

# Dismantling Entrenched Citadels in LIS: Critical Autoethnographic “Voices” in Resistance and Survival

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## ABSTRACT

Critical/ethical perspectives in resistance/survival within entrenched social structures in library and information science (LIS) (education/practice) provide potentially valuable opportunities to rectify wrongdoings/promote fairness, justice, and equity (Cooke & Sanchez, 2019; Jaeger et al., 2011). Historically LIS has inherited systemic exclusions, elitism, and social injustices toward diversely construed underserved populations (Jaeger et al., 2015; Mehra, 2022). For example, LIS largely derives its canons of theory and practice from Europe and a white Australasia, overlooking any alternate authority, such as Asian, African, Aboriginal, or other sources (Gray & Mehra, 2021). Anglo/Eurocentricity in LIS also bestows privilege to positivistic/postpositivist research and theorization/abstraction of realities, thereby, marginalizing everyday life experiences or overlooking humanist/interpretive approaches, action research, and other methods (Mehra, 2021). How can LIS gain insights toward balanced growth from those challenging such entrenched mechanisms? Diverse LIS panelists present glimpses of their navigating treacherous paths of entrenched citadels within and beyond the academy. They share critical autoethnographic “voices” towards dismantling entrenched mechanisms broadly immersed in white-IST (white + elitist) American culture (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020, Giroux & McLaren, 1986; Mehra and Gray, 2020). The panel marks a homage to Audre Lorde’s (1984) essay “The

Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House” and extends its argument that for implementing social justice against racism (and other isms: sexism, heterosexism, ageism, ablism, etc.), it is urgent to dismantle the foundational structures that facilitate their operationalization (Mehra, 2024).

The goal of this panel is to identify past/current entrenched dysfunctions experienced in LIS and strategies to dismantle systemic structures in pursuit of social justice. The following panelists give brief talks leading to audience reflections on issues related to the presented concerns:

- **Vanessa Irvin** (*“Becoming and Being 'Better' in the LIS Academy”*): LIS practitioner inquiry is a stance that asks, “How can I contribute my best research in the field? How can I bring my best teaching to students?” This talk explores what it means to become “better” as entrenched in an ongoing quest to present our authentic selves as librarian educators (Lytle, 2008). However, with librarianship being a field whose racist heritage remains unreconciled, practitioner inquiry often feels like a self-preservative response to the -isms (Irvin, 2019) rather than a stance of collegiality that is reflective, inclusive, and contributory to our field’s discourse.
- **Kimberly Black** (*“Can LIS Education be Decolonized?”*): This talk shares a response from the perspective of a person who led a successful effort to gain initial ALA accreditation at a Predominantly Black Institution. My experience with the process led to the (unsurprising) understanding that accreditors/professional associations like ALA are “captured” elite organizations, enabling the socially advantaged to gain control over benefits meant for everyone, and functioning to colonize and preserve the status of the colonizers (Alessandrini, 2023; Táíwò, 2022). Postsecondary education accreditation (including in LIS) is an inherently colonizing and political process in higher education – it is an integral part of the infrastructure of the citadel.
- **Kaurri C. Williams-Cockfield** (*“From the Funding Trenches: A Public Library Director’s Conundrum”*): This presentation focuses on my personal experiences serving as the public library director in Blount County, TN, during a contentious funding battle over library staff longevity pay. I narrate advocating for staff raises, petitioning the local government through the EveryLibrary platform, and the fallout given the entrenched misogyny and white male privilege existent in local politics. Deciding to challenge the status quo always comes with consequences, so understanding the political culture and being prepared for any repercussions is vital.
- **Joseph Winberry** (*“If We Suffered It Doesn't Mean Our Students Should: Modeling a Critical/Empathetic Doctoral. Education”*): It has been estimated that less than 2% of the global population has a doctoral degree. Many others might start the degree but decline to finish, for reasons as benign as simply realizing the degree was not for them. But what if the failure of institutions and individual advisors are to blame for education-related grief and trauma that continues to perpetuate within the academy? This talk draws on the author’s own experience to imagine what critical and empathetic doctoral education might be like and how it can create a better experience for all LIS students going forward.

- **Africa S. Hands** (“*Giving Notice*”): There’s a saying: “You teach people how to treat you.” These words are not limited to individual interactions. They have relevance for collective bodies, such as professional organizations and faculty bodies. In a collective, these words may be activated to put students on notice regarding how they are expected to treat faculty as a whole or to put reviewers on notice for how they are expected to provide feedback to authors. This talk asks: What does it look like to dismantle white supremacy—from day one—in the classroom, in our professional organizations, and in our journals?
- **LaVerne Gray** (“*The Matter Is Life’: Black Feminist Narratology/Collectivism in Resistance*”): In the 1991 collection of fictional stories about the Black experience (“The matter is life”), author J. California Cooper prophetically situates a movement centered on matter. It is this matter that manifests the space for wisdom centered in narration, storytelling, and life experiences, hallmarks of Black Feminist/Womanists knowledge and resistance. Exploring the collision of matter, life, voice, and lived experience, this talk offers creative autoethnographic tools to layer narratives in the exposition of the perpetual resistance of Black women from personal/observed narratives.
- **Bharat Mehra** (“*Deconstructing “One Brick at a Time” in LIS to Dismantle an Entrenched Citadel*”): The talk proposes a thematic deconstruction “one brick at a time”, applying Critical Race Theory (CRT), to dismantle systemic, white- centered entrenched power structures in American LIS educational programs immersed in exclusionary academic institutions. This talk integrates individual experiences and identifies foundational units (i.e., bricks) via which racism is maintained by LIS educators/practitioners to implement authentic antiracist praxis.

Structure of the 90-minute session:

Activity	Minutes
Panel introduction (Mehra: Moderator)	2
Seven glimpses (maximum 10 minutes each)	70
Audience reactions	15
Conclusion	3

By the panel conclusion, participants gain understanding of how systemic entrenchment is manifested in LIS and effective strategies to support/empower marginalized experiences.

# ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Critical librarianship; Education; Information ethics; Social justice.

## AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Autoethnographic; Dismantle; Entrenched citadels; Library and information science; Resistance and survival.

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