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The Neoliberal Library

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"There really is no alternative" (Thatcher, 1980).

In 1989, the American Library Association Presidential Committee on Information Literacy, which was created in 1987 with the charge of defining information literacy and developing ways to integrate information literacy into learning environments and educator training, issued its Final Report (American Library Association Presidential Committee, 1989). Although the term "information literacy" had been used by library science scholars in the 1960s and 1970s, it was not formally codified until this moment (Tuominen, Savolainen, & Talja, 2005). This strongly worded report, which argued "Information literacy is a survival skill in the Information Age," thus began the process of institutionalizing information literacy within librarianship and defining it as a core function and mission of the profession. This process continued with the development of the Big Six Skills model of information seeking and use in 1990 and the creation of information literacy programs and standards by educational institutions and professional associations such as the American Association of School Librarians and the Association of College and Research Libraries since the 1990s (Tuominen, et al., 2005).¹ Information literacy has become the predominant way to frame the educational role of libraries and librarians; it has become "common sense" and is often uncritically and unthinkingly used by both library scholars and practitioners. Pawley (2003) articulates this general definition as "the skills to use and locate information in a variety of formats, and the intellectual ability to evaluate such information" (p. 423). There are, of course, exceptions to this; for example, advocates

¹ Hall (2010) notes that the Public Library Association has done very little with information literacy, despite public libraries' investment in providing instruction and training. This essay thus focuses primarily on academic and school librarianship, which have engaged with information literacy to a much greater degree.

of critical information literacy such as Accardi, Drabinski, and Kumbier (2010), Elmborg (2006), Simmons (2005), Jacobs (2008), Doherty (2007), Swanson (2004) and Kapitzke (2003a, 2003b, 2001), and other scholars such as Lloyd (2007, 2009), Tuominen, et al. (2005), and Pawley (2003) both critique this understanding of information literacy and work to revise and reframe it. However, this work tends to be on the fringes of librarianship, rather than at the heart of it.

What is striking about this dominant understanding of information literacy is how little it engages with other disciplines, including critical theory and education, despite the clear connection to those disciplines and the claims of library and information science to interdisciplinarity. Librarianship generally fails to engage with the critical and theoretical traditions of related disciplines in a consistent way; this is particularly strange given librarianship and information literacy's ongoing concern with knowledge and information production and educational practices and systems. This essay will argue that librarianship must employ the interventions of scholars in other disciplines around power and politics in order to understand and critique its framing of information literacy specifically and education more generally. This is crucial, because dominant notions of information literacy reinforce and reproduce neoliberal ideology, which is invested in consolidating wealth and power within the upper class through the dispossession and oppression of non-elites. Neoliberalism is fundamentally anti-democratic and uninterested in social justice; an engagement with critiques of knowledge production and neoliberalism by critical theorists and education scholars is the first step in developing a notion of information literacy that is critically engaged, contextualized, and promotes social justice.

Rethinking Knowledge and Information Production through Critical Theory

In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault (1978) argues that during the nineteenth century, rather than repressing sex and sexuality, Western society

Put into operation an entire machinery for producing true discourses concerning [sex]. Not only did it speak of sex and compel everyone to do so; it also set out to formulate the uniform truth of sex. As if it suspected sex of harboring a fundamental secret. As if it needed this production of truth. As if it was essential that sex be inscribed not only in an economy of pleasure but in an ordered system of knowledge. (p. 69)

The creation of discourses around sex allowed the production of knowledge about sex that could then be known. It allowed the "incorporation of perversions" and a "specification of individuals" (p. 42-43); perversion could be identified and it was no longer a behavior, but rather inherited to an individual. This individual could then be identified and subjugated, as power operates through discourse. In Foucault's theorization, power "is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (p. 93). Discursive formations are the systems through which power operates and through which it is contested or supported; power relations are embodied in the state, the law, and in social hegemonies (p. 92-93). Power works not only by prohibiting certain forms of discourse but also through the production of discourses. In essence, power operates through knowledge production.

Edward Said, in *Orientalism* (1994), uses Foucault's articulation of the nexus of discourse, knowledge, and power to trace the formation of Oriental Studies as a discipline. Orientalism, Said argues, is a discursive formation, the essence of which is the "ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority" (p. 42). It is "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (p. 3) through the production of knowledge about the Orient, but only specific forms of knowledge, for it is also a "set of constraints upon and limitations of thought" (p. 42). Orientalism is not invested in "empirical data" about the Orient, but rather "representing institutionalized Western knowledge of the Orient" (p. 67-69); it is a "closed system, in which objects are what they are because they are what they are, for once, for all time, for ontological reasons that no empirical material can either dislodge or alter" (p. 70). The discourse of Orientalism cannot be removed from relations of power:

"it is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political...power intellectual...power cultural...power moral" (p. 12). Orientalism cannot be separated from the historical and political contexts in which it was produced, but it is also not reducible to those contexts; colonialism did not cause Orientalism, but reinforced it and was reinforced by it. Despite the disappearance of the formal colonialism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Orientalism has continued to pervade contemporary discursive practices, attitudes, and policies.

The implications of these theories for librarianship are numerous, but the most basic is that discursive practices matter, that the ways in which material realities are represented in language have effects beyond the linguistic. Pawley (2003) argues that the term "information literacy" embeds two contradictory ideals – "a promethean vision of citizen empowerment and democracy, and, on the other, a desire to control 'quality' of information" (p. 425) – and that ultimately, this tension can be productive and should be explored. The constructed nature of disciplines, such as Oriental Studies, and discourses, such as psychology, can offer librarianship a framework for developing a more critical version of information literacy. This version of information literacy would highlight the way discursive practices act to regulate the questions that can be asked and the conclusions that can be drawn, as well as emphasize that knowledge production is also historically situated and embedded in power relations. This can help learners recognize their own positionality and the ways in which different epistemologies and knowledges are valued due to power relations. The production of knowledge never occurs outside power relations—whether capital, colonial relations, or social hierarchies such as race, class, gender, and sexuality—and knowledge contributes to the maintenance of these hierarchies.

Moreover, the work of these theorists allows library scholars and practitioners to interrogate their own discipline and discursive formations. Similar to Orientalism, discourse around teaching and learning within

librarianship functions as what Said calls a "closed system." These topics are generally framed in terms of information literacy, which in turn encapsulates and contains these discussions due to its institutionalization and consequent ability to function as a "natural" – and unquestioned – category (Pawley, 2003, p. 445). Despite the obvious linkages between library instruction and research and practice in education, pedagogy, and composition, library practitioners and scholars do not tend to engage with these fields and very few interrogate or challenge the dominant notion of information literacy. Scholars that do, such as Lloyd (2007, 2009), Tuominen et al. (2005), and the critical information literacy movement generally accept the frame of information literacy and focus their efforts on complicating and expanding on the basic premise. Lloyd, for example, describes information literacy as it is currently envisioned as "reduced, over-simplified, and focused turned towards describing information skills" (2009, p. 245), while Tuominen et al. call attention to its almost exclusive focus on "binary logic" (2005, p. 337). This is not necessarily bad; as Pawley (2003) and Tuominen et al. (2005) point out, this rhetorical strategy has allowed librarians to articulate and claim a space in the educational process. However, in the current closed discursive system around library instruction, learning, and literacy, the notion of information literacy has acted to close off critique and render other discursive moves irrelevant, insignificant, and unimportant even prior to their articulation. Concepts in this discursive space only refer back to themselves. For example, the Association of College and Research Libraries' Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, which were recently revised, essentially duplicate ACRL's Information Literacy Standards for Higher Education, despite the stated goal of "address[ing] some of the unique issues presented by visual materials" (Association of College and Research Libraries Visual Literacy Task Force, 2011). This is also true of ACRL's Information Literacy Standards for Anthropology and Sociology Students, as a comparison of Standard One, Performance Indicator 1 across all three sets of standards reveals (Table 1).

Table 1: Comparison of Information Literacy Standards and Performance Indicators

Type of Information Literacy	Standard One	Performance Indicators
Information Literacy (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2000)	The information literate student determines the nature and extent of the information needed.	The information literate student defines and articulates the need for information.
Outcomes		
Confers with instructors and participates in class discussions, peer workgroups, and electronic discussions to identify a research topic, or other information need		
Develops a thesis statement and formulates questions based on the information need		
Explores general information sources to increase familiarity with the topic		
Defines or modifies the information need to achieve a manageable focus		
Identifies key concepts and terms that describe the information need		
Recognizes that existing information can be combined with original thought, experimentation, and/or analysis to produce new information.		
Visual Literacy (ACRL Visual Literacy Task Force, 2011)	The visually literate student determines the nature and extent of the visual materials needed.	The visually literate student defines and articulates the need for an image.
Outcomes		
Defines the purpose of the image within the project (e.g., illustration, evidence, primary source, focus of analysis, critique, commentary)		
Defines the scope (e.g., reach, audience) and environment (e.g., academic environment, open web) of the planned image use		
Articulates criteria that need to be met by the image (e.g., subject, pictorial content, color, resolution, specific item)		
Identifies key concepts and terms that describe the needed image		
Identifies discipline-specific conventions for image use.		
Information Literacy for Anthropology and Sociology Students (ALA/ACRL/ Anthropology and Sociology Section Instruction and Information Literacy Committee Task Force on IL Standards, 2008)	Define and articulate the information need. (Note: this is not described as a "standard" but rather as "What the student needs to do.")	
Outcomes		
Identifies and describes a manageable research topic or other information need appropriate to the scope of research questions in anthropology and sociology, using discipline-specific terminology, methods, and contexts.		
Reads background sources in anthropology and sociology to increase familiarity with the topic. Examples: <i>Encyclopedia of Social Issues</i> ; <i>Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology</i> ; <i>Sage Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods</i> .		
Identifies and lists key concepts, terms, social theories, culture groups, places, and names related to the topic in preparation for searching for information on it. Examples: uses the discipline-focused encyclopedias, <i>Thesaurus of Sociological Indexing Terms</i> , and <i>Outline of Cultural Materials of the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF)</i> . Reevaluates the nature and extent of the information need to clarify, revise, or refine the question after some initial research, reading, interviews, and work with data and/or a population have taken place. (Note: These are not described as "outcomes" but rather as "Key behaviors for success.")		

These do not differ in any substantive way. The Visual Literacy and Anthropology/Sociology Information Literacy standards simply accept and reproduce the original Information Literacy standards. This is not to argue that they necessarily need to differ from the original standards, but rather that there seems to have been no effort to contest or critically examine the original Information Literacy standards in the creation of these documents. These standards were, of course, all produced within the same professional organization, but even newer concepts, such as transliteracy, look remarkably similar in library discourse:

"Transliteracy is the ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media from signing and orality through handwriting, print, TV, radio and film, to digital social networks" ("Beginner's Guide to Transliteracy," 2010); and

"Information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to 'recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information'" (ACRL, 2000).

Transliteracy, in contrast to information literacy, highlights communication modes, but again, both essentially hinge on the individual's capacity to read and write within a specific context or community; the same website even notes:

Because transliteracy has its origins outside of libraries, the original thinkers in no way intended it to challenge nor replace information literacy. Transliteracy began as a descriptive concept, designed to understand how people navigate their way across various media. Transliteracy can help inform and supplement a successful information literacy program. The two concepts are not mutually exclusive and share quite a bit of common ground. ("Beginner's Guide to Transliteracy," 2010)

Information literacy and transliteracy also share quite a bit of common ground with literacy, which Cook-Gumperz describes as "a complex of communicative language practices and historically influenced attitudes to these practices that unite or divide a community" (2006, p. 17). The notion of transliteracy not only essentially reproduces the fundamental ideas of information literacy, with the addition of new and social media to make it particularly relevant to twenty-first century librarians, but duplicates

its disavowal of any commonalities with the ways literacy is understood outside of the closed system of information literacy discourse. These discursive practices around information literacy reproduce themselves and act to constrain alternative discourses that might critique, contest, and challenge their hegemony; they deploy power and define the truth of teaching and learning within librarianship. The production of this discourse has been built around particular power relations and specific motivations – the goal of professional organizations to claim territory – and this discourse works to maintain power relations, rather than question them. This discursive regime is not dehumanizing in the same ways as those described by Foucault and Said, but it is neither innocent nor the only possible discourse, and, as such must be dismantled to create space for alternative and minority views.

The power relations embedded in discursive practices are, like Orientalism, tied to the historical and political contexts in which they are produced and subsequently operate. Scholars of library history have charted the roles played by gender and class in the formation of the public library (Garrison, 2003) and the work of public libraries in promoting the assimilation of immigrants (Pawley, 2010). Librarianship's interest and investment in classifying and ordering knowledge, in ascribing order to the world, too, are an enactment of power that often reproduces contemporary social, economic, and political inequities as Berman (1971) and Olson (2001) have argued. Although information literacy appears in scholarship prior to 1989, it was only formally codified by the American Library Association Presidential Committee on Information Literacy in its Final Report issued that year. The report begins by asserting "No other change in American society has offered greater challenges than the emergence of the Information Age" (ALA Presidential Committee, 1989) and goes on to say:

Out of the super-abundance of available information, people need to be able to obtain specific information to meet a wide range of personal and business needs. These needs are largely driven either by the desire for personal growth and advancement or by the rapidly changing social, political, and economic environments of American society. What is true today is often outdated tomorrow. A good job may be obsolete next year. To promote economic independence and quality of existence, there is

a lifelong need for being informed and up-to-date.

How our country deals with the realities of the Information Age will have enormous impact on our democratic way of life and on our nation's ability to compete internationally. Within America's information society, there also exists the potential of addressing many long-standing social and economic inequities. To reap such benefits, people-as individuals and as a nation-must be information literate." (ALA Presidential Committee, 1989, para. 2)

The report outlines the ways in which information literacy can benefit individuals, business, and citizenship. Access to information can "improve [the] situations" of "minority and at-risk students, illiterate adults, people with English as a second language, and economically disadvantaged people." In terms of business, information is "now our most important, and pervasive resource," while "Information workers now compose more than half the U.S. labor force" (ALA Presidential Committee, 1989). Moreover

there is ample evidence that those who learn how to achieve access to the bath of knowledge that already envelops the world will be the future's aristocrats of achievement, and that they will be far more numerous than any aristocracy in history. (ALA Presidential Committee, 1989)

Perhaps it is somewhat unsurprising then that the report has somewhat less to say about citizenship than it does about individuals and business; it notes that "Any society committed to individual freedom and democratic government must ensure the free flow of information to all its citizens" (ALA Presidential Committee, 1989). The report goes on to call for a "Coalition for Information Literacy," with an advisory committee comprised of "nationally prominent public figures from librarianship, education, business, and government" (ALA Presidential Committee, 1989).

The most striking aspect of this report is how completely and uncritically it embraces neoliberalism, which Harvey (2005) summarizes as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (p. 2). This is signaled in numerous ways. The report's continual invocation of the "Information Age," its contention that employment in information-related fields predomi-

nates and that empowerment lies in information indicate a deep interest in information technologies, which is key to neoliberal discourse, as is the rhetoric of individual freedom that pervades this report (Harvey, 2005, p. 3-4; p. 36-37). The report's investment in neoliberalism truly emerges, however, through its pervasive appeal to the economic sphere. Information literacy is tied to "business needs," "advancement," "the economic environment," "a good job," and "our nation's ability to compete internationally." It can address "economic inequities" and thereby create an "aristocracy of achievement" (ALA Presidential Committee, 1989). The freedom and well-being of individuals and societies is thus repeatedly framed using the vocabulary of economics and business and is thus reduced to a "freedom of the market," in which individual workers must compete by becoming more and more flexible (Harvey, 2005, p. 38, 75-76). The implications of this redefinition of freedom are that "each person is held responsible and accountable for his or her own actions and well-being," as fewer social protections and services are provided by employers and the state (Harvey, 2005, p. 65, 75-76; Saunders, 2010). The core logic of this report, then, is that because individuals can choose to become information literate and because information literacy can resolve social and economic inequities, those inequities are ultimately the fault of those individuals (Saunders, 2010); in contrast, by embracing information literacy, individuals can become "aristocrats." As Harvey (2005) describes it, "(p)ersonal failure is generally attributed to personal failings, and the victim is all too often blamed" (p. 76).

The codification and institutionalization of information literacy occurred during and immediately following Ronald Reagan's presidency and Margaret Thatcher's tenure as Prime Minister, during which the welfare state was dismantled, labor was disempowered, industry and banking were deregulated, inequalities in wealth and power intensified, and deindustrialization sped up, as neoliberalism ideology was embraced and implemented by governments in both the United States and United Kingdom (Harvey, 2005; Saunders, 2010). As May (2002) argues, the notion of the "Information Age" or "Information Society" is a rhetorical strategy used to obscure the actual "new" economy, which is dominated by

low-wage and unstable service work rather than well-paying information work requiring higher education (Stevenson, 2009). The ALA Presidential Committee's Final Report duplicates this move and shifts the blame for social and economic inequities onto the very individuals disempowered by those inequities; if an individual cannot find a well-paying job, it is because she or he has not actively pursued information literacy. The report wholeheartedly rationalizes and supports the adoption of neoliberalism that occurred during the 1980s.

Rethinking Political Economy through Educational Theory

Educational scholars have recently begun to investigate the impact of neoliberalism on education. Hursh (2007) demonstrates the embeddedness of No Child Left Behind and similar educational reforms in neoliberal ideology. Saunders (2010) interrogates higher education and argues that neoliberal ideology "strengthens and extends some of the nefarious purposes of our colleges and universities" through "the infiltration of economic rationality with higher education, which has resulted in the prioritization of revenue generation and efficiency, corporate governance replacing shared and collegial models of decision making, faculty acting like entrepreneurs, and students being treated and identifying themselves as customers" (p. 66). Brancalone and O'Brien (2011) theorize learning outcomes and argue that "learning outcomes, through their bureaucratization and marketisation, imply the adjustment of one's social relations, mode of work/learning and hence, of consciousness, to an economic empirical base" (p. 507); they "constitute an illusory promise, which is set within the very real context of a neoliberal drive towards educational commodification" (p. 514). Learning outcomes, as developed and deployed within a neoliberal context, are not flexible or open, and do not theorize learning as a complex, recursive, and unpredictable system of processes. Instead, learning is presumed to be quantifiable and is justified and valued economically, as leading to greater earnings and thus a high return on investment. Henry Giroux, a prominent theorist of critical pedagogy, explicitly places critical pedagogy linked to an ongoing project of democratization in opposition

to neoliberalism, for it

offers the possibility of resistance to the increasing depoliticization of the citizenry, provides a language to challenge the politics of accommodation that connects education to the logic of privatization, refuses to define the citizen as simply a consuming subject, and actively opposes the view of teaching as market-driven practice and learning as a form of training. (2004, p. 38)

Educators, he argues, must contest “the increasingly dominant view propagated by neoliberal gurus such as Milton Friedman, that profit making is the essence of democracy and accumulating material goods the essence of the good life” by employing this vision of critical pedagogy (2004, p. 39).

As with critical theorizations of knowledge production and discursive practices, the analyses of neoliberalism by educational theorists and scholars are applicable to librarianship in two different registers. Most straightforwardly, this work can offer librarianship a way to complicate current formulations of information literacy by foregrounding information economics; for example, Saunders (2010) explicitly discusses the redefinition of research results, discoveries, and creations “from more or less public goods intended to be shared in order to promote knowledge creation to “intellectual property’ that should be sold on the open market” under neoliberalism (p. 57). This can help learners more fully grasp the contemporary information ecosystem, appreciate the results of the commodification of information and knowledge, and apply those insights to their own research practices. More specifically and in line with recent trends within librarianship, this work can also help librarians and learners articulate the goals of the Open Access movement. The perspective gained from applying the critiques of educational scholars and theorists to discursive practices around information literacy within librarianship, however, is significant and troubling.

In 1998, the American Library Association issued “A Progress Report on Information Literacy,” which tracked progress on the recommendations made in the 1989 Final Report. The Progress Report also included several new recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Forum members should encourage and champion the growing support of accrediting agencies...Recommendation 2: Teacher education and performance expectations need to include information literacy skills...Recommendation 3: Librarian education and performance expectations need to include information literacy...Recommendation 4: Forum members need to identify ways to illustrate to business leaders the benefits of fostering an information literate workforce. (American Library Association, 1998)

What is revealed in the Progress Report is an intensification and expansion of neoliberal ideology. The focus on accreditation and performance expectations and therefore accountability in the first three recommendations exemplify the neoliberal commodification of education: these concepts “stand for educational product” (Brancaleone & O’Brien, 2011, p. 513). In framing education as a standardized and measurable product, “the question of *who* gets access to educational opportunities” is obscured; that is, economic, political, and social inequities are erased and notions of power and social justice are ignored (Brancaleone & O’Brien, 2011, p. 512). Recommendation four, in a different move, redefines learning in neoliberal terms as mere “job training” (Giroux, 2004, p. 45) and individuals become “a mere factor of production,” who are flexible and easily exploitable due to power inequities, and ultimately disposable (Harvey, 2005, p. 167-169). This formulation of workers goes unchallenged in an *American Librarians* article about information literacy published that same year: “[T]he average 21st-century worker may need the skills to cope with as many as seven major employment changes in his or her lifetime” (quoted in Pawley, 2003, p. 422).

The neoliberal turn within information literacy discourse is apparent in numerous documents and publications. The ACRL Information Literacy Standards (2000) and the American Association of School Librarians’ Standards for the 21st-Century Learner (2007), with their reliance on measurable learning outcomes, embody the commodification of education and the obscuring of inequities (Brancaleone & O’Brien, 2011). These standards also rely on what Saunders (2010) refers to as the “homo oeconomicus,” the individual who consumes, is rational and autonomous, and who “no longer [needs] to rely on a larger society or to work together to attend to their

common issues, problems, and needs nor do they belong to any particular class" (p. 4748). This is particularly obvious in the Information Literacy Standards, which take as their subject "the information literate student," who exists outside of social, political, and economic contexts (ACRL, 2000). The lack of context in both sets of standards, as well as in practitioner guidelines such as the CRAAP test ("Evaluating Information," 2010), and the perceived neutrality of information embody Saunders's (2010) description of faculty teaching in the neoliberal university. Faculty (and according to these standards, librarians) "now should be neutral disseminators of ideological content" and the classroom should be a "space of sterile learning" (p. 61). The appeal to "authoritative" sources of information in the ACRL Standards and CRAAP test – usually defined as that produced by for-profit publishers and thus only available through library subscriptions and purchases – reinforces the notion that students are consumers and that information and learning are commodities (Saunders, 2010). Finally, the ACRL Standards only gesture towards the connection between information literacy and employment that is made explicit in the ALA's Final Report (1989) and Progress Report (1998), but the AASL Standards do note that "Technology skills are crucial for future employment needs" (American Association of School Librarians, 2007). As Giroux (2004) and Saunders (2010) point out, education under neoliberalism is primarily job training for disposable workers. The invocation of technology in the AASL Standards is also part of neoliberal discourse, which holds that there is a technological fix for each and every problem" (Harvey, 2005, p. 68). As Stevenson (2009) notes, the focus on technological fixes closes off alternate explanations, such as longstanding social and economic inequities exacerbated by neoliberal policies, and renders market forces as the sole solutions to those problems.

The institutionalization of neoliberal ideology within librarianship is even more evident in the work of Megan Oakleaf, whose most recent project was *The Value of Academic Librarians: A Comprehensive Research Review and Report* (2010). It begins:

Government officials see higher education as a national resource. Employers view higher education institutions as producers of a commod-

ity—student learning. Top academic faculty expect higher education institutions to support and promote cutting-edge research. Parents and students expect higher education to enhance students' collegiate experience, as well as propel their career placement and earning potential. Not only do stakeholders count on higher education institutions to achieve these goals, they also require them to demonstrate evidence that they have achieved them. The same is true for academic libraries; they too can provide evidence of their value. Community college, college, and university librarians no longer can rely on their stakeholders' belief in their importance. Rather, they must demonstrate their value. (p. 4)

The logic of the market pervades this paragraph, from education as a commodity, to students and parents as customers, to the importance of measurable evidence and economic value. The report goes on to list recommendations, such as:

- "Record and increase library impact on student enrollment"
- "Link libraries to improved student retention and graduation rates"
- "Enhance library contribution to student job success"
- "Track library influences on increased student achievement"
- "Demonstrate and develop library impact on student learning"
- "Document and augment library advancement of student experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of quality" (Oakleaf, 2010)

Each of these recommendations requires the development of measurable outcomes, the creation of assessment tools, and the gathering of quantitative and qualitative data in order to establish "value," which Oakleaf defines primarily in economic terms: "Value can be defined in a variety of ways and viewed from numerous perspectives...including use, return-on-investment, commodity production, impact, and alternative comparison" (2010, p. 19). The view of library instruction in Oakleaf's work is embedded in a "view of teaching as market-driven practice and learning as a form of training" and completely antithetical to Giroux's articulation of critical pedagogy (2004, p. 38) and yet Oakleaf's work is heavily lauded and embraced by library scholars and practitioners. *The Value of Academic Librarians* was commissioned by ACRL and in 2011, Oakleaf received the Lene F. Rockman Instruction Publication of the Year Award. She is frequently invited to speak at library conferences, has received numerous grants, and has been hired by eleven university libraries as

consultant (Oakleaf, 2012a; Oakleaf, 2012b). For many librarians and librarians, it might make strategic sense to adopt Oakleaf's approach to defining and measuring value, as external administrators pressure them to demonstrate the work they perform, in an era of austerity. However, this sort of strategic use of Oakleaf's work does not require that librarians and librarians accept its underlying neoliberal ideology as true and the only valid way to describe and justify the work of academic libraries and librarians. There is no sense that Oakleaf is maintaining any sort of critical distance in her work on the value of libraries, and this lack is repeated in the reuse of her work within librarianship more broadly; the closed, discursive system undoubtedly promotes the uncritical adoption of ideas that seem authoritative and obvious.

Steven Bell, like Oakleaf, is also widely regarded as a leader within librarianship, although he identifies more as a practitioner and less as a scholar. He is a regular columnist for *Library Journal*, publishes a popular blog, "The Kept-Up Academic Librarian," and is currently the vice president/president-elect of ACRL. And as with Oakleaf, neoliberal ideology is at the heart of much of his work. One of his columns, for example, focuses on business practices and publications:

As an ex-business librarian, I developed a great appreciation for business, but there's more to it than that. I want to continuously improve as a "leadager," a leader who also manages. Keeping up with the world of business is a real boon—a constant source of inspiration and ideation. If you think there's no place for business in libraries, think again. Does your library provide chat reference? Guess where that service originated—business call centers. Do you offer self-check technology? That idea evolved from the ATM.

Paying more attention to business isn't selling out. It's about discovering new possibilities to improve the library experience. (Bell, 2011)

Bell not only uncritically ventriloquates business rhetoric but elides the differences between the purposes of chat reference and business call centers, between checking out materials and using an ATM, between farmers and customers. However, the economic realm is not just a source of meaningless words for Bell — what he is most interested and invested

in is promoting a vision of higher education as completely subject to neoliberalism. In a column on what he refers to as the "unbundling" of higher education, Bell (2012c) writes approvingly of "start-up firms that see an industry ripe for disruption" and seek to monetize it by offering free or low-cost educational content in response to an "affordability crisis." In another column, he celebrates the increasing popularity of certificates by misreading a study and claiming that "compared to those enrolled in regular degree programs, certificate holders are the ones actually getting jobs" (Bell, 2012b). It is not just the possibility that certificates might improve employment prospects that make them so attractive to Bell; it is also that education for any other reason is not actually important:

We can certainly debate the merits of having our citizens obtain a well-rounded, liberal arts grounded education that prepares them well to be smart, engaged citizens. The supporters of alternate forms of higher education might agree, but would argue that it's just too darn expensive for most of those good-citizens-to-be. (Bell, 2012b)

Bell's contempt for education that is not completely subject to market imperatives is even more obvious in another column, purportedly about library service:

If you want to rile up faculty and academic librarians, just refer to higher education as a business. It can be incredibly off putting to many higher education personnel to suggest their work is in any way connected to profit making or any form of consumer-oriented exploitation that comes along with commerce. A new report is recommending that higher education might achieve transformative improvements by finally admitting the need to focus on functioning like any other business by shifting to a more customer-oriented operation...

The other thing you can do to agitate your colleagues is to consistently refer to students as customers. They dislike this because it suggests we are salespeople who now operate under the principle that the customer is always right. It also cheapens the noble causes and lofty values of the delivery of higher education. Customer service representatives and enlightenment don't mix. What if that thinking is plain wrong?...

I can already hear the negative reactions. "Looks like another business fad is being sold to us as the way to save higher education." "Let's see how quickly the administrators can lose interest in this waste of time."

Unlike the naysayers, this report strongly resonates with me because I've been arguing for years that academic librarians need to pay closer attention to the library experience received by every community member. (Bell, 2012a)

Bell summarily dismisses any sort of education that attempts to function outside of the market system as a hodgepodge of "noble causes" and "lofty values" that are outdated and irrelevant. Instead, higher education must act like a business – not because institutions are under pressure due to a decrease in public funding – but because, in a particularly insidious move by Bell, this will somehow, in an unspecified way, help students. What Bell envisions for higher education, then, is an educational product of uncertain quality, produced by a de-professionalized and low-wage workforce of adjunct professors (and librarians) employed by wealthy for-profit institutions, most likely delivered online to customer-students, who consume it in order to compete for similar sorts of low-wage service positions in the neoliberal economy. These customer-students do not attempt to critically engage with already existing knowledge, nor do they create new knowledge; they learn to earn, and take on debt to do so, due to the systematic defunding of education under neoliberal policies (Harvey, 2005, p. 76). This is the "disruptive and transformative change" that Bell is so eagerly anticipating and that those "naysayers" are so strongly resisting and challenging. Bell repeatedly casts himself as the voice in the wilderness, but his ideas dominate discourse within librarianship. The neoliberal subtext of his work is often cloaked by his emphasis on serving users, often through instruction. The "unbundling" of courses and degrees, the growth in vocational certificates, and the application of business goals and practices are portrayed by Bell as fundamentally positive, as they obviously empower users by offering them both a wider range of choices and the freedom to choose. These ideas of better service, increased access, more choices, and greater freedom are powerful, and strongly resonate with the core values of librarianship (ALA, 2004), and it is undoubtedly due to this resonance that they have become a key part of the dominant discourse within librarianship. But as Harvey (2005), drawing on the work of Karl Polanyi, points out, within a neoliberal framework,

The idea of freedom 'thus degenerates into a mere advocacy of free enterprise,' which means 'the fullness of freedom for those whose income, leisure and security need no enhancing, and a mere pittance of liberty for the people, who may in vain attempt to make use of their democratic rights to gain shelter from the power of the owners of property' [...] The good freedoms are lost, the bad ones take over. (p. 37)

Notions of choice and freedom have become tied to "differentiated consumerism and individual libertarianism," and, as such, are guaranteed only in the marketplace and are disconnected from any sort of social justice (Harvey, 2005, p. 42, 65). Harvey (2005, p. 69) also argues that neoliberal states are generally hostile towards and have consistently acted to limit democratic governance, despite their constant invocation of ideas like freedom that would seem to be bound up with the idea of democracy, particularly in an American context. The ALA, in its articulation of the core values of librarianship, carefully unpacks ideas of democracy, freedom, service, and social responsibility and subverts neoliberal ideology by framing these values as "public goods" and as existing outside of the market system (ALA, 2004). However, dominant discourse within librarianship, as well as in broader society, tends to elide distinctions between different varieties of freedom and so consumer choice becomes synonymous with democratic choice, and freedom in the market becomes democracy. It is in this context that the work of Bell and Oakleaf have become so persuasive to so many library scholars and practitioners, who fail to realize the implications of neoliberal ideology, and who fail to realize that the futures envisioned by dominant discourses within librarianship are not the only futures available. A re-envisioned or perhaps even a critical information literacy could begin to work towards this sort of parsing and contestation of ideology, but it cannot do this work in its current formulation, which ignores power and context. Neoliberal discourse is at the center of the closed system of library discursive practices, including those around information literacy and by and large, it remains unchallenged. Neoliberalism, as Harvey (2005) argues, is fundamentally anti-democratic and actively works against social justice; it consolidates wealth and power among a few and works to disempower the great majority of people, particularly those who are already oppressed due to hierarchies of race, class, gender,

nationality, and sexuality, and information literacy discourse uncritically participates in this.

Innocence and Alternatives

As Henry Giroux (2004) contends, "pedagogy is never innocent," and information literacy, from its emergence to its recent formulation, has and continues to uncritically adopt and reproduce neoliberalism within a closed discursive system that works to deny alternative conceptions of library pedagogy and instruction (p. 38). The knowledge produced by librarianship and information literacy discursive practices is an enactment of power that naturalizes and authorizes neoliberalism and constrains the questioning of inequalities. The dominance of neoliberal discourse within librarianship results in a movement away from social justice, as neoliberalism is characterized by the dismantling of social services and programs, the degradation of the environment, the creation of the disposable worker, greater income inequality, the consolidation of economic and political power among elites, and the subversion of democracy, accomplished through "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey, 2005, p. 199). To Giroux (2004), "critical pedagogy at its best attempt to provoke students to liberate, resist, and cultivate a range of capacities that enable them to move beyond the world they already know without insisting on a fixed set of meanings" (p. 39). Information literacy, if theorized differently, could work to challenge neoliberal discourse rather than eagerly adopting it; it could truly become a form of critical pedagogy and subject neoliberalism to critical analysis and thereby work to derive alternatives (Harvey, 2005, p. 198). This would entail an almost complete rethinking of the concept, as it is crucial at this historical moment, as education continues to be shaped to fit market imperatives, as librarianship struggles to define its role in late capitalism, as librarians and scholars become disposable workers in a market forces. Library instruction and pedagogy specifically and librarianship more generally needs to begin promoting an awareness of the field's embeddedness within a neoliberal political and economic context, and engaging critically with that context in order to open up a discursive

space in which alternatives to neoliberalism can be conceptualized and implemented. For there are alternatives, even following three decades of the neoliberal policies and practices that began with Thatcher and Reagan.

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