

Tech-ing to Transgress: Putting Values into Library Practice

Keynote presented by Jennifer Vinopal at the Oberlin Library Group Digital Scholarship Conference, Macalester College, June 11, 2016.

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I. Introduction

I've been trying to make my talks and slides more accessible. So you can view my slides here [at the URL in the citation above]. As well, whenever there is text on the screen I'm going to read it out loud.

This talk I'm giving today grows out of not just the research I've been doing but also personal and professional journeys I'm taking that are significant and difficult and good and emotional.

I'm going to start this presentation the way we typically end presentations---with credits. I am indebted to so many people in our profession who have been working for years on questions related to social justice in libraries, archives, and other educational and cultural heritage institutions. I'll quote only a small number of them in this presentation, but there are so many others.

On the screen I acknowledge just a few of the people whose work this year has been particularly resonant for me, as well as some who have spent a considerable amount of time supporting me emotionally. These are all people who teach me so much, whether they realize it or not. They make me think harder.

Baharak Yousefi #critlib bell hooks
April Hathcock Feminist praxis nina de jesus
research subjects Jill Conte
Chris Bourg Cecily Walker Monica McCormick
b.binaohan/mxbees **Credits** Emily Drabinski
Bethany Nowviskie @blackgirlinmain Jaena Alabi
my daughter Barbara Rockenbach Sarah Shreeves
Jessica Schomberg Tressie McMillan Cottom
brown bag women's discussion group

Attribution isn't just a legal act, abiding by copyright law so you don't get sued. For me it's an ethical and a political act, acknowledging not only that I build on the work of others, but also amplifying their voices and using what influence I have within my profession to open eyes and ears and hearts to messages that may be difficult to hear and to act upon.

Acknowledgement is an act of appreciation. It's a testament to what others have given me, both intellectually and emotionally.

For me, it's a feminist act.

In some ways I'm an odd keynoter for this conference. I don't work at a liberal arts college. I never attended a liberal arts college. I've spent my entire library career at a single, enormous, R1 institution---New York University---and I've only been talking professionally to folks working in liberal arts college libraries since 2013, when I participated in the Mellon-funded Digital Library Federation Forum pre-conference, "Liberal Arts Colleges and Digital Scholarship Services," which kicked off a really fruitful partnership between DLF and the liberal arts colleges community. (<https://www.diglib.org/forums/2013forum/schedule/>)

But in other ways, maybe I'm not so odd a keynoter.

When Catherine Newton first contacted me back in February about speaking at this conference, she said it was designed to bring together the community:

to discuss our digital scholarship initiatives, our daily engagement with these projects, and ***the impact of digital scholarship on the communities we serve.*** I highlight the part of the charge that is of particular interest to me, and about which I'll talk today. This last clause is one of the things I've been thinking about and working on over the past few years, both personally and professionally.

My title is a total rip-off of bell hooks's seminal "*Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom.*" (<http://www.worldcat.org/title/teaching-to-transgress-education-as-the-practice-of-freedom/oclc/30668295>) (I actually thought this terrible pun title, "Tech-ing to Transgress," was too cheesy. But people for whom I have a lot of respect egged me on. So there it is.)

In this book hooks talks about laboring for freedom and about "the difference between education as the ***practice of freedom*** and education that merely strives to ***reinforce domination.***"

For hooks, freedom is moving beyond or transgressing boundaries. As a teacher she advocates all kinds of things that we typically think of as disruptive to a proper learning environment: excitement; emotion; caring for souls rather than just minds; and valuing different ways of knowing, new epistemologies. (I have a high schooler in the New York City public schools and I assure you that these behaviors are indeed still considered disruptive.)

hooks talks about the possibility of learning as revolution. And her MO is to build community: "a sense that there is shared commitment and a common good that binds us."

So for the rest of my talk I'd like to explore these themes within the context of our library work:

- The Practice of freedom vs. reinforcing domination
- Disruptive behavior
- Building community for common good

Before I move on though, I just want to make a couple of observations or glosses on the relationships among these themes. In the first theme on the screen, hooks's opposition implies action: practicing vs. reinforcing. Action is required to counter domination. As Eldridge Cleaver is reputed to have said, "You're either part of the solution, or you're part of the problem."

There's nothing "neutral" about doing nothing. It's a vote for the status quo. Secondly, I understand "disruptive behavior" to mean behavior that disrupts domination. The domination I have in mind here is what April Hathcock, NYU's Scholarly Communications Librarian, calls "oppressive normativity," which she defines as "the norms of identity that dictate who is ***privileged*** in our society and who is ***marginalized.***"

(<https://aprilhathcock.wordpress.com/2016/04/21/whiteness-and-oppressive-normativity/>)

Third: building community for common good requires building a shared understanding of what “good” means, and for whom. This is not as easy as it sounds, given the privilege and marginalization that Hathcock highlights, and that we see all around us if we take the time to look.

I won’t address these themes sequentially. Instead they infuse the examples I’ve chosen to talk about today, as they infuse my work as a librarian, a library manager and leader, a scholar, and beyond the profession as well.

II. Data is Political

I’m sure you’ve heard versions of this idea many places before. But I’ll call your attention to a recent article by Jeffrey Alan Johnson entitled “How data does political things.” (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2015/10/07/how-data-does-political-things/>) This post succinctly summarizes some key ideas I want to explore here. I’ll highlight a couple of points from his abstract:

It’s difficult to see the political structure of data, because data maintains *a veneer of scientific objectivity*. But data is inherently a form of politics... it *allocates moral values*... A political theory of data, grounded in distributive and relational information justice, is necessary.

He goes on to explain that not only does data influence political practices, but we should consider the act of data collection in itself a political practice. He wants us to ask questions like:

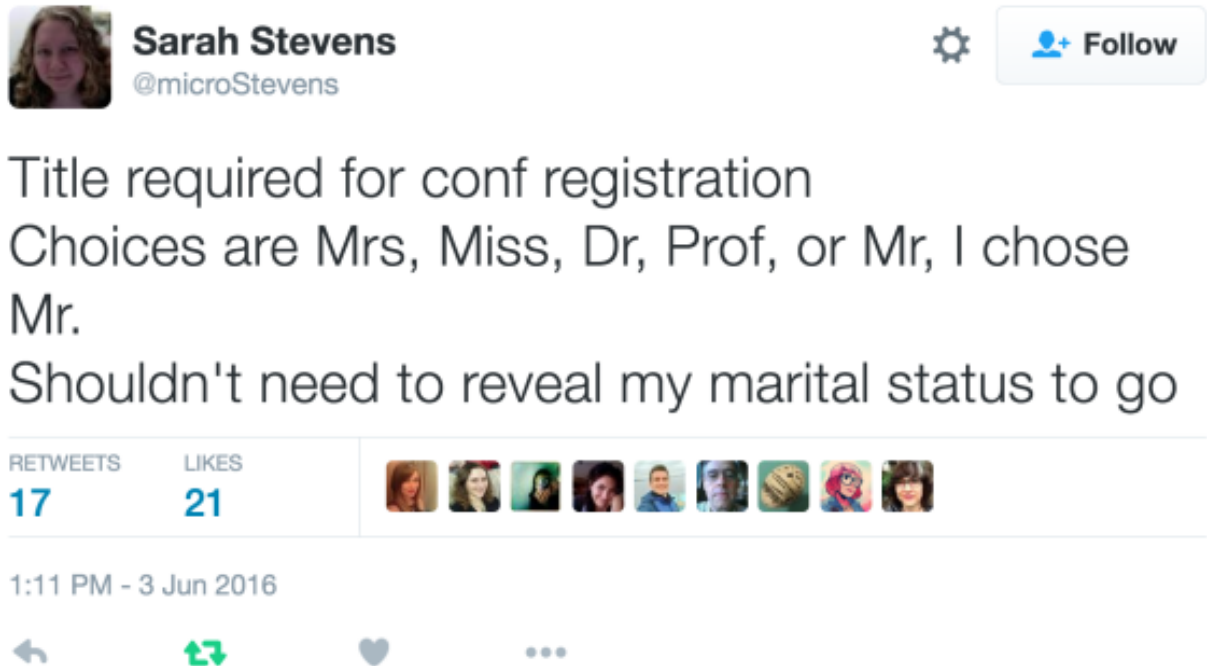
- Who mandates that it be collected?
- Who determines data fields & validation tables?

I’ll give you an example of this last point about the political nature of something as seemingly innocuous as data fields.

In my recent article “The Quest for Diversity in Library Staffing: From Awareness to Action,” (<http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2016/quest-for-diversity/>) published *In The Library With the Lead Pipe*, I look at a common survey tool used to evaluate organizational climate in libraries; the tool is called ClimateQual (<https://www.climatequal.org/home>). Though my article is focused on how libraries may interpret the ClimateQual data, rather than on the tool itself, I want to point out that in an optional demographic section, one question mixes options for sexual orientation and gender identity and allows the user to choose only one or not respond at all, thereby forcing some respondents to erase a part of their self identity.

This is an act of violence.

Here's another example. Sarah Stevens (Twitterhandle: @microStevens) tweeted on June 3:



[Caption: Title Required, tweet by Sarah Stevens, @microStevens]

I'll also add that everyone except Doctors have to reveal their gender identity or lie about it.

This is misogyny in action.

So this is how bias in how we think about data directly translates into discrimination.

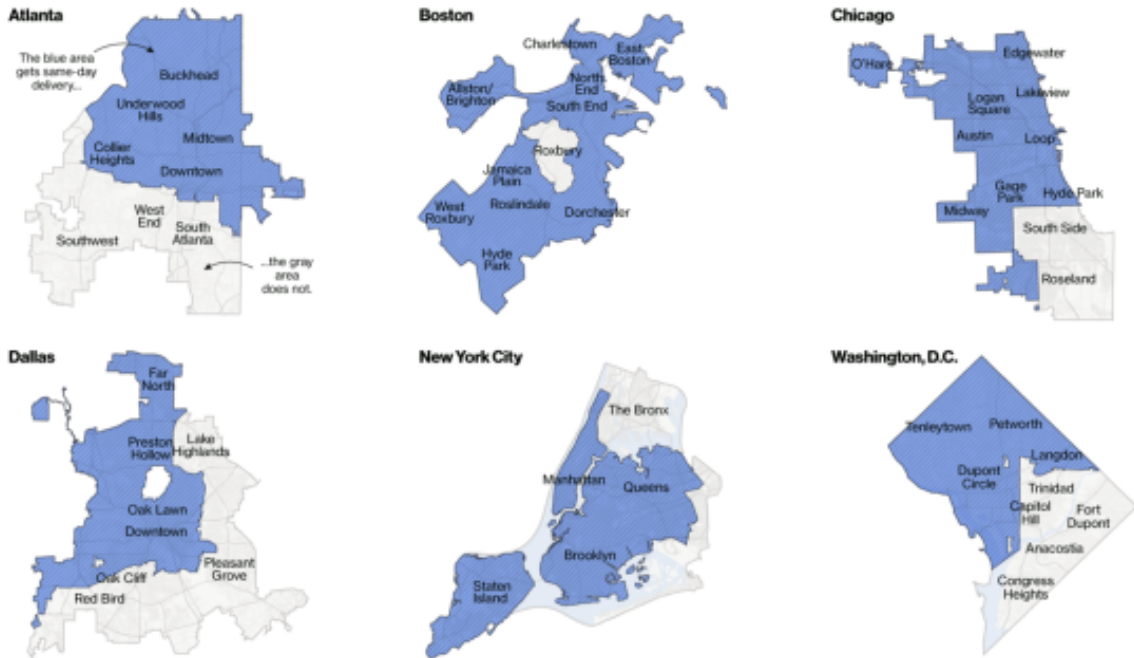
Let's look at a few more examples from the world beyond libraries, because once you open your eyes to this kind of bias, you'll find it everywhere. These next examples make Jeffrey Alan Johnson's point about how data maintains a "vener of scientific objectivity."

It was recently revealed that Amazon Prime same-day service wasn't offered to certain zip codes in some major metropolitan areas. It just so happens that those were neighborhoods where mostly black and brown people live.

An article on the Bloomberg business site said:

In six major same-day delivery cities, the service area excludes predominantly black ZIP codes to varying degrees, according to a Bloomberg analysis that compared Amazon same-day delivery areas with U.S. Census Bureau data.

(<http://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2016-amazon-same-day/>)



[Caption: Maps of Amazon Prime Same-Day Delivery in Select Cities, Spring 2016]

(Just as an aside: look at Boston up there. The service completely surrounded but did not include Roxbury!)

Amazon said race plays no role whatsoever in its decision making. But it doesn't have to, to have the same effect. They were focusing their same-day service on areas where there's a large majority of Amazon Prime customers. Those areas typically exclude black neighborhoods.

Their method is purely data driven, "scientific" you could say. Their discrimination is "unintentional," but real.

Another example:

Safiya Noble, professor of media studies at UCLA, has studied commercial search and discrimination against women of color. She wrote an article in 2013 entitled "Google Equates Black Girls with Sex. Why?" in which she talks about how pornography is what you find when you search for the phrase "black girls" in Google.

(http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2013/03/google_and_black_girls_search_engine_equates_them_with_sex)

In 2004 the Anti-Defamation League noted offensive Google results when you searched for the word "Jew."

Safiya Noble describes various reasons why Google's search algorithm works this way. It has to do with a combination of:

- How Google ads work
- The popularity of certain websites or topics
- And SEO

Noble summarizes Google's response to the Anti-Defamation League:

it could do little to affect search results. It claimed that its algorithm technology was **neutral**, and search results were a matter of how people use Google, rather than the technology itself.

Yet in 2012 Safiya Noble noted in a post on her personal blog that after two years of her research on the topic, and after she published an article about it in Bitch Magazine:

Google had changed its algorithm and pornography is no longer the primary source of information about Black girls in a keyword search. Thanks, Google. (<https://safiyaunoble.com/2012/03/08/bitch-magazine-article/>)

So, problem solved, right? Nope. Just *yesterday* news broke of yet another similar problem. It seems if you search in Google for "three black teenagers" you get mug shots, whereas "three white teenagers" gets you wholesome pictures of white kids. In an article in yesterday's Washington Post, Ben Guarino explains, quoting Google:

its search algorithm mirrors the availability and frequency of online content. "This means that sometimes unpleasant portrayals of sensitive subject matter online can affect what image search results appear for a given query... These results don't reflect Google's own opinions or beliefs — as a company, we strongly value a diversity of perspectives, ideas and cultures." (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/06/10/google-faulted-for-racial-bias-in-image-search-results-for-black-teenagers/>)

And apparently, according to that Post article, if you replace "white" with "asian," you get pornography.

Ok so we might say: Amazon and Google are commercial companies, they're driven by profit motive, etc. etc.

So let's look for examples closer to home:

On Our Backs was an erotica magazine run by women, for lesbian women, and was published in print starting in 1984. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/On_Our_Back) This magazine was recently digitized and made available for free online by a company called Reveal Digital. (<http://www.revealdigital.com/>) Here's how their operation works:

Our unique **library crowd-funding model** uses **library acquisition dollars** to fund the development of digital collections. **Working closely with content holders**, we help define and scope the collection, determine the cost base for producing the collection, provide data conversion and hosting services, and manage the entire process.

So why might this be problematic? Libraries own the collections. Reveal Digital sought and got permission from the copyright holder. More and more library collections are appearing online, to our users' delight. Everything's legal and legit, right? **But legal doesn't mean ethical.**

Tara Robertson is the Accessibility Librarian at the Center for Accessible Post-Secondary Education Resources in Vancouver. (<http://tararobertson.ca/about/>) In a March 2016 blog post about the digitization and online availability of the magazine, she argues that "Just because you can doesn't mean you should." She writes:

For a split second I was really excited---porn that was nostalgic for me was online! Then I quickly thought about friends who appeared in this magazine before the internet existed. I am deeply concerned that this kind of exposure could be personally or professionally harmful for them. (<http://tararobertson.ca/2016/oob/>)

She then turns her attention to the library profession:

Consenting to a porn shoot that would be in a queer print magazine is a different thing to consenting to have your porn shoot be available online. I'm disappointed in my profession. **Librarians have let down the queer community** by digitizing *On Our Backs*.

The collection is currently available in its entirety online on Reveal Digital's website. [Note: here I added that I did not know anything about how the decision was made to digitize and publish this magazine, or whether or not the library/ies involved had discussed the ethics of the project. I asked the audience to let me know if they had any more information about it.]

I want to pursue the topic of data interpretation in the library profession. In the article I just published, "The Quest for Diversity in Library Staffing," I explored the nature of our profession's homogeneity and gave an extended example of how our

willful ignorance of bias manifests itself in the ways that organizations measure “diversity,” interpret the results, and set priorities based on them. (<http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2016/quest-for-diversity/>) My article was intended as an opportunity to us to look critically at our culture, our practices, and our assumptions, and to investigate what it is about ourselves and our profession that is preventing underrepresented people from being able to, or even wanting to, enter and stay.

The ClimateQUAL survey was on my mind because NYU Libraries had recently administered the survey. ClimateQUAL measures staff perceptions about the organization’s climate, including what they *believe* and how they *feel* about the organization’s fairness and how it values diversity.

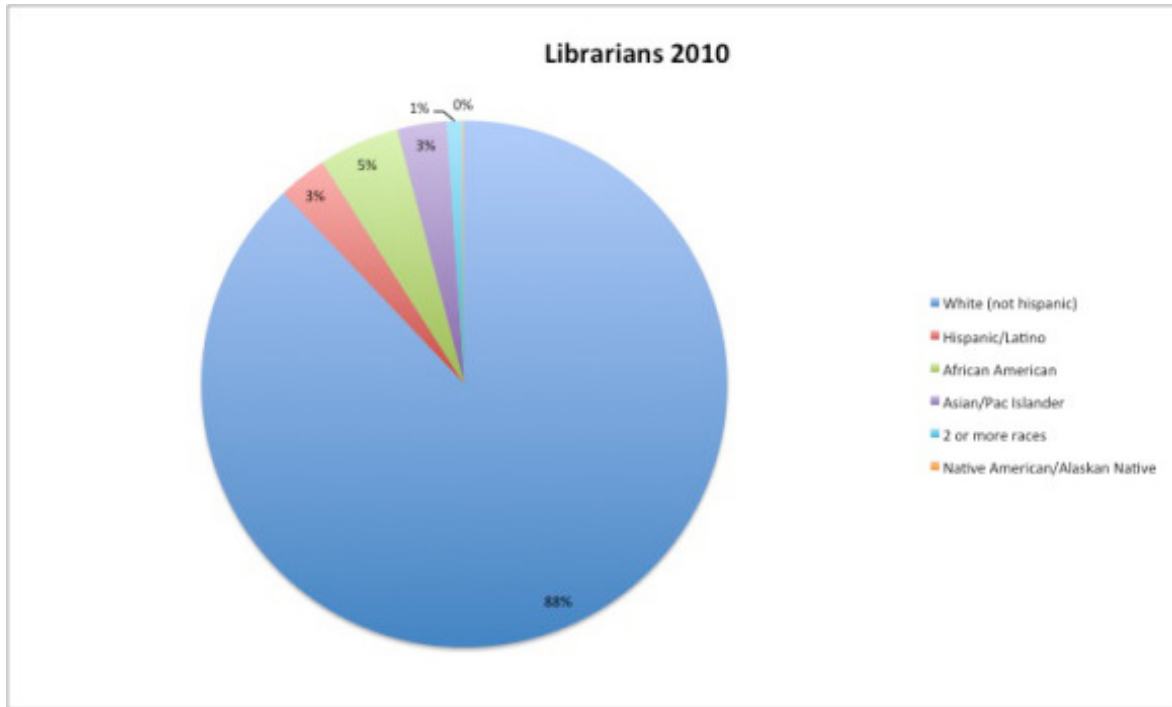
Here is a description of ClimateQual, from the ClimateQual website:

ClimateQUAL® is an assessment of library staff *perceptions* concerning (a) their library's commitment to the principles of diversity, (b) organizational policies and procedures, and (c) staff attitudes. (<http://www.climatequal.org/about>)

However, for a profession greatly lacking in diversity, relying on staff perceptions of demographic diversity and fairness as a proxy for organizational health might be quite problematic if not handled in an extremely thoughtful and well-informed way. Let me explain: And here I’ll focus primarily on racial diversity because there is more research and data on it, both within libraries and beyond.

Here you see a pie chart created by Chris Bourg, Director of MIT Libraries, based on the 2010 ALA Diversity Counts data. (<https://chrisbourg.wordpress.com/2014/03/03/the-unbearable-whiteness-of-librarianship/>)

Note that our profession is 88% white. (People who look like me get a whole lot of this pie!)



[Caption: Librarians by Race, 2010 (ALA Data; chart by Chris Bourg)]

Research studies have shown that, while white people say they like diversity, election and census trends suggest otherwise.

For example, white people’s tolerance for residential racial diversity is much lower than that of Blacks. In the article “Does Race Matter in Neighborhood Preferences? Results from a Video Experiment,” Maria Krysan and co-authors write:

For the most part studies of residential preferences find that whites are willing to live with only a handful of African American neighbors (some put the figure at around 20 percent), while African Americans are open to quite a diverse range of neighborhoods, though a “50-50” neighborhood is routinely identified as the most attractive.

(<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3704191/>)

While this research did not study the preferences of whites for workplace diversity, we can imagine that many of the same dynamics and biases play out in white-dominated workplaces—even those that profess a desire for diversity.

So when the ClimateQual survey asks staff to react to the following kinds of statements:

The race/sexual orientation of a team/division member does NOT affect how they are valued on this team/division.

(<http://www.climatequal.org/about/concepts/sample>)

We have to wonder exactly what they're asking and about whom. This question and others use the generic "a team/division member" and "they," rather than "your race/sexual orientation" and "you."

This question thus leaves the possibility open for respondents to answer based on their perceptions of how staff of other races, sexual orientations, gender identity, etc. are valued and supported in the organization.

So, for example, if your organization is between 80-90% white (a fair assumption based on the ALA statistics we just saw), the overwhelming majority of the organization's answers to questions about race will be based on white people's perceptions and reflect a white cultural perspective. (The same holds for questions about other demographic categories vis-à-vis the dominant culture.)

Now, research points to the fact that demographically dominant groups are unlikely to understand the lived experience of people from non-dominant groups and do not recognize bias when it occurs. In libraries this conclusion is supported by Jaena Alabi's research where she concludes that "non-minority librarians are unlikely to report observing racial microaggressions" even though "minority" librarians are, in fact, experiencing them.

(https://www.atla.com/Members/programs/libtools/Documents/Alabi_Racial%20Microaggressions%20in%20Academic%20Libraries.pdf)

Thus, in an overwhelmingly white (and heterosexual, cisgender) organization, it is important to recognize that the data we collect represents primarily the worldview of the dominant culture and will be shaped by its limitations and biases.

Getting back to how we assess our organizational culture and our often-professed desire for diversity, one has to wonder:

1. How much diversity in an organization is enough to make staff in the dominant culture, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc. feel like the workplace has achieved an acceptable amount of, but not too much diversity?
2. And how much "valuing diversity" does the organization need to demonstrate in order for staff from the dominant culture to perceive it as sufficient, regardless of whether or not staff from marginalized groups would consider it enough?

So here's a very practical outcome of this assessment right here. And you'll see how this kind of bias can be self-perpetuating. A natural follow-up to receiving your ClimateQual results (or the results of any measurement of your organizational culture---this is not specific to ClimateQual) a next step is to look at the results to see where you're weaker and where you're doing well. Logically we'd try to develop strategic initiatives in the areas where we're weak to then improve our organizational culture.

If the overwhelmingly dominant culture in your organization tends to think that everyone is well valued, regardless of their race, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc. your scores in that section will be good. Even if people in vastly underrepresented groups in your organization might think otherwise. Unless you're thinking really critically about this instrument, *you're unlikely to develop strategic initiatives to solve a problem **that doesn't look like a problem!***

This is one of things that we mean when we talk about privilege: privilege includes the prerogative of not having to recognize, understand, or solve problems that don't necessarily affect you personally.

We need to think critically about the data collection tools that our organizations adopt, the data gathered, and how we make sense of it. In addition to knowing what kind of information the tools are **designed** to elicit and **how** they do so, it is also crucial to understand what biases **we** bring to our interpretation of the data, and to think about what data is missing and why.

What we measure, what we collect, how we interpret, even **THAT** we measure, collect, and interpret, are political acts. Data and data collection are not neutral, and we shouldn't pretend that they are. We can't know the data unless we first know ourselves and the limitations and biases we bring to the act of measuring.

But if you are attuned to these kinds of problems with data collection and interpretation, you're already well-positioned to raise the question and challenge the results. How you do that will differ depending on your own organizational culture, where you sit within the organization, and how open others are to considering challenging, or, to use bell hooks's term, "disruptive" points of view. **But you can't say nothing, otherwise you're complicit.**

I'll end this section with some questions for you to think about as you consider your own data collection and that of your organization and the profession.

- What data do you collect, how, and why?
- What biases are embedded into your data collection and interpretation? (and note that I ask "**what biases**" and not "are biases embedded.")
- How will **you** disrupt harmful data collection practices? (What will **you** do in **your** organizations to call attention to and change misconceived or harmful data practices?)

III. Community

So if we're going to commit to disrupting the kind of privilege that makes us unable, or unwilling, to see the types of bias that I've been talking about, we're going to need some help. This kind of work can take its toll. It's emotionally draining. Even just worrying about how your boss or your peers might react to your pointing out the biases in how you're collecting data or interpreting it. Or pointing out, for example, that the subject headings we're using are discriminatory. Here are two

tweets from June 5th in which Chelcie Rowell shares excerpts from a talk by Carolyn Hansen:



[Caption: Tweets by Chelcie Rowell, @ararebit]

So how exactly do you “fight the power” in an organizational setting? How can you disrupt from within?

One answer is by building community. Community can provide us with intellectual support, and potentially more visibility, recognition, and political heft for the work that we do and the values that we try to instill in our professional practice.

An example is the Global Outlook::Digital Humanities community, which is a Special Interest Group of the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organisations. The goal of go::dh is to:

break down barriers that hinder communication and collaboration among researchers and students of the Digital Arts, Humanities, and Cultural Heritage sectors in high, mid, and low income economies.
(<http://www.globaloutlookdh.org/>)

Community can also be a safe place where you can gripe about your experiences. Sometimes these spaces can also help to expose to others in the profession harmful

practices that might otherwise go unnoticed. For example, LIS Microaggressions, which was started by a small handful of women in 2013. LIS Microaggressions is both a Tumblr and a zine. They explain:

 this space aims to identify, acknowledge, and overcome the microaggressions that continue to exist in our profession and that are the real, lived, experiences of LIS professionals from marginalized communities today.
 (<http://lismicroaggressions.tumblr.com/>)

A values-based community orientation could also help us to think about how other communities may have *different* values than ours. That's what happened when Kim Christen Withey, faculty at Washington State University, worked with an Aboriginal community in Central Australia to develop what would eventually become Mukurtu. (<http://mukurtu.org/about/>)

Their mission is to *empower communities* to manage, share, preserve, and exchange their digital heritage in *culturally relevant and ethically-minded ways....* Our first priority is to help *build a platform that fosters relationships of respect and trust.*

Withey, the project director, explains that the work of Mukurtu is "to ensure that technology bends to the needs of our users."

She says "not all information wants to be free." (This sentiment resonates with the *On Our Backs* example I talked about earlier)

IV. Feminist Leadership

This morning I've been emphasizing the power of individuals, the strength we derive from community, and the values that inform the work that we do. These themes come together powerfully in current research I'm doing with April Hathcock on feminist leadership. We're writing a chapter called "Feminist Praxis in Library Leadership" for the upcoming book *The Feminists Among Us: Resistance and Advocacy in Library Leadership*, coming out with Library Juice Press in fall 2017. (<http://libraryjuicepress.com/feminist-leadership.php>)

Feminism, in particular intersectional feminism, offers us both a *theory* and a *practice* for addressing the kinds of oppression that I've been talking about today. April and I wanted to know what feminist leadership in libraries looks like. So we've talked to self-identified feminist library leaders who are at different stages of their careers and who work at different levels of organizational management.

Our generous participants, to whom we have promised anonymity so they felt free to say things they might not otherwise have shared, represent a diverse set of perspectives and identities. We included people of different ages, gender identities and expressions, sexual orientations, abilities, races, ethnicities, and we sought

representation from different sized organizations, both public and private. Over the past few months during these interviews, we've explored with our research subjects how their feminist values inform and affect everyday management and leadership activities, such as staffing, mentoring, policy development, decision-making, etc.

Through this research we hope to provide our professional community with:

- real-life examples of the everyday practice of feminism in library leadership,
- to offer practical approaches that others can adopt or adapt,
- and to understand some of the challenges in bringing an overt feminist praxis into our library practice.

I'll share some preliminary observations from this research. These interviews revealed recurring topics that relate directly to the themes I'm talking about today: disrupting domination, looking critically and questioning the status quo, and building community.

Ironically, despite everyone's willingness, even excitement, to talk to us about the topic, most interviewees expressed some doubts about the possibility of feminist leadership. In some this manifested as surprise that we considered them leaders in the profession at all. It makes sense, when you think about it. I think it really depends on what cultural models you have in mind when you think of successful (or "successful") leaders. Other interviewees were ambivalent about the tension between the ideals and values of feminism, as they define it, and the idea of leadership from the top levels of an organization, because of the potential for power imbalance and the fear that this power might compromise one's values.

In two blog posts over the past two years, Chris Bourg clearly voices this ambivalence. On the one hand, in a 2014 conference paper on women in leadership, she addressed library staff interested in social justice issues but reluctant to take on leadership positions. (<https://chrisbourg.wordpress.com/2014/03/24/mentors-gender-reluctance-notes-from-taiga-panel-on-leadership-at-erl/>) Chris suggested that avoiding leadership positions "might mean that you are leaving the leadership of our profession in the hands of those who aren't concerned about those things..."

On the other hand, in her 2015 ACRL/NY Symposium keynote, she expressed her concern that "using traditional organizational power to push an agenda maybe isn't very feminist." (<https://chrisbourg.wordpress.com/2015/12/10/the-radicalism-is-coming-from-inside-the-library/>)

I guess we could say it's kind of like spending years fighting "the establishment" only to wake up one day to discover that you have *become* "the establishment."

Despite these concerns, interviewees all saw feminism as an antidote to power-wielding, ego-driven leadership, providing values and a set of practices pointing to the kind of "practice of freedom" that bell hooks advocates. They all felt that feminist

leadership is not the same as other kinds of leadership: it's definitely not positional, for many it's about moving people toward a common goal through influence (not ego), and one of the crucial roles of a leader is to look for and develop people within the organization, wherever they are in rank, who have the potential to become leaders in their own right. Especially so if they don't "fit the mold" of a typical library leader.

According to our interviewees, here are some other values that feminist leadership offers:

They see their work as politically engaged: their feminism is expressed through a commitment to justice, to thinking about power and oppression, to looking at their organizations, their profession, and the world with a critical perspective, and asking questions like:

- Who speaks and who doesn't?
- Who has power and who doesn't?
- Whose experiences are centered here, and whose are marginalized?
- They think about themselves and others as whole human beings
- They see the lie in the idea that everyone starts from the same starting line in life.

As well, they all insisted on the primacy of praxis in their feminism. In a nutshell, if you're just thinking and reading, but you're not doing, you're not doing it right. Almost everyone said (apologetically) they hadn't read enough feminist theory. (This happened frequently enough that I started to feel guilty asking them how what they read informed their feminism at work). And they all insisted that you have to live your theory and your values by performing them at work, no matter how hard that might be.

The final feminist value I'll mention (and for the rest you can read the chapter once it's out in 2017) is the idea of sharing:

- Many talked about shared leadership, balancing the need for executive decision making with valuing dialog and consensus building.
- Networking and finding allies is also really important to this group.
- Nearly all talked about information sharing as a feminist act. The word "transparency" came up a lot, especially among those in higher-level leadership positions.

In a recent post on the blog "Letters to a Young Librarian," Baharak Yousefi, Head of Library Communications at Simon Fraser University, picked up the topic of radical transparency that she's been thinking and speaking about recently: "Be absolutely committed to transparency. Do not assume that you know what others need/don't need to know." (<http://letterstoayounglibrarian.blogspot.com/2016/05/how-to-be-good-library-boss-by-baharak.html>)

Here's a nice way to summarize the sentiment---Rachel Fleming recently wrote:



M is for Rachel
@RachelMFleming

Follow

"Painfully Transparent" is the level of transparency that I'm going for.
"OMG Never Stops" is the level of communicating I'm going for.

RETWEETS
8

LIKES
13



12:36 PM - 25 May 2016



[Caption: Painfully Transparent, @RachelMFleming]

This is actually something that I'm increasingly practicing in my own work as a leader, a manager, and a colleague. Information is power and controlling information, and concealing how decisions are actually made, is a means to maintaining the status quo and protecting the powerful. I realize that not all information can always be shared with everyone. But without contextualizing information for their work, without understanding the larger picture affecting how decisions are made, how things are funded, which initiatives are undertaken, why some departments get new staff and why some are shrinking, what is motivating that reorganization, why that person got promoted and that other one didn't, staff are completely in the dark about what their work really means within the organization and how they are valued.

Well, not completely in the dark, because gaps in information will be filled by gossip, hearsay, speculation, even conspiracy theories.

I'd really love for us to make radical transparency a thing. Let's do it.

V. Conclusion: On Influence

So I want to conclude by talking a little bit about influence. For our Feminist Leadership interviewees, influence is a crucial aspect of leadership.

Here's the dictionary.com definition of *influence*: "the capacity of persons to produce effects on the actions, behavior, opinions, etc. of others."

For our interviewees, influence is related to bell hooks's idea of building community for the common good. A values-driven leader will influence those in her community toward making the right decisions to develop a more just organization and profession. Influence can be used for good or for ill. Influence can come from the exercise of power (physical, emotional, rank). But I'm much more interested in influence that results from respect and from appreciation for hard, thoughtful work; for values-driven work, and effective collaboration.

At any rate, that's how I'd prefer to be respected.

I'd like to do a 30-second exercise with you. This exercise is borrowed from DeEtta Jones who is a consultant who does a lot of work with libraries.
(<http://www.deettajones.com/>)

I'd like you to close your eyes (or keep them open if you're more comfortable doing that), and think about some people at work and in the profession whom you influence (or, more interestingly, people whom you *could* probably influence if you tried). They may be people who work for you, your peers, or people who are at a higher rank in the organization or the profession. Close your eyes for 30 seconds and think of some people whom you can or could influence.

=== *pause and think for 30 seconds* ===

So you're a leader. You have the power to influence, to change the actions, behaviors, and opinions of others. What will you do with that power?

Through the power of my keynote, I hope to have influenced you to consider how you as individuals, in the work you do---with technology, with people, with data, building collections, designing user interfaces, fighting for fair use and for privacy---how you have the capacity to influence others, your organizations, and the profession.

I also hope that you will join or build communities that share your values and support you in thinking more critically about your profession, and disrupting the oppressive norms that marginalize and exclude.

Not engaging critically, **not** asking hard questions about the work you do, **not** using your influence for good, doesn't mean you're staying "*neutral*." It means you're reinforcing systems of **domination** and **oppression** that need, instead, to be dismantled.

I'll leave you with some questions that I hope you will bring to the work that you do, in digital scholarship and beyond:

- Whom does this work benefit and whom does it disadvantage or exclude?

- Whose values, perspective, or voice is represented and whose is marginalized or erased?

And for you as a leader (or “influencer,” if you prefer) working within an administrative structure:

- Whom do or can I influence and how?
- Who are my allies?

Let’s get to work. Together.