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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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## TABLE OF CONTENTS LISTING

The table of contents for the journal will list your paper exactly as it appears below:

**Librarians' Views on Critical Theories and Critical Practices**

*Robert Schroeder and Christopher V. Hollister*

1 **Librarians' Views on Critical Theories**  
2 **and Critical Practices**

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7 *This study was conducted to investigate levels of familiarity that li-*  
8 *brarians have with critical theory, to determine the extent to which*  
9 *it informs professional practices, and to examine how the social*  
10 *justice issues related to critical theory inform the practices of librari-*  
11 *ans who are unfamiliar with it. A survey found that librarians*  
12 *were versed not only in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School,*  
13 *but also in poststructuralism, feminism, queer theory, critical race*  
14 *theory, and postcolonialism. Many librarians, lacking familiarity*  
15 *with critical theory, were also shown to be concerned with social*  
16 *justice and these issues significantly affect these librarians' pro-*  
17 *fessional practices. Based on these results, the authors propose the*  
18 *plausibility of incorporating more critical theory into library and*  
19 *information science programs.*

20 *KEYWORDS critical theory, critical practice, social justice,*  
21 *professional practice, , critical theorists*

22 INTRODUCTION

23 The term *critical theory* is most closely associated with the Institute for Social  
24 Research, established at the University of Frankfurt am Main in the 1920s.  
25 This institute, which became known as the Frankfurt School, included social  
26 theorists such as Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, Walter  
27 Benjamin, Erich Fromm, and later Jurgen Habermas (Leckie and Buschman  
28 2010, viii). These academics applied Marxist theory to the social problems of  
29 their time, such as “the rise of fascism, mass consumer culture, and the states’

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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 in-  
81 equities 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 His-*  
92 *torical Perspective: A Revisionist Interpretation*, in which he reassessed the  
93 romanticized history of the American public library, exposing its basic au-  
94 thoritarianism and elitism. Later, Wiegand (2000) noted Harris’s contribution  
95 to library history, and advocated for a broader critical approach to the pro-  
96 fession. Harris (1986a; 1986b) followed his aforementioned work with two  
97 articles in which he began to critique librarians’ mostly unarticulated positivist  
98 and pluralistic outlook, and he called for a critical and reflective/empirical  
99 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*  
112 *Approaches to Information Technology in Librarianship: Foundations and*  
113 *Applications*, in which he used critical theory to examine the use of infor-  
114 mation technology in libraries; this influential work was updated and then

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 Qualtrics<sup>1</sup>  
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 LibRef<sup>2</sup> list was selected to target reference librarians, subject selectors, and  
312 liaisons; the Information Literacy Instruction (ILI-L)<sup>3</sup> list was chosen to en-  
313 gage the community of instruction librarians; the Electronic Resources in



<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

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

314 Libraries (ERiL)<sup>4</sup> 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 Autocat<sup>5</sup> list was selected to involve cat-  
317 alogers, acquisitions librarians, and other technical services personnel; and  
318 finally, the Web4Lib<sup>6</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>6</sup> 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, holi-  
408 stic, 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,

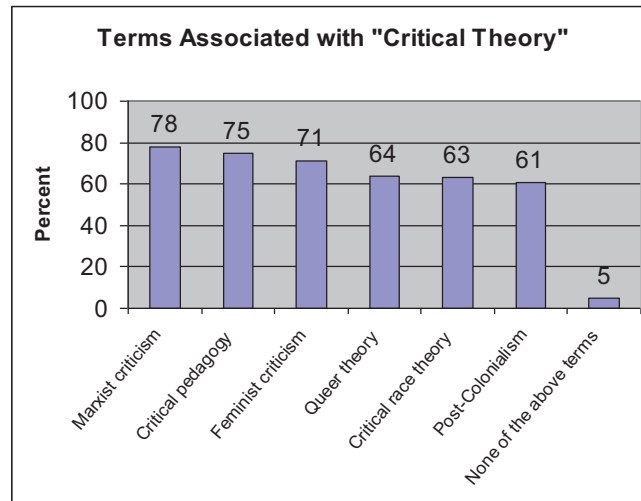
**TABLE 2** Theorists by Discipline/School

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, Lefebvre, 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, Sedgwick
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



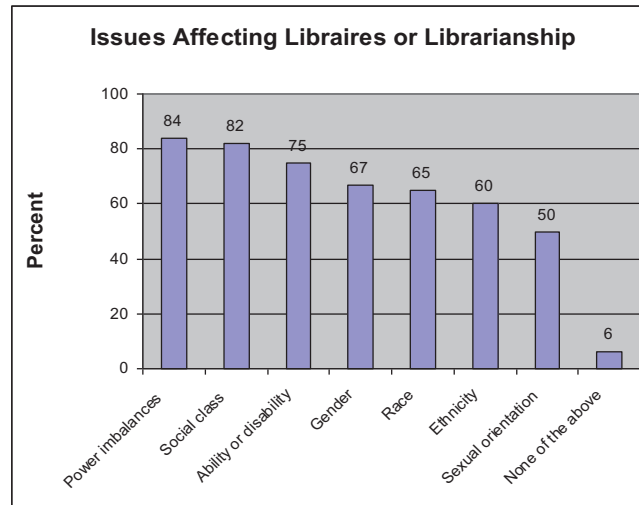
**FIGURE 1** Terms associated with "critical theory." (Color figure available online).

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]