The SRRT Newsletter

The Spread of Misinformation

Dear The SRRT Newsletter Readers,

Hello, everyone and welcome to the April 2021 SRRT Newsletter! For this issue, we’re looking at misinformation and how libraries can and are addressing this critical topic. I’m excited to offer you insights from our guest writers and I hope you’ll find them both interesting and useful as we all struggle to separate truth from half-truths to lies. Libraries are perfectly positioned to help with this, but we need to be clear about our responsibilities and even clearer about why this is part of our jobs and always has been. Our communities need us as both guides and purveyors of accurate information and in these challenging times, we are more important than ever.

Julie Winkelstein
The SRRT Newsletter Co-Editor

Amidst the issues concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, the continuing, persistent events of racist violence against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, and the forces seeking to uproot our democratic institutions, we also contend with critical evaluation of information — rampant conspiracy theories and huge range of misinformation that go viral through various media channels. As information professionals, critical engagement with information and their sources are our what we teach and for which we strongly advocate. In this issue, we take a look at how we keep on.

Melissa Cardenas-Dow
The SRRT Newsletter Co-Editor
From the SRRT Coordinator

Upcoming SRRT Virtual Meetings

SRRT meetings are open to all members. A call for agenda items will be sent out early in each month and the finalized agenda and Zoom link will be posted in ALA Connect prior to the meeting. I have really enjoyed seeing new names and faces and I encourage everyone to attend if they can. Here are our upcoming meeting times:

Thursday, April 29th, 11am Central
Tuesday, May 25th, 12pm Central

SRRT Membership Numbers

As of January 2021, SRRT has increased membership by 9.81% compared to January 2020. Here are other Round Tables which also saw an increase in the same time period:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALA Round Tables</th>
<th>Membership Numbers</th>
<th>% of Growth</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT)</td>
<td>2,059</td>
<td>9.81%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sustainability Round Table (SUSTRT)</td>
<td>1,412</td>
<td>15.36%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graphic Novel and Comics Round Table (GNCRT)</td>
<td>1,087</td>
<td>11.49%</td>
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“[T]he number of round tables increasing memberships in a time of overall decline shows how valuable we are to the organization.”

Find SRRT on ALA Connect

ALA Connect is a great place to, well, connect with other SRRT members. Here, you can find information about upcoming meetings, calls for opportunities to volunteer, discover or create task forces, or have general discussions about the progressive issues that interest you.

Not getting the messages from Connect? Check the notification settings in your profile under “My Connect” in the top bar. You can select from real time emails, daily digest, or no email.

ALA Annual Virtual 2021

The scheduler for ALA Annual Virtual 2021 is available online.

ALA Annual Virtual 2021

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SRRT Councilor Report

Many SRRT members have likely already heard about the "Resolution to Condemn White Supremacy and Fascism as Antithetical to Library Work" passed at this year’s Midwinter Meeting. It has often been extremely difficult to get ALA as an association to take this sort of stand, even when that stand requires absolutely no internal change. This resolution is an extremely important and promising step for ALA that goes beyond a statement of values and intents, laying out a plan for action going forward.

In addition to acknowledging and apologizing for past harm caused by the Association’s failure to appropriately address white supremacy, the resolution charges the Working Group on Intellectual Freedom and Social Justice, a joint working group of the Intellectual Freedom Committee and the Committee on Professional Ethics, to identify and recommend new language to replace what the resolution calls 'neutrality rhetoric.' The association’s approach to controversial issues often drifts from the core value of intellectual freedom -- that we should not censor or limit the information available to our patrons - into one of neutrality -- not a core value in itself -- which taken to an extreme can mean that when some parties treat other parties’ basic human rights as a matter that is open for debate, we must remain neutral on the subject of those parties’ basic human rights. I am confident that with the support and involvement of the Intellectual Freedom Committee the working groups created by this resolution will find ways to ensure that ALA is able to uphold all of its core values, without allowing the sometimes distorted and abused approach to neutrality stop us from taking a stand when the rights of marginalized people are on the line.

The resolution also charges ALA to develop confidential communication channels to collect feedback from BIPOC members past and present which the association will use to build antiracism and antifascism into its internal and external communications, advocacy, events, and organizational design efforts. A preliminary plan is due Jan 1 of next year. The association will also provide regular updates on this work, the first of which is due over the summer. This step comes at once far too late and at the perfect time: right now we’re in the process of reinventing the association, and I think and hope that the work of the committee will help inform the forward together process as we move towards building a more inclusive ALA.

The Forward Together resolutions working group is just beginning its work and will be providing an update to council at the end of March. At the moment I am very hopeful that whatever body or bodies replace the current council they will be ones with authority and teeth. The suggestion of eliminating council and replacing it with a set of advisory boards and a slightly expanded executive board is one that I’ve heard many concerns about from the SRRT action council and from members. I’ll be participating in the ‘future of council’ subgroup of the Forward Together working group and am hopeful that we can build a body that is more diverse and more representative of the many different roles library workers fill. I think that in particular a more representative council could have great implications for ALA-APA: the current council is also the governing body of ALA-APA and I think it’s particularly important that if council is to be replaced, it will be with a body that will serve ALA-APA well. There’s consistent demand for better advocacy and organizing for library workers, and not just for libraries themselves, and I think ALA-APA is the natural place for that work.

As always please be in touch if you have concerns or input about any of the above or anything else you think is or should be of interest to SRRT.

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Submitted by Tara Brady, SRRT Councilor

Voices From the Past

Each issue, The SRRT Newsletter will feature relevant article excerpts from past issues, selected by the Editors.

In keeping with this issue’s theme of misinformation, the following is excerpt from the SRRT Newsletter #78 issue (#78 December 1985).

Please visit the SRRT Newsletter Archive to peruse past issues.


Fully acknowledging the "literary inspiration" of George Orwell and Ambrose Bierce, Farrell, who teaches history and American studies at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minn., “translates the vulgar vocabulary of nuclear newspeak into common English in order to keep us all from being conned by the powers that be.” His dictionary entries, ranging from A and ABM to Yield and Zero Option, are “meant to be both consciousness-raising and informative in the full sense of the word: conveying knowledge and informing (or forming within) the people who read it.” In fact, his definitions are both accurate and wry (e.g., “Breeder. A reactor that breeds trouble by producing more fissionable material – especially plutonium – than it consumes.”) Like any good lexicologist, Farrell also specifies synonyms and antonyms, as well as furnishing plentiful

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Voices From the Past

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cross references (e.g., “National Security...ant. personal security”). Bierce and Orwell alike would applaud this effort – at once entertaining and enlightening – to demystify nuclear theology and render “nukespeak” understandable (if also frightening) to the unordained. And they’d surely appreciate the graphic dimension: some 44 stinging cartoons by Herblock, Tony Auth, Julies Feiffer, Paul Szep, Pat Oliphant, and other anti-nuke artists. Ideal for libraries as a casebook of manipulative, Big Brother-ish jargon and a serious comic treatment of atomic doomsday.

SRRT Meeting Minutes & Notes

As SRRT has been meeting virtually and more frequently, members of the ad hoc SRRT Web Task Force have created a meeting minutes webpage. Currently under construction, it will house official minutes and notes from SRRT meetings.

From the SRRT Coordinator

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Hate the Connect format? You can fully interact with Connect via email! Make sure you are receiving either real time emails or daily digests to be able to respond to posts. To start a new discussion, you can send an email to ALA-srrtsocialresponsibilitiesroundtable@ConnectedCommunity.org.

Hunger, Homelessness, and Poverty Task Force (HHPTF) News

For the past three years, I’ve taught a library school class at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, entitled: “The Role of Libraries in Addressing Homelessness and Poverty.” This winter I also co-taught, with Vikki Terrile, a new class at the University of Washington I-School, called: “Youth and Children Homelessness: The Role of Libraries.”

For both classes, one of the aspects of homelessness that we examine and discuss is the negative stereotype attached to the word “homeless.” The assumptions that are made about somebody who is unhoused are not only stigmatizing and inaccurate, they also mean that many people, including single adults, unaccompanied youth, families with children and a multitude of others, are reluctant to divulge their housing status because they don’t want to be associated with any assumptions about who they are and why they are unhoused. And because of this, they frequently don’t receive the services, support and resources they need. For example, you may have in your academic or public library a young person who doesn’t know where they’re going to sleep that night, who hasn’t eaten in 24 hours, who is experiencing trauma every day. But you won’t know, because unless you have shown that you do not buy into the stereotype, that you welcome everyone, that you are a safe person to confide in, that young person won’t tell you.

In the classes, we talk about this impact and we look at the systemic factors that contribute to homelessness, like racism, homophobia, ableism, transphobia, classism and what Coco Auerbach calls “housism.” In addition, we consider the US version of capitalism that is based on greed, acquisitiveness, individualism, and a zero sum approach that leaves too many without the human basic needs, such as healthcare, adequate and safe housing, education, healthy food, and meaningful employment.

Despite the stories that are told, homelessness and poverty are not choices and when we are able to understand the myriad reasons a person is without a safe, reliable, and predictable place to lay their head every night, we can move beyond the stereotypes, take a closer look at our society and understand that this is misinformation that impacts lives every day.

Interested in finding out more about the HHPTF? We’d love to hear from you! Contact Julie or Lisa for more information.

Submitted by Julie Ann Winkelstein, Hunger, Homelessness and Poverty Task Force Co-Coordinator
The International Responsibilities Task Force (IRTF) is eager to highlight its completely revised and expanded website. Topics addressed are Free Speech Issues, Global Climate Change, Iran, Native American Rights, Palestinian Libraries, US Foreign Policy, and Whistleblowers and Mass Government Surveillance. Each section includes information on SRRT programs, short annotated reading lists (and some films), and SRRT resolutions. Some of the reading lists were compiled by the program speakers. Speakers include Phyllis Bennis, Daniel Ellsberg, Glenn Greenwald, Stephen Kinzer, Winona LaDuke, and Bill McKibben.

The International Responsibilities Task Force is continuing its presentation of major speakers with a timely (virtual) talk by acclaimed public intellectual Trita Parsi on US relations with Iran. Trita Parsi is an award-winning author and the 2010 recipient of the Grawemeyer Award for Ideas Improving World Order. He is the Executive Vice President of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft and an expert on US-Iranian relations, Iranian foreign politics, and the geopolitics of the Middle East. He is a frequent commentator on the major US TV networks, the BBC, and Al Jazeera; and has published articles in many major U.S. newspapers and journals such as The Nation and The American Conservative. He is fluent in Persian/Farsi, English, and Swedish.

Parsi was born in Iran but moved with his family at the age of four to Sweden in order to escape political repression in Iran. His father was an outspoken academic who was jailed by the Shah and then by the Ayatollah. He moved to the United States as an adult and studied for his Ph.D. in foreign policy at Johns Hopkins University.

“NIAC is a vocal proponent of dialogue and engagement between the US and Iran, which Parsi consistently has argued would enhance our national security by helping to stabilize the Middle East and bolster the moderates in Iran.”

He founded the National Iranian American Council (NIAC) to provide a non-partisan, non-profit organization through which Iranian-Americans could participate in American civic life. NIAC is a vocal proponent of dialogue and engagement between the US and Iran, which Parsi consistently has argued would enhance our national security by helping to stabilize the Middle East and bolster the moderates in Iran.

He wrote his Doctoral thesis on Israeli-Iranian relations at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. And he also holds a Master’s Degree in International Relations from Uppsala University in Sweden and a Master’s Degree in Economics from the Stockholm School of Economics. He has taught at the Johns Hopkins University, George Washington University, and Georgetown University. He has also been an adjunct scholar at the Middle East Institute and a Policy Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington DC. His latest book is Losing an Enemy: Obama, Iran and the Triumph of Diplomacy.

Submitted by Al Kagan, International Responsibilities Task Force Co-Coordinator
Call for Additional Editorial Board Members

Are you looking for a way to be more involved in the Social Responsibilities Round Table? Are you passionate about books, media, and their role in social responsibility? Do you have excellent writing and editing skills? Are you good at meeting deadlines and encouraging others to meet them as well? If so, membership in The SRRT Newsletter Editorial Board might be just the volunteer position you’re looking for!

We are in need of more members who can serve on the Editorial Board after ALA Midwinter Virtual 2021 and beyond. Editorial Board placements are determined by the SRRT Action Council.

The SRRT Newsletter Editorial Board members must be a members of SRRT. The duties of members of The SRRT Newsletter Editorial Board are to liaise with groups in the profession to solicit content and to collaborate with The SRRT Newsletter Co-Editors to layout, publish, and distribute issues of The SRRT Newsletter. If you are interested, please send a copy of your resume/CV and a brief letter of inquiry outlining your qualifications and interest in the position to The SRRT Newsletter Co-Editors.

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First, thank you all for your continuous support of the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Sunrise Celebration and Observance. I’m pleased to report that our first ever virtual celebration was an unqualified success! The pre-recorded event was live streamed on Monday, January 25. As I write this report, the celebration has received over 600 views on ALA’s YouTube channel. If you have not watched it, I cordially invite you to take an hour out of your day and spend it celebrating the 2021 King Holiday with us.

This marks the first time we were able to share this event with an audience outside of Midwinter attendees. It’s a great opportunity for folks who have either attended Midwinter but couldn’t make it to the event, or folks who can’t come to Midwinter to participate. I’m proud that we were able to maintain elements of the program in a virtual setting that makes the in-person event so inspiring. A special thanks to Monica Chapman and the ODLOS office for their tireless dedication to the Sunrise Celebration this year and for years past. Also, a round of thanks to our co-sponsors BCALA, Beacon Press, and OCLC; our keynote, V.P. Franklin, author of The Young Crusaders: The Untold Story of the Children and Teenagers Who Galvanized the Civil Rights Movement; and Dr. Carla Hayden, 14th Librarian of Congress. To anyone I missed, thank you, Thank You, THANK YOU!

Did you (or your library) lead a virtual Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Celebration this year? Would you like to share how you did it and how it went? I’m looking for some representatives from various libraries to discuss their 2021 celebrations for an exchange of ideas. I hope to bring together some representatives from a few libraries to discuss how these celebrations worked in a virtual environment and showcase some highlights from your programs. If you’re interested in participating or sharing, please reach out to me. I’m very interested in hearing from you. Thank you!

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Submitted by LaJuan Pringle, MLK Jr Holiday Task Force Coordinator

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Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Task Force (MLKTF) News

Did you (or your library) lead a virtual Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Celebration this year? Would you like to share how you did it and how it went? I’m looking for some representatives from various libraries to discuss their 2021 celebrations for an exchange of ideas. I hope to bring together some representatives from a few libraries to discuss how these celebrations worked in a virtual environment and showcase some highlights from your programs. If you’re interested in participating or sharing, please reach out to me. I’m very interested in hearing from you. Thank you!
Before I was a librarian, on the frontlines of fighting misinformation, I was a fact check reporter, on the virtual frontlines. The overlap between these two fields became very, very clear to me when I received an offer letter from an HR department, which included a quote in their signature line that I had previously come across in my work.

It read, “Kindness Is The Gift The Deaf Can Hear And The Blind Can See (Mark Twain).”

One problem: there’s no evidence of Twain ever saying that. It’s not in any of his surviving letters or writings, and if she had some sort of archival record proving that quotation, she really should have shared it with the Mark Twain scholars who identify this quote as spurious—or illegitimate.

You see, while most of my work was fact checking political speeches, State of the Union addresses, CNN headlines, and the like, I became known in the office for one particular skill set: fact checking fake quotes from historical figures.

Talking to people about misinformation is really fraught—no one wants to be told they’re wrong, especially about something they believe is true or is important to them, or affects them in a big way.

“It is impossible to rightly govern a nation without God and the Bible,” is often attributed to President George Washington, and of course used to justify the need for a particular religiosity, but there’s no evidence Washington said it.

Is it the highest stakes game to play? Absolutely not, but doing so—and continuing to do so in my spare time amongst Facebook acquaintances—has shown me that fake George Washington quotes may be the best way to introduce the masses to the prevalence of misinformation.

“Madame Spurious Quotations,” I dubbed myself, when I took on a string of quote fact checking that included quotes, shared by very large organizations, by George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Mark Twain, and Morgan Freeman, to name a few. There’s something about Founding Fathers that makes them ripe for misattribution, isn’t there? Many of the historical websites devoted to these men (it’s always men, somehow) have entire pages devoted to misattributed quotes.

This is why it’s so frustrating to see people insist that Thomas Jefferson said something that Monticello says they’ve never heard.

As an information professional, I struggle seeing these fake quotes proliferating, because there are so many great quotes that did come from the great minds of our universe. But we live in a world where people google “quote from XYZ” and grab the first image they see, instead of going to the archives.

The dissemination of spurious quotations also shows what I believe will be an increasing issue in misinformation control going forward—Can you prove they didn’t say it?

I was asked that, usually rudely in a 2 a.m. Facebook message by a middle-aged white man, countless times in response to my fact checks on fake or spurious quotations. Could I prove that George Washington didn’t say a quote about the internet being full of snake-eyed demons? Well, technically no, but, as I would point out, fact-checking isn’t about that. Fact-checking, and the fight against misinformation, isn’t about proving a negative. It’s about proper attribution and the dissemination of accurate information.

Sharing a spurious quotation and saying “well you can’t prove he didn’t say it” is similar to sharing a conspiracy theory and saying “well you can’t prove it didn’t happen that way.”

So what can we, as socially responsible information professionals, do?

We can stop posting said spurious quotations on our own social media accounts. We can hold our fellow professionals accountable. We can teach courses on working with archival records and primary sources. In particular, I think we can showcase how easy it is to check the source of a quotation—especially when it’s someone who’s archives are so well preserved, like Washington, Jefferson, and Twain. A century from now, the historians and librarians might be fact-checking fake quotes by searching people’s Twitter history.

Talking to people about misinformation is really fraught—no one wants to be told they’re wrong, especially about something they believe is true or is important to them, or affects them in a big way. That’s why vaccine
Features: Start With The Spurious--Misinformation & Fact Checking the Masses

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misinformation is so prevalent--people take their health seriously, so it’s easy to find those scary fake anecdotes and run away with them.

Fake George Washington quotes though--the stakes are much lower. People feel less personally attacked when you inform them that their quote is fake, so let’s use that as a teaching opportunity. That’s your in--the stakes are low, the chance for learning is high, and you’re beginning the process of fighting disinformation without people feeling like you’re calling them dumb or ignorant. Fake quotes are everywhere--show them it’s a superpower to double check before hitting post.

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Aryssa Damron is a library associate at the District of Columbia Public Library. She holds a BA in English from Yale University and an MSLS from the University of Kentucky. Her favorite spurious quotation is “Doctor, I die hard, but I am not afraid to go. Bring me the Book,” which was not said by George Washington.

Features: The Misinformation Wars

On the February 15, 2021 CBS evening news, Nancy Cordes reported on Lindsey Graham saying Kamala Harris should be impeached for bailing out “rioters” claiming one was bailed out and “broke somebody’s head open.” [Video from Fox News Sunday] Graham conflated capitol insurrectionists with peaceful Black Lives Matter protesters. No BLM protesters were involved in the invasion of the Capitol building. It was a dog whistle to those who believe BLM is a terrorist group, lumping them with men and women who stormed the Capitol building as “patriots” and believing the presidential election was stolen from Donald Trump.

Misinformation has become par for the course in the world of information and librarians are faced with the dissemination of information from the fantastic to the absurd, from fake news to QAnon. California wildfires are caused by Jewish space lasers, not climate change. People who’ve had children killed in school shootings made it up to change gun laws. Such cruel notions!

In times like these, librarians have to be aggressive about information, its access and validity to preserve the democratic process with the truth, facts, eye witness accounts, and vetted sources. We’re caught up in misinformation wars that are not about the truth, but manipulation of the public’s fears. So, do we don a red, white and blue swimsuit costume with a tiara and double Ls on the belt, or a red and blue onesie with an L on the chest to save the misinformed masses? Or do we do what we were trained to do in library school? Find the information the patron has asked for without partiality? Is that even possible when the truth is that America has always been framed by fears of class, race and gender?

Being an academic librarian who moved from Tennessee State University to the University of Tennessee at Martin during the pandemic, I had to go from face-to-face instruction in writing classes to guiding students through the library website for peer-reviewed journal articles via chat.

I miss being in classes where a student tells me her subject is diabetes. A medical database returns thousands of hits. There’s something familiar in her eyes. It’s personal and racial. I slyly move to reframe her search. “Why diabetes?” I ask. “My grandmother had it,” she answers. I tell her to take her demographics into consideration for the question and the answer. She’s a black female in America and I let her know it’s all right to investigate herself. Black women. America. Diabetes. We get a nice offering of articles she can relate to and use. I just manipulated the situation, Black male librarian to a black female student, stepping outside the parameters of impartiality to help her get the information she really needs to make sense of her world.

I think back to reporter Nancy Cordes and her sly smile while countering Lindsey Graham’s news bite with information from “supporters of the Vice President.” Impartiality has become a casualty of misinformation wars. This sullies our heroic efforts to not take a side, but pushes us to be human beings trying to save one another with information that is vetted and unaligned with any one political group’s agenda. At least, not intentionally. Whether we want to be “woke” librarians or not, the world has pushed us to a new iteration of librarianship we didn’t ask for. The enemy is misinformation that is bewildering as flat earthers or the Jewish community building a Death Star to settle a secret beef with California. The lies and truth get interwoven into a mesmerizing tapestry that must be teased apart at the seams of nuance. We’ve got our work cut out for us!

Academic and public librarians have a new charge: To train those we serve how to vet information. It’s no longer about being impar-
News Around Libraryland

Rainbow Round Table (RRT)

Contemporary Connections

March 11, 2021 marks one year since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. During this period, the world has suffered devastating losses, public health updates have become a top news focus, and an abundance of new realities have led to opportunities to reflect, adapt, and hopefully be more thoughtful about our place in our shared world.

Within this context, technology has afforded important means to build and maintain connections. In the case of the American Library Association (ALA), and other professional organizations, many systems of communication were already in place prior to the pandemic. Members had knowledge and experience accessing and using email, discussion forums, video-based meetings, social media, apps and other forms of computer-mediated communication to interact effectively. As such, ALA was able to quickly pivot and provide modified e-engagement opportunities for conferences, events that usually center around face-to-face engagement, albeit supported by extensive tech-based infrastructure. That said, pivoting ALA, or any large, complex organization is not an easy endeavor. Staff, leadership, and many members and volunteers should be recognized for their extensive efforts in making it happen.

Although some aspects of in-person engagement cannot be replicated; and although many people have been overwhelmed with illness, uncertainties, and needing to adapt many aspects of their lives to online realms, new opportunities for e-connections have enabled new participation. In the case of ALA conferences, this includes those without means to travel. These kinds of fundamental issues of access should not be forgotten as we begin to move out of pandemic-based operations. In the broader view, providing pathways to engage for those who cannot via normative routes – like paying conference fees (or other kinds of association fees) – deserve ongoing consideration.

In conjunction with the recent Midwinter Meeting, new options to participate at no cost for those recently furloughed or laid off emerged; as well as new emphasis on gifting memberships – to enable members (and others) to support each other. SRRT also began sponsoring memberships and Rainbow Round Table (RRT) will echo this initiative for the upcoming Annual Conference.

In addition to dealing with necessary business issues, RRT e-conference engagement has enabled members to come together and consider important topics – and have fun! Last summer, RRT sponsored a program on providing library services for the transgender community (beyond bathrooms!) During Midwinter 2021, we hosted our first e-social, which included a vibrant slideshow depicting RRT members and events over the past 50 years; queer meditation, presentation of the adult Stonewall Book Awards, and a dance party!

RRT fabulous Zoom dance party at ALA Midwinter 2021

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Features: The Misinformation Wars

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Misinformation doesn’t exist in a vacuum. It’s about teaching students and the public bombarded with misinformation on how to sort through it all. Librarians don’t have to dress up in superhero costumes to do this. We can do this in sensible shoes and comfortable attire knowing the real enemy is misinformation along with its sidekick, a half-truth.

“Misinformation doesn’t exist in a vacuum.”

Features: Making the Best of Bad Information

Misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda are nothing new in the library world, but recently they seem to be appearing more often and in more potentially dangerous forms than in the past. Unfortunately for information professionals, presenting authoritative sources and heavily researched evidence to misinformed patrons isn’t the most effective solution. As with many aspects of patron service, empathy is one of the most effective tools for meeting people where they are emotionally and intellectually to help them be receptive to contradictory information. QAnon researcher Travis View suggests approaching those who believe in misinformation, “...with the same pity and compassion you might show someone who chooses to stay in a destructive relationship.” (View as quoted in Warzel, 2020).

Misinformation doesn’t exist in a vacuum. Growing wealth disparities, extreme political polarization and increasing social atomization all lead to a sense of powerlessness and isolation that can send people down research paths to seek explanations that justify a coherent view of the world (Douglas, 2021). A recent analysis by CNN showed that residents of Flint, Michigan are hesitant about getting the COVID vaccine because of the role the government in the ongoing water-safety crisis, (Jimenez, 2021). It’s easy to understand these residents’ caution; they have been deceived by some of the same people telling them the vaccine is safe.

Strengthening bonds between members of the community has become a primary goal of many libraries, and this part of our mission can help to fight back against the spread of misinformation. Perhaps we can learn some tips from the health care field. A recent study found that those who believed in pandemic conspiracy theories were less likely to say they would get a COVID-19 vaccine—but 90 percent of the participants said they trusted their doctors (Kramer, 2021). The finding adds to existing research showing that doctors can help stymie the spread of health falsehoods and expose where misinformation could be reduced. Many people today don’t have a regular physician, so having informative programs with local doctors (especially those who have a good community reputation) could address concerns for this group of people.

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But what about those patrons who don’t attend library civic discourse programs? What about patrons who feel certain that they’ve arrived at a fact when, in fact, they haven’t? What can librarians do in the moment of the reference interview?

One response to misinformation might be to argue a patron out of their beliefs—we caution against this. This tactic will make them defensive or view the library as hostile to their views. According to Jovan Byford, “the spirit of doubt that pervades the conspiracy-minded internet is actually a key opening for rational thought” (Byford as quoted in Spring, 2020). Even though we might see a patron as misinformed, they are not unintelligent. We need to be prepared to harness this inquisitiveness and offer them more productive outlets. A response like, “We all want our government to be more transparent, have you looked into (an issue in local government)?” could send patrons on a more productive line of inquiry. Steering people’s concerns toward local issues encourages them to engage with the community and gives them a sense of agency in changing the world around them. Regardless of the words you choose in the moment, begin and end your response with empathy and common ground.

It can sometimes seem like fake news and misinformation might overwhelm people’s ability to discern the truth, but we live in a world of spam emails and robocalls, where you have to be on alert for too-good-to-be-true deals and never-signing anything before reading the fine print.

Our patrons are intelligent, with a healthy curiosity to understand the world around them. Let’s use those qualities alongside them to redirect their research path away from misinformation, and closer to the truth.

“Strengthening bonds between members of the community has become a primary goal of many libraries, and this part of our mission can help to fight back against the spread of misinformation.”


Submitted by Ian Ruge, Teen Librarian, and Mallory Pillard, Library Manager, Centennial Park Library, High Plains Library District, Greeley, CO
After reading the author’s article in December 2020, the editors thought readers of The SRRT Newsletter would greatly benefit from additional thoughts and ideas related to the article. We reached out to the authors and invited them to write an essay for this issue. Below is the invited essay they shared with us. ~~~ The Co-Editors

Our initial motivation for writing “Nice White Meetings” was to critique the absurdity of library bureaucracies, paying particular attention to meeting culture, which, through its over-reliance on structured group work, does little to accomplish libraries’ missions. We planned to argue certain aspects of library meeting culture contribute to inequitable labor practices and foment distrust among staff. We also wanted to focus on different approaches that would promote a culture of collaboration and mitigate the damaging impacts of bureaucratic practices. But as we delved more into this piece, we realized that it’s difficult to propose any sort of solution(s) without properly addressing the legacy of American libraries’ complicity in upholding bureaucratic structures that are, at their core, grounded in white supremacist values. In order to fully name the problem with library bureaucracies, we found it necessary to apply a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens to our analysis.

A survey of the literature revealed that there are very few pieces that specifically analyze bureaucracy in libraries and virtually nothing that breaks down its truly deleterious impacts on Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC). Bureaucracies, with their hierarchical structures and strict adherence to ahistorical and immutable rules, are somehow presumed to be neutral, rational, and equitable. Such a system is meant to run efficiently (a benefit to all!) with little complication. CRT, however, clarifies that such a hierarchy fails to regard the range of human experience as well as how race, class, and gender intersect in ways that have historically disenfranchised and disempowered BIPOC. All four of us agree that while bureaucratic environments are fraught for most everyone, they can be especially devastating for BIPOC library workers who are hampered by seemingly neutral policies that exist to promote assimilation into systems entrenched in Whiteness.

In case this all sounds too academic, consider, for example, library meetings that are organized according to Robert’s Rules (derived from parliamentary procedures) to ensure a fair and democratic process. Rules such as “letting the group do its own work” or “giving each speaker your undivided attention” may seem to be neutral and egalitarian. However, laissez-faire dynamics with little to no intervention from group leadership can often fail to protect or give voice to the most vulnerable group members in an organization (who are often BIPOC), particularly in a mostly White profession.

We can also think about how interviews (another type of “meeting”) entirely depend on a visual performance that helps to determine a person’s fit within an organization. Other scholars such as Angela Galvan and Kaelenna Davis Kendrick have extensively written about how performing Whiteness in interview/work situations (whether it’s through downplaying cultural markers of identity or trying to visually imitate whiteness) entails incredible emotional labor and, in the long run, can be damaging to BIPOC’s mental health. Meetings aren’t just “meetings”—they are venues where BIPOC question how authentic they can be with their colleagues in such settings. In a recent Twitter conversation, one librarian noted how our article was relevant to an analysis of “toxic positivity” in libraries, and we would have to agree; BIPOC are constantly pressured in meetings to display happy and upbeat personalities, which is really code for accommodation and silence.

Academic librarianship is only just starting to reckon with the impacts of Whiteness on the profession, and we hope this piece serves as a starting place for libraries to begin critiquing the structures and practices that disenfranchise and exclude BIPOC library workers. From here, we can begin to determine a way forward that is genuinely inclusive and equitable. And that possibility—of working in a profession that aligns its actions with its stated values—gives all of us hope.

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Holly Hampton is the Head of User Services/User Experience Librarian at the University Library at California State University at San Marcos. In this role, her philosophy includes ensuring the staff and faculty within her unit feel supported, empowered, engaged, and fulfilled. Her research includes examining how this philosophy can be applied, and how academic libraries can evolve and improve to continue to meet the ever-changing needs of its users.

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Talitha R. Matlin is the STEM Librarian at the University Library at California State University at San Marcos. She holds an MLIS from SJSU and a Masters of Learning, Design, and Technology from SDSU. Her research focuses on instructional design approaches applied to non-traditional settings such as internships and conference planning.

Yvonne Nalani Meulemans, California State University at San Marcos
Yvonne Nalani Meulemans is the Head of Teaching and Learning at the University Library at California State University at San Marcos. In this role, she leads a team of library faculty and staff that partners with the campus community to encourage and support research and inquiry. Her research focuses on pedagogical approaches to developing information literacy and using the threshold concepts framework in undergraduate education.
News Around Libraryland

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Plans are now in the works to host two sessions at the upcoming Annual conference:

- Celebrating Fifty Years of Stonewall Book Awards, which is being planned/presented by Donatá McPherson-Joseph, Jamie Campbell-Naidoo, Christine Jenkins, John D’Emilio, and Rae-Anne Montague; and
- What’s In a Name: LGBTQ+ and Latinx perspectives on access terminology-challenges and solutions, which is being planned/presented by Bob Díaz, Samuel Rumore, Susan Wood, Andrea Guzman, K.R. Roberto, Emily Drabinski, and Jamie Ann Lee.

More information is forthcoming via the conference site, social media, and RRT news blog. Plan to join us! All are welcome.

Submitted by Rae-Ann Montague, RRT Coordinator

REFORMA

Updates

In the past months REFORMA as many other organizations, have moved into the virtual platform to bring our members and audience great events. REFORMA National and its chapters put together The Book Buzz Summer and Winter Series. Hosted by the Northeast and Los Angeles Chapters, the Buzz event brought together publishers and distributors together to display their material to our members.

REFORMA National also worked with the Los Angeles Chapter and Public Library to bring forward the Noche de Cuentos celebration during the month of September 2020. We also had spectacular events during the months of September and October honoring Latino/a Heritage Month such as The Hispanic Heritage Month: Virtual Author Showcase, where Latinx authors spoke about their works, life and contributions to Latino/a efforts.

The El Paso REFORMA Area Chapter along with the Texas Library Association and the Border Regional Library Association (BRLA) held the Annual Fall Conference on October 16 and 17, 2020. Author Sergio Troncoso and anchor, and executive producer of NPR show Latino USA, María Hinojosa gave great presentations highlighting the work Latinx authors, journalist and others have done in the literature world. In addition, Oscar Baeza, REFORMA National President, was awarded the Librarian of the Year Award by BRLA. REFORMA is also glad to convey about the partnerships we have built over the last year to bring forward great events to our members and professional librarians. Some of these partnerships and future events are listed below:

- September 3, 2020, The Libraries at the Intersection of Adult Education, Family Literacy, and Digital Equity, REFORMA and ALA Committee on Literacy partnership.
- October 20, 2020, Desigualdad y bibliotecas: cómo la profesión bibliotecaria puede contribuir a acortar esta brecha, REFORMA members presenting: Oscar Baeza, National President, Nicanor Díaz, National Vice-President, and ALA & REFORMA Past President, Loida Garcia-Fefo.

REFORMA is also delivering mini grants from our DIÁ and Noche de Cuentos Mini Grants Project headed by Madeline Peña. This effort allows libraries across the country to apply for grants where their libraries can put forward children and community projects. We also encourage our members to always keep an eye on our awards, grants & scholarships page for the latest.

REFORMA’s Children in Crisis Project continues to grow and gain popularity. The project has received positive feedback from around the world in its efforts to secure reading material and learning supplies to children reaching our borders. We are proud to announce that CIC continues these efforts to educate all of these children.

REFORMA is also celebrating its 50-year anniversary. Many projects and events are in the planning stage, so stay tuned for more information.

Submitted by Oscar Baeza, REFORMA President