1. Introduction

I’ve been trying to make my talks and slides more accessible.
I don’t assume that everyone in the room can see the screen.
Whenever there is text on the screen I’m going to read it out loud.
And I will read or describe any charts that I include.

I gave a “version” of this talk at the 2016 Oberlin Library Group Digital Scholarship Conference, nearly a year ago to the day.
But oh! ... how times have changed.
In some ways it feels to me like we’re living in a different world than the last summer.
...
But in so many ways -- too many ways, really -- things haven’t changed all that much. What’s changed for some of us is our willingness to look hard, to see what’s been in front of us all along.

As the Reverend William J. Barber, II, chief architect of Moral Mondays in North Carolina, recently wrote:

[[ WE CAN’T MAKE SENSE ]]

“We can’t make sense of what’s happening in front of us because, somehow, we’ve failed to see that this has been happening all along.”

So today I’m going to talk not just about the values we ought to be bringing with us to work, but about something more fundamental: our responsibilities to the people around us and to ourselves. And I’d like to probe at these ideas of seeing what’s in front of us and our power as individuals and in community to affect change.

I’m starting this presentation the way we typically end presentations -- with credits. This is a practice I started last summer and that I see, gratefully, that others have adopted it.

I am indebted to so many people in our profession who have been working for years on questions related to social justice in libraries, archives, and
other educational and cultural heritage institutions. I’ll quote only a small number of them in this presentation, but there are so many others.

[[ CREDITS ]] On the screen here I acknowledge just a few of the people whose work and support and guidance over the past few years have been significant for me. Some are my mentors and teachers, whether they realize it or not. Some are people who have taken chances on me (a number of them quite recently). Some have supported me intellectually and emotionally over the past year. Some inspire and challenge me from afar (which is to say they have no idea who I am). They all make me think harder.

Attribution isn’t just a legal act, abiding by copyright law so you don’t get sued. But it’s an ethical and a political act, acknowledging not only that I build on the work of others, but also amplifying their voices and using what influence I have within my profession and in the world to open eyes and ears and hearts to messages that may be difficult to hear and to act upon.
Sue Baughman first contacted me back in March about speaking at this conference. She said the organizers hoped I would,

“bring a critical lens to digital scholarship practice, [integrating] issues related to diversity, social justice, digital labor, etc.”

These are topics that I’ve been thinking and writing about and working on over the past few years, both personally and professionally.

Why am I interested in diversity and social justice? Being raised a middle class, white, cisgender, straight woman, in an overwhelmingly white New Jersey town, social justice is not an obvious place for me to focus my attention. It’s far too easy for someone like me to take my social position and the attendant benefits for granted and carry on my life as if everything were hunky-dory.

But I also care about other people, even people who seem, on the surface, not like me.
I come to the idea of social justice regrettably late in my life, but also with an appreciation for both my power and my responsibility to affect change.

What power? This power comes from my class, race, able-bodiedness, sexual orientation, height and weight, educational level, and all the other attributes that we would characterize as advantages in our society. There’s also power in our ability and willingness to identify and look at problems deeply, to question and critique the systems around us, and to join with other people in solidarity to make change.

Power to do what?
To borrow words from my friend April Hathcock, ultimately we should be

“dismantling oppression and erecting systems of equity.”

What April is talking about here is systems of oppression.

This all sounds well and good. But how can any of us as individuals, as “regular people,” affect change? And even if we come together, we’re just librarians. Who listens to us?
It really seems quite impossible, doesn’t it?
Hopeless even.
And yet we are obligated to act or we are part of the problem.

[[ WHITE SILENCE EQUALS VIOLENCE ]]

So what to do? First we need to open our eyes to the problems around us, even in our own profession. As you know, there are debates about the supposed neutrality of libraries.

But like everything else, we’re part and products of larger systems: our society, our history, our political structures, our educational system, our cultures and traditions. As April Hathcock has said:

[[ NEUTRALITY IS A MYTH ]]

“Neutrality is a myth and all things are tinted by the systemic bias inherent to our society.”

Systemic bias can be really hard for some of us to see, especially when it benefits us to not notice it. Like Peggy McIntosh’s invisible knapsack, we have a strong tendency to see this system which serves many of us quite well, as “just the way things are.” “Normal.”

This is a kind of confirmation bias, which is the tendency to see and interpret the world in a way that confirms our preexisting beliefs or hypotheses. And in many cases, that means not noticing it at all.
In my talk today, I’m going to give you a few examples of how bias is baked into everything around us, and thereby encourage you to keep your eyes peeled and your critical mind engaged.

Seeing bias and recognizing oppression is a great start. But then we need some models to show us what to do when we see bias, to show us what engagement and action looks like in our profession. To help us understand that we, too, can resist and make change.

So let’s start by talking about the kinds of bias we can find in our own work.

[[ DATA IS POLITICAL ]]  
Data is political.

I’m sure you’ve heard versions of this idea many places before. But I’ll call your attention to a 2015 article by Jeffrey Alan Johnson entitled “How data does political things.” This post succinctly summarizes some key ideas I want to explore here.

[[ LSE BLOG ]]  
I’ll highlight a couple of points from his abstract:
“It’s difficult to see the political structure of data, because data maintains a **veneer of scientific objectivity**. But data is inherently a form of politics... it allocates moral values... A political theory of data, grounded in distributive and relational information justice, is necessary.”

[[ SLIDE: DATA INFLUENCES POLITICAL PRACTICE ]]
He goes on to explain that not only does data influence political practices, but we should consider the act of data **collection** in itself a political practice. He wants us to ask questions like:

- Who mandates that it be collected?
- Who determines data fields & validation tables?

I’ll give you a few examples of this last point about the political nature of something as seemingly innocuous as data fields:

[[ ALA DEMOGRAPHIC STUDY ]]
The 2017 American Library Association Demographic Study, in which you’d think they would be **particularly** careful about the language they use to denote demographic categories, confuses gender and sex and completely leaves out any acknowledgement of people who don’t self-identify with the gender binary.

[[ ALA DEMOGRAPHICS SURVEY ]]
And here’s the survey itself where you see that “Male” and “Female” are the only options.
Male and Female aren’t even genders.

This is all kinds of wrong, including being transphobic.

In my 2016 article “The Quest for Diversity in Library Staffing: From Awareness to Action,” published in *The Library With the Lead Pipe*, I looked at a common survey tool used to evaluate organizational climate in libraries; the tool is called ClimateQual. Though my article is focused on how libraries may interpret the ClimateQual data, rather than on the tool itself, I want to point out that in an optional demographic section, one question mixes options for sexual orientation and gender identity and allows the user to choose only one or not respond at all, thereby forcing some respondents to erase a part of their self identity.

This is an act of oppression.

If you start looking for examples of mixing gender and sexual orientation, or gender and sex you’ll find it everywhere.

[[ SARAH STEVENS TWEET ]]

In 2016 Sarah Stevens tweeted:

- Title *required* for conf registration
- Choices are Mrs, Miss, Dr, Prof, or Mr, I chose Mr.
- Shouldn't need to reveal my marital status to go
I’ll also add that everyone except Doctors and Professors have to reveal their gender identity or lie about it. This is misogynist and classist and also transphobic.

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Here’s an example with a “veneer of scientific objectivity.”

Researchers in China, Wu and Zhang, claim that machine learning techniques can predict the likelihood that a person is a convicted criminal with nearly 90% accuracy using nothing but a driver’s license-style photo. They proved it by feeding their computer “objective” data -- standardized ID photos -- and then told it which people in the photos were convicted criminals. They say their study is “free of any biases of subjective judgments of human observers.”

Their conclusion:

[[ “THE FACES OF” ]]

“the faces of general law-[a]biding public have a greater degree of resemblance compared with the faces of criminals, or criminals have a higher degree of dissimilarity in facial appearance than normal people.”

What they’re saying here is that “normal people” and criminals look different from each other and that the machine can tell.
A recent article written by Arcas, Mitchell, and Todorov about Wu and Zhang’s research points out that nothing is objective about any of this:

- Facial features are influenced by environmental, situational, and contextual factors.
- How photographs are taken, by whom, and what the photographers believe about their subjects, all affect the resulting portrait.
- Not all people convicted of criminal behavior are, in fact, criminals (because, as we know, not all convictions are fair).
- And not all criminals are caught and convicted and thus labeled as criminals. (I’ll bet a good portion of the general “non-criminal” population has engaged in some kind of criminal activity in their lives. I know I have. --> look around you!)

So the training data being fed into the machine, and the machine algorithms are already biased by all the biased life experiences and the biased beliefs of the people who created this test environment.

The authors say,

[[ “THIS WORK SCIENTIFICALLY LEGITIMIZES” ]]

this kind of work “‘scientifically’ legitimizes a correlation that itself emerges from training data with embedded social bias.”
Tressie McMillan Cottom, a professor at Virginia Commonwealth University, says in reaction:

“This is always the promise of technology: efficient oppression.”

An Israeli startup, Faception, is picking up on Wu and Zhang’s research, offering “computer vision and machine learning technology for profiling people and revealing their personality based only on their facial image.” Faception says they can identify who is an Extrovert, a person with High IQ, a Professional Poker Player, a pedophile, or a Terrorist.”

Imagine that… identifying a terrorist from a picture of a face. As they say on the internet: “what could possibly go wrong?!”
I want to pursue the topic of data interpretation in the library profession. In my “Quest for Diversity” article, I explored the nature of our profession’s homogeneity and how our willful ignorance of bias manifests itself in the ways that organizations measure “diversity,” interpret the results, and set priorities based on them. My article was an invitation for us to look critically at our culture, our practices, and our assumptions, and to investigate what it is about ourselves and our profession that is preventing underrepresented people from being able to, or even wanting to, enter and stay.

**[[ CLIMATEQUAL IS AN ASSESSMENT OF... ]]**

From the ClimateQual website:

ClimateQUAL® is an assessment of library staff *perceptions* concerning (a) their library’s commitment to the principles of diversity, (b) organizational policies and procedures, and (c) staff attitudes.

However, for a profession greatly lacking in diversity, relying on staff *perceptions* of demographic diversity and fairness as a proxy for organizational health might be quite problematic if not handled in an extremely thoughtful and well-informed way.

Let me explain:

And here I’ll focus on racial diversity because there is more research and data on it, both within libraries and beyond.
Here’s a pie chart of the race and ethnicity data in the 2017 ALA Demographic Survey of members. Note that our profession is 86.7% white. (People who look like me get a whole lot of this pie!)

Research studies have shown that, while white people say they like diversity, election and census trends suggest otherwise.

For example, white people’s tolerance for residential racial diversity is much lower than that of Blacks. In the article “Does Race Matter in Neighborhood Preferences?” Maria Krysan and co-authors write:

For the most part studies of residential preferences find that whites are willing to live with only a handful of African American neighbors (some put the figure at around 20 percent), while African Americans are open to quite a diverse range of neighborhoods, though a “50-50” neighborhood is routinely identified as the most attractive.

While this research did not study the preferences of whites for workplace diversity, we can imagine that many of the same dynamics and biases play out in white-dominated workplaces—even those that profess a desire for diversity.
So when the ClimateQual survey asks staff to react to the following kinds of statements:

[[ SAMPLE CLIMATEQUAL QUESTION ]]  
“The race / sexual orientation of a team/division member does NOT affect how they are valued on this team/division.”

We have to wonder exactly what they’re asking and about whom.

This question leaves the possibility open for respondents to answer based on their perceptions of how staff of other races, sexual orientations, gender identity, etc. are valued and supported in the organization.

So, for example, if your organization is between 80-90% white (a fair assumption based on the ALA statistics we just saw), the overwhelming majority of the organization’s answers to questions about race will be based on white people’s perceptions and reflect a white cultural perspective. (The same holds for questions about other demographic categories vis-à-vis the dominant culture.)
Now -- Research points to the fact that demographically dominant groups are unlikely to understand the lived experience of people from non-dominant groups and do not recognize bias when it occurs. In libraries this conclusion is supported by Jaena Alabi’s research

[[ ALABI QUOTE ]]

where she concludes that

“non-minority librarians are unlikely to report observing racial microaggressions” even though “minority” librarians are, in fact, experiencing them.

Thus, in an overwhelmingly white (and heterosexual, cisgender) organization, it is important to recognize that the data we collect represents primarily the worldview of the dominant culture and will be shaped by its limitations and biases.

Getting back to how we assess our organizational culture and our often-professed desire for diversity, one has to wonder:

[[ HOW MUCH DIVERSITY ]]

- How much diversity in an organization is enough to make staff in the dominant culture feel like the workplace has achieved an acceptable amount of, but not too much diversity?
How Much “Valuing...”

- And how much “valuing diversity” does the organization need to demonstrate in order for staff from the dominant culture to perceive it as sufficient, regardless of whether or not staff from marginalized groups would consider it enough?

So here’s a very practical outcome of this assessment right here. And you’ll see how this kind of bias can be self-perpetuating:

A natural follow-up to receiving your the results of any measurement of your organizational culture is to look at the results to see where you’re weaker and where you’re doing well. Logically we’d try to develop strategic initiatives in the areas where we’re weak to then improve our organizational culture.

If the overwhelmingly dominant culture in your organization tends to think that everyone is well valued, regardless of their race, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc. your scores in that section will be good. Even if people in vastly underrepresented groups in your organization might think otherwise. Unless you’re thinking really critically about this instrument, you’re unlikely to develop strategic initiatives to solve a problem that doesn’t look like a problem.
This is one of things that we mean when we talk about privilege: privilege includes the prerogative of not having to recognize, understand, or solve problems that don’t necessarily affect you personally and that you don’t even notice.

[[ MODELS OF RESISTANCE ]]

So first we need to be willing to recognize and interrogate bias in ourselves and the world around us. Then we need to resist it. What does resistance in the library world look like? I’ll give you a few examples:

Safiya Noble, a professor of information studies at UCLA, has studied commercial search and discrimination against women of color.

[[ GOOGLE EQUATES BLACK GIRLS ]]

In a 2013 article she talks about how pornography is what you find when you search for the phrase “black girls” in Google.

In 2004 the Anti-Defamation League noted offensive Google results when you searched for the word “Jew.”
Safiya Noble describes various reasons why Google’s search algorithm works this way. It has to do with a combination of:

- How Google ads work
- The popularity of certain websites or topics
- What previous users may have searched for
- And SEO

[[ GOOGLE COULD DO LITTLE ]]

Noble summarizes Google’s response to the Anti-Defamation League:

“it could do little to affect search results. It claimed that its algorithm technology was neutral [here’s the “veneer of scientific objectivity”], and search results were a matter of how people use Google, rather than the technology itself.”

And anyway, Google can’t be biased, they like diversity!

They were quoted in a 2016 article after yet another incident of extreme racial bias in their search results:
“...These results don’t reflect Google’s own opinions or beliefs — as a company, we strongly value a diversity of perspectives, ideas and cultures.”

(I’m picking on Google here. But think for a minute about how familiar this phrase in red sounds: “we strongly value a diversity of perspectives, ideas and cultures.” It sounds a heckuva lot like phrases in library strategic plans, doesn’t it? This is what we say again and again in our overwhelmingly white profession.)

In 2012 Safiya Noble noted in a post on her personal blog that after two years of her research on the topic, and after she published an article about it in Bitch Magazine:

“Google had changed its algorithm, and pornography is no longer the primary source of information about Black girls in a keyword search. Thanks, Google.”

This is what activism and resistance in the library community looks like.
Ok so we might say that Google is a commercial company that is driven by profit motives, etc. etc.

So let’s look for examples closer to home. Don’t worry, we have them.

[ [ ON OUR BACKS ] ]

On Our Backs was an erotica magazine run by women, for lesbian women, and was published in print starting in 1984.

This magazine was digitized a few years ago and made available for free online by a company called Reveal Digital. Here’s how their operation works:

[ [ REVEAL DIGITAL: OUR UNIQUE... ] ]

“Our unique library crowd-funding model uses library acquisition dollars to fund the development of digital collections. Working closely with content holders, we help define and scope the collection, determine the cost base for producing the collection, provide data conversion and hosting services, and manage the entire process”
So why might this be problematic? Libraries own the collections. Reveal Digital sought and got permission from the person they believed to be the copyright holder. More and more library collections are appearing online, to our users’ delight. Everything’s legal and legit, right? But legal doesn’t mean ethical.

Tara Robertson is the Accessibility Librarian at the Center for Accessible Post-Secondary Education Resources in Vancouver, Canada.

In a March 2016 blog post about the digitization and online availability of the magazine, [[ DIGITIZATION: JUST BECAUSE ]] she argues that “Just because you can doesn’t mean you should”

She writes “For a split second I was really excited — porn that was nostalgic for me was online! Then I quickly thought about friends who appeared in this magazine before the internet existed. I am deeply concerned that this kind of exposure could be personally or professionally harmful for them.”

She then turns her attention to the library profession:
“Consenting to a porn shoot that would be in a queer print magazine is a different thing to consenting to have your porn shoot be available online. I’m disappointed in my profession. Librarians have let down the queer community by digitizing On Our Backs.”

Last year, Tara found some of the administrative records for On Our Backs in Cornell’s archives, including some contracts where the content creators did not sign over all rights to the magazine.

Here’s one where the participant hand-wrote “one-time rights only”

Reveal Digital contended that they had talked to the community and decided that publication was in the community’s interest. But which community are they talking about? Whose interests?
On August 24, 2016 they issued a statement saying that they were temporarily removing the content from their website, saying they had “come to share the concerns expressed by a few contributors and others around the digitization of OOB and the potential impact it might have on contributor privacy.”

This is still an actively developing story with no guarantee that Reveal will do the right thing. I’ve talked to Tara about the situation and have offered to work with her to write letters to the funding libraries to help them understand the consequences of their decision to fund digitization. And to try to get them to change their minds in order to get the magazine permanently taken off the web. We’re waiting to see what Reveal does next.

This is what activism and resistance in the library community looks like.

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This next story’s about the Library of Congress Subject Headings and a Dartmouth undergraduate student named Melissa Padilla.
Padilla was doing research in the Dartmouth library and kept running across the phrase “illegal aliens” in the subject headings of materials she was consulting. As a former undocumented immigrant herself, she found this terminology insulting and so, with the help of other students and some Dartmouth librarians, she worked for 2 years to gather the documentation needed to petition the Library of Congress to change the subject heading and related entries.

With a boost by librarian Tina Gross, at St. Cloud State University, MN, several ALA divisions passed a resolution asking LC to change the subject headings and LC agreed. But last spring, congress intervened and put a stop to that change, which inspired the New York Times to write both an article and an editorial about it.

The situation seems to be in limbo right now. When I checked in May, the Library of Congress still included “illegal aliens” and other related terms in its list of subject headings (as you can see here).
Despite the fact that this action is unresolved, Library Journal acknowledged that

[[ THE WORK ACCOMPLISHED... ]]  
“the work accomplished by the Dartmouth students sets a powerful precedent for instituting civic change at a grassroots level.”

Melissa Padilla herself describes

[[ WHAT IT MEANS... ]]  
“what it means for me to be seen as an equal and not be seen as an other, or as less than.”

[[ PADILLA PHOTO ]]  
This is what activism and resistance in the library community looks like.

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Resistance also looks like:
These people: Independent scholar, Penny Peterson, Kevin Ehrman-Solberg, LIS grad student at the University of Minnesota, Kirsten Delegard, scholar at Augsburg College, and librarian Ryan Mattke, also at the University of Minnesota, who are creating the Mapping Prejudice project to digitize property records and map the history of racial segregation in Minneapolis.

Or John Mark Ockerbloom at the University of Pennsylvania, who is adding missing information to wikipedia articles about the enslaved people who lived and worked on plantations. He recently tweeted

“Wow there are a lot of Wikipedia articles on plantations with little or nothing about the people enslaved there.”

He urges his followers to “un-erase” this information from what otherwise sound like “Happy Antibellum Times.”

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This is what activism and resistance in the library community looks like.
These are “normal people”. They’re just like us.

If they can do it, so can we.

We need to think critically about the information available to us, our data collection and description tools and resources that our organizations adopt, the data gathered, and how we make sense of it all. In addition to knowing what kinds of information these tools are designed to elicit or offer and how they do so, it is also crucial to understand what biases we bring to our interpretation of the data, and to think about what data is missing and why.

What we measure, what we collect, how we interpret, how we describe, even THAT we measure, collect, interpret, and describe are political acts. Data and data collection and organization are not neutral, and we shouldn’t pretend that they are.

But if you are attuned to these kinds of problems with data collection and interpretation, you’re already well-positioned to raise the question and challenge the results. How you do that will differ depending on your own organizational culture, where you sit within the organization, and how open others are to considering challenging or disruptive points of view. But you can’t say nothing, otherwise you’re complicit.
I’ll end this section with some questions for you to think about as you consider your own data collection and that of your organization, the scholars with whom you collaborate, and the library profession.

[[ WHAT DATA DO YOU COLLECT ]]

- What data do you create or collect, how, and why? Where does it come from?
- What biases are embedded into your data collection and interpretation? (and note that I ask “what biases” and not “are biases embedded.”)
- How will you disrupt harmful data collection and description practices? (What will you do in your organizations to call attention to and change misconceived or harmful data practices?)

[[ COMMUNITY ]]

Community

So if we’re going to commit to identifying, resisting, and disrupting the kind of privilege that makes us unable, or unwilling, to see the types of biases that I’ve been talking about, we’re going to need some help. This kind of work can take its toll. It’s emotionally draining.
So how exactly do you disrupt and resist in an organizational setting? How can you disrupt from within the system?

One answer is by building community.

[[ COMMUNITY ]]

Community can provide us with intellectual support, and potentially more visibility, recognition, and political heft for the work that we do and the values that we try to instill in our professional practice.

[[ GLOBAL OUTLOOK::DIGITAL HUMANITIES ]]

An example is the *Global Outlook::Digital Humanities* community, which is a Special Interest Group of the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organisations. Alex Gil was just elected to serve a 2-year term on the executive board.

[[ GO::DH MISSION ]]

The goal of go::dh is to:

“break down barriers that hinder communication and collaboration among researchers and students of the Digital Arts, Humanities, and Cultural Heritage sectors in high, mid, and low income economies.”

Go::dh reminds us that the global northwest is not the only source of knowledge, creativity, capacity, capability, or enthusiasm for working at the intersection of culture and digital scholarship.
Community can also be a safe place where you can gripe about your experiences. Sometimes these spaces can also help to expose to others in the profession harmful practices that might otherwise go unnoticed:

[[ LIS MICROAGGRESSIONS ]]  
For example, LIS Microaggressions, which was started by a small handful of women in 2013. LIS Microaggressions is both a Tumblr and a zine. They explain:

“this space aims to identify, acknowledge, and overcome the microaggressions that continue to exist in our profession and that are the real, lived, experiences of LIS professionals from marginalized communities today.”

...  
From community and sharing come strength.

A values-based community orientation could also help us to think about how other communities may have different values than ours. That’s what happened when Kim Christen Withey, faculty at Washington State University, worked with an Aboriginal community in Central Australia to develop what would eventually become

[[ MUKURTU ]]
(MOOK-oo-too)
Their mission is to empower communities to manage, share, preserve, and exchange their digital heritage in culturally relevant and ethically-minded ways…. Our first priority is to help build a platform that fosters relationships of respect and trust.

Withey explains that the goal is
   “to ensure that technology bends to the needs of our users.”
   She says “not all information wants to be free.”
(Picking up a theme here from the On Our Backs example - “just because you can doesn’t mean you should”)

((end Community section))

This morning I’ve been emphasizing the power of individuals, the strength we derive from community, and the values that inform the work that we do. These themes come together powerfully in past and current research I’m doing with April Hathcock on feminist leadership.

[[FEMINIST PRAXIS]]

Feminism -- in particular intersectional feminism -- offers us both a theory and a practice for addressing the kinds of oppression that I’ve been talking about today.

April and I wanted to know what feminist leadership in libraries looks like. So we’ve talked to self-identified feminist library leaders who are at different stages of their careers and who work at different levels of organizational management.

Our generous participants, to whom we have promised anonymity so they felt free to say things they might not otherwise have shared, represent a diverse set of perspectives and identities. We included people of different ages, gender identities and expressions, sexual orientations, abilities, races, ethnicities, and we sought representation from different sized organizations, both public and private. We explored with our research subjects how their feminist values inform and affect everyday management and leadership activities, such as staffing, mentoring, policy development, decision-making, etc.

Through this research we hope to provide our professional community with:
• real-life examples of the everyday practice of feminism in library leadership,
• to offer practical approaches that others can adopt or adapt,
• and to understand some of the challenges in bringing an overt feminist praxis into our library practice.

These interviews revealed recurring topics that relate directly to the themes I’m talking about today: resisting oppression, looking critically and questioning the status quo, and building community.

Ironically, despite everyone’s willingness, even excitement, to talk to us about the topic, most interviewees expressed some doubts about the possibility of feminist leadership. In some this manifested as surprise that we considered them leaders in the profession at all. It makes sense, when you think about it. I think it really depends on what cultural models you have in mind when you think of successful (or “successful”) leaders.

Other interviewees were ambivalent about the tension between the ideals and values of feminism, as they define it, and the idea of leadership from the top levels of an organization, because of the potential for power imbalance and the fear that this power might compromise one’s values.
In two blog posts over the past few years, Chris Bourg clearly voices this ambivalence. On the one hand, in a 2014 conference paper on women in leadership, she addressed library staff interested in social justice issues but reluctant to take on leadership positions.

**[[BOURG: AVOIDING LEADERSHIP POSITIONS...]]**

Chris suggested that avoiding leadership positions

“might mean that you are leaving the leadership of our profession in the hands of those who aren’t concerned about those things…”

**[[BOURG: USING TRADITIONAL ORGANIZATIONAL POWER...]]**

On the other hand, in her 2015 ACRL/NY Symposium keynote, she expressed her concern that

“using traditional organizational power to push an agenda maybe isn’t very feminist.”

I guess we could say it’s kind of like spending years fighting “the establishment” only to wake up one day to discover that you have become “the establishment.”
Despite these concerns, interviewees all saw feminism as an antidote to power-wielding, ego-driven leadership, providing values and a set of practices that raise up others and resist oppression. They all felt that feminist leadership is not the same as other kinds of leadership: it’s definitely not positional, for many it’s about moving people toward a common goal through influence (not ego), and one of the crucial roles of a leader is to look for and develop people within the organization, wherever they are in rank, who have the potential to become leaders in their own right. Especially so if they don’t “fit the mold” of a typical library leader.

According to our interviewees, here are some other values that feminist leadership offers:

[[ Feminist leadership is: politically engaged ]]

They see their work as politically engaged: their feminism is expressed through a commitment to justice, to thinking about power and oppression, to looking at their organizations, their profession, and the world with a critical perspective, and asking questions like:

- Who speaks and who doesn’t?
- Who has power and who doesn’t?
- Whose experiences are centered here, and whose are marginalized?
- They think about themselves and others as whole human beings
- They see the lie in the idea that everyone starts from the same starting line in life.
As well, they all insisted on the primacy of praxis in their feminism. In a nutshell, if you’re just thinking and reading, but you’re not doing, you’re not doing it right. Almost everyone said (apologetically) THAT they hadn’t read enough feminist theory. And they all insisted that you have to live your theory and your values by performing them at work, no matter how hard that might be.

The final feminist value I’ll mention (and for the rest you can read the chapter once it’s out) is the idea of sharing and transparency:

- Many talked about shared leadership, balancing the need for executive decision making with valuing dialog and consensus building.
- Networking and finding allies is also really important to this group.
- Nearly all talked about information sharing as a feminist act. The word “transparency” came up a lot, especially among those in higher-level leadership positions.

In a blog post last year on the blog “Letters to a Young Librarian,” Baharak Yousefi, Head of Library Communications at Simon Fraser University, picked up the topic of radical transparency that she’s been thinking and speaking about:
“Be absolutely committed to transparency. Do not assume that you know what others need/don’t need to know.”

Here’s a nice way to summarize the sentiment:

“Painfully transparent” is the level of transparency that I’m going for. “OMG never stops” is the level of communicating I’m going for.”

This is actually something that I’m increasingly practicing in my own work as a leader, a manager, and a colleague. Information is power and controlling information, and concealing how decisions are actually made, is a means to maintaining the status quo and protecting the powerful. I realize that not all information can always be shared with everyone. (Not all information wants to be free.)

But without contextualizing information for their work, without understanding the larger picture affecting how decisions are made, how things are funded, which initiatives are undertaken, why some departments get new staff and why some are shrinking, what is motivating that reorganization, why that person got promoted and that other one didn’t, staff are completely in the dark about what their work really means within the organization and how they are valued.
Well, not completely in the dark, because gaps in information will be filled by gossip, hearsay, speculation, even conspiracy theories.

I’d really love for us to make radical transparency a thing.

**Conclusion - on influence**

So I want to conclude by talking a little bit about influence. For our Feminist Leadership interviewees, influence is a crucial aspect of leadership. And once we’ve opened our eyes to the biases and oppression visible everywhere, we must commit to resisting and ending it by influencing others to work with us in solidarity.

As Tressie McMillan Cottom said recently,

**[[ YOU CAN SEE THE WORLD ]]**

“You can see the world as an opportunist or you can see the world as an activist.”

These are your two options: you need to choose.

For our interviewees, influence is used to build community for the common good. A values-driven leader will influence those in their community toward making the right decisions to develop a more just organization, profession, and society.
Influence can be used for good or for ill. Influence can come from the exercise of power (physical, emotional, rank). But I’m much more interested in influence that results from respect and truth; from appreciation for hard, thoughtful, values-driven work; and effective collaboration.

At any rate, that’s how I’d prefer to be respected and to influence.

You can lead from wherever you are; \textit{everything} you do influences the people around you, even if you don’t realize you’re doing so. So become aware of this power that you have. \textit{You} have the power to influence, to change the actions, behaviors, and opinions of others.

What will \textit{you} do with that power?

[[ IF YOU HAVE POWER... ]]

Toni Morrison told her students:

“If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else.”

Through the power of my keynote, I hope to have influenced you to consider how you as individuals, as “regular people,” in the work you do--with technology, with people, with data, building collections, designing user interfaces, fighting for fair use \textit{and} for privacy--how you have the capacity to influence others, your organizations, and the profession.
I also hope that you will join or build communities that share your values and support you in thinking more critically about your profession, and disrupting the oppressive norms that marginalize and exclude.

*Not* engaging critically, *not* asking hard questions about the work you do, *not* using your influence for good, doesn’t mean you’re staying “neutral.” It means you’re reinforcing systems of domination and oppression that need, instead, to be dismantled.

I’ll leave you with some questions that I hope you will bring to the work that you do, over the next few days, in digital scholarship, and beyond.

**[[ WHOM DOES THIS WORK ]]**

- Whom does this work benefit and whom does it disadvantage or exclude?
- Whose values, perspective, or voice is represented and whose is marginalized or erased?

And for you as a leader (or “influencer,” if you prefer) working within an administrative structure:

- Whom do or can I influence and how?
- Who are my allies?

Let’s get to work. Together.