



Administrators' Perceptions of Racial Equity Accountability Practices in Academic Libraries

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abstract: This article examines racism and accountability practices within academic libraries from the perspective of academic library administrators, with attention to differences between BIPOC and White academic library administrators. The quantitative data collected via an online survey show White academic library administrators are more likely to believe leadership is accountable and proactive in addressing racism within the workplace than BIPOC academic library administrators. The data reveal a need for accountability to be better defined within libraries and for academic library administrators to work together to better align on commitments toward addressing racism within the library workplace.

Introduction

In the summer of 2020, over 160 academic and public libraries as well as library-affiliated organizations in the United States issued statements acknowledging police brutality and racism and affirming that Black Lives Matter.¹ Five years later, how are libraries living up to the anti-racist commitments and equity plans announced in the summer of 2020? While a statement does not necessarily equal a plan, being accountable to our equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) and racial equity commitments and statements is often a missing piece of the conversation.² In the workplace, criteria for what constitutes racism, and behavioral examples, are not often extrapolated and clarified to employ-

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ees. Additionally, these statements and racial equity plans are often outward facing and focused on the patron experience. While this is important, attention must also be paid toward improving the working conditions and experiences for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) library employees.³ It is crucial to move beyond lip service to do the tangible work of enacting racial equity in the workplace.⁴

While libraries may release statements and include EDI principles in strategic planning and mission statements, no known national survey has examined library employees' knowledge and attitudes about racial equity issues at their libraries. Specifically, no previous study investigates whether administrators in academic libraries are accountable for addressing racist comments or actions that take place in the library workplace. Accountability is "being answerable to audiences for performing up to certain prescribed standards, thereby fulfilling obligations, duties, expectations, and other charges."⁵ More specifically, accountability in the context of racial equity "refers to creating processes and systems that are designed to help individuals and groups to be held in check for their decisions and actions and for whether the work being done reflects and embodies racial justice principles."⁶

Furthermore, research has shown that library leadership impacts the success of EDI commitments within the library.⁷ This article focuses on administrators in academic libraries and their perceptions of library leadership's accountability practices when racist incidents and comments occur in the library workplace, with attention to differences between BIPOC and White academic library administrators. It is important to understand whether there are differences between the groups' perceptions and whether racism is addressed in the workplace, as the answer has implications for library employees, library leadership accountability practices, and the dedication to racial equity principles within the organization.⁸ This national survey was designed to address the research question, "How do participants who are administrators in academic libraries perceive leadership accountability practices addressing racism within their workplace? Do the perceptions vary by race?"

Literature Review

Toxic and Hostile Work Environments and Accountability

Library and information science (LIS) literature explicitly discussing racism in the library workplace and library leadership accountability is limited, and what exists is not informed by accountability literature. This review examines the LIS literature on racism in the library workplace and highlights how accountability research can contribute to this emerging area of study.

Amelia Gibson et al. make the call for sustained dedication to antiracism within libraries, using libraries that put out statements in support of Black lives in 2020 as an example.⁹ The authors note that it is unclear how issues such as "long-term plans for action and accountability" have been addressed in these statements, even if some libraries have included specific actions they plan to take or issues they are trying to address.¹⁰ Expanding the scope beyond libraries and into museums, an article by Juline A. Chevalier, Gretchen M. Jennings, and Sarah A. Falen use content analysis to examine museums' solidarity statements, prominent after the murder of George Floyd in 2020,



to evaluate how their efforts were aligning with their statements. The authors found that only a small percentage of museums that released statements were grappling with white supremacy and its impact on their boards, museum employee demographics, as well as their collections, programming, and exhibitions.¹¹

An Ithaca S+R report that focused on national movements for racial justice and library leadership in academic libraries compared 2019 survey data to data collected in 2020 and found library directors were less confident in EDI and accessibility as it pertained to personnel in 2020 than they were in 2019. Additionally, there were differences between how BIPOC directors and White directors viewed the importance of libraries and EDI and accessibility: “Forty percent of directors of color [were] confident in their equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility strategies with 41 percent of Black directors specifically strongly agreeing. A small share of white library directors agreed (29 percent).”¹²

Who is allowed to enter senior leadership positions can also impact a library’s commitment to racial equity in the library. In this author’s previous article, “Black and Non-Black Library Workers’ Perceptions of Hiring, Retention, and Promotion Racial Equity Practices,” co-authored with Tatiana Bryant, survey responses from Black and non-Black participants on their perceptions of hiring, retention, and promotion of BIPOC library employees in academic and public libraries were analyzed. Participants shared thoughts about how all-White leadership can impact a library’s commitment, practices, and accountability to EDI and racial equity in the organization.¹³ Earlier research from Kimberly Bugg found that while retention is less of a concern for middle managers of color in academic libraries, advancement into senior leadership positions, such as an associate university librarian or director position, is impacted by their relationship with their supervisor.¹⁴ The article notes that future research might consider the impact the small number of senior leaders of color in academic libraries might have on the lack of interest or advancement of middle managers of color into senior leadership roles.¹⁵ In academic libraries, which are often hierarchical, if the majority of senior leaders are White, bias and discrimination can impact the relationship between a middle manager of color and ultimately influence their career progression into more senior roles. This has implications for who ultimately progresses into senior roles in academic libraries as a whole.

Megan Bresnahan used interviews to explore the relationship between EDI statements and committees and an academic library’s action, or implementation, of their EDI statement.¹⁶ Importantly, Bresnahan notes that the work of EDI committees in earlier studies focused on internal library issues whereas now academic libraries are increasingly focusing on external support. This may partly explain why literature about library accountability and action against racism within the library workplace is minimal. One of Bresnahan’s key findings demonstrates that the success of EDI commitments, or the ability to carry the commitments out, largely depends on the support of library administrators, which is supported by earlier literature.¹⁷ If there is a lack of support from within academic library leadership, resources will not be allocated toward racial equity and EDI efforts.

Isabel Espinal, Tonia Sutherland, and Charlotte Roh trace LIS literature discussing, interrogating, and critiquing whiteness with a focus on ways to decenter whiteness in the profession and for library workers. They highlight that managers who refuse



to acknowledge or address a hostile work environment for BIPOC library employees, actively contribute to it. They write, "As a result, there is no pain barometer, there is no escape clause that says if your workplace is hostile because you are a racial minority under siege that there will be support for you when it becomes too much."¹⁸ This quote exemplifies the pain of a hostile work environment for BIPOC library employees and shows that there can be a disconnect between a library's commitment to EDI and creating an inclusive library workplace. When BIPOC library employees have a manager who refuses to acknowledge a hostile work environment—which often includes microaggressions and racist comments or actions—or how they are contributing to it, accountability can be non-existent.¹⁹

In a qualitative study, Sojourna Cunningham, Samantha Guss, and Jennifer Stout identify three themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews the researchers conducted with ten academic librarians who left their job before they intended to, with the overarching theme of hostile work environments being most prevalent:

- 1) being punished for "shining"
- 2) managers who either do not support their subordinates or actively try to hinder their career advancement, and
- 3) racism and toxic environments.²⁰

They note that there is a dearth of literature discussing structural issues within library management but "there is little on the explicit connection between the seeming lack of accountability in library structures and the subsequent impact of library retention."²¹ In other words, a toxic work environment is one in which a lack of accountability can thrive, which can then have an impact on the retention of academic library workers in general and can have a disproportionate impact on BIPOC library workers who face the additional burden of dealing with racism in the workplace. High turnover is also an issue related to retention and numerous studies have shown that high turnover is an indication of a toxic work environment.²² Additionally, high turnover can disproportionately impact BIPOC library workers in staff positions, who often receive lower compensation.²³

Calls to decenter whiteness and center BIPOC library employees' voices in the workplace are also echoed in professional discourse. In 2021 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Twanna Hodge and Jamia Williams wrote a call to action in *American Libraries*. While the article did not specifically address library leaders, it did address the inconsistent and incremental change within the profession and the dearth of committees dedicated to addressing EDI issues and made a call within the profession to center BIPOC voices.²⁴

As noted previously, the emerging literature on racism in library workplaces does not address accountability literature, which has the potential to help guide the profession in a move from statements of commitment to transformative change for racial justice. The second part of this review introduces that literature with examples that illustrate how accountability literature might be explanatory in the library setting.

Accountability and Responsibility: Micro, Macro and Meso Levels

Accountability literature is found predominantly in psychology, human resource management, and the interdisciplinary field of organizational studies; however, some of the

first academics to discuss it as a concept were philosophers, such as Jean Paul-Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir who wrote on the topic of accountability and responsibility.²⁵ The term itself, however, has evolved over time and there is no one agreed-upon definition. That is, researchers have varying definitions of accountability and sometimes use the term responsibility instead.²⁶ Within academic literature, accountability is often understood and written about at the micro (individual) and macro (society, the state) levels. Jennifer S. Lerner and Philip E. Tetlock's research, however, argued that accountability is multi-leveled and the emergence of a meso-level theory of accountability builds upon their work to argue that accountability is a perceptual phenomenon.²⁷ Additionally, accountability control mechanisms are interactive and multi-leveled such that individual, organizational, and societal systems work in tandem and cannot be studied without this interwoven context.²⁸ Scholars researching accountability have often focused on the micro level or macro level with less attention to the meso level.²⁹

At the micro level, Barry Schlenker et al. discuss the triangle model of responsibility, a conceptual framework the authors developed, and whose thesis asserts "responsibility is a necessary component of the process of holding people accountable for their conduct."³⁰ The triangle model of responsibility is made up of three parts: a) the event b) prescriptions (expectations of behavior), and c) identity of the actor (position, values, and beliefs).³¹

The seminal work of P. E. Tetlock argued that social and organizational contexts impact an individual's judgement and the choices they make and thus, individual accountability needed to be researched in the settings it is shaped by rather than in laboratories. Therefore, the research on judgement and choice that was conducted prior was limited in its applicability to understanding individual accountability since, as Tetlock asserts, it is devoid of the contexts in which individuals make decisions and are accountable for their decisions.³² Tetlock's later research theorizes the ways in which managers' perceptions of external accountability for employees is subjective: "Ideologically grounded disagreements over human nature and the causal structure of the social world parallel in key respects disagreements over how to manage people, at both a micro and macro level."³³ Perceptions of employee accountability are impacted by the biases of the manager and thus are not ubiquitously understood or agreed upon.

According to the triangle model of responsibility, which is micro-level research that built upon Tetlock's works, responsibility acts as an "adhesive that connects an actor to an event and to relevant prescriptions that should govern conduct, and thus provides a basis for judgement and sanctioning."³⁴ The authors assert that the strength of the combined components of the model governs how responsible an actor is judged to be for a specific event and their identities impact the extent to which they feel responsible for a particular event.³⁵

Older literature that focuses on accountability at the macro level is predominantly focused on governance and organizational citizenship.³⁶ Dwight D. Frink et al. assert there are three strands of macro-level accountability.³⁷ While the first and second strands impact libraries, for the purpose of this article the focus is on the third strand: how the social and environmental contexts, or the political climate, can impact the organizations, or the library and its parent organization or structure. Calls for racial justice came to a peak after the 2020 murder of George Floyd, and libraries responded with statements affirming the Black Lives Matter movement.³⁸

Literature focusing on the social and environmental context and accountability and organizations have often emphasized corporate social responsibility (CSR).³⁹ Although libraries are not corporations, they are organizations and newer, related macro-level accountability CSR literature has examined how organizational effectiveness depends on meeting the needs of its primary stakeholders, which is pertinent to libraries.⁴⁰

Meso-level theory of accountability conceptualizes that accountability is a perceptual phenomenon with organizational formalized mechanisms of accountability being shaped by environmental, organizational and societal forces.⁴¹ Denise M. Rousseau and Yitzhak Fried define it as encompassing two levels of analysis, hence the interplay between the micro and macro levels; while Hubert M. Blalock describes accountability using the contextual effect model where macro-level processes—for example a policy and how it is applied and communicated—impact individuals beyond any individual-level variables.⁴² The thesis for Dwight D. Frink et al.'s article "Meso-level Theory of Accountability in Organizations" focuses on the premise that accountability is based on perception and is inherently a meso-level phenomenon.⁴³ Within the context of accountability literature, explicit mentions of race are absent. Victory Ray's seminal work, "A Theory of Racialized Organizations," offers a deeper dive into organizational literature that interrogates the absence of race in organizational theory.⁴⁴

Accountability for Academic Library Leaders: Issues and Challenge

Building a culture of accountability is tied to addressing toxic and hostile work environments, however a lack of accountability toward racist actions in the workplace can often go unchecked. Enacting accountability is not easy. In Kaetrena Davis Kendrick's

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qualitative study focused on the low-morale experiences of formal library leaders—those who have "administrative, managerial, or supervisory duties"—accountability was identified as a leader-specific impact factor.⁴⁵ Specifically, formal library leaders can face barriers to enacting accountability within toxic work environments, which include: "positional isolation" when deciding to involve human resources (HR),

issues with the limitations of HR to address employee misconduct, suspicion or doubt regarding people and systems, limits on a library leader's authority when making calls for more support for the library from upper administration, and getting caught in the middle when trying to deal with negative behavior from an employee.⁴⁶ Moreover, her research demonstrates that library leaders themselves not only experience low morale in toxic work environments but can also be targets from people in higher positions as well as indirect and direct reports.⁴⁷ Therefore, library leaders' attempts to address low morale in toxic work environments, including legacy toxicity and racism, may also be



stymied by the structures the library exists within as well as by upper administration.⁴⁸

Noting the lack of research on White higher education leaders' perspective on race, racism, and anti-racist leadership efforts, Dustin Evatt-Young and Brandy Bryson's critical phenomenological study explores the complexities of addressing white supremacy and whiteness in higher education as White leaders, while also providing five concrete strategies for possibilities for anti-racist leadership.⁴⁹ These include:

- 1) examining biases and how they impact White leaders' interpretation and enforcement of procedures and policies
- 2) addressing representation by subverting hiring and promotion systems that uphold whiteness
- 3) examining how interpretations of professionalism reinforce and uphold whiteness and white supremacy,
- 4) moving beyond "whiteness as niceness" and addressing issues of race head on, and
- 5) building authentic and real relationships with people of color and listening to what they say and taking action.⁵⁰

Data and Methodology

This exploratory study surveyed public and academic library staff about their libraries' racial equity efforts, employees' perception of those efforts, and their experiences with racial equity and inequity within their library.⁵¹ The survey instrument included open questions as well as close-ended questions using a Likert scale for level of agreement, and yes, no, or unsure questions.⁵² For the open-ended questions, the principal investigator (PI) and co-PI wanted to give participants the opportunity to share more in-depth information about their experiences with racial equity or racism in the workplace without being confined to specific answer choices.⁵³ A Likert scale was used for select questions, so that the researchers could better understand participants' perceptions whereas the yes, no, or unsure response options were used for questions that concerned facts.

The survey was reviewed and received exempt status from the Institutional Review board at the University of Illinois Chicago. Demographics, including institution type, role, race, gender, and the number of years worked in a library, were collected to better ascertain representativeness and variance across responses. No personally identifying information was collected. The survey was developed using the online survey software, Qualtrics, and released in November 2020, remaining open for six weeks.⁵⁴ The survey invitation was posted on multiple professional library and information science (LIS) listservs, and the American Library Association's (ALA's) ALA Connect, an LIS forum. Institutional support from ALA, Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), Public Library Association (PLA), and the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), who sent the survey announcement through their member email lists, enabled the study to reach a larger audience. See Appendix A for the full survey.

Non-probability voluntary response sampling was used since participants self-selected to participate in the online survey. Inclusion criteria included:

- Library staff who currently work in a public or academic library
- Retired library staff who worked in a public or academic library
- Unemployed library staff whose previous position was in a public or academic library
- Employees who work in the United States or Canada

If a participant indicated they worked in another type of library, they automatically exited the survey. There was no incentive for participating in the research study, and participants were allowed to withdraw at any point, unless they completed the survey. Since it was anonymous, there was no way to retract an already submitted survey. Only completed surveys were analyzed. 749 participants who identified as being over 18 and working or having worked in public or academic libraries within the past five years in the US or Canada elected to take the survey. There was a skip logic technical error when the survey initially went live, and sixteen responses had to be eliminated from the sample. After limiting respondents to those who met the inclusion criteria and consented to participate, there were a total of 717 respondents. For this article, the analysis was limited to the 66 participants who self-identified as administrators in academic libraries and who provided their racial identity.

The focus of the analysis for this article was limited to survey questions 25, 26, and 27 from the entire dataset:

25. Does management acknowledge when racist actions and comments take place in your library? (Yes, no, unsure)
 - 25.1 If yes, how do they communicate this? Select all that apply. (Multiple choice)
26. There is a management and leadership protocol for acknowledging and apologizing for racist actions and comments in my library. (Yes, no, unsure)
27. When racist actions or comments have occurred in your workplace, management and leadership are proactive in addressing the situation and requiring accountability. (Likert scale)

Data Analysis

To analyze the aggregate quantitative data, the author used simple descriptive statistics provided through Qualtrics' analysis tool and then ran multivariate analysis (crosstabs) using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).⁵⁵ For this paper, the author first analyzed the initial aggregate results from the entire dataset and then compared these to the responses of the 66 academic library administrators. The 66 academic library administrator responses were then disaggregated into Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and White administrators' groups. The author then compared the disaggregated results to the aggregate results to look for differences between the two groups.

Questions 25 and 26 had possible answers that included "yes," "no," or "unsure." Participants who answered "yes" to the first part of question 25 were asked a follow-up question, "If yes, how do they communicate?" and were asked to select all that applied to the question from the options of "Privately," "Publicly" and "Other (please specify)." To analyze those selections, the author identified response categories based

on the individual responses. The individual responses were then sorted into the appropriate response categories, and response numbers for each category were tallied. Question 27 asked about level of agreement with the given statement, so participants were able to select “strongly agree,” “agree,” “neither agree nor disagree,” “disagree,” or “strongly disagree.” The author chose this subset of questions to analyze from the entire survey instrument because, based on previous research, library leadership impacts the success of EDI commitments within the library workplace, and accountability is an under-researched area within LIS scholarship. The author is particularly interested in understanding how library leadership—specifically academic library administrators—perceive the ways they are responding to racist incidents that are happening within the library workplace.⁵⁶

Results

Demographics

Since fewer than 20 participants indicated a non-White racial identity, these individuals were grouped into a BIPOC category rather than analyzed separately, to ensure anonymity.

As shown in Table 1, 27.3 percent of the respondents were BIPOC whereas 72.7 percent were White. Fifty-one were women and 15 were men.

Most participants worked in a public university or college library (59.1 percent), followed by 28.8 percent of participants who indicated they worked in a private university or college library, and with 12.1 percent who worked at a community college or the equivalent (See Table 2). Forty-five participants had worked in libraries for 20 years or longer, thirteen had worked in libraries for 10 to 19 years, and seven had worked in libraries for between five and nine years. Just one participant indicated one to four years of experience, and no participants selected less than a year.

Acknowledgement of Racism

When asked whether library management acknowledges when racist actions or comments take place in the library, 60.6 percent of participants selected “yes” compared to 10.6 percent of participants who selected “no” and 28.8 percent of participants who selected “unsure” (See Figure 1).

A different picture emerges when the results are disaggregated into White and BIPOC groups (See Figure 2). Whereas 62.5 percent of White administrators answered “yes” to the question about whether management acknowledges racist actions, 55.6 percent of BIPOC administrators responded in the affirmative. BIPOC administrators selected “no” 27.8 percent of the time compared to 4.2 percent of White administrators. Conversely, White administrators had the highest number of “unsure” responses at 33.3 percent, compared to BIPOC administrators who answered “unsure” 16.7 percent of the time.

Participants who selected “yes” for the question, “Does management acknowledge when racist actions and comments take place in the library?” were asked a follow-up question: “If yes, how do they communicate?” The results shown in Figure 3 are limited to academic library administrators who selected “yes” to the previous question (see Figure 1). Those participants were asked to select all of the communication methods library



Table 1.
Demographic Characteristic of Participants ($n=66$)

Characteristic	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Total Responses
Race		
Black, Indigenous, and people of color	18	27.3%
White	48	72.7%
Gender		
Man	15	22.7%
Woman	51	77.3%

Table 2.
Occupational Characteristics of Participants ($n=66$)

Characteristic	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Total Responses
Current Institution Type		
Public university or college library	39	59.1%
Private university or college library	19	28.8%
Community college or equivalent	8	12.1%
Number of Years Worked in a Library		
Less than a year	0	0%
1-4 years	1	1.5%
5-9 years	7	10.6%
10-19 years	13	19.7%
20 or more years	45	68.2%



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Figure 1. Percentages of academic library administrators who responded “yes,” “no,” or “unsure” to the question of whether management acknowledges when racist actions or comments take place in your library.



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Figure 2. Percentages of BIPOC and White academic library administrators who responded “yes,” “no,” or “unsure” to the question of whether management acknowledges when racist actions or comments take place in your library.

administrators used when addressing a racist comment or incident that takes place in the library. The options were “Privately,” “Publicly,” or “Other (please specify).” For “Other (please specify)” participants had the option to elaborate via free text. Figure 3 shows that the highest reported method of communication selected was “Privately,” with 46.4 percent of responses, followed by “Publicly,” with 28.6 percent. Fourteen individuals chose the “Other (please specify)” response and offered more detail about incidents they were aware of. Some shared that incidents were addressed privately (with the people involved and one-on-one) and some publicly (with all library staff). Five participants mentioned that the strategy chosen depends on the situation itself. Two participants expressed that incidents were reported up the supervisory chain to be handled. Three stated that decisive action was taken immediately when they themselves were made aware of incidents. Two participants mentioned that they were unaware of any incidents that had ever taken place during their tenure but stipulated they either had a plan in place if such a situation arose or were planning on establishing a process.

Protocol

For survey question 26 most participants, 56.1 percent, selected “no” in response to the statement, “There is a management and leadership protocol for acknowledging and apologizing for racist actions and comments in my library,” whereas 24.2 percent of participants indicated they were “unsure,” and 19.7 percent selected “yes” (See Figure 4).

When asked whether they agree with the statement, “There is a management and leadership protocol for acknowledging and apologizing for racist actions and comments

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Figure 3. Communication methods used to address racist incidents and/or comments in the library as reported by academic library administrators who state that their library does acknowledge when these incidents occur ($n=56$).



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Figure 4. The percentage of academic library administrators who replied “yes,” “no,” and “unsure” regarding whether there is a management and leadership protocol for acknowledging and apologizing for racist actions and comments in their libraries ($n = 66$).

in my library,” 22.9 percent of White administrators selected “yes” while 11.1 percent of BIPOC administrators responded the same way. Similar proportions of White and BIPOC administrators indicated a negative response to the statement, with 56.3 percent and 55.6 percent, respectively, making that selection. Thirty-three percent of BIPOC administrators indicated they were “unsure,” as did 20.8 percent of White administrators (See Figure 5).

Proactivity

In response to question 27, “When racist actions or comments have occurred in your workplace, management and leadership are proactive in addressing the situation and requiring accountability?” most academic library administrators (42.4 percent) selected “neither agree nor disagree.” Of the 66 academic library administrators, 37.9 percent selected “agree” and 15.2 percent “strongly agree.” These responses were followed by “strongly disagree” at three percent and one and a half percent who selected “disagree” (See Figure 6).

When the responses to this survey question are disaggregated by race, a different picture emerges. White administrators selected “strongly agree” the most at 16.7 percent while only 11.1 percent of BIPOC administrators selected that choice. White administrators selected “agree” the more often as well, with 39.6 percent making that response as opposed to 33.3 percent of the BIPOC administrators. BIPOC administrators selected “neither agree nor disagree” at 44.4 percent, as did 41.7 percent of White administrators. No BIPOC administrators selected “disagree” while only one White participant did. Finally, 11.1 percent of BIPOC administrators selected “strongly disagree,” while no White administrators made that choice (See Figure 7).



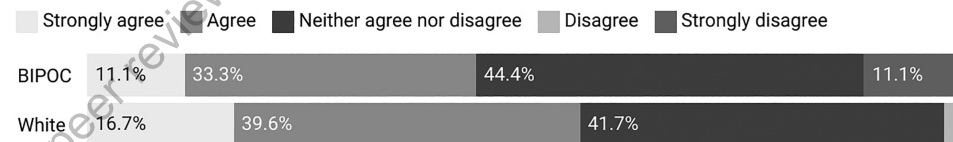
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Figure 5. The percentage of BIPOC and White academic library administrators from each group who said “yes,” “no,” and “unsure” regarding whether there is a management and leadership protocol for acknowledging and apologizing for racist actions and comments in their libraries (n=66).



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Figure 6. The percentage of academic library administrators who strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, or strongly disagree with whether library management and leadership are proactive in addressing situations involving racist actions or comments (n=66).



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Figure 7. The percentage of White and BIPOC academic library administrators who strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree regarding whether library management and leadership are proactive in addressing situations involving racist actions or comments (n=66).

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Discussion

This study analyzed academic library administrators' perceptions of library leadership's racial equity accountability within their own library. When the academic library administrators' group was disaggregated by race, there were more notable differences between the groups. When asked whether library management acknowledges when

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racist actions and comments take place in the library, White and BIPOC academic library administrators said yes at roughly the same percentages. However, 27.8 percent of BIPOC administrators said no compared to only 4.2 percent of White administrators. More White administrators were unsure of their response than BIPOC administrators. This disparity in number of "no" responses may be due to differing perceptions of what constitutes addressing racism in the workplace. A theory of meso-level accountability conceptualizes accountability as a perceptual phenomenon.⁵⁷ Tetlock theorized that managers' perceptions of external accountability are subjective and impacted by their

own biases, and thus there is no single agreed-upon understanding of accountability.⁵⁸ White academic library administrators would benefit from ensuring they are building relationships with BIPOC administrators and senior leaders at their own institutions to create a workplace dedicated to anti-racism by listening to their colleagues as well as following through with action.

LIS literature supports the notion that moving EDI and racial equity work forward begins with library leadership.⁵⁹ Fifty-six and one tenth of a percent of academic library administrators reported that there is not a management and leadership protocol for addressing racist comments and actions in their library, and there was little difference among BIPOC and White administrators' assessments. The differences that did exist were primarily small ones. . This suggests the imperative for academic library leadership to model and create a process for internal accountability and to practice being transparent about the limitations of the systems that are currently in place. Academic library administrators dedicated to anti-racist leadership practices within higher education should use their institutional authority to create a clear protocol for addressing racist comments and actions in the library, even if they face pushback. In a time when EDI is facing a large backlash, creating accountability structures can serve as an impetus to do the necessary work.⁶⁰ Making sure this protocol is known by all employees is also crucial to ensuring it is used when needed.

Additionally, accountability literature also demonstrates that perceptions of employee accountability are impacted by managers' viewpoints, prejudices, and biases.⁶¹ Therefore, when racism occurs between employees in different hierarchical positions within an organization, it is possible that the manager's relative power, coupled with



their prejudices and biases, will impact when and if accountability happens. Moreover, the employee with more institutional power has more influence to define the issue as a problem and to decide whether to address it. For the question about how management addresses incidents of racism in the library, both White and BIPOC academic library administrator groups were most likely to neither agree nor disagree about whether leadership is being proactive and requiring accountability, which suggests that most academic library administrators are either uncertain or possibly ambivalent. More research is needed on managers' perceptions of their own racism and self-accountability in the workplace. Beyond additional research, it is important for academic library administrators to reflect and become self-aware about how their own biases may be impacting their interpretation of processes and procedures. Academic library administrators could benefit from creating peer support groups with others in similar roles who are dedicated to creating anti-racist work environments as another mechanism for self-accountability.

Most academic library administrators said that when racism does occur and is addressed, it is primarily handled privately. While the survey did not ask participants the context in which the issue was handled (for example, through HR, a campus equity office process, or through an informal conversation), "privately" may have been chosen the most because, as Ann Russo writes, "In this society, accountability is often synonymous with punishment, shame and/or retaliatory harm."⁶² As Evatt-Young and Bryson note, addressing issues of race head-on is important when practicing anti-racist leadership.⁶³ Modeling transparency regarding conversations on race can also help normalize this practice. By normalizing discussions about race and addressing issues when they come up, administrators can contribute to creating a culture of accountability where being accountable for mistakes is not about punishment, but about creating a culture of care where BIPOC library employees are psychologically and physically safe.

In addition to the threat of shame, punishment, and possible retaliatory harm, within the context of a library, accountability can be impeded by the limitations of an organization's processes to adequately address racism among library employees, between the library and its stakeholders, as well as the library and its parent organization. Kendrick Davis' study on the low-morale experiences of formal library leaders also demonstrates the systems-level difficulties library leaders can face, such as having to determine whether an issue can be addressed through HR or dealing with lack of support from upper administration.⁶⁴ For example, accountability can be impeded if there is no mechanism other than HR to report racism in the workplace, given the limitations of what HR can do and employee distrust toward HR. As Cunningham et al. demonstrate, HR is not often a place where employees feel they

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can turn for support when encountering racism in the workplace.⁶⁵ For library leaders, there are legalities to consider when making decisions about how to address racist comments and actions within the workplace given that discrimination based on a race is unlawful.⁶⁶ However, when racism is only being addressed privately, and within systems that may or may not actually solve the issue, accountability becomes an individual dynamic rather than an organizational one. The issue may continue to persist after it has been addressed, even when the comments target a library leader.⁶⁷ Despite these challenges, an academic library administrator practicing anti-racist leadership should use their power to push back and subvert systems and processes that uphold whiteness at the expense of BIPOC library employees.

Furthermore, while EDI work is impacted by a leader's investment in it, research also demonstrates that leaders alone cannot be accountable for EDI efforts. If EDI and racial equity commitments, mission statements, or letters of support have been established, a plan that includes clearly articulated roles, responsibilities, and ways to assess outcomes must be given to everyone in the library. Otherwise, the question of who is responsible for executing EDI and racial equity commitments will always appear as optional work, an add-on to employee's work, or as a top-down mandate, rather than something that is clearly integrated into every employee's role.

Limitations and Future Research

Due to having fewer than 20 participants per non-White racial group, the data was disaggregated into White and BIPOC academic library administrators' groups. However, as Rhonda Vonshay Sharpe observes, there are limitations to combining BIPOC racial groups together when analyzing data since, even though the groups may share similar experiences, the outcomes may not be the same for each group.⁶⁸ Additionally, when BIPOC groups are combined, those similarities and differences between and amongst groups can be lost. However, as the Ithaca S+R report on ARL member demographics notes, as positions become more senior, there is less non-White racial and ethnic representation.⁶⁹ Ultimately, limited representation of BIPOC administrators within academic libraries reduces our field's ability to safely do more nuanced research on racial equity issues without risking reidentification.

As would be expected, men are slightly overrepresented in this sample of administrators compared to the profession as a whole. The 2017 American Library Association Demographic Study reports 81 percent of ALA members are women and 19 percent are men, whereas respondents in this study are 77.3 percent women and 22.7 percent men. BIPOC librarians are overrepresented in this sample compared to the profession as a whole: 9.4 percent of ALA members are BIPOC and 86.7 percent are White, whereas respondents in this study are 27.3 percent BIPOC and 77.3 percent White.⁷⁰ This difference may reflect a higher interest in the topic among BIPOC librarians.

Finally, the survey instrument for this exploratory work has not yet been validated. For example, the term *library leadership* may have been understood differently by individual participants. It is possible that those who selected "administrator" were answering the questions by evaluating themselves, other library leaders or managers in their institution, or both. Validating the survey instrument will be an important step for future research on this topic, along with random sampling to allow for inferential statistics.



Conclusion

Academic library administrators could benefit from examining accountability literature to better understand what is meant when they make calls for accountability. While academic library administrators are not the only ones responsible for racism in the workplace, they do play an important role in whether EDI and racial equity commitments are made and upheld and whether processes are put in place to address racist comments and actions that take place in the library. This study demonstrates that there are differences in perceptions of whether library leadership is addressing racist incidents in the library, whether protocols exist, and the level of library leadership's proactivity in addressing racist incidents and comments in the library. Academic library administrators would benefit from working together to align their racial equity work, the related processes needed to execute, and to be accountable for EDI and racial equity work within the library. For the academic library administrators in very high research activity universities, or R1s, aligning with peers on processes could be an opportunity to develop accountability practices across institutions. In addition to the five concrete anti-racist leadership strategies discussed earlier, the Building Cultural Proficiencies in Racial Equity framework provides an already established racial equity framework that could be used as a shared point of understanding to help align on, and discuss, possible processes and protocols toward racial equity and accountability within academic libraries.⁷¹

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Appendix A

Survey Instrument

Demographics

Q1 Are you from a library in the United States or Canada?

- Yes, I am currently working in a library (1)
- Yes, I worked in a library in the past 5 years (2)
- Yes, but I am currently between jobs (3)
- No (4)

Skip To: End of Survey If Q1 = No

Q2 Which type of library best describes your current or last workplace?

- Public library (1)
- Public university or college library (2)
- Private university or college library (3)
- Community college or equivalent (4)
- School K-12 library (5)
- Special non-academic library (6)

Skip To: End of Survey If Q2 = School K-12 library

Skip To: End of Survey If Q2 = Special non-academic library

Q3 I identify as...

- American Indian, Alaska Native, Indigenous, or Native (1)
- Asian (2)
- Black or African American (3)
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (4)
- White (5)
- Hispanic or Latinx (6)
- Western Asian or North African (7)
- Prefer to self-describe: (8) _____

Q4 I identify my gender as...

- Man (1)
- Woman (2)
- Non-Binary (3)
- Prefer to self-describe: (4) _____



Q5 Do you identify as transgender?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q6 How long have you worked in libraries?

- Less than a year (1)
- 1-4 years (2)
- 5-9 years (3)
- 10-19 years (4)
- 20 or more years (5)

Q7 What is your current role?

- Paraprofessional / Library staff (1)
- Librarian (2)
- Administrator (3)
- Faculty (4)
- Library and Information Science (LIS) Student (5)
- Please specify: (6) _____

Q8 Do you have supervisory responsibilities?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Personal Thoughts and Experiences with Racial Equity in the Workplace

Please answer the following questions based on your experience at your current library or the last library you worked at if you are currently unemployed or retired. Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

Q9 I am comfortable talking about race in my library with people of my same race

- Strongly agree (5)
- Agree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)

Q10 I am comfortable talking about race in my library with people of different racial backgrounds from my own

- Strongly agree (5)
- Agree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)



Q11 I can identify examples of institutional racism. Please refer to the definition below.

Institutional racism refers to organizational policies and practices — based on explicit and/or implicit biases — that produce outcomes which consistently advantage or disadvantage one or more racial group(s).

- Strongly agree (5)
- Agree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)

Q12 I can identify examples of interpersonal/individual racism. Please refer to the definition below.

Individual racism refers to the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that support or perpetuate racism. Individual racism can be deliberate, or the individual may act to perpetuate or support racism without knowing that is what is being done.

- Strongly agree (5)
- Agree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)

Q13 I feel my voice matters within the workplace

- Strongly agree (5)
- Agree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)

Q14 I believe my race influences the degree to which my voice matters within the workplace

- Strongly agree (5)
- Agree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)

Q15 I can speak up about the racism I experience or witness in the workplace

- Strongly agree (5)
- Agree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)



Q16 I trust that my job security is not at risk when I address the racism I experience or witness in the workplace

- Strongly agree (5)
- Agree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)

Workplace Experiences with Racial Equity

Q17 I believe my workplace has a responsibility to address racial equity

- Strongly agree (5)
- Agree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)

Q18 My library has made a formalized commitment to addressing and eliminating racial inequities

- Strongly agree (5)
- Agree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Strongly disagree (2)
- Disagree (1)

Skip To: Q19 If Q18 = Neither agree nor disagree

Skip To: Q19 If Q18 = Strongly disagree

Skip To: Q19 If Q18 = Disagree

Display This Question:

If Q18 = Strongly agree

And Q18 = Agree

Q18.1 If strongly agree or agree, what does that commitment look like? Select all that apply.

- Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Committee (1)
- Racial equity or EDI mission statement (2)
- Racial equity audit (3)



- o Racial equity trainings (4)
- o Racial equity statement of support (5)
- o Commitment to be an anti-racist organization (6)
- o Racial Equity / EDI officer (7)
- o Designated EDI HR representative (8)
- o Other (please specify): (9) _____

Q19 Does your library promote EDI principles and practices to library staff?

- o Yes (1)
- o No (2)
- o Unsure (3)

Skip To: Q20 If Q19 = No

Skip To: Q20 If Q19 = Unsure

Display This Question:

If Q19 = Yes

Q19.1 If yes, select all that apply

- o Assign personal librarians as liaisons to programs devoted to Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) or marginalized groups (1)
- o Allow library staff to attend library programming and/or events related to EDI on work time (2)
- o Charge one or more library committees to focus on EDI issues and initiatives (3)
- o Collect and preserve materials related to BIPOC and marginalized groups (4)
- o Collect materials related to teaching and/or research in EDI (5)
- o Participate in and/or lead research related to EDI (6)
- o Serve on campus committee(s) focused on EDI (7)
- o Support staff participation in professional development for EDI (8)
- o Conduct ClimateQUAL surveys to assess for racial equity within the library (9)
- o Has supports for BIPOC library staff, such as racial healing circles or affinity groups (10)
- o Other (please specify): (11) _____

Q20 My library addresses racial inequities by hiring Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) employees

- o Yes (1)
- o No (2)
- o Unsure (3)

Skip To: Q20.2 If Q20 = No



Skip To: Q20.2 If Q20 = Unsure

Display This Question:

If Q20 = Yes

Q20.1 If yes, select all that apply:

- Action plans for recruiting BIPOC candidates (1)
- Uses a hiring rubric when evaluating potential candidates (2)
- Conducts anonymous peer review of resumes and other application materials (3)
- Analyzes the numbers of applicants, finalists, and hires for BIPOC candidates (4)
- Includes an explicit EDI statement in job postings (5)
- Offers implicit bias training for library hiring manager and search committee (6)
- Dedicates staff to help integrate EDI principles into each state of the hiring process (7)
- Agrees upon in advance as a hiring committee what an ideal answer looks like to an interview question before conducting interviews (8)
- Ensures that hiring committees are racially diverse (9)
- Trains search committee on best practices for inclusive searches (10)
- Other (please specify): (11) _____

Display This Question:

If Q20 = No

And Q20 = Unsure

Q20.2 If no or unsure, please explain:

Q21 My library addresses racial inequities by retaining BIPOC employees?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (3)

Skip To: Q21.2 If Q21 = No

Skip To: Q21.2 If Q21 = Unsure

Display This Question:

If Q21 = Yes



Q21.1 If yes, select all that apply:

- Regularly assesses the organizational culture to ensure that BIPOC are hired into an inclusive organization (1)
- Generates solidarity statements (2)
- Provides EDI training for library staff (3)
- Provides formal mentorship for new hires (4)
- Pay BIPOC equitable wages (5)
- Compensates BIPOC employees when asking them to take on EDI responsibilities (6)

Display This Question:

If Q21 = No

And Q21 = Unsure

Q21.2 If no or unsure, please explain:

Q22 My library addresses racial inequities by promoting BIPOC employees:

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (3)

Skip To: Q22.2 If Q22 = No

Skip To: Q22.2 If Q22 = Unsure

Display This Question:

If Q22 = Yes

Q22.1 If yes, select all that apply:

- Has BIPOC employees in management and administrative positions (1)
- Has leadership training for BIPOC employees (2)
- Formal mentorship for future BIPOC leaders (3)
- Other (please specify): (4) _____

Display This Question:

If Q22 = No

And Q22 = Unsure

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Q22.2 If no or unsure, please explain:

Q23 Select all of the support structures that your workplace has set up for employees to address the racial inequities they experience or witness:

- Human resources process (1)
- Supervisor or administrative support (2)
- Formalized accountability process (3)
- Town halls (4)
- Bias incident reporting system (5)
- Ombudsman office (6)
- Union representation (7)
- Mediators (8)
- Other (please specify): (9) _____

Q24 Have there been employee trainings on racial equity or EDI principles?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: Q25 If Q24 = No

Display This Question:

If Q24 = Yes

Q24.1 If yes, how frequently has your organization provided trainings on racial equity or EDI in the past year?

- Once (1)
- 2-3 times (2)
- More than 3 times (3)
- Unsure (4)

Display This Question:

If Q24 = Yes

Q24.2 Have they been mandatory for all employees?

- Yes, for all (1)
- Yes, for some (2)
- No (3)
- Unsure (4)

Display This Question:

If Q24 = Yes



Q24.3 Did you attend these trainings?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: Q25 If Q24.3 = No

Display This Question:

If Q24.3 = Yes

Q24.4 Who conducted the training?

- Library personnel (1)
- Human Resources (2)
- External presenter (3)
- Campus or administrative personnel (4)
- Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Office (5)
- Unsure (6)
- Other (please specify) (7) _____

Display This Question:

If Q24.3 = Yes

Q24.5 What content was covered in the training? Select all that apply:

- Recruitment and retention of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) employees (1)
- How to be an anti-racist organization (2)
- Implicit bias (3)
- Microaggressions (4)
- Alternatives to calling the police (5)
- How to restructure decision making so that power is shared within the library (6)
- Other (please specify) (7) _____

Display This Question:

If Q24.3 = Yes

Q24.6 Did you find the training useful in your professional practice?

- Very useful (3)
- Somewhat useful (2)
- Not at all useful (1)



Display This Question:

If Q24.3 = Yes

Q24.7 Why or why not?

Display This Question:

If Q24.3 = Yes

Q24.8 Did the trainings lead to any changes in library procedures or policies?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (3)

Skip To: Q25 If Q24.8 = No

Skip To: Q25 If Q24.8 = Unsure

Display This Question:

If Q24.8 = Yes

Q24.9 If yes, please explain more.

Q25 Does management acknowledge when racist actions and comments take place in your library?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (3)

Skip To: Q26 If Q25 = No

Skip To: Q26 If Q25 = Unsure

Display This Question:

If Q25 = Yes

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Q25.1 If yes, how do they communicate this? Select all that apply:

- Publicly (1)
- Privately (2)
- Other (please specify): (3) _____

Q26 There is a management and leadership protocol for acknowledging and apologizing for racist actions and comments in my library

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (3)

Q27 When racist actions or comments have occurred in your workplace, management and leadership are proactive in addressing the situation and requiring accountability?

- Strongly agree (5)
- Agree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)

Q28 Power is shared within my library to enact changes around racial equity in regard to policies, practices, and procedures:

- Strongly agree (5)
- Agree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)

Q29 Are racial equity commitments within your library subject to specific accountability measures?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (3)

Skip To: Q30 If Q29 = No

Skip To: Q30 If Q29 = Unsure

Display This Question:

If Q29 = Yes

Q29.1 If yes, what are they?

Q30 Is there anything else you would like us to know? Please share below.



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