Libraries are not neutral: Implementing social justice and critical information literacy into one-shot instruction

What is critical information literacy?

Critical information literacy is, "a way of thinking and teaching that examines the social construction and political dimensions of libraries and information, problematizing information's production and use so that library users may think critically about these sources."

Tewell, E.C. (2018). The Practice and Promise of Critical Information Literacy: Academic Librarians' Involvement in Critical Library Instruction. *College & Research Libraries* 79(1), 10.

By taking a critical approach to information literacy, librarians can address **social justice** in their classrooms

The ACRL Framework for Information Literacy
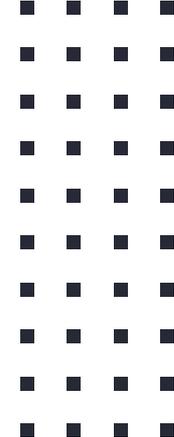
Unlike the former ACRL Standards for Information Literacy, the Framework is concerned with power and how power and privilege relate to information.

Three frames discuss *POWER* and *PRIVILEGE*

Information has value

Scholarship as conversation

Authority is constructed and contextual

Information has value

States:

- ❏ "Experts understand that value may be wielded by powerful interests in ways that marginalize certain voices."
- ❏ That learners should "understand how and why some individuals or groups of individuals may be underrepresented or systematically marginalized within the systems that produce and disseminate information."
- ❏ That learners should be "inclined to examine their own information privilege."

Scholarship as conversation

States:

- ❏ "Established power and authority structures may influence [learners'] ability to participate and can privilege certain voices and information."
- ❏ That learners should "recognize that systems privilege authorities."

Authority is constructed and contextual

States:

- ❏ "Experts understand the need to determine the validity of information created by different authorities and to acknowledge biases that privilege some sources of authority over others, especially in terms of others' worldviews, gender, sexual orientation, and cultural orientations."
- ❏ That learners should "remain skeptical "of authority granting systems and to "recognize that unlikely voices can be authoritative."
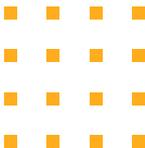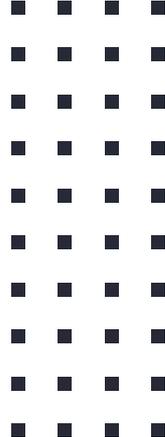
Critiques of The ACRL Framework for Information Literacy: Does it go far enough for social justice?

Arguments that the Framework doesn't do enough to advocate for social justice

- ❏ Battista et al. (2015) argue that the framework is missing a clear statement connecting information literacy to social justice.
- ❏ Saunders (2017) argues that the language used in the framework is too passive and proposes an additional frame "Information for social justice."
- ❏ Both Beatty (2014) and Seale (2020) argue that the Frames, while better than the Standards, still promote a neoliberal agenda and thus cannot advocate for true social justice.
- ❏ Rapchak (2019) argues that the Framework participates in neoliberal colorblind culture because the Framework never mentions race.

" ACRL has responded to arguments saying,

The taskforce who wrote the Framework considered a frame related to social justice in a draft of the document but, "felt that social justice was not its own frame and that social justice components were better served as pieces of other frames. In the end, we incorporated many of its components into other frames in descriptions, practices, and assignments."

Saunders, L. (2017). Connecting Information Literacy and Social Justice: Why and How. *Communications in Information Literacy 11*(1), 66.
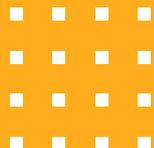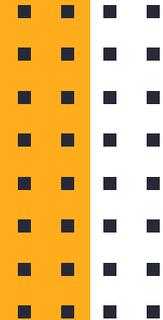
DISCUSSION QUESTION

What do you think?

Does the Framework do enough in terms of social justice?
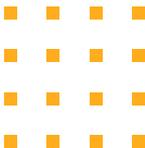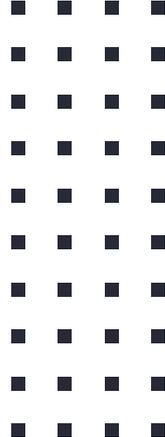
Ways librarians can implement social justice work into one-shot information literacy sessions

If you have no time…

❏ **Use diverse examples in the material you already cover**
  ❏ **When you demo a database, have students look something up during class, or compare and contrast two sources, etc. use social justice, BIPOC, and LGBTQ+ examples**
  ❏ **For example, as the art librarian, I could use Great Zimbabwe instead of Stonehenge or Jacob Lawrence instead of Pablo Picasso**

Barr-Walker, J., & Sharifi, C. (2019). Critical librarianship in health sciences libraries: an introduction. Journal of the Medical Library Association, 107(2), 258–264. https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2019.620

If you have 10 – 15 minutes...

- ❏ **Discuss how library systems aren't neutral**
  - ❏ **Intentionally perform searches that demonstrate biases in subject headings and/or the library's classification system**
  - ❏ **For example, the indiginous arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas are still found under the subject heading "primitive" in LCSH**
- ❏ **Discuss the peer-review process and how it creates power and privilege**
  - ❏ **Whose voices are heard? Whose voices aren't?**
- ❏ **Discuss information privilege**
  - ❏ **Who has access to the library's databases? Who doesn't?**

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Tewell, E. (2016, October 12). *Putting Critical Information Literacy into Context: How and Why Librarians Adopt Critical Practices in their Teaching*. In the Library, with the Lead Pipe. http://inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2016/putting-critical-information-literacy-into-context-how-and-why-librarians-adopt-critical-practices-in-their-teaching/

If you have 20 minutes (or more!)

- **Have students compare and contrast two sources from different time periods to point out bias**
  - For example, a book about African art from the 1950s would likely use racist language, like the previously mentioned term "primitive"
- **Have students look at LCSH or Dewey like "an archeologist from 2815"**
  - What can you conclude about this society based on how they organized information?
- **Challenge students to find research on their topic by BIPOC folks**
  - **What does it mean if they can't find any? Who is represented in the academic literature? Who isn't? Who gets to be an expert or authority? Who doesn't?**

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Elliot, L. & Harvey, A. (2019, July 17). *Liberate Our Library: Embedding Social Justice Work in Everyday Practice* [conference presentation]. ARLIS UK & Ireland 50th Anniversary Conference, Glasgow, Scotland.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

How could you work critical information literacy into your one-shot instruction?

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Thank you!

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