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Librarians' Views on Critical Theories and Critical Practices

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Librarians' Views on Critical Theories and Critical Practices

ROBERT SCHROEDER AND CHRISTOPHER V. HOLLISTER

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- Q2.** Au: In paragraph starting "Not all librarians" for citation of Accardi et al., 2009, or 2010 as in refs?
- Q3.** Au: For footnote 1, please insert institution.
- Q4.** Au: For Litwan quote, pls check year, 2009 as cited in text or 2010 as in refs list?
- Q5.** Au: For Simmons reference, please cite this in article.

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Librarians' Views on Critical Theories and Critical Practices

Robert Schroeder and Christopher V. Hollister

30 desire to circumscribe intellectual inquiry and critical dissent by the masses
31 through science and technology” (Porfilio 2009, par. 2). Various French the-
32 orists joined the critical theory camp, or at least appeared to be allied with
33 it in the eyes of many scholars: critics such as Roland Barthes, Henry Lefeb-
34 vre, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, and Pierre Bourdieu
35 (Leckie and Buschman 2010, viii). In the latter part of the 20th century other
36 theories arose that became entwined with critical theory—feminist theory,
37 critical pedagogy, queer theory, critical race theory, and postcolonialism, to
38 name a few.

39 Critical theories are all unique. Many move away from solely looking at
40 the human condition through the Frankfurt School’s Marxist perspectives of
41 economics and class to using lenses of gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity.
42 Such theories are also employed to varying degrees in different disciplines in
43 the halls of academe. As the 20th century unfolded, many Western political
44 and social institutions, including universities, began to include in their ranks
45 larger numbers of women, minorities, and people of color. The formerly
46 unquestioned and opaque assumptions at the root of these institutions began
47 to be questioned by people outside the traditionally privileged classes, and
48 those bases of privilege came under more and more scrutiny, analysis, and
49 critique. Many would rightly say that critical theories and theorists share
50 less than they have in common, but some strong threads of commonality
51 are also apparent. To paraphrase Lisa Zanetti (2007) in her discussion of
52 contemporary critical theory, they all look for understanding in “the lived
53 experience of real people in context,” and they try “to understand the ways
54 in which various social groups are oppressed.” Furthermore, the knowledge
55 gained through the examinations of social conditions and hidden structures
56 is seen as empowering for the oppressed, and the knowledge gained from
57 these critical investigations is meant to be used in the transformation of
58 society (Zanetti 2007, par. 13). All of these theories question status quos in
59 Western thought, culture, or society. Adherents of critical theories, as they
60 are termed by the authors of this article, ask questions such as, “Who or what
61 is heard? Who or what is silenced? Who is privileged? Who is disqualified?
62 How are forms of inclusion and exclusion being created? How are power
63 relations constructed and managed?” (Cannella 2010, par. 7).

64 Critical theories have become part of the fabric of many disciplines,
65 including “education, literary studies, philosophy, management, communi-
66 cation/media studies, international relations, political science, geography,
67 language studies, sociology, and psychology, to name a few” (Leckie and
68 Buschman 2010, ix). Critical theories are also becoming part of the discourse
69 in library literature, as searches in library science databases will reveal. But
70 what exactly do librarians mean when they speak of critical theory? Is it only
71 in reference to the Frankfurt School or to one of the other critical theories
72 already mentioned? Librarians all have an undergraduate degree outside of
73 library and information science (LIS), and many have one or more non-LIS

74 graduate degrees. They may have learned about critical theory in any of
75 these numerous disciplines, so there may be many conceptions of it in the
76 library world. Perhaps even more importantly, librarians may be engaged
77 in critical practices to different degrees and in varied ways. What do librarians
78 do when they engage in critical practice? And finally, what about the
79 librarians who have never heard of critical theory? Librarianship has a strong
80 ethos of “user-centeredness,” and librarians have long recognized how inequities
81 in society have hindered different groups’ access to information and
82 technology. Might even those librarians who are not cognizant of critical
83 theories actually be engaged in critical practices when they address issues
84 of social justice? These, then, are the questions the authors of this article
85 address.

86

LITERATURE REVIEW

87 Librarianship and Critical Theory

88 Although critical theory began in Germany in the 1920s, it was not until the
89 1970s that it made any substantial inroads in the United States, and it was
90 at this time that it entered into the LIS field (Antonio 1983, 325). In 1972,
91 Michael Harris published *The Purpose of the American Public Library in Historical Perspective: A Revisionist Interpretation*, in which he reassessed the
92 romanticized history of the American public library, exposing its basic authoritarianism and elitism. Later, Wiegand (2000) noted Harris’s contribution
93 to library history, and advocated for a broader critical approach to the profession. Harris (1986a; 1986b) followed his aforementioned work with two
94 articles in which he began to critique librarians’ mostly unarticulated positivist and pluralistic outlook, and he called for a critical and reflective/empirical
95 approach to librarianship.

100 By the 1990s and 2000s, more librarians began to take a critical approach
101 to their profession. Pawley (1998), Budd (2003), Benoit (2002; 2007), and
102 Pyati (2006) variously used the theories of Gramsci, Bourdieu, Habermas,
103 and Marcuse as critical lenses through which to question the curricula of LIS
104 programs. Following on these works, Leckie, Given, and Buschman (2010)
105 edited a volume in which contributors explored ways that critical theorists’
106 ideas could readily be infused into LIS curricula, research, and practice. Many
107 of the theorists represented in this work are from the Frankfurt School, but
108 many others, like Bourdieu, Foucault, Lacan, Deleuze, and de Saussure, are
109 representative of other critical schools.

110 Most areas of the library and librarianship have since been examined
111 using a variety of critical theories. In 1993, Buschman published *Critical Approaches to Information Technology in Librarianship: Foundations and Applications*, in which he used critical theory to examine the use of information
112 technology in libraries; this influential work was updated and then
113
114

115 republished in 2009 (Leckie and Buschman 2009). In the early 2000s, a
116 number of prominent LIS authors explored the theory of critical informa-
117 tion literacy—most notably Troy Swanson (2004), James Elmborg (2006),
118 and Heidi Jacobs (2008). In the area of pedagogy, Accardi, Drabinski, and
119 Kumbier (2010) edited the seminal work *Critical Library Instruction: Theo-
120 ries and Methods*. Finally, the areas of cataloging and classification were also
121 analyzed critically (Olson 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Olson and Schlegl 1999;
122 2001).

123 Critical Practice

124 The authors of this article are defining critical practice as the application of
125 a critical theory to one's professional life, or to one's societal environment.
126 For librarians, this would involve the application of a critical theory to their
127 own professional life as a librarian in a specific library, or to libraries or
128 librarianship in general. Critical theory has played a part in LIS for the past
129 40 years, but what about critical practices? In a larger perspective one might
130 ask, does critical theory, as discussed by members of the Frankfurt School,
131 say anything about critical *practices*? Finding itself researching sociological
132 topics, with a Marxist lens, in pre-war Germany, the original Frankfurt group
133 was extremely pessimistic about specific political application of their theo-
134 ries, and as Simone Chambers (2004) relates, "Critical Theory was born in the
135 conviction that social theory should embrace normative, and pursue moral,
136 ends. Thus for every evaluation of an 'is,' Critical Theory suggests an 'ought.'
137 What Critical Theory has not always been good at is suggesting how we get
138 from the 'is' to the 'ought'" (219).

Q1

139 Since the 1930s critical theory has evolved and other, related, theories
140 have emerged: feminist theory, queer theory, postcolonialism, and critical
141 race theory, to name a few. Many of the theorists in these camps advocate
142 for the application of critical theories to societal issues and to politics. Within
143 the discipline of education, for example, scholars such as Stephen Brookfield,
144 Henry Giroux, and Paulo Freire have not only theorized in critical terms, but
145 they have demonstrated how critical theory can inform educational prac-
146 tice (Brookfield 2005; Freire 2000; Giroux 2001). As academic libraries are
147 embedded in institutions of higher learning, the librarians in them can ben-
148 efit and learn from these critical educational theorists. As Ryan Gage (2004)
149 notes:

150 The value in examining the texts of critical theorists like Giroux is cen-
151 tered around the belief that a richer, more nuanced and multi-perspective
152 means of reading the complexity and dynamic nature of society and li-
153 brary work is necessary not only for the purpose of extending knowledge
154 but to then mobilize and transform theory from its abstract and institu-
155 tional life into concrete ways of everyday practice and being. (73)

156 Freire's (2000) *praxis* extends, in radical and novel ways, the concept of
157 critical practice. He defines praxis most basically as "reflection and action
158 upon the world in order to transform it" (51). Freire's is perhaps an extreme
159 example of the application of critical theory, but in some ways it may also be
160 the most developed, in that he ties together theory, practice, and reflection.
161 As McLaren et al. (2010) state:

162 Praxis is the union of action and reflection and of theory and practice.
163 Paulo Freire refers to praxis as the reassertion of human action for a more
164 humane world on two levels, the individual and social, where the simul-
165 taneous changing of circumstances and self-change occur. Critical praxis
166 is threefold and includes self-reflection, reflective action, and collective
167 reflective action. (par. 1)

168 Not all librarians who have been exposed to critical theory are neces-
169 sarily involved in critical practices, certainly not to the extent envisioned by
170 Freirean praxis. At the most basic level, for an academic librarian, a critical
171 practice might be in choosing to base her or his scholarship (i.e., research,
172 writing, and presentations) upon aspects of critical theory. Librarians cited in
173 this literature review, along with many others, have chosen this method of
174 critical practice. An obvious example of a critical practice in public services
175 librarianship would be the use of critical pedagogies in library information
176 literacy programs and classes. For instance, the text *Critical Library Instruc-*
177 *tion: Theories and Methods* (Accardi et al. 2009) includes many examples of
178 the application of critical theory to library instruction. Maria Accardi's new
179 publication, *Feminist Pedagogy for Library Instruction* (2013), also provides
180 examples of applying feminist content and feminist models to library in-
181 struction. Another obvious example of critical practices is the application
182 of critical concepts to cataloging. Sanford Berman, then cataloger at the
183 Hennepin County Library, began this trend in the 1970s, and others such
184 as K. R. Roberto continue exploring critical cataloging with works such as
185 *Radical Cataloging: Essays from the Front* (Berman 1971; 1981; 2013; Roberto
186 and Berman 2003).

Q2

187 Social Justice

188 Social justice is a highly contested concept, but at its most basic understand-
189 ing, it can be seen as "a normative concept concerning the ways in which
190 resources and power should be shared across society" (Ross and Rosati 2006,
191 437). While many traditional critical theorists have investigated power rela-
192 tions among various groups in society, few would prescribe specific actions
193 that individuals should take in order to rebalance resources and power. Many
194 schools of thought that are seen to be allied with critical theories, such as the

195 poststructuralists and postmodernists, would also take issue with the concept
196 of social justice, especially in its appeal to be a grand narrative—that is, one
197 with universal appeal over all times and cultures. However, some members
198 of critical camps do see social justice actions as possibilities, or even as
199 desired outcomes of critical inquiry. As Ross and Rosati (2006) explain:

200 Poststructuralist approaches, which many feminists have incorporated
201 into their work, have criticized the apparent claims to universalism that
202 mark many libertarian, liberal, and Marxist conceptions of social justice.
203 They maintain that no universally shared meaning of social justice does,
204 or can, effectively exist. They also argue that the bases on which concep-
205 tions of social justice have been measured place far too much emphasis
206 on class or economic interests than on other forms of social well-being.
207 This is not to say that poststructuralists necessarily wish to do away with
208 ideas of social justice. Viable conceptions of social justice could exist
209 so long as they incorporate mechanisms to recognize and dismantle the
210 everyday power inequities related to differences in gender, race, ability,
211 and sexuality in addition to those associated with class. (438)

212 The idea of social justice then, within the confines of this article, is defined
213 as a concept concerning the ways in which resources and power should be
214 shared across society, taking into consideration not only social class, but also
215 inequities related to gender, race, ability, and sexuality.

216 Librarianship as a profession has long been concerned with issues of
217 social justice, as related in the American Library Association's (ALA) *Core Val-
218 ues of Librarianship* (2004). This document provides guidelines that exhort
219 librarians to advocate for democracy, diversity, lifelong learning, intellectual
220 freedom, and the public good. These guidelines also include the following
221 commitment to social responsibility:

222 ALA recognizes its broad social responsibilities. The broad social respon-
223 sibilities of the American Library Association are defined in terms of the
224 contribution that librarianship can make in ameliorating or solving the
225 critical problems of society; support for efforts to help inform and edu-
226 cate the people of the United States on these problems and to encourage
227 them to examine the many views on and the facts regarding each prob-
228 lem; and the willingness of ALA to take a position on current critical
229 issues with the relationship to libraries and library service set forth in the
230 position statement. (par. 14)

231 All of the issues outlined in this core values statement—the role of the library
232 in a democracy; diversity within the library profession and service to diverse
233 or marginalized groups; intellectual freedom; equity in technology and the
234 digital divide—have scores of articles devoted to them. As early as 1989, in
235 the book *Social Responsibility in Librarianship: Essays on Equality*, librari-

236 ans discussed illiteracy, library resources, and library programs through the
237 lens of race or from a feminist perspective (McCann 1989). More recently,
238 in *Information Literacy and Social Justice: Radical Professional Praxis*, the
239 authors (Gregory and Higgins 2013) show librarians and students moving
240 beyond neo-liberalism, challenging authority, co-learning together, and en-
241 gaging with the community for social change. Librarians responding to and
242 embedding themselves in social movements around the world are also high-
243 lighted in the new work *Informed Agitation; Library and information Skills*
244 *in social Justice Movements and Beyond* (Morrone 2014). The existence of
245 both the ALA's Social Responsibility Round Table and the Progressive Librar-
246 ians Guild, along with the promulgation of the Association of College and
247 Research Libraries (ACRL) *Diversity Standards: Cultural Competencies for*
248 *Academic Libraries* in 2012, provide additional evidence of a strong thread
249 of social justice within the library world. As Leckie, Given, and Buschman
250 (2010) note, critical theory and a socially responsible library profession are
251 natural partners; they state:

252 LIS is also very interested in the betterment of society, from the de-
253 velopment of national information policies, to the provision of user-
254 friendly and equitable access to information, the inclusion of diverse
255 and or/marginalized clientele, the support of citizen lifelong learn-
256 ing, the nurturing of the library in the community, and many other
257 proactive areas of research and practice. Critical theorists give us an
258 array of perspectives or approaches to the very concerns that we
259 have in LIS and help us to think about/examine those issues in new
260 ways. (xiii)

261

METHOD

262 The purpose of this study was to investigate the levels of familiarity that
263 librarians have with critical theory and, furthermore, to determine the extent
264 to which critical theory informs library practice. The authors were particularly
265 interested in the levels of familiarity and the relative practices of front-line
266 librarians—namely, the range of those professionals whose work has the
267 most immediate impact on library users in person or online. For this reason,
268 the authors wished to solicit input from public services personnel (i.e., ref-
269 erence, instruction, subject selectors, and liaisons), from technical services
270 personnel whose work has the most immediate impact on online users (i.e.,
271 acquisitions, cataloging, and electronic resources), and from library comput-
272 ing personnel whose work also has the most immediate impact on online
273 users (i.e., systems and Web development).

274 The authors' hypothesis included the assumption that library practition-
275 ers have varying levels of familiarity with critical theory. For this reason,

276 the authors needed to fashion a dual method of soliciting relevant input
277 from librarians who are very or somewhat familiar with critical theory, and
278 from those who know nothing of it. This need for a dual method of data
279 collection led the authors to develop a survey instrument that separated the
280 two groups of respondents and directed them to separate sets of questions.
281 The nature of the survey's subject matter required the use of open-ended and
282 closed-ended questions for both groups of respondents, and accordingly, the
283 authors needed a way of capturing, organizing, and analyzing both quan-
284 titative and qualitative results. For this reason, and also for the purpose of
285 distributing the survey electronically, the authors adapted it to the Qualtrics¹
286 online survey platform (see appendix).

287 The first two questions of the survey were the same for both groups.
288 For Question 1, respondents were asked to specify what general area of li-
289 brarianship best describes their professional responsibilities: public services,
290 technical services, or systems. For Question 2, respondents were asked to in-
291 dicate their level of familiarity with critical theory: very familiar or somewhat
292 familiar (Group A), or no familiarity (Group B). The respondents' answers to
293 Question 2 led them to one of two separate sets of subsequent questions that
294 were deemed by the authors to be appropriate for indicated levels of critical
295 theory familiarity. The questions specified for Group A were designed for the
296 following main purposes: to reveal the academic backgrounds of librarians
297 who self-identify as being very familiar or somewhat familiar critical theory;
298 to assess their depth of critical theory sophistication; to show how specific
299 elements of critical theory inform their professional practices; and to gauge
300 how they project the possible applications of critical theory and its major
301 tenets to professional practice. The questions specified for Group B were
302 designed for the following main purposes: to learn whether these librarians
303 engaged in social justice activities as part of their normal job responsibilities;
304 to see what these social justice practices might be; and to discover whether
305 these practices differed in any substantial ways from the critical practices of
306 Group A.

307 To solicit input from the desired range of librarians, the authors dis-
308 tributed the survey to five professional discussion lists. Each list was vetted
309 and ultimately chosen for the purpose of generating input from deep pools
310 of professionals in each of the targeted areas of academic librarianship. The
311 LibRef² list was selected to target reference librarians, subject selectors, and
312 liaisons; the Information Literacy Instruction (ILI-L)³ list was chosen to en-
313 gage the community of instruction librarians; the Electronic Resources in



¹ Information on Qualtrics Online Survey Software is available at <https://www.qualtrics.com>. [Author's institution] was licensed to use the program at the time of this study.

² The LibRef-L list is available at <https://listserv.kent.edu/cgi-bin/wa.exe?A0=LIBREF-L>

³ The Information Literacy Instruction (ILI-L) list is available at <http://lists.ala.org/www/info/ili-l>

314 Libraries (ERiL)⁴ list was picked to generate input from electronic resources
315 librarians and the wide range of related and overlapping public, systems, and
316 technical services personnel; the Autocat⁵ list was selected to involve cat-
317 alogers, acquisitions librarians, and other technical services personnel; and
318 finally, the Web4Lib⁶ list was chosen to elicit input from library systems and
319 Web development people.

320 The survey was distributed simultaneously to the five selected discussion
321 lists, inviting those who knew about critical theories as well as those who
322 knew nothing of critical theories to respond. Prospective respondents were
323 given a 2-week window in which to complete the survey. The survey used
324 in this study was based on convenience sampling, and for that reason the
325 results are not generalizable. Only librarians from the discussion lists just
326 noted who felt inclined to complete a survey on critical theories in libraries
327 would have taken the time to do so. As the authors were more interested
328 in the breadth of thought about critical theories among librarians and the
329 range of professional activities that librarians believe to be critical practices,
330 a nonrandom sampling was deemed to be sufficient.

331 RESULTS

332 Questions 1 and 2: All Respondents

333 The survey garnered 369 responses in total. As the survey bifurcated after
334 Question 2—*To what extent are you familiar with a critical theory?*—two
335 groups were formed: Group A and Group B. Subsequent questions for each
336 of the two study groups are henceforth referred to by the group designation
337 and the question number (e.g., A1, A2, B1, B2, etc.). As none of the survey
338 questions required a response, the individual questions ultimately received
339 between 49 and 365 total responses.

340 More than half of the respondents (52 percent) categorized themselves
341 as working in public services; roughly one-third (31 percent) in technical
342 services; 9 percent in systems; and 8 percent in other. As the authors desired
343 to solicit responses from a variety of areas within libraries, the representation
344 seemed appropriate. Roughly two-thirds of the respondents reported that
345 they had some understanding of a critical theory; they became Group A.
346 Within Group A only 12 percent reported being “very familiar” with a critical
347 theory; 29 percent were “somewhat familiar”; and 26 percent had a “passing
348 familiarity.” The remaining one-third who had no familiarity with critical
349 theory became our Group B, and each group was directed to a different set

⁴ The Electronic Resources in Libraries (ERiL) list is available at <http://listserv.binghamton.edu/scripts/wa.exe?A0=eril-l>

⁵ The Autocat list is available at <https://listserv.syr.edu/scripts/wa.exe?A0=AUTOCAT>

⁶ The Web4Lib list is available at <http://web4lib.org>.

350 of questions. The authors were pleased to receive such a large response from
351 librarians unfamiliar with critical theory. About half of the technical services
352 and systems librarians were part of Group B, while less than one-quarter of
353 public librarians were in this group. This resulted in Group A's composition
354 being more highly skewed toward public services librarians.

355 Questions for Group A: Respondents Familiar with Critical Theory

356 *Question A1: How did you learn about critical theory?* Question A1
357 generated a total of 220 answers from 184 respondents; multiple answers
358 were allowed. More than two-thirds (68 percent) of Group A learned about
359 critical theory while in college; equal numbers were indicated for under-
360 graduate and graduate studies. One-quarter of responses were coded as
361 "learned independently," and by far the vast majority of responders in this
362 category stated that personal reading was how they learned of critical the-
363 ory. Only 4 percent of respondents learned about critical theory via pro-
364 fessional development opportunities: mostly by attending conferences. In-
365 terestingly, 4 percent also reported other "informal" means of becoming
366 exposed to critical theory: from talking with graduate students or faculty; by
367 assisting students with research; and by the simple fact of being women of
368 color.

369 *Question A2: What were your undergraduate and graduate majors in*
370 *college?* More than one-half (57 percent) of the respondents to Question
371 A2 reported a college major in the humanities; more than one-third (36
372 percent) were in the social sciences; and only 7 percent reported a major
373 in the sciences. One hundred and six respondents who indicated college
374 as the place they learned about critical theory also reported their majors, so
375 the authors were able to surmise the disciplines in which they encountered
376 critical theories. Ignoring LIS for the moment, the largest percentages were
377 from English/literature (29 percent) and history (13 percent). This comes
378 as no surprise, as it is reflective of the large numbers of these graduates
379 in the library profession (Cain 1988). Seven other disciplines filled out the
380 remaining 38 percent: education (8 percent); philosophy (7 percent); art
381 history (6 percent); communications (6 percent); film studies (5 percent);
382 general humanities (4 percent); and sociology (4 percent). This, too, is not
383 surprising, as critical theories have been applied robustly in each of these
384 fields for decades. Library science was reported by 14 percent of the re-
385 spondents as the discipline in which they first encountered a critical the-
386 ory. Although this is a comparatively large percent of the answers given
387 to this question, LIS is the one major that all of the respondents shared.
388 From this perspective, 14 percent seems remarkably low, and the relatively
389 weak association of LIS and critical theory was corroborated by the next
390 question.

391 *Question A3: To what extent did your library school experience inform*
392 *your ideas of critical theory?.* Only 6 percent of the respondents to this
393 question reported that their library school experience informed their ideas
394 of critical theory to a great extent; 12 percent indicated that library school
395 informed their ideas to some extent. Conversely, 32 percent reported very
396 little exposure or influence, and 50 percent of the respondents reported that
397 library school did not inform their ideas of critical theory at all.

398 *Question A4: To what extent does critical theory play a role in your*
399 *professional life as a librarian?.* Of the 145 respondents to this question, 79
400 percent indicated that critical theory plays a role in their professional lives to
401 some extent; 21 percent to a great extent; 33 percent only somewhat; and 25
402 percent a little. The remaining 21 percent indicated that critical theory plays
403 no role in their professional lives.

404 *Question A5: Give an example or two of how you have applied a criti-*
405 *cal theory concept to your practice as a librarian.* Question A5 generated
406 a total of 155 answers from 102 respondents. All answers given for this
407 question were placed into one of three broad categories—functional, holis-
408 tic, or skeptical—and then subdivided for closer scrutiny. It is important to
409 note, however, that some respondents provided multiple answers that were
410 placed into separate categories or into separate areas of the same categories.
411 Answers labeled as functional were those given by respondents who have
412 applied critical theory or tenets thereof to specific areas of their professional
413 practice (e.g., cataloging, reference, etc.). Answers labeled as holistic were
414 those given by respondents who have applied critical theory or tenets thereof
415 to inform their broader perspectives on librarianship, libraries, and library
416 users. Answers labeled as skeptical were those given by respondents who
417 have not or would not apply critical theory or tenets thereof to areas of
418 their professional practice. Answers indicating that respondents were uncer-
419 tain about the applications of critical theory to professional practice were
420 also placed in skeptical category. Sixty-five percent of the answers given
421 for Question A5 were functional in nature, 28 percent were holistic, and 7
422 percent were skeptical.

423 Functional answers were led by librarians who have applied elements
424 of critical theory to instruction (38 percent), cataloging (15 percent), refer-
425 ence (13 percent), and collection development (13 percent). Given that 52
426 percent of the survey respondents reported themselves as working in public
427 services, it was not surprising to find greater percentages of respondents
428 who have applied elements of critical theory to those relative professional
429 practices. Still, numerous overlapping answers were given, as exemplified
430 by this response:

431 I use a critical framework when devising human rights-based informa-
432 tion literacy instruction, especially for evaluating WWW resources. I use

433 the same critical approach for collection development and for in-house
434 cataloging.

435 Interestingly, 7 percent of the answers given in the functional category
436 showed that survey respondents applied critical theory to their professional
437 research and writing. The authors included these answers in the functional
438 category because the respondents were predominantly academic librarians,
439 and because a recent study showed that 87 percent of academic libraries
440 either require or encourage their librarians to publish in scholarly journals
441 (Best and Kneip 2010). Other functional areas were represented to lesser
442 degrees: administration (3 percent), systems (3 percent), access services (2
443 percent), and subject specialist/departmental liaison (2 percent).

444 Holistic answers were led by librarians who have applied elements of
445 critical theory to inform their broader perspectives on students/library users
446 (26 percent), the role of libraries (12 percent), the nature of librarianship
447 (4 percent), and the role of educational institutions (2 percent). Skeptical
448 answers included librarians who have not or would not apply elements of
449 critical theory to their professional practices (9 percent), and those who were
450 uncertain of the applications (1 percent).

451 *Question A6: Hypothetically, what other ways might you consider apply-*
452 *ing critical theory to your practice as a librarian?* Question A6 generated a
453 total of 139 answers from 91 respondents. As with Question A5, all answers
454 given for this question were placed into one of three categories—functional,
455 holistic, or skeptical—and some respondents provided multiple answers that
456 were placed into separate categories or into separate areas of the same cat-
457 egories. The same operational definitions apply for each category. Sixty-two
458 percent of the answers given for Question A6 were functional in nature,
459 24 percent were holistic, and 14 percent were skeptical. Although the per-
460 centages of answers attributed to each category were similar to those for
461 Question A6, the breakdown within each category was notably different.

462 Functional answers were led by librarians who might consider applying
463 elements of critical theory to instruction (19 percent), professional research
464 and writing (13 percent), reference (12 percent), collection development (12
465 percent), cataloging (10 percent), access services (10 percent), and subject
466 specialist/departmental liaison (10 percent). A comparison of these func-
467 tional answers to those given for Question A5—librarians who *have* applied
468 critical theory to professional practice—shows a significant decrease in the
469 hypothetical application to instruction, and notable increases in the areas
470 of professional research and writing, subject specialist/departmental liaison,
471 and access services. Interestingly, 7 percent of the respondents to this ques-
472 tion indicated that they might consider applying elements of critical theory
473 to all functional areas of their professional practice. To maintain the in-
474 tegrity of the survey results, the authors created a separate subcategory for
475 “all functional areas,” as opposed to adding to the separate percentages for

476 each subcategory. Other functional areas were represented to lesser degrees:
477 administration (5 percent) and systems (2 percent).

478 Holistic answers were led by librarians who might consider applying
479 elements of critical theory to inform their broader perspectives on stu-
480 dents/library users (12 percent), the role of libraries (10 percent), the nature
481 of librarianship (9 percent), and the role of educational institutions (2 per-
482 cent). A comparison of these holistic answers to those given for Question
483 A5 showed a significant decrease in the hypothetical application of criti-
484 cal theory to inform respondents' broader perspectives on students/library
485 users, and a somewhat notable increase in the hypothetical application to
486 inform perspectives on the nature of librarianship. There was also a signif-
487 icant increase in the percentage of skeptical answers given to this question
488 (20 percent), as compared to those given for Question A5. Skeptical answers
489 were led by librarians who were uncertain of the hypothetical applications
490 (11 percent), and those who have not or would not hypothetically apply
491 elements of critical theory to their professional practices (9 percent).

492 *Question A7: Briefly, what might librarians do that would further the*
493 *adoption of critical theory and the application of critical theory concepts*
494 *to professional practice?.* Question A7 generated a total of 154 answers
495 from 88 respondents. As with Questions A5 and A6, all answers given for
496 this question were placed into one of three categories—functional, holistic,
497 or skeptical—and some respondents provided multiple answers that were
498 placed into separate categories or into separate areas of the same categories.
499 However, there is an important distinction to be made when comparing the
500 results of Question A7 to those of Questions A5 and A6. Although the two
501 previous questions related to librarians' own professional experiences, this
502 question asked respondents to speculate or suggest how all librarians might
503 apply elements of critical theory to professional practice. For the purpose
504 of comparing and contrasting the answers to Questions A5 through A7, this
505 distinction generated noteworthy results. Seventy-one percent of the answers
506 given for Question A7 were functional in nature, 22 percent were holistic,
507 and 7 percent were skeptical. Although the percentages of answers attributed
508 to each category were somewhat similar to those for Questions A5 and A6,
509 the breakdown within each category was significantly different.

510 Functional answers were led by two subcategories that were not ad-
511 dressed by respondents in Questions A5 or A6: professional development
512 (39 percent), and LIS curricula (24 percent). The authors included these
513 answers in the functional category for the same general reason that they
514 included professional research and writing: to wit, these subcategories are
515 deemed to be functional elements of professional practice. Interestingly, 23
516 percent of the respondents to this question indicated that librarians might
517 apply elements of critical theory to all functional areas of professional prac-
518 tice. As with the results to Question A6, the authors included a separate
519 subcategory for "all functional areas," as opposed to adding to the separate

TABLE 1 Theorists Associated with “Critical Theory”

Theorist	Number of responses
Michel Foucault	32
Karl Marx	25
Paulo Freire	20
Jacques Derrida	18
Jurgen Habermas,	16
Teodor Adorno	13
Judith Butler	11
Frankfurt School	10
Roland Barthes	10
bell hooks	9
Max Horkheimer	9
Jean Baudrillard	9
Total	182

520 percentages for each subcategory. Other functional areas were represented
 521 to lesser degrees: professional research and writing (16 percent), instruction
 522 (11 percent), subject specialist/departmental liaison (9 percent), access ser-
 523 vices (3 percent), reference (1 percent), collection development (1 percent),
 524 administration (1 percent), and systems (1 percent).

525 Holistic answers were led by respondents who speculated or suggested
 526 that librarians might apply elements of critical theory to inform broader
 527 overall perspectives on the nature of librarianship (15 percent), the role of
 528 libraries (11 percent), students/library users (7 percent), and the role of ed-
 529 ucational institutions (1 percent). A comparison of these answers to those
 530 given for Questions A5 and A6 showed a significant decrease in the perceived
 531 holistic applications of critical theory to professional practice. Skeptical an-
 532 swers included 3 percent of respondents who speculated or suggested that
 533 librarians would not or should not apply elements of critical theory to pro-
 534 fessional practice, and 1 percent of respondents who were uncertain of the
 535 applications (1 percent).

536 *Question A8: What keywords or theorists do you associate with critical*
 537 *theory?* With this question the authors were looking to discover the critical
 538 theorists to which librarians most closely related, and also what range of
 539 theorists and schools that might be represented. Question A8 generated a
 540 total of 326 answers from 99 respondents; these answers consisted of 91
 541 unique theorists. Twelve theorists accounted for 182 (almost 60 percent) of
 542 the responses, as shown in Table 1. Although the Frankfurt School is not
 543 a single theorist, it was included in this table because it was mentioned so
 544 frequently.

545 Unsurprisingly, Karl Marx and the Frankfurt School (i.e., Habermas,
 546 Adorno, and Horkheimer) were ranked highly. Somewhat surprisingly,
 547 there was a significant representation from the group of theorists who are
 548 loosely identified by scholars as poststructuralists. These theorists—Foucault,

549 Derrida, Butler, and Baudrillard—are often linked with the Frankfurt School,
550 especially in the area of critiques of power relations, but these schools are
551 also seen as being at odds. As Phil Carspecken (2008) states, both critical
552 theory and poststructuralism

553 take issue with modernity, specifically with Enlightenment and post-
554 Enlightenment concepts of knowledge, truth, and rationality. Critical the-
555 ory bases its notion of critique on a paradigmatic shift in the concepts
556 of universal reason, reflection, emancipation, and the human subject.
557 In contrast, poststructuralism/postmodernism bases its notion of critique
558 on the rejection of any universal features of these same concepts. Thus,
559 although both perspectives are “critical,” they are fundamentally opposed
560 when it comes to explaining the ultimate basis of critique. (par. 2)

561 Another way to examine the complete list of answers to Question
562 A8—326 responses and 91 theorists—is by the disciplines or schools of
563 thought with which the indicated theorists are associated. In the best of con-
564 ditions, classification is a tricky and value-laden exercise; the categorization
565 of these theorists is no exception, especially considering that it was their
566 theories, in part, that helped to create the interdisciplinary, unhinged, and
567 postmodern world we inhabit. Many of these theorists are considered to be
568 at home in one discipline, but have influenced others. Many are situated
569 at a confluence of disciplines: Is bell hooks, for instance, to be classed in
570 education, feminist theory, or race theory? Many of the indicated theorists,
571 especially those who are described as poststructuralists, vehemently oppose
572 their inclusion in this group. These theorists are not being categorized here
573 in order to argue for the authority of their classification, but rather, within
574 the confines of our convenience sample, to broadly discover main schools of
575 thought that are influencing librarians' concept of what constitutes a critical
576 theory.

577 Referring to Table 2, the broad range of theorists and disciplines repre-
578 sented is striking, but the corresponding broad range of respondents' college
579 majors provides a possible explanation for this. That the Frankfurt School,
580 Karl Marx, and the poststructuralists should top the list comes as no sur-
581 prise, due to their association with critical theory and postmodernism. It is
582 also understandable that a large contingent of educators are represented, as
583 their theories are touched upon in many academic curricula. Given that all
584 respondents were librarians, it is somewhat surprising that relatively few of
585 their responses named other librarians.

586 The answers to Question A8 are unique and noteworthy because
587 the respondents—all librarians—listed significant numbers of theorists from
588 other disciplines: semioticians/linguists; philosophers; sociologists; psychol-
589 ogists; and scholars of literature. It is hard to imagine another field besides li-
590 brarianship where Chomsky, Barthes, Bourdieu, Lukacs, Maslow, Nietzsche,

TABLE 2 Theorists by Discipline/School

Discipline/school	Number of responses	Number of theorists	Theorist name (listed alphabetically)
Poststructuralism	86	8	Baudrillard, Butler, Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault, Kristeva, Lacan, Lyotard
Frankfurt School	57	6	Adorno, Benjamin, Habermas, Horkheimer, Marcuse, "the Frankfurt School"
Education	41	16	Brookfield, Bruffee, Burbules, Dewey, Freire, Gee, Giroux, Horton, Kolb, Ladson-Billings, Lankshear, McLaren, Piaget, "New London Group," Shor, Valenzuela
Marxism	38	6	Althusser, Badiou, Gramsci, Jameson, Luxemburg, Marx
Semiotics/linguistics	19	4	Barthes, Chomsky, Guattari, Saussure
Feminism	14	5	Cixous, de Beauvoir, Harraway, hooks, Paglia
Library	14	10	Chatman, Day, Elmborg, Hjørland, Kapitzke, Kuhlthau, Olson, Pawley, Raber, Ranganathan
Philosophy	13	9	Gadamer, Hegel, Kant, Kuhn, Lefevbre, Mumford, Nietzsche, Simmel, Wittgenstein
Sociology	11	3	Bourdieu, Latour, Weber
Miscellaneous	8	8	Alinsky, Appadurai, Arendt, Bookchin, Bryson, Moore, McClary, Wong
Postcolonialism	8	3	Fannon, Said, Spivak
Psychology	7	5	Bandura, Dreyfus, Freud, Maslow, Zizek
Literature	6	4	Bel, Eagleton, Lukacs, Sedgewick
Critical race theory	4	4	Bell, Crenshaw, Delgado, Davis
Totals	326	91	

591 and Weber would appear on such a list. Representative scholars from art
 592 (Norman Bryson), music (Susan McClary and Deborah Wong), and religion
 593 (Stephen Moore) were also included in a "miscellaneous" category. Scholars
 594 who are associated with other critical theories rounded out the list: femi-
 595 nists, postcolonialists, and critical race theorists (Angela Davis, Edward Said,
 596 Derrick Bell, bell hooks, Kimberle Crenshaw, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spi-
 597 vak). The prominence of all these varieties of critical theories in the minds
 598 of the respondents is confirmed by the answers to Question A9.

599 *Question A9: Which of the following terms do you associate with critical*
 600 *theory?* Question A9 generated a total of 509 answers from 120 respon-
 601 dents, offering six different critical theoretical models from which to choose
 602 (see Figure 1). More than 70 percent of the respondents selected Marxist
 603 criticism, critical pedagogy, or feminist criticism, while more than 60 percent
 604 selected queer theory, critical race theory, or postcolonialism. Only 5 percent
 605 responded that they associate none of the choices with critical theory.

4C/Art

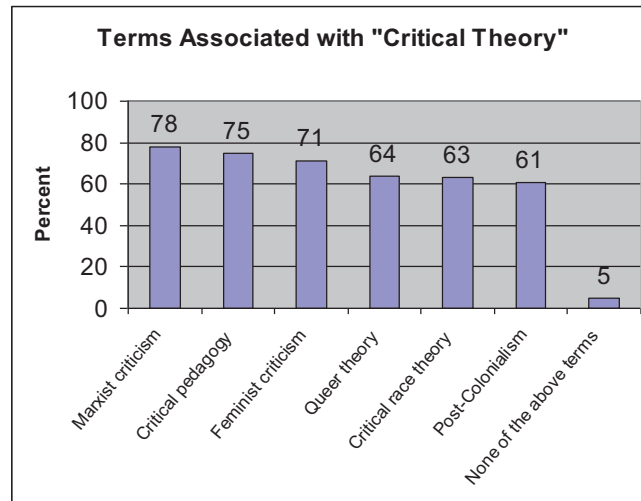


FIGURE 1 Terms associated with "critical theory." (Color figure available online).

606 Questions for Group B: Respondents Not Familiar
607 With Critical Theory

608 Questions B1 through B6 were administered to survey respondents who in-
609 dicated that they were not familiar with critical theory. Of the 365 librarians
610 who responded to the survey, one-third (122) fell into this category. Given
611 that Group B consisted of librarians who were unfamiliar with critical theory,
612 respondents were asked to answer questions that related to the underlying
613 causes of the issues that critical theories and practices address—those be-
614 ing issues of social class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability
615 or disability, and power imbalances among groups in society. The authors
616 hoped that these questions might reveal the extent to which the librarians
617 in Group B might be recognizing and partially addressing the same societal
618 issues as the librarians in Group A, although without the benefit of a critical
619 theoretical perspective.

620 *Question B1: What were your undergraduate and graduate majors in*
621 *college?* The preponderance of respondents to Question B1 had earned
622 non-library-science degrees in the humanities (44 percent) or in the social
623 sciences (42 percent). The sciences were the least represented disciplinary
624 group (14 percent). Still, this made the composition of Group B slightly
625 more skewed toward the sciences and social sciences than Group A. Sim-
626 ilar to Group A, the largest represented non-library-science majors were
627 English/literature (21 percent) and history (12 percent). Only music (9 per-
628 cent), foreign languages (6 percent), and psychology (5 percent) garnered
629 over 5 percent of the remaining responses.

4C/Art

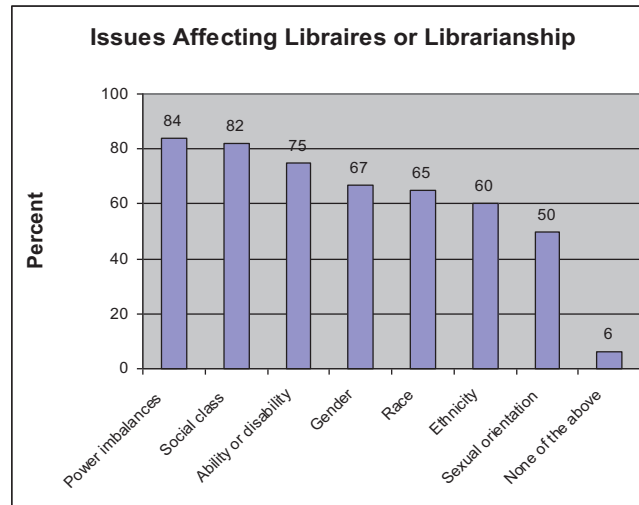


FIGURE 2 Issues affecting libraries or librarianship. (Color figure available online).

630 *Question B2: Some issues in contemporary society relate to social class,*
 631 *race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability or disability, and power im-*
 632 *balances between different groups. The following five questions relate to the*
 633 *intersection of these issues in libraries, librarians, or librarianship. Do you*
 634 *believe that any of the following issues affect libraries or librarianship? Choose*
 635 *as many as apply.* Question B2 generated a total of 496 answers from 101
 636 respondents (see Figure 2). More than 80 percent of the respondents indi-
 637 cated that both issues of social class and power imbalances between groups
 638 in society were affecting libraries or librarianship; more than 70 percent se-
 639 lected issues of ability or disability; more than 60 percent selected issues
 640 of race, ethnicity, and gender; and 50 percent selected sexual orientation.
 641 Only 6 percent responded that none of these issues affected libraries or
 642 librarianship.

643 *Question B3: Can you give a brief example of how one or more of the is-*
 644 *ssues listed above [in Question B2] affect libraries or librarianship?.* Question
 645 B3 generated a total of 93 answers from 58 respondents. Answers given for
 646 this question were coded for one of seven categories— social class, race, eth-
 647 nicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability or disability, and power imbalances.
 648 It is important to note, however, that some respondents provided multiple
 649 answers; each answer was added to its relevant category. Furthermore, more
 650 than one-quarter (27 percent) of the respondents provided holistic answers
 651 to this question, answers that defied classification into any of the categories
 652 just listed. Many comments were general in nature, as exemplified by this
 653 response: “All of these issues affect librarianship as we serve the public.
 654 These folks are all members of the public and therefore need to be consid-
 655 ered in our mission as librarians.” Others respondents reflected on a specific

656 functional area of the library (e.g., reference, instruction, collection develop-
657 ment, etc.), and their answers were focused on meeting patrons' needs in
658 those areas. Interestingly, there were also five comments that related library
659 funding to all of the issues noted.

660 The social class category accounted for 20 percent of the answers to
661 Question B3; access for lower class patrons was indicated as a very important
662 issue, especially access to computers and to the Internet. Lower class patrons
663 were described by respondents as having unique needs, such as job hunting
664 and seeking social services. Patrons from lower classes were also described
665 by respondents as unaware of what the library had to offer, and as lacking
666 in the social capital around library use.

667 The ability/disability category accounted for 13 percent of the answers
668 to Question B3. Most of these responses were related to disabled patron
669 access, and major concerns were expressed regarding technology and com-
670 puter use by disabled patrons. The issue of gender also garnered 13 percent
671 of the responses. Interestingly, the majority of the gender-coded responses
672 were related to library employees rather than library patrons. A chorus of
673 comments echoed one librarian's response: "Librarianship is a pink collar
674 profession; low prestige and salary associated with women, men tend to
675 dominate upper management positions." Issues of ethnicity, race, sexual
676 orientation, and power imbalances in society each received less than 10
677 percent of the responses. Responses in these categories highlighted the role
678 that education—or the lack thereof—plays in library use; the need to build
679 collections appropriate for members of all these groups; the unique barriers
680 in asking for assistance that are perceived by members of these groups; the
681 lack of ethnic librarians and/or librarians of color; and the comparatively
682 high representation of gays and lesbians in the library workforce.

683 *Question B4: Do any of these issues inform your practice as a librarian*
684 *in a substantive way? Choose as many as apply.* The perspective for this
685 question was shifted away from the profession of librarianship in general
686 and focused more on each respondent's particular critical practices. Ques-
687 tion B4 asked respondents to indicate which of the issues from Question
688 B2 informed their practices as librarians in a substantive way. As shown in
689 Table 3, the issues were ranked in much the same order as the answers to
690 Question B2; there were, however, a few notable differences. For instance,
691 101 librarians responded to Question B2 about issues affecting libraries in
692 general, and only 79 responded to Question B4 about how those issues
693 informed personal practices. This difference may be attributed to survey fa-
694 tigue, but it might also indicate that fewer librarians relate these issues to
695 their own work, as opposed to the profession at large. Two other data from
696 this table support this supposition. First, between 50 percent and 84 percent
697 percent of the respondents considered the various issues presented as rel-
698 evant to the profession of librarianship, but only between 29 percent and
699 54 percent regarded them as applicable to their own practice; and second,

TABLE 3 Comparison of Responses to Questions B2 and B4

	Question B2, issues that influence librarianship	Question B4, issues that influence personal practice
Power imbalances between groups in society	84%	54%
Social class	82%	56%
Ability or disability	75%	49%
Gender	67%	42%
Race	65%	39%
Ethnicity	60%	37%
Sexual orientation	50%	29%
None of the above affect libraries or librarianship	6%	25%

700 one-quarter of the respondents replied that none of the above factors in-
 701 formed their practices in a substantial way.

702 *Question B5: Can you give a brief example or two of how one or more of*
 703 *the issues listed above inform your practice as a librarian?.* With Question
 704 B5, the authors continued to explore how social issues play out in librarians'
 705 personal practices; they did this by asking respondents to provide examples.
 706 There were 59 answers given by 52 respondents; their replies were coded
 707 into the categories in Table 4.

708 A comparison of responses to Questions B3 and B5 shows that many
 709 of the categories have similar representation; those categories are holistic,
 710 social class, gender, ability/disability, ethnicity, and power imbalances. Re-
 711 sponses dealt with most functional areas of the library, including collection
 712 development, reference, cataloging, and instruction. Ten percent of these
 713 answers were self-reflective, in that they mentioned how social issues af-
 714 fect librarians rather than patrons—issues of funding, hiring, and promotion.
 715 Regarding this point, one librarian wrote the following:

TABLE 4 How the Issues Inform Librarianship and Personal Practices

	Question B3, issues affect librarianship	Question B5, issues inform personal practice
General/holistic	27%	32%
Social class	20%	19%
Gender	13%	12%
Ability/Disability	13%	10%
Ethnicity	9%	7%
Race	6%	0%
Sexual orientation	5%	0%
Power imbalances	5%	5%
Not at all	1%	15%
Total	100%	100%

716 As an administrator, I try to create a climate where all users are comfort-
717 able and unthreatened. I support programs for staff to build an awareness
718 of how we are often staff-centric instead of user-centric. I try to monitor
719 electronic services so they are accessible to all and easy to use. I try to
720 model behaviors that reach out to others who are unlike me.

721 Both the race and the sexual orientation categories yielded no responses
722 when it came to issues of personal practice. It was also noteworthy that 15
723 percent of the respondents indicated that these social issues did not inform
724 their personal practices at all.

725 *Question B6: If librarians were to get more involved in the issues listed*
726 *above as they affect the profession of librarianship, what are the most im-*
727 *portant actions they can take?* Question B6 generated a total of 98 an-
728 swers from 49 respondents. As with Questions A5–A7, all answers given for
729 this question were placed into one of three categories—functional, holistic,
730 or skeptical—and some respondents provided multiple answers that were
731 placed into separate categories or into separate areas of the same categories.

732 Holistic answers to Question B6 were led by respondents who specu-
733 lated or suggested that librarians might use their social justice concerns to
734 inform broader overall perspectives on students/library users (41 percent),
735 the nature of librarianship (37 percent), and the role of libraries (17 percent).
736 Functional answers given to Question B6 were led by librarians who desired
737 to improve access services (41 percent), instruction (20 percent), collection
738 development (17 percent), and systems (10 percent).

739

DISCUSSION

740 It is useful to begin the discussion with brief demographic overviews of
741 the two study groups. Group A—two-thirds of the respondents—had at least
742 some familiarity with a critical theory. The members of this group represented
743 numerous areas of the library, with more than one-half being public service
744 librarians. The majority of Group A had college majors in the humanities, but
745 there was also a good number of social science and a few science majors
746 as well; the most common majors were English/literature and history. More
747 than two-thirds of Group A learned about critical theory in college, with only
748 14 percent encountering it in a library science course. About one-quarter of
749 Group A learned about critical theory independently, most often through
750 their own personal reading.

751 Approximately one-third of the survey respondents knew nothing about
752 critical theory; they became Group B. This group consisted of slightly more
753 social science and science college majors, and it also included slightly more
754 technical services and systems librarians than Group A. As with Group

755 A, however, Group B's most common majors were English/literature and
756 history.

757 Group A was asked the extent to which critical theory played a role in
758 their professional lives (Question A4), but because Group B members had
759 no knowledge of critical theory the same question could not be asked of
760 them. However, the authors were interested in the extent to which these
761 librarians, who knew nothing of critical theory, might be involved in many
762 of the same social justice issues that critical theory addresses. As noted in the
763 introduction, Cannella (2010) summarizes some of the lines of inquiry that
764 many critical theorists pursue when they ask, "Who or what is heard? Who or
765 what is silenced? Who is privileged? Who is disqualified? How are forms of
766 inclusion and exclusion being created? How are power relations constructed
767 and managed?" (par. 7). These questions of inclusion, privilege, and power
768 in society are often conceptualized in terms of the groups who are excluded,
769 underprivileged, and disempowered, with those groups being seen in terms
770 of social class, disability, gender, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. For
771 this reason, Questions B2 and B4 were framed in terms of these groups, and
772 Group B participants were asked how they view the relationship of these
773 groups to the library and to their professional practices. While the authors
774 do not consider these two questions as being exactly equivalent, so that no
775 point-by-point comparison can be made, the juxtaposition of the answers
776 may be insightful.

777 In answer to question A4, 79 percent of the respondents in Group A
778 indicated that critical theory played some role in their practice as a librarian.
779 To a large extent Group B librarians indicated that issues affecting the so-
780 cial groups just listed play out in the library, with responses to the various
781 social issues being between 50 percent and 84 percent (see Table 3). Group
782 B participants also noted that these issues influenced their own personal
783 practices as librarians to a lesser extent—between 29 percent and 54 percent
784 on the various issues. It is interesting to note that about one-fifth of Group
785 A respondents indicated that critical theory played no role in their practice,
786 even though they knew something of it, and that one-quarter of Group B
787 respondents noted that the social issues described played no role in their
788 practices either.

789 Group B recognized various social issues affecting different groups of
790 their patrons, and these issues seemed to be echoed by Group A. In re-
791 sponse to Question A8, which asked participants to give critical theorists'
792 names, Group A respondents noted Marxists, poststructuralists, and mem-
793 bers of the Frankfurt School who all are concerned with social class and
794 power, but they also included feminist critics, queer theorists, and critical
795 race theorists. Additionally, when participants were asked to identify terms
796 that were associated with critical theory in Question A9, the categories of
797 feminist criticism, queer theory, postcolonialism, and critical race theory all
798 garnered more than a 61 percent response rate. This suggests that both

799 librarians who are knowledgeable about critical theory and those with no
800 knowledge of it might be recognizing and responding to many of the same
801 societal issues, although at different rates and with differing approaches.

802 The authors were particularly interested in comparing the answers given
803 for Questions A7 and B6, as these were the questions in which respondents
804 from the groups were asked to speculate on how either critical theory (Group
805 A) or social justice concerns (Group B) might be applied to the library
806 profession in the future. This comparison yielded some intriguing results:
807 Fifty-five percent of the answers given for Question B6 were holistic in
808 nature, 47 percent were functional, and 3 percent were skeptical. Compared
809 to Question A6, this represents a 33 percent increase in holistic answers, a
810 24 percent decrease in functional answers, and a modest 4 percent dip in
811 skeptical responses. The authors attribute these larger differences to the fact
812 that respondents from Group A, by way of their prior familiarity with critical
813 theory, had more time than those in Group B to synthesize the relative
814 implications in terms of daily, functional practices.

815 Interestingly, when the answers to Question B6 were compared to the
816 answers given to Question A7, there was an increase in the percentages rep-
817 resented in each of these leading functional categories; this was especially
818 notable in the area of access services. The functional areas of professional
819 development and professional research and writing—both of which were
820 well represented in the results for Question A6—received no mentions. For
821 librarians in Group A, advancing critical theory through research and reflec-
822 tion appears to be a priority. For librarians in Group B, social justice actions
823 and applications to the library as a whole appear to matter more.

824

CONCLUSION

825 As this study shows, many librarians are concerned with social justice issues
826 as they relate to the library, and many of them act upon these issues in their
827 professional practices. Some librarians have knowledge of critical theories
828 and others do not. It is heartening that librarians, as a professional group,
829 created and abide by the *Core Values of Librarianship* (ALA 2004) statement,
830 which includes a commitment to social responsibility.

831 The majority of the librarians in this study who have no knowledge of
832 critical theory regard service to historically underserved and underrepre-
833 sented populations as an inherent part of their daily practices. Two-thirds
834 of the study participants had some knowledge of a critical theory, and most
835 of them view strong relationships of critical theory to librarianship and to
836 their own practices. In fact, the richness of the theories and the theoreticians
837 indicated was noteworthy, due in part to the characteristic interdisciplinary
838 backgrounds of librarians. And these librarians indicated that if critical the-
839 ory were to expand further into librarianship, more research, conference

840 presentations, and inclusion of critical theory in LIS curricula would be key
841 elements. Critical theory and its related questions provide strong support and
842 a structural framework for librarians' involvement in social justice issues in
843 relation to professional practices.

844 Since such a small percentage of the librarians surveyed were exposed
845 to a critical theory in an LIS program (only 14 percent of the respondents
846 to Question A2), the authors suggest that more of this subject matter should
847 be included in LIS programs. From at least the early part of the 20th cen-
848 tury, library science has been criticized as lacking in a theoretical
849 foundation. As early as 1934 Periam Danton, in his article titled "Plea for a
850 Philosophy of Librarianship," mused that this lack of philosophical under-
851 pinnings may be a result of our profession being a pragmatic one that only
852 focuses on practical problems, or perhaps a result of librarianship being a
853 relatively new profession (Danton 1934, 532). Recent scholars continue to
854 assert that this lack of a philosophical base questions the very existence of
855 a discipline of library science, or at the very least lessens librarians' effec-
856 tiveness in addressing the current challenges to the profession (Budd 2001;
857 Hjørland 2013, 2). Emily Ford, in her recent article, "What We Do and Why
858 We Do It?" (2012), argued that librarians need to develop a philosophy of
859 librarianship for more pragmatic reasons. Ford quoted Rory Litwan, from his
860 introduction to his translation of Andre Cossette's *Humanism and Libraries:*
861 *An Essay of the Philosophy of Librarianship*, in saying:

862 Sound ideas about what librarianship is and what its goals are permit
863 us to claim a degree of autonomy in institutions where we might other-
864 wise serve as mere functionaries rather than as the professionals we are.
865 Without a philosophical foundation, we lack a basis for making decisions
866 regarding how to change our institutions in response to external forces,
867 with the potential result that we do not play the role that we should in
868 decision-making. (Litwan 2009, x)

Q4

869 The authors of this study suggest the possibility of exploring critical
870 theories as a basis of LIS. As can be seen from the results in this study, many
871 librarians come to LIS programs with some exposure to a critical theory.
872 Many LIS authors cited in this article have begun to explore ways in which
873 critical theories provide the library science with both a useful philosophical
874 basis for the discipline, and a basis for librarians' actions in furthering various
875 causes of social justice. Further research in this area is warranted to address
876 the following questions: What philosophies of librarianship are currently es-
877 poused by LIS programs? To what extent are critical theories included in
878 LIS programs? Which type of critical theory (the Frankfurt School, feminism,
879 queer theory, etc.) is used? In which functional areas of librarianship (instruc-
880 tion, cataloging, technology, etc.) are these theoretical applications found?
881 These and many other questions await exploration.

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1002 APPENDIX—SURVEY QUESTIONS

1003 [Questions for all respondents]

- 1004 1. Which area of the library do you work in? Please choose the one response
 1005 below that most closely matches.
- 1006 a. Technical Services (Acquisitions, cataloging, serials, etc.)
 1007 b. Public Services (reference, instruction, circulation.)
 1008 c. Systems (Computing, Web, etc.)
- 1009 2. To what extent are you familiar with a critical theory? [Choose one]
- 1010 a. I am very familiar with a critical theory. [go to A Questions]
 1011 b. I am somewhat familiar with a critical theory. [go to A Questions]
 1012 c. I have a passing familiarity with a critical theory. [go to A Questions]
 1013 d. I don't know much of anything about any critical theory. [go to B
 1014 Questions]

- 1015 [Group A Questions]
- 1016 3. How did you learn about critical theory? [text box]
- 1017 4. What were your undergraduate and graduate majors in college? [text box]
- 1018 5. To what extent did your library school experience inform your ideas of
1019 critical theory? [choose one]
- 1020 a. Greatly
- 1021 b. To some extent
- 1022 c. A little
- 1023 d. Not at all
- 1024 6. To what extent does critical theory play a role in your professional life
1025 as a librarian? [Choose one]
- 1026 a. A great extent.
- 1027 b. Somewhat
- 1028 c. A little bit
- 1029 d. Not at all
- 1030 7. Give an example or two of how you have applied a critical theory
1031 concept to your practice as a librarian. [text box]
- 1032 8. Hypothetically, what other ways might you consider applying critical
1033 theory concepts to your practice as a librarian? [text box]
- 1034 9. Briefly, what might librarians do that would to further the adoption of
1035 critical theory and the application of critical theory concepts to profes-
1036 sional practice? [text box]
- 1037 10. What keywords or theorists would you associate with critical theory? [text
1038 box]
- 1039 11. Which of the following terms would you associate with critical theory?
1040 Choose all that apply:
- 1041 a. Feminist Criticism
- 1042 b. Critical Race Theory
- 1043 c. Marxist Criticism
- 1044 d. Queer Theory
- 1045 e. Post Colonialism
- 1046 f. Critical pedagogy
- 1047 g. None of the above terms.
- 1048 [Group B Questions]
- 1049 12. What were your undergraduate and graduate majors in college? [text box]
- 1050 Some issues in contemporary society relate to social class, race,
1051 ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability or disability and power im-
1052 balances between different groups in society. The following 5 questions
1053 relate to the intersection of these issues and libraries, librarians, or librar-
1054 ianship.
- 1055 13. Do you believe that any of the following issues affect libraries or librari-
1056 anship? Choose as many as apply:

- 1057 a. social class
1058 b. race
1059 c. ethnicity
1060 d. gender
1061 e. sexual orientation
1062 f. ability or disability
1063 g. power imbalances between groups in society
1064 h. none of the above affect libraries or librarianship
- 1065 14. Can you give a brief example or two of how one or more the issues
1066 listed above affect libraries or librarianship? [text box]
- 1067 15. Do any of these issues inform your practice as a librarian in a substantive
1068 way? Choose as many as apply:
- 1069 a. social class
1070 b. race
1071 c. ethnicity
1072 d. gender
1073 e. sexual orientation
1074 f. ability or disability
1075 g. power imbalances between groups in society.
1076 h. none of the above affect libraries or librarianship
- 1077 16. Can you give a brief example or two of how one or more the issues
1078 listed above inform your practice as a librarian? [text box]
- 1079 17. If librarians were to get more involved in the issues listed above as they
1080 affect the profession of librarianship, what are the most important actions
1081 they can take? [text box]