

Critical Data Approaches to the Interconnected Library

Miriam E. Sweeney^a, LaTasha Velez^b, Melissa Villa-Nicholas^c

^a University of Alabama, United States

^b University of North Carolina, Greensboro, United States

^c University of Rhode Island, United States

mesweeney1@ua.edu, lmvelez@uncg.edu, mvnicholas@uri.edu

ABSTRACT

This panel borrows from critical data approaches to explore the library as a site of interconnected information assemblages that incorporate (and consolidate) a range of technological, cultural, political, economic, and social arrangements. Critical data studies asserts data, like libraries and technology, are not neutral and value-free. Part one of the panel grounds the conversation in empirical research. Part two will be a discussion about how LIS education can further integrate and support critical data approaches to better prepare library workers to serve diverse communities, particularly those that are most vulnerable in this data environment.

Part one: Making connections, mapping power

LaTasha Velez and Melissa Villa-Nicholas's research explores how Latinx people are described through metadata in LIS classification schemas. By analyzing controlled vocabularies and subject terms in article abstracts for LIS databases and journals, they visualize how Latinxs are portrayed in the LIS field more broadly. Understanding patterns of how Latinxs are classified in our field is critical for revealing bias in LIS systems that are interconnected to broader power dynamics which contribute to discrimination and classism.

Miriam Sweeney and Emma Davis's research draws from a national survey of public, school, and academic libraries and begins to fill a gap in empirical knowledge about smart digital assistant and voice interface use in libraries and documents a wide variety of privacy concerns voiced by library workers. Understanding the application of these emerging technologies has important implications for developing responsive library practices, policies, and educational opportunities that prioritize patron privacy and data literacy in an interconnected landscape of ubiquitous surveillance technologies.

Part two: Setting the critical data agenda for LIS education

During the open discussion section of the panel, some topics we may explore include how critical data perspectives help us answer the following questions:

- What are the most pressing social issues related to the library data environment?
- What does LIS accountability look like at micro and macro levels?
- How does LIS education need to shift to prioritize these questions?

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

specific populations; critical librarianship; metadata; information ethics; social justice

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

critical data studies; critical LIS pedagogies; marginalized populations; asset-based model