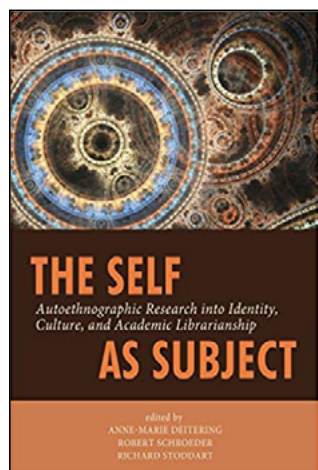


Book Reviews



The Self as Subject: Autoethnographic Research into Identity, Culture, and Academic Librarianship. Anne-Marie Deitering, Robert Schroeder, and Richard Stoddart, eds. Chicago: American Library Association, 2017. 361p. Paper, \$70.00 (ISBN 978-0-8389-8892-3).



Much of the professional literature in information and library science focuses on bringing new, sometimes significantly different, perspectives on what is already known. From reference services to information literacy instruction, collection development to patron services, innumerable works have been published with the intention of drawing the attention of the profession on how to enhance the work we do and challenging readers to think about that work differently. Instead of where much of the professional literature focuses upon the activities of librarians, what if the research were to focus upon the librarians themselves, and the general understanding that can be gained from the experiences of individuals? Librarians at varying stages of their respective careers view themselves and the profession differently, and the unique stories they tell may help others better understand their own attitudes about their work. Meanwhile, in recent years the matter of identity, how each of us sees (and defines) ourselves and how we wish to be perceived by others, has become increasingly complex. Matters of racial, ethnic, and sexual identity have moved from something socially constructed toward something much more personally defined. Specific to librarianship, the various and sundry librarian stereotypes are well known, and compounding those stereotypes, at least for academic librarians, is a general lack of knowledge about what we do. At the intersection of these two, disparate spheres is this collaborative effort to illuminate who academic librarians are, and how that impacts their professional endeavors. Using an autoethnographic methodology, they provide a unique and welcome approach to revealing some of the diversity, both professional and personal, to be found among librarians.

The editors (who also contribute to the content) have structured the book in a very traditional fashion: A foreword, an (extended) introduction, and sixteen chapters, each written by a different author. For those wanting to explore the topic(s) discussed within the introduction and/or any of the chapters, there are notes and a bibliography of varying lengths (for example, the combined length of the notes and bibliography for the introduction are nearly five pages in length; for chapter 13, they are 11 pages). For those less familiar with autoethnography, or who may be dubious of the rigor of this methodology, editor Deitering provides a detailed and reasoned discussion on the particular value of this type of research, explicitly addressing the advantages offered this project by this methodology, as well as this fundamental question: "how can this be research?" The importance of the introduction is further reinforced by the decision to take skeptics head-on with sections such as "autoethnography demands a lot of the reader," "autoethnographic rigor exists and is challenging," and "autoethnographies are

never really finished.” The effect is to open the mind of even the most entrenched doubter to the research, embedded within very personal perspectives though it may be, that follows.

The formal chapters of the text are written from a variety of perspectives, both professional and personal; in all instances, there is a good balance between personal experiences and relevant professional literature. The blending of the two provides an important context to the individual perspectives; rather than overwhelming the review of the literature, the personal nature of the experiences illuminates the literature. Professionally speaking, essays run the gamut from the perspective of the brand-new librarian’s struggle to overcome feelings of inadequacy as an instructor, to another chapter’s author, a seasoned librarian, who focuses on the struggle to acknowledge and overcome feelings of burnout. Still another examines life as a librarian denied tenure, and the collection also includes the reflections of a library director, working to balance administrative responsibilities and research interests. The breadth of the essays ensures that almost anyone reading the text will see something of their professional selves in the authors’ experiences.

As valuable as tales of professional experience can be, the most powerful chapters are those that focus on the nexus of personal and professional identities. For example, “Cataloger’s Judgment and Cataloger’s Bias” examines privilege and bias in the context of descriptive cataloging. This device proves effective, despite its step-by-step nature. One of the most affirming essays in the collection, “When Worlds Collide,” reminds the reader of just how, and how fundamentally, important librarians can be to students, and how identity informs the work of both librarians and students. Finally, as a profession, librarianship encourages and embraces diversity; but “Through a Colored Lens” challenges that notion, observing that libraries and librarianship are built upon “the white dominant culture” (117). This wide-ranging discussion attempts to tie the author’s personal identity to the antebellum era in United States history, as well as the need for more librarians of color to the Black Lives Matter movement. Author La Loria Konata’s perceptions, and perceptions of her experiences, are brutally honest and provocative; and though one may question some of the arguments she makes, the importance of the topic and her obvious passion for it make “Through a Colored Lens” an important contribution to the professional literature.

The strength of these essays is that it does an excellent job of embodying the many unique individuals who comprise librarianship. In reading the essays, there are ample opportunities not only to affirm what we have experienced, but also to reexamine those experiences and to reevaluate the lessons we learned. So it is with this autoethnographic collection that the reader not only learns something about the authors’ experiences; in the very act of reading, they may learn something about themselves.—*Joseph Aubele, California State University–Long Beach*

Disciplinary Applications of Information Literacy Threshold Concepts. Samantha Godbey, Susan Beth Wainscott, and Xan Goodman, eds., for the Association of Research Libraries. Chicago: American Library Association, 2017. 368p. Paper, \$72.00 (ISBN 978-0-8389-8970-8).

Approaches to student learning and information literacy continue to evolve. Threshold concepts in information literacy (IL) are a relatively new way of critically considering the learning that students do. The editors note in their introduction that “threshold concepts are currently defined by the following characteristics: transformative, integrative, irreversible, bounded, and troublesome” and include a discussion of what each defining characteristic means. The ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, introduced in 2015,