That Which Cannot Be Named: The Absence of Race in the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*

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ABSTRACT: This article examines how information literacy is situated in a history of white supremacy in academia and academic libraries and provides an overview of some of the historical critiques of information literacy, to which the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* is ostensibly responding. Using Critical Race Theory, I provide a close reading of the *Framework*, highlighting the ways in which issues of race and racism are elided and white academia is centered. This article also examines critiques of information literacy and how critical information literacy has responded to the *Framework*. I then propose some ways to emphasize antiracist pedagogy in the information literacy classroom.

Keywords: critical race theory, Framework for Information Literacy, information literacy, race

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When the Association of College & Research Libraries's (ACRL) *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* was initially introduced in 2015, I was enthusiastic. The *Framework* presents librarians and faculty in higher education in the United States with a new set of skills, competencies, and ways of thinking about information literacy, defining information literacy as "the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning" (ACRL 2016, 8). The *Framework* offers six frames that represent the important concepts of information literacy: Authority Is Constructed and Contextual; Information Creation as a Process; Information Has Value; Research as Inquiry; Scholarship as Conversation; and Searching as Strategic Exploration. At my previous institution, we used the *Framework* as a basis for revising our information literacy program, and I saw greater engagement from students because we focused on the knowledge practices and dispositions provided by each of the frames. I have led trainings on the value of the *Framework* and have written about the positive aspects of this ostensibly new approach to information literacy, an approach that focuses less on the ability to passively find information and more on the learner's active role in the creation and sharing of information. In short, I view the *Framework* as an improvement over the *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* and a helpful lens through which to view information literacy.

It is also clear, however, that the criticisms against the *Framework* raise important issues that *Framework* proponents have not adequately addressed. Though Drabinski (2017) argues (convincingly) that the *Framework* does integrate several critical librarianship perspectives, the terms "race" or "racism" do not appear in the document's approximately 3,700 words. Given that the *Framework* is meant to provide guidance to students on the information environment, an understanding of the systems of oppression within that environment—and of the library's complicity in those systems—is essential to the "reflective discovery of information" (ACRL 2016, 3). We cannot fully examine the information environment without understanding how it is impacted by the structural oppression of people of color, especially at the intersection of other identities. Since the *Framework* names some of these other identities, it is peculiar that it does not include race. While racial injustice and the fight against racism are not new issues in the United States (or in libraries), the Black Lives Matter movement, the rise in the activity of hate groups, and some highly publicized racist actions in academic libraries should be taken as signs that addressing racism continues to be a pressing issue in information literacy instruction—yet it remains absent from the most

important official document on information literacy in higher education.

Using a Critical Race Theory lens, this article situates the *Framework* as part of the history of white hegemony in higher education, librarianship, and information literacy instruction. By examining the language of the *Framework* itself, I demonstrate that the *Framework*'s silence on race perpetuates a culture of avoiding discussions of racism, which protects white people from racial discomfort and maintains white supremacy (DiAngelo 2011). Specifically, I will argue that the *Framework* (in spite of its purported criticality) provides no mechanisms for scrutinizing how structural racism shapes the information environment, which is a necessary step toward antiracist information literacy instruction. I then turn to an examination of the ways in which critical information literacy better enables us to consider these specific operations of structural racism and to use this understanding as a springboard for social justice. In our information literacy instruction, we must confront racism and white supremacy as contextual and historical forces if we wish to work toward racial justice.

White Supremacy in Academia

It is worth starting this discussion of white supremacy in academia with a definitional note: in the context of this article, white supremacy does not refer (only) to the violence and extremism of white nationalist groups. Instead, I use the definition from Critical Race Theory that frames white supremacy as "a political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings" (Ansley 1997). White supremacy is reinforced by economic, judicial, and cultural systems that benefit those identified (often tacitly) as white at the expense of others.[2] As Owen (2007, 215) argues, "As a system of domination, white

2 Examining what is meant by whiteness and how it is perpetually constructed allows us to see how the category of whiteness is used to maintain white supremacy. Writers of color have questioned the concept of whiteness for over a century before whiteness studies appeared with any frequency in academic disciplines (Middleton, Roediger, and Shaffer 2016). Writers on whiteness have shown that "whiteness is a powerful and ever-morphing social category" (Hughey 2010, 213). Hughey (2010, 214) argues that, while the experience of those identified as white are varied, they "hold similar notions of an ideal and hegemonic whiteness." Whiteness is a construction with ever-changing expectations, definitions, and performances that are "internalized as the natural and existential background" of those who are identified as white (Hughey 2010, 214). This internalization of whiteness as normal and natural—as the "mythical norm" (Lorde 1980, para. 7)—helps to maintain white supremacy.

At the same time, it is important to note that exposing whiteness as a mutable category used to oppress those who are not white does not automatically lead to antiracist action—and that it, indeed, can risk

supremacy consists of interlocking elements that work in complementary ways to oppress." By looking at white supremacy through this lens, we can identify the ways in which various institutions in the United States maintain the status quo of white dominance through the constructions of whiteness as superior.

Academia is one such institution. Within academia, the traditional focus of the curriculum on scholars and authors who are understood to be white (Pashia 2017) and on materials that portray those seen as white more positively than people of color (Clawson 2002) means that students are exposed to content that upholds the idea of white superiority. While there are certainly courses that resist white supremacy in academia and that highlight voices that have typically been absent, curricula tend, on the whole, to leave the status quo unchallenged. Additionally, some so-described "diversity" courses are "so broad that racism and other issues that deal specifically with dismantling oppression get neutralized" (Patton 2016, 321). Until 2017, for example, courses at the University of Iowa that qualified for the diversity requirement included "King Arthur through the Ages" and "Food in America" (Brown 2016). While the university has since changed the standards for diversity requirements in response to student protests (Brown 2016), the situation nonetheless highlights one way in which the term "diversity" has been used in higher education to perform inclusion efforts while ignoring issues of structural racism and oppression.

Similarly, diversity initiatives for staff, students, and faculty focuses on heterogeneity as the goal for higher education rather than transformational change (Stewart 2017; Truesdell 2017). An analysis of twenty-one diversity action plans in institutions of higher education showed that the plans positioned people of color as deficient, as outsiders, and/or as simply a way to add value to the university (Iverson 2007). Diversity initiatives have also been used as a way to sell universities, allowing such institutions to maintain the appearance of being welcoming and inclusive (Ahmed 2012). This welcoming, though, means that "Whiteness is produced as host, as that which is already in place or at home. To be welcomed is to be positioned as the one who is not at home" (Ahmed 2012, 43). Diversity work in higher education is not only ineffective at producing change, but can perpetuate a view of whiteness as "the standard" or "normal."

Despite the decades of diversity efforts, universities and colleges continue to see low percentages of faculty of color, and those faculty are less likely to be promoted and/or achieve tenure (Museus, Ledesma, and Parker 2015). Faculty of color are often asked to do

"reproducing white privilege" (Ahmed 2004, para. 12).

the work of teaching courses on race, advising students from minority groups, and serving on numerous committees as the spokespeople for marginalized communities (Chesler, Lewis, and Crowfoot 2005). Faculty of color have more pressure "to serve as role models, mentors, even surrogate parents to minority students, and to meet every institutional need for ethnic representation" (June 2015). While this work can be very meaningful, it may take time away from research and may not be acknowledged by the department and/or the university as being as important as research (Stanley 2006). Additionally, that scholarship by faculty of color which does focus on race is at times published in journals that, because of their narrower scope, may have lower impact factors (Museus, Ledesma, and Parker 2015). This can negatively affect chances of tenure for those researching issues of race if the committee does not understand the importance of these journals (Museus, Ledesma, and Parker 2015). These challenges contribute to an academic devaluing of the scholarship and research of and about people of color.

Along with the devaluing of some of the activities of faculty of color, some academic disciplines maintain white supremacy through the ways that faculty and researchers address race in the scholarship of the discipline. Research in sociology on the structures and systems from which those who are identified as white benefit (like the justice system or housing) is often divorced from discussions of race and racism (Bonilla-Silva and Baiocchi 2001; Harper 2012). The exclusion of analyses of systemic issues provides "evidence that there is something wrong with minorities themselves" (Bonilla-Silva 2014, 302) instead of evidence of oppression. Similarly, much of the research surrounding race and education focuses on connecting Black students with failure rather than what makes Black students successful (Ladson-Billings 2012). This research reinforces stereotypes of Black failure, placing the blame for the results of racism on minority groups themselves.

White Supremacy in Academic Libraries

As entities of higher education, academic libraries and librarianship have perpetuated these structures of white supremacy. Academic libraries in predominantly white-serving institutions (PWIs) have focused on collecting and disseminating resources that highlight mostly white scholars and authors, and the systems in place for collection development make diversifying the collection difficult (Warner 2007). Archives at PWIs reflect content created mostly by those who are identified as white; it is indeed only recently that a few archives at these colleges and universities have sought to provide a more complex view of the racial history of the institution and the experience of the students, faculty, and staff of

color (Joseph, Crowe, and Mackey 2017). Furthermore, the way in which academic books are cataloged are "rooted in historical structures of White supremacy" (Drabinski 2008, 198), with Library of Congress Subject Headings presuming whiteness as the default. Drabinski (2008) notes that those researching white history would not necessarily have to include the term "white" in their searches, while those researching the history of African-American women would need to include the phrase "African American women." The organization and cataloging of books in the academic library assume, in other words, that that which is perceived as the white experience is the standard by which others are measured (Adler 2017; Drabinski 2008).

Like academic libraries, the discipline of Library and Information Science (LIS) itself has also perpetuated white supremacy. Honma (2005) points out that LIS has typically ignored the issue of race, which makes it complicit in upholding the racist structures to which it is connected. With some notable exceptions, LIS curricula do not consider the need for education that focuses on antiracism, social justice, and intersectionality (Cooke et al. 2017; Cooke, Sweeney, and Noble 2016; Pawley 2006). We have seen how this lack of discussion about—and lack of preparation for—antiracist action in libraries can negatively impact communities. While some libraries have tried to support their communities in the face of specific hate crimes, other academic libraries have themselves instigated racial violence. Ashly Horace, a Black graduate student, was removed by the police from a West University library branch in Houston after a librarian contacted the police. At the law library at Catholic University of America, Juán-Pabló Gonźalez, another Black graduate student, was removed from the library after the library clerk called the police.[3] Students are not the only ones facing racism in libraries. Academic librarians of color face and observe microaggressions from their colleagues and others at their workplace at a higher rate (Alabi 2015); they often leave the field because they are marginalized if they do not "perform whiteness" or are expected to fill additional roles as the "diversity hire" (Galvan 2015, para. 5-6). Like higher education, the LIS profession focuses its diversity efforts not on institutional change but on representation and inclusion that perpetuates an assumption of the normality of whiteness and does little to address oppression at a systemic level (Hudson 2017; Hussey 2010). In sum, academic libraries can be unwelcoming to students, faculty, librarians, and staff of color both overtly through the racist actions of librarians and staff and covertly through collections that highlight white, Eurocentric scholars and authors, through the organization and categorization of information that centralizes the experience

3 Ironically, both students were enrolled in LIS programs.

of those who are identified as white, and, as I discuss in the next section, through information literacy instruction that does not address the role of structural racism in the information environment.

White Supremacy in the IL *Framework*

As one of the functions of librarianship, information literacy education has been what Pawley (1998) terms "hegemony's handmaid." While her article focuses on the way that librarianship and information literacy education reify classism, many of her arguments apply to the ways in which information literacy has been used to uphold white supremacy, particularly through the most prominent guiding documents released by the ACRL. The *Information Literacy Competency Standards* (ACRL 2000) take an ahistoric, acontextual approach to information literacy that does not ask for a critical examination of how power structures, library practices, or systemic oppression impact the information environment (Saunders 2017). Instead, the *Standards*'s "neutral" and "objective" approach to information literacy—that there are competencies that a person either has or does not have—maintains a view that the status quo of the information environment (and the library's role in that environment) is natural and desirable.

The *Framework* was written as a response to many of the criticisms leveled against the *Standards*. Critics argue, among other things, that the *Standards* are narrowly constructed, representing what many considered a neoliberal approach to education (Seale 2013), and that they support a view of information literacy as a means to prepare the workforce and increase work-friendly skills (Nicholson 2016; O'Connor 2006). In contrast, the *Framework* is intended to acknowledge the role of the student in the information environment as a creator and sharer of content, rather than simply a consumer. Additionally, it defines information literacy as a set of critical approaches rather than a checklist of skills. While its success in moving away from neoliberalism is debatable, the *Framework* does attempt to recognize a more learner-involved and flexible approach to information literacy. It addresses, to a degree, the contextual nature of information, something the *Standards* have been criticized for ignoring (Foasberg 2015).

Despite this, the *Framework* perpetuates many of the same problems as the *Standards*. In her Gramscian analysis of education in the United States, Jay (2003, 6) demonstrates that hegemonic forces appropriate multicultural education approaches to reassert structural norms that privilege whiteness: "true to the symbiotic nature of hegemony, it is preserved

through on-going negotiations, with concessions granted to subordinate groups to secure their compliance." Similarly, the *Framework* has made concessions to accommodate critical librarianship, but it does not break completely from a decontextualized view of information literacy. Rather than highlighting the forces that try to exclude particular voices in academia (Beilin 2015), the document continues to place the most value on traditional academic resources, particularly on that which represents "upper-middle-class white American experiences that might seem hostile or exclusionary to those who don't fit that assumed identity" (Fister 2014, para. 5). Further, the *Framework* equates expertise with being able to maneuver through paid-for resources—the "valuable" ones (Beatty 2014)—presuming that those resources that are easily available may provide an interesting, different view, but are not as important as the ones for which an institution pays. Drabinski (2014) predicted this re-establishing of traditional information literacy ideas in the *Framework*, which emphasizes knowledge practices (that read like learning outcomes), rather than considering the classroom conditions and context. A thorough examination of the *Framework* reveals that the practices and standards of traditional academia are further normalized and centered. While an improvement on the *Standards*, the *Framework* could do more to examine the contexts in which information is required, the role played by the identity of information creators and consumers, and the impact of historical forces and structural oppression on the communities that engage in knowledge creation.

In my close reading of the *Framework* below, I draw on the following assumptions common to Critical Race Theory (Marx 2008):

1. Racism is so inherent to our existence in the United States that it seems to be the normal state of things.
2. The articulation of counterstories provide truths from the lived experiences of those who have traditionally been marginalized.

The first of these assumptions allows us to explore that ways in which any organizational document might not be overtly racist but could still perpetuate white supremacy by ignoring the ways in which structural racism impacts the information environment. The second provides a way of disrupting some of the hegemonic outcomes of the *Framework*. I will be highlighting frames where the issue of race or racist structures in the information environment is conspicuously absent, particularly "Authority is Constructed and Contextual," "Information Has Value," and "Scholarship as a Conversation"—the three frames, as Drabinski (2017) notes, that are most obviously influenced by critical

perspectives long espoused by leaders in critical information literacy. In these sections, an analysis of constructions of race and systemic white supremacy is essential to a full understanding of the concept at hand, but such phenomena are not addressed.

The first frame, "Authority is Constructed and Contextual," does not address the influence of racial bias on the evaluation and assignment of personal authority. Instead, it states that "Experts understand that authority is a type of influence recognized or exerted within a community. Experts view authority with an attitude of informed skepticism and an openness to new perspectives, additional voices, and changes in schools of thought. Experts understand the need to determine the validity of the information created by different authorities and to acknowledge biases that privilege some sources of authority over others, especially in terms of *others' worldviews, gender, sexual orientation, and cultural orientations*" (ACRL 2016, 12, emphasis mine). The absence of any mention of race is conspicuous, but, as Critical Race Theory tells us, not surprising given the way that institutional whiteness erases mentions of race and racism. While we should address the ways in which intersectional identities are subject to bias, to leave race unnamed among these identities is to ignore both the histories and the systemic processes of oppression that continue to devalue the experiences, ideas, and expertise of people of color. Of course, there are other identities ignored here—class, religion, and ability, to name a few—that all can and should be confronted when considering bias and privilege. But explicitly naming race in this section would encourage librarians and their students to consider the ways in which systemic exclusion and racial oppression has shaped the way authority is constructed and has thus impacted the information environment. The frame goes on to state that "novice learners come to respect the expertise that authority represents while remaining skeptical of the systems that have elevated that authority and the information created by it" (12). The language here certainly makes possible an examination of structural racism and its impact on the information environment, but it does not insist on such an examination, nor does it include any examples of such systems that could help to guide librarians and students to unpack the complexity of power and oppression in information environments.

Under the dispositions in "Authority is Constructed and Contextual," the *Framework* states that learners should "question traditional notions of granting authority and recognize the value of diverse ideas and worldviews" (13). This definition of diversity—a diversity of "ideas and worldviews"—is reminiscent of the overly broad approach to diversity discussed above. Understood this way, the concept of diversity nullifies any examination of power dynamics within these "ideas and worldviews." As Hussey (2010, 5) argues, "Diversity

without the discussion of race relations and their history in our society and in the LIS professions only provides a façade of change." In defining diversity so broadly, the *Framework* perpetuates the profession's problematic approach to addressing racism and white supremacy. It also reiterates some of the less-than-desirable professional values found in the ALA's *Library Bill of Rights* and *Freedom to Read Statement*; these ALA documents represent "a neoliberal multiculturalism that figures a diversity of speech within a marketplace of ideas as antiracist" (Seale and Mirza 2019, 47). Focusing on the "value of diverse ideas and worldviews" (ACRL 2016, 13) means that "[t]here is no room to grapple with the structural and systemic dominance and oppression that make violent ideas and speech both possible and powerful" (Seale and Mirza 2019, 50). At many universities, supporting free speech over all else, as Nicole Truesdell (2017) argues, signals that those universities welcome hate speech. At these institutions, "[S]tructures of oppression are never interrogated and instead everything is rendered 'opinions' that can be 'debated'" (Truesdell 2017, para. 6). In suggesting that learners should "value a diversity of ideas and worldviews" (ACRL 2016, 13), the "Authority is Constructed and Contextual" frame thus emphasizes that neutrality, civility, and intellectual freedom—rather than social justice and antiracism—are of the utmost importance for librarians (and are what should be taught in the classroom) (Shockey 2016).

Even if the frame "Authority is Constructed and Contextual" specifically referenced *racial* diversity, it would not be enough to address the issue of white supremacy in the information environment. As Hudson (2017, 13) argues, "The presence or absence of racial heterogeneity . . . is not per se a measure of racial justice. To be included in a space is not necessarily to have agency within that space, whether such inclusion takes the form of humans from 'diverse' (read: nonwhite) communities, 'diverse' materials, or 'diverse' knowledges and perspectives." The frame acknowledges that bias plays a role in what is considered authority or not, and that learners should be skeptical of the processes by which something becomes authoritative, but does not say anything about how "experts"[4] should address systematic oppression that is perpetuated in the policies and hiring, citing, and promotion practices in the institutions where they research.

The "Information Has Value" frame also fails to offer a meaningful vehicle for addressing race, again eliding the term "racism" to discuss systems more generally instead. One of the knowledge practices in this frame states that learners will "understand how and why some

4 This is the Framework's terminology. "Experts" are defined at one point in the document as "librarians, researchers, and professionals" (ACRL 2016, 9).

individuals or groups of individuals may be underrepresented or marginalized within the systems that produce and disseminate information" (ACRL 2016, 6). This frame may encourage an examination of how systems might marginalize groups and/or individuals through intersecting formations of race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, ability, and gender. What is missing, however, is an emphasis on considering ways to *combat* marginalization and/or underrepresentation, and to address the systems of power, including white supremacy, that structure our information environment. As Beilin (2015, para. 25) argues, the *Framework* "does not state as its goal the formation of possible solidarities for the student to help change the information system itself, nor the hierarchies of knowledge and status within academia." Instead, the focus is on understanding and evaluation; again, this can be a valuable step toward addressing racial oppression, but by excluding mentions of systemic racism and leaving unaddressed the agency learners have in shaping these systems, the frame limits how learners engage with the information environment. Additionally, the frame does not mention collaboration or group efforts, instead stating that learners should "motivate themselves" and engage in "self-evaluation" (ACRL 2016, 13). A frame that suggested that learners adopt strategies to collectively resist systemic marginalization—particularly the marginalization of people of color—through action and activism at local levels and through engagement with larger social movements would move learners beyond a distanced analysis of structural racism to a praxis of social justice.

The "Scholarship as Conversation" frame is marked by similar problems: it suggests that those who are information literate will "identify barriers to entering scholarly conversation via various venues" (ACRL 2016, 20), and while one might count structural racism among such barriers, the frame does not identify it as such. Additionally, as Beilin (2015, para. 16) shows, the frame presents scholarship in a traditional way: "As described, it does not pay sufficient attention to the ways that some voices are suppressed, silenced, and marginalized because they do not fit the proscribed boundaries of that field—which are, in the end, determined by a consensus of practitioners whose professional reputations and livelihoods often depend on the preservation of these boundaries and conventions." Rather than recognizing that there are "particular economic, social, and political systems that help determine the features and structure of the 'scholarly conversation,'" he argues (Beilin 2015, para. 17), the *Framework* takes a decontextualized approach. This decontextualization does not encourage librarians and students to consider how power structures, including white supremacy, restrict what is included in the scholarly conversation. Focusing on individual understanding rather than collective action against

systemic oppression reflects the individualized approach to racism and antiracism that, Seale and Mirza (2019) argue, is commonly seen in library and information studies and beyond. The shift of racism as a public phenomenon to a private one is described in Goldberg's (2009) *The Threat of Race*. He argues (2009, 23) that the establishment of laws that ostensibly create equality have produced "born again racism," a private, individualized definition of racism: "Born again racism . . . is a racism acknowledged, where acknowledged at all, as individualized faith, of the socially dislocated heart, rather than as institutionalized inequality . . . In short, born again racism is an unrecognized racism for there are no terms by which it could be recognized: no precedent, no intent, no pattern, no institutional explication." This reveals how neoliberal understandings of racism divorce it from its historical and structural contexts. Goldberg further argues that neoliberalism ensures that the state cannot regulate racism. In the effort to shift the focus of the state to protecting privatization and policing resistance, neoliberalism has erased an understanding of racism and the (relatively modern) history of race from the public sphere (Goldberg 2009). Instead, racism is a private, moral failure, which means that even addressing issues of race or racism is often seen as more offensive than racism itself (Goldberg 2009, 344–45). It is perhaps because its authors wished to avoid such offense that the *Framework* elides issues of race throughout the document.

Were the *Framework* to address systemic racism as a barrier to the creation, organization, and distribution of information in a more explicit and meaningful way, librarians and their students would have a foundation for discussing and challenging white supremacy within the information environment, including in the library itself. Instead, librarians must turn to scholars of critical information literacy for more guidance on how to engage in antiracist pedagogy.

Critical Information Literacy Perspectives

Informed by the critical pedagogy of, among others, Paolo Freire and bell hooks, critical information literacy provides an important lens for and critique of pedagogy in libraries and the *Framework*. Critical pedagogy posits that education has traditionally played a role in oppression, but that a critical approach to teaching and learning can enable students to struggle against injustice. Critical information literacy, like critical pedagogy, resists the "banking" model of education, wherein students are containers into which an instructor simply deposits knowledge. Instead, critical information literacy provides students with the critical awareness to process information for analyzing the world and systems of

oppression, for understanding themselves and their role in making change, and for resisting and solving significant issues and problems that impact their lives (Elmborg 2006). In short, the intent of critical information literacy is to "empower learners to identify and act upon oppressive power structures" (Tewell 2015, 36). This includes the power structures like search algorithms that support stereotypes and racism (Noble 2018), classification systems that reinforce white supremacy (Adler 2017; Drabinski 2008), and a literary canon that has historically emphasized white, Western writers in the United States (Nguyen 2018). The liberating aspirations of critical information literacy may be optimistic, but a critical information literacy approach can enable us to identify and work against the limits of the *Framework*. Though the *Framework* may indeed be an "institutionalizing" of critical information literacy and critical librarianship, as Seale (2016) posits, we can reclaim space for critical information literacy in the *Framework* by disrupting the "hegemonic liberalism" that attempts to "reduce systemic and structural differences to individual difference" (Seale 2016, 3).

Critical information literacy proposes, as Beilin (2015, para. 11) puts it, that "information literacy instruction should resist the tendency to reinforce and reproduce hegemonic knowledge, and instead nurture students' understandings of how information and knowledge are formed by unequal power relations based on class, race, gender, and sexuality." Beilin (2015) also argues, however, that critical information literacy insists on a resistance to these power structures, a complicated undertaking that raises the issue of complicity when one is part of the system that one claims to be resisting. Critical information literacy can provide both critique of the structures that shape the information environment, as well as methods of resisting these structures, such as those described in the essays and activities presented in the two volumes of *Critical Library Pedagogy* (Pagowsky and McElroy 2016), in which many librarians take a social justice approach to teaching while meeting faculty information literacy requests. Many of these critical information literacy approaches detailed in the book and elsewhere include antiracist information literacy, which, as described below, offers strategies to examine and counter systemic racism, allowing us and our students to move beyond the limitations of the *Framework*.

Antiracist Information Literacy

Antiracist information literacy approaches seek to confront white supremacy through fostering a recognition of the ways in which systemic racism permeates the information environment. Pashia (2017) takes this form of critical information literacy approach in her

classroom, teaching students to think about who typically writes scholarly materials, to think beyond who is typically considered authoritative,[5] and to consider alternate media sources. While none of this exploration is explicitly precluded by the ACRL *Framework* (and, some could argue, is even encouraged), the *Framework*, as I have shown, does not explicitly address the ways in which systemic racism has shaped the information environment, instead centering traditional academic sources and discourse. Where the Scholarship as a Conversation frame (ACRL 2016, 8) names "scholarly and professional fields" as generating "varied perspectives and interpretations," a critical information literacy approach could emphasize "perspectives and interpretations" that are generated through a number of communities (activists, interest groups, and so on) and modalities (online, informal publications, informal discourse) that are not necessarily considered scholarly and/or professional. As Barbara Fister (2014, para. 3) asks in response to this very frame, "are we only going to think about this happening in the context of school? What about civic participation? Local activism?" A critical information literacy approach does not mean that all academic sources should be eschewed, but that we can resist the idea that paid-for and academic resources are inherently better while we highlight authors that have traditionally been ignored because of structures of oppression, scholarly and otherwise.

To begin to address how such structures of oppression like white supremacy impact the information environment, I have my students reflect on why it matters that fields such as history, medicine, and literature have been dominated by white male authors and scholars in Western higher education. Many of them mention the myths they were told in school—how their history classes ignored or glossed over the genocide against Indigenous peoples, how war crimes were justified, how slavery was sometimes even painted as having some benefits. Sometimes we discuss how medical research has ignored the different needs, symptoms, and conditions of transgender folks, cisgendered women, and people of color. As Harris (2018, para. 15) argues, "Many scholars and pundits . . . dismiss nonwhite scholars writing on slavery, Native Americans and race, or women writing on gender, discounting their research, subjecting their books to greater scrutiny or writing off their focus on the history of enslaved blacks, Native Americans or women as simplistic. They laud scholars who focus on the elites who developed the ideologies and technologies of slavery and white supremacy, judging their work as more complex or 'smarter.'" While alternative narratives do exist in the scholarship, in other words, they are not as likely to be

5 In another article, she points out that "these markers of authority are socially constructed within the context of structures of oppression, including racism and sexism" (Pashia 2016, 142).

found in the textbooks or canonical literature to which students are more frequently exposed. Additionally, showing that what was historically considered "'objective' or 'Truth' could have actually been Eurocentric, served to hide white privilege, and legitimate and perpetuate dominant ideologies" can help to disabuse students of the notion that knowledge is neutral and/or apolitical (Kishimoto 2018, 546). In exposing structures of oppression in the information environment, critical information literacy can be a catalyst to encourage students to seek justice and dismantle such structures—something that can be achieved not simply by seeking out other voices in general, as the *Framework* asks us to do, but by specifically centering those voices that have been traditionally silenced. By centering marginalized voices and focusing on stories that reveal the insidious impact of white supremacy on every aspect of society, librarians can work with students to begin to rethink the presumed normalcy of white privilege and its results, addressing such privilege instead as a historical construction of power and control.

Since access to traditional methods of distributing information have at times been withheld from people of color, there is much value, Critical Race Theory tells us, in hearing narratives and stories of those who have been marginalized (Marx 2008). What is of particular interest in Critical Race Theory is the counterstory. Counterstories refute stock stories that are used to justify systemic racism (Marx 2008). For example, a stock story may have it that diverse candidates are not interested in a particular position or institution in higher education, while the counterstory would be the account of a candidate who was denied an interview or faced microaggressions during the interview.

In our classrooms, we need to seek out and highlight counterstories that negate the mainstream stories of academia and beyond which maintain white supremacy. An antiracist approach to information literacy goes beyond recognizing "that unlikely voices can be authoritative" (ACRL 2016, 4), and instead centers perspectives that have been traditionally written out of history because of systemic racism. Pashia (2017) does this in her course by showing students the value of seeking eye-witness accounts, specifically those of witnesses to the events in Ferguson, as compared to the stock story told by news media, which featured a distorted version of the behavior of Black protestors because of the white supremacy of the mass media. Counterstories "all[ow] for the challenging of privileged discourses" (DeCuir and Dixson 2004, 27). It is not simply an acknowledgement of different views and opinions, a "recogni[tion of] the value of diverse ideas and worldviews" (ACRL 2016, 4), but a centering of something that entirely disrupts the primary narrative of a subject. The purpose of counterstories is "to demystify the notion of a racially neutral

society and tell another story of a highly racialized social order: a story where social institutions and practices serve the interest of White individuals" (López 2003, 85). When joined with a more general discussion of the dynamics of systemic racism, exposure to counterstories could, for some students, result in a revelation, illuminating the ways in which white supremacy permeates society. As Matias and Mackey (2016) found in using this approach for prospective teachers, combining counterstories with an understanding of the structures of racism led students to a better understanding the various experiences of BIPOC overall, including, specifically, an understanding of such experiences in the context of the systemic institutional silencing and exclusion of BIPOC counterstories. The use of counterstories that highlight the bias and inaccuracy of stock stories, along with an examination of some of the structures that help to perpetuate these stock stories, can lead to a deeper understanding of how systemic racism shapes the information environment specifically. For Matias and Mackey (2016), this also meant that their students, who were future educators, described how they would practice antiracist pedagogy in their future teaching positions. Matias and Mackey (2016) believe that much of the success of the course could be attributed to the trust established between them and the students, which "plays an integral role in the development of their [the students'] critical consciousness" (43).

As a supportive and social-justice-minded space, the antiracist information literacy classroom cannot be neutral. As Truesdell (2017, para. 9) states in her article encouraging faculty to challenge oppression inside and outside the classroom, "Now is *not* the time to side with neutrality." Not siding with neutrality may mean that librarians need to find spaces beyond the one-shot to truly engage their students in antiracist efforts. At Truesdell's university, the Office of Academic Diversity and Inclusiveness started a #GetWoke series that focused on "Organizing and Activism During 45" in the 2017-2018 academic year. Similar efforts are possible for librarians. Jennifer Brown (2019) discussed how breaking out of the typical 50-minute information literacy session (and, indeed, out of the library space) was necessary for her reading bias workshops, but this allowed her to have the time for students to discuss the complexity of the topics brought forth (Brown and López-McKnight 2019). Librarians can create their own advocacy-focused and antiracist events, education, and programming. These programs outside the traditional classroom can maintain a critical information literacy focus that engages the campus context and/or current national concerns. For example, a zine-making event about the history of racism on campus could use archival materials and link them to students' lived experiences of racism,

allowing both an evaluation of resources and an understanding of how racism still impacts academia. In creating a collaborative environment in the educational space, librarians may establish trust and relationships that allow them to work as activists alongside their students. Perhaps librarians, students, faculty, and staff could work together to challenge racist policies and ineffective or harmful initiatives at the institution through gathering information about the history of such policies as well as ways in which students and others have organized to change such efforts in the past. They could encourage a decolonization of the curriculum and the library through efforts that center texts from Indigenous and persons of color. Through such critical information literacy efforts, librarians can support students to make the university (and hopefully beyond) a more just environment.

While systemic racism is unlikely to be dismantled through information literacy instruction, naming the issue of systemic racism and its prevalence in the information environment (something the *Framework* fails to do), providing counterstories in the classroom, and creating a supportive learning community are important antiracist steps that can lead to librarians and students working together to address white supremacy in their universities and beyond. Those of us who have white privilege have a particular duty to address this in our classrooms because, as Gusa (2010, 465) argues, "When Whites neglect to identify the ways in which White ideological homogenizing practices sustain the structure of domination and oppression, they allow institutional policies and practices to be seen as unproblematic or inevitable and thereby perpetuate hostile racial climates." Antiracist education within the sphere of information literacy in academia may be limited, but several librarians have provided effective strategies for antiracist approaches in the classroom.[6] We must reveal to our students how predominantly white institutions of higher education, and the academic libraries within them, have been complicit in the marginalization of nonwhite authors and researchers. By revealing the structural barriers in the information environment and resisting narratives of white privilege in the information literacy classroom, we can take an important step in creating solidarity in the classroom dedicated to racial justice. Finally, we must work alongside our students to collectively address the systemic forces that perpetuate oppression in our communities through critical information literacy efforts on campus and beyond.

6 See, for example, Drabinski (2008), Pagowsky and McElroy (2016), and Pashia (2017).

Conclusion

Such endeavors are not easy. As librarians at the University of California (UC) discovered, not all academic librarians are afforded academic freedom. An administrator at UC Davis took issue with the title of a librarian's presentation, claiming it implied that administration had not always respected copy catalogers (Ellis 2018). This disagreement led to the realization that librarians in the UC system did not have academic freedom to protect them, sparking a round of contentious negotiations between the union and administration (Ellis 2018). This does not bode well for those librarians who want to take an antiracist information literacy approach but are not granted academic freedom. Antiracist information literacy allows us to address race in the information environment in a deep and meaningful way, but we need the support of our institutions and our profession to do so.[7] If our employers, institutions, and professional documents make vague references to diversity, civility, and neutrality without substantive support for antiracist efforts, then we may be told that our critical information literacy is "too political" or not in alignment with the profession's values. In our libraries, in our institutions of higher education, and in our profession, it is imperative to foster environments conducive to social justice to the extent that we can. Documents like the *Framework* should emphasize the role of librarians in working with their communities to expose white supremacy in the information environment and to take steps to address this inequality. If academic freedom is necessary for antiracist instruction, then at institutions of higher education where librarians do not have academic freedom, they can collectively organize to fight for this right.[8] Again, all of this is easier said than done. What happens when other librarians (influential librarians in the profession, our supervisors, our colleagues) disagree that the mission of librarianship is one of social justice? Are librarians who do not have faculty status able to integrate antiracist information literacy instruction without fear of retribution? How do we respond to those who believe that academic freedom and freedom of speech means that every viewpoint is valid? The answers to these questions are complex, but let us work together where we can—where our efforts are needed and where inroads can be made—or we will be complicit in reinforcing the systems that allow white supremacy to exist.

7 Though we also must realize how the institutionalization of critical information literacy, explored by Seale (2016), can both legitimize critical information literacy while "foreclose[ing] other possibilities and manag[ing] into nonexistence opposition it cannot absorb" (3).

8 A new memorandum of understanding that grants academic freedom to librarians at UC was ratified in 2019 (Brennan 2019).

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