

Beyond Resilience: Moving from Self-Care to Collective Care

Nicole A. Cooke^a, Abigail Phillips^b, Cory Eckert^c, and Kaetrena Davis Kendrick^d

^aUniversity of South Carolina, United States

^bUniversity of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, United States

^cThe Post Oak School (TX), United States

^dWinthrop University (SC), United States

ncooke@mailbox.sc.edu, abileigh@uwm.edu, corydeckert@gmail.com, kendrickk@winthrop.edu

ABSTRACT

During the 2020-2021 academic year, which occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, library and information science (LIS) faculty, scholars, practitioners, and students were all forced into new ways of being, learning, and working with communities who were also unsure and at risk. The abruptness and uncertainties of the global crisis, compounded by racial unrest and economic decline, shone the harshest of lights on many pre-existing societal inequities and conditions in libraries (e.g., racism, the digital divide, and staffing hierarchies), and sharply exacerbated them. This new reality produced inordinate amounts of stress and introduced new mental health challenges for many in the LIS profession.

There are countless stories and anecdotes of LIS professionals being encouraged to practice self-care in an effort to cope with these challenging circumstances and times; do yoga, take a bubble bath, take a nap, etc. These practices are not inherently bad; however, they have become commodified, they place the onus on the individuals who are suffering, and they do nothing to address or rectify the systemic professional barriers and inequities that are part and parcel of the stressors being experienced. Instead of expecting individuals to “buck up,” demonstrate “grit,” and correct the larger systemic environmental issues themselves, the onus should be on the profession and its organizations to engage in collective care. “Collective care refers to seeing members’ well-being – particularly their emotional health – as a shared responsibility of the group rather than the lone task of an individual” (Mehreen & Gray-Donald, 2018). LIS and its entities should be focused on healing and improving themselves holistically and rectifying the issues that symptomatically affect its constituents. The solution is not to demand that people be resilient; the solution is to create healthy environments and demonstrate empathy and compassion towards the people who keep the organizations running.

To this end, *The Skillset Podcast* (a production of The University of South Carolina and Publishers Weekly) dedicated its Spring 2021 episodes to the topic of

Collective Care (as opposed to self-care). Collective care references the idea of caring for each other in addition to the self-care that we need to engage in for ourselves. Guests were asked: How, if at all, does collective care show up in the work that you do in your libraries and organizations?

What became clear in all of the episodes is that self-care is not enough; in fact, relying solely on self-care can be damaging because it doesn't fully address individuals' stressors and because it does not address underlying issues, the problems remain. And when the problems remain, individuals banking on the wonders of self-care are left disappointed, frustrated, and feeling as though they continue to fail themselves and their organizations. Additionally, many are unaware of collective care and therefore don't know to expect it from their organizations or how to ask for, or work towards, this kind of environment. Collective care can be expressed in a variety of community specific ways, and its beneficial effects extend to the larger communities being served by said organizations and staff.

This panel session will feature the podcast host and three of the season's guests who will discuss their opinions of self-care and collective care and share their thoughts about how they believe the LIS profession can improve in this regard and take better care of its most important assets - the people in the profession.

Panelists:

Nicole A. Cooke is the Augusta Baker Endowed Chair and an Associate Professor at the University of South Carolina. Her research and teaching interests include human information behavior, critical cultural information studies, and diversity and social justice in librarianship. She was the 2019 ALISE Excellence in Teaching Award recipient, and she is a cohost of *The Skillset Podcast*.

Abigail Phillips is an Assistant Professor in the School of Information Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where her research interests include cyberbullying, youth, social media, empathy, librarianship, libraries, making, critical librarianship, neurodiversity, and mental health advocacy. Abigail is a member of the [#LISMentalHealth](#) team. The [#LISMentalHealth](#) initiative aims to raise awareness of mental health among library and archives workers through online discussions, blog posts, resource-sharing, and the "Reserve and Renew Zine" series.

Cory Eckert is a private school librarian in Houston, TX. She received her MLIS from the University of Arizona and has worked in college, public, and public school libraries over the course of her career. She founded Storytime Underground.

Kaetrena Davis Kendrick is Dean of Ida Jane Dacus Library and Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections at Winthrop University (SC). Her research interests include professionalism, ethics, racial and ethnic diversity in the LIS field, and the role of communities of practice in practical academic librarianship. In 2019 she was named the Association of College & Research Libraries' (ACRL) Academic/Research Librarian of the Year for her research into the phenomenon of low morale which quantifies the experiences of many academic librarians who are not getting the support that they need for success in the field. Taking a deeper

dive into the subject, Kendrick has now documented behavior and cultures that specifically enable the low morale experiences of racial and ethnic minority academic librarians.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Critical librarianship; Information rights; Social justice; Political economy of the information society; Community engagement.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Self-care; collective care; LIS mental health; podcast.