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Session: Intersectional Cultural Competence / Identifying Racism in Library Practice

Critlib Unconference 2015 Session 2 Attendees

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Intersectional cultural competence / Identifying racism in library practice

Definitions:

Intersectionality: meeting point of cultural backgrounds; coined by Kimberly Crenshaw - each individual has intersection of different experiences and backgrounds. Also the intersections of social-structural hierarchies.

Cultural competency: rather than other-izing the person, understanding them on a deeper level. Also how an institution defines how to be more welcoming

"Standpoint theory is a postmodern method for analyzing inter-subjective discourses. This theory concerns the authority generated by people's knowledge and the power such authority has to shape people's opinions in daily life." - Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Standpoint_theory

Strategies we construct to resist oppression depend on what intersectionalities we might be addressing

Do academic libraries define diversity really narrowly and only focus on one identity at a time?

When we talk about diversity in librarianship, we are trying to do things that are really visible, counting how many [ ] people are in the room, but there are so many things we don't always see, invisible diversity, harder to account for and harder to address

Intersectionality also has to do with political categories and political structures in addition to people's individual experiences. Important to recognize how power plays into intersectionality. Also has to do with recognizing privilege

Examples of how understanding intersectionality has played out in academic library space:
- Operating from professional standpoint (professionalism as privilege, we are the librarians, we are experts) makes it difficult to listen to users
- Diversity committee in the library: organize MLK events, etc., Rape Aggression Defense training only for (cis) women

Making time for it: "it's on the list" ok but let's talk about what action looks like

Does action only happen when there's a threat of a lawsuit?

Language: "women and people of color" excludes women who are a people of color
Can also be about age, class, staff vs. faculty vs. administrators,
Hispanic-serving institution: lots of english-language learners and lots of hispanic students, but those aren't necessarily all the same: having ELL books only for Spanish speakers, what about Farsi speakers, no support for getting something like Mango that has so many different options for english-language learners (side note: Duolingo is recommended over Mango)

This idea that we're always under threat, funding under threat, things have to be prioritized -- but why are our resources being allocated the way they are. Even if the numbers of X students are small, maybe they should still be a priority if they aren't being served

We buy things, we have power! how often when reviewing resources do we say we're not going to buy this because it doesn't, for instance, have universal design, rather than accepting "you're working on it"

Tangent: Ebrary sucks, ebooks not widely accepted on campus, prevent sharing, someone else says their first-years and intl students want ebooks

More resources talk: get students to advocate for resources
Does suppressing ebooks in shared records suppress access
Maybe this conversation is about intersectionality in that moving to a community college that's associated with big university sees that those students now don't have access to U's books now that they can't share the ebooks

In reference interaction, student couldn't find stuff on her topic related to Northern Nigeria because she wouldn't search for the subject term "Africa" - Ebsco indexing by CONTINENT
Searching for "black" and getting "black bears in Canada" the language to describe themselves isn't available. How do we not discourage them in research?
Talk about it: Here's how we can explore hierarchies of power and how we use language in the library world
And get EBSCO to talk about it
search for strippers in Ebso and you get chemical strippers; the preferred term is "Stripteasers"

How does the history of subject headings reflect the era
A librarian called out Ebsco for problematic indexing on Twitter and got a response...don't remember what the indexing term was (Maybe this? Melissa Morrone @InfAgit “Finally submitted a complaint to EBSCO to get them to stop using "Anti-Jewish Boycotts" to describe articles about BDS Boycotts of Israel.”)

In another class, student wrote on board "Asians are good at math" and librarian had him leave the class, but how do we make that a teachable moment (with no time, etc) for him and the other students
How do we prioritize making collections accessible? Ethnic studies collections in the basement, etc

Being the go-to person for the diversity stuff
Allocation of library space and inclusivity: put in a prayer space in library (in response to Muslim students who need a place to pray, didn't feel comfortable in interfaith chapel), but is the library a religion-free zone?
Another library is putting in a $40k foot-washing station, Controversy about spending student money to pay for foot washing
The library IS a place of contemplation, if their prayer space is elsewhere they have to interrupt their studying to go pray
Where is the line between practical concerns and Islamophobia
It's EXCITING they feel comfortable in the library
It's a misnomer that the library is neutral space--if it were, we wouldn't be here. The library is about social justice.

Importance of partnerships