Equity Series Course 1

OTHERING IN THE LIBRARY

Participant Guide

Multnomah County
Library

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Othering in the Library
Two hours

Audience: All library staff

Learning Objectives:
- Learn about the history of oppression and racism in Oregon
- Be able to describe the history of oppression and racism in American public libraries
- Discuss how historical experiences create intergenerational patterns of library use
- Describe how you can work to interrupt systemic oppression

Introduction

The library is working to make sure that staff have a pathway to engage in equity and inclusion work. In order to do that work, we need to know some foundational information. We need to learn about the

history of bias and exclusion in our state and in libraries. We need to think about our own experiences and our own work.

Everyone comes with their own unique experiences and may be at different starting points in the work. This class is a great first step. For those who have already begun to engage in equity and inclusion work, this class can serve to reaffirm your commitment and to make sure you have the foundational knowledge you need.

Perspectives

Some of the issues we cover during this class might be difficult to think about. Depending on your perspective, they might be painful, surprising or exhausting to think about.

When we are discussing these issues, keep in mind that even when you have positive **intent**, the **impact** of your words or actions on another person may be damaging.

We are all here to learn, so we should remember that everyone is coming from a different perspective. Creating space for multiple truths and norms can help broaden our own perspective.

Think of a statue:

Via Flickr: Kara Newhouse

Via Flickr: Krista Kennedy

If I describe this statue as a dog stretching out, or ready to jump up or run away, am I wrong? If I describe this statue as a dog facing me, approaching me, or greeting me am I wrong?

Library Mission, Priorities and Vision

Multnomah County Library uses three year priorities to share what we do and explain how we do it. The priorities are built on four pillars that will not change. Equity and inclusion is called out explicitly in those pillars - the foundation of the work we do at the library:

A champion for equity and inclusion

The 2019-2021 priorities call out goals related to equity and inclusion, too:

- We help people build trust and work toward common goals
- We help people better understand each other and respect differences
- We invest in people who face the greatest barriers in life

MCL's equity and inclusion vision is to:
Operationalize a system that equitably nurtures, empowers, and lifts staff, patrons and the community to their highest potential

If we do not approach our work with an equity lens, we will not be able to build the trust needed to help our patrons, staff and communities build trust and work toward common goals. If we do not make the effort to learn about perspectives other than our own, we will not be able to help people better understand each other and respect differences. If we do not believe equity is important, we cannot invest the resources required to serve those who face the greatest barriers in life.

To support equity and inclusion in the library, consider everyone who might be impacted:
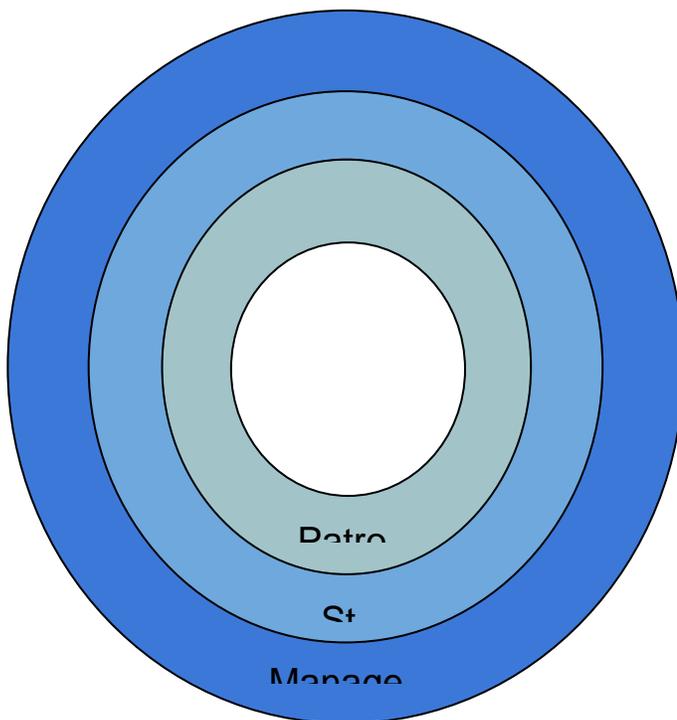
Management - Does management from diverse communities and experiences feel welcomed, included and supported?

Staff - Do our staff from diverse communities and experiences feel welcomed, included and supported?

Patrons - Do our patrons from diverse communities and experiences feel welcomed, included and supported?

Community - Do all communities feel welcomed, included and supported?

Who we are, who we serve

Keeping in mind that, in order to support equity and inclusion in the library, we need consider everyone who might be impacted, we should think about who works here and how we reflect the communities we serve.
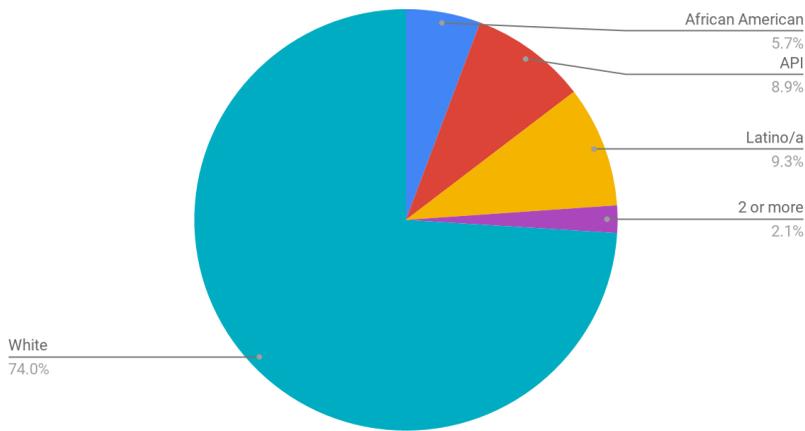
Multnomah County Library recognizes our responsibility to work toward the highest level of cultural awareness and sensitivity, and strives to provide services that are culturally and linguistically relevant to
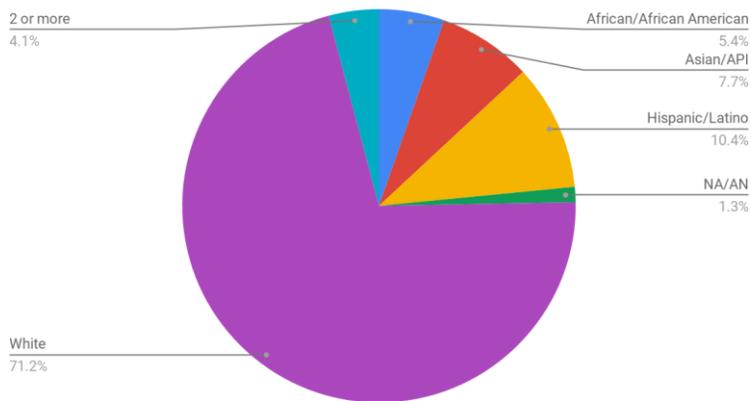
the community. While the background of MCL staff reflects the communities we serve, we recognize that cultural and linguistic barriers are factors in not fully reaching diverse communities.

Additionally, gentrification has and is forcing people in Multnomah County to move away from their cultural communities. This puts their cultural connections and support systems at risks, and means that the library must continue to be flexible and adaptive, recognizing that staffing and collections must change to meet changing needs.

Staff demographics

Category	Percentage
African American	5.7%
API	8.9%
Latino/a	9.3%
2 or more	2.1%
White	74.0%

Multnomah County demographics

Category	Percentage
2 or more	4.1%
African/African American	5.4%
Asian/API	7.7%
Hispanic/Latino	10.4%
NA/AN	1.3%
White	71.2%

[1]

Vocabulary

Shared vocabulary will help us learn together.

Dominant Culture: Characterized by a high consistency of cultural traits and customs. A dominant culture is one that is able, through economic or political power, to impose its values, language, and ways of behaving on other cultures. This may be achieved through legal or political suppression of other sets

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[1] https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/multnomahcountyoregon#qf-headnote-b

of values and patterns of behaviour, or by monopolizing the media of communication. Dominant culture refers to a system of power, not to individuals.

Inclusion: The extent to which a person feels heard, informed, respected and influential over their environment

Equality: The quality or state of being equal

Equity: When everyone has access to the opportunities necessary to satisfy their essential needs, advance their wellbeing and achieve their full potential.
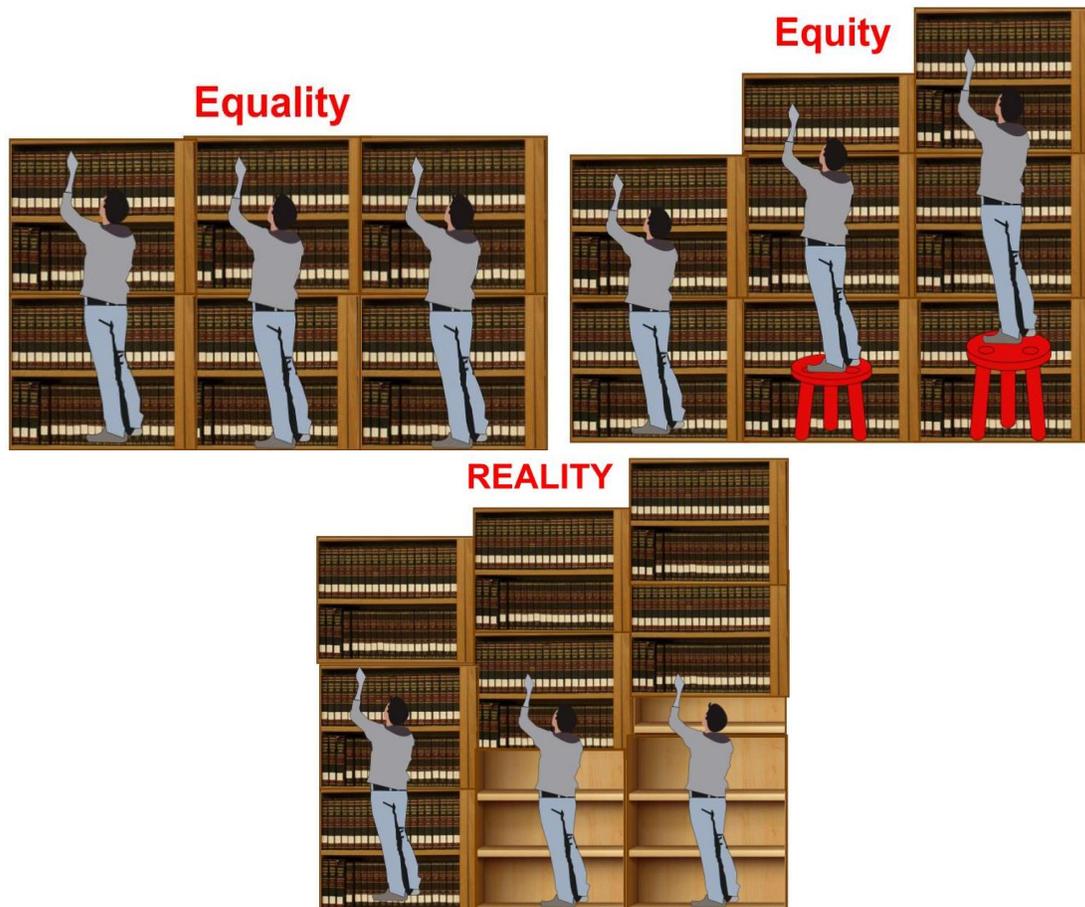
Systemic oppression/racism: Institutional racism/oppression or systemic racism/oppression describes forms of racism/oppression which are structured into political and social institutions. It occurs when established laws, customs, and practices systematically reflect and produce inequities based on one's membership in targeted social identity groups.

Privilege: a special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group of people.

White Privilege: is a term for societal privileges that benefit people identified as white in Western countries, beyond what is commonly experienced by non-white people under the same social, political, or economic circumstances.

History and othering in libraries

Understanding how systems were created allows us to gain knowledge to dismantle them.

Systems and foundations of oppression
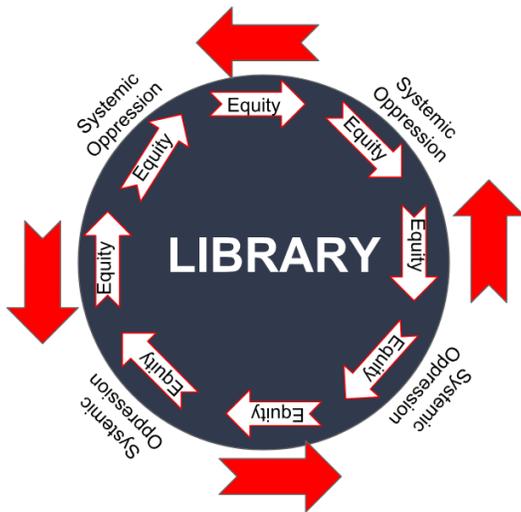
Systems were created by members of the dominant culture (white, male, cis; straight). These systems were created to keep people out. Systems continue to function from original foundations; even the most equitable and inclusive institutions are still influenced by external oppressive systems. This means that we need to think about change as **transformational**, not **transactional**. You can think about this like building a new house. If you build a new house on an old foundation, you risk that foundation jeopardizing the new house. If you build a new foundation and a new house, the house will be on stable ground. It takes more work to build a new foundation, but the work pays off.
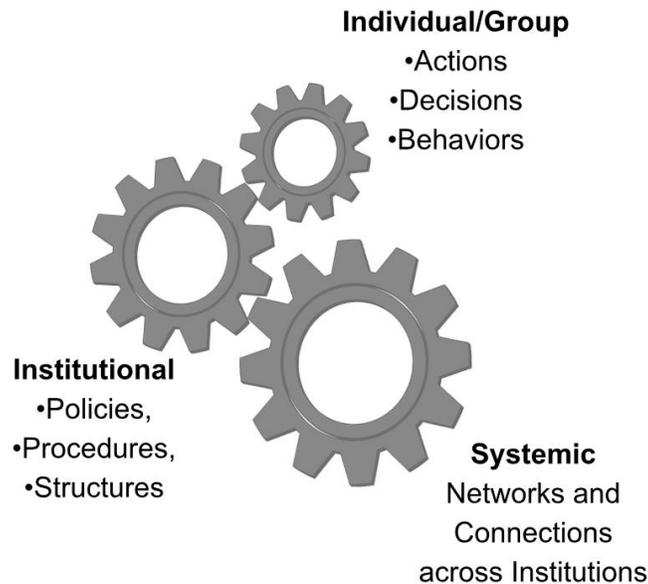

The gears of oppression

Individual, institutional oppression function as interlocking gears that reinforce each other to perpetuate discrimination, structural inequity and norms against groups of people in ways that benefit others. In order to dismantle the systems of oppression, we need to "jam the machine" by challenging all of the ways oppression plays out.

Individual/Group
•Actions
•Decisions
•Behaviors

Institutional
•Policies,
•Procedures,
•Structures

Systemic
Networks and
Connections
across Institutions

Segregation in American Libraries

The gears of oppression mean that past exclusionary practices affect access today.

In the past:
- Libraries were spaces reserved for whites only
- Library materials were chosen to address the needs and interests of whites
- If libraries were open to people of color, they were required to access the colored section only
- Colored libraries had limited resources and materials-often not meeting the needs of the community
- People fought to gain access to white libraries (Tougaloo Nine)

Now
- Historical experiences create intergenerational patterns of behavior (library use)
- Library materials continue to be geared towards dominant culture
- There is a continued lack of workforce diversity
- There is a continued lack of trust

Tougaloo Nine

In 1961, Black students at Tougaloo College participated in civil disobedience by staging sit-ins/read-ins of segregated public institutions in Mississippi. Students refused to leave and were arrested and charged with breach of the peace for failing to leave when ordered to do so.

In 1962, partially as a result of this event, the American Library Association membership adopted the

"Statement on Individual Membership, Chapter Status, and Institutional Membership[2]" which stated that membership in the association and its chapters had to be open to everyone regardless of race, religion, or personal belief.

Four state chapters withdrew from ALA: Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Mississippi.

Moving Forward and Taking Action

Be open to education, training and discussions on equity and inclusion. Check Workday for classes on this topic offered by the county. The library offers a series of classes (sign up in Workday).

Equity Series Part Two: Recognizing Bias
We all have a level of implicit bias and sometimes we act on it without even knowing it. This training provides staff with an opportunity to begin to explore and gain awareness and understanding of these biases.

Equity Series Part Three: Mitigating Bias
This class will provide participants with a deeper understanding of implicit biases and strategies to address them.

Equity Series Part Four: Cross Cultural Communication
Have you had a conversation with someone that didn't go well and both of you left feeling like the other person was just being difficult? Imagine if the person was not being difficult, but what was said and how it was said have different meanings to each of you. Could this shift change the outcome of the conversation?

Familiarize yourself with the diverse programs offered at the library and seek out opportunities to participate in events inside and outside the library with cultures different from your own.

Be aware of and check your privilege.

● What can you do at work to create a more inclusive environment?

● What **will** you do to create a more inclusive environment at work?

Sources and Further Reading

Videos from class

Max Macias: Culture and Information Literacy (What if?): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBUgWhNAGRU

[2] Statement On Individual Membership, Chapter Status, And Institutional Membership. (1962). *ALA Bulletin, 56*(7), 637-637. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/25696482

Walidah Imarisha: Why Aren't There More Black People in Oregon?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTZlNEZ3NEw

History of racism in American libraries

ALA Resolution to Honor African Americans Who Fought Library Segregation:
https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/ala-honors-african-americans-who-fought-library-segregation/

ALA Statement on Individual Membership, Chapter Status, and Individual Status:
https://drive.google.com/open?id=15mwW858uuZX8QcTacD11AAQiXhC0U4sG

Race and Librarianship: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1175796/#i0025-7338-093-03-0308-b1

Rocks in the Whirlpool:
http://www.ala.org/aboutala/missionhistory/keyactionareas/equityaction/rockswhirlpool

Tougaloo Nine

The African American 'Hidden Figures' Who Desegregated the South's Public Libraries:
http://www.zocalopublicsquare.org/2018/10/16/african-american-hidden-figures-desegregated-souths-public-libraries/ideas/essay/

The Tougaloo Nine Remembered: https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/tougaloo-nine-remembered/