Journal of Information Literacy

ISSN 1750-5968

Volume 11 Issue 2
December 2017

Article

Pashia, A. 2017. Examining structural oppression as a component of information literacy: A call for librarians to support #BlackLivesMatter through our teaching. *Journal of Information Literacy*, 11(2), pp.86–104.

http://dx.doi.org/10.11645/11.2.2245

Examining structural oppression as a component of information literacy: A call for librarians to support #BlackLivesMatter through our teaching

Angela Pashia, Ingram Library, University of West Georgia. Email: apashia@westga.edu Twitter: @LibrarianAngie

Abstract

This article calls for librarians to expand our understanding of information literacy to include the connections between structural racism and information production, dissemination, and organisation. It begins with an examination of some of the ways libraries have recorded and replicated inequities endemic in Western society. These issues are connected to both the field of critical information literacy and the #BlackLivesMatter movement. The author then provides an overview of how these issues are taught in a credit bearing information literacy course.

Keywords

critical information literacy; diversity; inclusion; information literacy; structural racism; whiteness

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1. Introduction

There is a popular mythology that libraries, and therefore library instruction, are politically neutral. We are champions of the free exchange of ideas, providing instruction in research methodologies that students may then use to research any topic from any political position and ideology. Attempts to be neutral and apolitical can be seen in the recent debates in the US about how to respond to the resurgence of white supremacist organisations (Fister, 2017; Balgord, 2017) and in the public discourse around the role of public libraries during large protests (Seale, 2016). Despite these claims to neutrality, libraries are also somehow generally considered a force for good in society, rather than a neutral influence (e.g. Seale, 2016, compare with Peet, 2015).

These mythologies have faced increasing scrutiny. Over a decade ago, Honma called on librarians to incorporate a structural critique of 'the library's susceptibility in reproducing and perpetuating racist social structures found throughout the rest of society' (2005, p.2). Discussions centred on critical librarianship regularly address the ways claims of neutrality have the effect of upholding the status quo. In tracing the foundations of the modern library, de jesus details some ways in which libraries, as we know them, have never been neutral. Consider this quotation:

> Public libraries began as instruments of enlightenment, hoping to spread knowledge and culture broadly to the people, who as free citizens of a democratic republic required access to that knowledge and culture to live fuller lives and to become better citizens.
> (de jesus 2014, quoting Bivens-Tatum)

This encapsulates the vision many have of libraries as a positive force, and explains the sense of 'vocational awe' (Ettarh, 2017) many feel toward the role of librarians. However, it is imperative to examine the full meaning of this vision. What do we mean by 'better' citizens living 'fuller lives'? What 'knowledge and culture' is being valued in this paradigm? Do we believe that 'the people' have no knowledge or culture without libraries, or is it simply not the preferred knowledge and culture? As de jesus (2017) explains, 'almost nothing in this statement about the purpose of libraries is value-neutral and apolitical'. To begin to approach the structural critique Honma (2005) called for, we need to look beyond the surface to examine the implicit assumptions and structures of social power in all aspects of library work.

Taking the critiques above seriously opens a Pandora's box of ways in which libraries often reinforce rather than challenge social structures that oppress those considered to have 'inferior' cultures, who lack (the right) knowledge. This paper will outline some of the ways in which libraries have never been neutral. After examining this background, I argue that we must address structural inequities as part of a critical information literacy approach and present some ways I incorporate lessons on racial justice into a credit bearing information literacy course.

2. Structural inequity in academic libraries

For those who are new to examining oppression from a structural position, it is important to differentiate between individual actions and overarching structures. In discussions of structural oppression, it is common for those who are more privileged to feel defensive, as though they themselves are being accused of intending to be racist (diAngelo, 2011), sexist, or otherwise prejudiced. However, it's important to understand that while individual actions contribute to sustaining the structures, the structure is self-replicating without relying on individual motivations. In other words, many people make well-intentioned choices based on the information they know, with absolutely no intent to oppress anyone, but their actions may contribute to a larger structure of oppression. Bonilla-Silva's book, aptly titled *Racism Without Racists* (2003), provides an in-depth exploration of how individual choices made with no ill intent may ultimately serve to uphold oppressive structures. Learning how these structures function and coming to terms with the ways we have been complicit in the past enables us to more effectively act against those structures.

Examining oppression through a structural lens means examining the power dynamics inherent in socially constructed relations. Racism is not simply a matter of individual prejudice. Instead, it necessarily involves differences in access to power, whether that is social, economic, political, or other forms of power. This may be softened to frame it as a 'system of advantage based on race' (Tatum, 2003, p.7), but those advantages function to confer social capital, which enhances one's power to act or set the terms of engagement in interactions. I focus primarily on structural oppression in the context of race in this article, but it is also important to analyse power dynamics in relation to other axes of oppression, such as gender (e.g. Olin & Millet, 2015) and sexual orientation (e.g. Drabinski, 2013), and examine the way these structures of social power intersect (Crenshaw, 1991; Ettarh, 2014).

Furthermore, it is important to note that in this analysis, race itself is socially constructed (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Gusa, 2010; Honma, 2005; Hudson, 2017). That does not make it any less real in terms of its

impact on people's lives – after all, money, language, gender expression and marriage are also socially constructed. This is important to recognise, because it enables us to ‘approach race as a formation produced *in* and *through* the exercise of power rather than as a natural, pre-existent, and unchanging demographic attribute around which ”race relations” are organized’ (Hudson, 2017, p.20).

2.1 Whiteness as a dominant ideology

As integral components of academic institutions, libraries play a significant role in recording and sustaining structures of oppression. This happens in many ways, from the way library spaces are constructed (Brook, Ellenwood & Lazzaro, 2015) and organised (Drabinski, 2013) to our information literacy instruction practices. Gusa's (2010) framework of White Institutional Presence (WIP) is useful for understanding how this occurs. WIP consists of

> customary ideologies and practices rooted in the institution's design and the organization of its environment and activities. WIP, as a construct, names the racialized influences on discourses between and among students, between student and teacher, and between students and academic resources.
> (Gusa, 2010, p.467)

Gusa details the patterns through which the cultural practices and assumptions associated with the socially constructed category of ‘white’ are uncritically treated as the normal and appropriate way to behave and produce research in a scholarly setting; this then may cause students of colour to be marginalised and excluded. Failure to critically engage with the ways race has shaped our society, including our academic institutions, will allow these patterns to continue unchecked, regardless of individual intent (Gusa, 2010).

One example of how WIP operates in academia can be seen in reactions to attempts to diversify the curriculum. Students may be dismissive of courses seen as diversity requirements more so than other required courses (Gusa, 2010, p.472). When required to discuss race, ‘white students subverted a structural study of racism with personalistic concerns over how they are perceived as white individuals’ (2010, p.473). In addition to attempting to derail conversations about structural oppression, it is not uncommon for students to criticise those faculty who do raise such issues or report feeling ‘ambushed’ by encountering such content in courses not explicitly labelled as diversity courses (2010, p.473). These reactions combine to reinforce the whiteness of the curriculum, whether by centring white feelings in a discussion of structural oppression or by penalising, by way of course evaluations, instructors who do incorporate structural critiques in their courses. The instructor has even more power to reinforce WIP by determining course content, allowing white students to derail conversations, calling on white students more often than other students, being more critical of work submitted by students who raise issues of structural oppression in their papers, and many other subtle mechanisms that the instructor may not even realise they are doing.

While Gusa (2010) examines academia more broadly, Honma (2005) examines this phenomenon in Library and Information Studies (LIS). Consistent with Gusa’s WIP framework, Honma argues that ‘whiteness, particularly as a discourse of power, goes unnoticed’ (2005, p.6).

One of the ways unnoticed whiteness plays out in libraries is in the discourse of multiculturalism and diversity that celebrates cultural differences rather than critically engaging in a discussion of structural racism. The effects of this include:

> First, the focus on concepts such as 'diversity' and 'ethnicity' elides any mention of race, problematically divorcing these terms from the distinct power relations of their racialized meanings. Second, the failure to specifically indicate race leads to the inability to conceptualize and articulate social and institutional structures of discrimination that lead to the necessity of forming these special committees in the first place.
> (Honma, 2005, p.10)

By celebrating differences instead of naming WIP as a problem that we need to address, librarians have continued to reproduce the very power structures we claim to want to challenge.

Honma concludes with a call 'for us to critically dialogue about various interlocking systems of oppression and their intersections with the field of LIS' (2005, p.21). Structures of oppression permeate all library systems and practices. Below, I provide a broad overview of some ways these structures are embedded throughout library resources that are relevant to information literacy.

2.2 Systemic racism in organizational schema

A good deal has been written on how the systems libraries use to categorise information and organise resources encode the normative ideologies and prejudices of those with power in a given era. Drabinski (2013) discusses several studies that have critiqued organisational schemata. For example, 'works about religion in the Dewey Decimal System are overwhelmingly Christian; works about heterosexuality are barely named as such in LCSH' (Drabinski, 2013, p.97). The Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) are commonly used in academic libraries in the US and internationally. By learning to navigate these organisational schemas, users

> 'learn' that ethnocentric myths are true, like that Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism are minor religions compared to Christian monotheism. Similarly, they 'learn' that heterosexuality is normative, that gay and lesbian sexuality is the only sexual identity that ought to be examined, and that queer sexuality is inherently deviant.
> (Drabinski, 2013, p.97)

Non-white racial identities are also marked as 'other' in the catalogue. For example, there is an authorised subject heading for 'American literature–African American authors', along with other qualifiers for other non-white categories and women authors, but no authorised heading to indicate white authors (Library of Congress, 2016). This reflects and reinforces WIP – white male authors are treated as the default author of American literature, marking blackness as other. There are on-going efforts to update the controlled vocabularies that are used to organise library resources, but each revision reflects the social and temporal context of the person(s) advocating the revision (Drabinski, 2013).

While many library users pay little or no attention to the subject terms listed for an item in the catalogue, these organisational schemas determine the call numbers used to organise books on the shelves. For example, in the Library of Congress call number ranges used for books about education, under the subheading 'Education of special classes of persons' there is a sub-subheading specifically

for men/boys as well as women/girls. The racial categories listed include blacks/African Americans, Asian Americans, Latin Americans/Hispanic Americans, but again, white is the default category with all others marked as 'special classes' (Library of Congress, n.d.). So books about educating black students will be separated from books that are very similar in topic but focused on working with a demographically different group of students. Melissa Adler (2016) refers to this as informational redlining, drawing an analogy to the mortgage lending practices that effectively enforced segregation long after housing segregation was outlawed in the United States.

2.3 White Institutional Presence in hiring practices

These classification schema that treat whiteness as the default, with all others marked as 'other', reflect a structure in which those in power were predominantly white – and this condition remains largely in place in academia. Much attention has been paid to the racial makeup of librarianship and of university faculty. Based on data from 2010, 88% of librarians are white (Bourg, 2014). Looking beyond the library, using data from fall 2015, the US National Center for Education Statistics found that 77% of full-time faculty (all ranks combined) in degree-granting postsecondary institutions are white (McFarland et al., 2017, p.255). This figure doesn't account for variation between college and university types, with many high prestige institutions coming in as even less diverse (see Taylor et al., 2010; Green, 2016). However, neither of these figures are representative of the US population. This pattern can also be found in British universities. Data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency shows that only 1.6% of academic staff identify as black, and no black academics are included in the higher ranks of 'managers, directors and senior officials' (HESA 2017).

Hudson (2017) critiques the emphasis placed on diversity initiatives as insufficient to challenge structural racism, since it is possible to work toward representative demographic alignment without challenging racial power relations. For example, the application processes for diversity programs in LIS (Hathcock, 2015) and the librarian hiring process select for those candidates who are best able to 'perform whiteness' (Galvan, 2015), even when claiming to seek 'diverse' candidates. When we focus just on representation,

> What's missing is an analysis of the ways in which race serves as a mode of structuring physical and intellectual space, not only through the management of access, but also through the configuration of relations of power and assignments of value within the space; the exclusions through which the very parameters of the space are drawn; and the political, economic, and cultural interests ultimately served by the existence of the space (and indeed by its discourses of inclusion) to begin with.
> (Hudson, 2017, p.13)

These figures are important to discuss, not just because they are so misaligned with the populations many of us work with, but because of how they reflect and influence structural power relations.

2.4 Systems of scholarly communication

The resources libraries collect – whether print books on our shelves, electronic books listed in our catalogues, or databases we subscribe to – reflect decisions made by humans. Given the whiteness of the profession, and considering the WIP framework, it is important to ask what biases contribute to decisions about which books to purchase. Faculty members throughout a college or university often

have the opportunity to contribute to those purchasing decisions, which means we have to look beyond librarian selections to examine academia as a whole. Many of these individual faculty members may not be actively choosing to exclude voices. They may simply be replicating and building on the canon they were taught, but the effect of that leaves many voices out. Though researchers have commented on this for a long time (Honma, 2005; Tatum, 2003), there has been a recent proliferation of discussions about why university curricula are so white (UCLTV, 2014; Domosh, 2015), often excluding important African, Asian, and Native American scholars. Again, going beyond mere representation in library collections, this calls for an examination of how different forms and sources of information are valued.

Beyond decisions about purchasing, academia privileges the scholarly source, written by researchers for researchers. Students are generally expected to learn to cite scholarly, peer-reviewed journal articles in their papers. This makes sense as students are learning to converse in academic discourses. However, recognising that the majority of those publishing scholarly journal articles are faculty in academia means that we need to consider the effect of White Institutional Presence on those channels of scholarly communication. What voices and perspectives are excluded or mediated when students are required to only use scholarly sources?

Considering a different axis of power relationships for a moment, though men make up just over half of all full time faculty in the US (McFarland et al., 2017, p.255), studies found that around 70% of scholarly journal articles (using samples of 5.4 million and 8 million articles) were authored by men (Roh, 2016). This raises the question of whether analogous patterns occur with regard to other forms of structural oppression. Given that scholars of colour are already underrepresented in the faculty ranks (McFarland et al., 2017; HESA, 2017), it is important to explore how subtle power dynamics and the pressures of White Institutional Presence further limit their participation in the scholarly record.

Here again, simply focusing on numerical representation, without challenging the existing structures inherent in White Institutional Presence, will be insufficient to fully address these omissions. As long as ‘all those who control the academic apparatuses (academics, administrators, publishers) uphold the “possessive investment in whiteness”’ (Honma, 2005, p.15, applying the concept advanced by Lipsitz, 1998), researchers will have difficulty publishing scholarly work that challenges the assumptions of WIP. The need to fit these expectations leads scholars of colour to discuss tensions ‘between “playing the game” to succeed in graduate school (by mainstream standards) and authenticity’ (Grollman, 2017), and between writing in their own voices and an ‘academic’ voice (Bradley, 2017).

Bias in structures meant to support research further constrains the range of perspectives found in scholarly sources. Scholars attempting to publish research ‘on marginalized populations often [receive] negative reactions, accusations of “me-search” and questions about resonance or importance to the broader (read: dominant) world’ (Sumerau, 2016). The term ’me-search’ is used to refer to research topics that align with a scholar’s marginalised identity. Some use it to imply that such research is more personal, and therefore less objective, than research other scholars pursue. The bias described by Sumerau may play out in terms of departmental support (Grollman, 2017), tenure and promotion structures (Castleden et al., 2015), in the peer review process (Fryberg & Martínez, 2014), and in the granting of research funding. Without addressing the research topics proposed in detail, researchers found, after controlling for a range of other variables, that black scholars are about 10 per cent less likely than white scholars to receive funding from the U.S. National Institutes of Health (Ginther et al., 2011). The end result is a skewed scholarly record.

The issues outlined above are just the tip of the iceberg. This overview is intended to briefly touch on the range of ways structural racism is embedded in the work librarians do, and to pave the way for a discussion of how those structures relate to information literacy.

3. Information Literacy

Information literacy is defined by the Association for College & Research Libraries (ACRL) as 'the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning' (ACRL, 2015). The official document from ACRL that fleshes this out, the 'Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education', identifies six concepts in the path to becoming information literate. These include understanding the ways 'authority is constructed and contextual'; recognising how the processes that went into creating a piece of information shape that resulting piece of information; an emphasis on research as a process of inquiry rather than a simple linear procedure; participating in scholarship as an on-going conversation rather than a fixed body of facts; searching for information as a messy, iterative process; and recognising the value of information, including academic (proper citation) and market based (copyright) values (ACRL, 2015). The way the document is written leaves a considerable amount of room for interpretation and adaptation.

Some librarians approach teaching information literacy as a 'neutral' exercise. We can teach students to evaluate information sources according to a simple checklist, usually including the authority (constructed through the attainment of formal credentials) of the author/creator of the work, whether it's up to date, and the purpose of the piece (to inform or to sell a product), without having to examine the power structures that enabled that author to become an authority or the ideological biases represented in the piece. We can discuss the peer review process as a means of vetting scholarly publications, a standard part of the process of creating scholarly information, without getting into the messiness of potential biases, the number of studies that have been retracted, or any other critiques. And we can teach students to develop useful search strategies for finding relevant articles in library databases, adjusting keywords or using the subject terms to find more articles if their initial searches yield too few results, without problematising the profit model of academic publishers and databases or questioning who cannot afford access to the results of academic research. Of course, choosing to not question these structures effectively reinforces the status quo, and therefore is inherently not neutral.

In contrast, the subfield of Critical Information Literacy (CIL) pushes us to raise the questions that get left out of a 'neutral' approach. This approach employs a range of theoretical perspectives and critical pedagogies to encourage theoretically informed practice, viewing the range of information available, the learners, and those teaching information literacy as socially situated entities. It is important to teach the ways in which 'the existing information system mirrors the larger social and political order, which is characterized by a radically asymmetrical distribution of power, and is shot through, systematically and structurally, by racism, sexism, homophobia, militarism, and class oppression' (Beilin, 2015). From this perspective, it is imperative that we include the sorts of structural racism and the effects of White Institutional Presence outlined above as integral components of information literacy.

4. Black Lives Matter

Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi – three women who identify as black and queer – created #BlackLivesMatter in response to specific acts of violence – both the killing of Trayvon Martin and the assassination of his character during the subsequent prosecution of his killer (Garza, 2016). It gained wider recognition during the protests in Ferguson, Missouri, in August 2014 and in demonstrations across the US following the non-indictment of Michael Brown's killer in November 2014. Today it is most commonly associated with protests and political actions in resistance to state violence, but the hashtag that has grown into a movement relates to a wider critique of white supremacism and structural racism.

Garza describes Black Lives Matter as ‘an ideological and political intervention in a world where black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise’ (Garza, 2016, p.23). The movement focuses specifically on black lives because ‘black lives, which are seen as without value within white supremacy, are important to your liberation. Given the disproportionate impact state violence has on black lives, we understand that when black people in this country get free, the benefits will be wide reaching and transformative for society as a whole.’ (Garza, 2016, p.26) The Black Lives Matter Network lists several examples of issues they consider within their focus, including poverty, mass incarceration, and the intersectional effects of blackness compounded with other axes of oppression (Black Lives Matter Network, n.d.). These issues remain relevant because of an ideology of white supremacy that is spread and reinforced through myriad everyday messages and interactions.

As librarians and educators, it is critical that we examine the ways the ideologies this movement addresses – white supremacy and anti-black racism – permeate academia and the library. When teaching information literacy, we should seek ways to address some of the biases embedded in the tools or concepts we are discussing. Understanding the ways these ideologies function and are used to frame information is an important component of being fully information literate.

These issues can be addressed without specific reference to the Black Lives Matter movement. In some cases, depending on the faculty member one is working with, it may be more effective to avoid explicitly mentioning it. However, for those of us who have come to this work as a result of learning from Black Lives Matter activists ‘it is appropriate politically to credit the lineage of your adapted work’ (Garza, 2016), particularly when publishing or presenting on it. Though researchers have been publishing on these issues for decades, the dominance of White Institutional Presence has allowed a great many of us to be considered experts in our fields without ever having engaged with these critiques so I credit the Black Lives Matter movement with bringing these issues to my attention.

5. Teaching Black Lives Matter in an Information Literacy course

I teach a two-credit hour, semester-long course titled "Information Literacy and Research" (LIBR 2100). LIBR 2100 is not a required course, but it is included as one of the electives students may take to fill a general education requirement. Most of the students who enrol in the course do so during their second, third, or fourth semester, before getting into upper level courses in their majors. Each section is limited to 24 students, and several sections are offered each fall and spring semester. I note these

characteristics up front, because they provide me with a degree of pedagogical freedom that many librarians do not have. Those who only teach "one-shots" are often limited in how much information they can introduce, and are often beholden to the instructor of record for the class in terms of what they are expected to discuss.

The learning outcomes for my course are:

1. identify, access, evaluate, and use information appropriate to a specific purpose;
2. analyse the political, cultural, and social dimensions of information; and
3. ethically create information by synthesising sources.

These outcomes include a lot of content and leave room for interpretation. Identifying information appropriate to a specific purpose may sound simple, but it entails understanding what type of information one needs (simple instructions or a broad overview or detailed research results) for that specific purpose, what type of information tends to be found in different categories of sources (news articles vs. journal articles vs. books vs. blogs), and other standard information literacy lessons. In addition, this may include learning to identify a need for a counter-hegemonic narrative that is not readily available in the scholarly record – which implies an understanding of how the process of creating scholarly works often filters out counter narratives as well as filtering for quality. The second learning outcome is even more open to interpretation. I focus on issues of racial bias, such as discussing how the cultural prevalence of White Institutional Presence has affected the scholarly sources available through the library, examining ways to find and critically evaluate potentially counter-hegemonic perspectives, and examining the social and political effects of biases in algorithms.

5.1 Why is my curriculum white?

I encourage students to examine the power structures involved in all of the concepts we discuss. I set the stage for this on the second day of class with a lesson that asks students to think critically about the university itself, and how that affects everything else that we will discuss throughout the semester, as well as the resources they have available to use in their research. We begin the semester by watching a video posted on the University College of London's YouTube channel: ‘Why is my curriculum white?’ (UCLTV 2014). In this 20 minute video, students talk about the whiteness of the established canon in their respective fields. Several specifically mention non-white and non-Western scholars who made important contributions but are not included in the curriculum. They also discuss how that exclusion has affected their perceptions of academia.

After watching this video and discussing initial reactions, I invite students to use their own devices or one of the provided laptop computers to search online and see if they can find the demographic profile of students and faculty at our university. The 2016-17 University of West Georgia Fact Book (2017) reports that our student body is 51.6% white, 36.8% black/African American, and 5.1% Hispanic (p. 37). Our faculty, including both full and part time teaching faculty and administrative faculty, are 81.5% white, 7.3% black or African American, and 7.3% Asian (p.60). No student has yet reported finding this or an earlier fact book from our university, but most very quickly find some data reported on various websites online.

The most common initial reaction I hear when students find figures about the student population is surprise. Several have mentioned that they would have expected the white/black ratio to be in the

opposite direction. Depending on time constraints, this reaction itself can lead to interesting discussion that connects to an evaluation of library resources and scholarly communications. For example, is this difference between perception and actual demographics a matter of perception bias for white students coming from even less diverse high schools? If that is the case, how does that perception bias then influence their interactions with the texts available to them through library resources and included in their class reading assignments?

Like the majority of librarians and faculty, I am white. I find it important to openly address this elephant in the room during this lesson. Depending on the way the discussion goes, I may bring up more aspects of my positionality – a white woman, first generation college student, from a low income background who has moved into the middle class, and who is now a tenured associate professor. I attempt to include a wider range of voices through the materials selected for the course, including this video, but I invite students to also consider how my positionality affects the ways I understand and present the course content.

Class discussion about how the whiteness of the curriculum affects their research, beginning with who is likely to be writing the scholarly articles and books in the first place, and extending to selection biases of those deciding which books to purchase for the library, is important. However, many students are reluctant to speak up in front of their peers, especially if this is the first time they've been asked to question the educational system. Therefore, I save some time at the end of the class period for students to write an individual reflection on the day's material in order to both include more students' voices and to extend the conversation.

By starting with this lesson at the beginning of the semester, I am able to refer back to these ideas throughout the semester and address many of the issues outlined above. For example, when discussing source evaluation, we explicitly discuss the ways structural racism influences the likelihood of an author being published. Examining the authority of the author or creator of an information source (conceived broadly as anything from a book to an article, YouTube video, tweet, etc.) is an important factor in determining whether a source is credible. Academic credentials signify authority in some contexts. However, students need to be able to go beyond that, to consider other ways of constructing authority, especially when researching a topic like Black Lives Matter or other social justice movements. This means taking a more complex approach to evaluating the credibility and authority of a source than simply checking the 'peer-reviewed' box – it means critically examining the author or speaker's claim to authority. Are they an eye-witness to an event? Do they have a lived experience that counters the popular narrative? If so, is that just one anecdote, or do many other marginalised people report similar experiences?

While it seems rare to be invited to do a full session on a topic like this in a one-shot, I have done this lesson as a stand-alone research workshop. Attendance was relatively low, but students were all very engaged and we had an excellent conversation that built on these issues. In one iteration of this, participants included a few faculty members, at least one graduate student, a couple of undergraduate students who planned to go to graduate school, and a few other undergraduate students. The activity consisted simply of watching the video and having a guided discussion about the content. Because this was an optional workshop, rather than a lesson in class, I allowed the discussion to flow without keeping it as explicitly connected to information literacy as I do in class. Participants shared personal

experiences related to those recounted in the video and, using informal terms, discussed ways to cope with and challenge White Institutional Presence in academia, research, and scholarly communications.

The issues related to the whiteness of the curriculum, of libraries, of faculty, and consequently of the scholarly record, could also be raised in one-on-one research assistance meetings, particularly when it is relevant to the topic the student is researching.

5.2 Alternative media

Building on discussions of how we construct authority, I spend time in class explicitly discussing alternative forms of media. I consider this category to include a wide range of source types that can provide a platform for marginalised voices and/or counter-hegemonic perspectives. This includes social media and blogs, as well as newspapers produced by African Americans for a predominantly African American audience. Recognising the expectations that other faculty have for the sources students will use in their papers, it is important to discuss how students can effectively incorporate 'alternative media' into their papers without being penalised, including justifying their determination that these are credible sources. This provides practice in applying discussions of how authority is constructed and contextual, as well as providing a context in which those discussions become more directly useful in their future coursework.

Introducing these other forms of media as valid and useful can also provide an opening to examine the ways different sources frame an event. One example I use to illustrate this is from using Twitter to find out what was happening during the protests in Ferguson in August 2014. As an event is happening, the most credible sources of information are often the people actually observing the events. Many people privilege news reporters as the authoritative voice for this sort of information. However, considering the power structures of the broadcasting industry means that we have to examine the way those news agencies frame their stories and be open to considering counter-narratives. For example, during the Ferguson protests, several people who were participating in the protests took to Twitter to critique and provide a counter-narrative to the ways the protests were being portrayed on local and national news (e.g. Elzie, 2014). In this example, which is the more authoritative source – the people on Twitter or the local news broadcast – and what values are reflected in the answer to that question? Of course, selecting credible sources from the flood of tweets on a trending topic is challenging, so we discuss ways to evaluate the credibility of an individual twitter account. This is more work than simply accepting the account posted on CNN based on the authority of an established news network, but it is important for students who want to begin to question the hegemonic narrative.

This contrast can also be illustrated by having students compare a report about a controversial event in a minority-run news source and a mainstream news source. Examples in the United States include the *St. Louis American* and *Atlanta Black Star* newspapers. Another source is Media Diversified (mediadiversified.org), which was started with the explicit purpose of providing a platform for more diverse voices, and often features articles that specifically examine issues of framing and bias in mainstream media.

This can, unfortunately, get into some murky ground. Recent attention to 'fake news' highlights the way things can go wrong when anyone and everyone is treated as an authority with a worthwhile perspective. I stress the importance of considering power dynamics and intersectional -isms, like

racism and sexism, when critically evaluating the credibility of a source. When reading something that questions the dominant narrative, I encourage students to ask whose interests it serves: those who already have power or those who have traditionally been excluded from access to power? In the context of a credit-bearing course, I have the privilege of being able to refer back to this lesson to reinforce the points I want students to take away, and to recalibrate misunderstandings.

5.3 Algorithms

During the section of the class that deals with using library tools (the catalogue and databases) to find sources, it is important to discuss the biases inherent in the way those sources are organised. Realising that many students (as well as faculty and even librarians) will continue to rely on tools like Google and Google Scholar to find sources, it is also important to discuss the biases encoded into Google algorithms.

There is a growing body of research on the ways racial and gender biases are encoded in the Google algorithm. Results that reinforce negative stereotypes rise to the first few pages, with analysis and counter-narratives appearing much later, on pages many users rarely if ever view (Noble, 2013, 2018). Google ads also produce biased results in searches of racially associated names. One study shows that 'ads suggesting arrest tend to appear with names associated with blacks, and neutral ads or no ads appear with names associated with whites, regardless of whether the company placing the ad reveals an arrest record associated with the name' (Sweeney, 2013). These patterns reinforce implicit biases insidiously, creating the conditions in which a police officer may be even marginally more likely to associate blackness with criminality, which can have fatal consequences.

The personalisation of results, as described by Eli Pariser (2012), also limits the information searchers are exposed to, which can reinforce, or at least fail to challenge, their existing ideologies and biases. Pariser explains some effects of search personalisation in a 9-minute TED talk on 'filter bubbles' (2011) using an example of searching for Egypt and getting information about the Arab spring on one computer and about tourism on another. I have used the filter bubbles video as the basis of a class session in past semesters. After viewing the video, the class discussed ways it connected with previous topics, new problems personalisation can introduce, and ways students can step outside of these filter bubbles. The first few times I used this lesson, I kept the discussion more focused on how personalisation can affect student research. As I began to address structural bias throughout the course, our discussions began to include the ways this personalisation may reinforce prejudices. The majority of students are surprised to learn about how Google ranks and personalises search results.

In the fall 2017 semester, I am replacing Pariser's video (2011) with a TED style presentation by Safiya Noble (PdF YouTube, 2016). In this video, Noble presents issues with the Google algorithm and clearly explains how these 'algorithms of oppression' reinforce hegemonic power dynamics. As before, my plan for that lesson is to watch the video and lead a discussion of how the research presented affects the quality of information they find online and how that relates to past course material.

In an optional workshop in spring 2017, I showed Noble's video (PdF Youtube, 2016) to a small group of faculty and students, and then led a discussion of the issues raised. Conversation touched on a number of problems, and eventually led to the outcomes these algorithms make possible. At that

point, I showed a short video from the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC, 2017) that speaks directly to this question. The SPLC video suggests a direct causal link between the way Google's algorithm sorts results and the radicalisation of Dylan Roof, leading to the 2015 terrorist attack in which Roof murdered nine worshipers at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. They argue that, perhaps, had actual statistics refuting propaganda about the threat of 'black on black crime' appeared at the top of the results, instead of white nationalist propaganda, Roof may not have taken the path he ultimately chose. The video also discusses specific examples in which the SPLC raised their concerns directly with Google, and Google changed the one result specifically addressed, but didn't fix the algorithm overall. This leads to questions of how to more effectively respond to known problems with tools so many students use during the research process.

In the context of a semester-long course, I also use an article about biased algorithms in a homework assignment related to other lessons. After examining the ways ideologies both shape the way information is presented and how the reader interprets that information (Critten, 2015), and discussing ways to critically evaluate information, I ask students to practise evaluating an article as a homework assignment. I assign an article about bias in algorithms that are used to help determine sentences for people convicted of crimes (Angwin et al., 2016) and ask students to evaluate its credibility and identify an ideology represented in the article (either that the author seems to hold or is arguing against). We discuss the assignment in the class period after it was due, because students often have difficulty distinguishing between an overarching ideology and a more specific opinion. Picking apart the specific biases encoded into the algorithm that were mentioned in the article and identifying how they connect to a white supremacist ideology provides an opportunity to both reinforce an earlier lesson and introduce a structural critique of algorithms.

5.4 Embedding critique in other lessons

Above are a few examples of ways we can teach lessons focused on structures of oppression in relation to information literacy, but issues of structural racism are woven throughout academia, scholarly communication, popular media, social media, and many other topics that fall within information literacy. Racial bias and structural inequities can be found in nearly all aspects of information production, dissemination, discovery, and evaluation.

Those who rarely have the opportunity to teach a full lesson like those described above can still make an effort to address instances of structural oppression as it relates to a basic information literacy session. In discussing ways to employ feminist pedagogy in the library classroom, Accardi suggests raising 'awareness of sexism and other forms of oppression through library research content and examples' and explaining structural problems with subject terms in relation to research on marginalised people (2013, p.51). When demonstrating a search, for example, one could select a topic that would provide an opening to briefly point out some of the classification issues outlined above. The homework assignment described above follows another strategy that can be adapted to other teaching settings: when asking students to practise evaluating a source, select one that addresses an issue of structural oppression.

6. Reflection and suggestions for further reading

These are challenging topics. My impression has been that very few of the students I work with have ever been invited to examine or criticise the education system in this way. As you may imagine, some

are resistant and others flourish. Many of these discussions focus on the huge grey area in which there is not a simple, cut-and-dried, correct answer, which is challenging for students who have been trained through most of their years in school to seek a single correct answer on standardised tests to prove competency.

One of the assessments I use in this course is a reflection essay at the end of the semester. The assignment asks students to 'reflect on the political, cultural, and social dimensions of information that have been covered in this class and how this knowledge affects you'. I ask students to describe the lesson(s) they choose to focus on, explain why it matters, why they think we covered that topic in this course, and how knowing about it will affect the way they find or evaluate information in the future. They may focus in depth on one specific lesson or discuss the connections between multiple lessons. Many of the students have written about racism, either in the curriculum, in terms of which voices get to be considered authoritative, or in the systems designed for finding information (library catalogues or search engines). Using that knowledge to alter the way one finds and evaluates information, to include a wider range of counter-hegemonic perspectives, is a small step toward challenging implicit biases and structures of oppression, in order to make sure that black lives – including experiences, stories, scholarship, and so on – matter.

While it's easy to focus on how students struggle with these concepts, it's also difficult for many librarians to feel confident discussing structural racism. White librarians may fear saying something in a way that comes across poorly and being accused of being a racist. However, avoiding this risk by staying silent or pretending neutrality allows the system to replicate unchecked. My strategy for overcoming this fear was to read widely. There is a wealth of literature available from many fields, including sociology, education, and psychology, that can help provide important background and useful strategies for addressing structural racism in the classroom. Literature on Critical Race Theory is a good place to start for a more thorough understanding of structural racism, along with the sources cited in this article.

Twitter can also be a powerful tool for learning, depending on who you follow. Some users share links to blog posts and news articles. Some may 'live tweet' reactions to scholarly journal articles as they read or tweet their notes during conference presentations. Others may share experiences and lessons through tweet 'threads' or 'tweetstorms' – series of tweets that are posted in sequential order and clearly building on earlier tweets, either marked by 'replying' to a previous tweet, listing a numerical order within the tweet, or both. In this setting, it is important to recognise that the person tweeting is sharing their personal experiences; they do not owe readers further explanation and may not be seeking to engage in debate about how to interpret those experiences. Listen, learn, and engage in respectful ways, but avoid demanding additional free labour from those who have volunteered to share those experiences.

Blogs can also be excellent sources for learning. Conditionally Accepted (https://www.insidehighered.com/users/conditionally-accepted) is one of my favourites for their focus on issues of diversity and inclusion in higher education, from the perspective of marginalised scholars. I also recommend Media Diversified (https://mediadiversified.org/) mentioned above.

This advice focuses on suggestions for white librarians. This is meant to respect the positionality of librarians who identify as black, Hispanic, or other racial categories, not to exclude. While I find the resources described valuable for all who are interested in information literacy, librarians from other racial categories face greater risk when attempting to discuss structural racism. Several studies have found that racial bias significantly affects student evaluations of teaching (e.g. Huston, 2005; Merritt, 2012; Boring, Ottoboni & Stark, 2016). Though librarians are rarely in a position to receive the sorts of formal student evaluations studied, many instruction librarians are expected to collect assessments of sessions. It stands to reason that the same biases would come through in any assessments that ask students to rate their opinions of a session. This may be exacerbated by the effect of White Institutional Presence on how research topics are valued, as discussed above. This means that it is relatively safer for white instructors to teach about structural racism in information literacy and academia – which makes it imperative that we join this conversation. Given my relative position of advantage in this area, it would not be appropriate for me to attempt to advise librarians of colour on how to become more comfortable addressing structural racism in information literacy instruction.

Considering the insidious nature of White Institutional Presence in academia, if we are serious about making our libraries inclusive of all of our constituents, we must do better at learning about and challenging structural racism in our libraries, and teach about it as a component of information literacy. By taking these difficult but necessary steps, we can help our libraries live up to their reputation as a force for good as we contribute to building a more just society.

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