CRITICAL LIBRARIANSHIP: QUESTIONING WITH PURPOSE AND HOPE

Eamon Tewell

@eamontewell | Penn State Libraries | 15 May 2019 | Slides: tinyurl.com/PennStateCritLib

I'd like to thank the many people who made it possible for me to be here, especially Emily Mross for being my contact person and helping coordinate my travel, and the other planning committee members who helped organize this event. Creating space for thinking about our practice is so important, and it takes a lot of work to make that happen.

I also want to thank you for attending today's program. It's an exciting and essential topic we're talking about, and I appreciate you taking the time. I hope this presentation will spark some ideas for how to pursue teaching and library work that contributes to librarianship's grand ambitions of social responsibility, access to information, and the public good, however those might look in your setting.
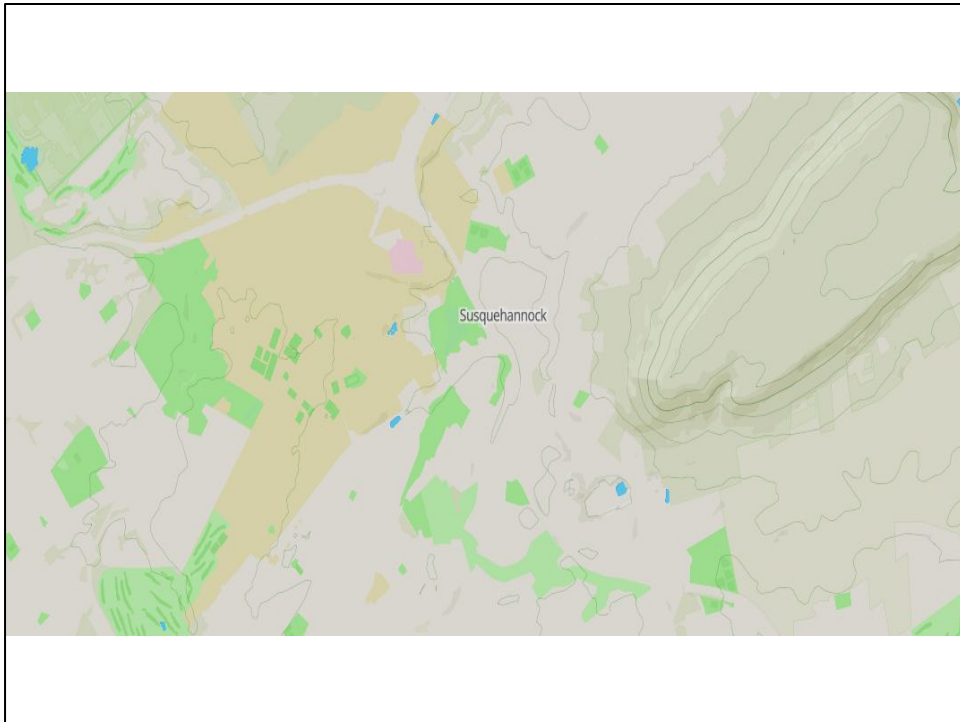
I want to take a moment to recognize and extend gratitude to the indigenous peoples who for many years stewarded the land we occupy today. I also wish to acknowledge, as a white settler myself, this country's legacy of colonialism and the subjugation and exploitation of people and our earth that continues to this day. We are on the traditional homeland of the Susquehannock tribe. While researching the Susquehannock, I was struck by how today there appears to be no record of what these people called themselves. We know the names they were given by Europeans--the French called them Andaste, the Swedes and Dutch called them Minquas, and the English in 18th-century Pennsylvania called them the Conestoga. Languages and the words we use matter, and this is one example among many of the historical erasure of indigenous nations.

That erasure is a violence that is both symbolic and literal. By 1697 the Susquehannock population had been devastated by the introduction of infectious diseases by settlers, and a few hundred members settled in what is today Lancaster County. Their population continued to decline, and in 1763, with thee tribe on the brink of destruction, a group of frontiersmen called the Paxton Boys attacked the village, killing six people. Two weeks later, the 14 surviving Susquehannock were murdered at a workhouse they were being sheltered in.

To take steps against the erasure of indigenous peoples' histories, I encourage you to learn more about the history of the land you live and work upon. One tool I recommend is NativeLand.ca, which provides interactive maps about different nations, languages, and treaties across Turtle Island. Most of us here today are librarians who teach, so I hope you'll also consider ways to bring the history of the stolen land we occupy into your instruction in meaningful ways, and to share this knowledge with students.

*Libraries can encourage people
to question what's given and
imagine what's possible.*

In this talk I want to emphasize one particular point. Libraries should be places to encourage people to question what's given and to imagine what's possible. It may seem obvious, but I feel it's becoming increasingly aspirational day by day and year by year, and it's something we must constantly keep in mind and strive towards. I really feel this is libraries and education at their best.

Questioning is at the heart of critical librarianship.

This process of questioning is also at the heart of critical librarianship. Questioning why we do what we do and the meager resources we're given to do it with, questioning the structures we uphold, and questioning the validity of power's claims to truth. Challenging the dominant forces that shape our lives is essential to imagining alternatives and creating a better world. It's easy to make broad claims like this, about social justice and a world that's more humane, and a lot more difficult to figure out where we fit in that work. That's what my talk, and this event today, are about.

1. *About Me*

2. *Critical Librarianship*

3. *Critical Information Literacy*

4. *Critical Information Literacy in Practice*

I don't like telling people what they should do. What you can do is dependent on so many factors, from your different identities, to your position in your institution, to what day of the week it is. Issuing directives just seems unreasonable and unhelpful. What I'll be doing instead is providing a bit of background about myself and what brought me to librarianship, a look at critical librarianship in higher education, and then critical information literacy and some of the many ways teaching librarians seek to question the ways our libraries, universities, and world works.

The personal is political.

The personal is political, and critical librarianship recognizes that everything, and I do mean everything, is political and imbued with values. I'm always struck by how significantly our environments shape who we are, and my upbringing absolutely impacted my approach to librarianship. As I talk about my journey I hope you'll think about what brought you to librarianship too, and where your upbringing and personal values might intersect with your work.

If this line of thought interests you, I highly recommend the book *Critical Journeys: How 14 Librarians Came to Embrace Critical Practice*, a collection of interviews by Robert Schroeder with library workers of different types who are all engaged with critical theories and practice in some way. I found *Critical Journeys* full of insight and a good reminder that there's no one right way to do critical librarianship. We're all continually learning and trying to do better, and that journey is different for everyone.

> *"One of the first things we discover in these groups is that personal problems are political problems. There are no personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution."*

The phrase "the personal is political" does have a specific use and meaning, which in fact isn't centered on the individual. Carol Hanisch, who was a prominent member of the Women's Liberation Movement of the late 60's and is still with us today, wrote an essay on consciousness raising groups, but never actually said "the personal is political." She is adamant about not having coined the phrase, and that it is the result of many different people's conversations, ideas, writings, and exchanges. Which is something I'd like to emphasize today--there are many people shaping critical library work, some of whom are here in this room, and there's no organization or committee that decides what it is or what it becomes. That's exciting not only because that's one less committee to join, but we can all decide, together.
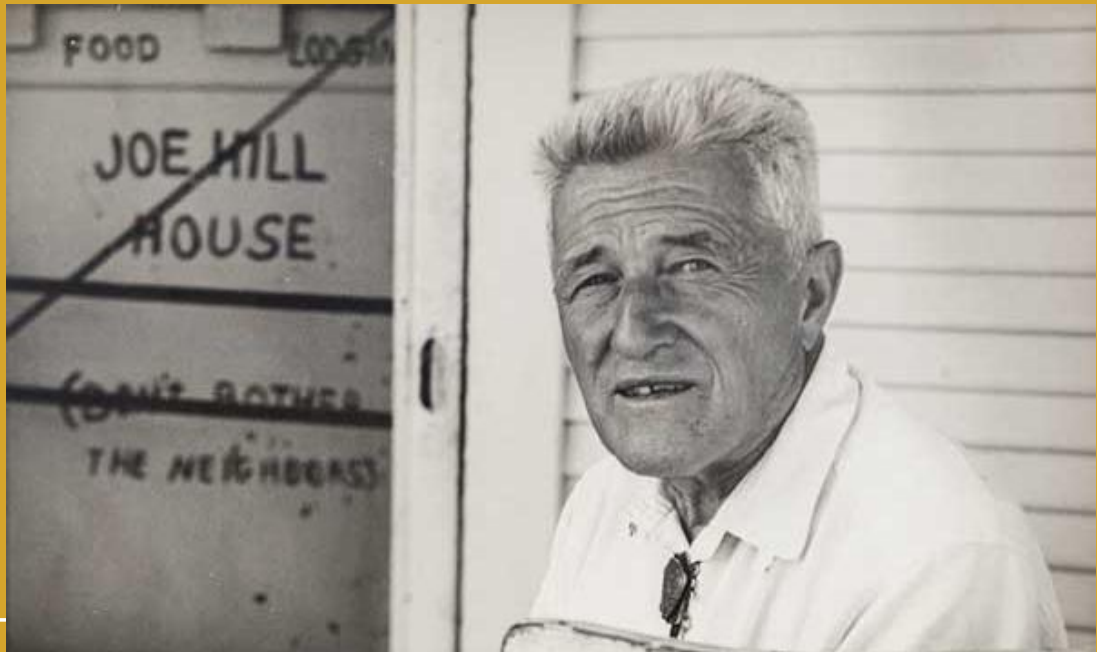
I was born in Louisville, Kentucky, and my family moved to Colorado after my brother was born the following year. I was named Eamon, after the Irish-American Catholic Anarchist, pacifist, and war resister Ammon Hennacy. He edited the *Catholic Worker Newspaper,* established a house in Salt Lake City that provided accommodations for dozens of homeless people every night, and once fasted for 40 days to protest nuclear weapons testing. So I have a little to live up to; no pressure or anything.

The town my family lived in for the first few years of my life was Colorado Springs, a city known for its extremely conservative politics, large evangelical Christian population, and beautiful location at the base of Pikes Peak. Focus on the Family's headquarters are there, as well as the US Air Force Academy and the North American Aerospace Defense Command Center, which is housed in a complex built under Cheyenne Mountain and 2,000 feet of granite to protect it from nuclear attacks.

A lot of how I understand the world began with living in Colorado Springs, looking at the foothills covered in spruce and pine trees, dotted with striking sandstone formations, and thinking about the bustling military activity going on 2,000 feet below. The incongruency of this breathtaking nature hiding a fortress of 15 buildings containing hundreds of military personnel, 25 ton blast doors, and according to rumor, even a Taco Bell, always came to mind as we drove on the interstate. If these mountains were used to conceal US military operations, what else was going on beneath the surfaces of everyday life that was meant to be kept secret from ordinary citizens with less proximity to the established powers-that-be?

We moved to Denver, Colorado after a few years, and that's where I spent my middle and high school years, skateboarding in parking lots and going to punk shows. I knew in high school that I wanted to work in libraries. Where else was committed to facilitating all people's access to information, and wasn't trying to sell people anything? Nowhere! It was a perfect fit. I worked at the Denver Public Library as a part-time shelver, volunteered at the Denver Zine Library, pictured here, as an amateur cataloger, and then as a part-time circulation assistant at my state university library.
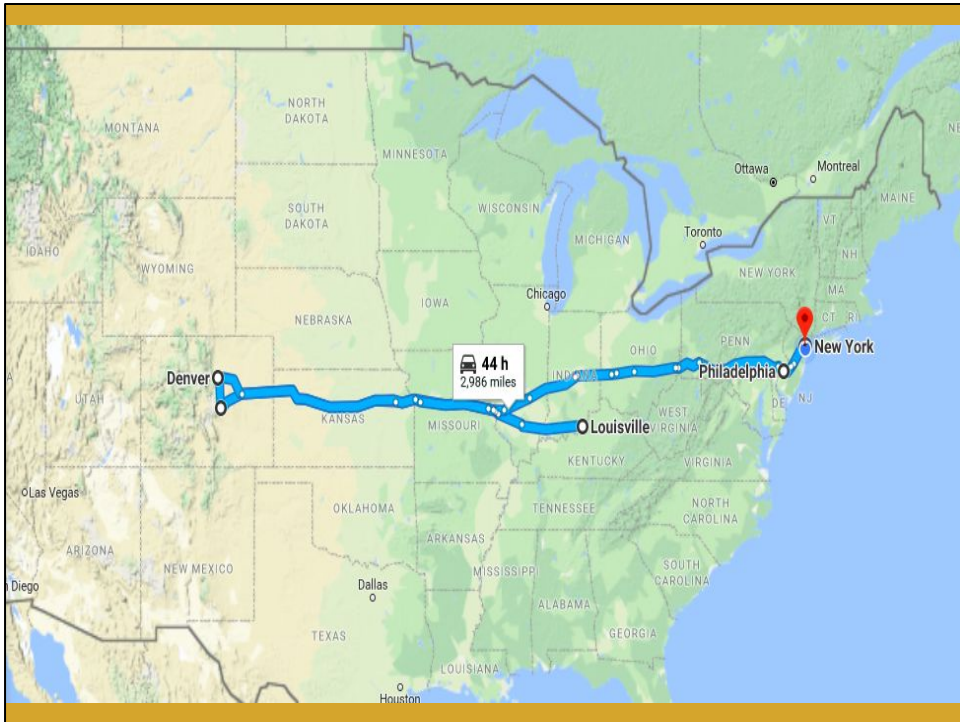
From Denver I headed to Philadelphia for library school, and a few paid internships and a lot of tuition dollars later, I was a credentialed librarian. Some people come to the profession after working in other fields, and others start out in libraries and stay there. I'm one of the latter. And most of my work life has been spent in academic libraries and higher education, which have their own histories and practices just as incongruous as Cheyenne Mountain and the missile defense headquarters hidden beneath it.

Critical Librarianship

To set the stage, let's talk about the term critical librarianship. Who feels familiar with the term? When did you first hear it?

> *"Critical librarianship is an international movement of library and information workers that consider[s] the human condition and human rights above other professional concerns."*

Toni Samek, "Critical Librarianship: An interview with Toni Samek, "2007

Critical librarianship is a relatively new term that emerged about ten years ago, with Toni Samek first describing it. Samek takes a broad approach to defining critical librarianship, which is necessary and useful. It's also important to point out that progressive and unequivocally political librarianship has a much longer history. There are individual librarians who rallied against injustice and changed what we knew librarianship to be: those who worked tirelessly to support marginalized and oppressed communities, like Regina Andrews, Clara Breed, and Miriam Braverman, intellectual freedom fighters like Zoia Horn, alternative publishers like Celeste West, and radical catalogers like Sandy Berman.

PROGRESSIVE LIBRARIAN
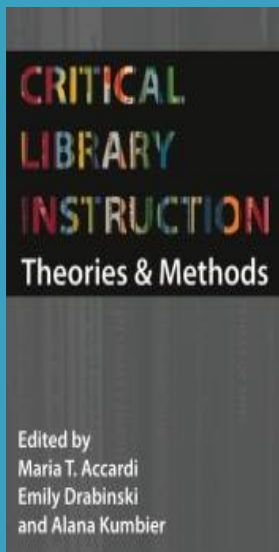
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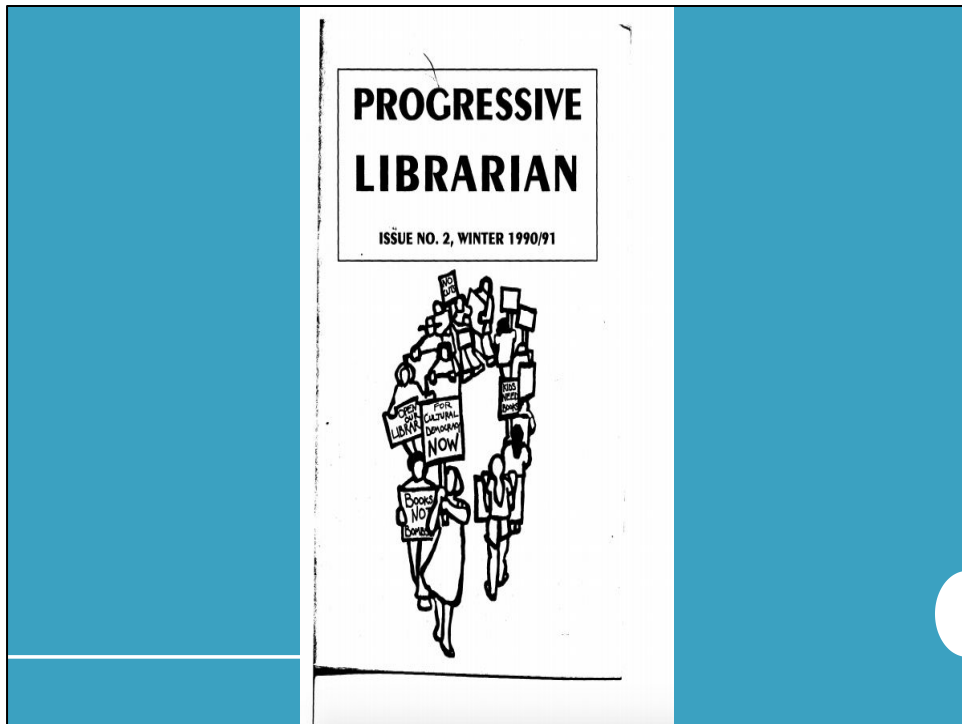
There are organizations with long histories, some of them founded by these same people. The ALA Social Responsibilities Round Table was established in 1969, and has provided a means for librarians to engage directly with social issues. The Progressive Librarians Guild is an independent organization that seeks to align librarianship's actions with its stated values of supporting democracy and countering the commodification of information.
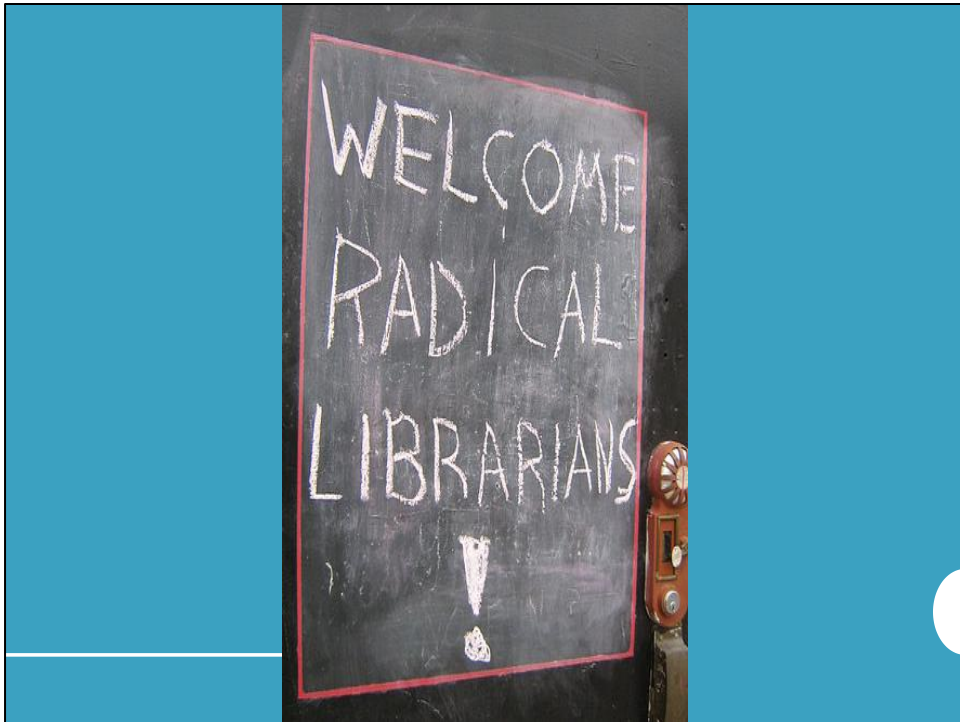
Radical Reference has been operating chapters since 2004, taking a grassroots approach to the intersection of information workers and activism. These are all groups that have been doing excellent work that often overlaps with or is part of critical librarianship, though as we see from Dr. Samek's definition, the term critical librarianship is newer than progressive or radical librarianship.

CRITICAL LIBRARY INSTRUCTION
Theories & Methods

Edited by
Maria T. Accardi
Emily Drabinski
and Alana Kumbier

"Ours is a profession that often splits working and thinking in two...Would ideas that didn't always lead to outcomes find a home in our profession?"
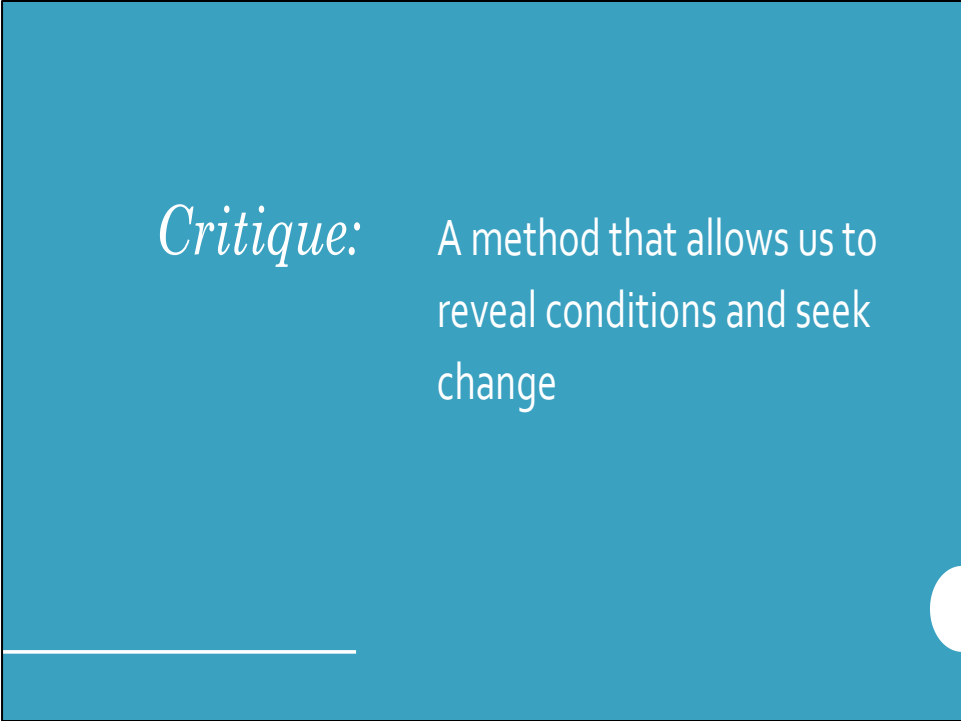
Maria Accardi, Emily Drabinski, and Alana Kumbier, 2010

What's happened in recent years is an increased interest in parts of the profession that have historically been less hospitable to these ideas--essentially a mainstreaming of critical perspectives. With critical librarianship, librarians have looked to critical theory and social justice movements to inform and change the profession. The scholarship in this area has majorly increased in the past decade, with the publication of a cornerstone title *Critical Library Instruction: Theories and Methods* in 2010.

Along with a number of other publications, this was followed by the beginning of #critlib Twitter chats in 2014. The #critlib chats, along with discussions about the place of critical perspectives in the ACRL *Framework*, have resulted in more attention to this movement. There have been probably a dozen symposia, unconferences, and workshops on critical librarianship topics since 2015, including the 2017 #critlib unconference that took place in Baltimore preceding ACRL.

Critique:

A method that allows us to reveal conditions and seek change

To foreground critical librarianship's aims, it's worth examining what we mean by critique. In short, critique is a method that allows us to reveal conditions and seek change. It can take many forms, including the application of theory, the practice of making complaints, and taking the time and space for reflection to inform action, but it always allows us to question the status quo, the norms of our work and our lives, and how that status quo shapes what's possible or imaginable.

Critique comes from a love for libraries and the potential they hold. It means to care. For me, this is what critical librarianship is about--taking a look at libraries not through the common lens of vocational awe, to use Fobazi Ettarh's term describing the way we tend to treat librarianship as a noble, saintly calling that can only do good, and to instead identify how libraries are complicit in systems of oppression, and how to leverage our power to create change.

Critical Librarianship

Centers a commitment to social justice

Questions the myth of neutrality

Asks who benefits, and why

What does critical librarianship actually stand for? What claims does it make? Critical librarianship has as many definitions as there are people practicing it. It changes depending on time, place, and person, and it looks different at Penn State, compared to Columbia, compared to anywhere else. There are, however, some core tenets and interests that give form to it.

Critical librarianship centers a commitment to social justice. The ALA Core Values of Librarianship are a start--they describe the profession's commitment to things that sound good on the surface, like social responsibility and diversity. But these values are not at all clear cut when we think about them, and things get messy when we consider what they mean in practice. Where does privacy fit in when we collect granular data on student library use and GPA to try and prove our worth to administration? Where does racial and ethnic diversity fit in with a profession that not only remains extremely white, but fails to support the library workers of color who *are* here?

All I want for Christmas is the abolition of imperialist white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy

When we talk about social justice, it's worth naming what's being fought against. That's why I love the term from bell hooks that names oppression for what it is: the imperialist white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy. These interlocking systems of domination are what must be dismantled and replaced.

Critical Librarianship

Centers a commitment to social justice

Questions the myth of neutrality

Asks who benefits, and why

Critical librarianship maintains that libraries are not and cannot be neutral. They never have been, and they never will be. Libraries are made up of people and collections, and every decision and action reflects what we know, believe, or value. When I buy a book, I choose one title among thousands of other possible choices. This book I buy puts money in the vendor's and publisher's pockets, becomes part of the library's collections, and there along with the other books, it is a visible, tangible manifestation of what knowledge the library prizes and promotes over other types. There are countless other examples--decisions we make while cataloging, while enforcing policies, while making hiring decisions. If it involves a choice, it's not neutral.

> *"Neutrality is a privilege afforded to those who do not live in fear, have not experienced genocide and war, do not have to daily face the effects of institutionalized racism."*

Candise Branum, "The Myth of Library Neutrality," 2008

This quote from librarian Candise Branum really gets at what's important when we consider neutrality. Neutrality is usually presented in abstract, what-if terms, when there are real consequences to pretending like we can be fair and impartial in the decisions we make. Critical librarianship recognizes that we live in a world of inequality, struggle, and change, and to act as if we're not part of that same world puts us on the sidelines, unable to advocate for others or ourselves.

Critical Librarianship

Centers a commitment to social justice

Questions the myth of neutrality

Asks who benefits, and why

One question I find useful time and time again is "who benefits?" When we ask who benefits, that also means who benefits structurally. I find these sorts of questions useful for instruction as well. What topics are represented in search results, and why? Who's represented among authors of academic works? Why is that, and what does it tell us? Why do some search terms work and not others, and who decides that?

Tuxedo Mask
@TheLoveBel0w

Follow

When you're a "Men's Rights Activist" and you finally get your "rights":

10:13 PM - 4 Apr 2018

This tweet always cracks me up. Some people, especially white cisgender men such as myself, are swimming in privilege. We're surrounded by it, and have trouble comprehending what it's like to not have it. Here we have someone benefiting from that complete immersion in their "rights," and they're luxuriating in a few more drops of it.

Benefiting from inequities doesn't happen uniformly, and it's not something you opt in to. All white people benefit in some way in a society that centers and rewards whiteness. Librarianship is a predominantly white, women-majority (but not women-dominated, if you look at the gender distribution of library deans and directors), middle-class profession. There is little space for librarians of color. The space that *is* there is often filled with hostility and microaggressions. In its attention to power dynamics and oppressive structures, critical librarianship considers how libraries uphold whiteness.

There is important work being done to diversify the profession at the national association level, but there are a couple of librarian-led developments I find especially significant. One is the We Here group, which is an informal network and supportive space for library and archives workers of color, and was started by librarians Jenny Ferretti and Sofia Leung. Just a couple of months ago the WOC+Lib website launched, which is a platform for women of color in librarianship founded by Lorin Jackson and LaQuanda Onyemeh. These are shining examples of librarians organizing to provide essential support and amplification that can't be done through more formal channels like professional associations.

What we do is important. Through conversation, reading, reflection, and taking action, critical librarianship is a promising framework for examining what we do and how to build and exercise our power.

Social justice and changing the world are lofty goals, but working towards them is done through small steps. It can mean recognizing when to speak up and when to listen. Self-educating on how identities such as race, gender, class, and abledness affect your positionality. Advocating for a pay increase for your student workers. Getting your library gender neutral bathrooms. Buying books by underrepresented authors. Trying something new in your instruction sessions, like asking students to think about why so many scholarly articles are paywalled.

We don't simply want students to pass their classes, as important as that is. We hope to achieve something greater in our work. And through dialogue, reading, reflecting, and taking action, critical librarianship is a framework for doing just that.

The potential of libraries is that they:

The importance of my work is that I:

We're spending a good amount of time today talking about the problems that libraries represent and reinforce. But it's also important to ask what's significant or consequential about them, and what we want them to look like. So in that spirit, these questions ask what potential these things hold.

I'd like you to take a couple minutes to reflect on these questions. You can note down any ideas that come to you. Afterwards, I'll ask for a few volunteers to share their responses to these prompts, before we move on to discuss where critical information literacy and teaching in libraries fits into all of this.

The potential of libraries is that they:
The importance of my work is that I:

Critical Information Literacy

With these ideas for potential in mind, let's talk about critical information literacy. It's one common way that academic librarians, and especially instruction librarians, are implementing critical librarianship in their work.

- *Aims to understand how libraries participate in systems of oppression and find ways for librarians and students to act upon these systems*

- *Applies critical theory and most often the ideas of critical pedagogy to libraries*

- *More than just instruction; a way of thinking about information literacy as a whole, from libraries' educational activities to IL standards/frameworks*

Here are some key points about critical info lit, which is both a theory with a significant body of literature that's been developing for the past 15 years, and a practice that librarians make and remake every day. Like critical librarianship more broadly, it seeks to understand how libraries and adjacent systems, such as scholarly communications and academe, contribute to systemic oppressions.

There are many sources of inspiration for critical IL, especially critical theory, but it can be any theories that consider power through different lenses, whether that's postcolonial, critical race, queer theory, or political economy. Critical pedagogy in particular has been influential in academic librarianship, with bell hooks, Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, and other scholars referred to often in the literature.

Critical info lit is not solely about instruction. It's really a way of thinking about and critiquing information literacy as a whole. That includes professional documents and standards, but also information literacy as it's practiced outside of higher education and libraries as well.

Critical information literacy "takes into consideration the social, political, economic, and corporate systems that have power and influence over information production, dissemination, access, and consumption."

Gregory and Higgins, *Information Literacy and Social Justice: Radical Professional Praxis* (2013)

This definition from Lua Gregory and Shana Higgins captures critical IL's focus. We're talking about systems, power, and information here, and where those things all intersect. These are big ideas, but still ideas that can be broken down into smaller pieces that are easier to address.

"When we limit [information literacy's] potentials to outcomes and standards, we run the risk of minimizing the complex situatedness of information literacy and diminishing – if not negating – its inherent political nature."

Heidi Jacobs, "Information Literacy and Reflective Pedagogical Praxis" (2008)

Along with that, this quote from Heidi Jacobs makes an essential point in a time when it feels like we're asked to track and quantify every little thing we can. Those standards, outcomes, and even frameworks we base our teaching on can result in us ignoring the most worthwhile aspects of education and information literacy, and the parts where discussions get difficult but learning is most likely to happen.

- *Examine library subject headings to show how information organization is rife with white, patriarchal assumptions (Drabinski, 2008)*

- *Develop feminist teaching methods to position lived experiences as valid ways of knowing (Accardi, 2013)*

- *Teach economics of schol comm by having students jot down when they encounter paywalls and reflect on barriers these costs create (Warren, 2010)*

Here are some examples from the literature on how librarians have incorporated critical IL into instruction. Reading the library catalog as a text that lays bare the white, patriarchal worldviews of classification systems, applying feminist teaching methods such as group discussions and centering learners' lived experiences, and emphasizing the economics that undergird scholarly communication and database subscriptions are just a handful of promising ideas. Specific teaching strategies like these are exactly what we'll get into in the next section, right after we take a moment to think on some questions that will help frame those strategies.

What might critical information literacy look like in your job?

Which students at your institution need the most support?

How does the culture at your workplace align or not align with critical library work?

These reflective questions are to get you thinking about your own library, institution, and students. There is no right or wrong way to do critical librarianship, and what we're able to accomplish is very much dependent, institutionally and personally. Take a couple minutes to think about these, and write down any thoughts that come to you. We'll do another share out with the group, and then we'll move onto some examples of critical info lit in practice.

What might critical information literacy look like in your job?
Which students at your institution need the most support?
How does the culture at your workplace align or not align with critical library work?

Critical Information Literacy in Practice

As I mentioned, information literacy and instruction is one of the most well-explored areas of critical librarianship. I think part of this is because teaching is one area where we have a good deal of latitude in deciding what we do and what our work looks like.

A couple years ago I did a study on critical information literacy, where I did a survey and interviewed some academic librarians on how and why they take critical approaches to their instruction. It was all very fascinating, and an enjoyable process to talk with other librarians doing this work. The participants were really generous with their time and examples of critical info lit in their practice, so I want to share some of my favorite ideas they contributed.

Critical Information Literacy in Practice

Teaching content

Teaching methods

13 librarians were interviewed, and we talked about inspiration for engaging in critical library instruction, their classroom practices, barriers they found, and what was rewarding about it. I'll focus on classroom practices, and this in itself is two parts: teaching content, as in *what* is being taught, and teaching methods, as in *how* things are taught. Sometimes these two are closely intertwined, which we'll see in a few examples. We'll take a look at teaching content first.

Teaching Content

- *Classification*
- *Search Examples*
- *Academic Conventions and Access*
- *Corporate Media*
- *Alternative Media*

There are all sorts of ways to bring challenging ideas into the library classroom, but these five themes came to the forefront. There's using classification systems as ways to think about the ideologies these tools reflect, using search examples that draw attention to social issues, examining how access to academic information is limited by vendors, and discussing corporate advertising platforms like Google and Facebook, or alternative media like zines and small press publishers.

> *"I've had students look at LC and Dewey as 'anthropologists from the year 2815' and they try to hypothesize values the cultures that produced these ways of looking at information had - thereby opening up the idea that knowledge is conditional on time, place, and power."*

Classification

I especially appreciate this example here for its creative take on classification, which is the single most useful and illustrative text we have on libraries and the ways of knowing they're organized to prioritize. A library catalog, or the controlled vocabularies in a database, are systems that tell us so much about assumptions, audience, and academic conventions. What knowledge is conveyed to be consequential, and what is not? If you take a close look at any classification system, it will tell you in great detail.

> *"I also make use of search terms that also have the effect of consciousness raising, like if it's a business class, or a session where they have some sort of career-exploration topic, using something about the gender wage gap or something like that as a search example can be interesting and powerful."*

Search Examples

Search examples are an easy way to draw attention to current events and social issues. Why not take the classic undergrad research topic, marijuana legalization, and make it about the push to clear convictions for possession, which is a racial justice issue, considering African-Americans are four times more likely to be arrested for possession than white people? These examples can be a way to get into class discussions or activities around important issues, and create dialogue where there may not have been before.

> *"We look at the economic power structures that limit access to academic information (overpricing, password protection). We consider how peer review can lead to quality control or suppression of newer or more radical views."*

Having parents who went to college and having worked in libraries and higher education for ten years now, I find it's all too easy to take academic conventions, like paywalled content and peer review, for granted. Questioning these price gouging practices and strange processes is something that really resonates with students who are new to academia. In a class last month, just asking first year students "what is peer review, and why is your professor requiring you to use peer-reviewed articles?" led to an interesting discussion on authority, publishing, and representation.
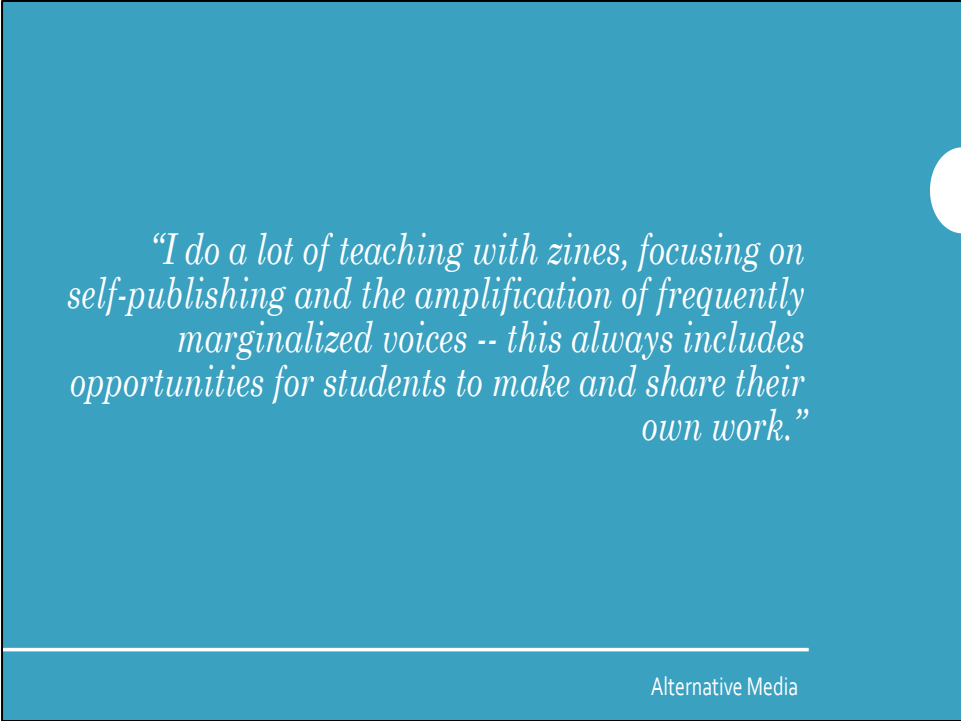
> *"I frequently design one-shot class sessions built around a few open-ended questions, and hope for students to drive the discussion. The topics have included bias in search algorithms and how editorial processes in popular media are designed to perpetuate the status quo, rather than truly 'report the news.'"*

Corporate Media

Looking at information access outside the library bubble brings up some essential questions about who determines what we see online and how. The internet is a pretty dark and convoluted place, centered upon attention, clicks, and commerce. A couple effective in-roads to teaching about corporate media in library instruction are considering algorithmic bias, which Safiya Noble has explored so well with Google, and Matthew Reidsma with library discovery systems, as well as social media and the many known issues with disinformation and the lack of any semblance of privacy. These commercial platforms are a significant part of our everyday lives, making them a good reference point for many students.

> *"I do a lot of teaching with zines, focusing on self-publishing and the amplification of frequently marginalized voices -- this always includes opportunities for students to make and share their own work."*

Alternative Media

As the last theme for content, we have alternative media. Zines are a tried and true way to center perspectives from marginalized people. At my previous job, a social work class spent the first few weeks learning about mental health issues, and later in the class students created their own zines on their research topics, which included works cited pages. The library session was all about zines--learning about their history and what they are, and then taking some time to practice making a zine using discarded periodicals from the library.

Critical Information Literacy in Practice

Teaching content

Teaching methods

Oftentimes how we teach is just as important as what we teach. Here are some methods that reflect the goals of critical librarianship and critical pedagogy, many of which I'm sure are familiar to you all.

Teaching Methods

- *Discussion and Dialogue*
- *Group Work*
- *Skip the Database Demo*
- *Reflection*
- *Problem-Posing*

Critical information literacy tends to prioritize discussion and dialogue among students and the teacher, to use group work as a way to decenter the typical classroom hierarchy and spark ideas, to skip the usual database demonstration, to find ways to incorporate reflection into the session, and to formulate and pose problems of significance to learners that they can consider and act upon.

> *"I lecture as little as possible and like to have students work together, present findings/ideas/reactions/etc. to the class, and then engage in a whole-group discussion.*
>
> *Again, I attempt to engage students in material that (a) they can relate to; and (b) will get them thinking. This ranges from group work exploring a variety of sources surrounding the murder of Trayvon Martin to acting out a scholarly debate on the coming out process."*

Discussion and Dialogue

Finding opportunities for discussion and dialogue is essential to incorporate student knowledge. This interviewee uses students working together on something followed by sharing out to the whole class, and emphasizes material that's relatable to students but also challenges them and gets them thinking. There are lots of ways to bring in discussion, and one of my favorites is the jigsaw method. The jigsaw method has students break into small groups to work on one piece of a broader activity, and then come together to put that information into something cohesive.

> *"It is difficult to establish trust in a one-shot lesson. I need student input to understand where they're at, what they are working towards, what gets them engaged. With group work, they are feeding off of an energy or a mood that's already been established. I find group work allows students to be more open in their ideas and more open to error."*

Discussion and dialogue can be a tall order for one-shots, where you don't have an existing rapport with students and are parachuting in to an unknown classroom dynamic. Group work is a way to make use of that existing dynamic, since the students do know each other, and as this librarian says, allows them to be more open in their ideas and less worried about appearing like they don't know all the answers.

> *"Instead of simply demo-ing a database, I facilitated a role-playing activity in which [students] assumed the roles of scholars, and we then had a discussion about who gets to be a scholar and thus who has a voice in the literature.*
>
> *"This was all new to them, and I think they were able to both understand what 'the literature' is and problematize academia in ways they hadn't before."*

Skip the Database Demo

This example talks about one way to move past database demonstrations, and actually have students involve themselves in a setting that too often sees them as passive receptacles waiting for knowledge. Critical librarianship asks us to consider the ways that education in libraries reinforces and leaves unquestioned dominant systems, while seeking opportunities to make library instruction meaningful to our students and to us, whatever that may look like in our own contexts.

> *"Allowing students time to reflect or posing questions that ask them to consider how/if the lesson is meaningful to them is important part of the classroom experience for me.*
>
> *Ideally, it adds a small jolt to their experience and communicates to students that I'm here for them, that I want to be useful and purposeful addition to their classroom, not some intruder with my own agenda."*
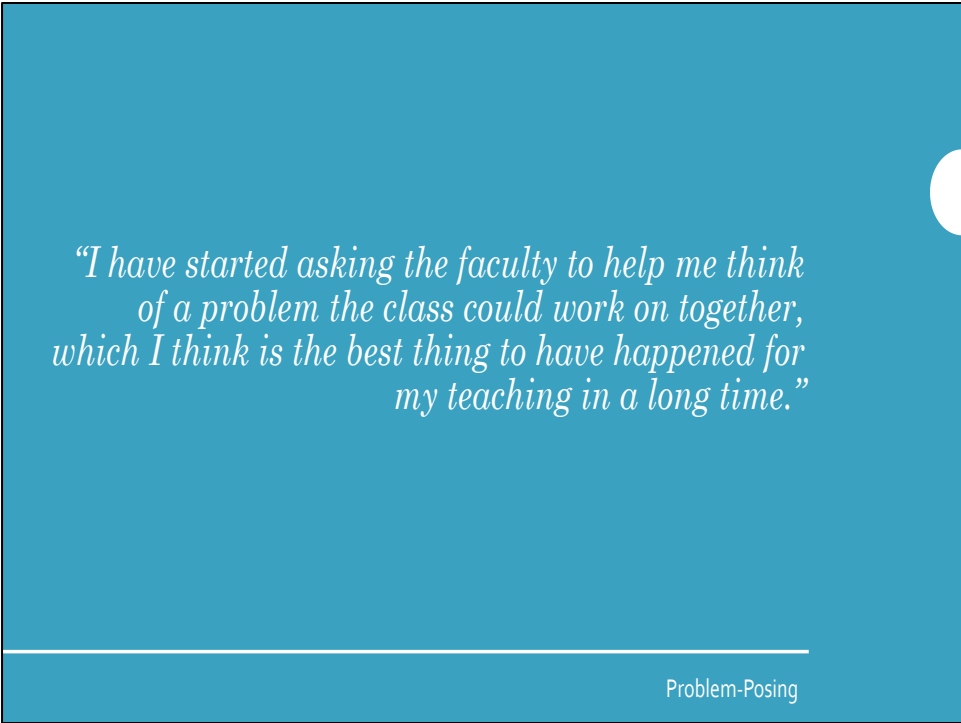
Reflection

Building in opportunities for reflection, whether at the beginning, middle, or end of a class, is key to assessing where students are or how a class went, but also to showing that their feedback matters. I like taking a moment at the beginning of a class to see where students are with their research, usually using Padlet or Poll Anywhere so it's anonymized and there's no shaming involved.

I also ask students to fill out a quick feedback form towards the end of class with one thing that was learned, one thing they were confused about, and one thing they still have questions on. Reflection is not just for students, either. I try to schedule a few minutes after every class to decompress and write down a few notes on how it went and what I might want to try next time.

> *"I have started asking the faculty to help me think of a problem the class could work on together, which I think is the best thing to have happened for my teaching in a long time."*

Problem-Posing

For the advanced or more confident teachers in the room, I really loved this idea. Spending the time in class to work on a problem, and an actual real-world problem, is critical IL at its best. In this example, the librarian asked the professor what problem they could use the class to work on, and the professor came back with a factual inaccuracy in Wikipedia about a historical event that was very difficult to trace. In the library instruction session they all worked on that problem, with the librarian recommending sources and search strategies to try as they went.

A situation like this typically means it's an instructor you know and have worked with before, and it requires more time on part of the instructor to come up with a problem. But we're taking a significant amount of time to prepare and teach the class too, and providing meaningful learning opportunities for students is what it's all about.

> *Questioning is at the heart of critical librarianship.*

We live in a country and an era that is extremely violent towards immigrants, refugees, and any people deemed undesirable. Our laws, governments, corporations, and institutions are designed to have that effect. This violence towards marginalized people has remained constant throughout history, but it has intensified and expanded with the current administration. There's so much work to be done. Critical librarianship encourages us to question what appears to be given, unchangeable, incontestable. It reminds us that our libraries face major challenges at the same time they perpetuate dominant ideologies. It lets us imagine a different world, and to work towards it, however imperfect those efforts may be.

> *Hope is at the heart of critical librarianship.*

Questioning is essential, absolutely, and that is a crucial part of libraries and education that we must seek to maintain and foster. Equally important, especially in challenging times, is hope. One thing that gives me hope is knowing that I'm not alone, that others are struggling towards creating change and trying to bring care and justice into the world. Our libraries reflect societal inequities and injustices, but they also reflect us. Our actions make up our libraries, and determine what they look like, what they do, and who they serve. I know so many incredible librarians, and I bet you do too. Let's take this opportunity to determine what we want libraries to be, with intent, strength, and hope.

Thank You

eamon.tewell@columbia.edu
@eamontewell

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