

AALL Diversity Redelineated*

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There are other types of diversity beyond race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Mr. Wheeler discusses various ways to experience different types of diversity in law librarianship.

¶1 A fair amount of attention has been given to the topic of diversity within the pages of *Law Library Journal* over the years.¹ The topic is considered so important that it is the focus of a regular feature in the journal, the feature for which I write this piece.² This concern over issues of diversity within the legal profession, within the profession of librarianship generally, within law librarianship more specifically, and within the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) is both valuable and laudable. Nevertheless, the discussions I am most familiar with tend to revolve around what we as an association have not achieved, what we have not done, and why we need to do more. While these types of discussions are essential, I would like to consider the diversity issue from a different angle. I would like to examine the ways we *are* a diverse association and what we have achieved thus far.

¶2 When I joined AALL back in 2001, I immediately began to survey the landscape with respect to the racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, and gender identity makeup of the membership. Back then I relied mainly on my uninformed observations and subjective assessments. I was curious, as an African American gay man, to see whether there were others like me involved in the association. Here are some of my impressions. That year AALL had just elected its first African American president.³ There were other members serving on the AALL Executive Board that

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1. See, e.g., Roy M. Mersky, *AALL and the Road to Diversity*, 85 LAW LIBR. J. 859 (1993); Dwight King, Rhea A-L Ballard, Helena Lai & Grace M. Mills, *Profiling Minority Law Librarians: A Report on the 1992–93 Survey*, 87 LAW LIBR. J. 247 (1995); Joyce A. McCray Pearson, *Diversity in AALL—It Does Exist*, 90 LAW LIBR. J. 541 (1998); Yvonne J. Chandler, *Why Is Diversity Important for Law Librarianship?*, 90 LAW LIBR. J. 545 (1998); Joan S. Howland, *Diversity Deferred*, 90 LAW LIBR. J. 561 (1998); Raquel J. Gabriel, *Diversity in the Profession*, 102 LAW LIBR. J. 147, 2010 LAW LIBR. J. 8; Alyssa Thurston, *Addressing the “Emerging Majority”: Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Law Librarianship in the Twenty-First Century*, 104 LAW LIBR. J. 359, 2012 LAW LIBR. J. 27.

2. *Diversity Dialogues* has been a regular feature appearing periodically in *Law Library Journal* since 2010. The first column, titled *Diversity in the Profession*, appeared at 102 LAW LIBR. J. 147, 2010 LAW LIBR. J. 8.

3. Carol Avery-Nicholson was then Assistant Director for Bibliographic and Collection Resources at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She was elected to and served in the office of Vice President/President Elect during 2001–2002.

year who also identified themselves as being from historically underrepresented groups.⁴ The Social Responsibilities Special Interest Section (SR-SIS) Standing Committee on Lesbian and Gay Issues (SCLGI) was highly visible at the Conference of Newer Law Librarians (CONELL) Marketplace and was, in fact, one of the very first organizations I encountered during my CONELL experience. The 2001 AALL Diversity Symposium was devoted to “diversity issues that commonly arise in the workplace.” It was titled *Effective Communication in a Diverse Society*.⁵ The Minority Leadership Development Award (MLDA) had just been created and was awarded the following year to its inaugural recipients.⁶ The 2001–2002 *AALL Directory and Handbook* contained 193 law librarians who self-identified as minorities.⁷ Most important, I saw people of color, lesbians, gay men, and individuals representing other kinds of diversity at every reception, facilitating or speaking on program panels, chairing committees, and serving in leadership roles in special interest sections.

¶3 Since then I have been actively involved with various diversity efforts within AALL.⁸ I have thought a lot about diversity in our association, and I am intimately acquainted with our progress on racial, ethnic, and sexual orientation issues. However, there are numerous kinds of diversity, beyond race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, that enrich and enliven our association and serve to make us all better law librarians.⁹ These other types of diversity, although they are often overlooked or ignored, have been a source of wisdom, compassion, enlightenment, and professional development throughout my career. So I would like to spend a little time discussing these other ways of experiencing diversity.

¶4 We all know that AALL is made up of a variety of members, including information vendors, librarians from many different types of libraries, and information

4. Cosette T. Sun, then Director of the Alameda County Law Library, and James E. Duggan, then Director of Information Technology and Professor at Southern Illinois University, both served on the Executive Board in 2001–2002. Each year since 2001, racial, ethnic, and sexual orientation diversity have been represented on the AALL Executive Board.

5. Iris Lee, *Diversity (Report of the Diversity Committee)*, *American Association of Law Libraries Reports of Chapters, Special Interest Sections, Committees, and Representatives 2000–2001*, 93 LAW LIBR. J. 651, 697 (2001).

6. The inaugural recipients of the MLDA in 2002 were Tanya Brown, then Head Librarian at Spiegel & McDiarmid in Washington, D.C., and Donna Nixon, then Reference Librarian at the Kathrine W. Everett Law Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. See Anne McDonald, *Diversity (Report of the Diversity Committee)*, *American Association of Law Libraries Reports of Chapters, Special Interest Sections, Committees, and Representatives 2001–2002*, 94 LAW LIBR. J. 725, 779 (2002).

7. AM. ASS'N OF LAW LIBRARIES, *AALL DIRECTORY AND HANDBOOK* 368–76 (2001).

8. I served on the AALL Diversity Committee in 2006–07, and I chaired the committee in 2007–08. I served as the AALL Executive Board liaison to the Diversity Committee from 2010 to 2013, and I have moderated or spoken at two AALL Diversity Symposia. I have been an active member of the SR-SIS Standing Committee on Lesbian and Gay Issues, and I was the inaugural recipient of their Alan Holoch Memorial Grant in 2002. I was involved with the SR-SIS planning group that drafted the 2002 AALL Resolution on Constitutional Amendments Defining Marriage, and I read the resolution to the attendees of the 2002 AALL Business Meeting. I am a member of the AALL Black Law Librarians Caucus and the AALL Latino Caucus.

9. My intention is not to minimize or discount the importance of race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Rather, I hope to discuss these important topics in subsequent installments of *Diversity Dialogues*.

professionals working in corporations, nonprofits, government, and other organizations not necessarily related to libraries. One thing that has fascinated me over the years is the wide diversity in both career choices made and career goals pursued by AALL members. The daily work life of a knowledge manager at a large, fast-paced law firm is completely different and requires many different skill sets from my work as an academic law library director and professor. Likewise, the motivation and skills necessary to excel as a foreign and international law librarian can differ greatly from those possessed by state, county, or court law librarians passionate about access to justice for the underserved. I recently met a law librarian who works in development prospecting for a large private university; her talents and skills serve the financial needs of her entire university—she does not work in libraries at all. Contrast that with librarians who are information vendors or information product developers. The factors that drive individuals toward such radically different career paths are intriguing to me. These facets of diversity exist within AALL, and they fuel the collective wisdom of our profession. They are part of what makes our association successful because they facilitate mutual learning, and they demonstrate to all that law librarians' skills and expertise are invaluable to many different types of organizations in countless ways.

¶5 I have benefited from AALL's rich diversity in both career goals and career paths. Discussing my law school's information needs with a law librarian managing the needs of a boutique law firm specializing in energy or intellectual property has helped me to learn and grow as a researcher and as a library manager. Learning which information resources are crucial for a specialized practice area helps me to better serve professors and other academic patrons researching in that area. In the same way, when law librarians serving judges or practicing attorneys share their experiences, it helps me to teach students skills relevant to real-world legal practice. In the academic world, librarians who choose to continue in their specialties rather than becoming managers or administrators, such as career reference librarians, help me to stay current with new and changing legal resources and cutting-edge teaching methods. Career catalogers help me to understand the new discovery tools available and how they interact with the traditional online library catalog. Keeping current in these areas would be almost impossible for me due to the numerous other time-consuming responsibilities I juggle as an academic director. Thus, the diversity of career choice present within AALL has been a significant factor in my professional development.

¶6 Members of AALL have a vast assortment of professional interests that they explore in multifarious ways at our annual meetings. This exploration has served to broaden and deepen the content and enhance members' experiences of the annual meeting. For example, when I was a very new law librarian charged with teaching legal research courses in my law school, I knew I needed help and guidance. It was not hard to find AALL members who had devoted their careers to innovative legal research instruction. These are people for whom teaching is a passion; people who spend a significant portion of their professional energy improving their teaching skills. Their insights helped me to succeed as a legal research teacher.

¶7 Another example is law librarians who are passionate about writing. For the past several years, I have attended an AALL Annual Meeting program called the

AALL/LexisNexis Call for Papers. This program features the winners of the AALL/LexisNexis Call for Papers competition discussing their papers and their writing process. The audience is typically filled with law librarians who write or who aspire to write; they are passionate about writing, sharing their insights, pitfalls, quirks, and successes. As a pretenure academic director who is required to publish, these programs have both educated and inspired me. They illuminate the fact that people write because they have something to say, and that the drive to write transcends library type, title, degrees earned, or employment-related publishing requirements. Moreover, these programs illustrate the reality that any of us, regardless of employer or job title, may have something to share with our professional peers.

¶8 One final example of a specialized interest or aptitude found within our association is that for technology. Technology-inspired law librarians span every library type, age, and gender. They have interests that range from mobile research technologies, to law firm knowledge management and cyber-security technologies, to cloud-computing solutions, to technology applications that aid self-represented litigants. I have witnessed how these law librarians have infused our profession with their passion for technology. Alas, I am one of the least technologically savvy law librarians ever, so I am constantly learning from others about how technology applications can be used to help me do my work faster and better and have more fun doing it.

¶9 Perhaps the most visible manifestation of the interest in technology within AALL is the Cool Tools Café sponsored by the Computing Services Special Interest Section (CS-SIS). This demonstration of great gadgets, apps, software, and other innovative uses of technology has become one of the most popular programs at the AALL Annual Meeting. Its popularity can be explained by its almost universal usefulness. Folks with deep technology knowledge and experience get to show off their expertise, and those who know little about technology get to learn and experience new and innovative gadgets and applications. Some of the items demonstrated at the 2013 AALL Annual Meeting were Prezi (a web-based presentation tool), Vuvox (a web-based tool for creating media-rich collages), augmented-reality image-recognition apps like Google Goggles, cloud-based storage solutions, RSS readers, screen-casting software, and more.¹⁰ These Cool Tools programs are the perfect manifestation of the wide diversity in technology knowledge and experience within AALL working for the benefit of all.

¶10 A type of diversity that is hard to describe accurately, but that most certainly influences the services we provide to our patrons, is something I will call socio-anthropological diversity. By this I mean the rich diversity of life experiences that we bring to our jobs. It includes familiarity with regional or even international social customs, speech patterns and accents, differences in demeanor and comportment, styles of dress, religious practices, and familiarity with various subcultures.¹¹

10. For a description of technologies demonstrated at the 2013 AALL Annual Meeting in Seattle, see *B3: Cool Tools Café*, CS-SIS: COMPUTING SERV. SPECIAL INTEREST SECTION, <http://cssis.org/education/annual-meeting/2013/b3-cool-tools-cafe> (last visited Nov. 8, 2013).

11. For example, there are subcultures that can influence dress, comportment, interests, and affinity. By subcultures I mean affinity groups such as goths, steampunk enthusiasts, gays, cowboys and ranchers, the transgendered, the homeless, hipsters, hip-hop fans, members of certain religious

It can also include ethnic factors. Some law librarians, due to their life experience or their place of residence, have had more exposure to certain subcultures than others. I have found it extremely helpful to learn from all types of law librarians about their experiences dealing with patrons from various subcultures.

¶11 One particularly interesting example involves mentally ill library patrons. Amy Hale-Janeke has a wealth of experience working with this population and has done several presentations on the topic.¹² While working at public law school libraries at the University of New Mexico and Georgia State University, I encountered a number of patrons with untreated mental illnesses. Admittedly, I felt uncomfortable and ill equipped to give them the service they deserved. However, drawing on insights gleaned from Ms. Hale-Janeke, I was able to provide better service and be an example to other law librarians of how we can engage and ultimately serve patrons with untreated mental illnesses.

¶12 A less widely applicable example from my professional life involves dealing with the ranchers (real-life cowboys and cowgirls) who came into the law library at the University of New Mexico. Being a somewhat sheltered city dweller, I had never encountered this subculture. Ranchers would come into the library covered in desert dust, occasionally with cattle manure on their boots, and sometimes even sporting guns in their holsters.¹³ As an inexperienced newer librarian, I am afraid my surprise and dismay sometimes showed on my face. However, I worked with exceptional librarians who talked with me about cattle ranching and the often unmet legal needs of ranchers who sometimes drove for hours to use our law library.¹⁴ Working with law librarians familiar with the region and the realities of life on New Mexico ranches helped me to establish empathy, build respect, and develop a strong and sincere motivation to help these delightful and often inspiring patrons.

¶13 One final example deals in part with race and ethnicity but also with culture and subculture. While working in New Mexico I served many Native American prose patrons, attorneys, and students from numerous tribes and Pueblos.¹⁵ Before moving to Albuquerque, I had had very little exposure to Native American people and their often rich, ancient, and storied cultures and histories. Working with librarians familiar with Native cultures and with exceptionally talented Native law

groups, the tattooed and pierced, the blind, the deaf, others that are differently abled, etc. Library patrons belonging to any of these groups may present a style of dress or a comportment that is unfamiliar and even startling to librarians who have not encountered it before.

12. Ms. Hale-Janeke, Head of Reference Services at the U.S. Court of Appeals Fifth Circuit Library in New Orleans, Louisiana, has many years of experience working in public law libraries and dealing with all types of patrons. I have twice seen her present on the topic of serving mentally ill law library patrons using specialized strategies and techniques.

13. Only once did I encounter a rancher who entered the library with a holstered gun. I was completely unprepared for that interaction. Carrying an unconcealed firearm is legal in New Mexico, although prohibited on university property. See N.M. STAT. ANN., 3-7-2 to 3-7-3 (West, Westlaw through 2012 legislation).

14. New Mexico does not have a system of county law libraries. The University of New Mexico School of Law Library is one of the only resources available to residents of that state seeking to do legal research.

15. There are twenty-two federally recognized tribes in New Mexico and nineteen of them are Pueblos. See generally *New Mexico's 22 Tribes and the Indian Affairs Department*, N.M. INDIAN AFFAIRS DEP'T, <http://www.iad.state.nm.us/history.html> (last visited Nov. 8, 2013).

students inspired me to learn more about the populations I was there to serve. These same librarians helped me to understand that seemingly simple legal issues can become extremely complex when federal Indian law and tribal law must be taken into consideration. Law librarians with this kind of diverse professional expertise and cultural exposure are a part of what makes our association great.¹⁶

¶14 Another fascinating aspect of diversity that enlivens and enriches our association has to do with work style or work predisposition. Some might even call it personality type.¹⁷ In the workplace, these differences manifest themselves in somewhat familiar ways.¹⁸ In the larger context of AALL, work style differences can take very particular and useful forms. Consider attendee behavior during AALL programs. There are those who immediately have their hands up to ask questions as soon as questions are taken. Often these same individuals can be seen asking questions in almost every program that they attend. These people presumably learn by asking questions. On the other end of the spectrum, there are others who never ask questions. These people can be seen sitting quietly and thinking deeply about programming content with looks of concentration on their faces. Still others learn by taking copious notes. These various types of people are all trying to get the most out of the programming content. They just do it in very different ways. We need all of these types within AALL.

¶15 Another example involving personality type or work style can be seen in the tasks or committees for which AALL members volunteer. People who tend to be very detail oriented and who are often more introverted volunteer for committees like the Bylaws Committee or the Copyright Committee. These committees are likely to involve reading, analyzing, interpreting, and revising text. People who are more focused on the big picture, less detail oriented, and often extroverted go for committees like CONELL, Placement, or Local Arrangements. They do so because these committees involve more face-to-face, interpersonal interactions. As a big-picture sort of person, I know this has been true in my own professional life. The diversity of work styles represented in AALL's membership delivers the variety of volunteer types needed to sustain our association.

¶16 These examples only scratch the surface of the countless ways in which AALL membership contains meaningful diversity. My hope is that they illustrate the point that a broader and deeper definition of diversity, one that encompasses

16. For example, early in my career, David Selden at the National Indian Law Library was touted as an excellent resource in the area of Indian and tribal law. Faye Hadley, then at the University of Tulsa, was famous in New Mexico for her expertise in Indian and tribal law research. She later went on to help found the AALL Native Peoples Law Caucus. Sherri Thomas, a law librarian at the University of New Mexico, has become an Indian and tribal law expert and scholar who both teaches and writes in these doctrinal areas.

17. See generally *MBTI Basics*, THE MYERS-BRIGGS FOUND., <http://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics/> (last visited Dec. 22, 2013) (The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is often used to help individuals discover or better understand personality type as it relates to work and career.).

18. See generally Bradley Davis Platt, *Criterion-Related Validity of the Kaleidoscope Profile: A Learning/Working Style Instrument* (2003) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, George Mason University); Nancy H. Leonard et al., *Information Processing Style and Decision Making*, 20 J. ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAV. 407 (1999); David J. Pittenger, *The Utility of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*, 63 REV. EDUC. RES. 467 (1993).

more than race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity, is instructive in examining the effects of diversity on librarianship and on AALL. Without a doubt, more limited definitions of diversity are important in certain contexts. Indeed, racial diversity has profound and desirable consequences that exceed the scope of this column.¹⁹ Yet the ways in which the diversity we possess tailors our skills and helps us to better serve our patrons is both fascinating and instructive. Diversity is a quality or condition to which we all contribute, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender identity. My hope is that we can keep in mind the flavors and spices that we all bring to the mix of our association and how these ingredients combine to form a stew that is nourishing to all types of law libraries and legal information seekers.

19. A discussion of racial diversity and its consequences for our profession will be the topic of a forthcoming installment of *Diversity Dialogues*.