



Western Michigan University
ScholarWorks at WMU

Academic Leadership Academy

Office of Faculty Development

Fall 9-14-2018

The Hidden Code of Bias and Power in the Infosphere: Moving towards trans(formative) information literacies

Kate Langan

Western Michigan University, kathleen.langan@wmich.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/acad_leadership

WMU ScholarWorks Citation

Langan, Kate, "The Hidden Code of Bias and Power in the Infosphere: Moving towards trans(formative) information literacies" (2018). *Academic Leadership Academy*. 90.

https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/acad_leadership/90

This Poster is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of Faculty Development at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Academic Leadership Academy by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



The Hidden Code of Bias and Power in the Infosphere

Moving towards trans(formative) information literacies:

Kate Langan,
Associate Professor,
University Libraries

Code is a Human Creation

- Code is a language
- Interacting with code is cultural phenomenon
- These narratives are susceptible to bias
- Each interaction creates a unique narrative that can be studied

Critical Race Theory

Race is a product of convenience and power, a construct of time, space, and social ideologies

Racism and racial inequality

- “Means by which society allocate privilege and status.” (Delgado, 2012, 21)
- Systemic social bias normalizes racial inequalities, renders racism mundane, and leaves power

Critical Code Studies

- Studies human interaction with code as creator and user
- Examines bias in computer languages
- Analyzes code individually and in relationship with other code
- Historical/cultural privileges dictate access to information

Problem

Racially, historically, and socially grounded privilege and status is hidden in the computer code that governs access to information and the research process

Solution

Information Literacy Instruction can equalize these invisible power constructs by developing a curriculum that grows awareness of the socio-cultural phenomenon of computer code

Critical Race Theory and Critical Code Studies

- Analyze code, how it functions in the infosphere
 - Reveals an invisible power
- Privilege and bias which influences the research process

The Information Seeking Process

- At risk through willful ignorance of code
- Power and bias remain unchallenged
- The researcher is could be negligent
- new knowledge is susceptible to bias

Instruction Librarians and Information Literacy (IL)

- Librarians are agents of change to raise awareness
- Minimize threat in the research process

Student Learning

- Students carry social stigmas with them into the classroom
- Institutional threats compromise academic achievement

Agents of Change

- Librarians are culturally responsive and socio-literate
- Neutralize learning space from institutional threat
- Minimize student stigmas

IL Learning Objectives

- Explicit acknowledgement of bias and access
- Tangible examples in IL instruction
- Does not need to be the computer code itself
- Can be word choice and awareness
- Metadata and algorithms that control databases, search engines, and discovery platforms

Narratives of Power in the Infosphere

- Code regulates the information seeking experience
- Manipulates access to information and the information itself
- Each interaction is a new narrative of power and bias
- Some Information seekers are more vulnerable than others