Addressing Psychosocial Factors with Library Mentoring

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abstract: The majority of articles on mentoring in the library and information science field address career development by emphasizing the orientation process for new librarians and building the requisite skills for a specific job. Few articles deal with the psychological and social challenges that many early-career and minority librarians face, which can affect their satisfaction with their work. This paper argues that a more personal approach to mentoring—one that addresses such issues as racial microaggressions, the impostor phenomenon, and burnout—is needed to create a more welcoming, inclusive organizational and professional culture.

Introduction

Since the mid-1990s, the library and information science (LIS) literature has increasingly addressed the changing demographics of librarians—from the graying of the profession to the importance of recruiting librarians from diverse backgrounds. To retain new LIS professionals and ensure their success, library leaders must now engage in a broader conversation, one that focuses not only on providing access to the profession but also on creating an inclusive environment for librarians of all backgrounds.

In this article, the authors will discuss three psychosocial issues—racial microaggressions, the impostor phenomenon, and burnout—that can negatively affect individuals and have far-reaching consequences for an organization. Racial microaggressions are subtle, denigrating messages based on stereotypes about one’s race or ethnicity, often conveyed unconsciously. They have particularly harmful consequences for people of color. The impostor phenomenon, or the feeling that one is an intellectual fraud undeserving of the success one has achieved, affects many librarians new to the profession or those undertaking new job responsibilities. While a variety of populations can experience impostor phenomenon and racial microaggressions, individuals affected by either
phenomenon will more likely suffer from burnout, a persistent feeling of exhaustion and decreased interest in one’s work.\textsuperscript{3} When employees experience racial microaggressions, impostor phenomenon, or both, as well as the resultant burnout, organizations can suffer from decreased productivity and the employees’ greater dissatisfaction with their work life.\textsuperscript{4} These problems can potentially lead to an increase in turnover of high-performing employees, which can be costly to the organization.\textsuperscript{5}

Mentoring can help mitigate the effects of these phenomena on organizations and individuals. In the library literature, libraries have often utilized informal and formal mentorship programs to acclimate new employees and encourage the sharing of professional knowledge between more experienced librarians and their newer colleagues. As a profession, however, we must acknowledge that our jobs require us to navigate a complex web of social, cultural, emotional, and psychological expectations, and these interactions can affect our performance. Including these more personal aspects in our approach to mentoring can help us improve performance, increase retention, and foster success in librarians at every stage of their careers.

**Mentoring in LIS**

Mentoring has the potential to facilitate the professional growth and development of library and information professionals and hence ensure retention and career success. In this study, we examine the mentoring literature to see the types of mentoring support and practices that are available to early-career and minority librarians. Additionally, we acknowledge that experienced library and information professionals also need mentoring, especially when dealing with new job assignments, a frequent result of declining library budgets that have led to reorganization and restructuring of job duties.

We searched the library literature for articles on mentoring in the databases *Library and Information Science Abstracts* (LISA) and *Library Literature & Information Science*. The search identified 900 articles. We further studied a sample of the abstracts of these articles to identify the topics being discussed. An article that dealt with more than one topic was assigned to a dominant topic or two at most. The articles selected discussed mentoring for academic, public, school, and special librarianship. Table 1 shows the topic breakdown for articles on mentoring.

**Case Studies of Mentoring**

Of the articles examined for this study, 70 (27 percent) are case studies, articles that report how institutions have designed, implemented, and assessed mentoring programs. These case studies show that the LIS profession as a whole is at different stages of developing and conducting mentoring programs in schools and other settings. Some case studies describe a process for revitalizing previously existing mentoring programs.\textsuperscript{6} Other
libraries have established formal mentoring programs from scratch. Still other articles offer practical approaches to mentoring or identify factors that contribute to its success.

Surveys of early-career academic librarians in the United States and Canada report that 75 percent and 83 percent of respondents, respectively, view mentoring as important for their professional growth and expect it to be offered at their institutions. Despite these studies that demonstrate a desire for mentoring in academic libraries, only about 30 percent of the libraries in the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) report having established formal mentoring programs. This disconnect may explain why so many of the articles on mentoring in libraries are case studies.

**Mentoring for Professional Development and Leadership Skills**

The next highest category (16 percent) of articles on mentoring focus on mentoring for overall career and professional growth and development. In this category, mentoring and grooming the next generation of leaders is a special focus of the profession. Articles in this category discuss the role a professional organization can play in developing LIS professionals’ leadership skills; the role of mentoring in succession planning, necessitated by changing demographics and anticipated retirements; and using mentoring to prepare existing employees for future leadership roles. Additional studies focus on coaching for career development and cultivating leaders through a variety of approaches.

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**Table 1.**

Topics of literature on mentoring in library and information science

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Number and percentage of citations</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case studies of mentoring</td>
<td>70 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career or professional development and leadership training</td>
<td>40 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library and information science student mentoring</td>
<td>32 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarian training for specific job duties</td>
<td>32 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure and promotion: scholarly research, writing, and <em>publishing</em></td>
<td>31 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring literature reviews</td>
<td>16 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative approaches to mentoring</td>
<td>15 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority recruitment and mentoring</td>
<td>11 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social factors and organizational culture</td>
<td>4 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisory role</td>
<td>4 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress and burnout</td>
<td>1 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>256 (100%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mentoring LIS Students

Articles that discuss mentoring programs specifically targeted at LIS students comprised 13 percent of the literature. These programs address training in responsibilities such as reference services\textsuperscript{16} or focus on preparing students for particular niches, such as medical librarianship.\textsuperscript{17}

Mentoring for Job Duties

Another 13 percent of the literature consists of articles that use mentoring to supplement on-the-job training. This approach has been used to encourage the development and specialization of cataloging skills,\textsuperscript{18} as well as reference and liaison duties.\textsuperscript{19}

Mentoring for Research

Another portion (12 percent) of the literature focuses on helping librarians to research, write, and publish, particularly in connection with the promotion and tenure process. These articles offer examples of various strategies for boosting research productivity, including establishing a faculty-member-in-residence program,\textsuperscript{20} developing a Canada-wide institute to foster a research culture,\textsuperscript{21} and promoting collaboration through writing and support groups.\textsuperscript{22}

Innovative Approaches to Mentoring

A small number of articles (6 percent) address innovative approaches to mentoring. These innovations include peer-to-peer mentoring,\textsuperscript{23} group coaching,\textsuperscript{24} and online and distance mentoring.\textsuperscript{25} Additional articles focus on librarians as mentors to undergraduates—specifically by working with undergraduate research programs\textsuperscript{26} or offering field internships in LIS to promising students.\textsuperscript{27}

Mentoring Minority LIS Professionals

At 4 percent, there is a small body of literature dedicated to the recruitment and mentoring of minority LIS professionals. Articles in this category discuss the anticipated demographic shift in libraries and other professions and assess various initiatives for recruiting and mentoring minorities,\textsuperscript{28} as well as the availability of diversity residency and internship programs.\textsuperscript{29} Other research in this category reports on the support available to minority LIS professionals and the negative consequences incurred when support is lacking.\textsuperscript{30}

Psychosocial Factors and Organizational Culture

From the sample of papers analyzed in this study, only a minimal number (2 percent) discuss social factors and organizational culture with regard to mentoring. The papers in this category describe the need for integrating new librarians into an organization for them to feel valued and relevant.\textsuperscript{31} The dearth of articles on this aspect of mentoring is surprising, given the increased attention on recruiting and retention of new and minority professionals to librarianship.
Our profession needs open discussions and analyses of the psychological and social adjustments of early-career and minority librarians to their organizations, as well as the organizations’ adjustments to these new professionals. Additionally, similar studies are needed for experienced librarians who must deal with new responsibilities and job reassignments, because many of them would also benefit from a broader, more comprehensive view of mentoring.

Another Frame for Mentoring

In the library literature, discussions of mentoring are often limited to research productivity and job performance; however, mentors can also address individuals’ psychological and social needs. This type of mentoring is often referred to as psychosocial and is defined as “those aspects of a relationship that enhance a sense of competence, clarity of identity, and effectiveness in a professional role.” According to Kathy Kram, a career-focused mentor may serve as a sponsor, protector, or coach, encouraging the mentee to take on challenging assignments. Alternatively, psychosocial mentoring may encompass role modeling, counseling, friendship, and providing acceptance and confirmation.

Psychosocial mentoring is positively correlated with increased career and job satisfaction. Additionally, it leads to employees having a stronger, more positive emotional connection to their organization, which translates into reduced turnover. Compared to mentoring that focuses strictly on job functions, psychosocial mentoring can make organizations more attractive to potential hires, as well as increase employee satisfaction.

The LIS literature has tended to ignore or shy away from the more affective, personal aspects of mentoring. Our profession, however, could benefit from a broader definition, one that addresses psychosocial functions. While the literature shows that psychosocial mentoring has beneficial effects for any employee, we argue that this form of mentoring could be particularly helpful to those experiencing such issues as racial microaggressions, impostor phenomenon, and burnout. In addition to performing the traditional role of advocate, mentors who are aware of these phenomena can also perform the critical function of helping their mentees make sense of their experiences with these issues. In the next sections, we will delve deeper into each psychosocial issue before further discussing practical strategies that mentors can employ to alleviate the negative consequences of racial microaggressions, impostor phenomenon, and burnout.

Racial Microaggressions

Racial microaggressions are subtle, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color. Racial microaggressions can take many different forms—from microassaults, which are overt, racist attacks, to more subtle forms such as microinsults
and microinvalidations. Examples from a recent survey of academic librarians illustrate these different types of microaggressions. Microinsults are subtle snubs and backhanded compliments, often delivered unconsciously, which nevertheless convey negative messages to the recipients. A colleague who questions or doubts the qualifications of a minority academic librarian would be delivering a microinsult. Microinvalidations negate the experiences and feelings of people of color and deny the role that race plays in success. For example, a Latina librarian who is told that she is lucky because “I get my degree paid for (assuming the scholarships I earned were not competitive)” has experienced a microinvalidation. Microaggressions can also take another, more systemic form in the shape of environmental conditions—for instance, a lack of people of color in a library’s administrative or leadership ranks can send the message to minorities that they do not belong in such roles or that they will not succeed in such an organization.

Chester Pierce, a Harvard University professor of education and psychiatry, initially coined the term microaggression in the late 1960s to describe racism’s increasingly subtle expressions. Pierce observed that, rather than racism being manifested in a “gross, dramatic obvious macro-aggression such as lynching,” it will more likely exhibit itself in television commercials where black men and women are disproportionately depicted as “dependent or subservient” or shown only in a limited range of activities, such as working. In the past decade and a half, the work of psychologist Derald Wing Sue and his colleagues has been influential in the increase of research on racial microaggressions. In a 2007 article, Sue and his coauthors Christina Capodilupo, Gina Torino, Jennifer Bucceri, Aisha Holder, Kevin Nadal, and Marta Esquilin analyze the existing literature on contemporary forms of racism—such as aversive racism, modern racism, symbolic racism, and implicit bias—and show that the subtle nature of these expressions makes them difficult to “identify, quantify, and rectify.” In an attempt to address this issue, Sue and his colleagues developed a taxonomy of racial microaggressions, identifying the distinct forms mentioned earlier as well as common themes or messages conveyed by racial microaggressions.

Researchers have investigated the specific experiences of Latina and Latino Americans, Asian Americans, Native American young adults, black women in corporate America, undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty of color. Psychologist Kevin Nadal suggests that the framework of racial microaggressions can be extended beyond race and ethnicity to any marginalized group, including women; lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) individuals; people with disabilities; and religious minorities. In addition to research involving interviews, focus groups, and surveys, social media has provided several outlets for those who experience microaggressions to make themselves heard, including the site Microaggressions in Librarianship, http://lismicroaggressions.tumblr.com/about.
The LIS literature, however, currently has only two articles presenting research on racial microaggressions and academic librarians of color. In one article, Jaena Alabi surveys minority and nonminority (white) academic librarians about their experiences and observations of racial microaggressions. In a quantitative analysis of the survey results, Alabi notes that less than 15 percent of the minority academic librarians studied reported they had never experienced any of the 20 microaggressions specified in the survey. In other words, 85 percent of respondents said they had experienced racial microaggressions at their academic libraries, the most common of which was being treated differently than white colleagues. Additionally, Alabi observes that nonminority academic librarians are unlikely to detect or identify racial microaggressions experienced by their minority colleagues.

Constant bombardment with subtle, insidious messages telling someone that they are not smart, not competent, not trustworthy, not good enough, and not welcome, or that they do not belong, can lead to a variety of negative emotional and psychological responses. These responses include self-doubt, guilt, anger, belittlement, alienation, isolation, depression, anxiety, frustration, powerlessness, invisibility, loss of integrity, rage, and fear.

In addition to reporting these common emotional and psychological reactions, researchers have hypothesized a typical thought process for responding to racial microaggressions. According to Sue and his colleagues, the first reaction is to question whether a microaggression actually occurred—was the incident racially motivated or something else? Next, the recipients consider the potential consequences of addressing or not addressing the microaggression. In this step, they take into account the specific situation, including their relationship with the microaggressor as well as their physical surroundings. For instance, the stakes would be different when addressing a stranger rather than one’s supervisor. Some situations might even threaten one’s physical safety. At this point, the recipients may find themselves in a no-win situation. Addressing the microaggression by educating the microaggressor can be emotionally and mentally draining; however, choosing not to address it can also have negative psychological consequences, such as “a loss of integrity” or “experiencing pent-up anger and frustration.”

Even after the decision to respond has been made, the work is not done—the recipients must then determine the best method of responding—should they confront the microaggressor directly or attempt to engage in a dialogue with that person? The effectiveness of either approach can depend on the specific situation and the relationships involved.

People who experience racial microaggressions may respond in a variety of ways. For example, they may seek support from others, withdraw from or avoid situations or people where microaggressions will likely occur, attempt to disprove racial stereotypes, or engage in meaningful service opportunities. Several qualitative studies report that people who experience racial microaggressions often seek out refuges outside their immediate departments. In these spaces, which often include multicultural centers, area
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studies programs, or affinity groups, people of color can find a less hostile and more supportive environment. While this response can serve to ameliorate the negative experiences and hurt feelings of minority faculty and students, it comes with a potential cost. If a faculty member is heavily engaged outside his or her department, colleagues inside the department might be more critical of the person’s work or decide that he or she does not fit into the department, both of which can lead to unfavorable promotion and tenure evaluations, and thus reduced chances for retention.

In addition to establishing a supportive network of peers and colleagues, people who experience racial microaggressions may attempt to avoid situations where these incidents are likely. In some instances, this may mean that people of color avoid establishing relationships with whites to sidestep possible racially insensitive or demeaning comments. Some researchers point out that racial microaggressions can create an unwelcoming and hostile work environment, which can have negative consequences for retention of minority employees. Some students and faculty of color have left their institutions or even their profession in an attempt to escape racial microaggressions.

The literature suggests that another common response to racial microaggressions is attempting to disprove racial stereotypes by overachieving. This resistance strategy may not immediately seem to have negative consequences, but constantly trying to prove oneself can lead to exhaustion and burnout. As Kimberly Griffin, Meghan Pifer, Jordan Humphrey, and Ashley Hazelwood note, “Those who are of proving their worth may eventually elect to leave their institutions and pursue work in another field.”

Additionally, some minority faculty may engage in resistance through participation in service activities, such as mentoring students of color or serving on committees where they can affect changes in the campus racial climate. As Griffin and her coauthors have observed, some faculty of color feel obligated or responsible for mentoring minority students, a future generation of scholars who may help to diversify the academy. Some faculty of color also seek service opportunities on university committees in an effort to voice the concerns affecting them and other minorities on campus. While these activities can be personally rewarding, they can also tax a faculty member’s time and energy and result in decreased research output. Because promotion and tenure decisions often focus on research productivity, engaging in service activities may have a negative effect on the retention of minority faculty members.

The Impostor Phenomenon

The impostor phenomenon, also known as impostor syndrome, is characterized by feelings of “intellectual fraudulence” among high achievers. Those who have impostor tendencies are typically people who have attained high levels of success in their chosen field and are objectively considered competent and intelligent. However, they have difficulty internalizing their own success. Instead, they deny or downplay the role their skills and intelligence have played in their achievements and instead attribute
their success to other factors, such as luck, charm, error, or working harder than their colleagues. Impostors feel they do not deserve their accomplishments and have succeeded by tricking their colleagues and supervisors into believing them more competent than they really are. Those with impostor phenomenon hold these beliefs despite all evidence to the contrary and in contrast to positive opinions held about them by their more objective colleagues and supervisors.

Pauline Clance and Rose Imes, two psychologists from Atlanta, Georgia, were the first to study the impostor phenomenon, focusing their research on the phenomenon in high-achieving women. The women in their study reported feeling like impostors and believed that any success they achieved came as a result of charming others, working harder than their colleagues, or luck.

Though scholars at first thought the phenomenon primarily affected women, several subsequent studies have found that men also suffer from impostor feelings. The impostor phenomenon has been studied extensively in student populations, and several studies have identified the prevalence of the impostor phenomenon in different careers. A subset of the literature has explored impostor feelings in minority populations.

The library and information science literature has only two articles that discuss this phenomenon: one early article exploring how impostor feelings might affect systems librarians, and a recent study by Melanie Clark, Kimberly Vardeman, and Shelley Barba exploring the phenomenon in college and university librarians in the United States and Canada. Clark, Vardeman, and Barba analyzed 352 survey responses from academic librarians. They found that as many as one in eight respondents reported above average impostor phenomenon scores. Scores among new librarians, young librarians, and those on the tenure track indicated that those groups were more likely to have impostor feelings. The authors suggest several reasons why impostor phenomenon may occur more frequently among academic librarians. These reasons include ever-changing job duties; the different roles librarians are increasingly asked to take on; the need to be seen as knowledgeable and an authority on a wide variety of subjects by those who seek their help; liaison duties that require working closely with faculty who often have higher degrees and more experience in the disciplines; and the demanding world of higher education with the stress of promotion, tenure, and the politics that process entails.

The impostor phenomenon can have many negative effects on the psychology of workers. The inability to find satisfaction in success makes those experiencing impostor phenomenon more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression. Impostors’ anxiety can result from their internal conflict between what they believe they deserve and what they have received, as well as from the stress of trying to confront their impostor feelings.

Research suggests that the effects of the impostor phenomenon go beyond the individual experiencing it and have consequences for the organization. High-achieving employees with impostor phenomenon, for example, may be more likely to leave their organizations, especially if they are promoted, exacerbating their impostor feelings.
Jasmine Vergauwe, Bart Wille, Marjolein Feys, Filip De Fruyt, and Frederik Anseel hypothesize that impostors may stagnate in jobs that do not challenge them. Because those who experience impostor phenomenon underestimate their abilities, they are less likely to seek out other positions. 

There are serious implications for librarianship, especially as librarians retire and more middle- and upper-management positions become vacant. If experienced and qualified librarians do not apply for higher-level jobs because of impostor feelings, the supply of acceptable candidates may fall short.

Those suffering from impostor feelings should be identified so that they can receive the support and encouragement they need. This is no simple task, because those with impostor phenomenon tend to isolate themselves from others. The fear of discovery can color the impostors’ relationships with colleagues and supervisors, making them unlikely to admit their impostor feelings and forcing them to cope alone with their anxiety and guilt about their perceived inadequacies. Impostors may also be less likely to ask for help when they need it, fearing that if they request assistance, their colleagues will discover their lack of skill or knowledge.

Those experiencing impostor phenomenon in the workplace may engage in a variety of activities that can make them easier to identify. One such activity, called the “imposter cycle,” is characterized by one of two approaches to a new project. Impostors may overwork, laboring longer hours than necessary on a project, claiming that they need to put in extra hours to do as well as their colleagues. Alternatively, impostors may procrastinate on starting a project due to their anxiety that the final product will not live up to their high expectations. They then engage in a flurry of activity just before the project is due. No matter which tactic they choose, the impostor has an excuse in case the final project is not satisfactory. This kind of defensive pessimism, anticipating failure with every project, is one way that those with impostor phenomenon manage their anxiety. If they anticipate the worst possible results, they will not be surprised when the worst actually happens.

Those with impostor phenomenon may attempt to keep others from discovering their perceived incompetence by avoiding situations that require coworkers or supervisors to evaluate them. The fear of failure, or even the fear of making a simple mistake that would lead to the discovery of their supposed “incompetence,” terrifies those with impostor phenomenon. They dread being embarrassed or humiliated in front of others. Though it is impossible to escape all forms of evaluation, impostors will avoid voluntarily subjecting their work to review. To impostors, every criticism is evidence that others have come a step closer to discovering that they are frauds.

**Burnout**

Experiencing racial microaggressions or impostor phenomenon can lead to burnout. Burnout is a “syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with people in some capacity.” An individual suffering from burnout may experience a number of negative feelings, including emotional and physical exhaustion, cynicism, disillusionment, over-extension, and incompetence. Consequently, people experiencing burnout may lose their emotional connection to others and become detached from the organization, thus
leading to lower organizational engagement and decreased productivity.  

The clinical psychologist Herbert Freudenberger introduced the concept of staff burnout in 1974. Freudenberger worked in drug treatment clinics and noticed symptoms of exhaustion, withdrawal, and detachment from the volunteer staff engaged in the complicated, high-stress work of addiction treatment. Freudenberger initially used the definition “to fail, wear out, or become exhausted by making excessive demands on energy, strength, or resources” to describe the reactions he observed as staff increasingly became emotionally detached from their jobs.

According to Christina Maslach and Susan Jackson, people in service professions that require them to interact with and care for others experience burnout most often. Over time, working with people and their problems can cause employees to feel emotionally detached. Because of this, early research on burnout focused on the helping professions. In the 1980s, Maslach and Jackson created a measurement called the Maslach Burnout Inventory, which allowed researchers to study burnout in helping occupations in a more empirical way. Over the years, scholars have studied burnout in a variety of occupation types, expanding on the original research on the helping occupations.

The topic of burnout is prevalent in the library literature. Articles thus far have included reviews of the literature from other fields, as well as reports of survey results and case studies. Some articles point to the variety of tasks and lack of clear definitions for those tasks as contributing factors that may make librarians an at-risk population for burnout. A number of articles also discuss strategies for preventing burnout. As has also been noted in the literature, librarians who experience burnout will likely suffer decreased job satisfaction and productivity.

Research on burnout has uncovered a link between organizational culture and burnout. A number of organizational dynamics can contribute to burnout, including rigid, highly politicized climates; particularly competitive environments; work tasks that are routine and repetitive; and organizations in which employees receive little reward or acknowledgment for their contributions. Insufficient budgets, rapidly evolving technology, and demanding new work roles can exacerbate burnout in libraries. For example, librarians who initially trained to perform traditional reference duties may find themselves moving beyond the reference desk and engaging in information literacy instruction or digital scholarship, areas that did not exist when they began their careers.

**Implications for Mentoring**

Mentors can employ several concrete strategies to assist colleagues who may be experiencing racial microaggressions, impostor phenomenon, or burnout. Building awareness of these phenomena is the first step toward alleviating their negative effects. Assisting colleagues in making sense of their experiences is an important role for both mentors and peers. Another critical function for mentors in positions of power is to serve as advocates for their mentees.
An awareness of racial microaggressions, impostor phenomenon, burnout, and their manifestations can enable mentors to better support their mentees. A mentor who understands these issues will respond with compassion, rather than in a way that exacerbates the problem. Mentors should take care not to invalidate their mentees’ experiences and feelings. If a mentee shares a racial microaggression he or she has experienced or admits to having impostor feelings, the mentor should not dismiss these concerns. If a mentee has experienced a racial microaggression, the mentor should not make the mentee “prove” that the incident was racially motivated or suggest that the mentee calm down or not take the offense personally. If a colleague admits to impostor feelings, it is generally not helpful to tell them that their anxiety is unfounded or to trivialize their fears. Advising a mentee who is experiencing burnout to work harder will likely be counterproductive. Instead of invalidating their mentee’s perceptions, mentors should listen with empathy and try to help the mentee make sense of his or her experiences and feelings.

For all these phenomena, mentors can share their own experiences in an effort to help mentees process what they are going through. For example, it can be helpful for people with impostor phenomenon to hear about times that others have also felt like a fraud or unqualified to complete aspects of their jobs. This lets people experiencing impostor feelings know that they are not alone and that these feelings are not uncommon. In addition to one-on-one conversations, mentors can also encourage mentees’ participation in groups that will provide validation and support. While the traditional, hierarchical mentoring structure can be useful for helping a mentee make sense of experiences, organizations should also promote peer mentoring and encourage participation in identity or support groups. These groups can provide safe, supportive environments for people to share their experiences with others.

Generally, mentors should empower mentees to speak for themselves as much as possible, but there may be times in a traditional, hierarchical mentor-mentee relationship when a mentor should step in and advocate on behalf of the mentee. This advocacy may take several different forms, including conveying any unique needs the mentee may have to colleagues and supervisors, promoting the mentee’s accomplishments to others within the organization, or even helping the mentee set boundaries by pointing out when he or she may be taking on too much work. If a mentee encounters racial microaggressions and seeks supportive relationships outside the department to process and cope with these experiences, colleagues may begin to question the person’s commitment to the department.102 In such a situation, it would be helpful for a mentor to explain how such connections can benefit the mentee without detract-
ing from the department’s mission. Mentees who experience racial microaggressions or impostor feelings may take on too many additional responsibilities in an effort to disprove racial stereotypes or to hide their feelings of incompetence. In these situations, a mentor should help the mentee to prioritize and set boundaries so that he or she can continue to produce high-quality work without risking burnout.

Constructive feedback is another critical part of the traditional mentor-mentee relationship. Mentors and mentees should be as explicit as possible about their preferences for giving and receiving feedback. Because those with impostor phenomenon are particularly sensitive to criticism from authority figures, mentors who suspect their mentees may have impostor feelings should take this into consideration when providing feedback. Layering critical comments with compliments may make feedback easier to hear and absorb. Another approach that may be useful for mentors with mentees of a different race is to convey that the mentor has high expectations of the mentee and believes the mentee can rise to that level. Additionally, mentors with mentees who may be experiencing burnout can encourage them to set specific, short-term goals to avoid being overwhelmed.

**Conclusion**

Although the LIS literature extensively addresses mentoring, the benefits of psychosocial mentoring have not been fully explored. In this paper, we have shown that psychosocial factors have the potential to negatively impact librarians at all stages of their careers, particularly minority LIS professionals and early-career librarians, as well as experienced librarians who must assume new roles. The existing literature suggests that a more comprehensive form of mentoring—one that is both professional and personal—can play an important role in mitigating the effects of racial microaggressions, impostor phenomenon, and burnout. However, we call for additional qualitative and quantitative research on these topics.

Engaging in conversation with librarians who are experiencing these phenomena can lead to a clearer understanding of how to best meet their needs. Some librarians may already take part in psychosocial mentoring, even if they do not use this label. Research with this group could help us to more clearly understand how this approach can address a broad range of needs and lead to a set of best practices.

To benefit from the experiences, perspectives, and potential contributions of a broad range of librarians, the LIS field must become more inclusive. As individuals, it is the responsibility of each of us to actively work toward creating a supportive organizational culture at our institutions. If we do not address such issues as racial microaggressions, impostor phenomenon, and burnout, our diversity, retention, and succession planning efforts will suffer.
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Notes

12. M. Kathleen Kern and Mary Pagliero Popp, “I’m a Chair, but I Feel Like a Folding Chair,” Reference & User Services Quarterly 53, 1 (Fall 2013): 5–8.
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63. Constantine, Smith, Redington, and Owens, “Racial Microaggressions against Black Counseling and Counseling Psychology Faculty,” 348–55; Griffin, Pifer, Humphrey, and Hazelwood, “(Re)Defining Departure.”
65. Ibid., 495–526.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
70. Ibid.


76. Clark, Vardeman, and Barba, “Perceived Inadequacy.”

77. Ibid.


82. Vergauwe, Wille, Feys, De Fruyt, and Anseel, “Fear of Being Exposed.”

83. Ibid.


85. Clance and O’Toole, “The Imposter Phenomenon.”

90. Ibid., 159.
91. Maslach and Jackson, “Burnout in Organizational Settings,” 139.
93. Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, “Job Burnout.”
96. Maslach and Gomes, “Overcoming Burnout.”
102. Griffin, Pifer, Humphrey, and Hazelwood, “(Re)Defining Departure.”
104. Maslach and Gomes, “Overcoming Burnout.”