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A Blueprint on Self-Exploration to Justice: Introduction to “Referencing Audre Lorde” & “Lesbian Librarianship for All”

Shawn(ta) Smith-Cruz

Praxis operates as a blueprint. This mapping, if we allow it, has the potential to merge our professional selves with our societal selves, humanizing our work, allowing for an evolution toward justice. Reference service reminds us that, like in any map, users of library service require a source key to navigate from their place of knowledge to a new space where information lives. My approach to social justice problematizes the profession by challenging the librarian to focus inwardly to a space concentrated with identity and self-exploration.

To galvanize justice, the librarian may impose her or himself into the reference interaction as an element of praxis. This requires a deconstruction of the imposed body and layers of societal implications. If the physical presentation of clothing, gender, race, age, perceived ability combined with the voice, movement, and pacing is explored, the reference interaction is then ripe for questions. How long have I been speaking vs. listening? Will it matter if I am sitting or standing? When does my positioning matter? Am I being received as a peer, servant, or an authority, and why? In the following two chapters, I use my own self-exploration to exemplify how social justice may be applied to reference. Each chapter reconciles my lesbian of color identity with my reference practice, but also invites the

reader to use his or her own identity by first using mine. The map to deconstruct oneself offers a sampling of an outside perspective as navigation. In other words, *you be the lesbian librarian*. To start, we will reference one.

Audre Lorde resides in a canon outside of the queer or African American diaspora, yet her professional identity as a librarian has historically been under acknowledged. In “Referencing Audre Lorde,” I present Lorde as an example for applying lesbianism to librarianship. Unlike most close readings of Lorde which deconstruct her poetry or prose, this chapter combines her writings with unpublished archival material, specifically audio recordings of her facilitation practice at a black lesbian conference. This analysis of Lorde, identity coupled with practice, unveils a formula for us as librarians to implicate her actions as reflective of librarianship and thereby applicable to our daily work.

Just as reference librarianship is an iconic depiction of library work, it is important for me to present an iconic description of lesbians while staying on task to supply applicable praxis for all librarians. If we can reference Audre Lorde in our methodologies for teaching and serving the public (and I believe we can), then with that single act, I attest that all librarians can be lesbian librarians, leading us on the path toward justice. “Lesbian Librarianship for All” is written as a manifesto focused on the two L-words and their diminishing relevance amongst their own communities, lesbians amongst queers and librarians amongst faculty. This chapter allows us to exercise a shift in perspective at best, or at the very least, a rearticulation. Both are attributes in praxis toward justice.