarians, I presented research concerning the experiences of Women of Color (hereafter referred to as WOC) leading open educational resources (hereafter referred to as OER) programs. OER programs are designed to make digital learning objects and educational materials freely and legally available for anyone to retain, reuse, revise, remix, and redistribute (Hewlett Foundation, n.d.; Wiley, 2014). At its core, OER aim to facilitate student access to equitable education through the open sharing of learning materials. They are a critical part of the open education movement due to their potential to reduce costs, facilitate access to learning materials, and advance open educational practices (Cronin, 2020). In the last decade, OER usage has seen an uptick, primarily in response to college affordability initiatives in higher education. Although the OpenEd conference is regarded as the premier and largest annual gathering of open education advocates in North America, the experiences of WOC in OER work had yet to be explicitly addressed at the time of our presentation. This lack of representation, however, was unsurprising, as few librarians of color (hereafter referred to as LOC) and WOC work in this area. Multiple reviews of librarian demographics have shown the profession remains overwhelmingly white (Morales et al., 2014; VanScoy & Bright, 2019)—an observation that extends to the broader OER community, wherein most in this area of work are not racially diverse. As a result, librarian scholarship is often framed from a white perspective that excludes the perspectives and experiences of minorities.

More recently, there has been increased focus on critically examining the tensions within open education work, particularly regarding questions of what, for whom, and to what extent the

community and its practices are either “open” or “closed” (Archer & Prinsloo, 2017; Cronin, 2020; Edwards, 2015; Gourlay, 2015). Conrad & Prinsloo (2020) have challenged open practitioners to interrogate “who, in fact, is leading the charge, and who is not” (p. 5). Many open education initiatives are generally aligned with social justice aspirations in terms of openness and inclusivity (Lambert, 2018). Yet, in practice, this has not always been the case. While librarians are considered critical partners in the leadership and management of OER programs and are often heralded as heroes and champions of these initiatives, existing research has yet to interrogate the other side of this narrative; namely, the challenges and invisiblized labor these librarians face, especially those who are historically marginalized. Furthermore, although librarians have been at the forefront of OER initiatives on college campuses, there is a glaring lack of representation and presence of WOC in this work, even as the student bodies grow ever more diverse. The goal of our OpenEd presentation was thus to create a space to collectively share and reflect on our experiences as WOC librarians leading OER projects in our respective institutions. We were the first to convene a panel of this nature, and attracted a room full of people eager to hear what we had to say.

The experience of publicly retelling our stories was deeply personal. Our narratives spoke to our experiences of imposter syndrome due to racism, microaggressions, microinsults, mansplaining, and other passive-aggressive behaviors we contend with while doing our work. In addition to sharing our individual experiences, we also reflected on how our institutions have failed to support us and how our work has been devalued and invisibilized as a result. It was the first time I shared these experiences in public and I found it both cathartic and liberating. I was emotional by the end of my talk, with tears streaming down my face from the relief of being heard and believed. Most attendees were riveted, shocked, surprised, and horrified when they

heard our stories. However, for most People of Color (hereafter referred to as POC) in the room, the anecdotes we shared were not isolated incidents, because they too had similar experiences. After our presentation, we asked participants to discuss their own experiences in small groups and to write them on the index cards we distributed. To further amplify their stories, I asked for permission to share what they wrote on Twitter using the hashtag #WoCinOER.

The #WoCinOER tweets in turn allowed us to engage further with participants. A few days after the conference, a group of college student interns who attended our session published blogs in response to our presentation. The post written by Drew Carter, a sophomore and president of the Black Student Association at Rice University at that time, was particularly notable given his articulation of what many feel is missing from the OER community:

> The most memorable presentation happened on the very first day. I went to a presentation on the importance of highlighting the work experiences of WOC in the OER community. During the presentation, I learned about the difficulties many of the speakers go through on a daily basis. Hearing the testimonies of the presenters was very eye-opening. It made me interrogate how the OER community could be open to some but not all. A community that is constantly shifting, progressing forward, and growing means that if we aren't paying close attention, some individuals could be left behind. (Carter, 2019, para 2).

Posts like these and the online discussions that ensued highlighted for me the need to make more spaces in OER work where the stories of WOC can be heard, centered, validated, and learned from. I was profoundly impacted by this experience and it served as a pivotal turning point that prompted me to consider the possibility of researching the lived experiences of WOC academic librarians doing OER work. After reflecting on the experience, I realized we were counter-storytelling in telling stories from our position in the margins (Delgado, 1989). In doing

so, we challenged the dominant narrative that depicts OER and open education as open to all, despite its disregard and exclusion of those advocating, supporting, and managing these programs. Our stories as WOC librarians disrupted the majoritarian narrative prevalent in the conference and field, and broadened OER discourse to more accurately reflect our experiences.

The experience was ultimately the catalyst for this dissertation study. Since so few WOC work in OER, I wanted to learn how they navigate and succeed in this space. I also wondered if there was a way to recreate what happened in our conference presentation in my dissertation research. Maybe I could find a way to critically examine the experiences of WOC librarians in open education and OER work and situate it within the broader landscape of academic librarianship to achieve my goals of change and transformation in the field. I am hopeful that, through this study, I can uplift the experiences of WOC OER librarians. I particularly seek to understand how systems and practices in academic libraries affirm and minimize their contributions, and how they navigate race-based discrimination and oppression in academic libraries. In doing so, I hope to identify the challenges they face and the contributions they bring to OER work. My research questions are thus as follows:

(1) What challenges do WOC OER librarians face in connection with their racialized and gendered identities?;

(2) In what ways do WOC OER librarians see their work valued or devalued?; and

(3) What are the unique contributions of WOC librarians in OER work?

In what follows, I provide background on the context of this study and delve deeper into the purpose and necessity of this research.

Background

In this section, I present important background information to contextualize this study in the broader landscape of librarianship. I begin with an account of the profession and then provide an overview of WOC in academic libraries and how their experiences have been depicted in the literature. I conclude with a discussion on open education, OER, and librarians' role in leading these programs.

Librarianship as a Profession

Librarianship is situated within the broader field of library and information science (hereafter referred to as LIS). Librarians work in various settings, such as educational institutions (primary, secondary, and postsecondary), public, government, museums, and corporations (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022.). The types of libraries they are employed by, such as public, academic, and school, determine their specialization; for instance, some are considered specialists in these areas or specialists in media (Evans & Greenwell, 2018).

The literature has consistently described librarianship as a service-oriented and female-intensive profession where women have always comprised the majority (Cooke, 2018; Harris, 1992; Higgins, 2017; Schlesselman-Tarango, 2016; Van Slyck, 1995). Librarianship has also been characterized as feminized, meaning the labor is coded as feminine and thereby frequently invisibilized and undervalued in the workplace (Arellano Douglas & Gadsby, 2017; Sloniowski, 2016). The profession has also been described as homogenous, in that it is predominantly white and persistently lacking in racial and ethnic diversity across all library types (Alabi, 2018; Alire, 2001; Bourg, 2014; Chang, 2013; Ferretti, 2020; Kim & Sin, 2008; Morales et al., 2014; Roh, 2018; Xu & Luhrs, 2020). This homogeneity endures in LIS graduate programs due to library schools' lack of diverse faculty and alumni (Kim et al., 2007).

Various data sources documenting the profession's demographics evidence glaring gender and racial disparities. For instance, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported that, among the 229,000 librarians employed in 2022 at public, school, and academic libraries, 77.5% were women. A breakdown across four demographic groups in librarianship further revealed 82% identified as white, 7.5% as Black/African American, 8.1% as Asian, and 7.7% as Hispanic/Latino (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). Although it has not been updated since 2012, the American Library Association (ALA) *Diversity Counts* report indicated that, among credentialed librarians, 88% identified as white. Of those who identified as white, 82% were female, and 18% were male (American Library Association, 2012b). Regarding racial categories, the same report revealed only 5% were African Americans, 3% were Latinos, 2% were Asian Pacific Islanders, and less than 1% were Native Americans (American Library Association, 2012b). This data is consistent with findings from the 2017 demographic survey by the ALA, which revealed 87% of its members identified as white. Of those, 81% identified as female, while 19% identified as male. The survey also showed that, regarding the racial composition of ALA members, 4.4% were Black, 4% Hispanic or Latino, 3.6% Asian, 1.2% American Indian, and 0.2% Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (Rosa & Henke, 2017). In the following section, I present the demographics of academic librarians, particularly WOC, along with a brief overview of how they are situated in the field of librarianship.

WOC in Academic Libraries

Given the profession's general demographics, it is no surprise WOC have been overwhelmingly underrepresented in academic libraries. Moreover, academic libraries are situated within higher education institutions that are historically structured by patriarchy, whiteness, and white supremacy (Arellano Douglas & Gadsby, 2019; Bourg, 2014; Espinal,

2001; Galvan, 2015; Hathcock, 2015; Honma, 2005; Hudson, 2017). In academic libraries, WOC comprise a notably small percentage of the larger credentialed librarian population. Like the demographics shown in the previous section, 86% of academic librarians identified as white, and of those, 69% were women (American Library Association, 2012a). In terms of racial group, the *Diversity Counts* report showed WOC academic librarians to be 4.7% Asian and Pacific Islander, 4% African American, 1% Latino, 0.3% Native American/Alaskan, and 0.6% multiracial (American Library Association, 2012b). Put another way, the representation of credentialed librarians from historically marginalized populations only accounts for 14% of the total academic librarian workforce, with 11% comprised of WOC. On the other hand, while white women are overrepresented at all ranks in the profession, this has not been the case concerning leadership roles. Even if the field is predominantly composed of women, men have disproportionately occupied the top leadership and managerial positions in academic libraries despite representing only 19% of the profession (Harris, 1992; Roh, 2018; Rosa & Henke, 2017).

These racial and gender disparities have significantly contributed to the low retention of WOC academic librarians (Alabi, 2015b). The system of white supremacy in academic libraries has caused WOC to experience marginalization, racism, racial microaggressions, bullying, discrimination, tokenization, loneliness, isolation, exclusion, alienation, devaluation, and invisibility (Alabi, 2015b, 2018; Anantachai et al., 2015; Berry, 2004; Brown et al., 2018; Chou & Pho, 2017; Cooke, 2019; Damasco & Hodges, 2012; Hankins & Juarez, 2015; Johnson, 2007; VanScoy & Bright, 2019). It also has led to reported feelings of disrespect, burnout, low morale, and emotional labor associated with the burden of care and service work (Alabi, 2015a, 2018; Anantachai & Chesley, 2018; Andrews, 2018; Kendrick & Damasco, 2019).

Several studies have posited that increasing the number of POC in academic libraries through various initiatives and programs has ineffectively addressed the diversity problem plaguing the profession (Chou & Pho, 2017; Hathcock, 2015). Researchers have thus suggested moving away from diversity initiatives to instead enact more concrete actions that address systemic issues, such as intentionally creating opportunities focused on equity, anti-racism, anti-whiteness, and social justice (Espinal, 2001; Ferretti, 2020; Gibson et al., 2017; Hathcock, 2015; Honma, 2005; Hudson, 2017). There have also been calls to examine how diversity in academic librarianship can extend beyond race and ethnicity to include sexual orientation, gender identity, class, age, national origin, and ability status (Moore & Estrellado, 2018). This entails using intersectionality to examine the multiple ways oppression manifests across intersecting identities (Chou & Pho, 2017). In the next section, I briefly discuss the role of OER librarians in advancing open education initiatives to better understand the pivotal role of their work in the success of these programs.

Role of OER Librarians

The OER movement is built on a culture of sharing and the belief that everyone should have the right and freedom to use, customize, improve upon, and redistribute learning resources without constraint (Cape Town Declaration, 2007; Pomerantz & Peek, 2016). This idea of freedom means that, unlike copyrighted materials, OER enables free access to learning materials with the legal permissions of Creative Commons licenses for anyone to use, reuse, and share (Bliss & Smith, 2017; Wiley, 2014).

The culture of sharing OER promotes and the free, equal, and equitable access to information have served as the common thread linking the two together. Academic librarians are considered a natural fit for leading OER initiatives because of this synergy and the support they

provide in advancing their institutions' teaching, learning, research, and outreach missions (Anderson et al., 2019; Cross, 2017; Kleymeer et al., 2010). Indeed, several studies have underscored the importance and critical role academic librarians play in supporting and overseeing OER and other textbook affordability initiatives in higher education institutions (Bradlee & VanScoy, 2019; Bueno-dela Fuente et al., 2012; de Jong et al., 2019; Jensen & West, 2015; Okamoto, 2013; Salem, 2017; Todorinova & Wilkinson, 2020). However, while librarians' role is generally understood as critical, few academic libraries have made the necessary investment and commitment to creating positions that directly support OER work (Cummings-Sauls et al., 2018). Because OER librarianship is still considered a relatively new specialization, few full-time positions exist that are solely dedicated to OER (Dai & Carpenter, 2020). In an analysis of 24 OER positions posted between 2017-2019, Larson (2020) found only half were dedicated to OER work. The others combined OER advocacy and outreach responsibilities with traditional library roles like reference and instruction.

Meanwhile, at institutions with limited financial resources, OER work is often added or integrated into librarians' existing job responsibilities and workload. This has been the standard practice, especially for understaffed and under-resourced academic libraries, and it only makes OER work more challenging for these professionals. Conversations among practitioners in the field, as captured by Dai & Carpenter (2020) during an OER certification training program they participated in, exemplify the need to interrogate existing practices:

> Our colleagues expressed concerns about managing added OER responsibilities, ensuring the sustainability of OER initiatives when they are funded and staffed through soft money rather than permanent funding sources, and balancing the competing—and frequently changing—needs of various stakeholders. (p. 13)

These concerns were similarly uncovered during the interviews I conducted with participants in this dissertation study, underscoring the need for concrete actions that intentionally support the systemic challenges OER librarians face on a day-to-day basis.

Work of OER Librarians

Having discussed the broader landscape of OER librarianship, I now turn to the work of OER librarians. Findings from Larson's (2020) study of job descriptions revealed that a standard scope of work for OER does not yet exist across academic librarianship. However, most of the work tends to fall under outreach, publishing, or a combination of both and other duties. Other studies surveying librarians to determine their specific areas of work in managing OER programs have shown most of the work includes the discovery of appropriate OER, evaluation, collection, preservation, curation, facilitation, training, resource description, classification, and dissemination (Bueno dela Fuente et al., 2012; Okamoto, 2013). Scholarly communication has also been identified as a critical part of the OER librarian's job, expertise is required in open-access publishing, institutional repositories, fair use, Creative Commons licenses, copyright, and intellectual property rights issues (Cummings-Sauls et al., 2018).

Furthermore, as librarians have become heavily involved in OER initiatives, their work has also expanded to statewide and national advocacy and legislation, student government partnerships, promotion, and marketing (Salem, 2017). As academic libraries increasingly engage in OER publishing efforts, librarians have been an invaluable source of support for open textbook publishing, project management, instructional design, user experience, open educational practices, policy development, and the management of faculty incentive awards and grants (Braddlee & VanScoy, 2019; Walz, 2015). Together, these studies provide important

insight into the multiple areas academic librarians offer expertise and support in toward advancing OER initiatives.

As the work of OER librarians is broad in scope, collaboration among stakeholders on and off campus is imperative. In accordance with Arellano Douglas & Gadsby (2017, 2019), I argue that the work of OER librarians and librarian instruction coordinators is highly relational in nature. In other words, because OER librarians' work is expansive and encompasses a tremendous amount of relational activity, it is work that cannot be done alone (Dai & Carpenter, 2020). My prior experience at a community college where I was the only person on the team doing the campus-wide OER work was unsustainable. This is because OER work is layered and complex, involving constant coordination across processes, management workflows, project collaboration, the maintenance of relations with diverse campus units, and the fostering of relationships with faculty, administration, staff, and students.

Moreover, OER work entails significant efforts in relationship building, supporting, connecting, communicating, promoting, and training. Arellano Douglas & Gadsby (2017) have described this kind of work in relation to instruction coordination as "overwhelmingly relational…[and] largely invisible" (p. 267). As such, this also applies to OER librarianship, since this work is "heavily predicated on relational work; relationship building and fostering community" (Dai & Carpenter, 2020, p. 12). Put another way, because OER work is affective and relational, it is often coded as feminine and thereby undervalued. When labor is undervalued, it is highly likely to be systemically under-compensated and under-supported (Dai & Carpenter, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

As previously stated, a growing body of research has begun recognizing the significant role libraries and librarians play in supporting, managing, and sustaining OER programs. Many of these are case studies written by practitioners and librarians whose job responsibilities entail overseeing and leading campus OER programs. While the existing empirical research provides a general idea of the role and various kinds of support academic librarians offer, key parts of their experiences remain relatively unknown. As a new area of specialization in academic librarianship, OER is underexplored and understudied, specifically regarding the experiences of WOC librarians. This is problematic given how previous research has established the historic disenfranchisement of WOC in academic libraries. Such disenfranchisement can be seen in studies of WOC in the reference desk (Chou & Pho, 2017; VanScoy & Bright, 2017, 2019), instruction information literacy (Arellano Douglas & Gadsby, 2017, 2019; Hall, 2012; Hicks, 2018), scholarly communication (Roh, 2018; Roh & Inefuku, 2016), systems and technology (Barron & Preater, 2018), digital humanities (Shirazi, 2014) and other subfields in librarianship.

However, while the roles of academic librarians and the success of OER library initiatives have been the subject of several studies, the experiences of WOC librarians, generally and amongst those working within OER, remain largely unexamined. Seiferle-Valencia (2020) has further noted that, in the OER literature, the prevailing and dominant discourses do not typically include race, gender, or social justice. For this reason, Seiferle-Valencia (2020) called for an intentionally engaged OER practice that "allows librarians from a range of identities to advocate for representation of often-suppressed aspects of their own identities, fighting deauthentication at a root level" (p. 481). In this dissertation, I extend Seiferle-Valencia's urgency and argue that, as part of an intentionally engaged OER practice, WOC librarians can

bring unique perspectives that center marginalized voices and support and advocate for diverse, representative OER content. The experience I shared at the beginning of this chapter attests to the need to center WOC librarians' experience in the open education space. In a community where OER advocates have pushed for openness, diversity, and inclusiveness in its practices, one wonders why there has been a lack of research by and about WOC that examines how they experience the work and in what ways their contributions are valued or devalued.

Purpose of the Study

In centering the stories of WOC academic librarians doing OER work, this study seeks to improve and transform current practices to support and empower WOC academic librarians. Doing so can help scholars and practitioners more effectively address systemic inequities in LIS and thereby enable us to build robust institutional support for OER programs, generally, and for OER leaders, especially WOC. There is a compelling need to address this gap in the literature because of the stark underrepresentation of WOC, not just in the profession's ranks but also in the knowledge they bring to working with an increasingly diverse student body. Given this purpose, I use two theoretical perspectives for my conceptual framework, as described below.

Conceptual Framework

In this study, I examine the lived experiences of WOC OER librarians using critical librarianship (CL) and critical race feminism (CRF). Together, these lenses uncover, highlight, and honor the lived experiences of WOC academic librarians engaged in OER work. A critical race perspective, from which CRF derives, assumes race and racism are pervasive and endemic in society and organizational structures within that society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). CRF also interrogates race and racism but does so by foregrounding the unique experiences of WOC for the purposes of formulating relevant solutions for institutional change. Similarly, CL allows

for the interrogation and examination of power relations in the work of WOC academic librarians, specifically. When put together, CL and CRF enable a deeper, intersectional understanding of the racialized and gendered oppression WOC OER librarians face. The combination of these frameworks thus informed my research questions, research design, methodology, and analysis in this study.

Methodology

In alignment with my conceptual framework, I employed counter-storytelling as my methodology for this study (Milner & Howard, 2013). Counter-storytelling is a method of storytelling rooted in the perspectives of those residing on the margins of society, whose experiences are not often told (Delgado, 1989; Yosso, 2006). As a methodology, counter-storytelling works to subvert traditional epistemologies and presents new possibilities that can disrupt the status quo (Delgado, 1989). Solórzano & Yosso (2002) asserted that, as a methodological tool, counterstories expose, analyze, challenge, and respond to the prevailing majoritarian or master narratives. An in-depth discussion of my methodology can be found in Chapter Three.

Significance of the Study

The prevailing research in academic library and OER work is dominated by quantitative studies about the efficacy of openly licensed materials and its impact on college affordability, access, and student success. While there is a growing number of studies about academic librarians of color, the existing literature has yet to address how WOC OER librarians navigate their work.

This study is thus significant in its focus on the lived experiences of WOC librarians as they navigate their place in academic libraries and OER librarianship. Moreover, the current

body of research on OER has yet to utilize CL and CRF as conceptual lenses for analyzing WOC narratives and counternarratives. As it is crucial to understand WOC's lived experiences, it is just as crucial to amplify how they negotiate their unique challenges and persist in academic libraries as institutions that marginalize and push them out of the profession. Lastly, the study provides implications on theory, research, and practice that can impact recruitment, retention, and professional development opportunities for WOC OER librarians.

Organization of the Dissertation

The remainder of this dissertation is organized into five chapters. In Chapter Two, I provide a literature review that gives a more comprehensive account of the scholarship undergirding this research. The conceptual lens used to frame this study is also in this chapter. In Chapter Three, I further discuss my CL and CRF methodology and its necessity in the current study. This chapter also explains the research design and process I use to ensure my study conforms to the standards of rigor and trustworthiness. In Chapter Four, I introduce the study's seven participants and offer important context for their journeys to academic librarianship and OER work. In Chapter Five, I present the findings of this study, which I organize by threads that correspond to my research questions. Finally, in Chapter Six, I synthesize the findings of this study, connect them to the literature and my conceptual framework, and provide recommendations and implications for practice and research. The following section presents key terms and concepts utilized in this study.

Key Terms and Concepts

Academic librarian – A professional with a master's in library science or library and information science degree employed by an institution of higher education categorized by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education classification framework (ACRL, 2006).

Academic librarianship – The profession practiced by those working in libraries affiliated with higher education institutions of various types and levels, such as community, technical, and liberal arts colleges, universities, and professional schools. Their primary responsibility is to support the teaching, learning, and research efforts of the parent institution's faculty and students (Moran & Leonard, 2010, p. 1).

Academic libraries – Libraries that belong to institutions of higher education, including publicly funded, federal, state, provincial, and national universities and colleges, privately funded universities and colleges, two-year community and junior colleges, tribal colleges, professional schools, and special focus institutions that offer a single or small set of programs (Curzon & Quiñonez-Skinner, 2010, p. 11).

Library and information science – An interdisciplinary domain concerned with creating, managing, and using information in all its forms. Emerging from parallel developments in libraries and information science, the field now encompasses diverse activities that are parts of the information transfer cycle—such as the creation, instantiation, communication, acquisition, organization, management, regulation, preservation, distribution, and use of information (Sweeney & Estabrook, 2017, p. 2768).

Open education – Encompasses resources, tools, and practices that employ a framework of open sharing to improve educational access and effectiveness worldwide. Open education is not limited to OER alone but also draws on open technologies that facilitate collaborative, flexible learning and the open sharing of teaching practices (Cape Town Open Education Declaration, 2007; Open Education Consortium, n.d).

Open educational resources – Teaching, learning, and research materials in any medium, digital or otherwise, that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that

permits no-cost access, use, adaptation, and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions (UNESCO, 2002).

Open licenses – A set of rights that permit anyone to use an original work or creation at no cost and allow modification with no or minimal restriction. The most widely used open licenses are Creative Commons licenses for written works, music, visual, and other artistic expressions (Creative Commons, n.d.).

Predominantly white institutions – The term describes institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment (Lomotey, 2010).

Whiteness – A theoretical concept that can extend beyond the realities of racial privilege to a wide range of dominant ideologies based on gender identity, sexual orientation, class, and other categories. It also stands as a marker for the privilege and power that acts to reinforce itself through hegemonic cultural practices that exclude all who are different (Hathcock, 2015, para. 3)

Women of Color – A term that originated during the 1977 International Women's Year Conference, wherein a group of Black women demanded that the Black Women's Agenda (BWA) they created replace the Minority Women's Plank, which was part of a 200-page document presented during the conference. When other historically marginalized women of color learned of the BWA, they also wanted to be included (Westernstatescenter, 2011). Thus, the term Women of Color was negotiated. In her interview about its origins, Dr. Loretta Ross summed it up as "Women of Color is not a biological designation. It is a solidarity definition. A commitment to collaborate with other oppressed women of color who have been historically marginalized. It is a term that has a lot of power" (Westernstatescenter, 2011).

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Background

I begin this chapter by situating academic librarianship in the institutional settings librarians enact their professional identities in. Following this is a historical overview of academic libraries that traces how their development has been impacted by the history of higher education. Next, I present the work of academic librarians and how their unique roles position them as an integral part of the academic workforce. I then examine the racialization of academic libraries to illustrate why and how they contribute to the continued marginalization of WOC librarians. I conclude by presenting the conceptual lens of critical librarianship (CL) and critical race feminism (CRF) I used to frame my study and explain its necessity in understanding WOC academic librarians' lived experiences and the challenges they face navigating academic libraries.

This literature review on WOC academic librarians' experiences intentionally includes scholarship by POC to highlight their epistemological contributions to LIS. Since this study seeks to highlight and center the lived experiences of WOC, it is imperative that I draw from the scholarship they have produced and the knowledge they shared. In doing so, I hope to elevate and amplify the voices.

Historical Overview of Academic Libraries

The development of academic libraries is inextricably linked to the development of the institution these libraries serve and support (Bivens-Tatum, 2012). To understand the history of academic libraries, it is thus necessary to understand the history of higher education (Shifflet, 1981). The symbiotic relationship between the two has long defined the academic library's connection and dependence on the institution of higher education.

The first academic library in the colonies came about when John Harvard donated approximately 300 books to the Harvard University Library (Weiner, 2005). These colonial college libraries consisted of small, eclectic collections of donated books by wealthy and affluent men (Weiner, 2005). From the colonial period to the Civil War, the curricular focus of American universities followed the classical model that emphasized theology, philosophy, history, grammar, rhetoric, and logic (Hanson, 1989). Faculty taught from a single text and favored recitation and memorization from their students (Hamlin, 1981). As a result, there was no need for libraries to support the curriculum and academic collections remained small (Rubin, 2016). This non-essential role of libraries at the time is evident in the allotment of financial resources to their institutions. For example, academic libraries were physically located in small, wooden structures and the librarians that staffed them were poorly paid scholars and former students (Bivens-Tatum, 2012).

It was not until the mid-nineteenth century that the role of academic libraries shifted dramatically from non-essential to essential, paving the way for their growth and expansion (Hamlin, 1981). The main drivers of this shift were changes in the academic curriculum, development of the research model, and passage of the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 (Rubin, 2016). The college curriculum specifically expanded when curricular focus moved from a classical orientation to more practical education, resulting in the library's increased importance in the academic ecosystem (Rubin, 2016). For example, the German-style universities established during this time offered graduate education, broadened the student body to include nonwhite males, and expanded beyond a denominational orientation (Geiger, 2016). As institutions like Harvard, the University of Michigan, Cornell, and Johns Hopkins transitioned to

research universities dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and scholarship, the value and importance of academic libraries grew (Bivens-Tatum, 2012).

Moreover, as faculty were expected to produce original scholarship and knowledge dissemination became the norm, information sharing among academic libraries grew (Bivens-Tatum, 2012). These developments catalyzed an important shift in the role of the academic library from a place for storing and preserving books to an institution that advanced scientific inquiry and, as a result, became the precursor of the modern research library (Rubin, 2016; Weiner, 2005). Academic libraries, for instance, established endowments during the mid-nineteenth century, with Harvard and Yale libraries leading the way (Weiner, 2005). At that time, the Harvard library director made it his mission to attract gifts from benefactors to amass and collect "published and written record of all events and discoveries, great or small" (Hamlin, 1981, p. 8). Libraries also strengthened their place in the academy as the "heart of the university," a term first used in 1873 by Charles Elliot, Harvard's president at the time (Weiner, 2005). In addition, the establishment of new institutions with new missions, such as land-grant universities through the Morrill Act of 1862, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU), women's colleges, and new fields of study, yielded a massive increase in academic libraries' collections and budgets to support curriculum and research (Hanson, 1989; Lattuca & Stark, 2009; Weigand, 1990). Such growth brought an urgent demand for full-time specialists and experts to manage the expanding corpus of print materials (Rubin, 2016).

By the twentieth century, American higher education had significantly changed. Student enrollment grew, due in part to the increase in women's participation beyond single-sex colleges (Bastedo et al., 2016). It was also a period in which disciplinary units in the university, such as engineering, business, education, medicine, and law, were established (Geiger, 1986). Increases

in enrollment continued until the end of World War II, with an influx of returning soldiers supported by the G.I. Bill and the establishment of two-year community colleges (Geiger, 2016). These developments were a turning point for academic libraries, as collections shifted and diversified beyond print books and monographs (Weiner, 2005). Libraries acquired, for instance, more "physical objects, including journals, books, atlases, maps, pamphlets, music scores, and also growing audiovisual collections, microforms for long-term storage and preservation, as well as the further development of special collections and university archives" (Stachokas, 2020, p. 13).

The shift from print to digital resources also marked a new era for academic libraries. It paved the way for automation and technology applications to manage increasingly diverse collections and perform daily tasks more efficiently and accurately. Digitization and the ever-increasing reliance on technology to facilitate discovery and access became the hallmark of the modern academic library (Stachokas, 2020). Significant advances in computer technologies paved the way for a paperless information system that ushered the electronic-based future for libraries (Lancaster, 1978). This digital information system enabled academic libraries to utilize computerized systems that automated traditional library functions and routine tasks (Sapp & Gilmour, 2002). This development also enabled the growth of shared copy cataloging systems that paved the way for cooperation and collaboration between libraries (Gong & Gong, 2013). Furthermore, advances in information systems and the growth of the Internet enabled the development of online library catalogs which enabled users to search the library collections online thus making it more accessible and discoverable (Gong & Gong, 2013). The Internet also enabled libraries to increase access to electronic databases and leverage the affordances of digital technologies to expand their services and programs (Engle, 1991; Zink, 1991).

Thus far, I have presented a brief historical overview of academic libraries and how their evolving roles in colleges and universities were closely intertwined with significant developments in higher education (Bivens-Tatum, 2012). Building on this, the following section provides an overview of academic librarianship to better understand how academic librarians are situated within the academy.

Overview of Academic Librarianship

Academic librarians are professionals employed in postsecondary institutions, whose work advances and supports their parent institution's teaching, learning, and research missions (Bates & Maack, 2009). As professionals, they have been described as simultaneously "university employees, teachers, professionals, clerical staff, support staff, professors, administrators, [and] public servants" (Graham, 2004, p. 10). Academic librarians' varying roles often situate them in a position straddling quasi-faculty and academic support professionals, which contributes to their unique status in the higher education workforce (Leebaw & Logsdon, 2020). In some institutions, academic librarians are classified as professional staff, while others consider them faculty or a hybrid thereof (Searle & Mirza, 2019). Depending on the institution, librarians may have faculty status but not tenure-track positions, or they may have tenure-track positions but not faculty status. And in some cases, librarians have both (Bates & Maack, 2009). To a certain extent, the expectations of academic librarians on the tenure track who hold faculty status are similar to those of teaching faculty with doctorate degrees, as these librarians are evaluated based on their teaching/instruction roles, research, and service (Applegate, 2010). These expectations are weighed atop an academic librarian's primary responsibilities, which adds another layer of complexity to their jobs (Seale & Mirza, 2019).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, librarianship has historically been female-dominated. The service-oriented labor of librarianship has thereby been coded as "women's work" and accordingly undervalued (Gaines, 2014; Harris, 1992; Higgins, 2017; Shirazi, 2014). The effects of this devaluation have been far-reaching for women and WOC academic librarians. One key issue in this regard is compensation. Previous studies exploring salary discrepancies and wage gaps among academic librarians revealed a persistent pattern of gender-based inequities. For example, although women make up most of the academic librarian workforce, they make 7% less than their male counterparts (Galbraith et al., 2018). While male librarians make up just 19% of the profession, they occupy 40% of the administrative and leadership positions and earn an average of $7,000 more annually than women library directors (ALA, 2018; Olin & Millet, 2015; Rosa & Henke, 2017). Aside from the gender disparity in compensation, racial disparity also can be problematic. Researchers agree that systematically tracking salary disparity by race can be challenging (Allard, 2020; Silva & Galbraith, 2018). The general lack of such data remains a critical gap in the literature that needs further exploration in future studies.

The imbalance in leadership and compensation in academic libraries has been felt most acutely by WOC. The number of African American women holding leadership positions as deans and directors in research libraries has been extremely low and has not proportionately reflected the number of African American academic librarians (Epps, 2008). The dismal number of WOC in leadership positions can also be attributed to the institutional emphasis on recruitment instead of the identification and development of these women as leaders. Wheeler (2000) argued LOC do not just emerge naturally as leaders and "without a conscious effort placed on the recruitment of leaders, librarians of color often are not a part of the system from which leaders naturally emerge" (p. 175). Thus far, I have presented a general overview of the academic librarianship

profession and its position in the academy. In what follows, I discuss libraries as racialized sites to better understand their exclusionary environment.

Academic Libraries as Racialized Spaces

Libraries have historically operated in environments intrinsically linked to racist policies and practices in the United States (Cope, 2017; Hall, 2012; Mehra & Gray, 2020). As early as the eighteenth century, libraries functioned as exclusionary institutions wherein literacy, reading, and access to books were rights accorded only to the privileged, educated, and white (Battles, 2003; Mehra & Gray, 2020). Enslaved people and Indigenous populations were restricted in both reading and access to materials and participation in library spaces as a result (Battles, 2003). Decades before the civil rights movement, African Americans continued to experience exclusion from public libraries and segregation from the white population (Ettarh, 2018; Hall, 2012). A closer look at libraries' sociopolitical history reveals they have been places of exclusion rather than inclusion (Gonzales-Smith & Swanson, 2014). Mehra (2019) has suggested the move toward authentic inclusion needs "an honest acceptance of the impact of racism…to remove vestiges of racial discrimination and micro- and macro-aggressions in LIS toward greater inclusivity" (p. 189). However, many scholars have argued that before this can be done, race and racism in libraries must be discussed and placed front and center instead of in the margins (Hill, 2012; Honma, 2005; Hudson, 2017; Mehra & Gray, 2020; Peterson, 1996). They argue that, to even begin addressing racism in academic libraries, it must be recognized that racism has been a problem in the field in the first place (Alabi, 2018).

As previously mentioned, academic libraries are embedded in higher education institutions, such that their development have been inextricably entwined. In this way, "academic libraries, and the people who work in them, are not immune to the racism that plagues our

society" (Alabi, 2018, p. 133). The colonial history of U.S. higher education was built primarily to educate white, elite men in preparation for religious roles (Geiger, 2016). Higher education institutions, notably the Ivy League schools, greatly benefited from slavery, as they were built and funded by slave labor, with administrators and professors themselves as the enslavers (Wilder, 2014). Moreover, given academic libraries were created to support and uphold the missions of their institutions, they are "embedded in a stratified ensemble of institutions dedicated to the creation, transmission, and reproduction of the hegemonic ideology" (Harris, 1986, p. 241). Bales & Engle (2012) referred to this as the dominant western ideology of "capitalism, liberal democracy, positivism, [and] neutral education" (p. 18) and asserted academic libraries and LIS professionals are therefore anchored in white hegemony and trained to reify and uphold it.

Bales & Engle (2012) further argued academic libraries are well-positioned to advance and reproduce these dominant ideologies through their practices, policies, collections, and library staff. For instance, academic librarians have historically acted as gatekeepers in building collections that privileged white, western canonical works (Bales & Engle, 2012; Doherty, 1998). Scholarly materials from non-western traditions were rarely selected and thus devalued (Shaw, 2006). Furthermore, scholarship in the LIS discipline, where future librarians are educated, have a history of privileging positivist/postpositivist paradigms and excluding other approaches, such as humanist, interpretive, qualitative, narrative, and ethnography (Jaeger et al., 2015). Mehra & Gray (2020) affirmed this in their description of epistemic exclusion in the LIS field:

> White information science historians studied white (and/or Anglo/European) role models of researchers within a particular mode of scholarship in their own

> likeness. This was at the cost of any others, which became a tragic case of pedestalizing only whiteness because those who did not belong to their category were excluded. (p. 204)

The above quote exemplified the silencing of certain forms of knowledge and ways of knowing within the LIS field. Libraries privileged certain knowledge systems and contributed to epistemic injustice and exclusion based on race, ethnicity, religion, or ability (Patin et al., 2020). For instance, the invalidation of WOC experiences can be seen as testimonial injustice where "the ideas, experiences, contributions, and criticisms made by women" (Patin et al., 2020, p. 5) are invalidated. Likewise, the classification systems used to categorize books and other materials in academic libraries demonstrated racialized underpinnings. In an expansive and thorough investigation of the library classification systems (i.e., Dewey Decimal, Library of Congress, and Cutter classification) created by Melvil Dewey and Charles Cutter, Adler (2017) uncovered both men infused library classification with evolutionary principles and racist, anti-Semitic language. In describing the racialized taxonomy for organizing library materials, Adler (2017) suggested the "legacy of disenfranchisement and segregation live on in the classifications, as does the evolutionary framework upon which some such practices were legitimized and based" (p. 25). Despite many revisions and changes, this problematic taxonomy in the classification system still contains racist, homophobic, and American-centric terminologies that Adler (2017) has called "racism in the stacks" (p. 26), which according to her necessitates taxonomic reparation.

In sum, it is evident academic libraries were born and developed within predominantly white institutions (Jennings & Kinzer, 2022). The above review indicates academic libraries' epistemological origins are rooted in the perspectives of white men regarded as "apostles of culture" (Garrison, 1979, p. 1). To fully understand academic libraries' historical complicity in

the perpetuation of racism, it is essential to understand the origins and exclusionary nature of white hegemony. In the following section, I show how the dominant narrative of whiteness in LIS has specifically contributed to the marginalization of WOC.

Whiteness in Academic Libraries

The literature on whiteness in LIS has significantly grown since Espinal (2001). However, even before the proliferation of studies examining whiteness in libraries and librarianship, scholars insisted the profession needed to confront the subject of race. Researchers particularly highlighted library professionals' avoidance and refusal to interrogate race in the field (Hall, 2012; Honma, 2005; Peterson, 1996). In one of the earliest works examining race in LIS, Peterson (1996) argued, "if the profession is serious about understanding race and racism…we would push them from the margins and into the center" (p. 172). A decade later, Pawley (2006) asserted LIS professionals' unwillingness to confront the "R-word of race…leads to race being understudied and poorly understood within the profession" (p. 151). Hall (2012) similarly observed that, "if the education system has been reticent in its discussion of racism, the library and information science field has seemingly slapped itself with a gag order" (p. 198). LIS scholarship has since generated a body of work on race and racism that critically interrogates how whiteness has been systemically ingrained and embedded in the profession (Brook et al., 2015; Dunbar, 2006; Espinal, 2001; Espinal et al., 2018; Hathcock & Sendaula, 2017; Honma, 2005; Hudson, 2017; Leung & Lòpez-McKnight, 2021; Mehra & Gray, 2020; Watson, 2017).

Across these studies, a shared understanding of whiteness has emerged, defined as a complete system of exclusion that operates via the privileging of white, heterosexual, capitalist, and middle-class perspectives (Bourg, 2014; Espinal, 2001; Galvan, 2015; Hall, 2012). Hathcock (2015) extended this to refer to whiteness as "a marker for the privilege and power that acts to

reinforce itself through hegemonic cultural practice that excludes all who are different" (para. 4). Affirming this, Alabi (2015b) observed the "overwhelming whiteness of librarianship can serve as an environmental microaggression, signaling to people of color that their presence is neither wanted nor welcomed in the profession" (p. 189). This exclusion based on whiteness as a privilege and as a dominant system in libraries contributes to the further marginalization of librarians of color.

I now turn to examples of whiteness as an ideology in librarianship, as described in the literature. An analysis of studies on whiteness has shown whiteness manifests in various ways, specifically: 1) the organization and representation in library classification systems that reinscribes racialized taxonomies and terminologies including knowledge production that privileges white, western epistemologies and positivist paradigms (Hudson, 2017); 2) physical spaces of service delivery where the expertise of historically marginalized librarians is called into question, particularly in reference desk interactions with library users (Chou & Pho, 2017); 3) recruitment and hiring practices upheld through job interview processes that disadvantage LOC by hiring based on candidates' acceptability and proximity to white normative values (Galvan, 2015); 4) LIS graduate curriculum emphasizing practical and applied tracks with limited examination and interrogation of the profession's racist past and present (Cooke et al., 2017); 5) diversity initiatives and programs focused on the recruitment of candidates who can embody and exhibit whiteness (Hathcock, 2015); and 6) professional norms and expectations of the ideal library worker as white, female, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied and middle class and the persistence of the unspoken (read: white) "Lady Bountiful" persona as a primary role model for librarianship (Schlesselman-Tarango, 2016).

In all, the literature on whiteness underscores the imperative to understand the myriad ways it has shaped the library workplace and the inherent role the library has played in the perpetuation of racism, power, privilege, and the oppression of POC (Cooke et al., 2017). Most studies on whiteness, however, have chiefly focused on its historical origins and proliferation in libraries and librarianship. Because discussions of whiteness in LIS have been framed alongside the field's lack of diversity, more studies are needed to problematize this issue beyond the matter of diversity. Studies demonstrating practical applications that decenter whiteness in the profession are thus essential to implementing equitable material change (Brook et al., 2015; Espinal et al., 2018). Together, these studies advance a deep understanding of the systemic and structural problems of whiteness and provide a framework for addressing its manifestations in the profession.

Up to now, this literature review has established academic libraries' complicity in perpetuating systemic racism in ways that harm librarians with marginalized identities. In the next section, I review the literature on the challenges WOC academic librarians face, as well as how they cope, survive, and thrive in a profession steeped in whiteness.

Experiences of WOC in Academic Libraries

The gendered dimension of librarianship is the subject of much research (Moran & Nadir, 2021; Sloniowski, 2016). There is also a growing body of literature exploring WOC's experiences in academic libraries. What we know is largely based on narratives, first-person accounts, case studies, and surveys of minority academic librarians' experiences and how they navigate and survive predominantly white library spaces (Alabi, 2018). It is important to note here that most of this research has been written by WOC and POC librarians, a fact that evidences the urgent need and importance of elevating their often-overlooked voices in LIS

(Chou & Pho, 2018). To further address this lack, I provide a thematic review of WOC librarian experiences in the field to date.

Racial Microaggressions

Several studies documenting racism and bias against LOC broadly and WOC academic librarians specifically found racial microaggressions to be prevalent (Alabi, 2015a, 2015b; Alabi, 2018; Arroyo-Ramirez et al., 2018; Chou & Pho, 2017). Sue et al. (2007) defined microaggressions as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color" (p. 271). In most cases, perpetrators of microaggressions are largely unaware their actions negatively impact marginalized peoples (Sue et al., 2007). This is especially salient for WOC in LIS, as the accumulation of microaggressions effectively reinforces racism and actively contributes to their continued marginalization (Dunbar, 2006).

In the context of the library profession, racial microaggressions can be challenging to identify because they are often subtle, nuanced forms of prejudice (Orozco, 2016). However, the literature has documented the many ways microaggressions manifest and impact LOC and WOC in academic libraries. Arroyo-Ramirez et al. (2018) suggested microaggressions in LIS are exhibited in assumptions about POC library staff that may or may not be related to their abilities to perform specific tasks. For instance, many assume WOC librarians working at reference desks are student workers (Arroyo-Ramirez et al., 2018; Chou & Pho, 2017). Hall (1998) observed "repeatedly, patrons will seek a white librarian to confirm the answers I have given them, even on very simple questions that someone who was 'brain dead' could answer" (p. 900). In these ways, patrons assume LOC are not professional librarians and therefore incapable of helping

with their information needs (Hathcock & Sendaula, 2017). Swanson et al. (2018) similarly found LOCs were perceived as incompetent and their professional skills and knowledge routinely second-guessed. As one participant shared, "I am in a management position. I do not believe I would have the amount of second-guessing of my decisions if I were white" (p. 884). In explaining this phenomenon, Hathcock & Sendaula (2017) argued "in many libraries, people of color are often in positions of support (e.g., library assistant) while white personnel hold credentialed librarian positions" (p. 255). Accordingly, many LOC and WOC experience continual questioning of their qualifications, authority, and intelligence by both colleagues and library patrons (Chou & Pho, 2017; Swanson et al., 2018).

The literature has also shown racial microaggressions manifest in the form of ignoring, avoiding, and patronizing LOCs. For instance, interviews by Lifer & Nelson (1997) of 400 minority librarians in academic, public, and special libraries revealed incidents of minority librarians being ignored based on how they are perceived. One WOC librarian interviewed for the study remarked, "they [patrons] will look for the non-threatening minority who looks safe. Those colleagues of mine that have more of an 'ethnic' look have more difficulty, they are not taken seriously…" (p. 42). A WOC participant in the study by Anantachai & Chesley (2018) expressed a similar sentiment:

> I am often invalidated or interrupted. I work with a lot of experienced white women, but I am an emerging Asian American librarian. Everything that comes out of my mouth has been filtered and strategized with a list of backup remarks to defend myself. (p. 317)

The experience shared by the participant above demonstrate how WOC cope with being ignored, not taken seriously, or invalidated. They either retreat or become hyper-vigilant so they can be ready to face another onslaught of racial microaggressions.

A two-part study by Alabi (2015a; 2015b) documenting shared experiences with microaggressions among LOC and WOC academic librarians found several examples in which white librarian colleagues put forth racially insensitive comments about their LOC and WOC academic librarian colleagues' education and intelligence, ignored their contributions, and did not listen to their ideas during meetings. Alabi's survey revealed a clear perception gap between white and historically marginalized librarians regarding microaggressions in academic libraries, wherein white librarians did not see nor recognize microaggressions. This is consistent with Lifer & Nelson's (1997) findings that predate Alabi's study by almost 20 years, in which they observed "whites are going to say racism is not a problem… it's more institutionalized, so people don't realize they are perpetuating racist characterizations" (p. 44). Kendrick (2017) further confirmed low morale can ensue as a result due to "protracted exposure to emotional, verbal/written, and system abuse or neglect in the workplace" (p. 174). She particularly linked low retention rates of LOC and WOC in academic libraries and toxic behaviors brought about by microaggressions against them. Yet, in his critique of the literature on microaggressions, Hudson (2017) argued research has mostly focused on the micro-level, or on the naming of implicitly offensive acts directed at historically marginalized librarians. In other words, while this micro-level focus has been useful, it also limits the literature, as microaggressions are often seen as purely individual instead of a broader symptom of structural and institutional violence. I

Importantly, the literature on racial microaggressions also offers ways to mitigate these incidents (Alabi, 2015a, 2015b; Alabi, 2018; Arroyo-Ramirez et al., 2018). For example, researchers have presented proactive, anti-racist practices to nonwhite library workers to foster allyship that could be mutually beneficial to all.

Thus far, I presented the experiences of WOC regarding racial microaggressions. These individual incidents contribute to feelings of loneliness and isolation that many minoritized librarians face. In the next section, I discuss WOC's experiences of loneliness and isolation as they navigate spaces in which they have consistently been in the minority.

Loneliness and Isolation

The racial climate in academic libraries has been described as inhospitable, hostile, and marginalizing for WOC (Alabi, 2015a, 2018; Brook et al., 2015; Hankins, 2015; Thornton, 2001). As established in the literature and discussed in previous sections, librarianship is not racially diverse and is comprised mainly of white women, who make up the majority of the profession. For this reason, WOC librarians have been disproportionately underrepresented in academic libraries and, as a result, have typically experienced being the "only one" or one of the very few in their library, a phenomenon that has led to feelings of loneliness and isolation (Anantachai & Chesley, 2018; Chou & Pho, 2017; Hankins, 2015; Hankins & Juarez, 2015; Thornton, 2001). A participant in Alabi (2015a) shared:

> People naturally gravitate to others who are similar to them, and with libraries lacking in diversity, the "majority" are never really challenged on these issues. Most of the time, people of color come into these organizations and are accepted but only for appearance's sake. In order to look benevolent and progressive, some academic librarians play like they accept you in order to not appear overtly racist. However, they don't ask you to participate in things that would build collegial relationships. (p. 186)

Another participant in the same study further explained:

> Some of my (Asian immigrant) colleagues are "ignored" because they don't speak up at meetings. It seems there are two reasons they don't participate: lack of confidence in their ability to speak English and discomfort with a different communication style. (p. 187)

These observations point to the challenges of being a minority in academic libraries. They not only feel alone but also do not feel a sense of belonging due to a lack of understanding about their unique identities and cultural differences. Narratives like these have been commonly depicted in the literature through studies documenting the lived experiences of LOC and WOC in academic libraries (Alabi, 2015a, 2015b; Anantachai et al., 2015; Chou & Pho, 2017).

Since it is not unusual to find WOC are the "only one" in their libraries, it is also not unusual to find they are often implicitly or explicitly asked to provide additional labor for diversity work (Anantachai et al., 2015; Chou & Pho, 2017). Committee involvement, especially concerning diversity programming and outreach, appeared to be the default expectation for WOC hires. A participant in Chou & Pho's (2017) study shared the undue burden this places on WOC, noting, "we have a lot of diversity programming, but it's always the same people. You're preaching to the choir, and so I'm not sure how effective we're going to be able to be… it's really, really challenging" (p. 232). As it is a common occurrence in academic libraries, the LOC and WOC it falls on forces them to bear the brunt of diversity work, even when their skills and interests are not diversity-related and even when they are new to an organization and do not know the institutional culture (Juárez, 2015).

In the same vein, quantitative studies surveying historically marginalized librarians in academic libraries yielded stories about dealing with feelings of loneliness and isolation in the profession (Swanson et al., 2018; VanScoy & Bright, 2017). Lifer & Nelson (1997) attributed this to a two-pronged problem of the underrepresentation of racial minorities and the lack of

opportunities for them to move up the leadership ranks. However, researchers have argued simply ensuring more representation and racial diversity in academic libraries will not solve this problem if white librarians do not step up and participate in diversity work (Alabi, 2015b; Chou & Pho, 2017). As such, there is a distinct need for academic libraries to provide more welcoming spaces that value WOC's contributions so they can fully participate and thrive as professionals. In the next section, I discuss the experience of WOC in academic libraries with respect to care work, cultural taxation, and emotional labor.

Care Work, Cultural Taxation, and Emotional Labor

A common trend across the literature is the burdening of WOC with care work, such as supporting the general well-being, health, and caregiving of others (Anantachai & Chesley, 2018; Yeates, 2005). In accordance with gendered and racialized expectations, WOC academic librarians must frequently straddle the space between academic and non-academic work, as they are often expected to be "care workers and waged domestic workers" (Sloniowski, 2016, p. 659). Academic LOC on the tenure track, for example, are expected to serve on diversity committees, liaise with units outside the library, and be the diversity expert who can represent other minorities (Damasco & Hodges, 2012). In their study of care work and cultural taxation of WOC academic librarians, Anantachai & Chesley (2018) found over half of respondents took on a disproportionately high amount of service and care work activities because of their racial identity. The authors further argued that such undue burdens can lead to the devaluing of WOC librarians' academic labor and thereby affect their career prospects. This intersection of care work and cultural taxation prevalent among WOC academic librarians is thus a direct result of gendered expectations and racialized identities in academic libraries.

The literature is also rife with studies on emotional labor in library work, especially for librarians with public-facing and instruction heavy responsibilities (Emmelhaintz et al., 2017; Matteson & Miller, 2012, 2013; Matteson et al., 2015; Sloniowski, 2016). Most of these studies have been quantitative surveys correlating emotional labor with burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and low retention rates. Particularly noteworthy is Shupe et al.'s (2015) investigation into the connection between stress level and burnout among academic librarians. In focusing on role ambiguity and role overload as major sources of stress for librarians, their study has been critical to understanding of role ambiguity, which results from unclear expectations of job-related responsibilities, and job overload, which occurs when one perceives their job as excessively demanding and requiring long hours of work (Shupe et al., 2015). Both were found to contribute to a high level of stress and burnout among academic librarians. Relatedly, Bright (2018) is the only study to date to specifically focus on the emotional labor of WOC by exploring the intersectionality of gender and race/ethnicity labor in reference and information work. Bright (2018) found WOC librarians performed hidden emotional labor via the numerous diversity committee assignments they were expected to participate in. The inherent expectation of representing all minorities of their race and ethnicity further exacerbated participants' resulting feelings of tokenism (Bright, 2018).

In the field of open education, only three studies have demonstrated how emotional labor manifests in the daily lives of librarians doing OER work. Batte (2020), an OER librarian, documented her own lived experience doing open education work and the emotional labor required to succeed in the job. She specifically described the dual role of advocating for student access to lower textbook costs and working with faculty to adopt OER, noting both necessitate a tremendous amount of emotional labor. Likewise, Dai & Carpenter (2020) have argued that since

OER work is predicated on relationship building and cultivating connections with faculty and other campus stakeholders, emotional labor is inevitable, albeit invisible, meaning such work is typically devalued. Most recently, Jordan (2023) employed autoethnography to chronicle her experience developing an OER at a community college. This is the first account of a WOC library faculty's experience as an OER author working at the intersection of being a working-class Latina woman at a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI). The piece described the invisible labor embedded in OER creation, especially for historically marginalized creators. As such, this study's strength lies not only in in its provision of a clearer understanding of the challenges faced by historically marginalized OER creators, but also in its recommendation of concrete steps for institutional support. The following section discusses academic labor in OER production to better understand how OER labor can be invisible and, thereby, undervalued.

OER and Academic Labor

As it relates to OER, academic labor can be defined as the "labor required for an OER initiative, including work done by faculty, educational technologists, graduate assistants, librarians, undergraduate students, and others" (McDermott, 2020, para. 7). An examination of the literature revealed OER and academic labor issues have rarely been covered in existing discourse. According to McDermott (2020), "OER efficacy studies are just as revealing for what they omit as for what they include" (para. 45). This is partly due to the preponderance of efficacy studies measuring cost savings, improved student outcomes, increased usage, and perceptions of OER quality (Hilton, 2016; Hilton, 2020). These studies have indeed offered a powerful argument for the potential of OER to address the affordability and access goals many OER initiatives espouse (Senack, 2014; Senack & Donoghue, 2016; Vitez, 2018). However, there remains a gap in the literature that fails to address the academic labor of librarians, faculty, and

staff involved in OER production. Jordan (2023) is the only study in the literature to discuss the experience of OER creation from the perspective of a WOC librarian faculty. In autoethnographically documenting her experience writing an English composition OER as a community college Latina faculty, Jordan illuminated the challenges WOC faculty face in OER creation and provided program-level recommendations to support women faculty of color in creating more diverse open learning materials.

The few studies on academic labor in OER suggest it has remained mostly hidden and unacknowledged. This glaring invisibility of academic labor in OER production has been problematic and the subject of many critiques (Crissinger, 2015; Gourlay, 2015; McDermott, 2020; Veletsianos, 2020). For example, while several studies have focused on affordability and cost savings, we lack research focused on the cost involved, such as how much faculty time and institutional funding are allocated to OER adoption (Hendricks et al., 2017). Similarly, the implementation process is time-consuming and scope creep can occur during course curation and design for faculty who create OER and the librarians who support them (West, 2017). In addition, Dai & Carpenter (2020) argued OER librarianship is feminized and relational, which can lead to devaluation of the work itself. The devaluing of academic labor is exacerbated in most cases because OER creation is not valued in the tenure system and adjunct faculty, especially at community colleges, are often expected to do the work without compensation (Crissinger, 2015).

The invisibility of WOC academic librarians' experiences and labor in OER mirrors the under-representation of the nonwhite population in the fields of scholarly communications, higher education, and librarianship. Academic publishing demographics indicate 91% of staff employed by companies that edit, produce, market, and distribute scholarly books and journals

are white (Greco et al., 2016). Given that a librarian's role is vital because they act as the selectors and purchasers of the materials produced by academic publishers, Roh (2020) has suggested examining who holds power in the scholarly communication system and what kinds of bias and narratives are perpetuated when white normative power is upheld. Ultimately, while cost savings might conform to funders' and administrators' directives, the academic labor enabling these savings should also be recognized, valued, and compensated (McDermott, 2020). The narrow focus on cost and outcomes has caused missed opportunities to address the critical questions of who does the work and how OER contributes to and reinforces structural inequities in higher education (Crissinger, 2015; McDermott, 2020; Nusbaum, 2020; Veletsianos, 2020).

Summary of the Literature

As evidenced in this literature review, librarianship is extremely homogenous and operates within a white normative environment (Bourg, 2014; Espinal, 2001; Hathcock, 2015). Existing research indicates this is true of academic libraries as well, given these institutions have reified and perpetuated the dominant narrative of whiteness in the profession and therefore contributed to its exclusionary nature toward POC and WOC librarians. The studies reviewed here show academic libraries are racialized spaces, wherein a majority of WOC experience racial microaggressions, loneliness, isolation, undue emotional labor, and cultural taxation, among others. The assumptions I bring to this research based on the literature lead me to believe WOC OER librarians also experience marginalization and devaluation in their work. As the literature confirms librarians' vital role in OER initiatives, the lack of research on WOC experiences doing OER work continues to prevent progress toward meaningful change. The present study thus seeks to build a more comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of WOC OER librarians by presenting participant narratives as counterstories to the dominant

narratives prevalent in the literature. My literature review and interest in learning more by uncovering the experiences of WOC OER librarians have led me to pose the following questions:

1. What challenges do WOC OER librarians face in connection with their racialized and gendered identities?
2. In what ways do WOC OER librarians see their work valued or devalued?
3. What are the unique contributions of WOC librarians in OER work?

What follows is a discussion of the conceptual framework I used to guide this study.

Conceptual Framework

In the following sections, I provide an overview of the development of critical librarianship (CL) and how its principles can be used to interrogate the uneven power relations in the work of WOC academic librarians. I then discuss critical race feminism (CRF) as a framework that emerged from Critical Race Theory (CRT). Finally, I make the connection between CRF and CL and how these frameworks inform my research.

Overview of CL

CL is a framework used to expose, understand, critique, and challenge the various ways libraries as an institution and librarianship as a profession support and uphold systems of oppression (Drabinski, 2019; Garcia, 2015; Preater, 2020; Rapchak, 2021). CL is considered an area of scholarship and practice in the LIS literature and draws its roots from critical theory (Nicholson & Seale, 2018). Following the Marxist tradition of the Frankfurt School, critical theory provides the descriptive and normative bases for social inquiry to decrease domination and increase freedom in all forms (Bohman, 2021). Moreover, critical theory is concerned with social transformation and eliminating social injustice with an eye toward human emancipation (Delanty, 2020). In line with critical theory, the goals of CL are transformation and

empowerment by challenging power and privilege and actively working towards dismantling structural inequities (Ferretti, 2020; Garcia, 2015). CL's transformative focus can be achieved through actions that "identify, expose, and disrupt social and political powers that underlie information systems" (Gregory & Higgins, 2013, p. 3). CL further strives to bridge the gap between theory and practice by utilizing a reflective lens to pursue a theoretically informed praxis rooted in social justice activism (Elmborg, 2006; Nicholson & Seale, 2018).

As a body of scholarship, CL has become a useful framework for examining and interrogating various functional areas and practices in libraries. The bodies of literature in which CL has been most extensively applied is critical information literacy and critical library instruction. In academic libraries, developing instructional programs to teach library users how to find and evaluate information is essential to the work of instruction librarians (Tewell, 2018). This is referred to as information literacy and has been defined as the "ability to read, interpret, and produce information valued in academia" (Elmborg, 2006, p. 193). It is an important skill all college students must develop during their postsecondary education. Critical information literacy challenges the notion that students need only to acquire these skill sets. By applying a critical lens to information literacy, students instead learn how information is produced, how knowledge is validated, and how the scholarly system functions in the broader academic landscape (Elmborg, 2006). Similarly, critical library instruction utilizes a critical lens to "examine the social construction and political dimensions of libraries and information" (Tewell, 2018, p. 10) in order to understand how libraries participate in systems of oppression so they can be changed for the better. This area of CL is heavily influenced by critical pedagogy theorists like Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, and bell hooks (Tewell, 2015). As an approach to library instruction, critical

pedagogy focuses on developing students' critical consciousness and their capacity to be active agents and participants in their learning (Elmborg, 2006).

In recent years, CL scholarship has expanded beyond critical information literacy and library instruction. It has been applied as a method of questioning the status quo of standards, organizational systems, and policies in archival studies (Caswell et al., 2017), health and medical sciences (Barr-Walker & Sharifi, 2019), academic libraries (Garcia, 2015), and public libraries (McElroy, 2017). CL has also been used to identify the complicity of libraries and librarians in systems of oppression, specifically in: cataloging systems that perpetuate racist, ableist, heterosexist, and cisnormative approaches (Adler, 2017; Drabinski, 2019); classist and racist systems of information access (Hare & Evanson, 2018; Honma, 2005; Noble, 2018); hiring structures that perpetuate white supremacy in librarianship (Galvan, 2015; Hathcock, 2015), and the notion of library neutrality as harmful to oppressed groups given its perpetuation of inequality, indifference, and marginalization (Barr-Walker & Sharifi, 2019; Farkas, 2017).

In all, the growing discourse on CL has underscored the need to question, probe, critique, and dismantle the oppressive and marginalizing spaces racialized library workers inhabit. CL enables creation of empowering and supportive structures, as well as capacity to address the injustices experienced by marginalized groups in libraries (Rapchak, 2021). In the next section, I provide an outline and discussion of the principles and tenets of CL to better understand how it can be used in my study.

Principles and Tenets of CL

Understanding the systems and practices CL aims to address requires understanding the five principles or tenets of CL, as posited by Drabinski (2019). They are as follows: 1) critical librarianship interrogates the work of power in structures and systems; 2) critical librarianship

acknowledges the social, economic, and political context of library policies and processes; 3) critical librarianship surfaces hidden labor; 4) critical librarianship articulates the infrastructures that enable some lines of inquiry and not others; and 5) critical librarianship knows that the world could be different (p. 51-53).

First, CL examines systems and structures that reproduce inequality. The profession, for example, is governed according to cataloging standards and classification systems, guidelines, and standards. Of this, Drabinksi (2019) asserted CL is "concerned with who determines what those systems look like and how they work, and who is excluded from those processes" (p. 51). Second, CL should situate library policies and processes within the social, economic, and political contexts of the institutions to which they belong. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic took a financial toll on colleges and universities, such that academic libraries experienced significant budgetary strains (Todorinova, 2021). This led to personnel reductions in areas such as access services, facilities, operations, and security, with academic library job cuts affecting staff across racial and economic lines (Frederick & Wolff-Eisenberg, 2020; Peet, 2020). The repercussions of these personnel reductions have directly affected library workflows and processes and caused inequitable burdens on staff in terms of workload.

Third, CL brings the hidden labor of librarians into the open. Much of the work performed by library staff and librarians is considered invisible (Bright, 2018; Shirazi, 2014). For instance, books do not magically appear on shelves; and the fact faculty can access library resources online with just a few clicks and journal articles are delivered online for free are not things that happen on their own. Yet, the labor required to provide these amenities is rarely examined and even devalued to a certain extent. Fourth, CL interrogates how libraries facilitate knowledge production (Drabinski, 2019). One way to think about this is via the systems and

processes that enable the acquisition, description, and cataloging of materials so they can be easily accessed by faculty and students. The processes and policies determine how materials are chosen, bought, and served to faculty, who in turn produce knowledge. Finally, CL is rooted in the certainty that the world can be more just and equitable for all. It is thus concerned with challenging the status quo and "a radical hope that things could be different from the way they are now" (Drabinski, 2019, p. 53). CL is highly invested in remaking oppressive structures and reimagining how library professionals can wield their expertise and power to transform marginalizing systems and practices.

For these reasons, CL is a useful lens for interrogating institutional structures, practices, and policies that marginalize WOC librarians in academic libraries. However, CL is limited in that it does not adequately address WOC OER librarians' individual experiences nor how they navigate their institutional environments. CL also does not account for intersectionality, which is necessary for delineating the multiple axes of oppression participants might experience while navigating institutional challenges. As this study aims to understand WOC OER librarians' lived experiences, I find the tenets of CRF to be an effective framework for analyzing participant narratives because it explicitly calls for WOC as the nexus of research. In the following section, I provide a more thorough discussion of the history and principles of CRF as a conceptual framework for this research.

Critical Race Feminism (CRF)

CRF traces its roots to Critical Legal Studies (CLS) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Wing, 2003). CLS came about through a coalition of legal scholars, primarily radical white males seeking to expose and challenge the traditional positivist or realist view that legal jurisprudence was neutral and value-free (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Wing, 2003). These

progressive scholars called attention to the inherent ways U.S. law has reified and upheld oppressive systems (Brown & Jackson, 2013). While many scholars embraced CLS for exposing the nature of power and control in law, some found it perpetuated racially based social and economic oppression (Delgado, 1995; Taylor, 2016; Wing, 1997). Thus, CRT emerged in the mid-1970s with the early works of Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Angela Harris, Cheryl Harris, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, Richard Delgado, and Patricia Williams, who believed racial reform was still very much needed, even after the gains won through the civil rights movement (Delgado, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2013, 2017). Although CRT started as a framework developed by legal scholars, it has also been used to examine and understand the role of race and racism in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Offshoots like LatCrit, TribalCrit, AsianCrit, and DisCrit—as well as CRF—were developed to interrogate the role of race and racism among historically marginalized and racialized groups. CRT adheres to the following basic tenets or themes: 1) racism is ordinary and normal; 2) interest convergence or material determinism; 3) race as a social construction; 4) centrality of the experiences and knowledge of POC; 5) intersectionality and anti-essentialism; and 6) use of storytelling and narratives to counter the majoritarian narratives and center the voices of POC (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Taylor, 2016).

As an offshoot of CRT that draws inspiration from feminism, CRF takes the experiences, roles, and narratives of WOC as the center of its analysis (Pratt-Clarke, 2010). According to Wing (2003), CRF is a "race intervention in a feminist discourse, in that it necessarily embraces feminism's emphasis on gender oppression within a system of patriarchy" (p. 7). CRF therefore provides "a framework for how to talk about race through a lens that looks at gender, and how to talk about gender through a lens that considers race" (Hines-Datiri & Carter-Andrews, 2020, p.

1429). Moreover, CRF challenges the notion that the law is unbiased, neutral, and objective and "exposes how the law has perpetuated unjust class, race, and gender hierarchies" (Wing, 2003, p. 4). WOC legal scholars have argued that CRT, with its emphasis on interrogating inequalities centered on race and ethnic identities, was insufficient for addressing the unique perspectives and contexts that historically marginalized women inhabit in society (Wing, 2003). CRF scholars have also critiqued feminism for its focus on elite, white women, often at the expense of the work, experiences, and perspectives of WOC (Wing, 2015). This has been particularly salient in legal studies, where WOC issues have been invisibilized under a system of either gender- or race-based analysis (Delgado & Stefancic, 2014; Wing, 2003). Overall, scholars have turned to CRF to remedy the essentialization of gender and the systemic lack of attention to gender oppression in CRT research (Wing, 2003, 2015).

Key Principles of CRF

While CRF intersects with and shares some tenets of CRT, it operates according to a distinct set of principles. These principles include: 1) centering WOC experiences and addressing anti-essentialism; 2) acknowledging intersectionality; 3) rejecting colorblind rationales; and 4) utilizing critical and engaged praxis (Berry, 2010; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Wing, 2003).

First, CRF critiques the essentialist assumption that all women's experiences are the same, especially because said experiences usually refer to those of white, middle-, and upper-class women (Wing, 2003). CRF instead takes an anti-essentialist stance to understand how and why WOC's lived experiences may not conform to the established norm in American society. Second, CRF centers intersectionality as it relates to anti-essentialism. As defined by Collins (2000), intersectionality focuses on the intersecting point of two systems of oppression, namely

race and gender, and seeks to learn how this intersection can shape lived experiences. It explores the mutual forces of domination, oppression, and subjugation for those at the margins of society. Crenshaw (1991) further asserted that "because of their intersectional identity as both women and of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, WOC are marginalized within both" (p. 1244). Furthermore, in analyzing the nature and extent of WOC's discrimination, Wing (2003) advocated for the use of the term "multiplicative identity to describe the concept that women of color are not merely white women plus color or men of color plus gender" (p. 7). In other words, gaining a comprehensive understanding of how WOC experience oppression is contingent on accounting for their multiple, intersecting identities (Wing, 1990).

Third, CRF rejects color-evasive discourse and "specifically embraces color consciousness and identity politics as the way to rectify today's racist legal legacies" (Wing, 2003, p. 6). For example, CRF rejects the assumption that libraries are neutral institutions separated and shielded from the political, social, cultural, and economic environments in which they operate. Fourth, CRF embraces a critical and engaged praxis in that it allows researchers to move from problem-posing to problem-solving with communities of color (Wing, 2003). Through CRF, researchers can attend to actual needs and practical strategies that "can bring about change and progress within society" (Wing & Willis, 1999, p. 4). CRF, for instance, calls for merging theory and practice to resist and revise the monolithic discourse prevalent in education (Berry, 2010).

Having described the utilities and limitations of CL and CRF, I now move to situating the two in the context of my study. The following section illustrates their principles, identifies the intersection between these frameworks, and explains how I combined them to answer my research questions.

CL and CRF and Its Applications to the Study

CL aligns with my purpose of exploring the lived experiences of WOC academic librarians doing OER work in higher education institutions. It specifically complements the principles of CRF through its critique of structures, practices, and systems of oppression for the purposes of destabilizing and changing normative practices and discourse in the LIS field (Nicholson & Seale, 2018). I see CL as a lens for interrogating the power relations, processes, and policies that contribute to the marginalization of WOC OER librarians. On the other hand, because CRF centers the experiences of WOC, it can be an effective framework for analyzing my participants' narratives. Table 1 illustrates the key principles of both CRF and CL.

Table 1

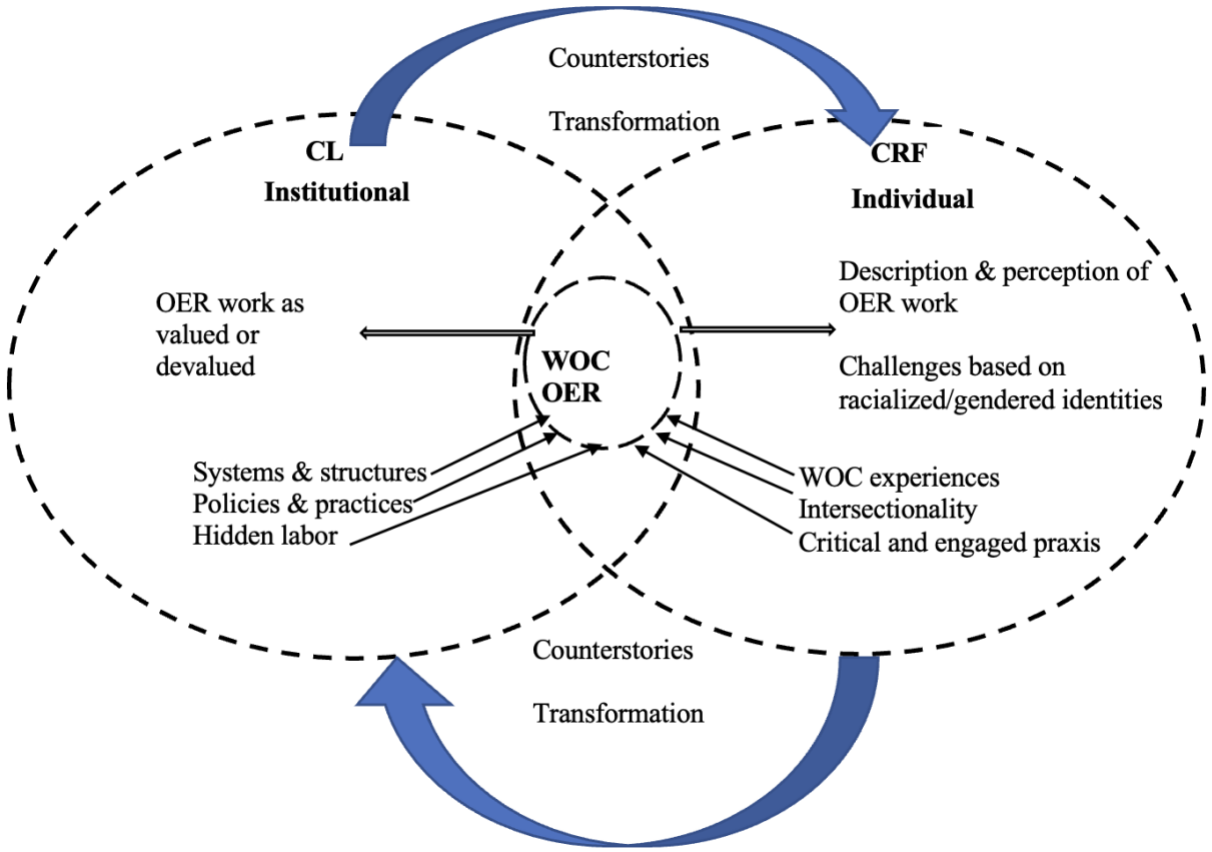
Principles of Critical Librarianship (CL) and Critical Race Feminism (CRF)

CL	CRF
• Interrogates the work of power in structures and systems • Acknowledges the social, economic, and political context of library policies and processes • Surfaces hidden labor • Identifies infrastructures that enable some lines of inquiry and not others • Knows the world can be different	• Centers WOC experiences and addresses anti-essentialism • Acknowledges intersectionality • Rejects colorblind rationales • Utilizes critical and engaged praxis

Figure 1 shows how I envision the two frameworks as interrelated and how both guided my inquiry and research design.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



CRF is useful for analysis on an individual level, as it centers the stories of WOC OER librarians and challenges the essentialization of women's experiences. This is particularly salient since librarianship is a field comprised predominantly of white women. However, the influence of gender and racial/ethnic identity, or the impact that this intersectionality may have on the OER work performed by WOC, has yet to be fully explored. The lack of attention to the lived experiences of OER librarians can thus be understood as a type of marginalization experienced by WOC with intersectional identities that dominant discourses fail to accommodate (Crenshaw, 1991). As such, it is crucial that the voices of WOC and the intersectional identities they possess directly inform research into how they navigate libraries as sites of marginalization. Another

CRF principle I employed in this study is critical and engaged praxis. As previously stated, CRF encourages the development of practical solutions that can potentially address the problems affecting WOC. I see CRF as a useful lens for interrogating my research questions, all of which aim to understand the challenges WOC OER librarians face in connection with their racialized and gendered identities. I specifically used CRF to examine participants' individual experiences so we can collectively envision how to effect change and transformation that empowers WOC OER librarians.

Alternately, CL is useful for analysis at the institutional level, as it interrogates academic libraries as sites wherein power relations are applied and mediated. Acknowledging the social, economic, and political environment in academic libraries that hamper and limit opportunities for WOC OER academic librarians is critical to their success and empowerment. Surfacing the hidden and affective labor of care work by WOC OER librarians can also help change how institutions reward and value their work, since said labor is often invisible and thereby undervalued (Arellano Douglas & Gadsby, 2017, 2019). Together, CL and CRF allowed me to provide a complete picture of WOC's individual experiences navigating predominantly white spaces as well as the institutional settings they inhabit. Utilizing CL to analyze WOC OER librarians' institutional contexts helped clarify how and why they feel valued or devalued. Doing so helped me uncover how academic libraries and their parent institutions' systems, structures, policies, and practices impact how WOC OER librarians' labor is valued or devalued.

Finally, both CL and CRF support the use of counterstories "to understand multiple positionalities of individuals or groups of individuals, particularly those stories of socially and politically marginalized persons living at the intersections of identities" (Berry, 2010, p. 25). Counterstories and storytelling are key to the CRF methodology I used in this study to center my

participants' lived experiences. While their counterstories are individual, they can be used together to advocate for change and transformation at the institutional level. In the next chapter, I provide the methodology for this study and delineate my research design and process.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter, I build on the literature review in the previous section that provided a glimpse into the presence and experiences of WOC librarians in higher education, including practices and structures in academic libraries that contribute to their marginalization. In line with the conceptual lenses of CL and CRF discussed in Chapter II, I describe my methodological approach to this study, including the methods, data collection, data analysis, and overall process I used in carrying out this research. I begin by offering an account of my positionality, epistemologies, and the context with which I approached the research questions.

Researcher Positionality

As an educational researcher, I believe my worldview is shaped by my convictions, culture, beliefs, and values, all of which are intertwined and influenced by one another. I am a Filipina, a first-generation immigrant to the United States, and the first in my family to attend graduate school. My journey as a critical theory researcher has involved a great deal of reflecting, reading, learning, re-learning, and unlearning how I was socialized and educated. In developing my identity as a professional and scholar of higher education, I have come to embrace the ontological position that there is not one universal truth or knowledge. Reality, truth, and how we experience the world are all mediated by our experiences, values, beliefs, cultures, social positions, economic statuses, and even religion. Our realities are thus subjective and constructed based on power (Sipe & Constable, 1996). I also believe embodying a critical paradigm entails advocacy for marginalized people toward an ultimate goal of transformation (Creswell, 2014). It involves asking questions such as "who/what is helped/privileged/legitimated? or who/what is harmed/oppressed/disqualified?" (Cannella &

Lincoln, 2016, p. 18). Embodying a critical paradigm means examining and insisting "research—and all ways by which knowledge is created—is firmly grounded within an understanding of social structures (social inequalities), power relationships (power inequalities), and the agency of human beings" (Bhavnani et al., 2014, p. 2). Since the goal of critical research is to uncover injustices against the most vulnerable and oppressed, there is liberatory potential for such research to help us achieve a just world and change for the better.

To do this, I chose to center the voices of WOC OER librarians in academia in my study. As a WOC librarian who has worked in predominantly white institutions for over a decade, I have experienced and witnessed the myriad ways our voices, perspectives, and experiences are marginalized. I have also dealt with incidents of racism, sexism, and other isms that many WOC must deal with daily. My position as a WOC librarian who previously led OER programs at a community college, public research university, and currently at a private liberal arts university puts me in an insider role in this study. I bring a personal connection to this research, not only as the primary researcher but also as a practitioner in the field who is deeply embedded in the open education community. Dwyer & Buckle (2009) asserted that when a researcher is an insider, they share the characteristics, roles, or experiences with their participants and intimate knowledge of the community and its members. This insider status can grant researchers immediate acceptance by their participants, as participants are more likely to be open and provide depth to the data they might not provide otherwise (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). I am fully aware that my background, assumptions, and experiences as an insider will play a crucial role in interpreting my findings. I acknowledge that I can never be separated from my research and that my understanding and meaning making will always be informed by my perspective and positionality. Yet, I am also an outsider because of my role as the researcher, as I may not racially identify with most of my

participants or share the identities they embody. Nonetheless, I encouraged openness among the WOC participants of this study to effectively learn about their experiences through storytelling and a dialogic process of questioning and conversation.

Having acknowledged my positionality as a researcher, I move to the following section, which outlines the methodology employed in this research. I begin by providing an overview of counter-storytelling and then discuss how I used this methodology in the study.

Counter-storytelling Methodology

The study of storytelling has been well established in the social sciences, humanities, and the law (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). It has a rich and enduring practice in the African American, Chicano/Chicana, and Native American communities (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Critical race theorists have sought to legitimize the use of stories and narratives to demonstrate how policy directly and indirectly informs the racial oppression and subordination of POC (Delgado, 1989; Parker & Lynn, 2002). Stories can be a powerful tool for this because "stories create their own bonds, represent cohesion, shared understandings, and meanings" (Delgado, 1989, p. 2412). As such, stories can also be a way to center voices that have been silenced (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Stories about and by historically marginalized communities and POC enable the storytellers to find their voice and extend connections—to remind themselves and others they are not alone in their struggles (Delgado, 1989).

Distinct from storytelling, counter-storytelling is the telling of a story from the perspective of those residing in the margins of society, whose experiences are not often told (Delgado, 1989). As a methodology, it seeks to subvert traditional epistemologies to present new possibilities with the potential to disrupt the status quo (Delgado, 1989). As a methodological tool, Solórzano & Yosso (2002) asserted counterstories or counter-narratives expose, analyze,

challenge, and respond to prevailing majoritarian or master narratives. Delgado & Stefancic (1993) referred to master narratives as the "bundle of presuppositions, preconceived wisdoms and shared cultural understandings persons in the dominant group bring to discussions of race" (p. 462). These master narratives privilege and center the white, male, heterosexual, middle-class perspective as the norm. Moreover, it reifies the discourse of meritocracy, color-blindness, and neutrality and perpetuates deficit stereotypes about POC and those who do not fit the norm (Alemán, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Yet, counterstories should not be written or told solely as a response to master narratives, since reacting only to majoritarian stories perpetuates their dominance (Ikemoto, 1997; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Instead, because they "can help strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32), stories and counterstories must be uncovered.

Critical race scholars have applied counter-storytelling in three forms: 1) personal stories or narratives; 2) other people's stories or narratives; and 3) composite stories or narratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). To develop my own counterstories, I used the first and second forms. Personal stories or narratives describe the experiences of individuals as they face various forms of racism and sexism. According to Solórzano & Yosso (2002), personal counterstories are usually autobiographical in nature, include the author's personal reflections, and locate these reflections within relevant socio-political and historical environments (p. 32). As previously articulated, I am a WOC academic librarian doing OER work in predominantly white institutions. As such, I am acutely aware of my unique position in this study. Even as I share some commonalities with my participants, it is their voices and narratives I seek to honor and center, not mine. I believe honesty is paramount to the integrity of any study. As this study is a collective story of the small community of WOC librarians doing OER in US higher education, it

is meant to prompt discussion about the racial and gender inequalities they face in their daily work and how they can work toward transformation.

Another way counter-storytelling can be applied is with other people's stories. Solórzano & Yosso (2002) noted "narratives that tell another person's story can reveal experiences with and responses to racism and sexism as told in a third-person voice" (p. 33). They further explained such stories, as told by POC, are usually autobiographical in nature. Like personal stories, these narratives are situated within a socio-historical and political context. This approach allowed me to center the unique, rich, and textured stories of WOC OER librarians to more comprehensively understand their experiences. Using CRF as a conceptual lens challenged me to center their voices in the stories they told and value their experiential knowledge. Drawing on Delgado (1989) and Lawson (1995), Solórzano & Yosso (2001) identified four functions that counterstories can serve: 1) building community among the marginalized and putting a human face to educational theory and practice; 2) challenging taken-for-granted beliefs about the world and providing new ways to understand and transform established wisdom; 3) centering the lived reality of those in the margins and encouraging them to imagine a better world in solidarity with those in the same position; 4) teaching others that when elements from both the story and the current reality combine, "one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 475). Given this and the fact my study is exploratory, I considered the WOC OER librarian participants' stories foundational to understanding the racialized and gendered challenges they face navigating their work and to building a sense of solidarity among them.

My choice of counter-storytelling as methodology is informed by my goal to uncover, highlight, and center the experiences of WOC academic librarians doing OER work. First, as

mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, librarianship as a profession is predominantly white and female, with the presence of POC and WOC in the LIS field dismally low. The voices of WOC are therefore seldomly heard, represented, or valued in LIS literature (Leung & Lopez-McKnight, 2021) and the OER discourse (Crissinger, 2015; Dai & Carpenter, 2020). Counter-storytelling empowered the participants in this study to name their reality (Delgado, 1995) and "present stories of possibility" (Brayboy & Chin, 2019, p. 52) that can help create a community of support among WOC OER librarians and allies in higher education institutions.

Second, the counterstories of WOC academic librarians challenge and disrupt the majoritarian narratives prevalent in the LIS profession and the institutional practices that contribute to their marginalization. For instance, although the core values in librarianship uphold diversity (ALA, 2019), they only do so via the provision of resources and services. Indeed, diversity and social justice in OER creation have been the focus of research in recent years (Bali et al., 2020; Cox et al., 2020; Jenkins et al., 2020; Lambert & Czerniewicz, 2020). Yet, the discourse notably omits any commitment to increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of the library staff providing the resources and services, which in turn fails to reflect the diversity of the communities they serve (Morales et al., 2014). In the case of OER programs, the dominant narrative in the literature and in practice indicates the critical importance of academic librarians in the support, management, and sustainability of these initiatives. Yet, time after time, the experiences of OER librarians broadly and WOC librarians specifically are overlooked. I contend my participants' counterstories have the potential to not just challenge conventional wisdom and practices in academic libraries, but also to transform the conversation through the inclusion of their voices. Much like how CLS and CRT have used counter-storytelling to change laws and legal practices (Miller et al., 2020), I hope transformation can be realized in LIS that

might generate the long overdue action the profession needs. As Leung & Lòpez-McKnight (2021) asserted, “we are the scholars of our liberation” (p. 26). Inspired by this potential for change, I envision this study contributing to a better understanding of the experiences of WOC librarians in OER in ways that benefit the profession as a whole.

Third, centering the perspectives and epistemologies of WOC academic librarians foregrounds their lived experiences and allows for increased understanding of how they grapple with racial inequities in connection with their racialized and gendered identities. Since there are so few WOC academic librarians doing OER work, their collective stories can serve as an inspiration and reminder that they are in this together and are not alone in their struggles.

Fourth, the counterstories shared here can help us reimagine a world more welcoming of WOC librarians in academic libraries. A theme in my participants’ stories was the aspirations they had to make the profession better for WOC. In listening to what they had to say, I found this aspiration to be the result of their institutional marginalization, which is one more reason to uplift and value their lived experiences. Thus far, I have provided an overview of counter-storytelling as a research methodology and situated it as an essential tool employed by critical race theorists to center the voices of the marginalized. Next, I discuss my research design and the process I used for this study.

Research Design and Process

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Application

Before seeking research participants, I applied for IRB approval at Michigan State University (MSU). The Human Research Protection (HRP) Program at MSU requires IRB review for all proposed human subject research. This includes Ph.D. dissertations because dissertations are considered a knowledge generating activity. Upon receiving IRB approval, I

began contacting prospective study participants.

Participants

My participants are academic librarians whose job responsibilities involve overseeing, coordinating, or managing OER programs in higher education institutions. OER responsibilities can be full-time as part of their overall job descriptions or they can be assigned on a part-time basis. To participate in this study, individuals had to identify as non-white and as a woman. I recruited participants from several types of higher education institutions, including community colleges, public and private four-year colleges, and research universities. I utilized a purposeful sampling method to identify my participants, which was an appropriate strategy because it can "purposely inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 326). I began by recruiting from my professional network and community of practice through direct contact via email. As I am very active in the OER community, I know only a few WOC OER librarians currently work in this space. I have met some of them while attending open education conferences and while serving on various committees. I initially identified 10 WOC OER librarians as potential participants for this study and emailed them to ask if they were willing to participate. Of the initial 10, seven responded affirmatively.

Consent and Confidentiality

It was important for me to respect participants' time and commitment to my research project, so I sent an informed consent form to ensure the utmost confidentiality. The consent form format followed the IRB's requirements at MSU. The informed consent form was attached to the interview request email to participants to ensure they had all the important information about my research, including their rights. The document additionally outlined the purpose of my

study and the research methods I intended to employ. The form explicitly indicated participants had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point without explanation.

As an OER librarian and a WOC deeply embedded in academic libraries and the open education community, the stories they shared with me were treated with the utmost confidentiality. I provided a safe online space where we could freely engage in dialogue anchored on mutual trust and respect. Participants were also notified their real names and the names of their institutions would remain anonymous. To do this, I assigned each participant a fictitious name.

Data Collection

The stories gathered from my participants through in-depth interviews were my primary data source and served as counterstories for this study. Counter-storytelling methodology supports in-depth, unstructured interviews that are more likely to yield purposeful interactions so researchers can learn, discover, record, and understand their participants' experiences, feelings, and motivations (Coe et al., 2017). For this study, I conducted two one-hour virtual interviews with seven participants. The interviews were done using Zoom with both video and audio recorded separately. Since my data collection method utilized unstructured interviews, I asked open-ended questions to explore participants' experiences, feelings, motivations, and the meaning they made of them (Coe et al., 2017). Instead of asking scripted questions, I used prompts based on my research questions to guide conversation. As our in-depth conversations required my undivided attention, I actively listened to understand the stories being shared and asking follow-up questions for clarification and further learning.

The first interview was an opportunity for me to learn about the participant's background information, education, and professional history. In this conversation, they shared what led them

to the profession and who influenced their decision to enter the LIS field. Learning about their journey to librarianship and their path to OER work was a crucial part of this initial conversation. It provided me with a more comprehensive understanding of their origin stories and how their experiences inform how they navigate their work as OER librarians in academic libraries. It was also in this first interview that I asked how they perceived their race, ethnicity, gender, and other identities impacted their work and relationships within their institution. We additionally discussed the barriers and challenges they encountered in connection with their racialized and gendered identities. While the conversations in this first round of interviews felt heavy at times because of the stories participants shared of their struggles on the job, we connected over this experience because I have encountered similar struggles.

The second round of interviews was a continuation of our first-round conversations and focused more on participants' racialized and gendered experiences as academic and OER librarians. Participants were specifically asked how they perceived racism, ethnocentrism, genderism and other isms impacted their work and relationships within their organizations. Consistent with my research questions, these interviews uncovered the ways they see themselves as valued or devalued by their libraries and institutions. I also invited participants to share their unique contributions to OER work and how they move toward the transformation they hope to see in open education. Together, these two unstructured interviews afforded me time and space to listen to their stories and engage in meaningful dialogue around their lived experiences navigating OER work in academic libraries.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research is an iterative process that, according to Rossman & Rallis (2017), involves: 1) knowing the data (immersion); 2) organizing data into chunks

(categorizing and coding); and 3) assigning meaning or generating themes (interpretation). Although formal data analysis began after I completed data collection, I adopted an ongoing analysis that described and analyzed the data as I completed each interview. As suggested by Rossman & Rallis (2017), a continuous data analysis can be helpful to data analysis at the end of data collection. Saldaña (2011) noted analysis can be done faster and more effectively when one takes "cognitive ownership" (p. 85) of the data, which facilitates an intimate familiarity with the contents and insights. Throughout the data collection stage, I thus developed intimacy with my data by reflecting, asking analytic questions, and writing analytic memos.

I began analysis by carefully re-reading the transcripts generated by Zoom, the video conferencing platform I used to conduct the interviews. Zoom typically generates three file formats: the audio/video file, audio file, and a text file of the video. I saved all three file formats in a secure cloud storage and corrected the transcripts immediately after each interview. I conducted a thorough review of the Zoom transcripts because the software was not able to accurately capture our conversations. To ensure accuracy, I listened and relistened to the video recording to ensure the transcripts correctly reflected what participants shared. This process helped me gain familiarity with the data so I could effectively extract and identify portions relevant to my research questions.

In this stage, I also did some pre-coding. This involved highlighting, bolding, and underlining relevant passages in the transcripts. After revising the interview transcripts, I began my first round of inductive coding. Saldaña (2021) defined inductive coding as analyzing data with an open mind by "learn[ing] as you go" (p. 41) and spontaneously creating codes during the initial data review. The first pass of my data analysis involved In Vivo coding, which Saldaña (2021) referred to as codes taken directly from what participants have said. To manage my data

effectively and efficiently, I created an Excel spreadsheet with a list of codes taken directly from my participants and labeled it "preliminary codes." I then classified these codes to correspond to my research questions. From there, I mapped out emergent themes from the interviews for all participants.

I then created another Excel spreadsheet to map out my thematic codes. Creating codes based on the themes that emerged from the research questions helped me label, sort, and compare the data among the participants (Spencer et al., 2014). I used a process of reviewing, re-categorizing, and revising these thematic codes based on a more thorough analysis of participants' interviews and the places their narratives interconnected. As recommended by Spencer et al. (2014), I summarized each participant's narratives that corresponded to the thematic coding I created using their own words (in italics) followed by my own interpretation of the passage. Doing this allowed me to identify implicit and explicit relationships between the themes at the individual level (Spencer et al., 2014).

The thematic codes also enabled me to parse through my data according to five overarching sections that corresponded to my research questions. For example, my analysis yielded themes regarding the challenges participants faced as WOC academic librarians. Another theme was the challenges they faced as librarians doing OER and open education work. I also identified themes and sub-themes regarding the ways their work has been valued and devalued. The section on WOC librarians' contributions to the open education community space were mapped out to identify relationships and commonalities among their experience. My literature review and conceptual lenses together helped me understand and make sense of my participants' experiences. The CL and CRF conceptual frameworks were instrumental in delineating the institutional factors contributing to the WOC OER librarians' experiences in their daily work.

Finally, to highlight and center my participants' narratives, I devoted an entire chapter, Chapter IV, to their profiles. The profiles include their origin stories of how they entered the profession, as well as their influences and key points of their journeys in OER librarianship.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, I engaged established strategies for ensuring credibility and rigor in qualitative research. Following Creswell's (2014) suggestion of using source evidence to build themes, I provided detailed descriptions of the data using direct quotes from participants. I also employed consistent member checking and participant validation to determine the accuracy of my findings (Creswell, 2014; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Following member checking conventions, I gave participants copies of both interview transcripts and asked if they wanted any parts of the conversations removed. I also asked them to clarify some of the points they raised during our conversations. In terms of participant validation, I asked participants to discuss whether the themes and their descriptions were consistent with what they shared. My intention in doing so was to continually engage with participants by sharing my process and the emergent findings in the study.

In addition, I consistently engaged participants in the data analysis, interpretation, and findings stages so they could provide input along the way and to ensure transparency. I utilized a peer debriefer who "served as an intellectual watchdog" (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 113), especially while developing codes and themes for interpreting my findings. My peer debriefer, who is also an academic librarian, recently finished their doctoral program in higher education and their research aligns with critical paradigms. I further relied on a community of practice for a critical and sustained discussion of emerging themes and ideas related to my research (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). This community of practice is a network of scholars called Global OER

Graduate Network (GO-GN), which includes Open Education fellows. They conduct open education research and provide support and mentorship to doctoral students doing open education research.

Boundaries of the Study

It is important to note the findings of this study are not intended to provide a generalized experience of WOC librarians doing open education work. Instead, the findings are meant to center and give voice the experiences of seven women of color to gain a better understanding of the challenges they face in their work and their contributions to OER. One limitation of this study is that it only examined WOC librarian's experiences and did not include librarians of color who do not identify as women or female. Another limitation is that only those with a formal library degree were included in this study. There may be WOC leading OER initiatives in higher education who are not librarians, especially for programs situated beyond the purview of academic libraries. Finally, the number of participants was limited to only seven WOC OER librarians in the United States. Accordingly, the findings of this study do not attempt to provide an essentialized account of their experiences. In the next chapter, I introduce the seven WOC OER librarians of this study. The stories of the circumstances that brought them to the profession provide a glimpse of their journey to academic librarianship and eventually to OER work.

CHAPTER IV: PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Introduction

As this study centers the lived experiences of seven WOC librarians doing OER work in academic libraries, the current chapter consists of each participant's profile. In two one-hour virtual conversations via Zoom, they shared their stories of navigating, surviving, and thriving in academic libraries. We discussed our shared experiences of working in academic libraries and the different paths we have taken to get here. More importantly, participants provided a candid account of the challenges they've faced as WOC navigating a profession that can be both fulfilling and frustrating, especially in an environment of declining institutional support. There are only a few WOC librarians working in the OER field so I took great care in ensuring participants' anonymity. Each goes by a pseudonym and the names of the institutions they are currently affiliated with are not named. Their profiles here include the race and ethnicity with which they identify and the extent of their OER responsibilities. See Table 2 for a summary of this information.

Table 2

Participant Profiles

Participant Name (Pseudonym)	Race/Ethnicity	Nature of OER Responsibilities
Elisa	Afro-Caribbean	Part-time
Ilya	Indigenous	Part-time
Anissa	Latina	Part-time
Yumi	Asian	Part-time
Raya	Biracial (Latina & White)	Full-time
Alena	Black	Full-time
Erika	Asian	Full-time

As Table 2 illustrates, most of the participants do OER work on a part-time basis. This means they also have other assignments and OER is just a part of their overall job responsibilities. Only three participants had full-time OER and open education work in their job descriptions. The following section briefly introduces participants and their journeys to academic and OER librarianship.

Participant Profiles

Elisa

Elisa did not initially aspire to become a librarian. She dreamed of becoming a teacher after finishing her history degree. But midway through college, Elisa developed an interest in pursuing a law degree, even though it meant her leaving her country to complete it. At that time, she was not ready to go because, "I had to leave my country to go to another country to do it because it was not offered for the first three years in my country." So, she decided to stay and finished college instead. Her first foray into libraries came after graduation when she worked as a library clerical assistant at the same university. Elisa stayed there for several years but felt stuck. Although she was a college graduate, she had remained in the role of clerical assistant. Recognizing this discrepancy, the head librarian offered her a library assistant position. The promotion enabled Elisa to consider a career as a librarian and pursue an MLIS degree. She thought, “I can do librarianship because they get to be a teacher, and they get to help students.” Armed with a graduate degree in library science, she began an eight-year career as a business librarian in her home country.

When she decided to immigrate to the United States, she found employment at a community college, where she worked as a non-tenure track librarian in special collections. This job, fraught with challenges, led her to move to another community college in the same state.

Elisa currently works at a community college in the Southern U.S., where she serves as the liaison librarian for business, mathematics, and education. OER work became part of her job because of her experience supporting business faculty in adopting openly licensed and low-cost materials in their courses. Despite the long hours she has devoted to OER work, it is not part of her official job duties or title. The tacit expectation is that she will do the work of advancing the college's OER initiative. At the time of our interview, her institution had no concrete plans for creating a dedicated OER librarian position.

Ilya

When asked how she became a librarian, Ilya remarked, "I'm an accidental librarian." Like Elisa, she started as clerical staff, except she did so at a large public library in New Zealand. Ilya enjoyed the work for the most part and had opportunities to sit in library management meetings, where she took notes, organized files, and set up calendar schedules. Upon moving to the U.S., she found a job as a page or shelver in another public library and stayed there for six years. Throughout her tenure there, she applied for positions that would allow her to work in academic libraries but found it challenging to do so in a small town, where the pool was quite competitive. At that time, she hoped to move up from her minimum-wage job by applying to graduate school for an MLIS degree. Ilya had to contend with many challenges and make several sacrifices to attend her classes. While it pushed her limits, it also helped her finally land an academic librarian job.

Ilya is currently an academic librarian at a private university in the Western U.S., where she does reference, instruction, liaison, open access, open education, and OER work. Although advancing open education and OER are both in her job description and title, Ilya noted in our conversation "the problem is that everything [is] in my job description," suggesting she has less

time and capacity to do all the work equally well because she pulled in many directions. The multiple and sometimes competing priorities she must contend with in her job make it difficult to advance OER across her institution.

Anissa

Growing up in a small town, Anissa always dreamt of becoming a teacher. Ever since she was a little girl, she knew she wanted to teach and work with children. Attending Sunday school and summer camps exposed her to memorable teachers she wanted to emulate when she grew up. However, her aspirations changed when she volunteered at a public library at the age of seven. Anissa enjoyed the experience so much she became very interested in libraries. This initial interest was further reinforced when she met her school media librarian in seventh grade. They developed a close relationship over the years, as Anissa had the same librarian until she graduated high school. In our conversation, she remarked that this was unusual, "I'm a little different in the sense that I knew I wanted to be a librarian since I was a senior in high school." Anissa continued, "it really was just like a light bulb went off, and I realized that I had been in libraries my entire life."

She continued to work in an academic library throughout college and graduate school. Because Anissa had extensive library experience, she did not find it difficult to get an academic librarian job. She worked at various academic libraries in different states as a reference, liaison, and instruction librarian. Currently, she works as a collection development librarian at a private university in the Western U.S. Like Elisa and Ilya, OER is also part of her job duties. At the time of our interview, the university library she worked at had no plans of creating a dedicated OER and open education librarian position.

Yumi

Yumi's entry into the field of librarianship was accidental. In college, she was never one to frequent the university library and she described herself as someone who did not use the library regularly. Yumi explained, "I was never a good library user as an undergrad. I never asked for help, except I think in my third or fourth year, I finally did." It was in graduate school that she came to appreciate the value of the library, primarily due to her interactions with librarians who used their knowledge to help students. Her connections with the library staff ultimately influenced her decision to pursue an MLIS degree. Yumi said, "I think I could do this; I think I could teach other people what they didn't know. I say I'm uniquely qualified to speak to people who aren't natural help seekers." This realization set her on the path to becoming a librarian.

After interning in various academic libraries, Yumi landed a tenure-track librarian position at a public university in the Western U.S. The tenure process was challenging. Yumi noted, "I found that most of my time, I was working on my dossier." Despite this, she stayed at the institution for over three years before considering other options, including working at a community college. While librarians at community colleges are considered faculty, they are not required to do research and are instead expected to work closely with students. Yumi also learned community colleges pay more. As these aspects of the job appealed to Yumi, she began applying for librarian positions in the same state. Currently, she works at a community college in a large urban area on the West Coast and has been there for more than five years. She is the de facto OER librarian in the college, and her job title includes OER. However, her job description is mainly reference and instruction work. As such, it does not name OER work as an official part of her duties.

Raya

Raya's story of becoming a librarian echoes the stories of the other WOC librarians in this study. While she worked at an academic library throughout her college years, she shared, "it wasn't like my goal was to become a librarian or anything. It was just a job that I happened to get." Like most people who graduated during the Great Recession in 2009, finding a job was difficult, so she took a year off. During that period, she worked different jobs, including as a legal assistant. By the time she returned to school for her graduate degree, Raya decided to pursue her MLIS at a public university on the East Coast, where she also worked as a student employee in the library. As a student worker, she worked across different library units, which exposed her to the variety of work staff do and solidified her plan to stay in academic libraries. While completing her MLIS program, she also took on another graduate degree in instructional design at the same university. Raya felt the MLIS degree and the teaching and instructional design focus of the other degree were unique sets of expertise that would serve her well in future employment.

Raya's first job was as a residency librarian at a research university in the Midwest. She stayed there for two years before moving to her current job at another public research university in the South. She did instruction and outreach early on in her job but after a few years, applied to other positions. Currently, she is the OER librarian at the same university and is one of the few full-time OER librarians in the field with OER and open education in her title. It is a job she loves, and she expressed gratitude for the support she has received from library administration.

Alena

When I asked Alena about her journey to librarianship, she said, "I'm not a person who, you know, volunteered in libraries as a kid or had a librarian parent who knew they wanted to be

a librarian." After college, she attended a graduate school fair, and it was here that she became aware of librarianship as a field of study. She also took an opportunity to intern at her local public library, where she learned more about the library's inner workings. This experience inspired her to give librarianship a try by pursuing an MLIS degree. Alena went on to say, "I just like librarianship because it captured a lot of my different interests." After finishing her program, she approached the job prospects with a dogged determination and thoroughly researched all available options. Initially, she wanted to go the public library route but decided against it upon closer examination. She said, "it seemed like in academic libraries, there was a lot more room. There were usually higher salaries, usually more kind of technology-related work." During her graduate education, she had interned in her school's library, where she was exposed to scholarly communication work. She enjoyed this area of librarianship because it complemented her undergraduate journalism background. After graduation, Alena worked in various academic libraries across the country and did instruction, reference, and user experience in multiple departments.

Her current role as a scholarly communications librarian has enabled her to do what she is most interested in: information access, publishing, open access, social justice, and advocacy. While OER and open education are part of her job description, it sometimes feels like too much to take on alone because she also has other responsibilities. Even though the library has advocated for a dedicated OER librarian position for years, Alena explained, "it just hasn't happened." She still has hope the position will eventually materialize but until then, she is doing all the OER work on her own.

Erika

Erika's path to librarianship was something she could not clearly pinpoint due to her lack

of exposure to libraries growing up. When I asked how she came to be a librarian, she paused for a bit and explained:

> I never have a really articulate answer because I didn't grow up with librarians in my family, unlike a lot of folks I meet. They're librarians because their mom worked in a library. I don't have that experience, and so I didn't know I wanted to be a librarian. I just graduated college. I have an English degree. I was like, I don't know what to do next.

Similar to the other WOC OER librarians I interviewed for this study, Erika came to the profession accidentally. She remarked, "I was like, I'll go to grad school. I was just kind of mindlessly wandering, and so I just picked going to grad school in library science and didn't really know what that would entail." During library school, she got the chance to work in an academic library and had internship opportunities that enabled her to take on reference and instruction responsibilities. After graduate school, Alena worked at a university in the Southern U.S. and stayed there for nearly three years as a reference and instruction librarian. This institution also exposed her to the emerging field of OER and open education.

Like most librarians of color, Erika participated in a diversity residency program at a research university. These programs typically range from two to three years and provide training for early career librarians in the different areas of academic librarianship (Boyd et al., 2017). After completing the program, the university library where Erika spent her residency created a full-time position that she eventually transitioned to. Currently, she is doing open education, OER, and equity work full-time. She also performs instruction and provides curriculum support for students and faculty.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented a brief introduction to the WOC OER librarians who agreed to

be part of this study. Their individual profiles provide a glimpse of their journey to academic librarianship and OER leadership. Their origin stories indicate that the motivation for entering the profession was influenced by their exposure to librarians and employment in libraries prior to or during college. Through this brief overview, we gleaned the extent of their OER roles at their respective institutions. Three participants have full-time OER or open education positions, while the majority only have it as part of their job responsibilities.

The next chapter discusses the findings of the study. Through counter-storytelling, I provide a narrative illuminating how being WOC impacts participants' work as OER librarians, including the challenges they face and how they experience their work as valued or devalued, and the unique contributions they bring to the open education and broader open community.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS

Introduction

I designed this study to uncover the lived experiences of WOC academic librarians doing OER and open education work. My goal was to examine how WOC navigate their work as academic librarians, cope with the challenges that come with being WOC OER librarians, and explore their unique contributions to OER work using critical librarianship (CL) and critical race feminism (CRF) as conceptual lenses. I was primarily motivated by the absence of research about this specific group of WOC academic librarians, as well as by a lack of understanding about the issues and challenges they encounter in OER work.

As discussed in previous chapters, little is known about librarians' experiences of leading campus-wide OER initiatives designed to advance equity and student success (Colvard et al., 2018). By using counter-storytelling to center the experiences of WOC, this study disrupts the majoritarian narrative that portrays librarians as "heroes" and "champions" celebrated for advancing affordability and access primarily through their leadership of OER programs. While those narratives are true and backed by research, they fail to capture the challenges some librarians, particularly WOC, face. The labor inherent in managing and leading OER programs from the standpoint of the WOC involved in these undertakings has not been thoroughly examined. Moreover, despite how the OER space has been framed as liberatory, my findings suggest this was not always the case for the WOC participants, as they encountered many challenges in advancing socially just and equitable knowledge creation. I thus offer my participants' narratives as valid knowledge that challenges the prevailing narrative by foregrounding the perspectives and contributions of WOC while also highlighting the institutional barriers they face and the unique contributions they bring to OER work.

As I began my interviews with the seven participants, it became clear their experiences with OER work could not be disentangled from their experiences as WOC librarians navigating academic libraries and educational institutions. My conversations with participants specifically highlighted their racialized and gendered experiences in relation to whiteness and white supremacy culture in academic libraries. They shared heartfelt and honest stories throughout our interviews. As I began processing what they shared with me, I could not help but see myself in their accounts. As a WOC academic librarian researching other WOC academic librarians, their narratives reflected and validated what I have experienced in my work. True to the dialogic nature of critical feminist researchers, I engaged participants in conversation such that we both shared stories in a conversation that flowed both ways. As a reminder, the research questions that guided this study are:

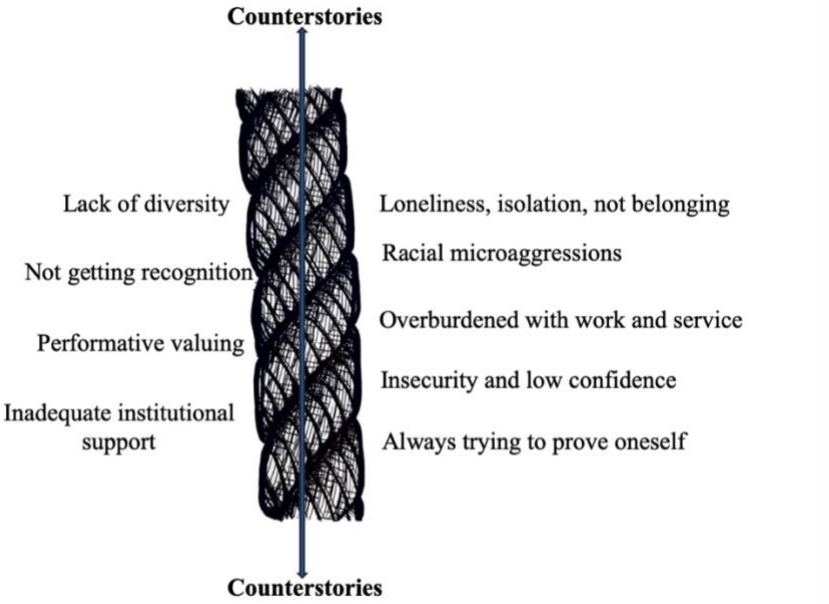
1. What challenges do WOC OER librarians face in connection with their racialized and gendered identities?
2. In what ways do WOC OER librarians see their work valued or devalued?
3. What are the unique contributions of WOC librarians in OER work?

The findings are presented thematically and organized according to my research questions. As I analyzed and made sense of participants' lived experiences, I began to see their stories as threads weaving in and around each other. Together, their stories ultimately formed a braid, which Cobb (2013) referred to as "the story about the problem, told collectively" (p. 14). In this study, the collective experiences of the WOC OER librarians form three major interconnected threads. As shown in Figure 2, the counterstories they shared as WOC navigating whiteness and white supremacy culture in academic libraries were the core of the braid

Embedded too in their counterstories were the challenges they experienced doing OER work in their professional lives.

Figure 2

Common Threads and Braided Narratives



I conceptualized this thread as representing their shared stories which I used to weave the themes that emerged from their collective narratives. The first thread in the braid represents the first research question. In this section, participants discussed the challenges they navigated as academic librarians embodying their identities as both women and people of color. The second thread in the braid represents my second research question, which aims to uncover and attend to the duality of being simultaneously valued and devalued by their institutions. The narratives in this thread further depicted participants' challenges in their work as OER librarians. The third thread in the braid represents participants' unique contributions to OER, open education, and the transformative influence they bring to students who benefit from these initiatives. I conclude with a summary of the findings, which acts as a foreword to Chapter VI.

Thread One: The Struggles of Being a Woman of Color Librarian

The first research question in this study aims to uncover participants' struggles as WOC academic librarians. My conversations with the seven participants revealed what the literature has already laid bare—that academic libraries can be a marginalizing, hostile, and unwelcoming for librarians of color (Alabi, 2015a, 2018; Brook et al., 2015; Hankins, 2015; Thornton, 2001). Throughout our conversations, it became evident their experiences were interconnected based on the similar themes that emerged from their individual narratives.

Racial Microaggressions

Participants shared their experiences with racial microaggressions in their everyday work and how these acts impacted them as WOC academic librarians. Racial microaggressions are "commonplace verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to people of color" (Sue, 2010). They are usually invisible and carried out by well-meaning or well-intentioned people, who are mostly unaware they are inflicting damage and trauma on people of color (Sue et al., 2007). The findings indicated that my participants experienced racial microaggressions in their everyday work. It showed up when their coworkers asked about their origins or when they mistook them for someone else. It also manifested in ways that harmed them from well-meaning colleagues unaware of their actions. In the stories that follow, the participants talked about their experiences with racial microaggressions and how these incidents affected them.

As a Mexican American, Anissa has always been a proud Latina but has had to constantly deal with people questioning her origins. She reflected on this during our conversation and shared these questions were more prevalent when she was working in North Carolina. When

asked about her origin, she always responded, "I was born and raised in Florida, and I'm from the panhandle." But she inevitably received a follow-up question: *"Where are you really from?"* At first, she would brush it off, but when she was asked about it more frequently, she became upset and angry. Having to endure repeated questioning regarding her country of origin made her feel conflicted about being an American:

> You know I'm very, very proud to be an American, but at the same time, sometimes that pride in the country is lowered because I've always been questioned about my identity. And whether I'm from here or not, it's definitely a difficult thing socially to navigate.

Anissa's experience was emblematic of what women of color, particularly Latina and Asian librarians, must deal with in the workplace, where colleagues ask where they are from because they assume they were not born in the United States or that they are not American citizens. Her reaction to questions about her country of origin demonstrated how members of historically marginalized groups develop coping mechanisms to direct or indirect racism (Gonzalez-Smith et al., 2014). Asian American librarians similarly encounter questions about their origins that evoke and amplify feelings of being a perpetual foreigner in this country (Hosoi, 2022).

Raya, on the other hand, experienced a variation of this. Upon starting her academic library career, she had to deal with people assuming she was Hispanic and spoke Spanish. As a biracial woman, these assumptions left her perplexed and surprised:

> The question just did not make sense to me because I've never spoken Spanish fluently, you know. So, I was like, no, I could not say anything else because my brain was trying to figure out what was going on. But it was like he saw me, and based on what I looked like, he assumed that I grew up speaking Spanish, or maybe was born out of the country,

or something like that. Which again, there's nothing wrong with that. But you're completely judging that based on first impression of what I look like and what you see.

Similar to Anissa's experience, assumptions about Raya's origins and the language she spoke were made by people based on her physical appearance. For Raya, questions and assumptions about her identity played to her annoying albeit flabbergasting experience regarding a mistaken identity. She also shared a story about being repeatedly mistaken for another Latina colleague at her library. It was not a one-off incident Raya could ignore because it happened for more than a year. She explained there were "at least five different people, [including] someone in my department, who clearly knew who I was but called me by the other person's name." It was an awkward situation that made her feel very uncomfortable. She wondered if her colleagues also confused white women with other white women.

Ilya's experience with lateral violence at her library illustrated another way racial microaggressions manifested in participants' professional lives. Lateral or horizontal violence is a form of workplace incivility that entails "repeated offensive, abusive, intimidating, or insulting behavior, abuse of power, or unfair sanctions that make recipients upset and feel humiliated, vulnerable, or threatened, creating stress and undermining their self-confidence" (Vessey et al., 2010, p. 136). For instance, Ilya revealed experiences of harm from white women coworkers and other WOC librarians, who took her under their wings as informal mentors. These mentors stole her ideas and took the credit for themselves. Ilya further encountered lateral violence from younger colleagues, some of them people of color, who acted as gatekeepers in her workplace. She felt they only pretended to be supportive and empowering, which Ilya acknowledged was "much more damaging than just straight-up racism from white people." She considered this type of microaggression more toxic because it was disguised as solidarity:

> Because I've experienced both, and you know, at least when you're encountering, say, a middle-aged white woman, you might have some idea of what to expect. That person doesn't make any particular proclamation of friendliness. And so, the lateral violence I've experienced has been much more harmful in that way.

She went on to describe how such experiences made her question whether working in academic libraries was for her and whether she could realistically stay in the profession:

> I'm not here to play the game. I'm not going to harm somebody else so I can climb up this ladder that was not meant for me. You know I like libraries, but I don't care about them so much that I'm willing to do that. So, you know, there've really been times when these behaviors have made me feel like I need to exit librarianship.

Ilya's experience aligns with research on how discriminatory practices directed toward academic librarians of color contribute to their low retention rates and desire to leave the profession (Walker, 2015). It also aligns with research on how racial microaggressions cause intense feelings of not belonging that are detrimental to the overall well-being of WOC librarians (Alabi, 2015a; 2015b).

Feeling Alone, Isolated, and Excluded

As discussed in previous chapters, WOC librarians are disproportionately underrepresented in academic libraries. Thus, they often find they are the "only one" or one of the very few, which contributes to loneliness and isolation in their workplaces (Anantachai & Chesley, 2018; Chou & Pho, 2017; Hankins, 2015; Hankins & Juarez, 2015; Thornton, 2001). During my interviews with participants, most agreed feeling lonely, isolated, and like they did not belong were challenges they regularly endured, mainly because they were the only WOC in their libraries. Ilya, an Indigenous librarian working at a private university, shared this sentiment:

> The first thing I'll say is that it's very lonely and it's very isolating. It's very difficult to build a community when you're the only person in your institution who does what you do, and you're the only person of your ethnic group or your race in the library and sometimes even the university.

Ilya's comment here underscores the struggles Indigenous librarians must confront as the least represented in academic libraries and higher education. Librarians identifying as Indigenous makeup less than 1% of the total number of LIS professionals (Andrews & Humphries, 2016). The loneliness, isolation, and not seeing yourself reflected anywhere make the work life of Indigenous librarians exceedingly difficult.

One way this isolation manifested and reinforced itself was through the tacit expectation that Ilya be responsible for all Indigenous students at her institution. Of this, she remarked, "if there's ever students of your race, it's like, oh, well, we know someone we can put you in touch with regardless of what my actual expertise is, and I'm just expected to vibe with that student." For Ilya, this implicit expectation to connect with Indigenous students at her institution might have something to do with looking young and presenting herself differently than most of her colleagues, who dress much more formally than she does. Because of this, she was often mistaken for a student when working at the reference desk. She emphasized that being hypervisible in a predominantly white space contributed to how she was perceived and treated in the workplace. She felt alone, isolated, and lonely as the only Indigenous librarian in her institution and was sure the few Indigenous students attending her university felt alone, too. She observed Indigenous students were often left out of discussions during meetings. This feeling of being erased affected her deeply:

> I will be in a meeting, and somebody will bring up, for example, the experiences of Black students or Black faculty and how we need to really focus on boosting those numbers, being mindful of those folks' experiences. And it's like, yes, we need to do that, but I never had this kind of talk about Latinx students. I never had this kind of talk about Native American students. I never had this kind of talk about Pacific Islander students. All of these other groups were just erased.

Ilya's remarks underscored her frustration about how students from other racialized groups were ignored by her institution. In the above quote, she was disheartened because none of the conversations happening in meetings were directed towards other minoritized groups (Latina, Native American, Pacific Islander) which made her feel more alienated and excluded.

Erika, an Asian American woman working at a library in the Southern U.S., similarly felt alone and isolated in her library. She specifically felt this in relation to other WOC librarians there, explaining, "I don't actually have a lot of people of color, women of color to talk to about things, and so I do feel like it's frustrating and lonely sometimes." Despite their shared identities as WOC librarians, she shared she was not particularly close to them and attributed it to a generational gap, given her coworkers were significantly older and had worked in the library for many years. This dynamic made Erika feel she did not belong and was out of place. For instance, during meetings, she was very vocal about her opinions and often asked questions about the library's policies and practices. She did this because she was new to the organization and wanted to understand how and why things worked. This starkly contrasted with her colleagues, who had been in the library for a long time and did not question why policies and processes were created and developed over the years.

Elisa also felt alone and developed a low sense of belonging in her library. It was her first job since moving to the U.S. and her first experience working for a community college. The college was a predominantly white institution and as an immigrant, she felt othered. Elisa shared how this othering affected her: "I was a minority there, and I felt like I didn't belong. And they were just making up numbers like I was just there to fill, to check that diversity box." Elisa's story demonstrates the problem with performative diversity in higher education. When one embodies diversity, they can become an instrument for institutional compliance and the organization can say that they have ticked the box or that their efforts are enough when they are not (Ahmed, 2018).

Importantly, participants' feelings of loneliness and isolation from being one of the few librarians of color in their libraries also extended to their OER work. My conversations with the women in this study indicated they did not see themselves reflected in this space because of the lack of representation of people of color. Ilya remarked, "most of the people I see in OER are white. It kind of replicates librarianship [in] that most of the people I see in leadership positions in OER are white men." Even at a community college where the student body is typically more racially diverse, Elisa, who is the only WOC on her OER team, explained, "I'm going through everyone who is on our OER team right now, and I am the only person of color." Anissa also shared this observation, confirming the higher numbers of white women doing OER work while librarians of color remain underrepresented. Erika has also experienced being the only one or one of the few WOC OER librarians in the workplace. She further mentioned there are few WOC are on her campus in general, noting, "if they're here, they leave after a couple of years, so that's really hard. So, I think that just bringing more perspectives to our community at large is helpful."

While having racial diversity in OER is critical, it is even more critical in leadership roles. Anissa specifically spoke of this importance in terms of the need for WOC academic librarians' leadership in OER programs:

> When you have different voices and different perspectives, then you just bring different ideas. You bring different solutions, and you think about things in a different way, and I just think as women of color librarians, we just want the best for our students in general, and I think that comes across very strongly.

This lack of WOC librarian leadership in OER impacts and is impacted by low retention rates for WOC, since many end up leaving the profession due to isolation and a lack of support. Alena, a Black librarian working at a large research library, knew early on librarians of color leave academic libraries at alarming rates (Neely & Peterson, 2007). She eventually found herself in the same situation, questioning whether to stay or leave librarianship. At first, she considered applying for leadership positions in libraries but found it difficult to reconcile that none were compatible with her values. When I asked her to elaborate, she talked about the prevailing practice of hiring librarians of color as department heads to demonstrate academic libraries' commitment to diversity. However, she observed that when librarians of color assumed leadership roles, they were expected to engage in diversity work and service more than their white colleagues, even though they did not necessarily want to take on these responsibilities by themselves.

The tension between wanting to apply for leadership positions to increase WOC representation and the expectation to lead diversity and equity work alone made Alena reconsider whether this path was for her. She remarked, "none of it really resonates with my values like it could, and there's so much onus to be the change agent." Alena's statement is

consistent with Minter and Chamblee-Smith's (2016) assertion that there is an implicit expectation for library leaders, especially WOC, to act as change agents. Yet, there is also a tendency to overlook and ignore issues affecting the communities in which librarians of color are embedded. Alena, for instance, felt tokenized in the organization. Even when her library tried to recruit racially diverse staff, she believed "there's not a lot of regard for actual inclusion, or doing things that would be radically different from the way that we do them." Alena felt that her library needed to do more than just recruit librarians of color and instead create an environment where they can thrive and succeed.

Alena also shared that her identity made her feel simultaneously hypervisible and invisible. On one hand, she stands out because she looks different. On the other hand, during meetings, she so often felt ignored that she developed strategies to mitigate the experience. She explained, "sometimes I would take a white guy to a meeting, knowing they would respond differently than if it was just me." In discussing this experience, she realized such a strategy could be self-defeating. For instance, Alena mentioned that when a white male supervisor attended meetings with her, the feeling of not being seen was even more heightened:

> Sometimes you can tell they're not even doing it on purpose. But [I tell my supervisor], no, this person was mostly speaking to you. They were referring to you. They deferred to you. My supervisor was like, oh, did that guy get back to you after the meeting? And I was like, no, he emailed you. He didn't email me, like he forgot that I was there.

What Alena describes here—being ignored during meetings by white colleagues—is a common experience for WOC. It has led to feelings of marginalization and invisibilization, low morale, and dismal retention rates for historically marginalized academic librarians (Alabi, 2015b; Kendrick, 2017; Kendrick & Damasco, 2019). Incidents like the ones she narrated by Alena and

other participants were reminders of the isolation many WOC academic librarians must contend with in their daily work.

Low Self-Confidence and Insecurity

In her previous position at a community college, Elisa received negative performance evaluations for three years. She had never received poor reviews in previous jobs, so every time her supervisor issued an evaluation, she questioned her worth and competency. She recalled, "…it was crushing. In that job, I felt like I was a non-performer. I was told I was a non-performer." The experience repeatedly eroded her confidence. In hindsight, she realized she received these poor performance evaluations because she was expected to do other people's work, which led to burnout and insufficient time to complete her own responsibilities. She said her former colleagues took advantage of her precarious job situation as a non-tenured new hire and dumped their work on her shoulders. Upon further reflection, she remarked, "I was taken advantage of by other people who would put their work on me, and then I can't fulfill my work in time because I'm doing theirs." Although Elisa knew she was being exploited, she did not speak up about it because she was still a foreign worker at the time and was receiving veiled threats suggesting her immigration status might be impacted if she pushed back. With her status still uncertain because she was not an American citizen, Elisa felt unstable, insecure in her job, and powerless to speak up.

Low self-confidence and insecurity also arose in participants' experiences with scholarly research and publishing, which are essential for tenure and promotion (Damasco & Hodges, 2012). For example, when Anissa and another WOC colleague whose first language was not English wrote an article and submitted it to a library and information science journal, they received feedback from reviewers exclusively focused on their grammar and writing style.

Anissa felt disheartened because the reviewers opted to point out grammatical errors without engaging their ideas. She described feeling at a loss, noting, "we've kind of reached our max, and if we've done our best writing and we're getting criticized for it, so what do we do now?" In desperation, they asked a white woman colleague with more publishing experience to look at their draft. The colleague edited their paper and was then added as an author. They resubmitted the article and finally got approved for publication. But by then, Anissa was already traumatized by the process and felt demoralized and inadequate. Insecurity also began to creep in, dampening her drive to publish beyond this critical first foray into scholarly writing. Anissa's experience with publishing illustrates the biases inherent in scholarly communication and the dominance of white males in peer review, editorial ranks, and citations (Roh & Inefuku, 2016). In the LIS field, Roh (2018) stated the commonality between publishing and librarianship:

> Like librarianship and other feminized professions that are female-dominated in numbers but male-dominated in control and leadership, there are fewer women at the top of the career ladder than there are at the bottom. The two professions have more than a love of books in common; they also share a lack of gender and racial diversity. (p. 428)

In other words, librarianship and publishing mirror each other in that they embody a culture of whiteness that privileges knowledge and what counts as knowledge from the lens of the white majority culture.

Finally, it was found that lowered self-confidence and insecurity also occurred in accordance with age and career stage. Anissa, for instance, began working in academic libraries at age twenty-four and found her age to be a disadvantage. She was younger than most of her colleagues and not much older than the typical graduate student at her university. Because of this, harbored insecurities, especially because her job entailed working with more senior faculty.

She recalled, “I was a little scared because of that age gap, like I was wondering if faculty would take me seriously, me being a Latina woman. At the time, business faculty tended to be more white male, so I will say, at the beginning, I was very intimidated.” Anissa expressed that her insecurity made her work harder to gain the business faculty’s respect as a result, which ultimately improved her confidence on the job and her relationships with the faculty over time.

Burdened with Service Work

The overburdening of WOC with excessive service work that impedes their capacity to perform their job responsibilities, conduct research, and pursue valued service opportunities has become a familiar narrative. For WOC academic librarians, it means being saddled with diversity-related service and committee involvement, where labor is mainly invisible and unrecognized. If not addressed in a timely fashion, this practice can be very taxing and may lead to burnout, stress, and physical and mental health issues.

Ilya, for example, shared she was often pushed into providing the care and service work her male colleagues were not expected to do. Much of this work was crucial to maintaining workplace relations and collegiality:

They never have to do the teaching or do the Saturday morning outreach tasks. They never have to pick up the birthday card for the office worker or host the afternoon tea for the person who’s retiring. So, I’ve really seen traditional gender roles play out in libraries, which is, it’s gross, and it’s disappointing.

The emotional labor involved in care and service work was even more glaring when she observed women disproportionately shouldered teaching, outreach, and administration. At the same time, her male peers made high-level policy decisions that impacted the day-to-day experience of their work. Ilya was almost indignant when she said, “I’m seeing my male peers

really coast and be able to be a lot more casual in their dress, a lot more casual in their demeanor. They are not held to as rigorous standard." Relatedly, Erika discussed how her male colleagues benefitted at the expense of the women in her organization by receiving undue praise for group efforts. She mentioned that even if a project was done by a team in the library, the lone white man on the committee was the one who received accolades from the administrator. Erika addressed this with the administrator, pointing out in an email that the project was the work of the whole committee, not just their male colleague. The white woman administrator felt badly and apologized to her but not before the exchange morphed into a long thread of responses and follow-ups that required significant emotional labor on Erika's part:

> It's definitely a lot of emotional labor because we're wasting our time thinking about whether or not this count. And then the extra effort it takes to call them out and thinking about the impact of how they deal with you because I feel like there's so many times I just have to deal with usually white women apologizing. [It's] just so much work trying to manage that process, so do I even want to like to engage with that, or should I just let go?

The gendered burden of service work can also arise in situations where WOC alone are expected to do diversity work for an entire organization. For example, Erika, whose job title was equity and open education librarian, was expected to do all the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work. She shared that many of her colleagues considered DEI to be the job of a select few in the organization. It was common for her to hear them say diversity was not their job. Frustrated, she explained:

> So much of our profession treats DEI work as an additive, right? We have a diversity librarian, or we have a director of diversity or whatever, and so they're responsible for it,

> and it's very much of a compliance model. I just think the reality is that the folks in our libraries, not just me, like maybe one or two other folks who do a little bit of equity work, we are the ones who are seen as responsible for the organization's equity work. And I don't think that's reasonable.

Erika's sentiment here underscores the challenges faced by WOC who do diversity work because in most cases, they are expected to do the job without organizational support. Research has shown WOC academic librarians are implicitly and explicitly expected to perform additional labor for diversity work (Anantachai et al., 2015; Chou & Pho, 2017). In illustrating this burden, Ahmed (2018) posited that in such situations, "you have more to do when there is only one of you" (p. 335). In addition to the aforementioned forms of gendered service work, WOC and other librarians of color who are the only ones in their organizations, and must bear the added burden of diversity work, even if their skills and expertise are not diversity-related (Juárez, 2015).

Always Trying to Prove Themselves

Several participants told me they often felt they had to prove themselves worthy of their positions in ways their non-WOC, non-POC colleagues did not have to. One reason for this was immigration status. For instance, Elisa's positionality as an immigrant and foreigner in this country made her feel she had to constantly prove herself. She explained:

> When I migrated, I always felt like I had to prove myself. I always felt like I was different from everybody else, and I needed to prove that I belonged in a way, so that kind of motivates me [and makes me feel] I can't say 'no' to someone.

Elisa said her character and upbringing made her strive to be the best, do her best, and prove she could do the job, even though her plate was overflowing. This mentality was consistent with her

personality of doing work as quietly as possible. She was never the loudest person in the room and preferred to let her accomplishments speak for themselves.

In addition to immigration, age was also a factor in participants' stories of proving themselves. Like Elisa, Anissa had to constantly prove herself and show people she could do everything expected of her. She dealt with imposter syndrome early in her library career in part because she was young and inexperienced:

> Especially in the first year of my career, I didn't want people to think that I got my job because I was a diversity candidate. I felt that I had to prove myself my value, and I had to work harder than anybody else to show why I'm here.

Anissa was eventually able to prove herself and ten years later, she is still working at the same institution. She took pride in her accomplishments and believed her talents and skills were valuable to the library. Her colleagues finally realized she was not a diversity hire, and Anissa ended up gaining their respect.

The experiences shared by Elisa and Anissa illustrate the burden WOC feel as tokenized individuals in academic libraries. Although they were highly qualified, there seemed to be an invisible weight on their backs that made them feel they had to prove themselves as exceptional and deserving. Even in cases where WOC ascended to higher level positions and gained advancement opportunities, their success also "leads to a double bind of debt and doubt, an additional burden to perform not just to prove ourselves, but on behalf of others" (Roh, 2018, p. 436). This feeling was evident in Elisa's and Anissa's stories, as both felt they deserved to be where they were because of their competence. However, the resolve to prove themselves became overwhelming and a burden they shouldered in their everyday work. In the following section, I discuss my participants' experiences regarding their role as OER librarians. While the previous

thread shed light on the challenges WOC academic librarians faced in connection with their racialized and gendered identities, this thread examines how they manifested the OER space.

Thread Two: The Challenges of Women of Color Librarians in OER Work

OER programs are institutional initiatives that support student success, access, diversity, and equity (Colvard et al., 2018). Indeed, a number of open education researchers have argued for these resources to address inequity and social justice (Bali et al., 2020; Cox et al., 2020; DeRosa, 2020; Hodgkinson-Williams & Trotter, 2018; Lambert, 2018). Yet, there can be a disconnect between institutions' purported commitment to this and their actions in higher education, more broadly, and in academic libraries, specifically. Most OER initiatives focus on a program's affordability by replacing publisher textbooks with OER. However, these same initiatives often ignore and devalue the labor this transformation requires. Participants' accounts in this thread illuminate the issues my second research question attempts to uncover regarding the challenges they face in seeing their OER work as valued or inadequate and performative. Together, their stories expand the discussion on challenges WOC must confront in leading and managing OER programs, as well as how the actions and inactions of their institutions impact their ability to perform their jobs and advance OER programs.

Performative Valuing

As discussed in previous chapters, most of my participants do not have OER as their primary job responsibility. Meanwhile, Raya, who does OER work full time, described feeling supported by her library and university administration. This was particularly evident in how she described her successes:

So, they've gone out and got funding for the OER program. Specifically, I've been able to hire a grad student. They got our additional OER librarian position approved. It's like they're

trying, that there is an effort to make it more sustainable, which I feel like they do acknowledge we want this to actually be successful and to make it sustainable.

In here, Raya talked about concrete ways her library was able to demonstrate support for the OER program. Having a graduate student and another OER librarian as part of the team was a step in the right direction because she was not a team of one anymore. In addition to being a full-time OER coordinator, Raya also served as department head of the newly implemented open education unit. Her dean created a position for a full-time librarian and a graduate student. Ecstatic with this level of support, she shared:

I feel like the work is valued and I'm seeing that through things like the provost was on board early on, so she supports OER. The fact that we're able to advocate for resources and get a whole new position and things like that, it's clear to me that OER is valued here and I feel like my work is valued here as well.

In Raya's view, having a team overseeing an OER program was an indication of support in that her dean recognized the importance of the work and the amount of labor involved leading a university-wide initiative. She felt grateful because having a dedicated OER team was something that not many institutions have. In fact, a fully staffed OER department in an academic library was an unusual arrangement because the work is typically performed in addition to a librarian's other responsibilities.

The notion of OER librarians as experts also came up in the findings. Even when OER was not part of their job title, participants were expected to be experts in OER. For example, Elisa's colleagues considered her an expert in the area. She was surprised when faculty consulted and relied on her expertise, which made her feel supported and valued, even though her college could not create a full-time OER librarian position. She remarked, "I think I've been treated

fairly. I think I'm looked up to, especially where OER is concerned, and my colleagues come to me, or my boss refers to me as the OER expert." Elisa was deeply committed to the job and wanted to do more than what she was already doing. She explained that if she could just devote all her time to OER work, she could do more and expand the scope of her expertise, "the way I see it and the way other people see me, they value the work I do and to some extent, I think I could always do more." Yumi's experience was similar to Elisa's, except that she appreciated the recognition from the faculty more than administration. She was grateful that the faculty she worked with on OER projects appreciated her efforts and valued the expertise and advice she provided them. Anissa also felt her institution valued the OER work that she had done. She explained some administrators on campus regarded her work as necessary:

> I feel the value in the work I do through these conversations and thankfully, library administration is very vocal about putting a value on it. And you know I do get a lot of support and appreciation from library administration for the work that's been done.

This statement by Anissa reinforced her feelings of being valued especially since it came from the library administration. While she knew that her work was important, receiving words of support made her feel all the hard work she did matters.

On the other hand, in cases where participants felt their OER work was valued, some remarked their work was only valued and recognized to a certain extent. Anissa explained, "the university administration is supportive. They give us the thumbs up and a pat on the shoulder, you're doing a great job, but that's about it." For Anissa, these actions were not enough because the financial commitment from the library's budget was not much. She expected the university to allocate more substantial funding to the OER program, especially because they seemed to value it. Anissa also wished the administration supported OER adoptions and open pedagogy practices

so faculty could create more diverse and engaging textbooks. She noted her vision for the success of the program:

> You know, form faculty group support systems, give tools and resources. If they came from the top and trickled down, that would be the ideal, like my best dream come true. Because then that would help the sustainability, and it wouldn't just be the library leading this initiative. I think there would be much more institutional buy-in and overall support, so I just wish we had a bit more acknowledgment and support from the university administration.

In this statement, Anissa articulated the level of support she hoped her university can provide. She wanted the OER program to be a key priority at her institution with university administration's explicit support and endorsement. Anissa was confident that by having this level of institutional buy-in, faculty can do more than just replacing expensive textbooks with OER. Instead, faculty can engage in open pedagogy practices that can make the learning experience better for their students.

Similar to Anissa's experience, Ilya believed her institution recognized her contributions but also had reservations regarding the extent of its recognition. She said, "I know that the work is valuable, and I know that at surface level, administration and campus administration value the work." Still, she felt this stated value was more performative because the university administration's words were not always aligned with their actions. Ilya had seen the prevalence of performative valuing at her university and thought it was tied to the lack of institutional support for the OER program:

> And when I talk to faculty, you know they pretty easily will say, oh yeah, that's a good idea, like that's good. So, on a surface level, I see that it's valued. But…when I test that

> surface is where it starts to dissolve a little bit, and I think it boils down to we just don't have enough staff.

Ilya expressed frustration regarding the staffing challenges at her university and knew this problem was affecting the expansion of their OER program. Alena similarly believed library administration appreciated her OER work. However, she felt her university failed to provide the OER program with the resources necessary to make it more sustainable. Ideally, she wanted a clear indication of the university's commitment to supporting OER, particularly the program's DEI goals. Yet, she was apprehensive because DEI work was under threat at her university in response to political pushback and state-sponsored legislation implemented to eliminate such programs. Alena exhibited a worried tone, noting:

> We have to communicate these things at the higher level of the university. Like one, they want these metrics, and they want a return on investment; they want to see, you know, prestige. That it's just as good as prestige journals, and it's just as good as like Cengage textbooks. If they start to suppress like equity and diversity stuff, what are we supposed to do as a library?

Alena was concerned about the future of the OER program at her institution and felt that at some point, this initiative might be discontinued due to its DEI focus. She was also apprehensive about how they can measure the impact of OER and show that these materials are comparable to publisher textbooks.

Overall, participants' experiences pointed to a conflict between how their campus administrations valued their OER contributions and the level of support administration provided. While there were explicit acknowledgments of the importance of their work, administrations were reluctant to provide the financial and staffing support necessary to sustain the OER

programs and ease participants' workload. Thus far, I have presented participants' accounts of their experiences with being recognized, supported, and valued for their leadership of OER programs. However, although it appeared most received support and recognition for their work, the feeling of being truly valued was limited by a lack of resources and support. The following section discusses the challenges participants faced and the conflict they experienced in feeling simultaneously valued and devalued by their institutions**.**

Not Enough Time to Do OER Work

A recurring concern among participants, especially those doing OER as an additional job responsibility, was lack of time to do the work. For instance, Ilya pointed out she could not perform all aspects of her OER work because of her many other responsibilities, such as one-shot instruction sessions, reference, outreach, service, scholarship, and repository management. Ilya remarked, "the problem is that everything is in my job description." Even though she wanted to spend more time on OER, she could not because of the other expectations of her position. Ilya continued, "if all I was focusing on, or even just half of what I was focusing on was OER, it would be such an improvement." Yumi felt the same, stating there was not enough time in her day to do OER work because of the added responsibilities she had to juggle. She could not fully immerse herself in the work because "I don't have designated OER time."

Elisa had similar experiences as the designated person in charge of the OER program, even though this was not in her title nor job description. She confessed she felt overloaded with college-wide OER advocacy and support while also serving as a liaison librarian to faculty. Although she advocated for and recommended hiring a full-time OER librarian, her college repeatedly bypassed creating a new position. She learned that while her institution considered the

OER program necessary, other positions within the college were higher priority for administration.

Raya, on the other hand, had a full-time OER librarian position. Despite this, she still struggled to do the complex work of leading the university's OER program. Fortunately, her library dean advocated for more funding to increase staffing support for the newly created OER unit. This show of support was crucial for Raya and demonstrated the importance of a dedicated OER librarian managing the program:

> You can't really develop it and see all the possibilities and support faculty, or do the outreach, or whatever the focus of your program is if it's just a half-time position. A half-time position is a half-time position.

In here, Raya underscored the difficulty in leading an OER program due to the complexity of the work. Even as a full-time OER librarian, she mentioned feeling pressured to meet high expectations. She explained:

> Even with me having a full-time position that's leading our OER program, it feels like it's not enough. It's like this is supposed to be a campus-wide program that directly contributes to our student success goals, which it does, but this is a university-wide thing and there's just one person driving it. Who else is in a position like that?

The expectation she had to do it all affected her ability to fully immerse herself in the role and flesh out all the necessary components of running an OER program. During our conversations, she expressed concern over having to start new projects only to pause halfway and not finish because of time constraints.

Erika, who had similar experiences, framed the issue of not having enough time for OER work in terms of her institution's culture of urgency. She said:

> We definitely have a culture of always [being] busy. We don't normally have time to do this and that, so I do think that when there are new ideas or something, I think people welcome them but they can't really commit to them in a full way.

Here, Erika described being pushed and pulled in multiple directions, such that she had to juggle equity, open education, and instruction work. Like most participants, the pressure to do all the work and do it well was overwhelming, whether they did OER half- or full-time. Job overload was also felt by the WOC OER librarians of this study regardless of institution type. These findings suggest a strong correlation between not having enough time to do OER work and not having dedicated OER positions (Dai & Carpenter, 2020). Participants expressed frustration with their inability to dedicate more capacity to OER work because of limited time, resources, and staff support needed to perform the wide-ranging scope of the job. These constraints further affected their ability to fully support faculty, expand services, and sustain other programs.

Ambiguous Nature of OER Work

Managing and supporting OER programs is complicated and involves various campus stakeholders within institution-specific contexts and environments (Ippoliti et al., 2021). These dynamics make the work less clear-cut and thereby open to ambiguity. Yumi, an Asian American librarian working at a community college, was unsure of the expectations for her OER work, even though open education was in her title. Yumi's role was not clearly spelled out in this regard, which made deciphering expectations difficult and ambiguous. She explained that administrators were unwilling to designate an OER point person and that there was no organizational structure in which to situate the program. For example, Yumi mentioned a lack of coordination between her and faculty who were duplicating the work she was already doing. It was exacerbated by internal politics and turf battles with faculty who wanted to exercise

programmatic control. This territorial conflict between her and the OER task force required her to constantly assert herself in discussions to let them know she possessed the expertise to lead the program:

> So, I think what we really need is infrastructure. I need someone to say who is the authority on OER. If people needed to get help, where would they go right now? That would be helpful, and just having it be a job responsibility and telling me what percentage I could do that work instead of just [doing] it in between your other work.

As the above indicates, Yumi struggled with being excluded and powerless at her institution, such that it hindered her ability to work more collaboratively with colleagues in serving students' learning needs.

Like Yumi, Erika revealed her job responsibilities were so unclear she had significant difficulty determining priorities, especially because multiple colleagues performed different aspects of OER work. Of her predicament, she shared, "a lot of the work that I do is trying to figure out what my work is. Honestly, I feel like we try to do certain things, but I'm sort of excluded from those things." Furthermore, Erika believed the advocacy, training, and awareness aspect of her OER work was unsupported and not funded by the library. Yet, the library's budget supported the grant program she was not in charge of running. She expressed her frustration about this situation, "it's a lot of advocating for yourself, so it's just kind of exhausting, but you just have to keep advocating for yourself."

Alena also struggled with the ambiguity of her OER work, particularly regarding how to influence campus stakeholders to sustain and further the program when her role was so unclear. Alena, however, believed these constraints allowed her to be more creative and flexible. She talked about growing professionally despite the limitations thrown her way:

> I think I've definitely been able to get a lot of experience managing people and speaking with the provost's office and the president. I think, especially being someone who presents as younger and reserved, I think people are surprised by how bold I can be. But you're going to have to be like that to do OER and open advocacy.

This testimony and participants' experiences shared above underscored the importance of engaging in dialogue with supervisors to ensure job responsibilities and expectations were spelled out. As Dai and Carpenter (2020) have suggested, OER librarians must be more proactive at the onset to minimize ambiguity by clarifying what is expected of them and the level of support and time commitment needed to effectively perform the work and ensure success. In the following section, I explore participants' stories about feeling valued and recognized for their work. However, while many felt valued by their institutions, they simultaneously had to struggle with the limits and conditions of that valuing.

Inadequate Institutional Support for the OER Program

Institutional support is one of the keys to a successful OER program because it demonstrates a commitment to sustainability. Such support typically includes funding for staff positions, professional development, and faculty stipends (Dai & Carpenter, 2020). However, in most cases, academic libraries and universities lack adequate financial resources to advance the growth of their OER programs. Elisa, for instance, believed her college was not doing enough to support her. She explained they would request a new OER librarian position but it was never approved because they did not consider the role pivotal to the program's success. Frustrated, Elisa remarked, "if the librarians who are there right now can do that job, just add on more to whoever is there without valuing what we currently do." Anissa also felt her university did not fully support the OER program. She was very familiar with the many challenges of

implementing an OER program at a small, private university, so she hoped there would be more support from the administration. Yet, according to Anissa, the support was sorely lacking and affected the needed buy-in from faculty.

It was apparent from participants' accounts that the infrastructure they needed their institutions to provide had much to do with financial, human, and administrative resources. Still, some participants equated the receiving of institutional support to shifts in organizational culture. Erika held this view because she wanted to do OER work the right way but her organization did not support these plans. Specifically, she wanted a more comprehensive approach to their OER program via the development of goals and an assessment framework. However, she found implementing them difficult because assessment was not part of the organizational culture and was thus not supported. Her current job situation exacerbated this problem, as "most of it ties to the fact that I get to do the parts that are underfunded, under-resourced and that's the biggest problem, that's the devaluing." Erika also attributed the situation to her feeling "…people are not recognizing our contributions, our work, but at the same time, I think, for a long time, I didn't really recognize them." Alena's experience echoed Erika's in that her university administration also failed to provide the funding necessary to support and sustain the OER program. While her administration said they were on board, Alena felt "OER is treated as just a fad, a trend, and a shiny new thing." Like many participants in this study, she felt her work was devalued as a result: "I don't think my work is valued because I feel like it's not aligned with what people feel libraries are there in a university to do, and what it is that they're there to advocate for." On the other hand, she saw advocating for more OER program support at her institution was less critical due to other pressing issues such as compensation and salary restructuring.

In sum, participants' accounts of how they were supported and recognized for their OER work indicated they were valued. However, while the recognition and support they received from key campus decision-makers were helpful, most agreed it was insufficient. Several participants believed the work could not be done in isolation from the broader institutional context. Without the strong backing of library leadership and the full weight of the university's resources, these WOC OER librarians were left to figure out how to make the initiative more sustainable in the long term on their own. In the following section, I discuss the contributions of WOC to OER programs in more detail.

Thread Three: The Contributions of Women of Color to OER Work

The previous threads unraveled the stories of how WOC study participants navigated their racialized and gendered identities as academic librarians and OER leaders. While they faced numerous challenges in OER work, participants cited several reasons for staying and working through those challenges. Foremost was the belief they bring a unique perspective to OER work. Our conversations showed their lived experiences enabled them to empathize more with the barriers students faced regarding textbook affordability. Participants also used their influence to help guide faculty OER creators in doing their work with diversity and inclusion in mind. In this thread, participants shared their contributions and why they continue to do the job despite their struggles. They also discussed possibilities for challenging the knowledge creation process, transforming OER work in ways that center students, and upholding the values of equity and social justice. Altogether, the findings in this section provide deeper insights into how WOC librarians perceived themselves as valuable contributors and partners with faculty, strong allies for students, and staunch proponents for diverse representation in OER.

Empathizing with Students' Challenges

Working closely with students was what Yumi appreciated most about her job as an OER librarian. She found fulfillment in talking to students about the textbook affordability initiative at her institution and the wider state system. Not many students knew they could search for free or low-cost courses, so they were grateful and appreciative when they finally learned about the initiative. Yumi shared she particularly identified with the challenges her students were facing, explaining how her dad was a first-generation student and a farm worker who picked grapes in the fields. She considered the struggles she experienced growing up as not much different from the challenges her students contend with:

> I don't forget that, and I think about that all the time when I work with students. And I think it's really easy to forget where you came from. You can say you remember what it's like, or you're advocating for students, but so many people I work with don't do that.

She knew that as a WOC, her shared experience and empathy for student's needs helped her become a better advocate for their interests:

> I use my identity in my relationships with my students. I really try to be empathetic to that and I also use that to call out or call [in] other people who aren't aligning with what they're saying. I'm like, okay, you're saying that, but this is still a really big issue, so how do we overcome this? And it has also helped me find allies or co-conspirators or whatever you want to call them—people who have the same idea and see the inequities that are happening.

She further explained the importance of finding people who shared her goal of providing culturally relevant course materials that reflect students' lived experiences and their local contexts. She noted, "I try to find the people whose ideals and actions align with mine and also

try to get people to see where their biases are coming in." This was important for Yuma because she works in community with educators who amplify diverse voices. She believed that through this community, she can make a difference to the lives of their students.

Anissa shared this feeling as well. Whenever she saw students facing financial difficulties, she related to them because she had experienced the same problems in college:

> When I see these students, even though it's a private institution, not everyone is, you know, rich. There are students who are struggling and have financial burdens, but they want to be here. They want this education and they want this career for themselves, and I see myself [in them]. College for me was such a big transformation. It was a way for me to get a career and move forward, and so, actually, that part of my story is intertwined with gender and class.

Anissa believed in the importance of education because it was her ticket to a better life. As a Latina, first-generation, low-income student, college was instrumental to the financial stability she is currently experiencing. Yet, for Anissa, OER was not just about saving students money. She talked about the critical need to center social justice in the work of OER librarians: "let's not only make an OER for the sake of saving students money, let's make this the best it could possibly be." Anissa's view here amplified what many open education scholars have argued in the literature, specifically that OER programs should anchor their goals on equity and social justice rather than affordability and access alone (Bali et al., 2020; Cox et al., 2020; DeRosa, 2020; Lambert, 2018; Lambert & Czerniewicz, 2020).

Ilya, too, brought a deep understanding of students' challenges to OER work. She opened up, saying, "I know what it's like to choose between textbooks and food." As someone who had to make sacrifices to be a library professional, Ilya knew first-hand the difficulties students

struggled with at her institution. She explained that her identity as an Indigenous librarian and her experiences as a student enabled her to be an advocate for their interests. Of this, she remarked, "I know what I'm talking about. I know the needs of the students probably a lot more closely than some of these other folks." She was also acutely aware of how textbook affordability programs could make a difference to low-income and other underrepresented students:

> You know, we are a private school in one of the most expensive cities in the country, and our students really need any help that we can give them. At least at our campus, we talk a lot about social justice, so I think we do have a bit of a moral obligation to do so.

Similarly, Raya felt her identity and lived experience contributed to her understanding of the students' plight at her university:

> I do feel like something I bring to the work that's beneficial from my identity is being able to relate to our students or knowing that experience of being a person of color coming from a lower-income background and being a first-generation student. I get that, and a great thing is I feel like a lot of our faculty get that, too.

Together, these testimonies make evident that participants' lived experiences were critical to understanding and empathizing with the challenges underrepresented students faced in higher education. The barriers were not just about financial difficulties but also the way students of color were not often reflected in OER materials created by faculty. This issue is further discussed in the following section.

Advocating for Diverse Perspectives in OER Content and Creation

First and foremost, participants agreed they brought more diverse perspectives to their workplaces by virtue of their lived experiences as WOC academic librarians doing OER work.

When asked what they bring to the OER space or field, Elisa answered with an emphatically: “I bring diversity.” As an immigrant and a person of color, she used her positionality to influence faculty OER creators to incorporate more diverse content and perspectives. When working with faculty authors, she reminded them to ensure students of color saw themselves reflected in class materials:

> As someone of color, when I look at the content of these courses, it doesn’t really reflect diversity. So, what I do is I tell them your classes are very diverse. See if you can change, even the names of the subjects and the contents. Stay away from the Jean and the Mary, all these Eurocentric names. Try to bring in more Hispanic names. Try to bring more Black American names. Try to bring in more American Indian names. Just try to make it more diverse so students can relate to it.

As the above indicates, Elisa saw a gap in the learning materials faculty used in their classes. She was therefore intentional in using her role to ensure teachers knew how to create and revise OER content to be representative of their diverse classrooms. Moreover, she knew firsthand how invalidating it can be for students to not see themselves in their learning materials:

> In textbooks, I feel OER can bridge that gap. It can make our students feel more included. And if I could, as a diverse person, give that perspective and encourage faculty to be more diverse in their content creation, then yes, I would feel accomplished doing that.

Elisa felt very strongly about having educational materials that reflect the diversity of students because she also experienced learning from textbooks where she did not see herself. She knew that through her work with OER, she could support and encourage faculty to create materials where students feel validated and seen.

Like Elisa, Anissa also believed she, as a WOC OER librarian, was uniquely positioned to help advocate for the inclusion of voices and identities not typically represented in learning materials. She shared:

> Just because it's open doesn't mean it's being inclusive or including the DEI perspective. So, I think as a woman of color who has been very active in various POC communities and DEI initiatives, I can bring that to the table. I can bring in that perspective of, like, okay, well, how are we going to make this successful for students and have it be representative and make sure diverse voices are represented for you? Can we bring other perspectives and be critical about how information is produced?

Yumi similarly believed OER materials needed to reflect students' experiences. She expressed particular concern with how traditional textbooks were unaffordable and did not necessarily resonate with students or enhance their learning. For her, removing barriers to affordability was deeply entwined with the incorporation of perspectives that reflect students' diverse and intersecting identities:

> I think our students deserve to have access to free and/or low-cost books that speak to them. So, one of the really important things is that we're a majority-minority campus, so our students are predominantly non-white. And so a lot of times, the content of our books don't necessarily resonate with a lot of students.

Yumi also underscored the importance of ensuring OER practitioners integrate what students already know and be mindful about building in opportunities for them to contribute to knowledge creation. In the literature, this practice is often referred to as open pedagogy or open educational practices, which maximize the benefits of OER and allows educators to customize content for their students in ways traditional textbooks cannot (Bali et al., 2020; Crissinger,

2015; Cronin, 2017). Among participants, advocating for OER to make learning materials more reflective of the rich diversity in the students who utilize them was critical to their work and leadership.

Embodying a Critical Perspective on Open Education

In this thread, I presented how participants' lived experiences enabled them to effectively empathize with the students they serve. When I asked what they offered to the OER space as WOC, they unanimously agreed they brought a critical perspective to knowledge production. For instance, during a conversation with Yumi, she mentioned how important it is that librarians practice open education and interrogate how OER work can contribute to social justice. She found OER was always regarded as inherently good but understood it could perpetuate inequities and reify whiteness:

> When I talk about open or open education, I always try to situate it in the greater open movements because I think it's really important to recognize the contributions of the Global South. I would argue that open in the Global South is much more. It's a much more beautiful thing, where it really is about access to information and knowledge building and community. We've transformed into something that still is capitalistic, is still rooted in whiteness, in Western perspectives, which is not good. We're perpetuating the things that we're trying to get away from.

Yumi's comment here extended Willems and Bossu's (2012) assertion that while OER is "oftentimes espoused as enabling educational equity, the reality is not always the case" (p. 185). The current body of OER is predominantly comprised of North American with Western perspectives that leave scholarship from other regions largely unrecognized (Cox et al., 2020; Hodgkinson-Williams & Trotter, 2018; Lambert, 2018; Seiferle-Valencia, 2020). As such, Yumi

felt it necessary to uncover why this problem persists and figure out new ways to overcome it. She continued, “I don’t want to just do things because that’s how we always do them. And that’s kind of how we operate in both libraries and in the open.” In this way, Yumi expressed a new way of doing OER work that echoed Seiferle-Valencia’s (2020) call to center librarians’ marginalized identities toward an intentionally engaged OER practice that interrogates hegemonic knowledge creation and Western epistemologies.

Alena shared Yumi’s position regarding the need to decenter Western perspectives in OER materials. She felt OER should be a vehicle for building and sharing knowledge that incorporates non-majoritarian perspectives. By critically examining OER’s epistemic orientation, she believed, “we could lay a very different foundation with this perspective.” Furthermore, Alena knew having more people of color, particularly WOC, in the OER space would productively extend current conversations on knowledge construction. She continued, “now we are talking a bit more about knowledge and how we think about knowledge, decolonizing it, making it anti-racist, just a deconstruction.” As a WOC and Indigenous person, Ilya also approached open education with a nuanced understanding of open access and OER. She said it was crucial for her to provide faculty the freedom to decide whether to assign open licenses to their intellectual work:

> So, when the faculty kind of say, oh, I need to publish in the right journals, or I need to do things the correct way. You know, for some of them, that might be the first time they’re really grappling with questions of gatekeeping or questions of privilege, and what happens if you don’t have the correct kind of credentials with you? So, I think we can offer a little more in that regard.

Here, Ilya highlighted the importance of being pragmatic in advocating for openness, as not all faculty can afford to publish under the open access model. In most cases, requirements for tenure and promotion necessitated faculty publish in top-tier journals with high impact factors (Roh, 2018; Roh & Inefuku, 2016). As a scholarly communication librarian, Ilya was able to advise faculty on their options and give them the agency to decide how to proceed.

Another critical take on OER came from Erika, whose approach was less about open licenses and more about how OER can catalyze culturally sustaining and open pedagogies. The transformation she discussed in our conversation leverages OER's affordances to improve teaching and learning, since open education, particularly OER, has the potential to facilitate socially just educational practices (Hodgkinson-Williams & Trotter, 2018; Lambert, 2018). Open educational practices or open pedagogy, where the emphasis is not only on the content but also on enabling teachers and students to be co-creators of knowledge (Bali et al., 2020; Crissinger, 2015; Cronin, 2017), challenge educators, including librarians, to interrogate existing practices that perpetuate inequality and encourage critical understandings of the unintended harms OER can potentially bring (Crissinger, 2015; Seiferle-Valencia, 2021). Thus far, I have presented findings from this study that speak to WOC academic librarians' contributions to the OER space. In the next section, I discuss another contribution: the impact each has had on the field in building solidarity with and among other WOC.

Building Connection and Community

The open education community has been instrumental in providing support for OER librarians overwhelmed by the demands of their work in ways that make them feel less alone and isolated (Dai & Carpenter, 2021; Gong, 2022). As a WOC, Alena felt the emphasis should be on the people doing the work, along with the collaborating instructors and students' experiences. As

an open education practitioner, she considered OER to be a means for students to achieve more than savings on textbook costs: "the savings is like scratching the surface since we know so much more about what open can do and how it can support people." She asserted one way to achieve this is by changing how librarians approach OER work by going beyond the current emphasis on measurable outcomes and cost savings:

> I think we get really stuck on the infrastructure and the policy, and the savings…and that's very neoliberal. It's white. And I think that having women of color perspectives would bring in so much more of the dynamic. I mean like community.

In addition, Alena further explained how the human connection in WOC and POC community benefited her immensely. The conversations in these spaces allowed her to forge a nurturing, caring, and empowering sense of mutual support:

> Having those conversations at the Open Ed [conference], because I feel those are really amazing spaces to talk about the shared joys and frustrations. Because it's not just frustrations, there's a lot of joy. I think there's a mutual understanding that we need to build community amongst women of color.

Ilya also shared Alena's view about the importance of having a supportive community. She believed building and nurturing it meant taking up space and allowing other WOC to enter the field. It was essential for her to work towards empowering other WOC so they too can effect change:

> I want us to make space for more folks interested in scholarly communication, OER, repositories, and digital collections. I don't want to shoehorn anybody into those positions because it makes us look good. I want to help people interested in that work who might not otherwise have a foot in the door.

Alena expressed her commitment to bring more WOC to the open education community by providing opportunities that enable them to be active participants. Erika spoke similarly, particularly in terms of how being in a community inspired her. She explained:

> When I look at a lot of our stuff, I'm mostly influenced by women of color and people of color writing because a lot of the scholarship focuses on the community and the care aspects, and so it really broadens the way I look at OER.

Still, Erika believed the OER community was more open to working towards social justice and change than the broader LIS profession. She remained optimistic that "the OER community seems a little bit more willing to invest in concepts like community, so that's why I think I'm still drawn to it a little bit more." It was evident from the findings shared here that being in a community and building a circle of support was critical to participants' overarching goals to transform the OER field and make room for others to be part of the space. In a field where few WOC are present, nurturing community was thus as important as and necessary to their work of serving educational needs.

Summary of Findings

Taken together, the findings of this study provided a clear picture of the everyday lives of WOC OER librarians and how they experience academic libraries and open education work. While my participants faced numerous incidences of racialized and gendered oppressions, they managed to find fulfillment in their work. Moreover, even though some aspects of OER work made them feel less valued and unsupported, they persisted because they believed their presence and efforts made a difference and contributed to the change they wanted to see in the field. Overall, the findings yielded crucial insights into how their positioning in OER work helped

them move the field to be more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. The next chapter summarizes and analyzes the findings, their implications, and recommendations for research and practice.

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study centers and highlights the lived experiences of WOC academic librarians leading and supporting OER programs. Taken together, my participants' stories illuminate how they navigated academic libraries and the demands of OER work while embodying their identities as WOC. In this chapter, I discuss the findings according to my three research questions. I begin by discussing my findings and the key takeaways. I then situate them alongside the existing literature and apply the conceptual lenses of critical librarianship (CL) and critical race feminism (CRF) I used to frame this study. I also discuss the implications of my study for expanding research and improving practice. Finally, I put forward my recommendations and concluding reflections.

As a reminder, the research questions driving this study were:

1) What challenges do WOC OER librarians face in connection with their racialized and gendered identities?

2) In what ways do WOC OER librarians see their work valued or devalued?

3) What are the unique contributions of WOC librarians in OER work?

The Unbearable Heaviness of Being a WOC in Academic Libraries

In this section, I discuss the challenges my WOC librarian participants faced while navigating their roles in academic libraries. In analyzing the data, I discerned two key takeaways: (a) the lack of diversity and pervasive culture of whiteness in academic libraries and open education contribute to their feelings of marginalization, and (b) racial microaggressions reinforced participants' sense of otherness.

In answering the first research question, I found most participants encountered marginalizing practices connected to their positionalities as historically minoritized librarians

working in predominantly white institutions. I have learned from my participants' narratives that to be a WOC in a profession steeped in whiteness and white supremacy culture can be spirit-crushing. Many of the women in this study shared they experienced racial microaggressions in their daily work as academic librarians. As most are the only or one of the few WOC in their libraries, these incidences made them feel utterly alone, unseen, and like they did not belong. Across different institutional types, participants' stories highlighted their struggles navigating the double bind of racism and sexism. They specifically described having to work through incidents in which they were made to feel less than or inadequate, usually because they were held to a different standard than their non-WOC colleagues. Consequently, they felt they had to prove themselves by demonstrating they were deserving and exceptional. Additionally, the expectation to do service work and the burden of being pigeonholed into diversity-related activities hindered their capacity to do their primary job responsibilities. These, in turn, profoundly affected their performance and productivity at work, as well as their overall well-being.

The findings from this study are consistent with what the existing literature has detailed and documented regarding the experiences of WOC in academic libraries. Indeed, participants' stories emphasized what has already been established in the LIS field regarding the prevalence of racial microaggressions that WOC academic librarians must constantly endure (Alabi, 2015a, 2015b; Alabi, 2018; Arroyo-Ramirez et al., 2018; Chou & Pho, 2017). However, I further argue racial microaggressions are manifestations of whiteness and white supremacy culture that make it challenging for librarians of color to feel included (Espinal, 2001; Espinal et al., 2018). The findings that pointed to participants' feelings of not belonging and not seeing themselves reflected in the work environment affirm previous studies that found whiteness in librarianship to be a complete system of exclusion dominated by white, heterosexual, capitalist, and middle-class

perspectives (Bourg, 2014; Espinal, 2001; Galvan, 2015; Hall, 2012). Moreover, since whiteness is the foundation of academic librarianship, lack of diversity continues to be the norm despite recent efforts to diversify the profession. The OER space suffers from the same issue, as OER initiatives are mainly led by librarians and predominantly embedded in academic libraries. It is evident from participants' narratives that the OER space replicates the lack of racial diversity in the wider profession of librarianship. Such limited representation of people of color in OER meant participants did not see themselves reflected in the field. As Erika shared, this stark underrepresentation of WOC in OER can be especially pronounced at open education-related conferences and meetings: "a lot of those spaces are very, very white, and the conversations tend to focus on things that white folks think might be important, and that's how I think conversations get shaped." Ilya and Alena also expressed concerns about the OER community's tendency to replicate the white supremacy culture pervading the broader librarianship profession. The findings thus underscore how whiteness shapes the narratives scholars have argued open education perpetuates (Almeida, 2017; Crissinger, 2015; Willems & Bossu, 2012).

In examining the system that enables and normalizes racial microaggressions, whiteness, and other forms of oppression in academic libraries, I turn to the conceptual lens I used to frame this study. CRF is a framework that centers the stories of WOC OER librarians and thereby challenges essentialized depictions of women's experiences, particularly ones exclusively rooted in the perspectives of white women, who dominate the LIS profession. Similarly, CL enabled me to interrogate the power relations, processes, and policies contributing to the marginalization of WOC OER librarians. The narratives shared by my participants surfaced the many ways they encountered racial microaggressions in their everyday work and the impact of these incidents on their capacity and wellbeing. In listening to participants' counterstories, CL provided me with a

lens to uncover, expose, and understand how libraries as institutions and librarianship as a profession often upholds systems of oppression (Drabinski, 2019; Garcia, 2015; Preater, 2020; Rapchak, 2021). Using CL, this research challenges majoritarian narratives that regard OER work as a means to make education more accessible, equitable, liberatory, democratic, and student-centered. CL specifically helped me push back against the current trend of omitting WOC academic librarians' labor in LIS research by surfacing participants' hidden labor through their stories. This not only exposed the inequitable challenges they face in the workplace, but also helped me better understand how institutions can shift to support them. These findings imply an acute need to examine the systems and structures that contribute to the marginalization of WOC in academic libraries. The findings also have the potential to promote meaningful conversation about race and racism in academic libraries from the perspective of historically minoritized librarians. Their experiences can be instructive in bringing awareness to well-meaning colleagues who may be unaware their actions contribute to perpetuating racial microaggressions.

The Unspoken Reality of OER Work

The second question in this study asked to what extent my participants felt valued or devalued by their institutions in their role as OER librarians. I identified two key points from the findings that begin to get at an answer: (a) participants believed their work was essential and recognized by campus decision-makers but also felt it could be performative because of an enduring lack of institutional support and infrastructure, and (b) role overload and role ambiguity are significant challenges that impede their capacity to do OER work effectively. These points challenge dominant narratives that disregard the experiences and labor of WOC leading and supporting OER programs.

In general, I found participants perceived their work as appreciated. For instance, Elisa, Yumi, and Anissa felt valued when their library director or deans acknowledged their ability to support faculty, advocate for students, and gain stakeholder buy-in. They also felt supported and recognized when university administrators and other key decision-makers provided OER funding for more full-time positions, faculty grants, and professional development opportunities. My findings in this regard are supported by the literature, which hails libraries and librarians as integral to the success of OER programs (Bradlee & VanScoy, 2019; Bueno-dela Fuente et al., 2012; de Jong et al., 2019; Jensen & West, 2015; Okamoto, 2013; Salem, 2017; Todorinova & Wilkinson, 2020). However, even when they were acknowledged and valued for their work, the findings simultaneously indicated those feelings were tempered with cautious optimism and uncertainty. For participants, support from library and university administration still fell short in that it did not adequately set them up for success in their jobs. This finding affirms the research by Jordan (2023), a WOC library faculty member herself who had to contend with inadequate institutional support and low commitment to her OER creation project. I found it was common for participants to feel this lack of institutional resources and infrastructure reinforced their sense of devaluation. Such complexities present a clear internal conflict: on one hand, participants felt valued because their efforts were supported and acknowledged, yet, on the other hand, participants felt their work was also devalued because they perceived acknowledgement from key decision makers could be performative lip service.

Perhaps the most surprising finding is that whether doing OER work full- or part-time, participants felt overwhelmed, overworked, and overcommitted. As the participant profiles in Chapter IV indicate, more than half are doing OER in addition to other responsibilities. Since they cannot do OER work full-time, they end up working long hours and juggling multiple tasks

to keep up. Participants like Raya and Alena, whose jobs are solely dedicated to OER work, also found the work overwhelming because they are essentially a team of one. Both Raya and Alena come from well-resourced public research institutions but still face unrealistic workloads that are too much for one person to bear alone. This phenomenon was replicated in the experiences of participants at under-resourced institutions that do not have full-time OER positions. They, too, had to contend with supporting OER programs that require coordination across multiple units on campus. The work further required participants to engage with key decision makers on campus despite little to no support from administration. This dynamic adds layers of complexity to the already complicated work my participants navigate in their work as OER librarians.

Role overload and role ambiguity, the second key takeaway from the findings, posed significant challenges for participants. The stories of the WOC OER librarians in this study clearly illustrate how role overload and role ambiguity impede their work and contribute to their labor exploitation. As mentioned in the previous section, participants across all institution types shared experiences of being overloaded, overwhelmed, and overstretched. Those from large research libraries that have more financial capacity to fund additional OER positions shared how even when their work was solely focused on OER, they still had to deal with role overload and role ambiguity. Likewise, those from smaller universities and community colleges with limited to non-existent financial resources to create full-time OER positions shared the same sentiment. The expectation to do more with fewer financial resources for both the faculty who adopt and create OER and the WOC librarians who support these programs is consistent with the literature that shows librarians' OER labor is often invisible and undervalued (Crissinger, 2015; Dai & Carpenter, 2020; Ettarh, 2023; Jordan, 2023). My findings thereby extend existing research on the devaluation of faculty OER labor, as those who do this work are not rewarded in the tenure

and promotion system, nor supported with the grant funding necessary to advance and sustain the work (Crissinger, 2015; Jordan, 2023).

Based on my findings, there is a correlation between the role overload experienced by the WOC OER librarians in this study and the role ambiguity inherent in their positions. As Yumi, Alena, and Erika attested, unclear expectations around job responsibilities, including their inability to set boundaries, called into question how power dynamics operate in academic libraries. Due to chronic understaffing, participants were forced to take on more work than is realistically manageable. Ilya captured best what most women in my study felt when she remarked, "the problem is that everything [that has to do with OER work], it's in my job description." Despite relentlessly advocating for a full-time position, participants found themselves caught between competing institutional priorities and financial commitments that pit OER programs against other campus projects. This environment directly hindered their capacity to lead OER initiatives and further contributes to role overload.

Applying the tenets of my conceptual framework allowed me to make meaning of my participants' experiences with OER work. CL was a useful lens for analyzing my findings given it exposes and critiques how libraries and the institutions in which they are embedded failed to set participants up for success and sustainability in OER work. In reviewing how their efforts have been simultaneously valued and devalued, it appears systemic inequities and the inability—or unwillingness—of those in power to challenge and change said inequities perpetuate the problems my participants continue to face. CL's focus on surfacing hidden labor and its implications for WOC OER librarians aligns with discussions on how labor has been invisibilized in previous studies (Crissinger, 2015; Dai & Carpenter, 2020; Jordan, 2023). The challenges participants dealt with in OER work also affirm Dai & Carpenter (2020) and Ettarh

(2023) regarding the relational nature of the job, wherein participants are expected to work with multiple stakeholders on campus and serve as program coordinators, all while operating without any actual power. Since it is difficult to see tangible and immediate results in the relationship-building my participants perform daily, their labor becomes hidden and invisible. Moreover, while my WOC participants' primary role entails coordination and facilitation of OER programs, they lack decision-making power, which resides at levels far above their positions. The findings of this study thus suggest decision makers provide insufficient support for implementing the changes needed to improve and ensure the initiative's sustainability.

CL also helped me examine the findings of this study through consideration of how vocational awe and invisible labor in OER work perpetuate inequitable systems, practices, and exploitation of those who manage and support these programs. Vocational awe is a set of beliefs and assumptions that hold libraries are inherently good and beyond reproach, which has led to intractable problems within the field, such as burnout, job creep, and under-compensation (Ettarh, 2018). Ettarh (2018) asserted institutions (e.g., libraries) can use vocational awe as a weapon for exacting obedience, allegiance, and sacrifice from its workers. I extend this assertion and argue vocational awe is deeply intertwined with OER work and that as such, OER work as it is done now contributes to the devaluation of labor by WOC OER librarians. The reality of OER work, as I have learned from participants' narratives, is complicated and fraught with inequities. Yet, the notion that OER work is inherently good and a means to achieve a more open, accessible, affordable, and equitable education comes at a cost. This framing functions as a smokescreen that obscures advocates from seeing how it creates inequitable and exploitative spaces, especially the labor it takes to achieve this vision. The WOC OER librarians in this study who led and supported these programs despite role overload, time constraints, and lack of

institutional resources and recognition all spoke of their deep commitment and passion for changing the status quo and effecting change. Yet, in line with Ettarh (2018), I contend academic libraries and higher education institutions all too often use vocational awe to exploit WOC OER librarians' labor by making them do more with less and by not providing adequate financial resources to ensure their success. Moreover, because the work itself and the goal of OER programs is to ensure student success, their sacrifices and challenges are considered inevitable, which further perpetuates their further exploitation.

Understanding the implications of my findings is essential to providing more effective support and institutional resources to OER librarians. As participants' stories indicated, ensuring they can perform their jobs well contributes to improved engagement, collaboration, partnership, and increased influence as they work with faculty, students, staff, administrators, and other key constituents on campus. The findings have clear implications for academic libraries. If academic librarians are essential to the success of an OER program but are burdened with an excessive workload and responsibilities beyond what they can reasonably accomplish, they will continue to feel devalued and experience burnout. Though participants' stories did not delve deeply into the physical, mental, and psychological toll they experienced as a result of these challenges, the findings suggest they are negatively impacted by the current institutional barriers they are forced to navigate in leading OER programs. Nonetheless, my participants expressed lasting commitment to the goals of their institutions' OER programs and shared their unique contributions to the open education community, which I discuss further in the next section.

Toward a Critical OER Librarianship

The third question driving this study aimed to uncover the unique contributions WOC librarians bring to OER work. Their stories give profound and nuanced insight into how they

perceive themselves as valuable contributors and partners to faculty, strong advocates for student success, and committed proponents of a more diverse and inclusive OER. The key takeaways I highlight from the findings in this regard are: (a) the unique contributions of WOC academic librarians in open education can make OER content, practices, and communities more diverse, inclusive, and equitable; and (b) the perspectives WOC academic librarians bring to the work and their potential to effect transformation can serve as the foundation for a critical OER librarianship practice. These key points imply a dire need for more librarians of color and WOC in OER work to contribute their expertise to developing practices that center equity and community.

This particular set of findings demonstrates how participants see themselves as active and valuable contributors to open education. As historically marginalized librarians, women like Yumi, Anissa, and Ilya identified with the struggles their students face, since they, too, had to forego some of their basic needs because they could not afford textbooks when they were in college. They all came from low-income families and were the first in their families to go to college, so they knew how difficult it was to navigate the hidden curriculum. Their empathy for students' financial challenges and deep understanding of their college experiences, especially historically marginalized and underrepresented students, were all assets they brought to the work. In addition to the ability to effectively empathize with students, they also filled an important gap by advocating and supporting faculty in creating more diverse representation in OER content. This finding is consistent with Seiferle-Valencia's (2020) call for intentionality in how librarians practice OER work. Since the WOC OER librarians in this study embody traditionally underrepresented identities in the field, they strive to be advocates for more diverse and inclusive materials that reflect the diversity of students' lived experiences. As Yumi put it, "the content of

our books doesn't necessarily resonate with a lot of students." OER can address this by making it possible to revise and adapt books like these to reflect local contexts. Participants' perspectives regarding whose knowledge gets valued at the expense of others extends existing research on the preponderance of Western-centric epistemologies in OER creation that questions what and whose knowledge is included or excluded (Hodgkinson-Williams & Trotter, 2018; Lambert, 2018; Seiferle-Valencia, 2020).

The critical perspective participants embody was another significant finding. I found they brought a critical lens to examining OER creation's epistemological foundations and a nuanced understanding of the harm and negative consequences such systems perpetuate. My findings thereby expand current discussions on the necessity of taking a critical stance by challenging inequitable practices and speaking truth to power. Furthermore, my findings broadly support a body of literature that challenges librarians to employ a critical perspective in the practice of OER librarianship (Almeida, 2017; Crissinger, 2015; Dai & Carpenter, 2020; Jordan, 2023; Seiferle-Valencia, 2020). As my analysis in this study indicates, employing both CL and CRF frameworks can steer librarians toward critical OER librarianship. With its emphasis on challenging power and privilege and dismantling structural inequities (Ferretti, 2020; Garcia, 2015), CL can be a useful lens for WOC OER librarians to challenge prevailing practices in the field that devalue their labor and the labor of those who create OER resources. By advocating for more institutional support in creating new positions and making a case for more stable funding sources for OER awareness, adoption, and creation, my participants demonstrated they are actively working to dismantle structural inequities in OER work. The transformative focus of CL can specifically be achieved through actions that identify and expose the hidden and often unspoken practices undergirding OER work. For instance, most participants expressed concern

that OER and openness are regarded as inherently good. Yet, not critically examining issues of labor, power, and equity, perpetuates these educational inequities. Another example is their view that students should be involved as co-creators in knowledge production. These findings amplify the extant literature on critical pedagogy, open pedagogy, and open educational practices, which encourages educators to approach teaching as a liberatory praxis that dismantles systemic oppression and includes students as active collaborators in their learning and knowledge creation (Bali et al., 2020; Crissinger, 2015; Cronin, 2020; Freire, 2017).

My findings further demonstrate participants' commitment to ensuring their work of supporting faculty and students is firmly rooted in social justice. This echoes literature that calls for anchoring OER programs on equity and social justice and not just on affordability and access benefits (Bali et al., 2020; Cox et al., 2020; DeRosa, 2020; Hodgkinson-Williams & Trotter, 2018; Lambert, 2018). Drawing from CRF, which calls for a critical and engaged praxis, my participants performed OER work with the knowledge that critical and open pedagogy theories should be actualized and applied in practice. This is evident in their collaboration with faculty to support the creation of a more diverse and inclusive OER materials. These findings have important implications for researchers in that they underscore the clear need for more studies that specifically address what critical OER librarianship means for WOC and other historically marginalized groups, and how they apply critical librarianship in their work. The findings have implications for practice, as critical OER librarianship enables OER leaders to leverage OER programs' growing focus on social justice and equity. A critical take on OER librarianship puts the efforts of librarians who support these programs in line with the social justice imperative open education seeks to advance.

Lastly, my findings demonstrate participants' strong commitment to positive transformation. Despite all the challenges they faced as WOC navigating institutions steeped in whiteness and white supremacy culture, building community with other WOC OER librarians was crucial to their persistence. In community, the women shared their thoughts and hopes about building a network that provides mutual support and encouragement for one another. For instance, although Alena believed OER would not solve all the problems inherent in higher education, she found comfort in community with other WOC in meetings and at conferences. This community was important because they are not often afforded the space to talk and think deeply about their experiences. By connecting with each other, WOC librarians can collectively think of ways to challenge and advocate for better institutional resources that advance OER programs and help their students succeed.

To reiterate the key points presented thus far, WOC OER librarians bring unique perspectives to advocating and supporting diverse OER content that centers marginalized voices. Put another way, WOC librarians' contributions and expertise are crucial to OER because together they work to co-construct more comprehensive narratives that reflect themselves and others with marginalized identities.

Recommendations for Research and Practice

Librarians represent a small cog in the big wheel of the OER ecosystem. However, their presence and contributions are indispensable to the success of any OER program. In this study, I presented evidence that WOC OER librarians bring unique perspectives and contributions to the work and their communities. The findings suggest their work is often unacknowledged, invisible, and under-appreciated. Yet, they persisted and remained in the field because of their commitment and passion for student success, social justice, and equity. Future research should

explore more stories of WOC experiences beyond the seven participants interviewed here. Future researchers can use qualitative studies that employ narrative inquiry, ethnography, phenomenology, participatory action research, and other methodologies to gain a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the lived experiences of WOC in academic libraries and OER work. Open education researchers might also undertake mixed methods studies that combine surveys and in-depth interviews of OER librarians to include those working outside North America, particularly in Asia, Africa, and Europe, where OER and open education programs are more advanced and supported than they are here in the U.S. Another area for future research is investigation into how institutional differences impact support for WOC OER librarians. It is important to examine practices and policies across different types of libraries, from public and private research institutions and community colleges, that support or impede WOC OER librarians' work.

My recommendation for practice is informed by my own positionality in this research and my role as an OER librarian and open education practitioner. As mentioned in previous chapters, I often identified with my participants' challenges because I have experienced them myself. My recommendations therefore come from the findings from this study and my personal experience. To address the dismal number of WOC and librarians of color in OER, academic libraries must hire more of them to lead OER initiatives. More importantly, library deans and directors must ensure these positions are full-time and dedicated to OER work without the added responsibilities typical of academic librarian positions. In addition, a separate OER department should be created with adequate staffing and funding support to ensure faculty are fully supported in OER adoption, adaptation, and creation. The funding should be ongoing and built into the library's budget to ensure continuity and sustainability. Furthermore, OER librarians

should be adequately supported with professional development funding and opportunities. I call on philanthropic and non-profit organizations involved in funding open education to allocate resources that can support more BIPOC OER librarians to be leaders in the field. This support will enable them to receive training on the various components of OER work, including certification programs that can strengthen the key competencies they need to be successful.

Concluding Reflection

I began this study with a story of how I first realized I wanted to do this research. From our presentation at the Open Education conference in November 2019 to the present in October 2023, my commitment has never wavered. Over the years, the world has changed in profound and meaningful ways and so have I. As I reflect on my journey as a WOC OER librarian, I cannot help but feel a sense of gratitude for all I have learned while doing this work. I was an accidental OER librarian at a community college who took on the job of leading the initiative on top of everything else on my plate. I worked long hours and said 'yes' to everything and everyone because I did not know there were other options. As a WOC, I needed to do that because, like my participants, I had to prove myself. Looking back, I believe it was my path to success.

However, it came at the cost of my physical and mental health. I left two institutions where I built OER programs from the ground up and found myself at a place where I could do my best work without feeling depleted. I am also in a different position and have more power to effect change and institutional transformation. I am well aware that not many librarians of color, let alone WOC, take the path I took, nor are given the opportunities I was fortunate to receive. But as someone who has lived through all the struggles and challenges my participants shared about their OER work, I am here to say it can be done. Two of my participants did it, too. They

left institutions that did not live up to their values. Together, we are committed to doing our best work and we deserve to do it in a place that values and sustains us.

Overall, this study has allowed me to learn and grow as a scholar and practitioner. My participants' narratives and experiences enabled and empowered me to better understand what it takes to be a WOC in academic libraries and do OER work. While I lived some of what they have gone through, I also know we are stronger despite the challenges and setbacks. Women of Color in OER continue to lift and support one another as we do the work of amplifying the voices on the margins. For now, we are proudly claiming our place in the center.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT EMAIL INVITATION

Dear [Name],

My name is Regina Gong, and I am a doctoral student in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education (HALE) program at MSU and the OER & Student Success Librarian at the MSU Libraries.

I am writing to ask if you would be interested in being a participant in my dissertation research about the lived experiences of Women of Color (WoC) academic librarians doing OER work. I am seeking academic librarians whose job responsibility involves overseeing, coordinating, or managing OER programs in their institutions. For this research, I am also seeking individuals who racially identify as non-white and identify their gender as a woman. My research study aims to center and highlight the stories of WoC academic librarians doing OER work. There has not been much research conducted in the area of OER librarianship to understand the connections between how an individual is treated in the workplace based on their gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other intersecting identities. My goal is that this study can inform, improve, and transform the practice to support and empower WoC OER librarians.

I plan to conduct two online interviews, with each interview lasting 60 minutes. Once you accept this invitation, I will be sending another email with possible dates and times for the interviews. In addition, there are no anticipated risks associated with the study. You will not be incurring any costs other than your time commitment to participating in this study. If you choose to participate, I am offering a $50 gift card as a small token of appreciation for your time. In addition, there is an optional one-hour group convening of the participants of this study that I am inviting you to attend virtually. I will be scheduling the meeting after the second round of interviews has been completed sometime in July of this year.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and your interviews will be kept confidential. However, the results of this study will be published in my dissertation and may be published or presented at professional meetings or conferences in the future. But rest assured that the identities of all the participants in this research will remain anonymous.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me at gongregi@msu.edu or call me at 517-993-7686. You may also contact my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Leslie D. Gonzales, at gonza645@msu.edu.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you and learning more about your experiences.

Sincerely,
Regina

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW REQUEST EMAIL

Dear [Name],

Thank you for agreeing to participate in an interview for my research study. This study seeks to understand the lived experiences of Women of Color (WoC) academic librarians doing OER work. I am now scheduling the first and second interviews you will be participating in. The interviews will take place on Zoom video conferencing. If you are available at any times listed below, please indicate which days and times in your reply to this email. All times listed are eastern standard (Detroit).

[Insert schedule here]

If the above dates and times do not work for you, please let me know so we can work out a schedule that best fits your availability. Once you indicate the days/times that will work for you, I will send you a Zoom meeting invitation. An outline of the interview questions will be attached to the appointment. You will also be provided with a copy of the informed consent document.

Please note:

1. All interviews will be conducted in Zoom with your video turned on.
2. All interviews will be recorded from the beginning to the end of the session.
3. If I have questions or need additional detail about the interviews you have done, I will send you an email request.
4. I will send you via email the interview transcripts. You may review and comment on them or clarify content if you wish.

Please read the attached Research Participant Information and Consent Form before we meet for your interview. I request that you fill out the form entirely and send it back to me via email before our first interview begins on [date].

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please do not hesitate to email me at gongregi@msu.edu or call me at (517) 993-7676. You may also contact my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Leslie D. Gonzales, at gonza645@msu.edu.

Thank you again for your interest in participating in this study. I look forward to our conversation and learning more from you.

Sincerely,
Regina

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Study Title: Towards an Understanding of Women of Color Academic Librarians Doing Open Education Work
Researcher and Title: Regina Gong, HALE Ph.D. candidate
Department and Institution: Department of Educational Administration, MSU
Contact Information: gongregi@msu.edu; Sponsor: Leslie Gonzales, gonza645@msu.edu

BRIEF SUMMARY
You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the research study, convey that participation is voluntary, explain the risks and benefits of participation, including why you might or might not want to participate, and empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to discuss and ask the researcher any questions you may have.

You are being asked to participate in a research study of the experiences of Women of Color (WoC) academic librarians doing open education work. Your participation in this study will take about 120 minutes total. You will be asked questions, and your answers will be recorded as the primary data for my research. In addition, there is an optional one-hour group convening of the participants of this study that I am inviting you to attend virtually. I will be scheduling the meeting after the second round of interviews has been completed sometime in July or August of 2022.

There are no likely risks of taking part in this study.

You will not directly benefit from your participation in this study. However, your participation in this study may contribute to a better understanding of the lived experiences of Women of Color academic librarians doing open education/OER work.

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH
This research study aims to center and highlight the stories of WoC academic librarians doing OER work. There is a compelling need to address the gap in the literature because of the stark underrepresentation of WoC, not just in the profession's ranks but also in knowledge production. Within the field of OER librarianship, there has not been much research conducted to understand the connections between how an individual is treated in the workplace based on their gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other intersecting identities. Thus, this study aims to inform, improve, and transform the practice to support and empower WoC academic librarians.

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO
You will be asked to participate in two interviews. Each one-on-one interview will take 60 minutes. You may be contacted again in the future with a request for follow-up questions or interviews.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY
Your identifying information will not be included in this research. All information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by applicable State and Federal law. Personal data will be anonymized in the final study. Interview participants will be anonymized in the final study. All original documentation will be secured on a flash drive, encrypted, and locked in a locked drawer in the researcher's office.

Digital audio and video recordings of these sessions, along with a scanned version of this signed consent agreement, will be kept by the researcher on her password-protected hard drive and/or a password-protected online cloud service until the recordings are deleted after the conclusion of this study. Excerpts of the transcription of interviews will appear verbatim in my research. I will be using this research in my dissertation and any potential published work or presentation.

YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW
You have the right to say no to participating in the research. You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop or withdraw from the study, and there will be no repercussions against you should you do so.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
There is no conflict of interest in this study.

CONTACT INFORMATION
If you have concerns or questions about this study, please contact the researcher (Regina Gong, 366 W. Circle Drive, East Lansing, MI 48823, gongregi@msu.edu, (517) 993-7676).
If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or email irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT
I have read the above statement and have been able to ask questions and express concerns, which have been satisfactorily responded to by the investigator. I understand the purpose of the study and the potential benefits and risks involved. I understand that participation is voluntary. I understand that significant new findings developed during this research will be shared with the participant. I understand that no rights have been waived by signing the consent form.

Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

_____ _____

Signature Date

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

IDENTIFICATION AUTHORIZATIONS

[INTERVIEWS ONLY] I agree to allow my identity to be disclosed in reports and presentations.

Yes ☐ No ☐ Initials ____

I agree to allow audio and video recordings of the interview conversation.

Yes ☐ No ☐ Initials ____

The security of these recordings is described above in the Privacy and Confidentiality section.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I would like to thank you once again for being willing to participate in the interview aspect of my study. As I have mentioned to you in prior emails, my study seeks to explore and understand the lived experiences of Women of Color (WoC) academic librarians doing OER work. This research study aims to center and highlight the stories of WoC academic librarians doing OER work to better understand their lived experiences, how their work is valued or devalued, and the challenges they face based on their racialized and gendered identities. There is a compelling need to address the gap in the literature because of the stark underrepresentation of WoC, not just in the profession's ranks but also in knowledge production. Within the field of OER librarianship, there has not been much research conducted to understand the connections between how an individual is treated in the workplace based on their gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other intersecting identities. Thus, this study aims to inform, improve, and transform the practice to support and empower WoC OER librarians.

Interview #1: Our interview today will be the first part and will last approximately one hour. During this interview, I will be asking about your biographical background, education, professional history, how you started in your OER work, the nature of your OER work, and in what ways your work is valued or devalued.

Prompt 1: Biographical Background

1. How do you identify in terms of race and gender?
2. Could you describe for me where you grew up? What was it like?

Prompt 2: Education and Professional History

1. Could you describe how you became a librarian?
2. What or who was your influence, if any, in becoming a librarian?
3. What were the circumstances that led you to be an academic librarian?
4. Can you tell me more about your professional history?

Prompt 3: OER Work

1. Can you please describe how you came to be an OER librarian?
2. What are your primary job responsibilities related to OER?
3. If OER is just part of your job responsibility, can you tell me what percentage it is and your other responsibilities?
4. I want to learn more about your work as an OER librarian. Could you tell me what your typical day looks like?
5. Could you tell me about the issues you might address in your typical workday?
6. Could you tell me about the challenges you face in your work as an OER librarian?
7. Could you tell me what you like the most about doing OER work?
8. Could you tell me what you like the least about doing OER work?
9. As a WoC librarian advocating for OER on your campus, what do you think are the kinds of contributions you want to make?
10. Could you tell me about the most challenging part of your work?

Prompt 4: Wrap Up

1. Do you have anything more to add to what you have shared with me today?

Interview #2: For this second interview, I would like to focus on your experiences in academic libraries and your OER work based on your racialized and gendered identities. I would also like to learn your thoughts about the policies, processes, and the overall environment of your library and your institution as it relates to your OER work, including how if at all, this has been a place of marginalization and empowerment for you.

Prompt 1: Academic Library and OER Context

1. Could you share any positive experiences in your work as an OER librarian?
2. Could you share any negative experiences in your work as an OER librarian?
3. Could you tell me about a time when you have experienced gender oppression/gendered racism or discrimination in your library?
4. How did that make you feel?
5. Could you tell me about the challenges you face based on your racialized and gendered identities?
6. How do your race, ethnicity, gender, and other identities impact your work and relationships within your organization?
7. Could you tell me if there are any policies or processes in your library and your institution that make you feel marginalized?
8. Could you tell me your thoughts regarding the diversity of the OER space?

Prompt 2: OER Work as Valued or Devalued

1. Could you tell me about the support you have within your library regarding your job?
2. How is your work valued? How is your work devalued?
3. Could you describe how you feel affirmed in the work that you do?
4. Are there any aspects of your work that you feel are hidden or invisible and not acknowledged?
5. How does your supervisor, associate dean, or library dean/director recognize your work?
6. How do they demonstrate that they value your work?
7. Could you tell me about your institution's support to ensure that the OER program is sustainable?
8. Are there things you wish your library and institution could do to provide more support for you?
9. Could you tell me about how your work as an OER librarian contributed to your leadership skills? What have you learned from doing this work?

Prompt 3: Closing Interview and Wrap-Up

1. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your experience working as a WoC OER librarian?

Optional Online Group Convening: This online gathering is optional for the participants and will be held tentatively around July or August of 2022. I plan on allocating 60 minutes for this meeting. This will allow me as the researcher to present themes that have emerged from the

individual interviews and share them with my participants. It will also allow us to collectively imagine a world where things could be better for WoC OER librarians and potentially offer some solutions.

It begins with welcoming participants and introductions. Then I will briefly talk about why this gathering was organized. I will present some of the major themes I have uncovered from the interview. I will ask each participant what they think about the themes I have presented and hopefully have a discussion around those issues. Then we will talk about how they see the OER space could be more diverse in terms of the OER librarians leading the programs.