

The Special Issues: The International Diversity by Design Symposium Toronto, ON, Canada (September 13-14, 2017)

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Editorial

This combined special issue of *IJIDI* (Volume 2, Issue 1/2) offers a reflection on the interventions and conversations that took place during the international Diversity by Design Symposium held in Toronto, ON, Canada, on September 13 to 14, 2017 (<https://www.idiversitybydesign.com/>). The symposium aimed to start an open, multi-sided dialog on the state of diversity, and the field of library and information science (LIS) emerged as a strategic leader to make this happen. Indeed, the conversations that took place at the symposium transcended the boundaries of a single discipline and profession and served instead as a springboard for engaging allied academic disciplines and professional fields in reconsidering and expanding diversity discourse and practice. As co-organizers of the symposium, our overarching goal was to reframe the diversity debate by expanding the definition of “diversity” and bringing together institutions of higher education, information and cultural organizations, community partners, and governmental agencies. Keynote speeches and introductions from sponsors set the tone and gave the event structure and shape. Refereed presentations and interactive workshops from representatives of diverse communities, solicited through an open call for papers and developed around case studies and real-life scenarios, constituted the cornerstone of the event. We are now pleased to partner with *IJIDI* to capture and disseminate online in the open public forum the selected symposium presentations. The full roster of presentations, workshops, and posters is available online at www.idiversitybydesign.com.

The symposium was organized to respond to an uneasy question: Why, despite our best efforts, is the state of diversity not getting better significantly or quickly enough in both educational and professional environments? Last year, in a [guest editorial for *The Library Quarterly* \(LQ\)](#), we proposed the concept of Diversity by Design (DbD) and posited it as a concept relevant to workplace environments, community engagements, and graduate LIS education. We invited LQ “readers to contemplate whether this concept ma[de] sense to them and, if yes, how it work[ed] in their respective” situations. We brought “to light the multiplicity of contexts that give diversity meaning and life in our complex field” and demonstrated that it was integral, rather than superfluous, to our field and way of being. Indeed, we posit that DbD promotes the idea of diversity as “integral and structural,” not a “mere add-on.” It is the kind of diversity that is “there by design, not by chance,” that is “part of the foundation, part of the core” (Dali & Caidi, 2017, pp. 88-89). As such, we promoted curricula, workplace organizations, decision-making processes, and academic research that integrated ideas of diversity “from the start” instead of “throw[ing them] in for reasons of trendiness and popularity” (Dali & Caidi, 2017, p. 89). The

symposium was set to generate an honest and uncomfortable conversation about the lack and oversimplification of diversity discussions in various contexts and to overcome the tokenistic approach geared toward increasing diversity numbers without much support for sustainability and retention. Moreover, we expanded the definition of “diversity” beyond the demographic and personal characteristics traditionally associated with diversity. As evident from the contributions in this special issue, engaging with these questions and concerns generated a healthy discussion about defining “diversity” and reframing our discourses and practices.

The symposium was both inspired and guided by the imperative to look deeper and unsparingly in order to bring about genuine and meaningful change in diversity conversations. As we noted in [our earlier publication](#), much of diversity discourse is afflicted by political correctness, excessive politeness, tokenism, safe topics, predictable answers, and, paradoxically, the lack of diversity in approaches and solutions. We felt it was essential to have a different kind of conversation about the personal, social, familial, historical, and community-wide causes of diversity tensions (Caidi & Dali, 2015). Indeed, policies, regulations, support mechanisms, and employment equity programs alone are not enough. Some diversity-related issues have deep historical and psychosocial roots and manifest themselves through a tangled web of workplace relationships, social interactions, and engagement with governmental and other institutions. These underlying causes preclude increasing diversity in our social and workplace settings; make the retention of a diverse workforce difficult; and create a relationship of misunderstanding, conflict, and mistrust among groups of individuals, thus provoking emotive and irrational responses and rendering a constructive dialog impossible (Caidi & Dali, 2015).

In this spirit, the papers and posters in the special issue introduce novel and comprehensive definitions of “diversity,” offer fresh perceptions of diversity from the standpoint of the various partners involved, and discuss the implications thereof for educating new generations of practitioners and scholars in multiple areas. Counted together, these publications demonstrate that diversity is at the very heart of practice and scholarship in LIS.

The issue opens with “Holy Selfies: Pilgrimage in the Age of Social Media,” by Nadia Caidi, Susan Beazley, and Laia Colomer, which examines social media tactics used by underrepresented and misrepresented voices to create opportunities for self-representation and community building. In “Engaging Linguistically Diverse Populations: Gatekeepers in Rural and Low-Population Parts of the U.S. Midwest,” Heather Moulaison Sandy and Denise Adkins offer insight into working with community gatekeepers as a key element in engaging communities of Latin American immigrants and Spanish speakers and as a means to improve inclusion, integration, and adjustment in rural and low-populated areas. In “Indigenous Initiatives and Information Studies: Acknowledging Challenges in the Classroom,” Lisa Nathan and Amy Perreault provide a personal critical pedagogical reflection on the engagement of library, archives, and information science with Indigenous communities and question professional norms and expectations as they play out in a classroom setting. Paul T. Jaeger introduces a historical reflection on and a future projection of libraries’ engagement with people with disabilities in his article “Designing for Diversity and Designing for Disability: New Opportunities for Libraries to Expand Their Support and Advocacy for People with Disabilities.” The article looks at the possible expansion of librarians’ roles as advocates and allies of people with disabilities in libraries and beyond.

As an open-access online journal, *IJDI* has the capacity to publish alternative, creative, and visual formats. This allows us to bring forward a wealth of research and practical experiences shared at the symposium through poster presentations. Posters in this issue can be divided into two groups: those that deal with equity, access, and accessibility and those that give voice to underrepresented community groups and members. In the former group, we find “Empowering Academic Librarians in Their Quest for Social Justice and Recognition in Academia,” by Ahmed

Alwan, Joy Doan, and Julieta Garcia; “Diversifying Music Collections by Design: Responding to the Needs of Iranian Music Researchers in North America,” by Houman Behzadi and Blair Kuntz; “Library Services and Early Literacy Approaches in Public Libraries for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children,” by Bobbie Bushman; and “A New Model for Accessible Formats in the Public Library,” by Kim Johnson and Sabina Iseli-Otto. In the latter group, explored topics include “Building Welcoming Communities,” by the Durham Library Partners in Diversity Initiative; “Unsettling Our Practices: Decolonizing Description at the University of Alberta Libraries,” by Sharon Farnel et al.; and “The Everyday Life Information Behavior of Immigrants: A Case of Bangladeshi Women,” by Nafiz Zaman Shuva.

Taken together, publications in this special issue build on and extend the definition of DbD and position diversity not only as an issue of social justice and an issue relevant to select minority groups, but as a primary concern of every person when it comes to the health, prosperity, and progress of society as a whole.

This symposium would not have been possible without the steadfast dedication, support, and financial contributions of our sponsors. First and foremost, its very existence and resulting success were enabled by a Connection Grant—“Connecting for Canada’s 150th”—from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada. We thank wholeheartedly the Ontario Trillium Foundation for hosting the event and ensuring the smooth operations and logistics of the symposium. We are especially indebted to our colleague Ikem Opara, Strategy Lead for Connected People at the Ontario Trillium Foundation, for his support, expertise, and enthusiasm for the project. We thank the Ontario Library Association for providing stipends for several graduate students to travel to Toronto and the Faculty of Information (iSchool), University of Toronto; the McLuhan Centre for Culture and Technology at the University of Toronto; the Art Gallery of Ontario; and the Toronto City Archives for supporting the symposium with funding, resources, and other assistance. We thank our Research Assistants at the University of Toronto and the University of Alberta (Leah Brochu, Jamila Ghaddar, Jen Kendall, Elise Tate, and Mari Zhou), as well as student volunteers (Robyn Cameron, Niel Chah, Mariam Karim, Alice Kim, Zhenni Liao, Azada Rahi, and Nafiz Zaman Shuva), who helped ensure the symposium’s success.

Capitalizing on the synergy of cultural and educational institutions and on the power combination of scholarly and artistic production, the contributions in this issue initiate a dialog that shifts power and ownership to representatives of diverse communities. By so doing, libraries and other cultural, heritage, and informational institutions become sites of potential disruption—a much needed strategy if we are serious about being truly inclusive and diverse.

References

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Dr. Nadia Caidi (nadia.caidi@utoronto.ca) is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Information (iSchool), University of Toronto, Canada. Her research focuses on human information behavior, societal implications of information and communication technologies (ICTs), information policy, and critical and cross-cultural studies. Dr. Caidi has received several grants for her research on information control and the public’s right to know in times of crisis. Her current research is situated in the context of global migration and the role that information resources, institutions,

and technologies play in the everyday lives of migrant and displaced communities. Caidi was President of the Canadian Association for Information Science (2011) and the 2016 President of the international Association for Information Science & Technology (ASIS&T).

Dr. Keren Dali's (keren.dali@alumni.utoronto.ca) research interests are in diversity and marginalized communities, relationships between LIS and Social Work; disabilities; LIS education with the focus on creativity, accreditation, and humanistic pedagogies; and reading behaviors. With the background in Social Work and LIS, Dr. Dali holds the inaugural Outstanding Instructor Award from the Faculty of Information, University of Toronto; the inaugural ALISE/Connie Van Fleet Award for Research Excellence in Public Library Services to Adults; the Outstanding Reviewer distinction and the Outstanding and Highly Commended Paper distinctions from the Emerald Literati Network Awards for Excellence. Her work has been funded by the grants from the Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the American Library Association, among others. She's active in ASIS&T, ALISE, and IFLA, chairing committees for both ASIS&T and ALISE.