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Disrupting Diversity Narratives: Introducing Critical Conversations in Libraries

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Disrupting Diversity Narratives: Introducing Critical Conversations In Libraries

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February 1, 2018

Beyond the SEA Webinar

Good afternoon, everyone! My name is Ione Damasco, and I'm the coordinator of cataloging at the University of Dayton. Today my hope is that you leave here with more questions than answers, but that those questions motivate you to work for deep, lasting, and positive change around diversity and race issues in our libraries. I'm going to start by sharing the results of a research project I completed in early 2016 that has relevance for our discussion around diversity. And then as you can see from the title of this presentation, we will explore what's missing from our conversations on diversity in libraries. While my experience and research is grounded specifically in academic libraries, I would like you to consider how to map these ideas to your work in health librarianship, because I think there are lots of possible points of connection here.

Part 1.
What We Talk
About

So let's look at how we talk about diversity in libraries.

Diversity Initiatives at MLA

- Newly appointed Diversity Task Force at MLA:
<http://www.mlanet.org/p/bl/et/blogid=36&blogaid=1636>
- Diversity & inclusion named “top priorities” for MLA:
<http://www.mlanet.org/p/cm/dd/fid=1122&blogaid=1273>

I would like to start off by saying that MLA has already started conversations to explore what diversity and inclusion really means for the organization and its members, and how diversity and inclusion impact the people that the members of MLA serve. I encourage you to read these two blog posts from MLA when you get a chance to find out more about what’s currently underway at MLA.



One way we can examine how we talk about diversity in academic libraries is to look at formal, institutional plans or policies regarding diversity. Many colleges and universities have institutional diversity plans in place these days. So why is formal planning for diversity important? It's one way of ensuring that diversity is an integral part of the framework of an organization, and can provide a blueprint for developing policies, programs, and practices that are seamlessly integrated into the daily operations of an institution. The process of diversity planning can be very similar to strategic planning. Academic libraries often do strategic planning to set both short-term and long-term goals, to clearly define areas of work, and to demonstrate the value of the library to the wider campus community. Sometimes academic libraries integrate goals related to diversity into their strategic plans, but some libraries create separate diversity plans that are more detailed and more focused around diversity goals. Caveat—just because these are listed here, doesn't mean I think these are the only ways to develop diversity plans, but these are what are commonly known.

ALA has provided some resources and examples to help libraries develop specific diversity plans, and they have also provided access to their own internal diversity plan. ARL compiled examples of diversity plan and programs in their SPEC Kit 319, which was published in 2010, and it is another great resource for diversity planning. But diversity plans themselves can vary in terms of structure and content. One more recent resource that I wanted to explore more fully for this particular research project is the ACRL Diversity Standards, and how they might impact diversity planning.

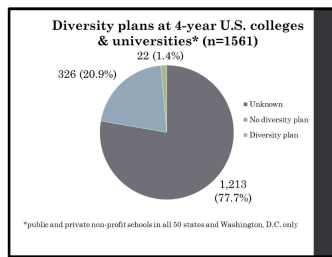


Some of you who work in academic library environments may be familiar with this. In 2012, ACRL published a set of standards for cultural competence in academic libraries. By creating these standards, ACRL was basically saying that in order to serve our diverse constituents effectively, those of us who work in academic libraries must develop the skills necessary to do so. Being culturally competent is not just a matter of personality or intuitiveness, there are specific areas of performance that can be developed, both on an individual and an organizational level that must be addressed in order to create inclusive environments that serve the needs of all of our users, especially those who have been traditionally underserved or underrepresented. What you see here are the standards listed in brief, but the full document goes into much more detail about what each standard means, and how it can be implemented. So, knowing that there are diversity plans for academic libraries are out there, and knowing that these standards exist, I undertook a research project in late 2015 that asked the question: to what extent are these standards reflected in current academic library diversity plans?

Methodology

- Content analysis
 - Deductive analysis
 - Coding
- Study limitations & challenges
 - Single coder
 - Diversity plans only, not strategic plans or university-level diversity plans
 - Unknown quantity for sampling purposes
- Plans collected in summer and fall 2015

The basic process for this project was relatively straightforward— I defined a sample of academic libraries, obtained copies of library diversity plans from those libraries if available, and then analyzed those plans using content analysis as the method for determining what standards are present in those plans. In this case, I used a deductive approach, and used the ACRL standards as the existing framework that I wanted to test through a process known as coding. I used the definitions for each standard as a starting point, and then created a codebook that I would use to help me analyze each document. I read each document closely, and then identified phrases or sentences that corresponded to one of the ACRL standards (or codes in this case). Normally, when coding a text, to ensure validity and reliability, it is best to have multiple coders, to see if more than one person is interpreting passages of text in the same way. But since I was the only coder for this project, I coded everything once, allowed some time to pass, and then coded everything again to make sure I was applying the standards consistently throughout the process. Another limitation of this study is that I decided up front to limit my pool of documents to stand-alone diversity plans, not strategic plans that included some component related to diversity, nor did I analyze institutional-level diversity plans. And another challenge I faced is that I had no idea when I started what the size of the pool of documents for this study would be. So coming up with a plan for sampling was a bit arbitrary.



Since I didn't know how many academic library diversity plans existed at the time I started this study, I decided to cast a wide a net to see what I could gather. Using the Carnegie Classification database of schools, I came up with a basic pool of 4-year colleges and universities in the United States. I excluded private for-profit schools (like the University of Phoenix), schools that were not part of the contiguous 50 states and the District of Columbia (such as schools in Puerto Rico or Guam), and schools that were actually closed although still listed in the Carnegie database. I ended up with 1,561 schools. At first I tried to search each school's library website, to see if I could find a publicly posted copy of a diversity plan, but I also ended up emailing each library (usually the dean or director) to see if I could obtain a copy of their library's diversity plan. I also limited my search to the main, undergraduate library for each college or university. I ended up receiving 22 documents from 22 different schools to use in my final analysis. 326 of the schools I emailed replied to my request to inform me that they had no formal diversity plan in place. And the remaining schools never responded to my email request, nor could I find any diversity plan on their library websites. An interesting side note—there were a small number of respondents who stated they did not have a plan in place, but after being prompted by my initial email request, acknowledged their library probably needed one, and some even said they would start the process of trying to develop one. Since the completion of this project back in early 2016, I have found a few more library diversity plans that have been recently written, which are referenced in the ARL SPEC Kit 356 that I mentioned a few slides ago.

Findings

Standard	No. of plans	No. of references
Organizational dynamics	22 (100%)	144
Workforce diversity	21 (95%)	197
Professional education and continuous learning	21 (95%)	82
Development of collections, programs, and services	19 (86%)	165
Organizational and professional values	19 (86%)	71
Service delivery	17 (77%)	121
Cross-cultural knowledge and skills	10 (45%)	15
Cross-cultural leadership	9 (41%)	36
Language diversity	6 (27%)	18
Cultural awareness of self and others	4 (18%)	4
Research	3 (14%)	3

Here you can see, in descending order of frequency, the ACRL standards listed and how often they appeared across the pool of plans I obtained.



Let's take a closer look at the top 3 standards that were conceptually referenced by the plans.

Organizational dynamics

- "Emphasize importance of civility in the workplace and foster positive working relationships"
- "Improved communication for and participation in diversity efforts across all Libraries' locations"
- "Library seeks to institutionalize and assess diversity in all aspects of the Library's performance"
- "fostering a work environment which will insure [sic] tolerance and respect for all"

According to the ACRL document, organizational dynamics is defined as: Librarians and library staff shall participate in and facilitate the development of organizational dynamics that enable individuals, groups, and organizations to continually develop and exercise cultural competence. Here are some examples from the plans of phrases and sentences that exemplified this idea of organizational dynamics. As you can see, organizational dynamics covers topics like workplace climate, assessment, and employee engagement. It makes sense that this standard would be manifest in all of the plans that I analyzed—without a good understanding of an organization's culture and climate, it is very difficult to implement new initiatives or develop new programs, especially if the members of that organization do not feel like they are valued members or if they have to work in hostile conditions.

Workforce diversity

- “Develop and implement recruitment and retention strategies for staff, faculty, and students from underrepresented groups”
- “Investigate additional retention incentives; i.e., a mentoring program”
- “Coaching regarding unconscious bias for search & screen committees, as well as supervisors”
- “Target recruitment efforts to media whose circulation potentially includes individuals with diverse backgrounds”

Workforce diversity is defined in the ACRL standards as “Librarians and library staff shall support and advocate for recruitment, admissions, hiring, and retention efforts in libraries, library associations, and LIS programs to increase diversity and ensure continued diversity in the profession.” This is one topic that I think a lot of institutions have been concerned about for years now. The continued lack of diverse racial representation among librarians is a real problem. So it’s not too surprising to see that most of the diversity plans I looked at included a focus on recruitment and retention of diverse employees.

Professional education & continuous learning

- “Organize workshops and other activities on topics related to diversity and have discussion of workplace applications”
- “Provide educational opportunities to employees (including student employees) to enhance customer service with an emphasis on serving customers with diverse interests, perspectives and expectations”
- “Create practical experience opportunities where possible for Libraries staff, especially diverse staff pursuing MLS/MLIS degrees and Library Support Staff Certification.”
- “Continue to offer workshops for staff on a broad spectrum of diversity topics.”

The ACRL standard for Professional education & continuous learning is defined as “Librarians and library staff shall advocate for and participate in educational and training programs that help advance cultural competence within the profession.” We all know that our field is constantly evolving, and that we have to keep our skills and knowledge base fresh and up to date in order to serve our constituents better. Honing our skills in cultural competence is no different from learning new pedagogical techniques, or familiarizing ourselves with new cataloging rules. Again, it is not a surprise to see professional and continuing education rise to the top in these plans, with an emphasis on encouraging employees to undergo diversity training, and to encourage underrepresented staff to pursue a professional degree.



Bottom 3
Standards

I think it's also worth taking a quick look at the standards that appeared very infrequently across the plans I analyzed, to get us thinking about having more intentionality about these particular areas where we should be more competent.

Language diversity

- “Create guides and brochures in languages other than English, e.g. Chinese, Japanese or Spanish.”
- “Explore translating portions of the Library’s webpage into other languages, in order to highlight diversity and be more welcoming.”
- “Highlight regional and historical linguistic diversity in signage by creating select trilingual signs”

This standard is defined as “Librarians and library staff shall support the preservation and promotion of linguistic diversity, and work to foster a climate of inclusion aimed at eliminating discrimination and oppression based on linguistic or other diversities.” This one is pretty straightforward, and I have to admit I was surprised at how little this standard was present in the diversity plans, especially as library users continue to be more diverse, and many of our users speak primary languages other than English.

Cultural awareness of self & others

- “Individual diversity / intercultural competence goals”
- “The creation of these displays will be an important opportunity for all members of University Library staff to become involved in increasing their own and others awareness of many cultures and points of view.”

This standard is defined as “Librarians and library staff shall develop an understanding of their own personal and cultural values and beliefs as a first step in appreciating the importance of multicultural identities in the lives of the people they work with and serve.” One could make the argument that finding ways to implementing all of the other standards would inevitably lead to greater cultural awareness of one’s self and of other people, but I think it’s still important to be explicit in recognizing the importance of starting with self-awareness as a foundation for the other competencies. However, I also think this is the hardest standard to quantify and to assess in a concrete way, so again, it’s not a surprise this topic did not come up often in the diversity plans.

Research

- “Library faculty is also encouraged to engage in publishing and research relating to topics relating to diversity.”

Finally, the least common standard among the diversity plans is defined as “Research shall be inclusive and respectful of non-Western thought and traditional knowledge reflecting the value of cultural ways of knowing.” In the ACRL document, this definition is extrapolated to cover actions such as support and encouragement for librarians and library staff to conduct research related to diversity. In particular, the document talks about ensuring research on topics related to diversity are valued in retention, promotion, and tenure processes.

MLA Competencies for Lifelong Learning and Professional Success

- **Competency 4: Leadership & Management**
A health information professional manages personnel, time, budget, facilities, and technology and leads others to define and meet institutional goals.
- **Performance Indicator:** Integrates multicultural awareness and appreciation of diversity and equality into professional practice.
 - **Basic:** Describes own cultural background and recognizes biases; values cultural norms, experiences of others, and expressions of diverse viewpoints; recognizes power dynamics in relationships.
 - **Expert:** Develops and implements practices that foster diversity and equality; contributes to correcting inequities; participates in external collaborations.


<http://www.mlanet.org/page/test-competencies>

While the MLA does not have a document recommending cultural competencies for health information professionals, I did find a list of other professional competencies, and one of the performance indicators for competency number 4 does address diversity to a certain extent. There are some interesting phrases here, but I would challenge you all to consider what might be missing from this performance indicator. And since this is a performance indicator, how should performance be measured here? There is some alignment here with the diversity standards laid out by ACRL, particularly around cultural awareness of self and others. But I would suggest that some of the language here could be reconsidered, and perhaps reframed. For example, what does “appreciation” mean in this instance, and how can that be measured?

THE OTHER MLA COMPETENCIES

- **Competency 1: Information Services**
A health information professional locates, evaluates, synthesizes, and delivers authoritative information in response to biomedical and health inquiries.
- **Competency 2: Information Management**
A health information professional curates and makes accessible bioscience, clinical, and health information data, information, and knowledge.
- **Competency 3: Instruction & Instructional Design**
A health information professional educates others in the skills of bioscience, clinical, and health information literacy.
- **Competency 5: Evidence-Based Practice & Research**
A health information professional evaluates research studies, uses research to improve practice, conducts research, and communicates research results.
- **Competency 6: Health Information Professionalism**
A health information professional promotes the development of the health information professions and collaborates with other professionals to improve health care and access to health care information.

These are the other competencies put forth by MLA, and I would challenge you each to consider how each of these could be reconsidered within a social justice framework that is centered around diversity, equity and inclusion. For example, under competency #3, instruction and instructional design, how could diversity and inclusion be infused into this? When you develop an instruction session around developing research skills, do you consider issues like the primary language of your audience, or using scenarios or examples in your sessions that might integrate the cultural norms and experiences of your users, especially if they come from marginalized or underrepresented populations? These are just some examples of ways to rethink these competencies in order to better empower your diverse users and patrons. Perhaps consider looking at the ACRL document alongside the MLA competencies and map those areas where there could be some alignment as a foundation for developing inclusive policy and practice.



Part 2.
What We Don't Talk
About

Exploring the impact of a document like the ACRL standards is one way of looking at how we talk about diversity at our libraries. However, outside of the academic library realm, we are seeing an evolving discussion around diversity emerge. I think that as a society, our understanding of diversity is evolving, and our conversations about race in particular are starting to borrow from critical theory more and more (sometimes unknowingly). As a profession, in order to move forward with ensuring our libraries are places where everyone has access to whatever information they need, regardless of how they identify or are identified, where the information they need or want to find is not selectively available because of the biases of those who make collection decisions, where libraries are active change agents for undoing oppressive structures and are champions of social justice, all of these actions require not only thinking differently about diversity, but using the right language to talk about it.



This word cloud represents words that I think are integral to our conversations about diversity, and how often they did (or did not appear) in these diversity plans. The word “inclusion” was used a lot throughout these plans, 64 times across 17 of the plans, to be exact. But here are some words that never appeared in any of the plans I looked at, which is why they are so tiny in this word cloud: “racism,” “anti-racist,” “whiteness,” “white privilege,” “privilege,” “racial justice.” I want you to consider the implications of the absence of these words in diversity planning, and how our inability to articulate these issues in our formal documents might reflect our difficulties in overcoming the lack of diversity in our field.

Text search across all plans—words that are not present, or only present a few times

Racism—no hits

Oppression—1 hit

Discrimination—8 hits among 5 plans

Social justice—12 hits among 2 plans

Anti-racist—no hits

Whiteness—no hits

White privilege—no hits

Privilege—no hits

Inequity—3 hits among 2 plans

Racial justice—no hits

Bias—3 hits among 2 plans

Inclusion—64 hits among 17 plans

Equity—25 hits among 6 plans

Inequality—no hits

Power—2 hits in 1 plan

Critical race theory (CRT)

- Centrality & intersectionality of race and racism
- Challenge to dominant ideology
- Commitment to social justice
- Centrality of experiential knowledge
- Interdisciplinary perspective

Excerpted from Solorzano, Daniel G. (1998). Critical race theory, race and gender microaggressions, and the experience of Chicana and Chicano scholars. *International journal of qualitative studies in education*, 11(1), 121-136.

To shift our thinking around diversity, I would like us to consider a specific theoretical framework that emerged out of legal scholarship and has been widely adapted by other disciplines, particularly higher education. One framework in particular that I would like us to consider is critical race theory.

There's a great article from higher education literature that defines 5 key elements of critical race theory and how it informs the perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy of CRT scholars. I'm going to take these elements and map their definitions from the field of educational research to our discipline of library and information science.

The first states that CRT operates from the foundational premise that race and racism are endemic, enduring, and a central, not marginal factor in explaining differences among individual experiences (for our purposes) within libraries.

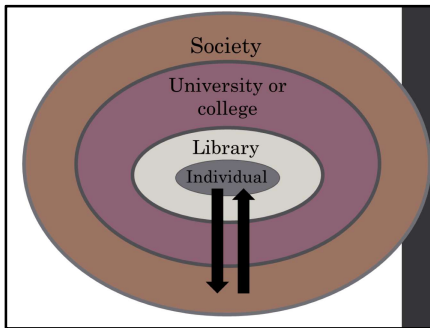
The second point defines CRT as challenging traditional notions of the educational system and its institutions, which have typically proclaimed objectivity, meritocracy, color and gender blindness, race and gender neutrality, and equal opportunity. Sound familiar? In particular, much like higher education, librarianship often touts neutrality as a desired stance. But CRT scholars and theorists would push back against those dominant

ideas, and would argue that upholding such claims of objectivity and neutrality actually camouflage self-interest, power, and privilege for dominant groups.

The third point emphasizes CRT's commitment to social justice. For us, this would mean that by working towards social justice in librarianship, we are working towards the elimination of racism as part of a broader social justice goal that seeks the ending of other types of oppressions that are focused on subordinating groups based on intersecting social identities.

The fourth point refers to the critical value that the lived experiences (or experiential knowledge) of men and women of color are legitimate, and essential to understanding and analyzing racism within librarianship. Qualitative research methods such as ethnographies, phenomenologies, storytelling, etc. are essential and integral to informing our understanding of racism in the field.

Finally, the last point emphasizes the important in CRT work of analyzing race and racism by placing them in historical and contemporary contexts using interdisciplinary approaches. Race and racism cannot be analyzed separately from other social identities, nor can race and racism be analyzed independently from socio-historical contexts. So we need to start pushing our research and writing about race in librarianship to include information, perspectives, and contexts from other disciplines, such as sociology, Black Studies, Gender studies, history, and education, to name a few.



Why do we need to think about diversity critically? I think using a critical framework, specifically CRT, means that we acknowledge and affirm that we as individuals, as libraries, as colleges and universities, as medical or health institutions, we are not separate from larger political, economic, social, and cultural forces at work in our everyday lives. Furthermore, as we interact with each other and with the larger communities or institutions of which we are a part, we both shape and are shaped by these forces. Sometimes we disrupt them, but often we reaffirm them, and usually unknowingly.

Social Identity & Social Power

- Diversity defined as different social identities
 - Race
 - Ethnicity
 - Gender
 - Sexual orientation
 - Ability
 - Socioeconomic status
 - Age

So in thinking about diversity in this way, it's important to also consider social identity and social power, and how those intersect. When we talk broadly about social identity groups, we often think of group membership as defined by certain labels, terms that we use to create a laundry list of difference, which is how we typically define diversity. Let's think back for a moment to our earlier discussion about how we define the word diversity in our libraries. Some of these categories of identity probably came up as you were talking with each other. And while recognizing or identifying those broad identities is necessary in order to increase diversity, it's also crucial to situate those identities within power dynamics. **[CLICK]**

Social Identity & Social Power

- **Oppressed/Marginalized/Target Group** - Group that faces oppression and has less social power; social identity groups that are disenfranchised and exploited
- **Privileged/Dominant/Advantaged/Agent Group** - Group that has privilege and more social power; social identity groups that hold unearned privileged in society
- **Intersectionality** - The ways in which each person's social characteristics or identities interconnect and contribute to unique, multiplicative, and layered experiences of oppression and privilege. Everyone holds multiple social identities (i.e., gay man; White woman; upper-class Person of Color). Social identity power can also be **contextual**, depending on the environment in which one is located.

Adapted from the University of Michigan, The Program on Intergroup Relations, 2013

So in thinking about diversity in this way, it's important to consider it within the context of social identity and social power, and how those intersect. I think it's helpful to have a common vocabulary to discuss these concepts, and the University of Michigan has provided some useful definitions for concepts that connect to social identity and power. When we talk broadly about social identity groups, it's important to situate those groups within power dynamics. It's also important to understand that each of us as individuals either identifies as or is identified by others as having membership within many social identity groups, but depending upon the context where we find ourselves, one or a couple of our identities might be more or less prominent at a given time. And of course these are connected to the idea of privilege, which a basic definition for would be the unearned benefits enjoyed by a particular group based on a particular social identity. And what's also important to consider is because we each hold intersecting identities, there are times when each of us as individuals might have more or less power. For example, I am and grew up as middle to upper middle class. That means I had and have more socioeconomic power than someone who might have grown up with a lower income status. That class privilege has led to me having access to high quality k-12 education and the ability to earn undergraduate and graduate degrees. However, as a woman of color who is the daughter of immigrants, I have experienced marginalization and discrimination around my identities as a woman and person of color,

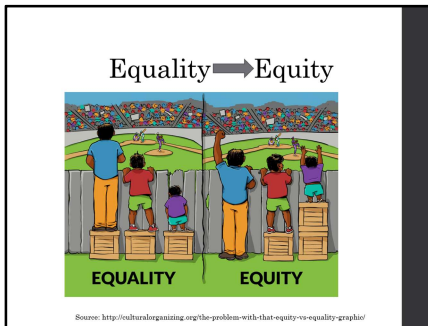
which in our society are often identities that experience more oppression and less privilege.

Social Identity & Social Power

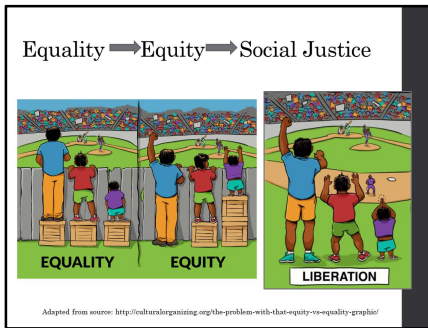
- **Oppression:** A system that perpetuates an imbalance of advantages and resources based on perceived social group memberships
- **Individual:** One person's actions that reflect prejudice against a target social group.
- **Institutional:** Policies, laws, or rules enacted by organizations and institutions that disadvantage marginalized groups and advantage privileged groups. These institutions include religions, government, education, law, the media, and health care system.
- **Societal/Cultural:** Social norms and customs that have a differential and/or harmful impact on more marginalized groups, whether or not they are so intended. These norms almost always have a historical significance.

Adapted from the University of Michigan, The Program on Intergroup Relations, 2018

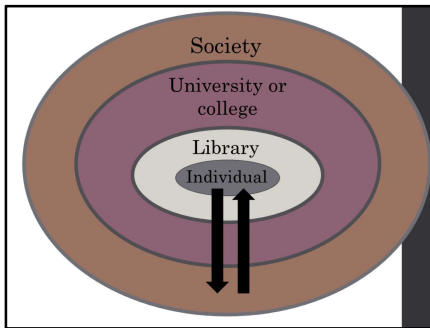
Again, considering the concept of power, individuals or groups of people can experience oppression around one or several of their social identities. And oppression can occur on multiple levels as well. One can experience an individual act of oppression—like a microaggression that might occur during a one-on-one personal interaction. Examples of institutional or systemic oppressions can occur when policies or practices disadvantage whole groups of people—for example, inequitable funding models for schools which disproportionately disadvantage communities of color. And social and cultural oppression can occur alongside and around institutional oppression, and can be another form of systemic oppression—think of social norms, customs or assumptions that can marginalize, silence or even erase the identities of those who don't hold power. For example, think of the continuing lack of racially diverse representation in leading roles for mainstream films, and how that perpetuates the invisibility of people of color in our culture, or the stereotyping that still occurs in film and TV that can reinforce negative images of people of color.




So, considering all of these ideas, let's examine why using a critical race lens is important when thinking about diversity and inclusion. Take a look at this cartoon. Many of you have seen this, or similar versions of this online. While I do think we have made some progress in thinking about diversity, where we are moving from an equality mindset (which states we treat everyone equally regardless of their differences), and moving towards an equity mindset, (where we are trying to achieve the same outcomes for everyone, regardless of their differences), by providing interventions that get to those outcomes. But I think we can push our thinking even further.



Using a critical lens to examine issues around diversity in libraries means moving from an equity mindset to a social justice mindset. In this image, you can see that in the first image, the same intervention (boxes of equal size) are provided to each baseball fan to boost them up higher so they can see the game. However, this intervention doesn't result in an equal outcome, as the shortest person among the group is still not able to see over the barrier. In the second image, and this is the conceptual space where I think most of us and our organizations are currently occupying, different interventions are being provided to each fan (more boxes for the shortest fan) to give each of them an equal view of the baseball game. So to think of this in terms of higher education, for example, this might mean providing scholarships to students who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds to give them access to the same educational institution as those students who come from a higher socio-economic status. But despite the equity of the outcome, where the fans can all see, or in the higher education example I'm using, all students are given access to the same educational institution, the barrier remains intact. In the last panel, we see a shift from the equity mindset to a social justice mindset—the barrier is completely eliminated for all of the fans. Of course, achieving liberation is much more complex than this cartoon would demonstrate, but I think this is a quick way to imagine how we can transform our thinking.



So let's revisit the ACRL cultural competencies for a moment, now that we have considered Critical Race Theory as a framework, and seen how we might move our thinking around diversity to an action-oriented social justice mindset. While I think there is definitely value in examining, and even implementing, many of the cultural competencies that ACRL has put forth, I would like for us to consider where it might fall short. The standards are very focused on individual, personal development and training, and to some extent, development or training at a library level, but leaves little to consider about how to create change or transformation at the institutional level, nor does it ask us to consider how larger sociohistorical and political forces constrain us. I think there is an underlying assumption that if we change our interpersonal behaviors, then we might be able to make some kind of impact outward, but the truth of it is, and this is what makes anti-racist, anti-oppression work so challenging, is that we have to be working at all levels simultaneously to push for change. **[CLICK]**



Disrupting diversity
narratives

Given a new framework to consider how we look at diversity in our libraries, where do we go from here? I would like to set before you some possible counternarratives to the dominant discourses we have had in libraries for a long time.

Dominant narrative #1

Libraries are neutral spaces, and librarians and other information professionals should strive to be neutral in their work.

COUNTERNARRATIVE

Libraries, archives, and museums are institutions grounded in the same social, political, and historical contexts as all other institutions in our culture, and therefore not neutral, and librarians and other information professionals, like all other people, each hold unconscious biases. To proclaim neutrality is to uphold an oppressive status quo.

STRATEGIES FOR DISRUPTION?

There has been a lot of debate over whether or not neutrality is a core value of librarianship and libraries in general. I think for a long time we have been told that as information professionals we should be as transparent as possible in the work that we do, but the truth of the matter is that we each bring our own mix of intersecting social identities into the spaces we inhabit, both professionally and personally. And our institutions are also the result of sociopolitical and historical forces that have shaped the ways in which we collect, preserve, and disseminate information. If we aren't willing to look critically then at ourselves, our practices, and the institutions in which we work, aren't we just maintaining the status quo, which has proven to be oppressive for many people over generations? What are some ways we can start to disrupt this particular story? How can we push back against a neutral ideal, and what should take its place?

Dominant narrative #2

We just need to provide more diverse library collections that reflect diverse identities and perspectives.

COUNTERNARRATIVE

The presence of marginalized perspectives on our shelves does not guarantee their use nor their integration into the curricular or research activities of our campuses.

STRATEGIES FOR DISRUPTION?

Many of us recognize how much our library collections reflect a Eurocentrist perspective. I think that many of us believe, with the best of intentions, that if we just add more “diverse” books into our collections, that will address a large part of our lack of diversity. However, I would propose that simply adding a handful of titles from marginalized perspectives is not truly transformative. If you build it they will come is not always an effective approach in academic libraries, and as we know from our circulation statistics, many of us have print collections where the majority of titles have never been touched. And the jury is still out on e-book usage, I think. So just adding more diverse collections does not ensure their use in the classroom, or as part of research activities. And to what extent do our collection practices and the scholarly publication industry make it more difficult for marginalized perspectives to get wide dissemination? What are some other ways we can think critically about our collection management policies and practices that push back against further marginalization?

<p>Dominant narrative #3 We just need to provide more educational and/or job opportunities to racial and ethnic minorities (e.g., diversity residencies, Spectrum scholarships, etc.).</p> <p>COUNTERNARRATIVE Adding more persons of color to an institution does not change whether or not that institution is socially just. Persons of color often find themselves in hostile environments, or are expected to adapt to “fit” into the culture of the organization.</p> <p>STRATEGIES FOR DISRUPTION?</p>

I think we often assume that if we simply increase our demographic diversity, our “diversity problems” will be fixed. However, there are a couple of issues with this kind of thinking. First, it keeps us in a mindset that diversity is a problem to be solved, which can create negative subconscious associations with the word diversity. This kind of thinking can lead to the concept of tokenism, or the idea that someone is hired for a position or given a scholarship simply because of their racial or ethnic identity, and not because they are otherwise qualified or can bring other skills and talents to an organization. Furthermore, increasing diversity in terms of numbers does nothing to change the structures around diversity—if we just bring in people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds without paying any attention to the environment in which we bring them, we are signaling a couple of things. First, persons of color are expected to adapt or assimilate in to the existing culture, which could be hostile, so it is no surprise when retention issues arise. Second, having demographic diversity on the surface also makes it easier for us to ignore the deeper reasons why we were never diverse in the first place, which means doing the hard work of looking at our policies and practices through a critical lens. What are some ways we can think differently about our strategies for increasing diversity in a meaningful way? What other narratives around hiring for diversity have you heard that could be disrupted?

- What are some other common narratives around diversity in libraries that you feel should be disrupted?
- How do you think libraries can move towards a social justice mindset?
- What strategies will you employ in your daily work to approach diversity and inclusion through a critical and intersectional lens?

Here are some questions for you to consider moving forward, and I hope that you continue having critical conversations around these issues with your colleagues.

Additional Recommended reading

- Babin, Michelle; Hamill, Dana; Janowski, Czeslaw; Kaufman, Rhonda; Langan, Julie; Miller, Michelle; Venlet, Jessica; Willer, Ann Marie. (2017). Creating a Social Justice Mindset: Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice in the Collections Directorate of the MIT Libraries. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/10871>
- Hathcock, April. White Librarianship in Blackface: Diversity Initiatives in LIS. In *The Library with The Lead Pipe*, October 7, 2015. <http://www.librarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/10/07/white-diversity/>
- Honna, Todd. 'Trippin' Over the Color Line: The Invisibility of Race in Library and Information Studies. *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 1(2). <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/108714>
- Hudson, David James. (2017). On "Diversity" as Anti-Racism in Library and Information Studies: A Critique. *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.24252/jcls.v1i1.9>
- Hussy, Lisa. (2010). The Diversity Discussion: What Are We Saying? *Progressive Librarian* no. 34-35, 9-10.
- Morales, Myrna, Knowles, Em Claire, and Bourg, Chris. (2014). Diversity, Social Justice, and The Future of Libraries. *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 14(3), 439-451.
- Vinopal, Jennifer. The Quest for Diversity in Library Staffing: From Awareness to Action. In *The Library with The Lead Pipe*, January 13, 2016. <http://www.librarywiththeleadpipe.org/2016/01/13/quest-for-diversity/>

There are lots of great articles out there that explore ideas of critical librarianship, looking at librarianship not just through a critical race lens, but through a critical queer lens, a feminist lens, and other modes of critical inquiry that use intersectional approaches. These are just a few to get started with. But don't limit yourself to articles—there are lots of other spaces online (blogs, Twitter, etc.) where librarians are engaging in these conversations to move us towards a more socially just future.

Questions?
Thank you!