
Social Justice Research in Library and Information Sciences: A Case for Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have employed a variety of research methodologies and methods to explore, probe, and uncover ways in which social justice is enacted, embodied, supported, or not supported by researchers, educators, and practitioners in library and information science and services (LIS). Discursive psychology as developed by social psychologist Jonathan Potter and critical discourse analysis as developed by Norman Fairclough are introduced as fruitful approaches to investigate the critical intersections of LIS and social justice. The theoretical development of social justice in LIS is discussed. Next, critical discourse analysis and discursive psychology are examined and then analyzed for goodness of fit with Kevin Rioux's (2010) five underlying assumptions of social justice metatheory: (1) All human beings have an inherent worth and deserve information services that help address those needs; (2) People perceive reality and information in different ways, often within cultural or life role contexts; (3) There are many different types of information and knowledge, and these are societal resources; (4) Theory and research are pursued with the ultimate goal of bringing positive change to service constituencies; (5) The provision of information services is an inherently powerful activity. Drawing on the findings of the goodness of fit of Rioux's metatheory and examples of discourse analytic studies in LIS, this article offers practical strategies for social justice researchers wanting to use critical discourse analysis or discursive psychology.

INTRODUCTION

The American Library Association (ALA) has affirmed democracy, education, diversity, intellectual freedom, and social responsibility as core

values of librarianship. While social justice is not explicitly recognized as an ALA core value, it is increasingly pertinent to and meaningful for those engaged in the library and information science and services (LIS) professions, including practitioners, researchers, educators, and library stakeholders. Sergio Chaparro-Univazo (2007) writes that “the fight for social justice is a task related to most disciplines of knowledge,” including LIS (p. 33). A growing number of members in the LIS community have responded to the call for engagement with social justice in professional practice, research, education, and theory development in addition to actively promoting diversity, inclusiveness, community building, community-led librarianship, and greater representation for under-represented communities and groups (Britz, 2008; Durrance & Fisher, 2005; Pyati, 2009; Samek, 2007; Warner, 2005). Other scholars such as Johannes Britz (2004) frame important issues pertinent to LIS such as information poverty as a serious moral concern and “a matter of social justice” related to social responsibility (p. 192).

In their paper “A Practical Framework for Social Justice Research in the Information Professions,” Mehra, Albright, & Rioux (2006) highlight methodology as a key social justice element and state that “a longer term [research] goal is to evaluate research methodologies for adaptation to social justice issues” (p. 8). Much social justice research methodology is firmly rooted in a rights-based agenda and situated in a transformative research paradigm that arose in response to the perceived inadequacy of interpretivist and constructivist approaches in addressing issues of power, social justice, discrimination, and marginalized peoples (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2010). To explore and uncover ways in which social justice is enacted, embodied, supported, or not supported by LIS researchers and practitioners, a variety of research methodologies and methods have been employed, including content analysis (Bonnici, Maatta, Wells, Brodsky, & Meadows, 2012), ethnography (Hyder & Tissot, 2013), and surveys (Anderson, Simpson & Fisher, 2012); in terms of theory development, Kevin Rioux (2010) has initiated work on a social justice metatheory. Social justice reflects movements that are concerned with egalitarianism, social relations, representation, and balance of power; its study requires heterogeneous methodologies and approaches; and theoretical orientation and development are important considerations (Denzin & Giardina, 2009; St. John, 2013; Weis & Fine, 2004).

In this article, discourse analysis is introduced as a valuable approach for the LIS community to employ to investigate problems and issues, including theoretical problems relating to LIS and social justice. Discourse analysis is not only a method but also a highly interdisciplinary field of study in which researchers use different approaches in their analyses by drawing upon various methodologies and methods, theoretical frameworks, and disciplinary backgrounds (Keller, 2013). At its core, discourse

analysis is a domain of scholarly practice concerned with how language generates, constitutes, and constructs identities, reality, and social relations; how language is used to perform social action; and how power is reproduced, construed, perpetuated, and legitimated in society through talk and texts (Fairclough, 2003; Foucault, 1972). The two discourse analytic approaches discussed in this article are discursive psychology as developed by Jonathan Potter and others (Edwards, 1997; Potter & Wetherell, 1987), and critical discourse analysis as developed by Norman Fairclough (2003). Whereas discursive psychology examines how language is used for creating factual descriptions of “objective reality” and how these factual descriptions then perform social action (Potter & Wetherell, 2001), critical discourse analysts take an explicit position in their work and prefer methodologies that are consistent with the interests of the social groups in which they engage and with methods that do not infringe upon the rights of the people they study. For critical discourse analysts, methods are often chosen so as to contribute to the social empowerment of dominated groups (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Huckin, Andrus, & Clary-Lemon, 2012). Discourse analysis offers a rigorous approach to examining social issues and problems, social inequality, domination and related phenomena, contextually situated discourse, and the role of discourse and communication (Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 1993). All of these are potential topics of concern for those engaged with or interested in social justice. This article provides an overview of critical discourse analysis and discursive psychology, two discourse analytic approaches that are conducive to exploring the intersections between LIS and social justice.

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

This article explores the feasibility of using critical discourse analysis and discursive psychology as methodological approaches to examine social justice in LIS. First, the theoretical development of social justice in LIS is discussed. Next, the epistemological, ontological, and theoretical underpinnings of critical discourse analysis and discursive psychology as appropriate methods or methodologies to explore social justice in LIS are presented and the goodness of fit of discursive psychology and critical discourse analysis with Rioux’s (2010) five principles of social justice metatheory are analyzed. Lastly, suggestions for using this method or methodology in LIS-oriented social justice research are offered.

While nonempirical studies are much less common in LIS research, the methodological approach used in this article is similar to that taken by Bernd Frohmann (1994) and John Budd (2006). In his article, Frohmann (1994) argues that Foucauldian discourse analysis is a useful, although often neglected, method in LIS. He argues that because LIS theory itself is composed of “serious speech acts,” LIS theory can act as a dataset of which important questions can be posed and subsequently investigated

using a discourse analytic approach. Frohmann states that a Foucauldian discourse analysis allows those in the field of LIS to pose questions regarding the discursive constructions of information, its uses, and its users, and he uses as examples three prominent discourses in LIS: Dewey's technocratic discourse, Ranganathan's facets, and the discursive construction of information users and needs.

Conversely, Budd (2006) analyzes the potential of conversation analysis and social discursive practices (e.g., a Foucauldian approach) to investigate research problems in LIS. Budd demonstrates how conversation analysis, as a method or methodology, can be used to analyze reference interactions and professional mediation. He then examines how social discursive practices have been taken up in LIS to investigate institutionalized discourse and the theoretical foundations of the field. In terms of methodology, both Frohmann and Budd explore the epistemological, ontological, and theoretical underpinnings of various approaches to discourse analysis and advocate for the use of discourse analysis—and in Budd's case, to advocate for conversational analysis as well—as a method in LIS by providing examples of its application to LIS and offering suggestions or questions for future research. This article is structured in a similar fashion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Justice in LIS

It is beyond the scope of this article to define social justice in extensive detail, but it is important to situate and highlight relevant principles and theories of social justice in order to understand its development and applicability to LIS. Ideas about justice and social justice have been debated since the fourth century BCE when Aristotle, the famed Greek philosopher, argued that situations and communities are “just” when each individual receives benefits from society according to his or her merits or virtue (Slote, 2014). Today this principle of justice is known as “justice as deserts.” John Rawls, in his book *A Theory of Justice* (1971), defines justice as fairness and suggests that justice entails two principles: “First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others. Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage” (p. 60). Other scholars suggest that there are additional social justice principles: The rights or entitlements contingent on membership in a society; deserts (or benefits) in which society monitors who receives these benefits; needs as a criterion used to determine distribution of resources; and equality, which is inexorably linked to the principle of deserts—who receives benefits, and why? (Miller, 1999). Social justice theories, then, broadly align along three areas: (1) Determining the role of the state in providing access to and distributing resources (some argue that it is not the role of society to ensure access to resources or to redistribute

them); (2) Determining what resources and services members of society are entitled to receive based upon need (what groups are most vulnerable or under-resourced) or merit (who is most deserving); and (3) Determining the role of the state in distributing equal access to resources for all members of society (Cornelius & Harrington, 2014).

Central to contemporary definitions of social justice are ideas about distribution of goods and resources, legal notions of justice (i.e., fair laws), and the concept of justice itself—preventing harm and demanding treatment that respects humanity. In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls offers another important contribution to the theoretical development of social justice because he powerfully resituates social justice into a moral framework (not merely a legal one), while simultaneously highlighting the centrality of social institutions in enacting justice when he states that “justice is the first virtue of social institutions” (1971, p. 3). While Rawls does not specifically mention libraries or any other social institution in this passage, its applicability to libraries is evident. Furthermore, because LIS professionals are situated in social institutions, and they are tasked with serving all communities, justice is an inherent professional concern even though not always made explicit or manifested in practice (Samek, 2000). Janke (2011) suggests that social justice is a concern for librarians because “all parts of a community are entangled” in social institutions such as libraries, and that it is “the obligation of librarians to know their values and act on them” (p. 124).

Mehra, Rioux, & Albright (2010), writing within a LIS context, define social justice similarly to Rawls: “a society in which individuals and groups are treated fairly and receive an equitable share of all the benefits of society” (p. 4820). The authors go on to suggest that while social justice is a foundational underpinning of library and information studies, this is not often made explicit in LIS research literature or professional literature. There are several reasons for this omission. Historically, libraries have often reflected the values of those in positions of privilege (Garrison, 1979). Pateman & Vincent (2010) write that “public libraries [were] hijacked by the middle classes who came to dominate both the running and the use of library services,” and that “equity is not embedded in our professional culture and sometimes excellence and professional standards are used as an excuse or smokescreen for not pursuing social justice objectives and outcomes” (p. 2). Furthermore, since the 1980s, and in both the United Kingdom and North America, libraries across all sectors have been subjected to many financial policy decisions made by governments that have often undermined librarians’ ability to provide equity to all library patrons (Holt, 2005). At the same time, LIS professionals, in their mandate to provide service, have themselves determined what their patrons’ information needs are and what information, resources, and services are available and to whom (Mehra, Rioux, & Albright, 2010).

However, in recent years, and particularly in a community-led librarianship model, LIS practice has shifted in order to be more inclusive and to share power more broadly. Pateman (2013) suggests that public libraries move to coproduction; that is, library users are not treated as “mere consumers of ‘choices’ provided from above by library professionals. Instead, power and resources are shared with local communities” (Co-Production section, para. 1). In terms of LIS research, the paradigm in user-centered research has turned from “the user in the life of libraries” to “the role of the library in the life of users” (Burke & Martin, 2004; Case, 2012; Wiegand, 2003). In addition, many LIS researchers and practitioners use inclusive, participatory research methods and practices such as community engagement and action-based research that allows community members and individuals to shape, guide, and participate in research relevant to them (Mehra & Braquet, 2011; O’Brien et al., 2014; Xiao, Farooq, Carroll, & Rosson, 2013). At the same time, the increasing use of social theory in LIS affords the opportunity to reflect upon and interrogate traditional understandings, values, practices, and ideology in LIS (Chatman, 1992, 1999; Hudson, 2012; Schroeder & Hollister, 2014). While this academic and professional work is not always explicitly tied to social justice, it demonstrates the growing awareness of and need for collaboration among patrons, practitioners, and researchers in order to deepen our understanding of local communities and library stakeholders, the broader social and political context of libraries, and the changing roles of libraries in the twenty-first century.

Furthermore, among LIS researchers, greater attention has been paid to using and developing theory and metatheory (Fisher, Erdelez, & McKechnie, 2005; Talja, 1997) with Rioux (2010) developing a social justice metatheory. The following are Rioux’s five underlying assumptions of social justice for LIS:

- All human beings have an inherent worth and deserve information services that help address their information needs.
 - People perceive reality and information in different ways, often within cultural or life role contexts.
 - There are many different types of information and knowledge, and these are societal resources.
 - Theory and research are pursued with the ultimate goal of bringing positive change to service constituencies.
 - The provision of information services is an inherently powerful activity.
- (p. 13)

Rioux’s metatheory is nascent, as his title “Metatheory in Library and Information Science: A Nascent Social Justice Approach” indicates, but it provides a starting point to frame the “fundamental set of ideas about how phenomena of interest in a particular field should be thought about

and researched” (Bates, 2005, p. 2). Rioux’s assumptions of social justice work on the macro- (societal), meso- (communities, neighborhoods), and micro- (individuals and small groups) levels by calling attention to how libraries and other information centers act as social institutions with inherent power relations, economic and cultural concerns, ideology, and values, and to how these social relations are both constructed and enacted by—and imposed upon—individuals and groups.

Discourse analysis offers a scholarly approach not only to critically examining the social justice assumptions presented by Rioux but also for analyzing the context of discourse: that is, the macro-, meso-, and microlevels, and the theoretical gaps between them (van Dijk, 2001). For discourse analysts, context is central, and for critical discourse analysts, macrolevel issues of power, dominance, and inequality between social groups is typically a concern. Conversely, Wetherell (2001) suggests that discursive psychology’s study of “minds, selves and sense-making” changes “our understanding of individuals, their internal states, how people form their views of the world, their emotions, desires and innermost selves” (p. 186). Discursive psychology often situates language use, discourse, texts, and communication to the microlevel wherein individuals are both producers and products of discourses in specific interactions. The critical discourse analysis approach and the discursive psychology approach to discourse analysis allow LIS researchers to investigate theoretical issues and research questions with a social justice orientation from an individual level, to a community level, and to a societal level.

LIS Research and Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is the study of language in use (Brown, 1983; Gee & Handford, 2014). It is the study of the meanings and actions people ascribe to language when it is used in a social context, and is described as “text and talk in action” (Wood & Kroger, 2000). People do things with everyday language such as create factual descriptions, order, persuade, accuse, and otherwise accomplish social action (Elliott, 1996; Potter, Edwards, & Wetherell, 1993; Taylor, 2001). While these definitions and conceptualizations of discourse are broad and commonsensical, the fundamental common idea underlying them is that language does not neutrally reflect reality, nor is it “merely a channel through which information about underlying mental or psychological states and behaviour or facts about the world are communicated” (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 9). Through language, representations of reality are created and constructed, and people’s use of language varies according to its function or purpose. Consequently, through language, social identities, social relations, and versions of the social world are generated, constructed, and constituted.

While there are many discourse analytic approaches, a Foucauldian

approach whereby discursive “practices systematically form the objects of which they speak” (1972, p. 49) has been used in LIS to study the relationships between discourse and power. For example, Kimmo Tuominen (1997) demonstrates how a discourse analytic approach (informed by Foucault), can uncover social identities, social relations, and issues of power by examining the underlying assumptions of user-centered research. He discusses how users, librarians, and other information professionals are discursively constructed in ways that enable information professionals and librarians to exercise discursive power over users within institutionalized settings. Another example is Gary Radford’s work, which takes as a starting point Wayne Wiegand’s remark that “One gets the impression of a profession [LIS] trapped in its own discursive formations, where members speak mostly to each other and where connections between power and knowledge that affect issues of race, class, age, and gender, among others, are invisible or ignored” (qtd. in Radford, 2003, p. 2). Radford employs Foucauldian “discursive formations” to investigate questions raised by Wiegand about discursive constraints in LIS scholarship.

Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis views language as a social practice and focuses on the ways in which social, political, and economic domination are reproduced through talk and texts. He writes: “Critical approaches differ from non-critical approaches in not just describing discursive practices, but also showing how discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies, and the constructive effects discourse has upon social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief, neither of which is normally apparent to discourse participants” (1992, p. 12). In LIS, Siobhan Stevenson (2001) applied Fairclough’s textually oriented discourse analytic method to critical information policy studies in order to explore the rise and decline of state-funded Community Information Centres in Canada from the 1970s to the early 2000s. Heather Hill (2009) also applied Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis approach in her doctoral work, examining the discourses arising from the movement of some municipalities in the United States from a traditional public library model—whereby the library is publicly funded, locally controlled, and managed by public employees—to a model whereby the public library is outsourced to private contractors. A critical discourse analytic approach has been taken in studies of education and information literacy (Rogers & Wetzel, 2013) and knowledge management (Käpylä, 2012). Another example of the application of critical discourse analysis comes from Daren Brabham (2012) in his study analyzing the myth of amateurism as it relates to crowdsourcing. Brabham found that the “amateur/hobbyist” label undermines the expertise and knowledge that self-selected experts contribute to crowdsourced projects, and that this has implications for labor and social relations. The myth of the amateur refocuses attention away from

crowdsourcers as laborers deserving of workers' rights, ethical treatment, and pay. For scholars taking a critical approach, notions of power, ideology, and sociopolitical context are paramount and central to analysis.

An additional approach to discourse analysis comes from social psychology. Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates (2001) outline three central topic areas of discourse analysis: (1) The study of social interaction; (2) The study of minds, self, and sense making; and (3) The study of culture and social relations. For social psychologists the study of minds, self, and sense making focuses on the production of social actors and "is about the construction of psychological order in discourse: the construction of identity, the process of making sense, and the emergence of collective and individual mind" (p. 5). In LIS, Natilene Bowker (2010) used discursive psychology to understand barriers experienced by people with disabilities in online environments. She found that the discursive resources and repertoires of "disabling differentials," "negative reactions," "gatekeeping," and "exclusion" placed barriers and influenced the participants' ability to engage online. Pam McKenzie (2003, 2009, 2010) has used discursive psychology in a program of research exploring the social information practices of pregnant women with twins and the information practices of midwives and their clients. McKenzie uses interpretive repertoires to understand how midwives and their clients as well as pregnant women with twins discursively position themselves to frame and shape information giving and receiving.

Underlying many of these approaches to discourse analysis is the idea that language and discourses are constructed or coproduced. Constructionists see knowledge as dialogically constructed through discourse, and some LIS researchers take a constructionist view of information. Tuominen & Savolainen (1997), for example, focus on information use as discursive action. The authors view information as socially constructed and analyze two conversational extracts to illustrate how information consists of two almost inseparably linked phases—discursive construction of information and the use of constructed information in action. In recent years, interest in a constructionist approach to LIS research has increased. A number of researchers either have used discourse analysis as a research methodology or explored its applicability to LIS (Frohmann, 2001; Heizmann, 2012; McKenzie & Oliphant, 2010; Talja, Tuominen, & Savolainen, 2005; Tuominen, Talja, & Savolainen, 2002), including a special issue of *Library Quarterly* on discursive approaches to information seeking in context (Talja & McKenzie, 2007). A discourse analytic approach has been used to explore a wide range of questions in LIS spanning all sectors—from asking foundational questions about the discursive formulations of the discipline, to discursive constructions of users, to exploring social information practices. The following section explores methodological considerations in discourse analysis.

Methodological Issues in Discourse Analysis

Underlying discourse analytic studies are certain epistemological and ontological claims. Most importantly, discourse analyses are not concerned with uncovering objective “truth.” Foucault, for example, avoided epistemological questions about the correctness, veracity, or adequacy of knowledge claims and instead focused on how institutions such as psychiatry and criminology produce knowledge. In addition, a discursive psychology approach does not focus on the accuracy or veracity of claims but rather on how cases and descriptions are constructed to appear authoritative (Potter, 2007). Researchers using discourse analysis approaches do not typically aim or claim to capture a truth about reality; instead, they offer an interpretation or version that is inevitably situated and partial. Margaret Wetherell (2001) outlines the important reasons for this approach. First, the complexity of the social world does not lend itself to confident predictions. Second, and this ties in closely with social justice, no neutral single truth is possible because people have their own viewpoints, and to make truth claims based on one perspective is to deny diversity of viewpoints and experiences. The third point is about ontology—there are multiple realities and multiple truths, and the world is not merely a reflection of what exists.

In terms of methodological implications, critical discourse analysts do not see themselves as politically neutral. Norman Fairclough (2003) argues that the primary objective of critical discourse analysis “is better understanding of how societies work and produce both beneficial and detrimental effects, and of how the detrimental effects can be mitigated if not eliminated” (p. 203). Critical discourse analysts explicitly commit themselves to “an engagement in favor of dominated groups in society,” and they explicitly conduct research with the aim of contributing to “specific social change in favour of the dominated groups . . . and may also attempt to influence and cooperate with crucial ‘change agents’ or ‘dissidents’ of dominant groups” (van Dijk, 2008, pp. 6–7). For critical discourse analysts, methodological issues are paramount as their approach is centrally concerned with the interests of the social groups in which they engage and with methodology and methods that do not infringe upon the rights of the people they study. There are two primary methodological implications for critical discourse analysts taking a political position in their research. First, critical discourse analysts’ sociopolitical stance has implications for choice of theory, methods, and data and for the priorities of their research. Second, critical discourse analysts recognize that taking a position alongside dominated groups in society requires research programs, theories, and methods that are complex and multidisciplinary. For critical discourse analysts, the political significance of the research can be evaluated by questioning the role of the research in maintaining or challenging power relations in society; that is, in relation to the ideological underpinnings of the work.

Some of the primary methodological concerns for social constructionists and discourse analysts, particularly those using the discursive psychology approach, are the issues of reflexivity, relativism, and the role of action. Discursive studies themselves are reflexive; they are considered by researchers as discursive constructions representing one version of the world. Taken to its extreme, this means that a study can be considered to be merely a reflection of the researcher's worldview or reality and not an analysis of a research problem or question. And, in terms of relativism, how do we decide which version of reality is better or what claims to believe? It can be problematic to defend one viewpoint over another. Furthermore, how do we justify or defend privileging one discourse over another? Vivien Burr (1998) suggests that politics must inform decisions about which discursive objects to deconstruct and what to put in their place. Burr goes on to object to the relativity of discursive psychologists as "afraid of reifying alternative constructions, and remain 'observers and commentators,' leaving the action for others to take. Although they may talk of discourse operating ideologically and are certainly aware of the effects of talk in constituting individuals and groups in particular ways, discourse psychologists seem wary of following this through in terms of recommendations for social change" (1998, p. 16). The lack of a critical stance might suggest that discursive psychology does not offer much for those in LIS interested in social justice. However, an examination of goodness of fit with Rioux's five assumptions of social justice metatheory can assist in determining if this is indeed the case.

FINDINGS

Discourse Analysis and Social Justice Metatheory

This section returns to Rioux's metatheory of social justice for LIS and discusses how discourse analysis can inform his five assumptions of social justice. Vakkari (1996) argues that metatheories consist of very general ontological, epistemological, and conceptual presuppositions that guide actual theory construction; he defines metatheories as "orienting strategies" because "they do not signify substantive theories" (p. 452). Here, discursive psychology and critical discourse analysis are examined for a goodness of fit for developing theory and exploring research problems in LIS related to social justice.

Assumption 1: All human beings have an inherent worth and deserve information services that help address their information needs. According to Bruner (1990), human beings are actively engaged in producing and managing discourses. They are capable of making decisions and actively participate in narrative self-constructions. Wetherell (2001) concurs: "At its most basic, the study of discourse and persons investigates how people tell stories about themselves and how they present themselves in talk. We can look at

how people put together an account, the discursive practices and routines they use and the consequences of choosing one way of talking about oneself over another” (p. 186). These narratives and conceptualizations have important implications for LIS, which recognizes that human beings are dynamic and draw on different discourses at different times, that their information needs are shifting, and that they also have agency. Conversely, a critical discourse analytical view of agency understands a “subject position” as determined by dominant discourses. The subject’s actions are shaped and constrained by already existing social, historical, and/or biological forces and knowledge relations. Discourse analysis potentially allows LIS practitioners, educators, and researchers to better understand their communities and the people they serve.

Furthermore, Budd & Raber (1996) claim that discourse analysis is used to examine communicative activities, and thus is an appropriate method for LIS because “the profession is one that is based on and sensitive to communication” (p. 218). Discursive psychology can help LIS researchers and practitioners to better understand how users construct information needs (Taylor, 1962). For LIS researchers and practitioners, the question of human agency and its relationship to discourse is essential to professional practice, research, education, and service provision and is intimately linked with Rioux’s first assumption of social justice metatheory.

Assumption 2: People perceive reality and information in different ways, often within cultural or life role contexts. A social constructionist viewpoint, which underlies many discourse analytic approaches, takes Rioux’s second assumption as a given—there is no singular, objective version of reality. Rather than assess the veracity of accounts or descriptions, researchers move from studying language use as describing some objective “truth” about reality or the individual’s internal state to analyzing how people use language to construct authoritative descriptions and accomplish specific actions (Potter, 2007). Potter argues that in almost every situation—from police reports, to courtroom proceedings, to mundane arguments between couples about whose turn it is to do the dishes—humans construct accounts that appeal to the facts, to describe what really happened, and to establish authority. These discursive constructions do not take place in a vacuum; they are reflective of cultural and life role contexts. Discursive psychology examines how descriptions become established as solid, real, and independent of the speaker. In LIS, for example, Talja (1999) argues that discourse analysis allows a researcher to understand what discourses participants access and how they use different discourses to present various positions that have meaning for them. Using different discourses or subject positions allows individuals the flexibility to take on different identities. “The starting point of discourse analysis is that meanings, values, and ethical principles are not individual creations, but entities that

people create together in communication and social action. This view of language, mind, meaning and self-hood is *dialogic*, emphasizing that we are not 'self-contained' selves" (p. 470).

Understanding this dynamic dialogic is especially useful for understanding social information practices as communicative, social activities: how people construct themselves as competent information seekers, how people discursively use previously sought information, and how people perceive information and related concepts such as credibility, cognitive authority, and sense making (Johannisson & Sundin, 2007; Neal & McKenzie, 2011). It also is an implied call for respecting diversity. In addition, a discursive approach to analyzing library services allows researchers to expand upon and elucidate concepts such as "information needs," "information use," or "information seeking" by making them be "seen as constructive action that can be studied as a real-world phenomenon rather than a theoretical abstraction" (Tuominen & Savolainen, 1997, p. 92). Discourse analysis can uncover the different ways in which people perceive reality and information.

Assumption 3: There are many different types of information and knowledge, and these are societal resources. Discourse analysts are concerned with knowledge production, truth claims, knowledge sharing, and social knowledge. To social constructionists, ideas about knowledge production have shifted from focusing on what is true to what knowledge is being used for. Inherent in this theorizing is the recognition that there are many different types of information and knowledge. Discursive psychology is not concerned about the veracity of truth claims but rather with how people use communicative resources (including information) in order to make such claims.

While information and knowledge are societal resources, critical discourse analysis allows us to problematize the concepts of information, knowledge, and belief systems, as previously discussed (see Frohmann, 1994; Budd, 2006; and Radford, 2003). Critical discourse analysis studies both power *in* discourse and power *over* discourse, providing a means for LIS researchers to examine the underlying epistemological and ontological assumptions of information, knowledge, knowledge production, and knowledge sharing as well as belief systems and analyses of power and social relations. Critical discourse analysis also enables LIS practitioners and researchers to understand who has access to information and knowledge (Heek & Luyt, 2010; Jaeger, Bertot, & Gorham, 2013).

Assumption 4: Theory and research are pursued with the ultimate goal of bringing positive change to service constituencies. Underlying a critical discourse analytical approach is a distinctly political goal of bringing positive change to constituencies or facilitating sites of resistance. Critical discourse analysts select research methods, and take a political position, that are in alignment with the rights and interests of the people whom they study. According to van Dijk (2008), critical discourse analysts "prefer to focus on

those properties of discourse that are most typically associated with the expression, confirmation, reproduction or challenge of the social power of the speaker(s) or writer(s) as members of dominant groups” (p. 5). While the critical discourse analysis commitment to a political stance has been the source of great debate about bias, van Dijk also points out that not taking a political stance is itself a political choice. Discourse analysis as a research approach is inclusive and focuses on the social empowerment of individuals and groups, dealing with epistemological, ontological, and teleological (purpose of theory and research) issues. In terms of LIS, this means that discourse analysis research can help to identify power imbalances among and between individuals, groups, communities, and societies.

Assumption 5: The provision of information services is an inherently powerful activity. Discourse analysts would accept this premise because libraries are social institutions, inherently connected to social and power relations. Libraries are subject to, and coproduce, powerful discourses about social institutions, people, culture, information, knowledge, belief systems, politics, economics, and the public good, and the relationships between and among them. Discourse analysis can make visible the power relations between library and information professionals and the people, communities, and societies they serve, but also between library workers and management, and other library stakeholders (Hicks & Given, 2013). In addition, discourse analysis research is a means by which professional guidelines and ethics, policy, and reflective practice can be scrutinized in terms of facilitating equity of access and promoting social justice.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discourse Analysis as a Research Approach

The following are suggestions for social justice researchers wanting to use discourse analysis as a research approach. These suggestions align with Rioux’s five assumptions of social justice metatheory.

All human beings have an inherent worth and deserve information services that help address their information needs. Whether consciously or unconsciously, LIS researchers, educators, and practitioners take a position when undertaking a research project. LIS researchers take epistemological, ontological, and theoretical stances when they develop a methodology, i.e., deciding what research questions are worth exploring and which research designs are best suited to answering these questions. In terms of discourse analysis, some researchers may or may not make their position explicit, but often the object of analysis is to interrogate hegemonic and other dominant discourses. There is a long history in LIS of taking an explicit position in research, education, and practice (e.g., questioning library neutrality, intellectual freedom and social responsibility, and using critical theory), and the methodological approach to social justice research should be no different. Because discursive resources are based in social relations, tak-

ing an explicit position in research or exploring dominant discourses in LIS acknowledges that all human beings have inherent worth and deserve information services that help address their information needs (which is also a discourse worth scrutinizing).

People perceive reality and information in different ways, often within cultural or life role contexts. Given this assumption, a suggestion for researchers interested in social justice is that a critical discourse analysis can lay bare whose interests are being prioritized by social institutions such as libraries, whose interests are prioritized in all manner of library services, and whose interests are prioritized in terms of information policy (at local, municipal, state or provincial, and federal levels). In essence, discourse analysis allows us to uncover whose “reality” and what information counts. The method(ology) also can assist in exploring discourses of resistance and help to reify alternative discourses.

There are many different types of information and knowledge, and these are societal resources. Rioux’s third assumption positions access to information and knowledge as a common good that must be promoted and maintained, and he suggests that libraries and library services are considered common goods. Discourse analysis can offer a number of research perspectives to explore who has access to information and knowledge and who does not. On a more microlevel of analysis, discursive psychology can assist in identifying how information sources are constructed and used by both individuals and collectives, which can ultimately help to make information services more relevant and meaningful to the communities they serve. Furthermore, a critical discourse analysis can be applied to macrolevel discourses about library governance, information policy, and an analysis of the changing role of the library in late capitalism.

Theory and research are pursued with the ultimate goal of bringing positive change to service constituencies. For critical discourse analysts, a primary consideration in their research design is to employ methods that do not infringe upon participants. For many, bringing positive change to participants and their communities is a central goal of the research. Insights into dominant discourses can help LIS professionals facilitate the development of community-led librarianship as well as contribute to the coproduction of libraries. Furthermore, discourse analysis provides a means for LIS researchers to explore the discursive constructions of social justice itself.

The provision of information services is an inherently powerful activity. As a service profession, guided by codes of ethics, the LIS community is foundationally interested in how power, social relations, and inequality are produced in society. Thus, LIS is not a value-neutral field or profession. Discourse analysts recognize that all discourses are potentially powerful and represent a possible version of the world. Furthermore, as Budd & Raber (1996) noted, both discourse analysts and members of the LIS community are concerned with and sensitive to communication. Information

services are shaped, shared, and used through communicative processes (discourse), making all aspects of information services inherently interesting to discourse analysts. In addition, discourse analysts and LIS researchers recognize that knowledge organization, such as cataloging and classification systems, are also available for scrutiny (Roberto, 2008).

Conclusion

Discourse analytic approaches are very much in alignment with the five assumptions of Rioux's social justice metatheory and share a social justice orientation. The central theoretical concept in critical discourse analysis is power: and since discourse is a form of action, power may be exercised by controlling discourse (van Dijk, 2014), which is of interest in different LIS contexts—practice, education, and research. Furthermore, critical discourse analysts share a political orientation found in the LIS community, taking a research position that explicitly involves seeking positive, empowering effects on dominated social groups.

Critical discourse analysis employs a systematic methodology that examines the relationship between the language use and texts and its social conditions on the macro-, meso-, and microlevels related to Rioux's social justice metatheory. Discourse analysis is a heterogeneous approach that is useful for exploring almost any matter related to LIS as broadly conceived. Discourse analysis is inclusive, recognizes human worth and agency, explores the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning knowledge production, and can be a site of resistance. These are not neutral or value-free positions, which make discourse analysis a powerful approach for examining the critical intersections of LIS and social justice.

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