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**Working Title**: Student Trauma Experiences, Library Instruction, and Existence Under the 45th

**Structured Abstract**

**Purpose**

By historicizing the broader system of education contextualized under the 45th presidential administration, this paper aims to provide a nuanced discussion regarding the condition of information literacy and librarianship as capitalist institutions in service to the state. In response, tools to oppose systemic racism and minimize harm in the classroom as well as recommendations for change and resistance are addressed.

**Design/methodology/approach**

The paper focuses on historical analysis of libraries as institutions within larger educational systems and draws heavily on critical theories as a method of critique.

**Findings**

This paper demonstrates that the 45th presidential administration is a logical progression of neoliberalism and institutionalized discrimination, which has had adverse effects on the health and safety of (primarily marginalized) students, library workers, and library practice, but that critical reflection and information seeking on part of librarians may provide solutions.

**Practical implications**

This paper can be used as a guide for librarians seeking to contextualize the educational environment and apply a critical praxis to information literacy programs.

**Social implications**

The reflection presented in this paper can aid in expanding awareness in LIS surrounding issues of equity and justice, and impart urgency and need for institutional change.

**Originality/value**

Given the lack of diversity in Library and Information Science, this paper provides critical interventions for information literacy practice. The authors’ unique practical and theoretical
backgrounds allow for nuanced discussion and pedagogical creation which directly impacts and addresses key issues of justice and equity in the classroom.

**Keywords:** Libraries, Social Justice, Pedagogy, Critical Theory, Equity, Neoliberalism, Information Literacy, diversity, inclusion, trauma-informed pedagogies

**Article Classification:** Conceptual Paper
Introduction

In November 2016, Donald J. Trump was elected as the 45th president of the United States. While reactions to the election results were polarized and diverse, opponents to his candidacy exhibited widespread shock and interpreted the results as unprecedented and even undemocratic. For many, his election seemed to reaffirm white, heterosexual, Christian, male privilege, while simultaneously shattering the illusion of living in a progressive post-racial society following the presidency of Barack Obama. Suddenly, the election of the 45th president was met with reports of declining mental health coined by clinical psychologists as “Trump anxiety disorder” (Keller, 2019; Kwong, 2018). More concerning, but not surprising, a growing body of research now shows a strong correlation between the event and aftermath of the 2016 election and declining mental health and safety of (especially marginalized) student populations (Hagan et al., 2018; Mette and Bertolini, 2018; Umaña-Taylor, 2016).

A growing body of literature focuses on the detrimental effects of the election and the administration's subsequent policy decisions on mental health, however, it's equally important to critically examine the underlying and systemic causes for the event. Doing so will aid us in understanding why and how we arrived at this culturally situated moment in order to determine the path forward. Examining public response (especially media) to the election offers deep insight into the socio-historical context that led to the 2016 election, but also offers an alternative view of the election results. Rather than understanding the 2016 election as a back-slide or failure of democracy, we might consider instead that the results point toward a logical success under a system of government founded upon racism and colonialism (Feagin and Ducey, 2019), and that the shock as communicated through media represents a continued obliviousness by privileged white liberals to systematic injustice and white supremacy, as obscured by shallow diversity rhetoric, including in higher education.
This alternative perspective is important to our understanding of the effects of the 45th president not as anomalous, but rather a logical progression of a system that has been and continues to be deeply and structurally racist. Furthermore, it illustrates that it’s not enough to continue on a path of shallow resistance through domesticated and institutionalized diversity rhetoric. Instead, to address the symptoms of the 2016 election and the impact on the mental health of students, we must directly attack the root cause and call “for the dismantling of the colonial institutions and power relations through which race is (re)produced,” especially with LIS information literacy practice (Rosa and Bonilla, 2017, p. 202).

Because this article discusses trauma informed pedagogies and critical interventions within libraries and library instruction, the authors believe that this work cannot be accomplished without first interrogating systemic injustices and the school’s role in traumatizing students. To do this, library workers must first and foremost perform the intellectual labor of theorizing on injustice and trauma to understand the deeper meaning, impact, and origin. “Once we expand our understanding of trauma...we can see how unexamined—or even well-intentioned—policies [and practices] can do real harm to students struggling with the trauma of managing systemic injustices.” (Gaffney, 2019)

**Global Context- Social, Political, Economic**

To begin, we must situate the academy as a whole within the appropriate global context under which college administrators function to develop policies and practices which in turn impact student health and success. As a cited source of anxiety, depression, and declining mental health, we will begin with impacts of the most recent presidential election on well-being of university students (Hagan et al., 2018).
The 2016 election exists against the backdrop of worsening economic inequality, intensified political partisanship, rapidly changing ethno-racial demography, global trends towards nationalist populism, and other neoliberal economic and political projects that have been “taking shape since the early 1970s and has accelerated with the end of the Cold War and the development of digital communication technologies” (Gusterson, 2017, p. 210). For the purposes of this paper, neoliberalism is defined as an economic and political philosophy that values privatization of public services, deregulation of industry, and reduced government spending. Within this context, libraries are affected in a variety of ways. As public institutions under neoliberalism, library funding is routinely threatened and libraries are forced to provide “measurable data” and demonstrate worth or risk loss of funding. Libraries are also pushed to innovate or support entrepreneurialism and to do so through competition for limited funding and competitive ranking (suspiciously similar to market capitalism).

The Trump presidency is a symptom of decades of unexamined neoliberal capitalist control, or in other words, a form of global capitalism that emphasizes privatization of wealth over public or common good. “In short, neo-liberalism subordinates all control of our civic spaces, from local governments to universities, to the interests of market-driven models of efficiencies and profit-taking under the false nostrums of the markets’ inherent ability to sort through any problem no matter how thorny and thereby provide a privatized (e.g. profitable) way to a better world or outcome” (McDonald, 2017).

We see evidence of neoliberalism through hyper-financialization (rapid and unchecked increase of market size and influence) of the economy, corporatization of educational systems, dramatic increases in globalization and exploitation of labor in the global south, forced austerity measures, loosening of food and drug regulations, increases in economic/climate migrants and refugees, and ever-deepening social and economic inequality (Harvey, 2011). In turn, these
incursions into the social, political, and economic realm engender a discourse and language preoccupied with commercialism and profit where “individual and social agency are defined largely through market-driven notions of individualism, competition, and consumption” (Giroux, 2002, p. 426) and individuals (or in this case students) commodified and reduced to a “brand”.

Based on this reality, there is no single or simple narrative that can adequately explain or offer interventions for the Trump presidency. Rather, the global context in which it occurred is a complex and complicated amalgamation of political, social, and cultural events and ideologies spanning decades. Framing these issues within librarianship, the most important takeaway is that these events, policies, and social shifts that set the stage for the 2016 election predominantly affected, and often intentionally targeted groups of particular race, class, gender, ability, and ethnicity (Hall and Lamont, 2013).

Institutional Context - Higher Education

As a pervasive and institutionalized ideology, global neoliberalism has similarly infected the (particularly Western) educational system in complex and profound ways (Giroux, 2002; McDonald, 2017; Saunders, 2010). To define and justify their existence under discourses of “new public management” during the 1980s and 1990s, educational institutions (and libraries by association) began stressing performance measures and metrics as valuation and proof of teaching effectiveness (Olssen and Peters, 2005). Simultaneously, private interests begin colonizing the public institution of education under what scholars refer to as corporatization, under which information becomes commodified (Lawson et al., 2015). This new corporate culture status quo of academia is an “ensemble of ideological and institutional forces that functions politically and pedagogically both to govern organizational life through senior managerial control and to fashion compliant workers, depoliticized consumers, and passive citizens” (Giroux, 2002, p. 429). Similarly, libraries also often tend towards embracing corporate
jargon and practice as a function of existing as an appendage of academia. Therefore, as LIS practitioners it’s important to reflect upon how uncritical adoption of language, policy, and practice—including assessment and standard information literacy lecture models—not only reproduces systemic injustices that actively harm and discriminate against students, but also validates the underlying ideologies of white supremacy.

Like neoliberal ideology contemporarily, higher education has historically been influenced by enlightenment ideologies of the 1700s. Enlightenment ideology—which champions humanism and virtues of reason, rationality, empiricism, and positivism—emphasized democratic transformation of a society through individual liberty and education. While on the surface enlightenment ideologies seem to provide a positive foundation for libraries as “democratic” institutions for public good, such rational scientific thinking has also created problematic paradigms which LIS. Borrowing from enlightenment interpretations of texts from the Han Dynasty, since the 18th century educational institutions have embraced the practice of meritocracy. In the United States, this system was proposed by Thomas Jefferson and John Adams under what they referred to as a “natural aristocracy,” eventually morphing into a system of “institutional merit” which is “concerned not with questions of character but with the acquisition of specialized knowledge — the knowledge that could be taught in schools, tested in written examinations, and certified by expert-staffed credentialing bodies” (McClay, 2017 para. 6). Meritocracy can manifest through standardized testing, gatekeeping entrance into professions by requiring an expensive degree when on the job training would suffice, scandals involving celebrities buying their children’s entry into college, legacy admissions, and more.

Combined with the current neoliberal reality as marked by economic inequality and hyperconsumerism (i.e. significant pressure to perpetually consume superfluous goods), rampant meritocracy has transformed higher education into academic capitalism, under which
education is corporatized and knowledge is commodified and treated as venture capital (Saunders, 2011, 2015). This in turn results in treating and viewing students as customers, rather than learners. The consequences of meritocracy as applied to librarianship are serious and far reaching and impact everything from the demographic composition of the library profession (Chang, 2013), to prescriptive information literacy (Hicks and Lloyd, 2016; Swanson, 2004), to basic policies and front desk services (Berman, 2001; Sung and Tolppanen, 2013). Meritocracy overwhelmingly favors those possessing power and privilege and naturalizes rhetoric of exceptionalism and individualism, and therefore, upholds and reaffirms white supremacy (Smith, 2017).

Local Context- Libraries
To understand and examine the historical implications and impact of the 2016 election and 45th presidential administration on students, library workers must critically examine the library institution itself as one that is part of the system of education (the academy). Simultaneously, it’s important to situate the library within the broader ideological, economic, and political issues that have shaped it. Questioning the unexamined ideologies and role libraries perform in the broad socio-political landscape discussed above which produced Trump is suggested. Exploring how that has manifested in LIS practice is also suggested.

In addition to neoliberalism and its varying impacts, another part of the larger landscape that researchers have pinpointed as key to the 2016 election is the persistent post-racial fantasy of American politics (Bobo, 2017). In other words, post-racial ideology/fantasy is the idea that a society has moved beyond the concept of race, and that people no longer experience discrimination on the basis of race. When this idea is consistently touted within American politics, predominantly white politicians (and by extension the people and institutions they “represent”) may begin to believe that because racial discrimination is a thing of the past, they
as individuals cannot “see color” and therefore do not discriminate. As a result, institutions may appear anti-racist and progressive through the lens of post-racial fantasy, but in reality are invested only in diversity and inclusion initiatives to maintain appearance and desirability just enough to attract “customers,” leaving the underlying structure itself unexamined and unchanged (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Racialized bodies (or bodies that are ascribed a racial identity by others/institutions for a particular use or purpose) become commodified and quantified within educational and corporate discourse, “disconnected from context, language and social identity...available for use in institutional promotion and branding” (Urciuoli, 2016, p. 30). Thus, the 2016 election shock and reaction illustrates that inclusion-oriented and body-based diversity projects have likely functioned to assuage white guilt and obscure the colonial history of higher education (Rosa and Bonilla, 2017). Placing the 45th president in context, his election in proximity to the first US president of color shows that diversification rhetoric, rather than promoting equality, is in actuality a tool of colonialism. This rhetoric reproduces power by inadvertently legitimizing and simultaneously making invisible the underlying institutional structure through the myth of a post-racial ideology. The library is no exception to this trend and is complicit in engaging in diversity projects for optics.

Given this context and that of neoliberal capitalism, we should consider how libraries reflect and manifest post-racial ideological thinking systematically and institutionally. As situated within higher education, libraries reproduce those same if not similar systems of institutionalized discrimination. In regards to post-racial ideologies, through diversity initiatives and rhetoric LIS has not only perpetuated but leaned into racial capitalism by endorsing diversity and inclusion over decolonization (Edwards, 2015). This is evidenced through persistent whiteness of LIS (Davis and Hall, 2007; Vinopal, 2016), poor retention rates of librarians of color (Neely and Peterson, 2007), ongoing issues of cultural hostility and microaggression (Alabi, 2015a, 2015b), and more. If LIS is unable to “solve the issue” of diversity within its own institution, it is unwise
and even concerning to expect the same predominantly white profession to serve diverse student populations without critical reflection or negative consequences. This is doubly true of working with students at-risk under the Trump administration.

Understanding the history and ideological underpinnings leading up to the election of Donald Trump is crucial to understanding students as situated within context of their local and social environment and realities. Observing and engaging with the lived realities of students and their environments as couched in historicity will aid in developing a well-informed, critically conscious library practice. As discussed later, not completing this theoretical and foundational work can have disproportionately devastating consequences and very likely re-traumatize students.

**Student Context**

Although stress among college students has been well-documented in popular and academic literature, recent (and historic) neoliberal trends paint a much grimmer portrait of the causes and future trajectory of the mental health crisis (Sweet, 2018). Rapidly rising suicide rates among millennials (Ducharme, 2019; Network, 2019), link to significant associations between minority stress and severe negative mental health (Gonzalez et al., 2018), and steadily declining self-reported emotional health of incoming college students are not a spontaneous contemporary phenomenon which exists in a vacuum. Instead, these issues present as symptoms of lived reality under late-stage capitalism (Prins et al., 2015) combined with unique stressors under the 45th presidency (Burnett-Zeigler, 2016; Drabble et al., 2018; Vega, 2018; Wray-Lake et al., 2018). Understanding the implications of neoliberalism, corporatization, and post-racial ideology on students contextually (and as influenced by historical factors which contributed to the Trump presidency) is key work towards the development of minimizing harm in the classroom and developing critically-informed pedagogy.
While research has suggested that suicide and poor mental health rates are affected by socioeconomic status, economic opportunity, race and ethnicity, sexual and gender identity, citizenship status, and more (Compton et al., 2015), these issues are only exacerbated by the current social, economic, and political environment and deterioration of public programs in lieu of privatization, both locally under US government administrations and globally amidst rising nationalism (De Vogli, 2011; McGregor, 2001). Millennials and Generation Z were born and raised during a unique period of neoliberal capitalism, which has had deep consequences on their mental and physical health and development as exacerbated through intersections of identity as well as their positionalities as learners in the classroom (Kirmser, 2013; Saunders, 2010). Both came of age during a shift/crisis in the medical profession towards privatization and resultant opioid epidemic, global economic recession, collapse of the housing industry, persistent wage stagnation and meager-post recession earnings, unprecedented educational debt, actual and conceptual wars (the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, post-9/11 war on terrorism, war on drugs, etc.), schoolyard violence, the environmental crisis and impacts of global warming, explosive rise of the internet and digital communication technologies, Google, social media, and more. While many of these were set in motion as a result of neoliberal reforms of the 70s and 80s, these culminating factors contribute to the classroom experiences and information gathering skills of students.

Students of color, students with disabilities, queer students, economically precarious students, undocumented students, indigenous students, and all students from historically oppressed and marginalized identities (Merrick et al., 2018) often face disproportionate discrimination (Hope et al., 2015; Museus et al., 2016) and potential hardship both in their daily lives and within the classroom. This discrimination may manifest through discriminatory policymaking (Acosta, 2013; Giroux and Schmidt, 2004; Tamura, 2008), microaggressions (Boysen, 2012; Franklin, 2016; Sue et al., 2018), dehumanizing rhetoric (Dolmage, 2017; Reyna, 2000), and more. Lived
realities under constant threat cause fatigue and heightened sensitivity and awareness of their environment (Gaffney, 2019), which includes the library classroom. Therefore, without fully considering the lived realities of students and the holistic impacts of experience, especially under a hostile presidential administration, library workers may very well trigger or deepen trauma experienced by students.

**Professional Context**

Within the new landscape of higher education and libraries both in the 21st century and as situated under the 45th presidential administration, library workers face a myriad of issues that profoundly affect our philosophical and physical labor. Under the neoliberal regime of higher education, library work has grown increasingly precarious; continuing appointment or full-time work is becoming rare or difficult to come by, replaced by part-time, contract, and adjunct work (Brons et al., 2018; Gregory and Higgins, 2018). Furthermore, to even get to the point of employability on a “professional” level (read: librarian), individuals are asked to accrue significant debt through attainment of the Masters of Library and Information Science (versus on job the training) and perform extensive underpaid or unpaid labor through staff positions, compulsory internships, volunteer work, and other invisible labor (Hathcock, 2015; Nicholson, 2016). Once in a library position (professional or otherwise), profession demographics, unexamined privilege and bias, and more form a political and ideological gauntlet at both local and national levels (Honma, 2005). Navigating this while also coping with overburdened workloads and disproportionate emotional labor very often lead to disenchantment, burnout, and psychological distress (Ettarh, 2018; Sloniowski, 2016). Taken together, these issues reflect how the landscape and practice of librarianship has been transformed by capitalist neoliberalism, meritocracy, corporatization, and post-racial ideology. It is under this internal context that we are creating and disseminating information literacy sessions to students, which undoubtedly affects students in a deep and unseen way.
The role of librarians and educators is not solely limited to the tangible ways that we address impacts of misinformation/disinformation in instruction sessions and provide outreach and support for student groups. In fact, without deep reflection into the institutional reality of librarianship paired with culturally-situated lives of students and knowledge of social justice, well-meaning information literacy sessions seeking to help students assess online information and develop critically reflective practice may in actuality inadvertently trigger or deepen trauma experienced by students with marginalized and intersecting identities, especially as compounded by a lack of diverse representation in the field (Stewart et al., 2014).

It is crucial for librarians teaching under the 45th presidential administration (and continuing indefinitely into the future) to be affective, critically self-reflective, and rooted in critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is a philosophical approach to teaching based primarily in critical theories such as critical race theory, feminism, critical disability theory, and more. The goal of critical pedagogy is to emancipate learners from oppression through the development of critical consciousness, but also to encourage individuals towards creating meaningful and progressive social and political change (Freire, 2000).

Key to the role of librarians under the current administration is to also remain cognizant of neoliberal exploitation of (gendered) emotional labor and trying to not perform tasks in service of these ideologies. This paper isn’t arguing that libraries should be a safe space where difficult discussions don’t occur. On the contrary, we ask that libraries dig deeper into the work of developing personal critical information literacy and self-reflection and move beyond diversity rhetoric and surface-level intervention. The paper is instead asking librarians and educators to deeply consider and acknowledge positionality when leading or facilitating discussions that may
be sensitive and complex. This is especially important if the librarian is part of any privileged or
dominant group.

Critical self-reflection and honest assessment should be embedded into librarians’ everyday
practice. Because no identity is monolithic, and all people have a variety of intersecting
identities, constantly challenging ourselves to intentionally consider and educate ourselves first
on identities we don’t possess is key. Furthermore, we must then commit to centering identities
that suffer disproportionate discrimination in our practice and development will invariably affect
our practice. Librarians should branch out from the library literature and familiarize ourselves
with social justice literature, theory, and critical practice/praxis, both personally, but also
professionally and within the MLIS programs. Furthermore, we should start to critically evaluate
our complicity in academic capitalism and strongly consider active resistance to neoliberal and
corporate tendencies within the workplace (i.e. assessment, learning outcomes, strategic
planning, etc.) as they represent a system that actively harms both our philosophical practice as
well as student well-being (Gaffney, 2019).

Why should we change?
Hopefully the discussion above illustrates that regardless of best intentions, libraries are
institutions within a much greater system and history of oppression and discrimination. If we as
librarians truly and honestly want to position libraries as spaces of healing and challenge
oppressive structures, there is much work and self-reflection to be done. To answer the
question posed above, we should change because current information literacy practice is very
likely actively traumatizing and hurting our students, and because it is not only just, but also
certainly attainable. If libraries claim to be benevolent, emancipatory institutions, but not
providing critically reflective or trauma-informed services, then we aren’t doing what we say
we’re doing.
When our general education classes come to our library workshops, in order to remain engaging to students many librarians try to keep searches and assignments topical and relatable. Furthermore, because of a broader acknowledgement embedded within the ACRL Framework to integrate social justice topics and critical literacy, instruction librarians may be tempted to utilize topics such as Black Lives Matter (BLM), police and government surveillance, or assignments that require research into a topical opposing viewpoint. Many of these sources, both provided by the library instructor and discovered by students, often discuss gender, race, the exploitation of black and brown bodies, police violence, objectification, and other heavy topics. Additionally, if working with a PowerPoint or conducting live searches, it's critical to consider that the images that we present to our students are not alienating them, tokenizing their experiences, or otherwise doing harm for the sake of topical relevance.

Through this model, students are introduced to new, complex concepts and given minimal time to deeply engage with sources and share with their partner or group and share out. Given time constraints of the one-shot, we often jump from one group to the next to cover everything required for the workshop, leaving little time to process or critically reflect not only on the information, but the information seeking process and how the process in itself relates to power and privilege. Although we are sometimes able to check-in with students while roaming and observing their work, the last portion of a typical one-shot information literacy workshop is a flurry of activities; students are sharing out, filling out a workshop survey, and listening to professors’ announcements regarding (related or unrelated) upcoming assignments. This sends the message that performance metrics and assignment completion (i.e. production of goods) is more valuable than the process of education, and illustrates that the consequences of corporatization and neoliberalism is greatly affecting library instruction practice by framing the student as passive and compliant.
Throughout one of the authors’ career, several colleagues have approached them following workshop sessions to share that they felt uncomfortable or unprepared to present difficult content in class, disagreed with professors, or felt the students of color were uncomfortable with the content. Being one of very few librarians of color in the library workplace, the disproportionate emotional labor of navigating well-meaning conversations ultimately driven by white guilt and fragility can be exhausting at best. This emotional labor by librarians of color outside of the classroom creates an environment where it becomes difficult to safely balance affective work within the classroom without risk of burnout.

Though rates vary depending on the definition of trauma used, findings consistently show that more than half of incoming freshmen have been exposed to potentially traumatic events (Boyraz and Granda, 2019; Carello and Butler, 2015; Read et al., 2011). While the literature is clear that a minority of these students develop PTSD, it is equally true that post-traumatic stress can still occur without it becoming PTSD, and this is a significant contributor to difficulty adjusting to college (Boyraz et al., 2016; Boyraz and Granda, 2019). These issues become amplified when considering the decreasing number of school library services or complete lack of school libraries and librarians (particularly in low-income neighborhoods) coupled with freshmen library anxiety. If the objective of information literacy is to impart critical literacy skills and confidence, why would we bring the painful realities of police brutality and racial inequities into the classroom without providing the space and time for nuanced discussion and processing?

In analyzing approaches to trauma narratives across nonclinical disciplines, Carello and Butler discuss the level of emotional safety vital to learning and propose a trauma-informed educational pedagogy (2014). This is especially applicable to library workshops where we don’t have the necessary time to build rapport and process potentially traumatic or retraumatizing
content. If we want to maintain emotional and psychological safety for our students in the interest of learning, at the very least we can be trauma-aware.

**What we can change**

First and foremost, we have the power to change ourselves through education, and through that our approach, pedagogy, and expectations. The information landscape has undergone radical transformations. This is a world in which information behavior is ruled by emotional responses rather than logic, fact, or truth (Cooke, 2017). In acknowledging the affective domain of information behavior and the climate in which our students exist, we open the opportunity for addressing the impact and effect of information literacy. As critical as these skills are, many of us only interface with students during one-shots or two sessions with our freshmen researchers, where we don’t have the benefit of established rapport with students, classroom management, or repeat exposure.

What we do have is authority and agency. At the helm of the classroom, we are in a relative position of authority and in control of the structure of the class. Even if we choose to reject the *sage on the stage* role, we still are in the position of imposing queries on students, and this gives us great freedom, but also significant responsibility. If done thoughtfully, we can use this to increase our focus on being intentional and critical. We need to address information behavior as it’s being presented and we need to be just as intentional and critical with our decisions in source evaluation. Addressing metacognition can help us set the scene for learning and bring everyone’s attention to the purpose of information literacy and thinking about learning (Booth, 2011, pp. 17–24; Ilett, 2019). It also centers the experience on learners, not just the outcomes we set for a session.
We should also manage our expectations of what we can convey effectively in 50 minutes. The pressure to deliver a great amount of information in that time can lead us to focus on content over learner outcomes. Pivoting from content-focus to results-focus and designing backwards are much better means to convey understanding (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005, pp. 13–17). Additionally, pairing in-class instruction with pre-work or online modules has the potential to increase reach and self-efficacy (if they remove performative aspects of classroom participation and encourage engagement).

Presented with an assignment prompt or syllabus that focuses on difficult history, BLM, or racial inequities, we can and should find sources relevant to the topic. However, we can have the authority in the classroom and the agency to select sources for evaluation that present nuanced viewpoints. It is also critical that we examine the reasons for choosing to present certain sources. Are we selecting that which is relevant to both students and assignments in the interest of grabbing/keeping attention? Are we presenting topical and current information that the students can relate to personally? Is this information being presented in a way that diminishes or erases experiences of students? Consider the environment of the campus setting and our student populations when selecting sources, especially the visual elements of sources.

In other words, while it’s important to engage students with information relevant to their lived experiences and issues within their community, the greater question is how is information being engaged, in what context, for what end, and by whom. Simply providing a topic related to social justice does not benefit students. Instead, librarians should consider what relationship is being built with students, is it transactional or relational? How is the classroom structured and why? Why are assignments and activities chosen and as a result what experiences are being erased or diminished? Is there adequate time for reflection? Is student learning being viewed from a
deficit perspective? The reasons why librarianship should change are too numerous for this paper to tackle, but we can start by asking ourselves honest questions about our choices.

It is important to remember that change can and often does start small. Although it’s unlikely that an individual can address systemic injustice at the university scale, a few committed, well-informed, and thoughtful librarians can start implementing immediate and meaningful changes in the classroom.

Suggestions
The following suggestions are by no means exhaustive, but they are a starting point in pivoting our practices to focus on students, their lived experiences, and the US climate under the 45th president and moving away from content-focus, centering one’s own experiences, and reinforcing the white supremacist roots of academia.

We can acknowledge and adjust to differences in our classroom. We can articulate that past experiences and our identities play a role in information behavior and that there is an emotional and cognitive response to information, textual or visual which we may use to solicit emotional reactions to sources and allow discussion to arise. We can make sure that all students have a chance to review all the sources in evaluation so they can engage rather than passively receive their peers’ assessments. Discuss privilege and pedigree when addressing that authority is constructed. Challenge texts: read against the grain when presenting primary documents as sources.

If the instructor assignment and prompts focus on difficult history such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) or fake news, consider whether materials with stereotypical depictions and extreme bias are useful. Educate yourself on teaching difficult topics and history. Though intended for K-12
settings, the Southern Poverty Law Center’s *Teaching Tolerance* has a wealth of professional
development resources and techniques for classroom use, including media literacy standards,
digital literacy standards, and advice for white educators (Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation,
2012). The *Guidelines for Discussing Difficult or Controversial Topics* and *Guidelines for
Discussing Incidents of Hate, Bias, and Discrimination* from the University of Michigan’s Center
for Research on Learning and Teaching’s contains a wealth of methods and resources
(“Guidelines for Discussing Difficult or Controversial Topics”, n.d.). Set yourself up to succeed
by taking the time to strategize so that you’ve prepared before you begin you step foot in the
classroom and build in time to reflect on what happened after the instruction session so that you
can continue to grow as an instructor and facilitator.

Educate yourself and do not place the burden on colleagues of color to explain what you do not
understand. Ask if they’re okay with discussing ideas with you before you disclose. Recognize
the limitations in your knowledge and skill set and know that you have access to networks,
toolkits, and reading lists to learn from (see the resources section for some starting points).

Finally, Carello and Butler propose a trauma-informed educational pedagogy and suggest
principles and practices to enhance classroom safety relating to student characteristics, content
presentation and processing, assignment requirements and policies, instructor and student
behavior, classroom characteristics, and self-care (2015). Their article, *Practicing what we
teach: Trauma-informed educational practice* is essential reading on the topic. In discussing
student characteristics to be aware of when considering classroom safety, Carello and Butler
note that,

Students bring to their educational pursuits a range of individual strengths that
they employ to meet the trials of training along with a life’s history of challenging,
and in some cases traumatic, experiences and present stressors. Consequently, instructors should assume that in virtually every classroom some unknown subset of students will be at heightened risk for retraumatization or vicarious traumatization as a result of personal trauma histories, mental illness experiences, and current challenges or difficult life transitions (2015).

Conclusion

Trauma-aware and trauma-informed practices are more commonly discussed in clinical disciplines and public libraries than academic libraries, but as discussed, students entering college with exposure to potentially traumatic events are not the exception, and it is our professional responsibility to educate ourselves on ensuring classroom safety.

Many of the suggested resources also include information on inclusive pedagogy and teaching methods to foster inclusive classroom discussions, communication best practices, and how to respond to incidents of bias in the classroom. Modeling inclusive behavior benefits learning outcomes of all students, as it fosters an open environment and can prioritize equitable representation of student voices by empowering students from historically oppressed and marginalized identities to share their perspectives.

It behooves us to contribute to an inclusive learning environment that challenges learners to think critically about the realities of the world they live in without causing harm. In acknowledging these realities and their impact on the educational attainment and mental health of students, we can honor their experiences, validate their needs, and find active, effective approaches to delivering library instruction.
Resources

Further Reading

- ACRL’s Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion LibGuide:
  http://www.ala.org/acrl/aboutacrl/directoryofleadership/committees/racialethnic

- American Council on Education’s Campus Climate and Inclusion Reports:
  https://www.acenet.edu/Research-Insights/Pages/Diversity-Inclusion/Campus-Climate-and-Inclusion.aspx

- Avoiding Racial Equity Detours

- Condition Critical—Key Principles for Equitable and Inclusive Education
  https://www.tcpress.com/condition-critical-key-principles-for-equitable-and-inclusive-education-9780807754764

- Disrupting Whiteness in Libraries and Librarianship: A Reading List
  https://www.library.wisc.edu/gwslibrarian/bibliographies/disrupting-whiteness-in-libraries/

- The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice’s reports on the #RealCollege movement (see https://realcollege.org/ for more on the survey of college student’s basic needs)
  https://hope4college.com/reports/

- JSTOR Daily’s Reading Lists
  https://daily.jstor.org/series/reading-lists/

- Southern Poverty Law Center’s report Teaching Tolerance in Higher Education
  https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/teaching-tolerance-in-higher-education

Toolkits & Praxis

http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/rsr

● ALA’s Association of Specialized, Government, and Cooperative Library Agencies’ Accessibility Resources: https://www.asgcladirect.org/resources/

● ALA’s GLBT Round Table’s Profession Tools Roundup: http://www.ala.org/rt/glbtrt/tools

● ALA’s Office of Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services’ Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Resources: http://www.ala.org/advocacy/diversity

● The Center for Applied Special Technology’s Universal Design for Learning Guidelines: http://udlguidelines.cast.org/

● Education Northwest’s Trauma-Informed Strategies for Postsecondary Educators and guidebook: https://educationnorthwest.org/northwest-matters/trauma-informed-strategies-postsecondary-educators


● Teachers College Inclusive Classrooms Project https://inclusiveclassrooms.org/

● United We Dream’s Toolkit for Educators and Institutions: https://unitedwedream.org/tools/toolkits/

● University of Maryland’s Difficult History Project: https://education.umd.edu/difficult-history-project-teaching-primary-sources
- University of Michigan’s Center for Research on Learning and Teaching’s *Guidelines for Discussing Difficult or Controversial Topics*:
  http://crlt.umich.edu/publinks/generalguidelines

- University of Michigan’s Center for Research on Learning and Teaching’s *Guidelines for Discussing Incidents of Hate, Bias, and Discrimination*:
  http://crlt.umich.edu/publinks/respondingtobias

**Training & Professional Development**

- Anti-Oppressive Resource and Training Alliance (AORTA)
  https://aorta.coop/portfolio_page/anti-oppressive-facilitation/

- The Center for Universal Design in Education’s Online Tutorial on Universal Design in Education:
  https://www.washington.edu/doit/programs/centre-universal-design-education/resources/universal-design-education-online-tutorial

- EdChange & Equity Literacy Institute
  http://www.edchange.org/index.html

- Project ENABLE
  https://projectenable.syr.edu/
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