



PRIORITIZING  
SELF-CARE  
AS A NEW LIBRARIAN

A BIPOC Perspective & Guide

by

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# DEFINING “SELF-CARE”

*“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare”*

Audre Lorde



## ROOTS IN ACTIVISM

Activists such as the Black Panthers in the 1970's described self-care as a way for Black Americans to “preserve their humanity in the face of systemic racism” (Lakshmin, 2023).

# ANATOMY OF THE MYSTICAL LIBRARIAN

Always says yes

Caretaker

Sometimes  
referred to as a  
“hero”

Provides excellent  
service

Prioritizes others  
first

Always saves the  
day

Librarianship is  
their “calling”

Kind and  
compassionate

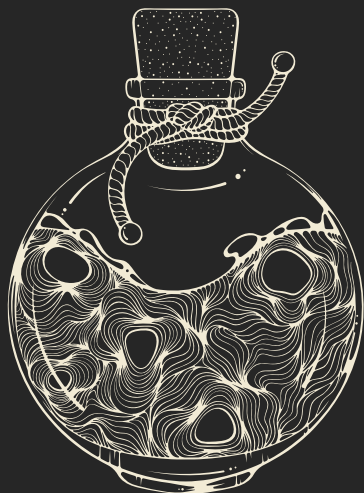
Goes the extra  
mile



# WHY IS THIS HARMFUL?

## VOCATIONAL AWE

Belief that libraries as institutions are inherently good and sacred and, therefore, beyond critique (Ettarh, 2018).



## RESILIENCE

Stories of resilience are currency in white culture. Those of us who succeed “against all odds” are praised for our resilience instead of critiquing the system.

## PRODUCTIVITY

As “caretakers” librarians feel the need to prove their “value”, which can take an emotional toll. The need to prove ourselves is harmful because we take on additional labor. This is especially true for BIPOC librarians.



# THE IMPOSTER MYTH

It is common for high-achieving people who doubt their abilities and achievements.

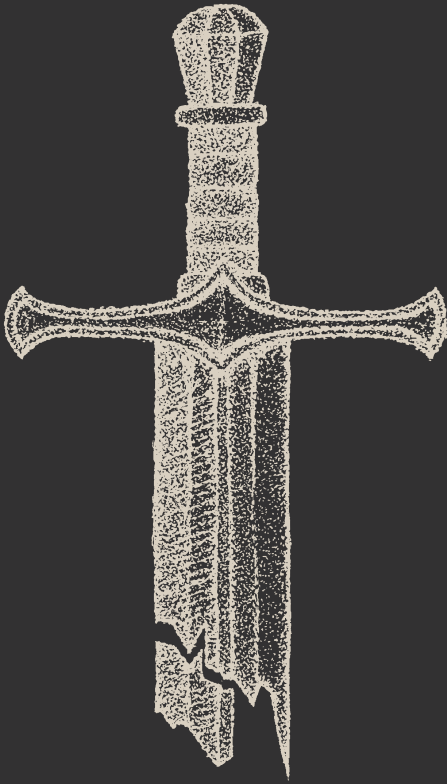
The concept of imposter syndrome was not originally defined with systemic racism, classism, xenophobia, and other biases in mind (Tulshyan & Burey, 2021)



IT PLACES THE  
BLAME ON THE  
INDIVIDUAL, NOT THE  
SYSTEM.

# DISMANTLING THE MYTH

Let's stop telling ourselves we are imposters.



Librarians need to build environments that challenge what is “professional” in academia.

Train leadership in intersectional feminism and critical race theories, create affinity groups, and validate the knowledge and experience of newer librarians.

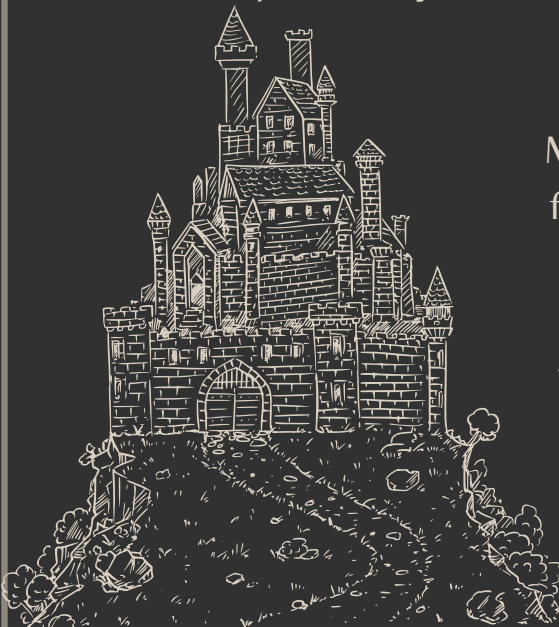
As librarians, we must embrace collective self-care by validating the unique knowledge and experience of BIPOC and early career librarians.

# VALIDATION AND RELATIONSHIPS

**VALIDATION THEORY** has been applied in higher education as a method to validate “nontraditional students” who do not see themselves as “college material” (Rendon, 1994).

## RELATIONAL-CULTURAL THEORY (RCT)

is a therapeutic, feminist ethic of care framework developed in the late 1970s at the Stone Center at Wellesley College that posits growth through mutually empowering relationships (Nataraj, et al., 20213)



Much of the responsibility falls to senior librarians to validate the knowledge and experience of marginalized employees.



## HOW CAN WE APPLY VALIDATION THEORIES?

### REVIEW EVALUATION PROCESSES

Consider the language you use in evaluations. Are you using outdated or oppressive language?

### REFINE ONBOARDING PROCESSES

Embrace collective knowledge by refining onboarding processes that are informed by both senior and new librarians.

### RESIST THE DEFICIT MODEL

New librarians do not lack knowledge. We come with existing knowledge.

### RETHINK PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Consider internal self-led professional development such as mini-workshops led by librarians at every level.

# DEFINE YOUR VALUES

*“When I devote myself to something that does not flow from my identity, that is not integral to my nature, I am most likely deepening the world’s hunger rather than helping to alleviate it”*

## The Courage to Teach



Write and reflect on your values, whether that’s in your teaching philosophy or a journal. Think of it as your “policy”. This can and should change over time.

This will help you set boundaries and stay true to your authentic self.

Senior librarians can facilitate this by sharing their own philosophies, sharing their favorite books or articles, or developing an annual workshop.



# SETTING BOUNDARIES

It's not really a "boundary" it's just communicating expectations (Lakshmin, 2023).



Why is setting boundaries so scary and difficult? Not because we can't identify our own boundaries but because we are worried about the backlash (Lakshmin, 2023).

Recognize the cultural components, too. Many non-Western cultures adopt a communal mentality toward decision-making. It's hard for some of us to say no.

This can also be a strength; if we develop collective and communal caretaking, librarians can thrive while maintaining healthy boundaries.



# HOW TO SET BOUNDARIES

## FOR NEW LIBRARIANS...



Use direct and clear communication, don't ask for permission.

If it's too scary, start small. Practice setting boundaries in less stressful situations (like friends or family).

Set the guilt aside. It will always be there in the background; learning how to live with it is more important.

If you don't feel confident about communicating your expectations, that's okay! Boundaries are not a natural instinct, they are learned. You have to practice and train it like a muscle (Lakshmin, 2023).



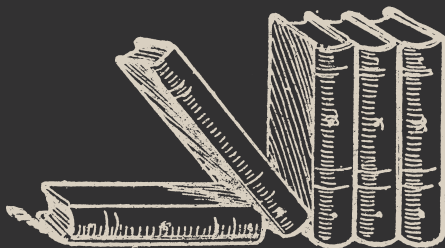
## FOR SENIOR LIBRARIANS...

Ask yourself if you are setting enough boundaries. You set the norms and expectations for faculty and your peers.

# STUDENT-LIBRARIAN RELATIONSHIPS

*If we ever hope to help our students  
feel like they belong in the classroom,  
BIPOC faculty must be  
collegially supported and also be able  
to feel as though we belong, too.*

It Starts With Us



How does self-care enhance instruction and relationships? Having compassion for yourself has a rippling effect to those around us. This creates a culture of collective care.



# REFLECTION



Try reflecting after every class, workshop, meeting with faculty, or whatever is significant to you.

Embrace vulnerability.

Reflect on your perspectives, biases, and assumptions.

Use a notebook, sticky notes, or a word doc; whatever works for you.

In research, reflection recognizes that the researchers' own perspectives/biases influence their work.

In this case, reflection recognizes that our own experiences and perspectives influence our relationship with students and faculty.



Both new and senior librarians should engage in consistent reflection.

# FINDING SUPPORT

Look externally: We may not have support in our departments, but it's okay to branch out across campus to find someone we connect with.

Join a mentorship program (many roundtables through the American Library Association offer this!)

Don't be afraid to ask - many people are more than willing to be a mentor or routinely meet up for a chat.

We Here provides a safe and supportive community for BIPOC in library and information science professions:  
<https://www.wehere.space/>

In the spirit of embracing collective care, I am available as a friend to support you

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