DO THEY HAVE A FUTURE IN LIS?

Investigating the Difference Between BIPOC and White Academic Librarians' Likelihood to Leave the Field

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The retention of academic librarians who identify as Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color (BIPOC) has been a constant concern within the field of library and information science (LIS) for the last few decades. Limited research has suggested some factors thought to influence BIPOC academic librarians' decision to leave, ranging from mentoring and job satisfaction to professional development and job knowledge. The full impact of these factors and whether the same factors influence a decision to leave the field by all librarians or only BIPOC librarians, is unknown. In this paper, the results of a secondary analysis of data from the IMLS-funded Workforce in Library and Information Science (WILIS 2) project was used to explore two research questions: 1) What impact do factors related to educational preparation, job preparation, and job satisfaction have on academic librarians' intent to leave the field?; and 2) Is there a difference in expressions of intent to leave the field based on whether librarians identify as BIPOC or White? Logistic regression analysis found a statistically significant impact on the odds that a librarian would express an intent to leave the LIS field within 3 years based on job satisfaction, though the model itself was not a good fit to the data. Ordinal regression analysis found a statistically significant impact on the odds that a librarian would express an intent to leave the LIS field within 1 year based on education satisfaction and job satisfaction. Neither job satisfaction nor racial identity were found to be significant factors in explaining intent to leave within the data set tested. These findings lend quantitative support to the importance of job satisfaction and education satisfaction on career longevity in LIS, and encourage further study of these factors. While racial identity was not a significant factor in this analysis, further studies to investigate its potential role are suggested.

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INTRODUCTION

Does academic librarianship have a Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color (BIPOC) retention issue? The retention of academic librarians who identify as BIPOC has been a constant concern within the field of library and information science (LIS) for the last few decades. Reported numbers show little to no positive changes in the percentage of BIPOC librarians in academic librarianship overall, and in the case of some racial identities, some declines.[1] However, it should be noted that retention of all academic librarians is also of concern.[2] Limited research has suggested some factors thought to influence BIPOC academic librarians' decision to leave, ranging from mentoring and job satisfaction to professional development and job knowledge. The full impact of these factors and whether the same factors influence a decision to leave the field by all librarians or only BIPOC librarians, is unknown.

Utilizing regression analysis and data provided by the IMLS-funded Workforce Issues in Library and Information Science 2 (WILIS2) study of the LIS workforce, this secondary data analysis study explored the influence of racial identity, educational satisfaction, job preparation, and job satisfaction on academic librarians' likelihood to indicate an intent to leave LIS within 1 year and 3 years.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the LIS literature suggests possible factors that could influence an academic librarian's decision to leave LIS as a career. The most prominent factors include mentoring, professional development opportunities, educational satisfaction, job preparation, and job satisfaction. This literature review will briefly address retention in LIS with a focus on academic libraries, and what is currently known about three of the factors anecdotally identified as influencing academic librarians' decision to leave LIS.

Retention

With more effort being put into recruitment than retention[3] and a notice that there is a higher attrition rate for BIPOC librarians,[4] the development of effective strategies for aiding retention is crucial. Damasco and Hodges surveyed 60 BIPOC academic librarians about their experiences in terms of tenure and promotion, ultimately finding that 25% of untenured participants and one tenured participant planned to leave their positions as soon as possible.[5] Despite the importance and the continued attention brought to the matter, limited research has been done to further the field's understanding of the topic. In addition studies on the topic tend to be small-scale and only provide anecdotal recommendations.[6]

From prior research, however, it has been suggested that microaggressions, discrimination, isolation, culture of Whiteness, work overload, lack of advancement, and low morale are some of the occurrences that prevent the retention of BIPOC librarians.[7] In addition, there is mention of the importance of potential retention strategies such as mentorship programs, professional development, networking, and counternarratives.[8] Yet the reason why so many BIPOC Librarians leave the profession is unclear. Identifying the work-life experiences that cause them to leave will allow for the creation of structured programs to help reduce the factors that trigger the decision to depart.

Educational Satisfaction and Job Preparation

There have been critiques in the past on the value of LIS professional education and how well the curriculum prepares future librarians for their careers. Remarks have been made about LIS degree programs sacrificing library career preparation for techno-centric education, as well as LIS programs inaccurately representing the profession thus leading to less diversity,[9] and a related study that shows a lack of consistency across ALA accredited programs.[10] A lack of consistency across ALA accredited programs is something that might directly impact different librarians' experiences in the field, because while some programs may leave students feeling fully prepared, other students may leave with their degree feeling completely stranded.

More recent research has shown varying results on the satisfaction of students who have their degree. One study showed that the number one thing students valued in their degree program was also the most commonly identified gap in their degree program: hands-on experience.[11] Many studies have proven the usefulness of hands-on learning experiences such as internships when combined with the LIS degree,[12] and yet an internship or similar hands-on learning experience is not a mandatory part of an ALA accredited degree program. How are librarians expected to succeed if they were not properly prepared to enter the field? This dissatisfaction with their educational preparation is yet another potential factor impacting librarians' intent to leave and another problem to be addressed.

Job Satisfaction

If a librarian is to remain in their position, they must be satisfied with their job. There are many factors that contribute to job satisfaction such as pay, faculty status, colleagues, meaningful work, and demographic status to name a few.[13] This indicates that satisfaction isn't necessarily linked to the type of library that librarians work in, though similarities in experiences may be expected based on library type. Rather, satisfaction is dependent on the environment they are working in, and the way they are treated by their coworkers, supervisors, and patrons. Job satisfaction is important in a library environment because the more satisfied a librarian is, the more engaged and effective they will be at their job.[14] Librarians should enjoy the work they are doing and feel comfortable in their work environment. When looking at the experiences of librarians of African descent, Thornton indicated that at the end of the survey, while most participants did not leave additional notes, there were many comments about participants experiencing racism, coworkers not willing to learn about Black resources, and a need to get more African American students into library school.[15] While this study was limited to employees within ARL academic libraries, these sentiments echo previous studies' mentions of a lack of inclusivity and diversity in the field. If librarians are finding that they are continually dissatisfied with their jobs, then this dissatisfaction could eventually push them to leave the profession entirely.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given the abundance of potential factors that could influence and impact librarians' intent to leave LIS as a career, a variety of research questions are available for exploration. For the purpose of this study and based on the availability of data related to identified factors found in the WILIS2 data set, the following two research questions were investigated:

1. What impact do factors related to educational preparation, job preparation, and job satisfaction have on academic librarians' intent to leave the field?; and
2. Is there a difference in expressions of intent based on whether librarians identify as BIPOC or white?

METHODS

Both binomial logistic regression and ordinal logistic regression were used to address the research questions. This methods section describes the data set, as well as the data analysis undertaken.

Data Set

The data set used for analysis was derived from the Workforce Issues in Library and Information Science 2 project (WILIS2) funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services in 2007. This project collected the data from graduates of 39 LIS programs in North America using survey items related to program assessment, employment status, career progression, career satisfaction, and continuing education.[16] The original data set included responses from 3,507 respondents. For the purpose of this paper, only participants who indicated they worked in an academic library were selected for inclusion, creating a data set of 777 respondents.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were first generated for the data set. Then, prior to running both regressions, a series of assumptions were checked to confirm that the data could be analyzed utilizing the regression techniques. As the data met all assumptions, first a binomial logistic regression analysis was conducted to determine the impact of racial identity, educational satisfaction, job preparation, and job satisfaction on participants' intent to leave LIS within three years. Then an ordinal logistic regression was conducted to determine the impact of racial identity, educational satisfaction, job preparation, and job satisfaction on participants' intent to leave LIS within one year. The survey questions and responses represented by the tested concepts are reported in Table 1.

TABLE 1			
Variables Utilized for Regression Analysis			
Concept	**Variable (Question)**	**Variable Type**	**Responses**
Intent to Leave LIS (3 years)	Do you think you will still be working in LIS 3 years from now?	Dependent	Yes, No
Intent to Leave LIS (1 year)	I plan on leaving LIS work within a year	Dependent	Strongly disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly agree
Racial Identity	Mark one or more races to indicate what you consider yourself to be[17]	Independent	Non-BIPOC, BIPOC
Educational Satisfaction	All things considered, how would you rate the overall experience that you had in your program?	Independent	Poor, Fair, Good, Excellent
Job Preparation	How well did your program prepare you for your first job?	Independent	Very well, Well, Adequately, Poorly, Not at all
Job Satisfaction	Overall, I am satisfied with what I do in my job	Independent	Strongly disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly agree

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

The sample of academic librarians whose data was included in the analysis, primarily identified as female (n = 606, 78.0%), followed by male (n = 151, 19.4%). Twenty respondents selected "Prefer not to answer" and only three skipped the question. The majority of the sample identified as non-BIPOC (n = 566, 72.8%) with 111 (14.3%) identifying as BIPOC.[18] Most respondents were married or living with a partner (n = 438, 56.4%) or single (never married) (n = 225, 29.0%). Only 43 (5.5%) indicated being divorced and four (0.5%) indicated being widowed. Forty-eight (6.2%) preferred not to answer.

Education Satisfaction

The question "All things considered, how would you rate the overall experience that you had in your program?" was used to approximate respondents' educational satisfaction. Most respondents reported overall positive educational experiences with 343 (44.1%) indicating a "Good" rating and 302 (38.9%) indicating "Excellent." Fewer indicated a "Fair" experience (n = 119, 15.3%) and only 13 (1.7%) indicated a "Poor" experience.

Job Preparation

Respondents' perception of job preparation was based on the question "How well did your program prepare you for your first job? Most respondents were positive about their preparation with 250 (32.2%) indicating they were "Well" prepared, 222 (28.6%) indicating "Adequately" prepared, and 159 (20.5%) indicating "Very well." Only 27 (3.5%) felt they were "Poorly" prepared and only 11 (1.4%) felt they were "Not at all" prepared.

Job Satisfaction

The question "Overall, I am satisfied with what I do in my job" was used to represent respondents' perception of overall job satisfaction. Most respondents were satisfied with the work they were doing in their job with 354 (45.6%) and 329 (42.3%) indicating "Agree" and "Strongly agree" respectively. Fewer indicated dissatisfaction with their job, with only 44 (5.7%) selecting "Disagree" and 36 (4.6%) selecting "Strongly disagree."

Intent to Leave LIS

Respondents were asked about their intent to leave the LIS field through two questions based on two different time periods: within a year and within three years. Respondents were first asked to rate their level of agreement if the statement "I plan on leaving LIS work within a year." Very few respondents indicated an intention to leave LIS within a year with only 10 (1.3%) selecting "Strongly agree" and 24 (3.1%) selecting "Agree." Most respondents did not express an intent to leave LIS work within a year, with 520 (66.9%) selecting "Strongly disagree" and 207 (26.6%) selecting "Disagree." Responses to the question "Do you think you will still be working in LIS 3 years from now" followed a very similar pattern with the majority (n = 725, 93.3%) of respondents indicating "Yes" they would still be working in LIS in 3 years, and only 38 (4.9%) selecting "No."

Regression Analysis

A logistic regression was performed to ascertain the effects of racial identity (non-BIPOC, BIPOC), education satisfaction, job preparation, and job satisfaction on the likelihood that academic librarians would indicate an intent to leave the LIS field within 3 years. The logistic regression model was not statistically significant, X^2 (9, N = 577) = 12.88, p = .17. The model explained only 7.4% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in intent to leave the LIS field within 3 years and correctly classified 95.7% of responses. Academic librarians who agreed that overall they were satisfied with what they did in their job were 96% more likely to not indicate intent to leave the LIS field within 3 years (OR=1.96, 95%CI [1.27, 3.05]). Satisfaction with education, racial identity, and job preparation were not associated with intent to leave the LIS field within 3 years.

An ordinal regression model was estimated to investigate whether racial identity (non-BIPOC, BIPOC), satisfaction with education, job preparation, and job satisfaction impact intent to leave the field of LIS based on level of agreement to the statement "I plan on leaving LIS work within a year"). Together, the predictors accounted for a statistically significant amount of variance in the outcome, likelihood ratio χ2 (11) = 85.92, p < .001. Only satisfaction with education, B = -.399, SE = .160, OR = .671, p = .012, and job satisfaction, B = -.893, SE = .125, OR = .409, p < .001, significantly independently predicted intent to leave LIS. For a one unit increase in Satisfaction with Education, the odds of moving from Strongly Disagree to Disagree to Agree to Strongly Agree are 0.671 times greater, given that the other variables in the model are held constant. In other words, the higher the Satisfaction with education, the lower the agreement of intent to leave. And for one unit increase in Job Satisfaction, the odds of moving from Strongly Disagree to Disagree to Agree to Strongly Agree are .409 times greater, given that the other variables in the model are held constant. In other words, the higher the Job Satisfaction, the lower the agreement of intent to leave. Each level increase in Satisfaction with Education was associated with a 32.9% decrease in the odds of agreement of intent to leave. Each level increase in Job Satisfaction was associated with a 59.1% decrease in the odds of agreement of intent to leave. Overall the model accounted for approximately 8.3% of the variance in the outcome, McFadden's pseudo-R^2 = .083. Racial identity and job preparation were not associated with intent to leave the field within one year.

DISCUSSION

The intent of this paper was to use existing data to empirically explore the impact of racial identity, educational satisfaction, job preparation, and job satisfaction on academic librarians' intent to leave the LIS field within one and three years. Overall, few academic librarians indicated an intent to leave the field in either one or three years. This finding supports the *Library Journal* study of library satisfaction conducted in 2008 that indicated academic librarians were satisfied with their careers in librarianship.[19]

The logistic regression did not produce an overall significant model for intent to leave the field within three years, though the model did suggest that high job satisfaction contributed significantly to respondents' indicating no intent to leave the field within three years. An ordinal regression produced an overall significant model with both job satisfaction and educational satisfaction contributing significantly to understanding respondents' intent to leave the field within one year. Both higher satisfaction with their education and with their jobs indicated lower odds of expressing an intent to leave the field within one year. Neither racial identity nor job preparation were indicated as significant factors for understanding intent to leave the field within one or three years.

The finding that job satisfaction indicates intent to leave the field supports research on career change in other fields. Rhodes and Doering identified job satisfaction, along with career satisfaction and available opportunities, as significantly impacting thoughts of career change in teachers.[20] Within LIS, a dissertation study by Rathbun-Grubb identified both job satisfaction and career satisfaction as determinants of occupational turnover intent.[21] Satisfaction with education as a potential determinant of intent to leave the field aligns with studies of career retention in other fields. Nursing in particular has found relationships between satisfaction with education and higher intent to leave their careers.[22] In the field of education, teacher preparation has also identified low satisfaction with preparation with higher probabilities of intention to leave.[23]

The sample studied in this paper showed no significant findings related to job preparation and racial identity. Given the lack of empirical research on either variable within LIS, this finding may or may not be relevant to future research on intention to leave LIS. As job preparation is more often associated with job satisfaction,[24] there is limited research supporting it as a stand alone variable with impact on intent to leave. A nearly 40 year old study of CPAs did find that career preparation was positively correlated with job satisfaction and negatively correlated with probability of turnover.[25] With racial identity, having only a small proportion of the sample (14.3%) identified as BIPOC likely made it more difficult to identify any differences based on racial identity.

LIMITATIONS

While secondary analysis of data is an accepted practice in research, it is inherently a limitation to a study as well. The main issue with secondary analysis of previously collected data is that the data was not collected with the intent of answering the secondary analysis research question.[26] This study takes advantage of the presence of questions of interest for understanding factors that may impact retention of academic libraries, but retention was not the initial focus of the study that originally collected the data. If retention had been the original intent of the study, different questions might have been asked, or different wording of questions might have been suggested.

A secondary limitation for this data was the small number of respondents who identified as BIPOC. Having fewer data points to work with in terms of identifying differences based on racial identity likely impacted the data analysis of racial identity as a potential variable of impact. Additionally, the original data set presented racial identity data as a collapsed dichotomous variable, rather than providing access to the individual responses based on the variety of racial identities originally included on the survey instrument. This decision to collapse was likely fueled by the smaller response rate for BIPOC respondents and a desire to ensure confidentiality of participants' identities by presenting racial identity in aggregated form.

A final consideration is the age of the existing data. It is possible that factors that affected BIPOC academic librarians' decision to leave the profession were different twenty years ago than they are today. Our future research will collect current data on academic librarians' job and educational satisfaction and intent to leave the profession.

CONCLUSION

Efforts to empirically understand what factors impact retention of academic librarians are needed in order for the LIS field to gain a full picture of the field's retention issues. This paper presented a secondary analysis of data collected by the WILIS 2 project, specifically participants' responses to questions related to educational satisfaction, job preparation, job satisfaction, racial identity, and intent to leave the field in one or in three years. Regression analysis indicated significant impact on job satisfaction and educational preparation on the odds of academic librarians indicating an intention to leave the field within one year. Job satisfaction was also significant for identifying the odds of indicating an intention to leave the field within three years, but the overall model was not significant.

These findings provide further support for the investigation of both educational and job satisfaction as factors that influence and impact intention to leave LIS as a career. While racial identity and job preparation were not found to be significant in the current analysis, future research should still consider them as potential factors. The results of this analysis will be used in planning a new survey related specifically to LIS retention, with the inclusion of questions directly addressing both educational preparation and job satisfaction as potential factors impacting the intent to leave. Data related to racial identity will also be included with the hopes of further exploring it as a potential factor influencing intention to leave the field. The results of this analysis also remind the field of the potential importance of job satisfaction for career longevity and support the suggestion for further, more current research into both job satisfaction and intention to leave the field.

NOTES

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