

Communications in Information Literacy

Volume 11 | Issue 1

Article 15

7-12-2017

Connecting Information Literacy and Social Justice: Why and How

Laura Saunders
Simmons College, laura.saunders@simmons.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/comminfolit>

 Part of the [Information Literacy Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Saunders, L. (2017). Connecting Information Literacy and Social Justice: Why and How. *Communications in Information Literacy*, 11 (1), 55-75. <https://doi.org/10.15760/comminfolit.2017.11.1.47>

This open access Perspective is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License \(CC BY-NC-SA 4.0\)](#). All documents in PDXScholar should meet [accessibility standards](#). If we can make this document more accessible to you, [contact our team](#).

Connecting Information Literacy and Social Justice: Why and How

Laura Saunders, Simmons College

Abstract

Libraries have a long, though not uncomplicated, history with social justice and social advocacy. The new ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy*, which is more conceptual and flexible than the original Standards, offers an opportunity for librarians to approach teaching and learning from a social justice perspective. Indeed, the *Framework* integrates social justice and anti-oppression into some of its frames. This essay will examine the reasons for approaching information literacy from a social justice perspective and will analyze the opportunities and limitations of the new *Framework* with regard to social justice issues. It concludes with a proposal for a new frame, "information social justice," that could be added to the existing *Framework*.

Keywords: information literacy; social justice; anti-oppression

***Perspectives* edited by Carolyn Gamtso**

Saunders, L. (2017). Connecting information literacy and social justice: Why and how.

Communications in Information Literacy, 11(1), 55-75.

Copyright for articles published in *Communications in Information Literacy* is retained by the author(s). Author(s) also extend to *Communications in Information Literacy* the right to redistribute this article via other scholarly resources and bibliographic databases. This extension allows the authors' copyrighted content to be included in some databases that are distributed and maintained by for-profit companies. All other rights of redistribution are licensed by *Communications in Information Literacy* under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

Connecting Information Literacy and Social Justice: Why and How

Libraries have a history of commitment to social justice principles and issues. This commitment is supported by an ethical code that promotes equitable access and service, intellectual freedom and resistance to censorship, and commitment to representing diverse perspectives in their collections (ALA, 2008), as well as a core value of social responsibility (ALA, 2004). Jaeger, Taylor, and Gorham (2015) argue that libraries have always been social justice institutions, and cite services such as bridging the digital divide, developing literacy, supporting new immigrants and facilitating citizenship as examples of such work.

Information literacy provides additional opportunities for libraries to engage in social justice issues. It is widely acknowledged that we live in an information society—one in which information is being produced and disseminated at an exponential rate, and where information literacy or the ability to locate, access, evaluate, and use information is required in order to fully participate and be successful in school, work, and everyday life.

Government, education, and policy institutions around the world have acknowledged the importance of information literacy and endorsed it as an essential skill for the 21st Century. Indeed, as these institutions recognize and endorse information literacy, some have made a case that access to information and to information literacy education is a human right, placing information literacy squarely within a social justice context. For the most part librarians and library professional associations have embraced information social justice as a natural fit for their educational and outreach missions, as well as the core value of social responsibility.

However, the adoption of information literacy as a social justice concept has not always been easy or comfortable. Some librarians suggest that by intertwining information literacy and social justice, we are giving up our core values of neutrality and objectivity, while others have argued that we do not go far enough, and that information social justice could be made an even more explicit part of our conceptualizations of information literacy. Indeed, libraries are not immune to structural and systemic racism, misogyny, and heteronormative assumptions and biases. If librarians do indeed want to embrace information social justice, they will need to engage in reflective practice to identify and challenge these inherent biases

and oppressive practices. The new Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (2016) has been a particular touchstone for this issue, as librarians have argued whether the *Framework* is elitist, whether it should take a stance on information as a social justice issue at all, and whether the stance it takes is strong enough. This paper examines the case for information social justice and information as a human right, with a focus on the need for reflective practice. It then analyzes the actual and potential social justice applications of the ACRL's *Framework for Information Literacy* (2016), and concludes with a proposal for a new frame focused on information social justice.

Information Access and Human Rights

Information literacy is predicated on access to information, in that one cannot exercise the abilities of evaluating, synthesizing, and using information unless one first has access to information. This dependency is evidenced by the fact that every definition and conceptualization of information literacy includes the ability to access information as one of the key competencies. Article 19 of the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* affirms each individual's right to "seek, receive and impart information and ideas, through any media and regardless of frontiers" (1948). Lawyers such as Christopher Weeramantry and Cheryl Ann Bishop extend the legal case for access to information as a human right, arguing that it is a prerequisite to the exercise of all other rights (Saunders, 2013). In other words, in order to fully engage in voting rights, the free expression of ideas, free assembly, and so on, people need access to reliable, credible information on which to base their decisions and opinions. Further support for access to information as a human right comes in the form of Freedom of Information (FOI) laws which guarantee the right for citizens to access government information. According to Freedominfo.org (2012), 93 governments around the world have enacted FOI laws.

While these arguments focus on information access generally, it might be constructive to frame the argument around types of access, specifically physical, social, and cognitive or intellectual access. Physical access refers to material access, or a person's ability and opportunity to "get their hands on" materials either in hard copy or digitally. Basically, physical access assumes that a resource, material, or piece of information exists and is available, and that the person in need of that resource has the ability to find it. Thus,

physical access is enabled by libraries and archives that gather and organize information and make resources available for free, as well as by policies and laws that guarantee a right to access. In the digital era, when much information is most readily, and sometimes exclusively, available online, access to the technology, including the internet, is a vital part of physical access. Indeed, on June 27, 2016, the United Nations adopted a resolution declaring access to the internet a human right (United Nations, 2016).

Social access draws on Chatman's (1999, 1996, 1995) theories of information poverty and small worlds, which propose that people's access to information is influenced, and sometimes limited, by the social communities into which they have been enculturated. Within their small world or social community, people tend to preference certain sources and types of information, and might be skeptical of information that comes from outside of their circle, even if it is reliable and authoritative. People might also be reluctant to seek certain information if they perceive that doing so might make them seem vulnerable, which can lead to information poverty. Social access is also dependent on social capital, or the community networks and norms that enable people to build trust and work together (Putnam, 1995). People draw on the individuals in their social network for help in answering questions and solving problems, so the larger and more diverse their social network, the more social capital they are said to have. People with less social capital are more likely to experience information poverty.

Finally, cognitive or intellectual access refers to a person's ability to evaluate, understand, and use the information they access, and is perhaps most closely related to information literacy. Information can be available, and people might be able to physically and socially access information, but without the cognitive abilities to engage with information and assess its authority, credibility, and relevance, other forms of access are not useful. Information can be suppressed or distorted. Facts can be selected and disseminated, and institutions can engage in propaganda to promote certain ideas. Challenges to access to information can be seen in the way news is currently accessed and shared. Increasing numbers of people rely on social media for their news (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016). However, because people generally select the news outlets and friends that they follow on social media sites, and because many of these sites use algorithms to push news stories that match people's interests, "likes," and past reading habits, many people are experiencing a filter bubble in which they are mostly or exclusively receiving news that confirms their perspectives and opinions (Pariser, 2012). Indeed, some analysts are

suggesting that the proliferation of fake news stories shared through social media might have influenced the outcome of the 2016 United States presidential election (Silverman, 2016; Timberg, 2016). People need to develop and cultivate the skills of information literacy in order to navigate these challenges and fully exercise their right to all types of access to information.

Information Literacy as a Human Right

The phrase “information literacy” was coined by Paul Zurkowski in 1974 in response to the explosive growth in information production and concurrent developments in technology (Zurkowski, 1974). While Zurkowski anticipated that information literacy would cut across industries and organizations, he saw a role for libraries in supporting its development, and librarians quickly became some of the biggest proponents and promoters of information literacy. Library professional associations took a lead in conceptualizing and codifying information literacy, and from the beginning many of them connected information literacy with issues of social justice and human rights. In its *Final Report*, the American Library Association’s Presidential Committee on Information Literacy notes the challenges people face in trying to make decisions, check claims, or form opinions when they lack access to reliable information and the skills to evaluate and use that information, and contends that information literacy is “a means of personal empowerment” (ALA, 1989, para. 6). Finally, the report notes that vulnerable and marginalized populations often have the most limited access both to information itself and to assistance in developing information literacy abilities, and quotes Bell (as cited in ALA, 1989, section 2, para. 4) in suggesting that these disparities could lead to an “information elite.” To that end, ALA emphasizes the importance of information literacy to full participation in a democracy, and highlighted its “potential of addressing many long-standing social and economic inequities” (ALA, 1989, para. 3). These sentiments were echoed by President Obama when declaring October 2009 National Information Literacy Awareness Month. In this proclamation, President Obama underscored the importance of information literacy abilities to not only access, but also to evaluate information. He also stressed the need for schools and libraries to support the development of these skills, which he stated are “essential to the functioning of a modern democratic society” (National Information Literacy Awareness Month, 2009).

The case for information literacy as a human right can be built on the concept of access to information as a human right. Sturges and Gastinger note that without information literacy, “the kind of overwhelming levels of access to information that are available today can simply confuse and deceive” (2010, 199). They point to a number of international documents that explicitly or implicitly equate information literacy with human rights, including the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (2005), the Scottish Information Literacy Project (2004), the Prague Declaration (2003), and especially the Alexandria Proclamation (2005). The Alexandria Proclamation, adopted in 2005 at the World Summit on Information Literacy, declares that information literacy is a “basic human right in a digital world,” and echoes the ALA *Final Report* in maintaining that information literacy “empowers people in all walks of life to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals” and “promotes social inclusion” (Alexandria Proclamation, 2005). Saunders (2013a) similarly argues that access to information is inherently limiting because information can be suppressed, misconstrued, and distorted. Thus, she argues that access to information as a human right should be coupled with information literacy because people need support while developing the skills that will enable them to evaluate and use information efficiently and effectively.

The Need for Reflective Practice

Libraries undoubtedly have a role to play in facilitating both access to information and the development of information literacy skills. By collecting and organizing materials and making them available free of charge, libraries help to increase physical access to information. Further, libraries provide access to the technology needed to access digital information, with some libraries even circulating handheld devices and mobile hotspots to allow patrons access to the internet at home. As community spaces in which diverse people can interact and connect, libraries can also contribute to building social capital and thus increase social access to information. Indeed, Johnson (2010) found that library use was significantly correlated with several indicators of social capital, including higher levels of trust in their community and higher levels of community involvement. While Ferguson (2012) warns that the direction or causal relationship between social capital and libraries remains unclear, he offers specific suggestions to libraries for increasing social capital, including working more closely with community associations, investing in their role as

community meeting spaces, and reaching out to new user groups. And of course, libraries facilitate the development of cognitive or intellectual information access or information literacy through library instruction sessions and one-on-one reference consultations, as well as through the development of online research guides and tutorials.

While these examples are heartening, they are also slightly one-sided. By celebrating the library field's efforts toward promoting and facilitating access to information and information literacy, we risk a tendency to "gloss over the library's susceptibility in reproducing and perpetuating racist social structures found throughout the rest of society" (Honma, 2005). Critics also lament the profession's tendency to focus on overly simplistic diversity initiatives that fail to acknowledge the oppressive structures inherent in many of our systems (Honma, 2005; Matheuwts 2016). Indeed, neither libraries as institutions nor the librarians who staff them are immune from the racist, misogynistic, and heteronormative values that tend to govern our society. If librarians truly wish to promote information social justice and access to information and information literacy as human rights we need to begin by acknowledging and challenging the biases and assumptions inherent in our own systems and practices.

Honma (2005) cautions against viewing the library as neutral or apolitical, and offers a strong critique of libraries as perpetuating whiteness. He points out that even programs and services that are usually lauded as exemplary of the library's mission of egalitarianism, such as immigration and citizenship services, could be seen as assimilationist and promoting a white European culture, even while, historically, many people including African-Americans were not even allowed to use the library. Drabinski (2013) and Drabinski and Hann (2009) expose numerous issues with library collections and cataloging practices. They note that hierarchical classification systems like Library of Congress and Dewey suggest relationships among subject terms, placing homosexuality in relation to sexual deviance and women within the larger contexts of marriage and family. They also highlight that subdividing subject terms by race reinforces the notion of whiteness as normative. Similarly, by offering only the binary choice of male and female, the Library of Congress Subject Headings do not allow for more fluid definitions of gender (Billey, Drabinski, & Roberto, 2014). Research also suggests that some librarians engage in discriminatory practices in reference interactions, including refusing to answer questions about homosexuality (Curry, 2005), and engaging in lower levels of customer service with patrons perceived to have ethnic-

sounding names (Shachaf, Oltmann, & Horowitz, 2008). We might also question the extent to which, consciously or not, reference and reader's advisory librarians allow biases and assumptions to influence recommendations they make when working with patrons. In other words, to what extent do we allow preferences for white, Western materials and biases toward notions of authority based on peer-review and empirical research guide us when searching for information or helping patrons evaluate and choose resources?

The issues and questions highlighted here should serve as a warning that, as much as librarians might profess a social justice mission and subscribe to ethical codes and values that promote equitable services and balanced collections, the profession is still situated within and contributing to a power structure that is inherently white, male and heteronormative. Overcoming these inequities will require libraries to do more than build multicultural collections or recruit more diverse staff. Librarians, the majority of whom are white themselves (Bourg, 2014), will need to engage in reflective practice and recognize where and how the profession continues to perpetuate racist, misogynistic and homophobic practices and then work to challenge and change those practices. In some cases, this may require challenges to our professional associations and guiding bodies, as Sandy Berman did for years when lobbying to change problematic subject headings (Knowlton, 2005), and as librarians such as Sarah Houghton (2016) and Emily Drabinski (2016) did more recently in pushing back against ALA's press releases that seemed to support the new Trump administration.

Information Social Justice in Academia: The Challenges and Opportunities of the ACRL *Framework*

It is interesting to note that the majority of research and writing related to information and human rights, including most of the works cited above, focuses on public libraries. This is not to suggest, however, that academic libraries have no role to play in the social justice aspects of information access and information literacy. Indeed, Chris Bourg, Director of MIT Libraries, recently advocated that "following the presidential election and the rise of racist incidents and protests across the country, libraries also need to consider how they can serve as 'town squares' to promote diversity and social justice" (Straumsheim, 2016). Indeed, social justice issues have been prominent on college and university campuses across the United States over the past year and more amid student protests, incidents of hate speech

sparking debates about freedom of speech, and efforts to find and define safe spaces while still promoting the open exchange of ideas and critical thinking.

Since passing the *Information Literacy Competency Standards* in 2000, ACRL has arguably been one of the most influential organizations in the field of information literacy. The *Standards* were adopted and endorsed by numerous research, policy, and accreditation organizations, and were international in their reach, heavily influencing the International Federation of Library Association's *Guidelines on Information Literacy for Lifelong Learning* (Lau, 2006). Even as the *Standards* became the leading definition of information literacy, however, there was criticism from some corners. A number of writers argued that the *Standards* were too formulaic; that they over-emphasized processes and task-based skills at the expense of higher order thinking skills; and that they ignored the meaning-making and phenomenological aspects of interacting with information (Budd, 2008; Lloyd, 2005; Ratteray, 2005). Indeed, while the *Standards* include higher-order thinking skills such as the evaluation and synthesis of information, research suggests that librarians largely focused on search and access skills in their instruction sessions (Saunders, 2013b).

In response, some librarians began to advocate for a shift to critical information literacy, or an approach which “questions many widely held assumptions about IL and the very nature of education in library settings, broaching such topics as the impossibility of pedagogical neutrality and the incompatibility of skills-based instruction with student engagement in the learning process” (Tewell, 2015). Proponents of critical information literacy recognize the inherently political nature of education and of conceptualizations of literacy and information literacy, which insist on adoption of a particular set of skills, competencies, and ways of thinking in order to be successful (Elmborg, 2006, 2012; Jacobs, 2008; Swanson, 2004; Tewell, 2016). These writers advocate for critical and reflective pedagogy and praxis, or the application of theory into practice, to encourage students to actively engage with information and information literacy competencies in order to develop a critical consciousness and to see themselves as people with agency and the ability to affect their own conditions.

In developing its new *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (ACRL, 2016), ACRL had an opportunity to respond to some of the criticism of and challenges to the *Standards* and offer a more critical approach to information literacy. In some ways, the

Framework does just that (Foasberg, 2016). While the prologue to the *Standards* linked information literacy to critical thinking and self-directed or lifelong learning, and mentioned the importance of information literacy to an informed citizenry, the document did not include any explicit language related to human rights or social justice. Similarly, the performance indicators and outcomes associated with each standard were written in neutral language. For instance, the *Standards* indicate that information literate individuals should be able to search using controlled subject headings, understand how different resources are created and disseminated, and recognize differences between types of sources. However, the *Standards* did not address issues such as recognizing problematic subject headings or questioning how power structures could impact whether and how information is created and disseminated. The only reference that could be considered an explicit reference to social justice issues is Standard Five, which indicates that information literate people use information ethically and legally. While this standard notes that students should understand socio-economic impacts related to information, and refers to issues of fee-based vs. free information and to issues of censorship, the associated outcomes focus squarely on understanding plagiarism, citing sources properly, and accessing information through legal channels, without elaborating on larger issues.

The *Framework*, on the other hand, does explicitly address some of these issues. For example, the *Framework* asserts that in evaluating for authority, the information literate person must “acknowledge biases that privilege some sources of authority over others, especially in terms of others’ worldviews, gender, sexual orientation, and cultural orientations” and be “skeptical of the systems that have elevated that authority and the information created by it” (ACRL, 2016). Similarly, the definition of the frame “Information Has Value,” indicates that “value may be wielded by powerful interests in ways that marginalize certain voices,” and “may also be leveraged by individuals and organizations to effect change and for civic, economic, social, or personal gains” (ACRL, 2016). In this way, the *Framework* goes further than the *Standards* did in acknowledging and explicating social justice issues related to information and in describing how information literacy can address those issues. Beilin (2015) highlights the ways in which the *Framework* aligns with critical information literacy and critical pedagogy and points to specific examples of the ways in which practitioners have used the *Framework* to inspire more creative and critical approaches in their instruction.

Criticisms of the Framework

Nevertheless, critics have argued that the *Framework* does not go far enough. Commenting on a draft of the *Framework*, Beatty (2014) contends that through its use of language such as “information marketplace” and “information ecosystem,” and its relatively uncritical stance on information power structures implied in such terminology, the *Framework* reifies and promotes a neoliberal agenda. Battista, et al. (2015) note that, while the *Framework* does include some attention to social justice issues, it “lacked explicit articulation of the ways in which social justice issues intersect with information literacy education: social inclusion, access, critical awareness of the mechanisms of establishing authority, cultural, historical, and socioeconomic contexts, and civic and community engagement” (2015, 112). These authors lament that the attention to social justice in the *Framework* is limited to three frames— “Authority Is Constructed and Contextual,” “Information Has Value,” and “Scholarship as Conversation”—and that the *Framework* as a whole lacks a “cogent statement that connects information literacy to social justice” (Battista, et al., 2015, p.112-113).

Similarly, Seale contends that the *Framework* did address some of the critiques associated with the *Standards*, but in the end it is “conflicted, internally contradictory, and ambivalent about some of these changes, specifically in its understanding of power relations and standards” (2015, p. 3). A further critique that could be offered to the *Framework* as written is that the language related to issues of social justice is relatively passive. Indeed, in the frame “Authority Is Constructed and Contextual,” students are encouraged to “question traditional notions of granting authority and recognize the value of diverse ideas and worldviews” (ACRL, 2016). In most of the other instances, however, the language is couched in more ambivalent terms. In the same frame, for instance, rather than encouraging students to engage in self-evaluation when assessing for authority, the frame suggests that students “are conscious that maintaining these attitudes and actions requires frequent self-evaluation” (ACRL, 2016). Being conscious of a need for self-evaluation does not necessarily entail that one engage in the activity. Similarly, the frame “Information has Value,” indicates that students “are inclined to examine their information privilege,” (ACRL, 2016) rather than simply stating that they examine their information privilege. As Beilin puts it, the *Framework* shows “how threshold concepts can help shift information literacy toward a pedagogy that stresses the development of self-critical and self-conscious learning in the student,” but “it does not state as its goal the formation of possible solidarities for the

student to help change the information system itself, nor the hierarchies of knowledge and status within academia” (Beilin, 2015, section 5, para. 4). It “appears that the specific type of information literacy advocated by the Framework is one which accepts the existence of a particular regime of knowledge, and demands that we as librarians focus our energies on making students and faculty competent citizens of that regime, even if dynamic, critical, and progressive ones” (Beilin, 2015, section 5, para. 5).

It is worth noting that ACRL did not take the question of social justice in the *Framework* lightly, but tried to make a considered decision. In responding to calls for a stronger stance on social justice in the *Framework*, ACRL notes that the task force did consider a frame related to social justice in a draft of the document, but ultimately the task force “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” (ACRL, 2014). Swanson (2014), who is both a champion of critical information literacy and pedagogy, and a member of the Framework Task Force, elucidates further. While cautioning that he does not speak for the task force, Swanson maintains that a separate frame on information as a human right was ultimately rejected both because the task force felt that the idea did not constitute a threshold concept—the theoretical base on which the *Framework* was initially founded—and because “a frame that emphasized social justice issues would make (or appear to make) a political statement for the sake of being political... It felt less like a definition of interaction within the information ecosystem and more akin to a values statement,” and “didn’t fit the Framework” (Swanson, 2014). Saunders (forthcoming) takes issue with this reasoning. To begin with, Swanson does not explain in what ways the proposed frame failed to meet the standards of a threshold concept. Perhaps more to the point, however, the frames were developed through discussions among the task force members and through a concurrent Delphi study, but were not tested empirically. It is difficult to determine whether any of the frames meet the criteria of being transformative, integrative, irreversible, bounded and troublesome, not just the proposed frame on information social justice. More troubling, however, is the suggestion that such a frame would be a political statement, and an unnecessary one. In parsing this statement, Saunders (forthcoming) draws on arguments from other proponents of critical pedagogy who contend that all instruction is inherently political. By avoiding taking an overt political stance that might have challenged some of

the structural inequities inherent in its systems, ACRL may actually be helping to perpetuate the status quo.

While Swanson (2014) and ACRL (2014) argue that social justice is woven throughout the *Framework*, and that adding a separate frame would have resulted in significant overlap with other frames, such overlap already exists among the frames. Without the separate frame, however, Battista, et al. argue that “librarians, other faculty members, and administrators must read between the lines of the Framework if they seek ways in which information literacy impacts social justice and civic engagement” (2015, p. 114-115), and they argue that adding a frame on information social justice “could have resolved concerns regarding civic engagement and social justice in the *Framework*” (2015, p. 114). Indeed, ACRL has not ruled out the possibility of a new frame. The prologue to the *Framework* states that the frames are “flexible options for implementation, rather than on a set of standards or learning outcomes, or any prescriptive enumeration of skills” (ACRL, 2015) and indicates that the lists are not exhaustive. Swanson (2014) describes the *Framework* as a living document and invites suggestions for a social justice frame, asking how it would be defined, and what knowledge practices and dispositions it would entail.

To that end, this author proposes the following frame for consideration. The proposed frame attempts to adhere to the format of the existing ACRL frames, offering a title contextualized by a definition, knowledge practices, and dispositions:

Information Social Justice

Information is created within existing power structures, and those power structures can impact the production and dissemination of information, as well as distort, suppress, or misrepresent information. To understand and use information most effectively, users must be able to examine and interrogate the power structures that impact that information, and analyze the ways that information can be used to both inform and misinform.

Knowledge Practices

Learners who are developing their information literate ability:

- Analyze how each stage of the production, dissemination, organization, location, evaluation, and use of information can be impacted by power structures
- Identify and interrogate those power structures

- Evaluate sources of information to go beyond basic checklist criteria of author credentials, peer review, etc. to body of research, methodologies, funding sources, conflict of interest, personal bias etc.
- Identify how the commodification of information impacts access and availability
- Recognize when information is missing, incomplete, or inaccessible, and recognize the absence of information as an indicator of possible power dynamics and bias
- Analyze how information— both in its absence and its presence, in how it is created, arranged, accessed, etc.— informs opinions and beliefs about the people, ideas, or situations it represents or reflects
- Examine the ways that information can be used to persuade, promote, misinform, or coerce

Dispositions

Learners who are developing their information literate ability:

- Engage in informed skepticism when evaluating information and its sources
- Question traditional sources of knowledge and publishing venues
- Reflect critically on their own information behaviors and how they might reflect and perpetuate the status quo
- Question traditional constructions of authority
- Value information and sources from different perspectives
- Recognize the impact of the filter bubble/echo chamber, and actively seek out diverse sources of information
- Are empowered to work for change in information structures (Saunders, 2016).

It is important to emphasize that this proposed frame is meant as a draft and a conversation starter, not a finished product. The hope is that those interested in the topic might use this frame as a jumping off point for engaging with each other and perhaps with ACRL in considering the addition of a new frame. Also, whether the frame is officially adopted or not, others are invited to adapt and implement the proposed frame on their own campuses and in their own instruction if they find it useful. As ACRL (2016) notes, none of the frames should be considered exhaustive and none are meant to be prescriptive. Rather, they are starting points for librarians to engage their campuses in conversation and to set their own local learning objectives.

A Final Note: Elitism and Looking Beyond Academia

An interesting observation arose in the writing of this article. As noted above, while most of the discussion of information literacy as a human right takes place within the context of public libraries, much of the discussion of critical information literacy and critical pedagogy is taking place within the context of academia. This seems to raise a question of whether information literacy itself, as it is being currently conceptualized, is embodying a sort of educational elitism. The question posed here, though, has more to do with the focus and potential scope of the *Framework*. As noted above, the ACRL *Standards* had gained widespread acceptance both inside and outside of academe. While there was some criticism that the Standards were overly-broad and general, as written they could be relevant to “anyone learning anything, anywhere, and at any time” (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2003, p. 2). The *Framework*, on the other hand, seems to have a more decidedly and overt focus on higher education.

Now, this is not meant as a criticism of ACRL. Indeed, as a professional association focused on institutions of higher education, it makes sense that ACRL would develop standards, guidelines, and frameworks with its audience in mind. However, at the 2016 ALA National Conference, the ACRL Board voted to rescind the *Standards*, essentially saying the *Standards* have been replaced with the *Frameworks*, and that institutions using the *Standards* should begin to move away from them. This has already caused consternation among academic librarians, some of whom have charged that the *Framework*, and perhaps even ACRL itself, might be elitist (Bombaro, 2016; Farkas 2016). But what about those institutions outside of academia, including public libraries, governments, and research institutions, that had apparently drawn on the *Standards* in advocating the importance of information literacy? This is not ACRL’s problem to solve—as already stated, the association is well within its rights to keep its focus on higher education. But, if we accept the arguments made earlier that information literacy is a human right and that libraries have a role to play in promoting and facilitating the development of information literacy skills, we must ask which definition or codification those libraries might draw upon.

References

- Alexandria Proclamation. (2005). Retrieved from <http://www.ifla.org/publications/beacons-of-the-information-society-the-alexandria-proclamation-on-information-literacy>
- American Library Association. (2008). *Code of ethics*. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/proethics/codeofethics/codeethics>
- American Library Association. (2004). *Core values of librarianship*. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/statementspols/corevalues>
- American Library Association. (1989). *Presidential committee on information literacy: Final report*. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/whitepapers/presidential>
- Association of College and Research Libraries. (2016). *Framework for information literacy for higher education*. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>
- Association of College and Research Libraries. (2015, January). Frequently asked questions. Retrieved from http://acrl.ala.org/ilstandards/?page_id=201
- Association of College and Research Libraries. (2000). *Information literacy competency standards for higher education*. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency>
- Battista, A., Ellenwood, D., Gregory, L., Higgins, S., Lilburn, J., Harker, Y. S., & Sweet, C. (2015). Seeking social justice in the ACRL Framework. *Communications in Information Literacy*, 9(2), 111-125.
- Beatty, J. (2014). Locating information literacy within institutional oppression [Blog post]. *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*. Retrieved from <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2014/locating-information-literacy-within-institutional-oppression/>
- Beilin, I. (2015). Beyond the threshold: Conformity, resistance, and the ACRL Information Literacy Framework for Higher Education [Blog post]. *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*. Retrieved from <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/beyond-the-threshold-conformity-resistance-and-the-acrl-information-literacy-framework-for-higher-education>

- Billey, A., Drabinski, E., & Roberto, K. R. (2014). What's gender got to do with it? A critique of RDA 9.7. *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, 52(4), 412. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01639374.2014.882465>
- Bombaro, C. (2016). The *Framework* is elitist. *Reference Services Review*, 44(4), 552-563.
- Bourg, C. (2014, March 3). The unbearable whiteness of librarianship. *The Feral Librarian* [Blog post]. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>
- Budd, J.M. (2008). Cognitive growth, instruction, and student success. *College & Research Libraries*, 69(4), 319-330.
- Chatman, E. A. (1996). The impoverished life-world of outsiders. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, 47(3), 193-206. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-4571\(199603\)47:3<193::AID-ASI3>3.0.CO;2-T](http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-4571(199603)47:3<193::AID-ASI3>3.0.CO;2-T)
- Chatman, E. A. (1999). A theory of life in the round. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, 50(3), 207-217. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-4571](http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-4571)
- Chatman, E. A., & Pendleton, V. E. (1995). Knowledge gap, information-seeking and the poor. *Reference Librarian*, 23(49/50), 135. http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J120v23n49_10
- Curry, A. (2005). If I ask, will they answer? Evaluating public library reference service to gay and lesbian youth. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 45(1), 65-75.
- Drabinski, E. (Nov. 19, 2016). ALA does not speak for me. Retrieved from <http://www.emilydrabinski.com/ala-nope-not-today/>
- Drabinski, E. (2013). Queering the catalog: Queer theory and the politics of correction. *Library Quarterly*, 83(2), 94-111.
- Drabinski, E., & Hann, M. (2009). Gendered s(h)elves. *Women & Environments International Magazine*, (80/81), 16-43.
- Elmborg, J. (2012). Critical information literacy: Definitions and challenges. In C.W. Wilkinson & C. Bruch (Eds.), *Transforming information literacy programs: Intersecting frontiers of self, library culture, and campus community*, (pp. 75-95). Chicago, IL: ACRL.

- Elmborg, J. (2006). Critical information literacy: Implications for instructional practice. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 32(2), 192-199.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2005.12.004>
- Farkas, M. (2016). Is the *Framework* elitist? Is ACRL? [Blog post]. *Information Wants to Be Free*. Retrieved from <http://meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress/2016/10/18/is-the-framework-elitist-is-acrl/comment-page-1/>
- Ferguson, S. (2012). Are public libraries developers of social capital? A review of their contribution and attempts to demonstrate it. *Australian Library Journal*, 61(1), 22-33.
- Foasberg, N. M. (2015). From Standards to Frameworks for IL: How the ACRL Framework addresses critiques of the Standards. *portal: Libraries & The Academy*, 15(4), 699.
- Freedominfo.org. (2012). *93 countries have FOI regimes, most tallies agree*. Retrieved from <http://www.freedominfo.org/2012/10/93-countries-have-foi-regimes-most-tallies-agree/>
- Houghton, S. (Nov. 20, 2016). An open letter to ALA president Julie Todaro re: recent ALA statements. Retrieved from <http://librarianinblack.net/librarianinblack/alastatements/>
- Honma, T. (2005). Trippin' over the color line: The invisibility of race in library and information studies. *Interactions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies*, 1(2), 1-26. Retrieved from <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/4nj0w1mp#page-2>
- Jacobs, H. M. (2008). Information literacy and reflective pedagogical praxis. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 34(3), 256-262.
- Jaeger, P.T., Taylor, N.G., & Gorham, U. (2015). *Libraries, human rights, and social justice*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Johnson, C.A. (2010). Do public libraries contribute to social capital? A preliminary investigation into the relationship. *Library & Information Science Research*, 32(2), 147-155.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2009.12.006>
- Knowlton, S.A. (2005). Three decades since prejudices and antipathies: A study of the changes in the Library of Congress subject headings. *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, 40(2), 123-145. http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J104v40n02_08

- Lau, J. (2006). *Guidelines on information literacy for lifelong learning*. International Federation of Library Associations. Retrieved from <http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/information-literacy/publications/ifla-guidelines-en.pdf>
- Lloyd, A. (2005). Information literacy: Different contexts, different concepts, different truths? *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 37(2), 82-88.
- National Information Literacy Awareness Month, 74 Fed. Reg. 51445 (2009).
- Mathews, K. (2016). Moving beyond diversity to social justice. *Progressive Librarian*, (44), 6-27.
- Middle States Commission on Higher Education. (2003). *Developing research and communication skills: Guidelines for information literacy in the curriculum*. Philadelphia, PA: Middle States Commission.
- Mitchell, A., Gottfried, J., Barthel, M., & Shearer, E. (July 7, 2016). Pathways to news. *The Pew Research Center: Journalism & Media*. Retrieved from <http://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/pathways-to-news/>
- Putnam, R. D. (1995). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy*, 6(1), 65-78. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jod.1995.0002>
- Pariser, E. (2012). *The filter bubble: How the new personalized web is changing what we read and how we think*. London, England: Penguin Books.
- Prague Declaration. (2003). Toward an information literate society. <http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/PragueDeclaration.pdf>
- Ratteray, O.M.T. (2005, November 20). RE: What to call what we do? Information literacy vs. research fluency (electronic mailing list message). Retrieved from Information Literacy Instruction Listserv, <http://lists.ala.org/wws/arc/ili-l>
- Saunders, L. (forthcoming). Reframing information literacy for social justice. *Proceedings of the 5th Annual Conference of the European Council on Information Literacy*.
- Saunders, L. (2016). *Reframing the Framework: Information literacy frames through a social justice lens* [Powerpoint slides]. Retrieved from

http://www.educause.edu/sites/default/files/library/presentations/NC16/SESS03/Nerc_omp_2016_Reframing%2Bthe%2BFramework.pdf

- Saunders, L. (2013a). Information as weapon: Propaganda, politics, and the role of libraries. In Mueller, D. M. (Ed.). *Imagine, innovate, inspire: The proceedings of the ACRL 2013 Conference, Indianapolis, IN*: ACRL.
- Saunders, L. (2013b). Culture and collaboration: Fostering integration of information literacy by speaking the language of faculty. In Mueller, D. M. (Ed.). *Imagine, innovate, inspire: The proceedings of the ACRL 2013 Conference, Indianapolis, IN*: ACRL.
- Seale, M. (2015). *Enlightenment, neoliberalism, and information literacy*. Paper presented at Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians: Academic Librarianship and Critical Practice Conference, University of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Retrieved from http://capalibrarians.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/7A_Seale_paper.pdf
- Scottish Information Literacy Project: The Right Information (2004). <http://www.therightinformation.org/archive-silp/>
- Shachaf, P., Oltmann, S., & Horowitz, S. (2008). Service equality in virtual reference. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science & Technology*, 59(4), 535-550.
- Silverman, C. (2016). This analysis shows how fake election news stories outperformed real news on Facebook. *BuzzFeed News*. Retrieved from https://www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/viral-fake-election-news-outperformed-real-news-on-facebook?utm_term=.imgrqRM4E#.sw8gqPOD3
- Straumsheim, C. (Nov. 23, 2016). A “moon shot” for libraries. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/11/23/massachusetts-institute-technology-invites-academe-collaborate-future-libraries>
- Sturges, P., & Gastinger, A. (2010). Information literacy as a human right. *LIBRI*, 6(30), 195-202. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/libr.2010.017>
- Swanson, T. (2014). Information as a Human Right: A missing threshold concept [Blog post]. *Tame the Web*. Retrieved from <http://tametheweb.com/2014/07/07/information-as-a-human-right-a-missingthreshold-concept-by-ttw-contributor-troyswanson/>

- Swanson, T. (2004). A radical step: Implementing a critical information literacy model. *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 4(2), 259-273.
- Tewell, E. (2016). Putting critical information literacy into context: How and why librarians adopt critical practices in their teaching. In *The Library with the Lead Pipe*, 1.
- Tewell, E. (2015). A decade of critical information literacy: A review of the literature. *Communications in Information Literacy*, 9(1), 24-43.
- Timberg, C. (2016, November 24). Russian propaganda effort helped spread “fake news” during election, experts say. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/russian-propaganda-effort-helped-spread-fake-news-during-election-experts-say/2016/11/24/793903b6-8a40-4ca9-b712-716af66098fe_story.html
- United Nations. (2016). *The promotion, protection, and enjoyment of human rights on the internet*. Retrieved from https://www.article19.org/data/files/Internet_Statement_Adopted.pdf
- United Nations. (2005). *Millennium development goals*. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>
- United Nations. (1948). *Universal declaration of human rights*. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>
- Weeramantry, C.G. (1995). Access to information: A new human right. *Asian Yearbook of International Law*, 4, 102.
- Zurkowski, P.G. (1974). The information service environment relationships and priorities related paper no. 5. (Report No. NCLIS-NPLIS-5). Washington, DC: National Commission on Libraries and Information Science. (ED100391).