INTRODUCTION: CRITICAL LIBRARIANSHIP

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While critical theory has roots in the social sciences and humanities, it moves beyond attempts to merely understand and explain society, challenging individuals and institutions to critique and perhaps change the social constructs in which we live, particularly those that contribute to social injustice. More specifically, critical theory acknowledges that racism, patriarchy, capitalism, and similar systems of power and oppression have become nearly inextricable from many aspects of Western culture, largely due to centuries of dominance by white, heterosexual, Christian males. This centralization of power led to the marginalization of "others," or those who do not belong to the dominant factions within society. Despite this, proponents of critical theory insist that ideology is the main impediment to human liberation, and liberation is achievable by interrogating and dismantling tyrannical ideologies and their effects on society.

Critical theory is not new. Critical Theory as a school of thought emerged in Germany in the 1930s, and has since been applied widely and in varying contexts. As aspects of Critical Theory were more broadly adopted and applied, "critical theory" became colloquialized and critical practices embedded in many professions and activities. Examples of this include critical pedagogy, critical management, critical anthropology, and critical librarianship. The primary commonalities within these movements are a conscious effort and interest in looking reflectively at the values, practices, and structures within pedagogy, management, librarianship, etc., and changing those things that contribute to social, economic, and other injustices.

Sanford Berman (born October 6, 1933) is known extensively in the library cataloging community as an activist and proponent of alternative library practices. He is perhaps most well known for his criticism of bias in Library of Congress (LOC) subject headings. In 2007, Berman submitted a formal recommendation to the LOC Cataloging Policy and Support Office to have "critical librarianship" added as a LOC subject heading. Within this proposal,

Berman (2007) recommends the subject heading be applied to works of library-related literature where "considerations for the human condition and for human rights take precedence over other professional concerns." This subject heading was yet to be added at the time of this publication. Despite this ongoing omission, I agree with Garcia (2015) in his assertion that this act was an overt attempt by a library professional to formally place "librarianship within a critical theorist framework that is epistemological, self-reflective, and activist in nature."

The term and concept of "critical librarianship" emerged fairly recently within our long professional history, but librarians have most certainly been practicing critical librarianship without a label or definition for a very long time. Indeed, since their beginnings in the mid-nineteenth century, public libraries in the United States have sought to provide citizens with free and equitable access to information resources. Prior to this, print literature was generally inaccessible to women, laypeople, and those lacking wealth, formal education, and other social privileges of the time. The demand for access was so great that, by 1920, more than 3,500 free public libraries were built throughout the United States (Brady & Abbot, 2015). Free and open access to information provided individuals and groups an opportunity to self-educate, obtain information resources that reflect multiple perspectives, and become more autonomous and empowered citizens. This expansion of access to information resources quickly became synonymous with – and considered necessary for – America's enduring democracy. In 1939, the American Library Association (ALA) published the *Library Bill of Rights*; still endorsed and maintained by ALA (most recently amended on January 19, 2019), this document outlines library patrons' rights to intellectual freedom, and the roles of librarians in supporting those rights. Examples include: resources should be provided for the enlightenment of all people; material should present all views on current and historic issues; libraries should challenge censorship and collaborate with others who resist abridgement of free access to information; a person's right to use the library cannot be denied due to origin, age, background, or point of view; and libraries should advocate for and protect user privacy (ALA, 1939).

Arguably, critical theory was already being applied by librarians when this concept was first being articulated by philosophers and theorists in the Western world, as a natural outcome of our professional values and responsibilities. In fact, "Critical librarianship has always been embedded in the library profession" (Garcia, 2015). Despite this, libraries are not immune to ideologies that allow for the marginalization and oppression of others. Indeed, "Libraries, like all institutions [in Western culture] are produced in and through systems marked by racism, patriarchy, and capitalist modes of production" (Drabinski, 2019, p. 49). Because of our professional values and the role of libraries within our society, however, librarians are well equipped for questioning power structures within our organizations and actively changing work practices that maintain preference and privilege for those who have historically held consolidated power within our society and places of work.

As Farkas (2017) notes, "critical librarianship has become a force that pervades every area of our work." Again, this is unsurprising since the concepts of

critical theory are inherent in our professional values. One aspect of librarianship that has been underexplored in this movement, however, is library management. This volume of *Advances in Library Administration and Organization* intends to help fill this gap in professional literature by providing evidence of applied critical theory in the administration and organization of libraries. Chapters demonstrate how library leaders have applied feminist theory in the management of their organizations, challenged antiquated hiring practices that perpetuate the subjugation of entire groups of people and provided practical solutions for changing course, encouraged librarians to question power dynamics between themselves and library users, and more. Each chapter demonstrates how critical theory has been or can be pragmatically applied in libraries, offering readers an opportunity to learn more about the critical librarianship movement while actively challenging and dismantling structures that perpetuate inequality within and outside our places of work.

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