Book Review

Review of Thriving as a Mid-Career Librarian: Identity, Advocacy, and Pathways

Semhar Yohannes, *University of Maryland Baltimore County*

ABSTRACT

Review of West, B.K., and Galoozis, E. (Eds.). (2023). Thriving as a mid-career librarian: Identity, advocacy, and pathways. Association of College and Research Libraries. 358 pp.

KEYWORDS

mid-career librarianship, advocacy, burnout, engagement

What is it called when a book falls into your lap at just the right time…perfect timing? Well, that is what happened to me with Thriving as a Mid-Career Librarian: Identity, Advocacy, and Pathways, edited by Brandon K. West & Elizabeth Galoozis. As a STEM librarian of 14 years, I have too many years of experience to be considered a young professional and too few to be considered a late career one. I am firmly in the middle and looking for new inspiration or even a new direction. It turns out this book gave me just that—new direction, and a chance to reflect on and reprioritize my professional goals.

Brandon K. West is head of research instruction services at the State University of New York at Geneseo. He recently achieved full librarian status and cannot rise higher in rank. Like so many mid-career librarians, he is asking himself "Now what?" Elizabeth Galoozis, head of information literacy and student engagement at the Claremont Colleges Library, recently transitioned from a faculty-librarian position at a large R1 school to this liberal arts college consortium position. She characterizes this stage of her career as "downshifting."

When soliciting chapters for this book, West and Galoozis asked contributing authors to center their chapters around four different themes:

- Section 1: Staying Engaged in Your Career

- Section 2: The Role of Identity in Shaping Mid-career Librarianship

- Section 3: Being Your Own Advocate

- Section 4: To Lead or Not to Lead?

In addition, they asked contributing authors to "include marginalized perspectives, address intersectionality, and/or reflect on privilege. All of us are affected, in different ways, by white supremacy and patriarchy and the library systems and structures in which they are embedded." Some authors were better than others at reflecting on their privilege and addressing how they advocate for others.

Section one starts strong with the chapter "Staying Engaged by Giving Back: The Librarian Parlor," which provides a look at librarians who found new ways to lead through the creation of LibParlor, a space for sharing expertise and asking questions about developing and publishing library research. Another standout chapter is "Boundaries and Breakthroughs: A Conversation on Maintaining Engagement and Avoiding Burnout in Reference and Instruction." I found this to validate my work experience of juggling increased responsibilities.

Section two, The Role of Identity in Shaping Mid-career Librarianship, is another excellent section with strong chapters that include "We Didn't Know: How a Mid-career Research Project Taught Us about Disability, Advocacy, and Ourselves" and "Community Cultural Wealth Model for Recognizing Strengths in Our Lived Experiences." I would easily read an entire standalone paper on both chapter topics.

Section three is the weakest of the four sections. As mentioned, the editors explicitly asked authors to "include marginalized perspectives, address intersectionality, and/or reflect on privilege" and except for one, all the authors in this section exclusively speak about how they advocate for themselves instead of how they use their position and privileges to advocate for others.

Section four is another strong section with the potential to be better. The last chapter, "How a Mid-career Librarian Advanced, Then Left Academic Librarianship," is a useful chapter but I cannot help but wish it were written from the perspective of a librarian who is Black or a POC. Academic librarianship suffers from the "leaky pipeline" in which Black/POC librarians leave the profession early because of mistreatment, a lack of advancement opportunities, and other negative experiences. It would be insightful to have a former Black/POC librarian share their experiences as a librarian and why they left the profession.

This leads me to my biggest criticism of the book, the editors asked contributing authors to include marginalized perspectives and address intersectionality, but the majority of the contributors are cis white librarians. The editors should have made greater effort to include marginalized librarian voices. It would be invaluable to hear their perspectives about how they experience mid-career with their many identities at play. Overall, this is a useful resource but has room for improvement. Hopefully, future editions will take this constructive criticism into consideration and seek out a greater diversity of librarians from marginalized communities to share their experiences.