

The Futility of Information Literacy & EDI: Toward What?¹

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This piece examines the parallels between one-shot library instruction and one-off equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) workshops. Library and Information Science/Studies (LIS) as a field problematically frames both information literacy and EDI as add-ons or afterthoughts to the work of library and information workers. This framing tells on itself when the field/profession turns to one-shots, one-off EDI workshops, or other band aid solutions to larger systemic and structural issues. Without actually “solving” anything, these types of neoliberal solutions become part of what enables and extends white supremacy’s hold on LIS (Hudson, 2017; Leung & López-McKnight, 2021). What are we hoping to accomplish with the one-shot? What are we hoping to accomplish toward and with information literacy and EDI? In other words, what’s the point of information literacy and EDI?

In the United States, library and information science/studies (LIS) as a field problematically frames both information literacy and equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)² as add-ons or afterthoughts to the work of library and information workers. This framing tells on itself when the profession turns to library instruction one-shots, one-off EDI webinars or workshops, or other bandage solutions to solve larger systemic and structural issues. Without actually “solving” anything, these types of neoliberal solutions become part of what enables and extends white supremacy’s hold on LIS (Hudson, 2017; Leung & López-McKnight, 2021). The performative nature of one-shots and checklist EDI works to hide what is truly at stake in the larger ongoing battle for the story of this nation-state known as the United States. At the time of this writing, November 2021 (and again in March and April 2022), there are a growing number of challenges to books on race, in addition to the challenges that often occur to books with LGBTQ themes (Noxon, 2021; NPR, 2021). This is after months of racially motivated dog whistles that called for Critical Race Theory to be banned from K–12 education (Demby, Kung, & Donnella, 2021). And of course, that follows the Trump administration attempts to prevent federal funding from being used on trainings on diversity, Critical Race Theory, white privilege, the New York Times 1619 project, and anything that could be construed as “divisive and harmful sex- and race-based ideologies” (Cineas, 2020).

All of these challenges to how the history of the United States is taught and understood by younger generations are at the core of why information literacy and EDI are such prohibitive structures that do not allow time for historical or political context, nuance, or deeper

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understandings of anything, really. When EDI as an office (or officer) is isolated within the institution and its work is segregated from the daily work of the institution within which it is meant to operate, it is nearly impossible to transform said institution. If placed into the format of a training, the work of EDI then becomes the work of individuals, rather than that of the institution, and the point is not to challenge the status quo, but to maintain it. Similarly, when librarians are given a limited amount of time and agency, we are often forced into focusing on the practical skills outlined by whoever invited us into their classroom. We are faced with the very real concerns of wanting the students to “succeed” in their assignments, their classes, their time in academia. But what then is the purpose of the one-shot or the one-off training? How do they get us toward the goal of information literacy or the goal of EDI? What is the purpose of information literacy? What is the purpose of EDI? What are we actually teaching our students to do? Would we even know what to teach instead?

As a child of immigrants and a Chinese American woman³ working at the intersection of academic libraries and social justice education, I find myself able to draw strong parallels between the work of information literacy and that of EDI. As a former academic librarian,⁴ my understanding of information literacy and EDI are specific to my experience of and with those structures as they exist within academic libraries. The way I am defining the one-shot here is a requested library session of any length that is either connected directly to an upcoming class assignment or is meant to be an introduction to the library—services, collections, spaces, and the like. Similarly, one-off EDI workshops or trainings are a single session of any length on a topic within the scope of EDI, usually nonthreatening topics such as implicit bias (to avoid personal responsibility), cultural competence (as though individual education can end structural oppression), white privilege (rather than supremacy and again, a reliance on individual understanding), among others. Some folks would consider my current work falling within the boundaries of EDI and to an extent, it does.⁵

Nicole Pagowsky (2021) writes, “within a curriculum, the one-shot has no memory of where information literacy has been and no vision of where it is going” and that has been my experience of one-shots and one-off diversity trainings, as well. There are many critiques of one-shots; the one that resonated with me was that one-shots are often removed from the context within which information literacy could or might be useful in real-life situations. However, as my own understanding of how white supremacy, racism, settler colonialism, and capitalism, among many other systems of oppression, grew, I realized the critiques of one-shots were not digging deep enough. As I have written elsewhere with Jorge López-McKnight (2020; 2021), these critiques lacked an acknowledgment, let alone a comprehension, of white supremacy’s roots in one-shots, in information literacy, in our field, in academia. What they lacked was not only the recognition that one-shots are a tool of white supremacy, racism, settler colonialism, and capitalism, but that one-shots obscured what information literacy is actually doing.

Education scholars have explored this extensively in their own field. H. Samy Alim and Django Paris (2017) write, “The purpose of state-sanctioned schooling has been to forward the largely assimilationist and often violent White imperial project, with students and families being asked to lose or deny their languages, literacies, cultures, and histories in order to achieve it in schools.” Education and LIS as fields are more than tangentially related, particularly in academic settings. I would argue that the purpose of information literacy and EDI have also been to forward the largely assimilationist and often violent white imperial project (Honma, 2005; de Jesus, 2014; Schlesselman-Tarango, 2016; Chiu, Ettarh, & Ferretti, 2021). Information

literacy and EDI as paradigms serve as containers for the types of liberal values libraries (and universities) espouse—democracy, access, intellectual freedom, diversity, and the like. Those values are specifically coded to whiteness⁶ and are alluded to in the name of what the US nation-state considers freedom. The one-shot and one-off are manifestations of white supremacist settler colonial thinking. They function as a cog in the machinery of the white imperial project, while at the same time, shielding that machinery from view.

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2018), both education scholars, ask a set of questions that serve to open up what wants to be hidden: “what is at work in all of this work? What does this work care about? What animates and compels this work? What does this work believe about itself and others?” These questions create a framework through which we can explore the purpose of information literacy and the purpose of EDI in the context of academic libraries. They help us understand what all of these areas are working toward and how to evaluate what this work is accomplishing. They challenge us to question the assumptions we make about our work in libraries and academia. They ask us whether this is the work we thought we were doing and if we should continue down this path. Critical Race scholar George Lipsitz gave a talk at the 2008 American Library Association conference, where he said, “we have a role to play in deciding what will be remembered and what will be forgotten, who will be included and who will be excluded, who will speak and who is silenced” (9). It can be easy to downplay our role as librarians, as memory workers, if we forget to look outside our day-to-day work, to see the connections between what may seem like small choices but have larger consequences over time. After all, it’s no mistake that most of us learn a highly sanitized history of the United States from our formal education, one that glosses over the horror and trauma of enslaved African peoples and the genocide and erasure of Indigenous peoples. The struggle for what belongs in library collections or in school curriculums is part of this larger struggle of who is allowed to tell the story of the United States, who is allowed to have access to that story, and who is able to control the master narrative that shapes what this nation-state is and will become.

In this article, I will explore how information literacy and EDI operate as tools of settler colonialism and white supremacy and examine the similarities between one-shots and one-offs as particular expressions of those systems. I will move to theories of Indigenous refusal and Black resistance, as well as Indigenous conceptions of relationality, to think toward whether liberation is possible within LIS.

What is at Work in Information Literacy and EDI?

Conceptions of Knowledge

Putting forth specific understandings of information and knowledge—how they are formulated, collected, organized, accessed, and used—is vital to how white supremacy and settler colonialism have justified and maintained themselves as systems of power. White supremacy, in the words of legal scholar Frances Lee Ansley (1989), “is a political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings.” It is an ideology based on political, economic, and cultural constructions of whiteness as human (and therefore, superior), whiteness as objective, and whiteness as the norm. It is the ideology behind slavery and anti-Black racism, which are the bedrock of racial capitalism, racism,⁷ and settler colonialism. Glen Sean Coulthard (2014) defines

settler colonialism as “contexts where the territorial infrastructure of the colonizing society is built on and overwhelms the formerly self-governing but now dispossessed Indigenous nations; indeed, settler colonial polities are predicated on maintaining this dispossession.” In other words, settler colonialism as a system requires the ongoing elimination and erasure of Indigenous peoples of those lands. This allows white settlers to make claims of indigeneity to the land and everyone else then becomes foreign or other (Patrick Wolfe, 2006). Using these definitions, I will explore how white supremacy and settler colonialism are embedded in and upheld by systems of knowledge, information literacy, and the very institutions that gate keep knowledge production and access.

The ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education’s release coincided with my early years as an academic librarian and heavily influenced my understanding of how LIS views the concept. So I use their definition: “Information literacy is the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning” (2015). The coded language of this definition is a reflection of what bell hooks called the imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy we live in (Yancy & hooks, 2015). Information has been constructed and obstructed through the eye of the white settler colonial state, where information must be “produced” and have value like any other form of capital, something to be discovered, owned, and conquered. The ACRL frame “Authority Is Constructed and Contextual” provides a guide of how to think critically about authority with regard to information. However, it does not mention how authority is constructed by systems of power and oppression like white supremacy, racism, and capitalism (Battista et al., 2015) or that authority is dependent on one’s positionality within a society ruled by these same systems. Nor does it challenge why authority is necessary to and for knowledge creation.

In her groundbreaking book, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Linda Tuhwai Smith (Ngati Awa & Ngati Porou), deconstructs the ways in which imperialism is embedded in Western knowledge systems. She summarizes a set of interconnected Western colonialist ideas about history that are directly connected to the ways in which we currently frame information and knowledge in LIS:

1. “The idea that history is a totalizing discourse...
2. The idea that there is a universal history...
3. The idea that history is one large chronology...
4. The idea that history is about development...
5. The idea that history is about a self-actualizing human subject...
6. The idea that the story of history can be told in one coherent narrative...
7. The idea that history as a discipline is innocent...
8. The idea that history is constructed around binary categories...
9. The idea that history is patriarchal” (2012, 31–32).

Western society’s understanding of knowledge is premised on the idea that all knowledge is universal and therefore must be known and shared. This is based on the assumptions that all human societies share the same values and characteristics, that we all agree on the binary categories that some “authority” has decided knowledge falls into (Tuhwai Smith, 2012), that knowledge can only be created by specific types of people who fit standards of whiteness—white, cisgender, male, and able-bodied—and in specific formats—the written word. “History

was the story of people who were regarded as *fully human*" (ibid.). White supremacy, racism, and settler colonialism dictate who is regarded as fully human and, again, it is those who fit the standards of whiteness.

If knowledge and information must fall within the bounds of whiteness, it means that only a master narrative of white settler progress is being told. That has led to what Myrna Morales and Stacie Williams (2021) call epistemic supremacy, which they define as "societal systems, infrastructures, and knowledge pathways that facilitate and uphold the conditions for tyranny and fascism by destroying any system of knowledge (epistemicide) not controlled by the ruling class as a means of facilitating racial monopoly capitalism." Not only does epistemic supremacy erase Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) and other nondominant forms of knowledge, it serves to bar BIPOC from telling their own stories. It opens the door to the stealing of knowledges and culture from Black, Indigenous, People of Color by white people while justifying it through the common cause of science and progress. In more specific instances of white settler colonialism, Indigenous scholars Sandra Littletree, Miranda Belarde-Lewis, and Marisa Elena Duarte remind us that:

"Indigenous peoples are also told that unless their ways of knowing can be codified as a form of property—with private property and the commons being the operational standard of nearly all laws under modern nation-state forms of sovereignty—they cannot be protected by authorized legislative and judicial bodies" (2020, 412–413).

Their point is that Indigenous knowledge has to be interpreted through the structures of settler colonial governance to be "protected" from settler colonial governance. That this might be antithetical to Indigenous belief and knowledge systems is of no consequence to the white settler. Indigenous knowledge only becomes Knowledge when it is represented as such by the white settler. This is an argument Indigenous scholars have had to repeatedly make because their authority has been constructed by others. Sarah Viren (2021) wrote an article about Andrea Smith, a scholar whose false claims of Cherokee ancestry were revealed more than a decade ago, but whose reputation remains intact. Viren discusses "the conviction felt by non-Natives that the land, but also the knowledge, cultural heritage and identities of American Indians belong to the rest of us."

This same conviction shows up in Toni Morrison's concept of the *white gaze* and what Tuck and Yang (2014) call the *settler colonial gaze*. Alim and Paris (2017) discuss how liberatory and expansive pedagogy could be by not teaching to those dominant gazes, that those gazes require a specific way of being that must be understood through and toward whiteness. There's inherently a demand within the white settler colonial gaze that requires that the Other be knowable, explained, made legible to whiteness. Tuck and Yang point to Nelson Maldonado-Torres' work to state that "Knowledge of self/Others became the philosophical justification for the acquisition of bodies and territories, and the rule over them. Thus the right to conquer is intimately connected to the right to know" (2014, 224). Settler colonialism necessitates that knowledge take a particular form to be valid and, therefore, worth preserving.

Not only must knowledge be created and owned by a white, settler patriarchy, but it must take a specific form and provide a particular function. Tuck and Yang write that "Research is just one form of knowing, but in the Western academy, it eclipses all others. In this way, the

relationship of research to other human ways of knowing resembles a colonizing formation, acquiring, claiming, absorbing, consuming” (Tuck & Yang 2014, 237). Knowledge exists in its highest, most “objective” form, as shaped through the academy, when it appears as research. As Tuck and Yang explain, other ways of knowing become taken up by researchers (settlers) to be reformulated into that which follows the rules of research. Thus, the knowledge of Indigenous peoples and racialized peoples become enveloped by the conquering force of colonialism. Tuhwai Smith makes clear that “Research is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realized. It is regulated through the formal rules of individual scholarly disciplines and scientific paradigms, and the institutions that support them (including the state)” (2012, 8). In other words, “research” is being used as a tool of imperialism, colonialism, and other systems of oppression, to codify what is allowed to be knowledge. Research as a particular class of knowledge lends itself to being owned as all things must be in a capitalist society. As Cheryl Harris establishes in her seminal article, “Whiteness as Property” (1993), in order for whiteness to be conceived of as property, or as a series of rights that white people are entitled to, Indigenous peoples and their knowledges must be erased, or in this case, repurposed for ownership by whiteness. Sandy Grande writes, “Within settler societies, the university functions as an apparatus of colonization; one that refracts the ‘eliminative’ practices, modes of governance, and the forms of knowledge production that Wolfe (2006) defines as definitive of settler colonialism” (2018, 48–49). The university, as the main conduit of research, polices knowledge production, organization, and preservation. And as an arm of the university, the library is the chief officer of that system, meant to house and regulate research under the codes of colonial governance.

EDI as Enclosure

There is a rather circular, absurdist, and ironic nature to the existence of EDI. The university was created to purposefully exclude Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and Pacific Islander peoples from higher education. That lack of inclusion and sense of belonging eventually led the university to develop EDI “as an office and an ideology” (Ferguson, 2021) to address the concerns of those BIPOC allowed into the university. However, those of us who have experienced what it means to be a “diverse” person in a predominantly white institution (PWI) know that, as Sara Ahmed writes, “The more the words circulate, the less they seem to do” (2019, 149). Roderick Ferguson (2021) and Rinaldo Walcott (2021) both foreground diversity, which here I will use interchangeably with EDI, as institutional responses to the demands for transformative change from student activists and social movements. Diversity as an office functioned as what Ferguson called “a pressure relief valve within the system to control or limit the pressure put on the system by movements internal and external to the campus” (2021). Diversity as an ideology serves as an institutional containment where “[diversity offices] emerged as part of an agenda to tell us, staff, students, faculty, how to be in the university, how to relate to it, how to see ourselves as part of it” (Ferguson 2021). He is arguing that diversity as both an office and an ideology were created purposefully to prevent social change. It is an enclosure into which go the demands, complaints, and stories of minoritized and marginalized people on campus and where they will remain. As Walcott writes, “we have developed a network of subinstitutions like human rights offices and tribunals, diversity offices and officers, equity offices and officers...as an apparatus invented to do important work and keep whiteness satisfied so that its legitimacy is not under attack” (2019, 399). Diversity or

EDI becomes part of the structure intentionally excluding BIPOC knowledges and the peoples themselves from the university.

Tuck and Yang point to Troy Richardson's analysis of "'inclusion as enclosure" (2011, 332) [as] the encircling of Native education as part of a well-intentioned, multiculturalist agenda. Such gestures...reduce the Indigenous curriculum to a supplement to a standard curriculum" (2014, 235). By including particular preapproved aspects of Native education, the institution indicates which parts of Indigenous culture do not endanger coloniality and through that inclusion can gesture toward what Patrick Wolfe calls inducements, which Sandy Grande defines "as a tool of the affective economy through which the desire for recognition has been cultivated... in the context of Indigenous-state relations" (2018). As Grande points out, the inclusion itself is an inducement by the university (2018). But, at the same time, as Leigh Patel states, "Being omitted from curricula creates a distinct form of harm for students, including white students, as they become more entrenched in the ideology of white supremacy, without being taught the harm that white supremacy has done" (2021, 4). We can see this now in ourselves, as former students, wherein many of us lacked an understanding of libraries' white supremacist assimilationist origins (Honma 2005) and its ongoing, purposeful exclusion of BIPOC from this profession and library spaces.

EDI as a structure of institutional enclosure and inducement is particularly harmful because it creates the illusion that the institution desires transformative change or that the solutions lie within the institution. However, all it ends up doing is replicating structures of white supremacy. Walcott warns us against inclusion, writing that "the extension of benefits not only demobilizes more radical calls for transformation but also simultaneously produces disposable populations in its wake" (2019, 402). In other words, only some of us get to be included and the rest are tossed to the side. But that inclusion is always precarious and contingent; all of us are expendable in the eyes of white supremacy, settler colonialism, and racial capitalism. Walcott goes on to say that we have to question the very idea of value, which is too intertwined with racial capitalism to be used as the foundations of EDI. As he writes, "Falling under the logic of inclusion, but a singular inclusion, we are expected to celebrate individual 'success' as if it is collective" (Walcott 2019, 402). Under the thrall of inducements and individual freedoms, we can easily overlook the struggle for collective liberation. Our individual liberation should not be at the cost of other peoples' liberation.

Expressions of Enclosure: The One-Shot & the One-Off

It is important that we understand the library one-shot session and the one-off EDI workshop as particularly insidious mechanisms through which white supremacy and settler colonialism manifest. They extend the enclosure through their very design. More specifically, their form is dictated by their function. One-shots can give the library, sometimes the librarians, a false sense that information literacy is happening, one one-shot at a time. They are particularly virulent because they appear innocuous, even virtuous (for instance: "we're doing the good work of information literacy!"). And in the case of EDI one-offs, they allow those requesting or attending them a sense of accomplishment, a gesture toward EDI. By including these "extraneous" topics as add-ons, the institution can create more inducements: look, we recognize that we have a problem and now look, we solved the problem with this additional session. "The investment in new can imply old patterns can simply be changed by a change of image. You can change the image but not change the organization.

You can change the image in order not to change the organization” (Ahmed 2019, 150). The university will choose to invest in new words, new images in the form of one-shots and one-offs to prevent change, while at the same time performing motions toward change with those very words and images. Then, when change has clearly not been made, one-shots and one-offs function as distractions and window dressing that can allow us to point to the one-shot or the one-off as the problem rather than the institution itself. Nonaccountability is intentionally built into the system.

How are the one-shot and one-off similarly formulated? By their very nature, each is considered a one-and-done session that must fall within previously dictated time constraints (see table 1). They are framed as external to the work at hand, whether it be coursework or the work of the organization at large. Someone must be invited in and asked to present specific library-related or diversity-related topics that must be practical and applicable to the participants. By keeping EDI and information literacy separate from other institutional work, they do not run the risk of challenging any of the power structures, if they were ever at the risk of doing so. And their isolation allows them to be the silver bullet or sole scapegoat for future demands from minoritized and marginalized groups. The work of EDI and information literacy is further constrained by labor practices (only certain people with specific degrees or work experience are authorized to do this work) and (non)accountability (who is the institution accountable to when nothing changes?).

TABLE 1
Comparison of the One-shot Information Literacy Session and One-off EDI Workshop

One-shot Information Literacy Session	One-off EDI Workshop
Time-limited, one-and-done	Time-limited, one-and-done
Separate and additional topic	Separate and additional topic
Content must be practical/applicable	Content must be practical/applicable
Lack of follow-up/accountability/reflection	Lack of follow-up/accountability/reflection
No sense of continuity or space for relationship-building	No sense of continuity or space for relationship-building

The structure of the one-shot/one-off workshop impacts the type of pedagogy one can bring into the space. It makes it difficult to build lasting relationships, to create knowledge communally, to do the work collectively, and limits the amount of care, trust, or patience we can show students or participants—all elements that are necessary to establishing transformative change. The format ensures we keep to white supremacy’s false ideals of urgency, efficiency, and expedience (Okun, 2021) in the name of capitalism. There is little room for the messiness of historical or social context. There is little time for conflict, different perspectives, or challenges to the status quo. The focus on the practical allows us to ignore the ideology behind our practices (in other words, white supremacy) and our complicity in these systems (Hudson, 2017). The one-shot, as many of you already experience, is usually not nearly enough time to talk about what is at work in information, research, and higher education. Within the profession’s desire for practicality lies “narratives of clarity,” as Hudson (ibid.) describes it, that combined with LIS’s imperative for legible categorization within white colonial bounds leads to an inability to deal with nuance and complexity.

The time-bounded, practical structure of the one-shot gestures toward the practicality of the content as well. The one-shot is often in the service of an assignment from the instructor that asks our students to learn only one way of knowing—research. We are teaching them to find the *right* keywords, using databases owned by big publishers, or conducting a literature review for “indisputable” or “authoritative” peer-reviewed sources, and the like. We are teaching them to think of information as capital instead of questioning why information should be regarded as capital. We are doing the work of capitalism in our desire to be practical, clear, and objective. The research paper itself is teaching to a white, Euro-centric, academic gaze that does not leave room for the type of creativity and critical thinking that encourages students to imagine worlds outside of white supremacy. As Tuck and Yang state, “The academy as an apparatus of settler colonial knowledge already domesticates, denies, and dominates other forms of knowledge. It too refuses. It sets limits, but disguises itself as limitless” (2014, 235). Our teaching within these spaces/systems of white settler colonial knowledge make it difficult to be anything other than complicit in the domestication of other forms of knowledge. The one-shot and the traditional research assignment encourage students to think of disciplines as hard boundaries, that different areas of study cannot cross over into each other, spread, and cross-pollinate. If we are not able to discuss how all of our institutions are connected to larger systems of oppression, then we continue to give students the impression that information and knowledge are objective, innocent, and universal. And even for those of us who have imagined doing things differently and actually managed to do so, there is often no supporting infrastructure or departmental (let alone administrative) support for the type of instruction that would challenge the way “things have always been done.”

In my experience as a participant of one-off EDI workshops or trainings, they often end up operating as a salve to white discomfort. The construct of the workshop itself is problematic, as David James Hudson has written, “liberal anti-racism locates the problem of race squarely within the realm of the (ir)rational individual” (2017, 14). When racism is framed as individualistic rather than systemic or structural, there is a patent misunderstanding that it can be solved through solely educational means or to check off the diversity box (Ahmed, 2012). Although, as Hudson points out, the word “racism” is rarely used, because (again) to do so would be to acknowledge complicity. Like information literacy in a one-shot, EDI topics are often presented without social or historical context because the whole point is to avoid examining how white supremacy and settler colonialism maintain and exert power. Even if a single workshop was able to sufficiently address power dynamics of race, gender, and class, the most it can do is raise awareness. By itself, a one-off EDI workshop is never going to effect change, although again, that is not its purpose.

While in my last role as an instruction librarian, I had a minor revelation that the small changes I tried to make in my pedagogy and the content of my instruction sessions would never be enough against white supremacy. Because I, as an individual, would never be able to change a system on my own and if I could not convince my colleagues or administrators or whoever, then my work felt futile. The reality of this revelation was depressing, but it also helped me to realize that the questions Tuck and Yang asked cannot be answered within the institution, that justice is not possible within the institution. This realization opened the door to Indigenous and Black theories of refusal and resistance that offer up different approaches to dismantling systems of oppression.

Refusing Information Literacy and EDI

“What happens when we refuse what all (presumably) “sensible” people perceive as good things? What does this refusal do to politics, to sense, to reason? When we add Indigenous peoples to this question, the assumptions and the *histories* that structure what is perceived to be “good” (and utilitarian goods themselves) shift and stand in stark relief. The positions assumed by people who refuse “gifts” may seem reasoned, sensible, and in fact deeply correct. Indeed, from this perspective, we see that a good is not a good for everyone” (Simpson, 2014, 1).

Audra Simpson’s theory of refusal comes out of the experiences and practices of the Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke who refuse citizenship in the United States or Canada because they will not give up their knowledge of self and sovereignty (2014). I want to be careful not to conflate what I am arguing for here with the struggles for Indigenous sovereignty because they are in no way the same at all. Tuck and Yang make a point to “caution readers against expropriating Indigenous notions of sovereignty into other contexts, or metaphorizing sovereignty in a way that permits one to forget that the struggles to have sovereignty recognized are very real and very lived” (2014, 243). What I hope to do is draw inspiration from and extend this thinking, action, and ways of being into the realm of LIS, much as Grande does with the university or Tuck and Yang do with social science research. Grande also brings in Black radical thinking, particularly from Robin D.G. Kelley, which I do here, in addition to the work of Rinaldo Walcott.

Kelley writes that Stefano Harney and Fred Moten “argue that the university is dedicated to professionalization, order, scientific efficiency, counterinsurgency, and war—wars on terror, sovereign nations, communism, drugs, and gangs” (2016, 158). If the goal of the neoliberal, corporate university is to churn out rule-abiding citizens ready to slot into a capitalist economy—and not creative or critical thinkers interested in challenging systems of oppression—then we have to understand that the university will not save us (Kelley, 2016; Ferguson, 2021; Walcott, 2021). The epigraph by Simpson opening this section moves me to question our society’s perception of “good things” and what it means to be “sensible.” For many of us, a college degree and all that it brings with it is a good, sensible thing. What we are taught, what we are teaching, is good and sensible. Our profession’s thirst to be good (Ettarh, 2018) is in collusion with our devotion to practicality or being sensible. But we cannot allow the false promise of information literacy and EDI—and that of academia—to distract us from their true intention: to uphold white supremacy and settler colonialism. Instead, what would it mean to refuse information literacy and EDI in the context within which we in libraries and academia have employed them? What would it mean to refuse the library one-shot or the one-off EDI workshop in those contexts? How do we resist their easy allure? What could we redirect our time and energy toward instead?

If we do not question the very idea of value, which Walcott writes, “is always already linked to capital and its racial economy rather than ideas about human work” (2019, 402), then the liberatory futures we thought we were working toward are already compromised. As Fannie Lou Hamer said in a speech at the Founding of the National Women’s Political Caucus in 1971, “Nobody’s free until everybody’s free.” This idea, at the center of which is what Kimberlé Crenshaw now calls intersectionality, is what needs to animate and compel this work—to return to Tuck and Yang’s questions. Collective liberation is what should drive

our work, not values⁸ dictated by an organization that has already shown itself to not care about Black, Indigenous and People of Color. Kelley writes that for Black communities, “The impulse to resist is neither involuntary nor solitary. It is a choice made in community, made possible by community, and informed by memory, tradition, and witness” (2016, 161).

Toward Relationality

I have thought in the past—how come I was never taught this or that in school? Or how did I never read this in my graduate program? However, much of my political and critical awakening has happened and continues to happen outside of formal education and formal understandings of US history, society, and culture. My experiences as a racialized, gendered person led me to look for other understandings of the world that better reflected those experiences and to find other people interested in the type of deep critique Kelley describes in “Black Study, Black Struggle.” In reading Kelley (2016), Grande (2018), and Tuck and Yang (2014), and my own experience of what Tressie McMillan Cottom often says, “The institution cannot love us,” I have come to understand that the institution will not save us. I/We cannot rely on an institution (LIS or the library writ large) to dismantle the very things keeping it upright. Audre Lorde always already knew, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (1984, 112). The answers do not lie with or in the institution.

Instead, I want to turn to what Grande calls “the un-demand, the un-desire to be either *of or in* the university” (2018, 62). That means turning away from the politics of recognition, the desire to fit in and be a part of, to assimilate into whiteness as it is embodied by academia. That does not mean rejecting the space academia and libraries can create, but to refuse the inducements that can often lure one into thinking that we are doing something for the “right” or “good” reasons. “The journey is not about self...it is about the disruption and dismantling of those structures and processes that create hierarchies of individual worth and labor” (Grande, 2018, 60). We will have to continuously question our own motivations for doing this work because it can be easy to be drawn in by the sparkling temptation of awards, promotion, tenure, popularity, branding, or whatever bigger and better carrots are dangled in front of us.

Refusing information literacy, EDI, and their attached inducements within academia opens us up to other ways of being and knowing. In their article, “Centering Relationality: A Conceptual Model to Advance Indigenous Knowledge Organization Practices,” Sandra Littletree (Diné/Eastern Shoshone), Miranda Belarde-Lewis (Zuni/Tlingit), and Marisa Elena Duarte (Pascua Yaqui) generously share Indigenous conceptions of knowledge, which center relationality. They write, “[we] depend on Cree scholar Shawn Wilson’s (2008) conceptualization of relationality, or the acknowledgement that we all exist in relationship to each other, the natural world, ideas, the cosmos, objects, ancestors, and future generations, and furthermore, that we are accountable to those relationships” (2020, 414). If our idea of knowledge centered on relationality, we would be able to be in reciprocity and mutuality with one another, with our students, with the communities excluded from institutions. Grande defines reciprocity as “being answerable to those communities we claim as our own and those we claim to serve. It is about being answerable to each other and our work” and mutuality as “the development of social relations not contingent upon the imperatives of capital—that refuses exploitation at the same time as it radically asserts connection, particularly to land” (2018, 61). It would mean questioning who and what we serve in libraries and who and what we are actually answerable to. It would mean putting care and compassion for one another, for the land,

first, remembering the importance of ancestral connections, and moving toward collective, ever-changing ideas of liberation. It means connecting back to the land you are on, to those you are in community with, and finding those answers together.

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Notes

1. This article builds on a keynote I gave for the Critical Librarianship and Pedagogy Symposium (CLAPS) in 2020, which was heavily influenced by a book I co-edited with Jorge López-McKnight, *Knowledge Justice*. Thank you to the organizers of CLAPS for inviting me and providing me the opportunity to explore this topic and always to the book contributors and Jorge for being in collective knowledge-making with me. The title is a reference to a book, *Toward What Justice? Describing Diverse Dreams of Justice in Education*, edited by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2017) as this article draws much inspiration from the book and its introduction, in particular.

2. EDI is often represented by any number of interchangeable acronyms D&I, DEI, DEIA (A standing for accessibility) or simply by “diversity” or “diversity and inclusion.”

3. This article is written by a racialized cis woman of color, one raised in an imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy and who is still divesting from those hegemonic ideas. While I am fully aware that my primary audience will end up being white, because LIS and academia are primarily white, the audience I write to is other Black, Indigenous, and People of Color library workers thinking and working through what does not feel right to them about one-shots, library instruction, information literacy, libraries, EDI, and academia. I use BIPOC, a term of solidarity among People of Color, while also understanding that it is still a highly contested term among People of Color. I do not use it lightly nor do I use it to conflate the highly complicated and complex relationships among and between different racial groupings. Where it is necessary to be specific, I will do my best to name the group I mean.

4. In this case, my work experience in libraries has mainly been in both public and private predominantly white universities (they granted academic degrees at every level—bachelor, master, and doctorate) with a heavy emphasis on research (not teaching). I acknowledge that there are many other types of academic institutions (community colleges, tribal colleges, Historically Black colleges and universities, etc.) that I do not have experience in and cannot say whether my understanding of one-shots and information literacy would be the same in those institutions.

5. Of course, I would be remiss if I didn’t acknowledge that a third (if not more) of the requests I receive for workshops and trainings fall within this category. I do try to address it directly in my work—that these one-off workshops will do very little toward moving the needle. But I have definitely benefited financially from this framing of the “problem of race,” something I am trying to move away from. However, at the same time, I have had to step away from working in a library to say the things that I thought needed to be said in those trainings because I could not say them at work without retaliation from colleagues, supervisors, and administrators.

6. Ironically, I, as a person of color, have had to become well-versed in whiteness and in understanding what whiteness is, often then have to explain it to white people. First, race is a social construct, which means that it is “shaped in specific historical, social, and political contexts” (HoSang and Molina 2019, 1). Who is considered white has changed repeatedly over time, to the point that sociologists even have a term for it: whitening. It “refers to the way the white race has expanded over time to swallow up those previously considered non-whites, such as people of Irish, Italian, and [non-Black] Jewish heritage” (Kuo 2018). Whiteness, then, is a tool of control or, as Todd Honma has written, “‘Whiteness’ works as an invisible and elusive structure of [power that inflicts harm and violence on those considered not white], one that allows for constant reinvention and rearticulation to protect the interests of a white racial ruling class” (2005). Stewart (2017) neatly encapsulates Cheryl Harris’ concept of whiteness as property: “the very idea of whiteness and the racialization of white people over and against all others is the invention of propertied, Protestant Christian, Western European settlers in the Americas. Whiteness was the means of preserving their wealth and status within an ideologically theocratic capitalist system” (2017).

7. In this instance, I refer to Merriam Webster’s definition: “the systemic oppression of a racial group to the social, economic, and political advantage of another” and “a belief that race is a fundamental determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race.”

8. ALA's core stated values are access, confidentiality and privacy, democracy, diversity, education and life-long learning, intellectual freedom, the public good, preservation, professionalism, service, social responsibility, and sustainability (2006).

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