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Developing A Social Justice Mindset in Technical Services

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Developing A Social Justice Mindset in Technical Services

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October 19, 2018

NCLA RTSS Workshop



Credits, acknowledgments, etc.

- Sara Ahmed
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- Jennifer Vinopal
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And many, many others...

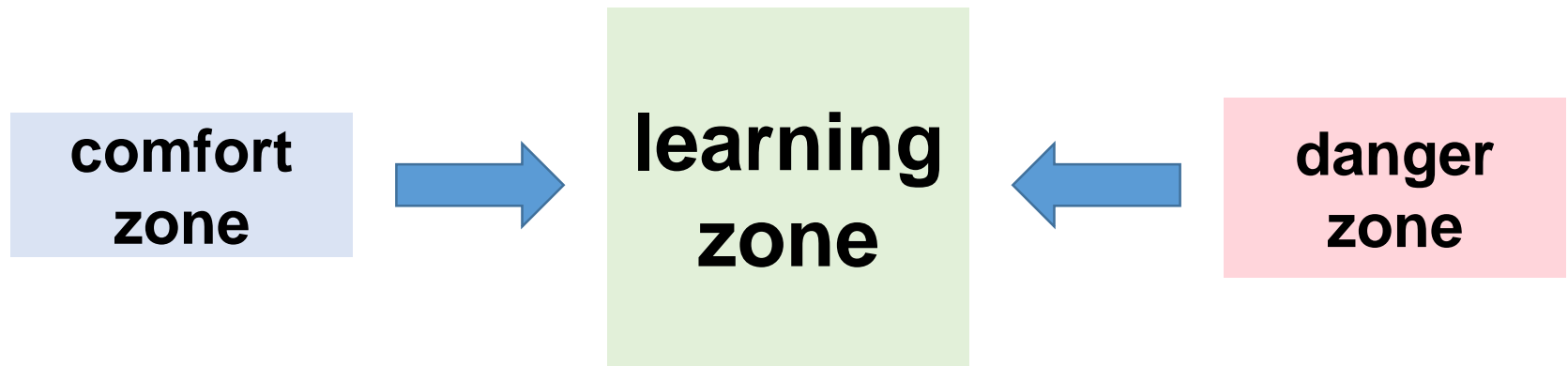


Land Acknowledgment

We acknowledge that the 2018 RTSS Workshop that is taking place on land that we call North Carolina is home to eight tribes, the Eastern Band of the Cherokee, the Coharie, the Lumbee, the Haliwa-Saponi, the Sappony, the Meherrin, the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation, and the Waccamaw-Siouan tribes. We acknowledge that indigenous peoples have been stewards of this land, and as guests here, we are committed to striving for social justice for all, but especially for indigenous peoples through reflection, accountability, and community building.



But first...



Adapted from Senninger, T. (2000). Abenteuer leiten – in Abenteuern lernen (Facilitating adventures – learning in adventures). Münster: Ökotopia Verlag.



My aspirations for today...

- Define diversity, equity, inclusion and social justice
- Naming systems of privilege and oppression
- Connect technical services work to social justice
- Connecting with each other to define social justice outcomes for our own work



What we say vs. what we mean

Diversity = Who

Equity = What

Inclusion = How



Diversity defined as different social identities

- Ability
- Age
- Ethnicity
- Gender expression
- Race
- Sexual orientation
- Socioeconomic status



What we say vs. what we mean

Diversity = Who

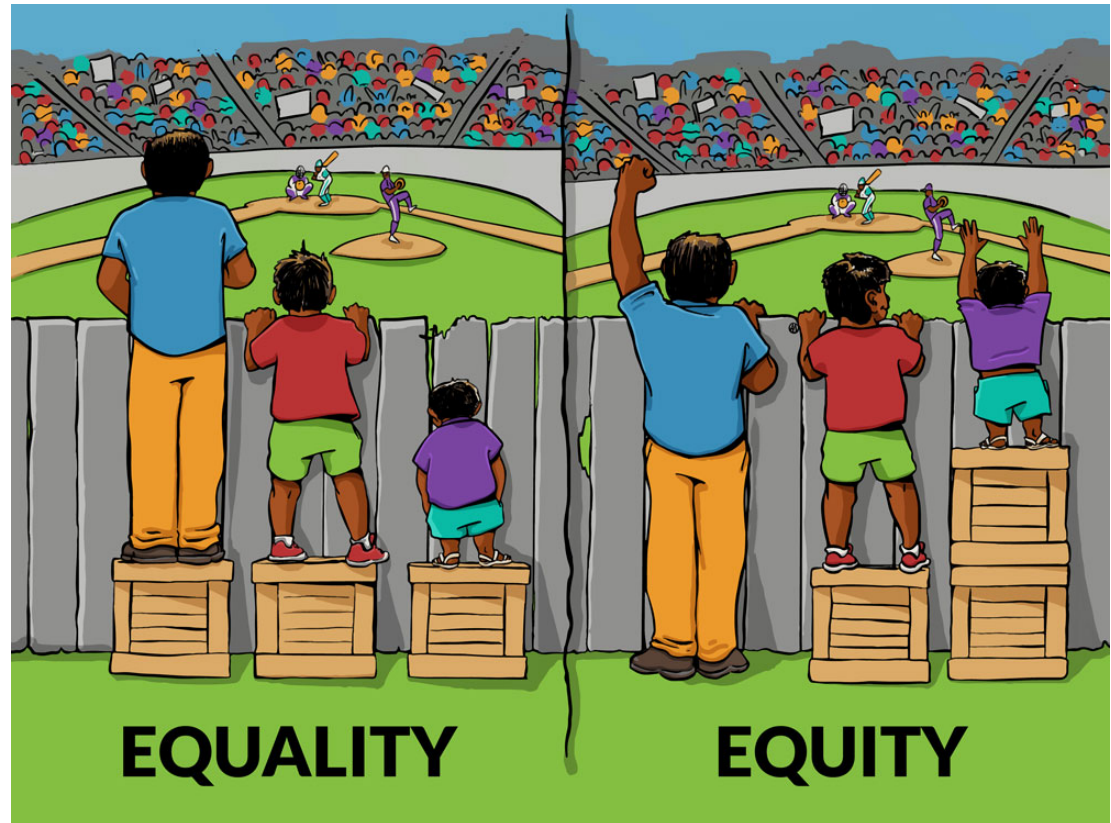
Equity = What

Inclusion = How

Equality → Equity

DESCRIPTION OF IMAGE

Equality vs Equity cartoon: In the first panel labeled equality, 3 different people of different heights are each standing on a box behind a fence that surrounds a baseball game. They are all trying to watch the game, but the shortest person still can't see over the fence because one box is not enough to make them tall enough to look over the fence. In the second panel labeled equity, the tallest person doesn't have any boxes and can see the game over the fence. The second person who is only a little bit shorter has been given one box to stand upon and can now see over the fence, and the last person who is also the shortest person, has been given 2 boxes to stand upon and can now see over the fence.





What we say vs. what we mean

Diversity = Who

Equity = What

Inclusion = How

Almost there...

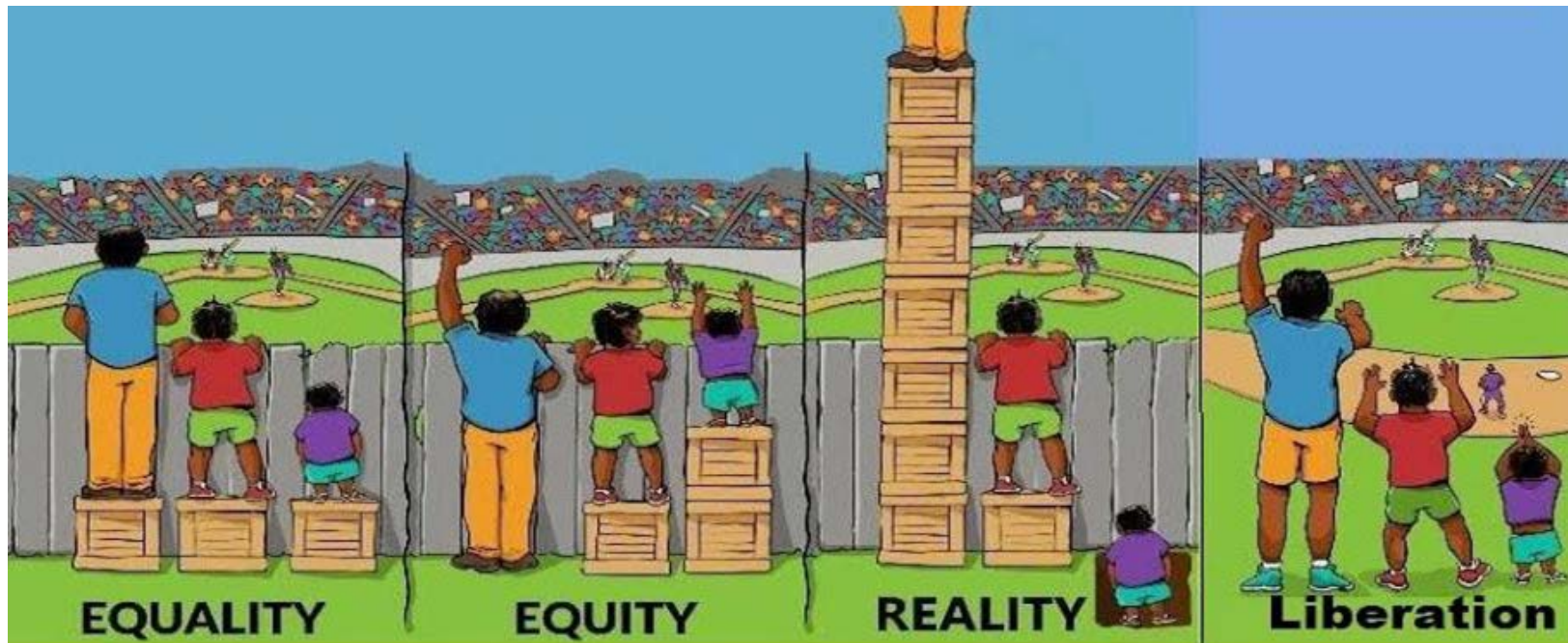
DESCRIPTION OF IMAGE

In this panel labeled liberation, all 3 fans who are of different heights can watch the baseball game because the fence that was the barrier in their way has been completely removed.



Equality → Equity → Social Justice

We have to be willing to recognize that privilege is real, and that the structures that surround us really are stacked in favor of certain groups over others, or else we cannot create meaningful change.



DESCRIPTION OF IMAGE: This cartoon includes the equality versus equity panels and the liberation panel, but also includes a panel labeled reality, where the tallest person is standing on 7 boxes to see over the fence to watch the baseball game, even though that person doesn't need any boxes to see over the fence. The second person has been given one box to stand on to see over the fence, and the last person who is the shortest person is actually standing in a hole in the ground and has no boxes, and cannot see over the fence at all.



What is social justice?

- GOAL: Full and equitable participation of people from **ALL** social identity groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs
- PROCESS: Reaching the goal should be democratic and participatory, respectful of human diversity and difference, inclusive and affirming of our capacity to collaborate to create change

In a socially just world, resources would be distributed in a way that is equitable and ecologically sustainable, and all people would be physically and psychologically safe, secure, recognized, and treated with respect.

We get there by building coalitions and working collaboratively.

Bell, Lee Anne. "Theoretical Foundations for Social Justice." In *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*. Third edition. Edited by Maurianne Adams and Lee Anne Bell, 3-26. New York: Routledge, 2016.



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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, 2015



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, the health care system, and libraries.
 - **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, 2015



“I have learned that oppression and the intolerance of difference come in all shapes and sexes and colors and sexualities; and that among those of us who share the goals of liberation and a workable future for our children, there can be no hierarchies of oppression. I have learned that sexism and heterosexism both arise from the same source as racism.”

Audre Lorde. 2009. “There Is No Hierarchy of Oppression.” In *I am your sister : collected and unpublished writings of Audre Lorde*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



“Neutrality is a myth.”

April Hathcock, “[It’s my struggle, give me space.](#)” *At The Intersections*, Feb. 29, 2016.



“We use subject headings that center the straight, white, male, European experience; and are often racist and dehumanizing.”

Chris Bourg, “[Debating y/our humanity, or Are Libraries Neutral?](#)” *Feral Librarian*, Feb. 11, 2018.



Subject(ive) Headings

From a 2016 email (Janis L. Young. Policy and Standards Division, Library of Congress)

“In response to requests from constituents who consider the phrase **illegal aliens** to be pejorative and disappearing from common use, the Policy and Standards Division of the Library of Congress, which maintains Library of Congress Subject Headings, has proposed that the headings **Aliens** and **Illegal aliens** both be replaced.

If approved, the heading **Aliens** will be replaced by **Noncitizens**, which is currently a Used For (UF) reference to **Aliens**. **Illegal aliens** will be replaced by two headings: **Noncitizens** and **Unauthorized immigration**. Other headings that include the word aliens or the phrase illegal aliens (e.g., Church work with aliens; Children of illegal aliens) will also be revised.”



Library of Congress Subject
Headings reflect the
language of the state.



On whose authority?

Name authority records & gender

Previous instructions at RDA 9.7 (2011 version)

9.7 Gender

9.7.1 Basic Instructions on Recording Gender

9.7.1.1 Scope

Gender is the gender with which a person identifies.

9.7.1.2 Sources of information

Take information on gender from any source.

9.7.1.3. Recording gender

Record the gender of the person using an appropriate term from the list below.

female

male

not known

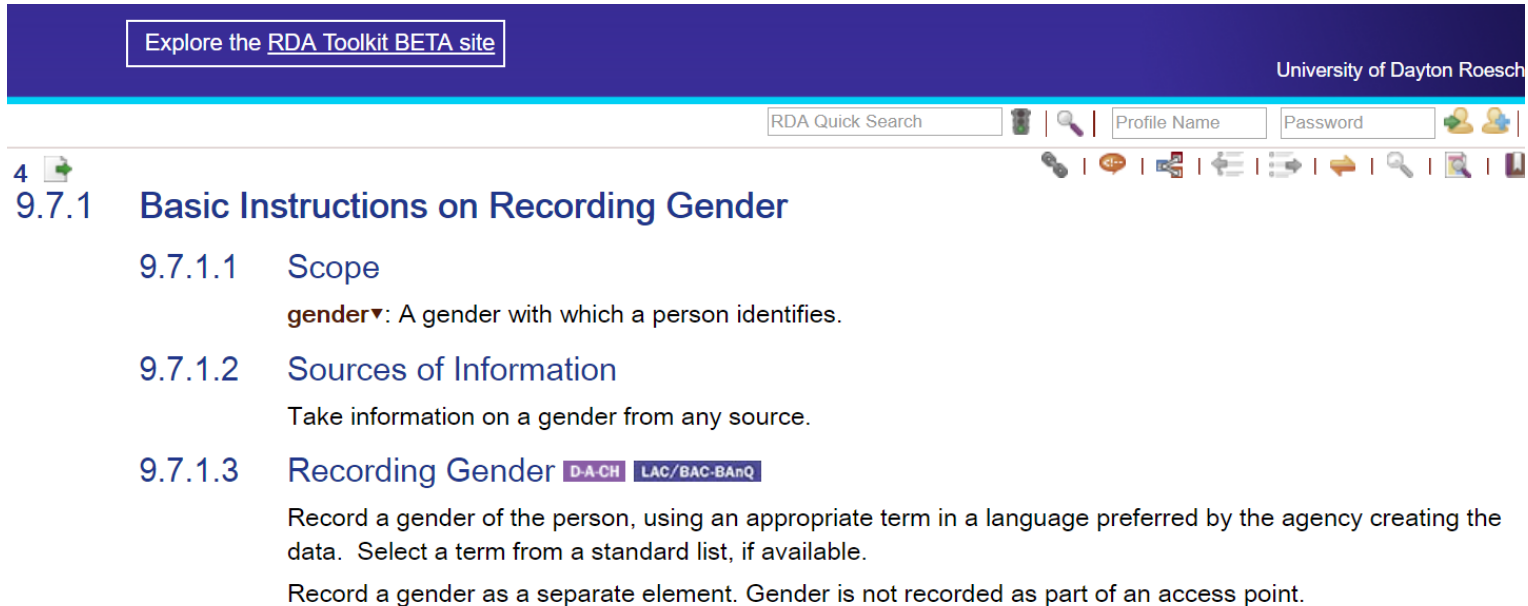
If none of the terms is appropriate or sufficiently specific, record an appropriate term or phrase.

intersex

transsexual woman

On whose authority?

Name authority records & gender



The screenshot shows the RDA Toolkit BETA site interface. At the top, there is a dark blue header with the text "Explore the RDA Toolkit BETA site" and "University of Dayton Roesch". Below the header is a navigation bar with a search box labeled "RDA Quick Search", fields for "Profile Name" and "Password", and user icons. The main content area is titled "4 9.7.1 Basic Instructions on Recording Gender". Under this title, there are three sub-sections: "9.7.1.1 Scope", "9.7.1.2 Sources of Information", and "9.7.1.3 Recording Gender". Each sub-section has a brief description. The "Recording Gender" section also includes two tabs: "D-A-CH" and "LAC/BAC-BAnQ".

Explore the [RDA Toolkit BETA site](#) University of Dayton Roesch

RDA Quick Search Profile Name Password

4 9.7.1 Basic Instructions on Recording Gender

9.7.1.1 Scope
gender▼: A gender with which a person identifies.

9.7.1.2 Sources of Information
Take information on a gender from any source.

9.7.1.3 Recording Gender **D-A-CH** **LAC/BAC-BAnQ**
Record a gender of the person, using an appropriate term in a language preferred by the agency creating the data. Select a term from a standard list, if available.
Record a gender as a separate element. Gender is not recorded as part of an access point.

DESCRIPTION OF IMAGE: Current RDA 9.7.1 Basic Instructions on Recording Gender

9.7.1.1 Scope: gender= A gender with which a person identifies.

9.7.1.2 Sources of information: Take information on a gender from any source.

9.7.1.3 Recording gender: Record a gender of the person, using an appropriate term in a language preferred by the agency creating the data. Select a term from a standard list, if available. Record a gender as a separate element. Gender is not recorded as part of an access point.



Best practices for recording gender

From the “[Report of the PCC Ad Hoc Task Group on Gender in Name Authority Records](#)”

Record information about gender as the person **self-identifies and explicitly discloses**, taking information from readily and publicly available sources such as:

- Biographical information published on the resource
- Biographical information provided by the publisher
- Author’s personal website or social media profiles
- Direct communication with the author



Best practices for recording gender (continued)

- Record Males or Females in accordance with the term used by the person, or with gendered pronouns and/or inflected nouns used in the source
 - Do not assume gender identity based on pictures or names
 - Do not dig for given names or genders assigned at birth
- For transgender/transsexual persons record the terms Transgender people or Transsexuals in accordance with the term used by the person
- Take into account the following considerations:
 - **Is there potential for this information to harm the [person] through outing or violating the right to privacy?**
 - Is there an indication that the [person] consents to having this information shared publicly?
 - Will including this information help a library user in the search process?



As of today, these remain
best practices in principle.



Resistance Isn't Futile

DESCRIPTION OF

IMAGE: Image of
Cataloging Lab
homepage



<http://cataloginglab.org/>



Proposing subject heading revisions

Current heading:

**Japanese Americans--Evacuation and relocation,
1942-1945**

UF Evacuation and relocation of Japanese
Americans, 1942-1945

UF Internment of Japanese Americans, 1942-
1945

UF Relocation of Japanese Americans, 1942-
1945



Proposing subject heading revisions

Proposed new subject heading through The Cataloging Lab (draft):

Japanese Americans--Forced removal and incarceration, 1942-1945

670 __ Power of Words Handbook, viewed online September 18 2018 \$b ([The usage of the word Evacuation] to describe the forced removal by the federal government of over 110,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans from their homes on the West Coast and Arizona is not accurate. They were not “evacuated” to protect them from a disastrous environment[...] The words forced removal should be used instead—which more accurately describes the lack of choice provided to Japanese Americans who were ordered to leave their homes.) \$u <https://jacl.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Power-of-Words-Rev.-Term.-Handbook.pdf>



And here's a successfully proposed new LCSH!

<http://cataloginglab.org/kb/gender-nonconforming-people/>

Gender-nonconforming people

UF Genderqueer people

UF Non-binary people

UF Gender-variant people

UF Gender-creative people

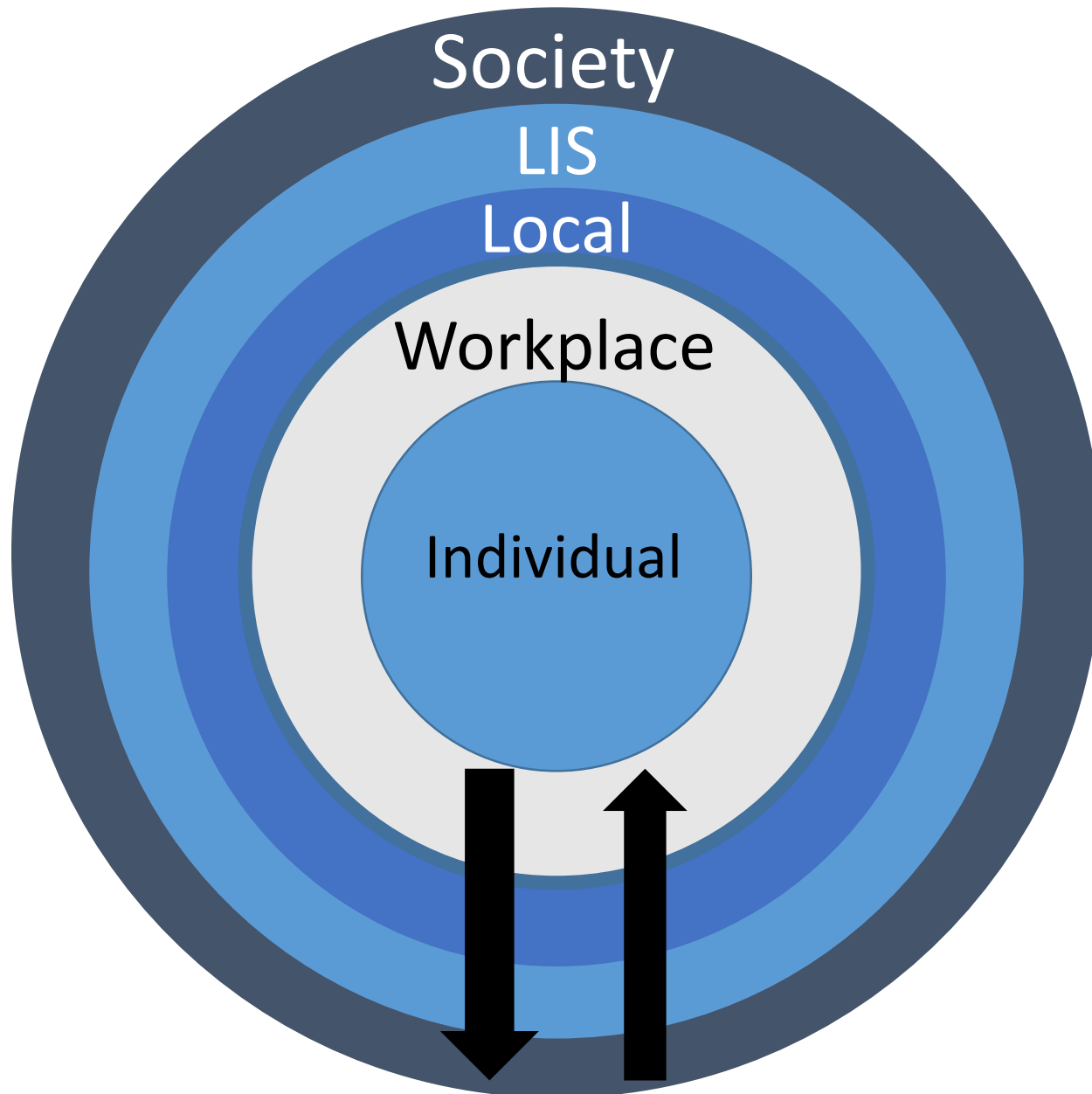
See also Sexual minorities

See also Transgender people



**DESCRIPTION OF
IMAGE:**

Community-based
framework
model: Series of
concentric circles.
The innermost
circle is labeled
"Individual." The
next layer of circle
is labeled
"Workplace." The
next layer of circle
is labeled "Local."
The next layer of circle
is labeled
"LIS." The
outermost circle
is labeled
"Society." There
are two arrows
that point in
opposite
directions that
span across all of
the circles.



Adapted from Chris Bourg, 2016. <https://chrisbourg.wordpress.com/2016/04/16/diversity-inclusion-social-justice-and-libraries-proposing-a-framework/>



Additional sources and recommended reading

- Baildon, Michelle; Hamlin, Dana; Jankowski, Czeslaw; Kauffman, Rhonda; Lanigan, Julia; 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://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/108771>
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- Schomberg, Jessica. (2014-) Cataloging and Social Justice. <http://catassessmentresearch.blogspot.com/2014/02/cataloging-and-social-justice.html>
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Other issues to consider...

How can we create/use alternative controlled vocabularies/folksonomies alongside LCSH to describe cultural materials (“nothing about without us”)?

Accountability up—what do we expect from our vendors, our publishers, those who create what we collect, and those who design the systems we use everyday?

Accountability from ourselves—how do we mitigate our own biases? Do we know what microaggressions are? How do we interact with those around us?

Thank you!

NCLA RTSS Workshop Keynote Text for Powerpoint Notes

Title: Developing A Social Justice Mindset in Technical Services

Slide 1

Good morning! Thank you all for being here, and for giving me the opportunity to share some of my thoughts on how we can think of social justice in relation to our work in technical services.

Slide 2

Before I get started, I want to acknowledge that the work that I do, the research I have been exploring, these are because there are so many other great voices out there who have inspired and informed what I do. Different from the traditional citation list at the end of a presentation (which is still essential practice), I am borrowing this practice from Jennifer Vinopal and others, who start their presentations this way. These are people who have shared their expertise, their lived experiences, and what they have learned through many different platforms, including traditional scholarship and newer ways of communicating, like blogs, social media posts, and of course, in-person interactions at conferences and workshops like this one. Some of these names are people whom I have never met, some are people who I have had the privilege of working with on different projects in the past, some have been mentors and provided support in personal and professional ways. So here are just a few of the people who have done a lot to spark important critical conversations around social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in my life. I hope that I can extend this conversation to all of you through today's talk.

Slide 3

I also want to take a moment for us to acknowledge that we are on land that is home to eight tribes. I feel it is important to show respect to these tribes, and acknowledge that indigenous peoples have been stewards of this land for longer than we have called this the state of North Carolina. As guests here, we are committed to striving for social justice for all, but especially for indigenous peoples through reflection, accountability, and community building.

Slide 4

So why am I here today? I was given a very broad prompt regarding the content of my talk--basically anything I want to talk about regarding equity, diversity, and inclusion, as long as it relates to technical services. When I first started thinking about what I would address, I wrestled with thinking about the specifics--do I talk about problems with subject headings in cataloging? Authority control and how RDA now allows for the inclusion of gender in name authority records? Issues related to collection development and diversity in collections? The troubling lack of representation of particular voices and perspectives in scholarly and mainstream publishing? Metadata and the ways in which we provide access to digitized cultural content? How we label and present our resources to our user either through our catalogs or in displays? After thinking about all of these, I realized there is no way we can touch upon all of these issues and their impacts in an hour. I didn't even know where to start. And then I realized all of these conversations have to start with each of us as individuals.

Which brings me to what I would like to cover in the more formal part of my talk, and then I really want to open up the floor for authentic conversation around social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion with all of you. I think there is much we can learn from each other, and while I recognize that at this

moment, I am occupying a particular place of power because I'm the one at this platform with my name on the program, I am certainly no expert on these issues, and I think we can all learn together from the valuable lived experiences we each bring to this space.

Slide 5

And speaking of space, I want to address one more important aspect of today's talk--some of you might be familiar with the phrase "safe space." I'm here to tell you that this is not a "safe space" in terms of challenging our thinking today. We live in a time where no physical space truly feels safe for many of us, particularly those of us who identify as something other than cisgender, white, heterosexual, male, and come from middle to lower socioeconomic statuses. And I'm going to be naming some truths that will be uncomfortable for some of you to hear. So I have several humble requests of you all. I am asking each and every one of you to think of this as a brave space (I didn't come up with that term), where we push ourselves beyond our comfort zones into a space where we set aside our assumptions, sit with our discomfort for a minute, and open ourselves to hearing truths that are different from or contradict our own experiences. In creating a brave space, I ask that we listen with openness and treat each other with respect and civility, even if we end up disagreeing.

Slide 6

Here are my hopes for today. I will talk about some terms that we all hear but maybe are unsure of how we use them. I will also do a bit of work to look at ourselves as individuals who hold different social identities, but then I would like to move us to a systems mindset, because I think that's where the work of social justice really lies. Then I plan to give some concrete examples related to my specialization as a cataloger to show how social justice can inform daily practice. I will also mention some other areas of typical technical services work where I think we can infuse a social justice mindset into our practice. And then finally, I would like to give us time at the end not just for questions and answers but to give us all time to share ideas, thoughts, suggestions, and action steps that you might have. Many of you may have already been thinking about these issues, or doing related work at your home institutions, so I want us to have the opportunity to share and inspire our colleagues in this room to explore the possibilities for transforming our work mindsets.

Slide 7

So let's start with some terminology. I think the words diversity, equity, and inclusion get used a lot these days, in our libraries, in our professional associations, and in higher education. Sometimes these words get lumped together as a catchall phrase, but they really are three distinctly different words that are strongly related. Let's start with diversity. I like to think of it as the who, the people we are talking about. Broadly defined, diversity simply means difference or variety. When we talk about diversity, we are often talking about different people, demographics if you will.

Slide 8

When we talk about demographic diversity, here are some of the categories we often think about when we talk about difference. At many institutions that use the term diversity in things like policy documents, strategic plans, those kinds of codified statements, the term diversity might specifically list different social identities. Some of these social identities are ones that we talk about more explicitly when we say we are trying to create more diversity in our institutions, categories such as race and

gender. We might think of diversity in terms of numbers, how many people from a specific social identity group are part of our institutions. I know that working on a college campus that is predominantly white, we talk a lot about increasing the demographic diversity by enrolling more students of color. However, just talking about numbers doesn't necessarily lead to lasting change. We have to talk about more than just statistics when we are talking about diversity if we really want to think about social justice. And we cannot limit our thinking about social identity as these stand-alone categories. Every person holds multiple social identities that surface and intersect in different and complex ways, and we have to be able to recognize that complexity if we really want to show we truly value diversity.

Slide 9

Going back to terminology, let's talk about equity for a moment. I think of equity as the what, the outcome or goal of doing work around social justice. Equity is what I think we are trying to get to by addressing issues in our work that disadvantage some people from certain social identity groups and that privilege other groups.

Slide 10

Some of you may have seen this particular cartoon online. Quick caveat—I do think this is overly simplistic, and I'm not fond of sports metaphors or analogies, but this is a pretty popular graphic. Ok, going back to the word diversity, and people who come from different social identity groups, we often use the word equality. I think for a long time in our society, we thought the answer to alleviating issues related to prejudice or discrimination was to say that we will just treat everyone equally, regardless of their differences. However, I think more and more institutions are moving away from an equality mindset to an equity mindset, because as you can see from this graphic, treating people equally doesn't mean they will reach equal outcomes. As you can see in the first image, everyone gets the same amount of boxes to boost them up to watch the baseball game, but since each person is of a different height, the box does not help each of them see over the fence. In the second image labeled equity, I think we are getting closer to a social justice mindset, because now each person has the same outcome—they can each see over the fence. In this case, their differences are taken into account, so they are not given the same amount of resources, they are given the resources they each need to get to the same place.

Slide 11

Finally, let's get back to the term inclusion. I think of inclusion as the how of work around diversity and equity. I think a lot of institutions think that if we include more diverse people in our spaces, then that means we are being inclusive. Some places that have come farther along in their understanding of social justice outcomes recognize that inclusion means more than just putting different people in the seats around the table, it's also making sure that every person at the table has an opportunity to share their perspective, to have their perspective taken seriously, and to be respected for who they are. Where I work, which is a Catholic and Marianist institution, we use a lot of language around the idea that every person is welcome at the table (the Marianists do a lot around sharing meals together, and using meals as a way of being in a kind of community with one another). Inclusion sounds great, doesn't it? And it is often seen as the goal that we should be striving for—that every person, regardless of their differences, is included in our institutions, in our spaces, in our libraries, and made to feel welcome. And that does sound great on the surface.

Slide 12

In this graphic, I think we're getting much closer to a social justice mindset. Again, we see diversity (people of different heights), we see equity (everyone can see over the fence), and inclusion (people are given different boxes so they can all participate as fans of the baseball game). But a social justice model, here referred to as a liberation model, recognizes that the root of the problem for these fans is literally a structural barrier, in this case, the fence. By removing the structural barrier, the fans can all watch the game, and their differences are present but are not seen as hindrances. This is where I would like us to get to—recognizing structural barriers gets us to start thinking more about systems, which have broader impact and implications for people from different social identity groups.

Slide 13

In this slide, the panel labeled “reality” is I think the hardest one for us to acknowledge or accept. When we talk about systems connected to social identity groups, we are talking about issues of power, and systems of oppression. We have to be brave enough to accept the truth that privilege is real. That there are some of us in certain social identity groups where things are literally stacked in our favor, and at the same time there are groups who aren't starting on level ground with us, but are actually, and actively disempowered. In the reality panel, we see that someone has more boxes than they could possibly need, and that someone is literally in a hole in the ground. The thing about privilege that I think is hard for many people to wrap their heads around is that it's not something to be ashamed of, or to feel guilty over, or to get defensive about. It is simply a fact that depending upon your social identities, there are some social identities that come with a series of unearned benefits simply by virtue of being that particular identity. And those unearned benefits have been historically constructed, and deeply institutionalized. When we think about various social identities, such as race, and gender, and class, we have to be willing to face the difficult truth that there are some of us who benefit from privilege, and that there are some of us who are actively oppressed. And the thing that makes all of this so challenging is that even if we, as individuals, really act in ways that we don't think hurt other people, we are still part of a larger system that will give us those boxes whether we asked for them or not. So if we're talking about something like white privilege for example, one can't help it if they were born white, but being white in a country that has a long history of legalized racism (like slavery, or Jim Crow laws that legalized segregation) means that there is a certain degree of privilege that is afforded to white people that people of color do not experience. However, privilege also doesn't mean that just because you are a member of a privileged social identity group your life will be easy. You can have privilege around your race, and still experience hardship and oppression in your life that might be connected to other social identities, such as socioeconomic status, or gender. None of these categories of identity are simple, and none of our experiences are one-dimensional, so I think we run into conflict when we don't know how to talk about these issues in deeply complex and honest ways. I really believe that having a genuine social justice mindset means we have the courage to name systems of power, privilege, and oppression. To acknowledge that we are often complicit in those systems, and that we are willing to work together across our differences to achieve better outcomes for us all. Getting defensive about where we have privilege gets in the way of us doing real work towards social justice.

Slide 14

So the title of this talk is developing a social justice mindset, and I have used that phrase a lot up to this point--but what do I mean by social justice? When I think about social justice, I think of it as both a goal

and a process, that acknowledges the need to address both resources and recognition of different identities. There's a fantastic book that I highly recommend everyone read, no matter what kind of work you do. It's called Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice, and it does a really great job of connecting the work of educators to social justice work. And although we work in libraries and might not always think of ourselves as educators, the very fact that we provide access to information resources means we have a role—and I would argue, a responsibility—in the educational process. In this book, Lee Anne Bell doesn't oversimplify the definition of social justice—this is where I have learned to think of it as both something we strive towards, but in doing so, we must ensure that the ways in which we get there do not further marginalize people along the way. In Bell's book, as a goal, social justice is defined as the full and equitable participation of people from all social identity groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. How we reach that goal is also a form of social justice—the process of achieving these outcomes should be democratic and participatory, respectful of the diversity of all people, inclusive, and affirming of our capacity to create change through collaboration.

Slide 15

There is a lot to unpack in this slide. First, I want to talk about social identity groups. Social identities are complex—sometimes we claim them, sometimes they are ascribed to us by others. Some identities are visible, such as race or gender expression, while others are less apparent—such as socioeconomic status, or differences in cognitive or emotional abilities. To reiterate what I said earlier, when we talk about diversity, what we often are really talking about are the different social identities we are aware of.

Slide 16

Now let's look at process. The process for creating a world where every person has equitable access to resources and feels safe, secure, affirmed and respected should be a just process. That means the work to achieve this goal should integrate a participatory framework that encourages collaboration and coalition building, that ensures all perspectives are not just considered, but treated as crucial to decision-making processes, and that respect for the dignity of each person is an assumed value of all who are working to achieve socially just goals. If we take a top-down approach to achieving social justice goals, where we make decisions without actively seeking and incorporating the input of the people affected by those goals, when we make assumptions about what different groups want or need, then we end up replicating the very same process that have led to the establishment of socially unjust systems and structures in our world.

Slide 17

We can't talk about identity without also talking about power. We each hold multiple characteristics of identity as individuals, which also means we are part of broader social groups that are also identified by those characteristics. When we talk broadly about social identity groups, we have to situate those groups within the dynamics of power. We also have to understand that each of us as individuals either identifies as or is identified by others as having membership within multiple social identity groups. And each of those groups might hold privilege or experience oppression, and sometimes at the same time. This means we are impacted by structures of power every single day, by virtue of our social group identity membership. Power is complex because the ways in which it functions within systems can really

vary—depending upon the situation or environment where we find ourselves, we might experience either oppression, or benefit from privilege.

For example, as a tenured faculty member, I hold a great deal of socioeconomic privilege, as well as a certain degree of positional privilege in my library when I'm in a meeting that is a mix of library faculty and staff. However, outside of my library, my experience as an Asian American woman has sometimes meant I have experienced oppression in the form of microaggressions. For example, people make assumptions about my ethnic identity and ask me questions like "Where are you from?" Or other people on my campus make assumptions about what my role is, and treat me as if I'm invisible in situations like campus committee meetings. I have experienced being talked over, or not having the opportunity to share my opinion or perspective on a topic in meetings that are dominated by white faculty, especially white male faculty.

Slide 18

I have mentioned the word oppression several times, now, but I think it's important to have some common language around a definition for it. So here is one definition, and a quick demonstration of how it can occur at many levels. When we talk about systems of power, we often talk about those who hold power, those who have privilege, and those who are oppressed. What is oppression? Broadly speaking, oppression is what happens when prejudice and power intersect. So individual oppressions are the things that happen on a one-on-one level. Institutional oppression are things like policies, rules, laws, etc. that are harmful to certain groups. Examples of social or cultural oppression are things like stereotypes in film or TV that reinforce our cultural notions about particular groups of people that are harmful. When we think of resisting oppression or undoing oppression, we often focus on the individual level, because it's easier to address our own individual behaviors and mental frameworks that are harmful to other people, but it's much more challenging to resist institutionalized oppression, because it's often deeply embedded in our policies and long-standing practices. It means working against systems, and not just changing individual people. And again, this is challenging work, because these systems have been built and perpetuated over time, long before any of us were here, but we are all enmeshed within these systems.

Slide 19

In an unpublished essay, Audre Lorde linked oppressions, addressing the fact that we cannot pick and choose which marginalized identities we are going to advocate for—as hard as it is, we must work together to simultaneously undo these systems of oppression if we truly want to create a just society. Dr. Kimberle Crenshaw later coined the term intersectionality to name this phenomenon of how power manifests and is interlocked. We all have intersecting identities, and for some of us, the vulnerability and marginalization we experience are not singular experiences—they are often compounded by the multiple categories of difference that we hold, and cannot be pinned to one particular social identity or another. I don't get to decide when I'm a woman or when I'm a person of color, in other words. I am always simultaneously both.

Slide 20

If you walk away from this talk with only one thing in your mind, I would like you to remember this statement. Neutrality is a myth. I work in cataloging, and in my journey to become a cataloger, I was

taught to believe that catalogers assign subject headings from an objective point of view, that we set aside our personal opinions and thoughts about a particular work and use Library of Congress subject headings as the place to find the “objective” language we should use to describe a particular work. However, I think we know that LC headings are problematic, and critiques of headings date as far back as Sandy Berman’s work in the early 1970s critiquing subject headings about people, particularly Native Americans. More recent debates about suggested subject heading changes and the addition of a new field in RDA for authority records has definitely shown why we need to acknowledge that we cannot operate from an objective stance. Our work, especially the impact of our work is not neutral. Going back to what I said earlier about structures of power that affect us all—that means we are all part of different systems of privilege and oppression. The thing about systems that make them so complex and hard to undo is that systems are designed to run efficiently, even if you take individuals out of the system. And if we operate in a way that we think is neutral, where we are doing nothing to actively resist or dismantle the system, we are actually ensuring the system keeps running. Let me say this again because I really believe this—if we do nothing to actively resist oppression, we are complicit in maintaining systems of oppression that benefit only some people, and actively harm many others.

Slide 21

If we can all agree that no one, and no system, is ever neutral, then we have to also agree that there are some truths about the tools that we use to do our work that contribute to the maintenance of systems of oppression in our culture. Subject headings, which are a way that we help users find resources about particular topics, can be just as harmful as they are helpful for users when looking for materials in our libraries.

Slide 22

Since I work as a cataloger, I’m going to talk about some specific examples of work that I think is connected directly to social justice in cataloging work. In 2016, there was a push by members of the cataloging community to change the heading *Illegal aliens* to two headings: *Noncitizens* and *Unauthorized immigration*. This was, and continues to be a reflection about how the issues around immigration in our culture are being talked about, and how language has a tremendous amount of power. To refer to someone as an “illegal alien” is completely dehumanizing. When we hear the word “alien” on its own, I think many of us think of extraterrestrial creatures, not human beings. And to call a person “illegal” is inaccurate as well—actions can be legal or illegal, but a person is not illegal. That implies that one’s very existence is in violation of a law. The cataloging community came together, and made recommendations to change these headings in full recognition of their pejorative nature. However, in a rare instance of intervention, Congress stepped in and blocked the recommended changes, so we still have *Illegal aliens* as a subject heading.

Slide 23

The intervention of Congress to block the change away from the phrase *illegal alien* was a reminder that these subject headings are exactly this—they reflect the language of Congress, or the language of the state. If you stop to really think about this, then you can see how oppression can become institutionalized and systematic. Many other subject headings still exist in the LC controlled vocabulary that many people find are offensive, outdated, or simply hide the realities marginalized peoples have experienced, sometimes at the hand of the government.

Slide 24

Connected to the use of controlled vocabularies for subject headings are the use of authority records for personal names. How many of you are familiar with name authority records? If you don't work with these all of the time, name authority records are ways of establishing a record for an creator that ensures the right works are linked to that person. So, for example, if two people have the same name but write in completely different subject areas, we want to make sure we point users to the right list of titles when they are looking for a specific person. So just as an imaginary example, if I wrote books on kickboxing, and there was another lone Damasco out there who wrote books on the art of ice cream making, we would need ways to distinguish us from one another in authority records so that people who wanted books on ice cream weren't getting a list of books on how to throw a roundhouse kick. There are many pieces of data that can be added to an authority record to distinguish between authors of the same name. The most common way is to add something like a birth or death date, but with the release of RDA, other attributes of a person can be added to an authority record. One of the new attributes that can be added is gender. Here's how RDA used to tell us how to include gender in authority records. And here is where I have to give a great big shout-out to the work of Emily Drabinski and Amber Billey, who did a great presentation on changes to RDA 9.7 for ALCTS. Their work, and the work of several others led to some significant changes to this instruction. What you see here are what the instructions at RDA 9.7 used to look like regarding the use of gender to identify persons for authority work.

Slide 25

And here is the current version of RDA 9.7. It immediately removes language that reinforces a gender binary and ensures that a person's gender is not included as part of the authorized heading (the way a birth and death date might appear as part of a heading). Why are these changes significant? The old language of RDA made several assumptions about gender—that gender is binary, your only options are male, female, or unknown (or empty data, implying that someone just doesn't have a gender if they don't conform to the binary). Right away we can see the problems with this—there are many people who don't identify along a gender binary (and our notions of gender as being just male or female are definitely a Western construction). The old instructions also limited the gender of a person to only one option by using the word "the." By changing the phrase to "record a gender" instead of record the gender, we have opened up the possibilities beyond a specific construction of gender identity that implies it is fixed, and not fluid. The old limits on what could be recorded as "valid" data literally codifies oppressive ideas about gender. Remember when I talked about the levels of oppression several slides ago? This is an example of how oppression around social identity groups can become institutionalized.

Slide 26

In addition to changes made to the instructions on recording gender in RDA, the Program for Cooperative Cataloging has also issued a report with recommendations for best practices on recording gender when creating name authority records. Again, this took the work of many people, not just the task force, but others in the cataloging community to provide their feedback and voicing their concerns over the use of gender in authority records. These best practices in my mind are absolutely a form of social justice work—these guidelines help to re-center the power of identity and place it back with the individuals we are trying to create records for, rather than allowing those who create authority records to make assumptions and allow their own biases about gender to impact how data about a person is recorded and shared. Giving the power back to the author to name their own gender rather than us

assigning a gender is a huge, and is a step towards undoing some of the marginalization that has occurred with the use of RDA 9.7 in the past.

Slide 27

These best practices are really important because they reflect how gender is actually lived by many people in our world. First, we cannot make assumptions of gender identity based upon appearance or names. That is really important. We can easily misidentify a person if we make assumptions like “well, only men have facial hair, so this author picture of a person with a mustache means that I should assign male in MARC field 375 for their authority record.” The recommendations also remind us that we should not violate people’s privacy—someone might not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth, and to do some detective work to try to find that out means that we don’t accept the gender with which they identify now. Again, it’s dehumanizing, it takes power away from that person. And something else that we might not have considered when RDA 9.7 was first written—how does assigning gender have the very real potential to do harm to someone? If someone has identified as a woman, and everyone around them knows them as a woman, what happens if we include information that says they were assigned male at birth? Could that put that person at risk of things like losing their job, familial relationships, even physical harm? Violence against trans men and trans women has been on the rise for the last few years. It doesn’t seem like our desire to add data points to disambiguate name headings should outweigh the safety of human beings. And the thing is, there are so many other data points that can be recorded to distinguish between similar names in an authority record, such as profession or occupation, birth or death date, affiliated group like place of employment, that can be used that don’t take away someone’s agency and identity, and that don’t put them at any kind of risk.

Slide 28

The original best practices recommendations were put forth in 2016, and while the PCC has stated they these were approved in principle, they have yet to be formalized and included as specific PCC instructions directly linked to from the RDA toolkit. Earlier this year, PCC conducted a survey regarding the use of gender in authority records and the recommendations report, and hopefully based upon the feedback they collect, these recommendations can become codified.

Slide 29

So now that I have pointed out some issues that I feel are social justice issues in terms of cataloging and authority work, I want to share with you ways that you can act towards creating a more socially just information environment. Are any of you familiar with this website? The Cataloging Lab was created by Violet Fox as a way to help people interested in creating proposals for new or revised subject headings and name authorities, but who might not be comfortable submitting a proposal on their own to the Library of Congress, or are not members of NACO (the PCC’s name authority cooperative) or SACO (the subject headings cooperative). What is the Cataloging Lab? Well, essentially it’s an open, collaborative platform where those who are familiar with the requirements for justifying new subject heading proposals can work with those who are knowledgeable about the subject matter being proposed, and vice versa. Since these are open proposals, the wider community can share whether a particular preferred term is a better heading over another. The wider community can suggest related and relevant terms, and again, it puts the power of creating subject headings back in the power of those whom the heading might be about.

Slide 30

Here is an example of an existing subject heading that people are working on collaboratively to recommend revisions to through the Cataloging Lab process. This subject is often used when describing works about the internment camps of World War II, when between 110,000 and 120,000 people of Japanese descent, primarily on the Pacific coast, were forced to leave their homes and live in camps. 62% of detainees were American citizens. The language here is important, because the term “evacuate” sounds like the government was doing something for the benefit of the Japanese Americans who had to leave their homes and jobs behind to live in camps. We use the word “evacuate” when we talk about trying to save people from things like natural disasters. But that’s not what happened in this case. In this case, the government treated a whole segment of our population as a potential threat, which is why they were put in camps where they could be constantly monitored by the government.

Slide 31

Here’s the new heading that the cataloging community would like to propose instead. Again, the use of language is really important—there is a big difference in meaning when we say “forced removal and incarceration” instead of evacuation and relocation. These words completely shift the narrative dominance from the one of the state to the one of the people who were actually forced to live in internment camps. This heading speaks to the truth of their experiences and re-centers them as the focus of this experience. The 670 MARC field here cites the work that justifies the change in language, which is a required part of subject heading proposals.

Slide 32

And just so you can see an example of a heading that was successfully proposed from scratch, here is the heading “Gender-nonconforming people.” This heading was proposed in November of 2017, and was approved in December of 2017. Before that, the phrase “Gender-nonconforming people” did not exist as a heading. As you can see, a lot of work went into citing numerous sources to justify the creation of this heading. A lot of work from the cataloging community went into drafting this proposal, which was accepted, and now means that people who do not conform to a gender binary (which is again, a very Western way of thinking about gender) can now be found when someone is doing a search in a catalog for works about their identities and experiences. In my mind, this is clearly an example of socially just technical services work, as this heading provides access to a group of people who were previously rendered invisible in our catalogs because we didn’t have terms to describe them.

Slide 33

So I would like to bring us back around to the concepts I talked about at the beginning. Social justice goals and socially just processes affect all of us, so I think it’s helpful for us to think of this work within a community-based framework. This framework, presented here as a series of concentric circles, is something I adapted from Chris Bourg at MIT. Starting with us as individuals in the center, we can see here that we are part of different communities and that we both affect and are affected by the communities of which we are a part. That flow of impacts is represented by the bi-directional arrows that span across all of the circles. Again this is just one model of thinking, and we could adjust the labels to better reflect our actual communities, but I like this as a basic framework for our thinking. I truly believe that we can dismantle oppressive systems at every level of this framework, but it means we

have to start with examining our own social identities, those areas of our lives where we benefit from privilege, and naming those areas where we are disempowered. In order to work with others collectively and collaboratively to make real socially just change happen, we have to start with ourselves.

Fortunately, there are lots of resources and opportunities out there in library land to learn about these issues of identity, but I would also encourage you to look outside of libraries and seek out other places and resources for doing this kind of work. I think we can learn a lot from community organizations and community organizers when it comes to doing this work. I truly believe no matter what role we play in our libraries, we each have the capacity and the potential to help transform our communities into more equitable and just places where each of us can be our fullest selves. We just have to be brave enough to be honest with ourselves and with each other, and have faith that we can truly work together for a better world.

Slide 34

So I only touched upon a few issues today, but there are lots of great articles out there that explore ideas of critical librarianship, which is a way of looking at librarianship through different social identity lenses, such as critical race theory, queer theory, feminist theory. 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.

Slide 35

Finally, here are a few questions that I would like for us to consider—maybe we can open up discussion using some of these as prompts, or if you have questions for me at this point, or through the rest of the day, I'm happy to take them.

Slide 36

Thank you!