

IJIDI: Book Review

Tolley, R. (2020). *A trauma-informed approach to library services*. ALA Editions. ISBN 9780838919811 (paperback). 180 pp. \$59.99 US.

Reviewer: Francesca Marini, Texas A&M University Libraries, USA

Book Review Editor: Norda A. Bell, York University, Canada

Keywords: library services; outreach; safe spaces; trauma-informed approach; trauma-informed care

Publication Type: book review

As librarians and archivists, we are constantly looking for ways to improve our services and provide effective and inclusive support to our patrons. *A Trauma-Informed Approach to Library Services* by Rebecca Tolley is a thoughtful and useful book that helps us better serve our patrons, but also better understand each other as colleagues. The publisher's description states that "this book applies a trauma-informed care framework to library services. This approach can foster empathetic service, positive patron encounters, and a trusting workplace" (p. iv). Tolley, a professor and librarian at East Tennessee State University, describes how students and colleagues introduced her to trauma-informed care, approaches, and practices, which are used in many fields, including nursing and social work. The Buffalo Center for Social Research (The State University of New York/University at Buffalo) states that: "Trauma-Informed Care understands and considers the pervasive nature of trauma and promotes environments of healing and recovery rather than practices and services that may inadvertently re-traumatize" (para. 1). In her job, Tolley coordinates research consultation services, but her book effectively articulates how to implement trauma-informed care in a variety of library services.

My job focuses on programming and outreach in special collections and archives, and I always try to make patrons feel welcome and at ease; I want to understand their needs, give them a voice, and enable them to be seen for who they are. I found this book compelling, because it explains in a systematic way what I instinctively have been striving to achieve in my work. Tolley organizes the book in three parts: "Part I: Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma-Informed Care," "Part II: The Six Guiding Principles of Trauma-Informed Approaches," and "Part III: Creating a Culture of Trauma-Informed Care in Libraries." The book guides readers from the general to the specific, with the goal of supporting actual training and implementation in library settings.

Besides focusing on patrons' needs and backgrounds, the book also reflects on our work environments, as well as on our emotions. For example, Chapter 13, addresses, in a simple and direct way, topics that will resonate with most librarians and archivists, including our own trauma and the resulting "personas" that we adopt (such as the "caretaker role," "the scapegoat role," etc.). A section on emotional labor acknowledges how "service with a smile" can be exhausting, and how "it requires emotional intelligence skills to read patrons' emotional states and navigate our interactions with them, as well as to manage our own emotions" (p.132). The statement is even more valid in these pandemic times, when keeping a smile on our face seems to require more effort every day.

In keeping with the theme of this issue of *IJIDI*, I want to point out that this book addresses issues faced by LGBTQIA+ communities. For example, the section on “Gender Issues” in Chapter 10 touches on the importance of creating safe spaces in libraries, in order to reduce the amount of emotional labor experienced by members of LGBTQIA+ communities, who have to constantly assess the safety of the environments they navigate. This section is useful, although it comes across as somewhat oversimplified (maybe because of space limitations) and cites older harassment data (from 2001). In another chapter, Tolley also makes reference to her own association with the local chapter of PFLAG, a well-known organization, described by its website as “the first and largest organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) people, their parents and families, and allies” (PFLAG, 2021).

The book offers useful insight into approaches and practices that many librarians and archivists might naturally gravitate towards, but without always having formal training. The book is clear and is complemented by a reference section, which can be used for further research. The book has some limitations, mainly because it addresses complex topics in the relatively short span of 180 pages. The brief last chapter, Chapter 14, offers a blueprint for planning for trauma-informed services, and provides some very useful tips, but, of course, it will take libraries considerable work to realize a detailed implementation. The use of language is another limitation: while Tolley is generally attentive, there are instances where she should avoid certain terms, or at least explain why she is using them: without context, these terms evoke historically derogatory implications, as well as reflections of oppression. Instances can be found in Chapter 10, in the section on historical trauma. Notwithstanding some limitations, the book is a welcome tool that can help us make our work environments more welcoming and inclusive to all.

References

PFLAG. (2021). *About PFLAG*. Retrieved October 25, 2021, from <https://pflag.org/about>.

University at Buffalo School of Social Work. (2020, May 1). *What is trauma-informed care?* University at Buffalo: Buffalo Center for Social Research. Retrieved October 25, 2021, from <http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/social-research/institutes-centers/institute-on-trauma-and-trauma-informed-care/what-is-trauma-informed-care.html>

Francesca Marini (she/her/hers) (fmarini@library.tamu.edu) is Associate Professor and Programming and Outreach Librarian at the Texas A&M University Libraries, Cushing Memorial Library and Archives. She holds a PhD in Library and Information Science from the University of California, Los Angeles.