#libeyrianship: Pop culture in critical information literacy programs at art and design colleges

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JF: Thanks ARLiS for inviting us and making a video recording of this. We’re not terrified at all, we swear. It’s really special to talk about Beyoncé’s work in the context of information literacy in New Orleans.

SE: Thanks so much to Kelly for moderating. And we’re super excited to hear about Stephanie’s work.
SE: So, we’re going to start with a diagram. And I just want you all to know that Jenny named this slide “REVENGE OF THE VENNNNNNNN.”

We actually weren’t going to put this in our presentation, initially. It was just a tool for us to organize ourselves. We wanted to use one of the main principles of backwards design here: we’re starting with what we want our audience to get out of this session and lay it out explicitly for you so we’re all on the same page. We also really try to employ this principle in our instruction.

JF: Because the title of our presentation has a lot of moving parts and we have a lot of overlapping interests, we wanted to lay out some of the areas we wanted to touch on.

SE: And because we know folks can’t really read and listen at the same time, take a second to absorb.
“Critical librarianship includes the development of critical thinking, information literacy, and lifelong learning skills in students, as well as engagement with diversity, information ethics, access to information, commodification of information, labor, academic freedom, human rights, engaged citizenry, and neoliberalism.”

Kenny Garcia, *Keeping Up With... Critical Librarianship*

SE: One of the central themes of this presentation is critlib. So, what is critlib? This is the brief description of critical librarianship from Kenny Garcia’s article, *Keeping Up with Critical Librarianship*. As you can tell, over the decade or so since the term was coined, it’s become something that can be rather loosely defined. However, it comes from Paulo Freire’s concept of critical pedagogy, from his 1970 book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Critical pedagogy aims to disrupt the power dynamic in the banking system of education, where an instructor deposits information to the students.
think - pair - share

SE: Because this is a session on critical librarianship, which takes as one of its principles the disruption of the authority of the instructor, we wanted to use some active learning techniques to bring your experiences into the conversation. This is the gif I use whenever I introduce group activities in my classes because I imagine this is what’s going through your brains when I suggest that you get up, move and do some active learning. So get ready, because we’re going to ask to you to do just that towards the end of our presentation.
SE: How many of you have had to write Information Literacy programs? Ours, like a lot of examples I looked at in my research, was primarily focused around instruction. It’s the area in which we have the most direct impact on our students and, of course, information literacy is closely aligned with pedagogy. But, today we’re going to broaden that scope a little bit and talk about a concept that came up in our presentation planning: information literacy everywhere.
JF: As Siân said, we’re going to broaden the discussion a bit. For us, everything is librarianship and information literacy is everywhere, including pop culture. Based on the definition we just read, critlib supports this. I’m going to illustrate these points using Beyoncé’s recent work.
JF: Beyoncé released the song ‘Formation’ and accompanying music video one day before Super Bowl 50, at which Bey performed this song.
JF: The video’s backdrop is presumably New Orleans, showing flooded streets and houses, reminding us of the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina. It starts with Beyoncé on this Ford Crown Vic police car and moves through the city with musical processions, marching bands, fashion of the antebellum south, and several dance routines.

Information Literacy Everywhere.
JF: We see images that reflect the Black Lives Matter movement and police shootings. Here we see a young boy with his hood up who has just finished dancing in front of a line of police officers with their hands up. The video ends with what sounds like a first-hand recording of a New Orleans resident during Hurricane Katrina after the levees broke.

Critics claim that this work was “anti-police,” which Beyoncé denies.

Information Literacy Everywhere.
JF: The next day Beyoncé performed this song during the halftime show at Super Bowl 50. Beyoncé was again criticized for her costume choices because they reflected clothing associated with the Black Panther Party. Police unions called for off-duty security to boycott (Raleigh, North Carolina, Miami, Nashville, etc.). Think about that for a moment - her costume decisions caused these boycotts and controversy. Would this have happened with different costumes? This is the power of art and artistic decision.

Information Literacy Everywhere
JF: Closer look at the costume decisions. On the left are Beyoncé’s backup dancers. On the right are members of the Black Panther Party in 1969.

These costume decisions made me think about how our students might research iconic looks of the past. How do they use iconic or indigenous looks, for example, without parody or appropriation? How do they make it their own while paying tribute to something?

Information Literacy Everywhere.

SE: When I first started at MICA about 9 months ago, Jenny and I went out for a drink and talked about our mutual interest in Beyoncé.
JF: For me, the outcome of the conversation with Siân was the idea that information literacy everywhere was something that had to be shared. After the release of Beyoncé’s visual album *Lemonade* and a discussion about this work with my mom and brother, two people who had not seen the visual album nor were big fans of Beyoncé’s music, the Lemonade LibGuide was born.

We’ll get back to *Lemonade* the visual album.
SE: For me, what came out of this was an instruction one-shot session based around Beyoncé’s ‘Formation’ and the history of Black Power Movements in the U.S.

Building on the discussion of the controversy around the Black Panther costumes at the Superbowl, I had students break into groups and do research on the Black Panthers in our databases, our library catalogue, and Google. They then presented back to each other on their findings: how many hits they got, what kind of search results they were finding, and so on.

In the second half of the session, I address the controversy around Beyoncé not attributing her references in Formation. Although the actual copyright issues of the appropriation are complex, I use it as a platform to positively frame citation. For example, while a lot of people know Beyoncé, they might not know anything about that B.E.A.T, a 2013 documentary about Bounce, which is a New Orleans-based predominantly queer brand of hip hop. They might not know anything about Big Freedia,
the so-called Queen of Bounce, pictured here. I use this to highlight that citation not only gives credit where credit’s due but also allows for further learning.

Information Literacy everywhere.
JF: This conversation, this exchange of ideas and interest between Sian and I, brings design thinking to mind. Ideas were elicited through conversation. We’re challenging ourselves to adopt to design thinking principles at our library. Design thinking is associated with professional design practice and business and social issues. It focuses on users’ experience, builds empathy with users through observation of behavior, not focus groups or surveys, which are great, but they typically don’t lead to earth shaking processes and services. The stages of design thinking are inspiration, ideation, and implementation. Design thinking is typically performed through small, interdisciplinary teams, which reflects real life work situations of our students. For example, architecture, industrial and graphic design professions.
JF: Let’s talk a bit more about *Lemonade*, a visual album consisting of an hour of music, poetry, references to history, literature and art, making it a perfect opportunity to discuss research and information literacy. After watching, I wanted to know what it took to make this work because this information would help our students understand the job market.

For example, a team of several directors and cinematographers were involved with making this visual album, which reflects the current working climate many students will experience. Very few will have the experience of solo artist in their studio, at least not directly after they graduate.

The *Lemonade* LibGuide provides perspectives, opinions, and ideas expressed or referenced in *Lemonade*. 
JF: I’m also interested in cultural literacy and understanding images. Making connections and delving into a piece of art might help students understand research methodologies that focus on translating and embedding information literacy into their own work.

In a scene in Lemonade, Beyoncé walks down a city street with a bat and smashes storefront windows and cars parked along the street. Several people have written articles comparing this particular scene in Lemonade to artist Pipilotti Rist's audiovisual installation *Ever Is Over All* from 1997.
JF: In the Anger chapter of Lemonade, Beyoncé samples a Malcolm X speech from 1962 in Los Angeles. The section she uses starts off “The most disrespected woman in America is the black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the black woman. The most neglected person in America is the black woman.” My first thought was, “will students recognize this voice? Do they understand that this is just part of a much longer speech?”

SE: Just to make a brief note on social justice: You can do critical information literacy or critical pedagogy without explicitly introducing social justice concepts. Just by using active learning techniques, for example, you are destabilizing power dynamics in your classroom. However, I don’t think that goes far enough, so in my instruction, I try to use examples that are women, people of color, and other marginalized groups when doing simple things like demonstrating a search or looking at a Wikipedia article. Instead of using the Mona Lisa or Picasso or some
other old white dude, I use examples like Ana Mendieta and Juliana Huxtable. It’s a really simple way to scaffold social justice work subtly into your instruction and to increase the visibility of people of color, queer people, trans people and other marginalized groups.
JF: On that note, after the Baltimore Uprising in 2015, I created Understanding Civic Unrest in Baltimore, 1968-2015. The uprising was sparked after the death of 25 year old Freddie Gray in Baltimore City police custody. The actual uprising happened not far from MICA's campus and many of our students, staff, and faculty were involved in protests, cleanup, discussions, and other community efforts. The uprising as well as discussion of social issues have been the basis of street art, fine art, community events, social design projects, and more. The guide provides resources for people to investigate what happened in 2015 as well as historic context of unrest in Baltimore.

Information literacy everywhere.
JF: I also want to plug this supportive community/space on Facebook for librarians, archivists, and library professionals of color called ‘we here.’ Librarianship is 87.1% white, it’s important that we let each other know ‘we here.’ As a first generation-American Latina, who did not have a straightforward career path toward librarianship, it is important for me to discuss my background.
JF: Switching gears a bit, we’re going to talk about tools, both digital and in the classroom.
JF: each tool has a different audience and advantage/disadvantage. At MICA, every academic program has a LibGuide as a starting point for research. As you can gather from this presentation, I prefer LibGuides that are topical, and apparently a lot of other people do too: the Lemonade guide has been viewed over 68,000 times and the Civic Unrest guide is our second most popular. However, I’m aware that not all of our students see our guides or follow us on social media, which is why instruction is so important! It reaches so many more of our students. Thought has to go into what you do digitally and what you do in the classroom, which causes you to think about your audience for each platform or activity.

SE: This concept comes from tech, but can be applied to pedagogy. There are moments in which a lecture format makes sense and there are moments when active learning makes more sense and those are all tools we have in our toolkit.
SE: Previously, instruction sessions at Decker assumed our students were using the library primarily for browsing. As Larissa Garcia and Jessica Labatte pointed out in their recent Art Documentation article, art and design students do use the physical collections and do browse much more than students in other disciplines. Our circulation data as part of the Baltimore Academic Library Consortium also confirms this. However, students also need to understand how to navigate web sources, how to understand the power dynamics in information creation and so on, in order to be not only informed citizens but also to effectively build careers in the arts, a notoriously unforgiving field. Our students need to leave basically able to be entrepreneurs, whether they know it or not.
SE: So you might still be asking yourself: what does pop culture have to do with critical librarianship? And what does it have to do with critique?

Pop culture can serve as a framework to highlight social justice issues in a way that’s engaging and interesting. It allows us to introduce political and academic concepts like intersectionality in a way that feels already familiar and builds on students’ existing bodies of knowledge.

I actually started out the Beyonce instruction session by watching a few minutes of Formation and having students respond to it off the cuff. Because they’re art and design students who spend most of their time doing studio work, I found that they were super comfortable with this format. I hadn’t intended to use the model of a critique, but realized that it was a really easy way to make students feel comfortable in the library, by mimicking their other academic experiences.
SE: So, I built on this! I started having students do concept mapping and then literally referred to it as a “crit” of each others’ concept maps. These are Graphic Design seniors concept mapping their capstone projects.
SE: I had them literally comment on each others’ concept maps. And I’ve used this in almost every class since. I find that it allows for different learning styles: some groups like to talk it out, whereas the introverts often prefer to quietly write on each others’ concept maps. All in all, this crit-like structure is one they’re used to and comfortable in.

And it works. Since we’ve been employing more active learning techniques, we’ve had an over 100% increase in instruction, teaching more than 100 sessions in the Fall Semester.
SE: In our Twitter chat, we had someone question the relevance of pop culture as a frame. We concede that if you’re not into Beyoncé, you shouldn’t present on Beyoncé. You should teach with things that are interesting to you. You should be a human being at the center of your instruction, and meet your students where they are -- holistically, not just as students but as human beings.

JF: This is true of your teaching, but also social media. And this is not to say we haven’t been called boring. But what helps is talking to each other about how a session went and asking for feedback directly after the session.
think-pair-share

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Kenny Garcia, Keeping Up With... Critical Librarianship

SE: So, now we’re going to flip this discussion. We’d like you to get up and sit next to your neighbor. Think back to what I mentioned earlier about how I use examples of people of colors, LGBTQI folks, and other marginalized communities. That’s just one example of how I include critlib in my instruction. So turn to your neighbor and talk with your neighbor about strategies you’re using to make your instruction more critical, or ideas you want to try out.
JF: If this is your first introduction to critlib, we encourage you to explore the hashtag critlib on Twitter, or check out critlib.org to find out more. Sian and I are also two of the many co-organizers of the crit lib unconference in Baltimore right before ACRL.
Thank you!

This presentation - bit.ly/libeyrianship
Jenny - @citythatreads
Siân - @sianniekins

Thank you!