Debbie Feisst and Willa Tavernier

OpenCon 2018

Building a community of openness, advocacy, and activism

From November 2 through 4, 2018, we were fortunate to attend OpenCon 2018 in Toronto, Canada, through generous scholarships sponsored by ACRL. OpenCon is an annual opportunity to learn about open access, education, research, and data, and the 2018 conference marked OpenCon's fifth meeting and the first time it had been held in Canada. OpenCon is known for its focus on youth and the next generation of Open advocacy. Additionally, we have been invited to contribute to ACRL's scholarly communication initiative by being appointed for upcoming two-year terms on the Research and the Scholarly Environment Committee (ReSEC). We are pleased to share our reflections from OpenCon 2018.

Building Community in Scholarly Communication—Willa Tavernier

Community building was a hallmark of OpenCon 2018. It was an invaluable professional development experience, and the ease with which new members, like myself, were able to participate in the community, even to highlight problematic situations, was remarkable. Many of the attendees expressed the view that a lack of awareness of the role of scholarly communication librarians contributes to a feeling of isolation within their institutions. Coming to OpenCon 2018 gave us access to our community of practice.

The environment at OpenCon was a marked departure from the often polarizing tensions within scholarly communication discourse between advocates of subscription publishing and open access advocates. These play out as if the participants are speaking different languages rather than being part of the same ecosystem.

Recent discussions around the somewhat controversial "Plan S" have exacerbated this polarization. Some have expressed the view that the manner in which these tensions play out discourages recent graduates from meaningful participation in scholarly communication discourse.

Such polarization can inhibit the work of finding solutions to increase access to research. Moreover, the exclusionary, inequitable, and elitist nature of the scholarly communication and information-sharing ecosystem has been identified as one of the grand challenges for scholarly communication. Researchers point to biases of gender, class and race, as well as restrictive definitions of ways of knowing, and "who is assumed to be knowledgeable" as contributing factors.[1]

Community building is therefore an imperative for scholarly communication. Successful community building can only take place where individuals are equipped with

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the skills to decode and participate in the explicit as well as the social languages of a community. OpenCon 2018 was successful in providing an environment in which this could take place: an environment where knowledge acquisition and communication could take place in a decolonized rather than an elitist framework, where participants could navigate and indeed challenge the relationships of power that can threaten to devalue or derail personally held knowledge, and to execute strategies for self-advocacy and self-fulfillment so as to maximize the professional development benefits of the conference.

OpenCon has been able to generate active, ongoing work on scholarly communication projects,[2] and OpenCon 2018 was characterized by inclusion—the attendees were extraordinarily diverse in terms of nationalities, gender identities, professions, and career level. Despite these differences, participants were able to discuss different, often conflicting perspectives, in a respectful manner, therefore OpenCon stood out as an example of a community in which such discourse could take place effectively. A few examples of how this operated in practice are worth highlighting.

Ahead of the conference, participants were asked to commit to three things: commit to take action, participate in the OpenCon Do-a-thon (an all-day work sprint where participants craft new campaigns, lay the foundations for new resources, and form long-term collaborations), and actively engage with the community.

An individual spoke out on the morning session of the second day, on the feeling that their views were discounted during sessions on the previous day because of the type of institution they attended. The community took action to ensure that the behavior was not repeated and that every forum was inclusive of varying points of view.

During the OpenCon Do-A-Thon, I hosted a challenge[3] in partnership with Jennifer Hoops, a graduate assistant in my home department. We focused on reduc-

ing the role of commercial publishing in higher learning, particularly the academic promotion and tenure system through a process of storytelling, brainstorming, and proposing solutions. Listening with respect and valuing the lived experiences of researchers and librarians who chose to share their stories helped me to see the many facets of what appeared to be a straightforward, though fraught, issue. I was able to appreciate, in a real sense, that the challenge is systemic and goes beyond the current publishing system.

A clear message of respect came through at the conference. In the opening remarks, Stacy Allison-Cassin set this tone with a land acknowledgment situating herself within the troubled history of Canadian First Nations land rights. Then, speaking as part of the "Diversity, Equity and Inclusion" panel Denisse Albornoz pointed out instances in which openness is inappropriate, and Alexis C Johnson closed the panel, after sharing on the trans experience in research environments, with a powerful call for love as the key to progress.

The scholarly communication community would undoubtedly benefit from taking a critical look at language, discourse, and community—three concepts that are becoming increasingly intertwined—if serious headway is to be made in efforts to decolonize knowledge and build an equitable and inclusive information ecosystem. OpenCon 2018 can provide a model for community building in scholarly communication. The "language" I learned at OpenCon is one of respect, action, and love. These principles ought to be the foundation of our efforts to build community and forge solutions in scholarly communication.

Equity, diversity and inclusion for the next generation of open advocates—Debbie Feisst

Two clear themes that were woven throughout OpenCon 2018 were that of diversity, equity, and inclusion and the role of OpenCon to act as a catalyst to em-

power the next generation toward openness. In the opening session, Albornoz, research associate for the Open and Collaborative Science in Development Network (OCSDNet) and part of the Knowledge G.A.P. project, raised the questions of Whose openness are we empowering? and Whose voices are shaping the open movement? Are a variety of worldviews being represented? We were reminded that the real heart of OpenCon centers on young voices, and that the participants were chosen for their drive and creativity in projects, but that, as Albornoz stated in the opening session, "an open space needs to be a diverse space."

I believe that OpenCon was successful in this mandate, as we learned later during SPARC's Director of Open Education Nicole Allen's closing statements, 75% of OpenCon participants were first timers. Additionally, 30% of attendees were from Asia, Africa, and Latin América and more than half identified as a person of color.

It was no surprise to me that the largest profession represented was that of librarians, as I count myself in this category and understand the open movement best from this perspective. Graduate students, researchers, journalists, doctors, lawyers and others rounded out the overwhelmingly youthful group. Speakers truly represented a variety in gender, race, and ethnicity.

Perhaps the most memorable session of OpenCon 2018 for me was the panel "Diversity Equity and Inclusion in Open Research and Education." This session to me best represented the theme and purpose of OpenCon, but also cemented in my mind the tangible ways in which openness can be constructed and used throughout the world as a vehicle for social change and activism. The panel aimed to "prompt critical discussions around the ways in which the Open movements have replicated some of the same systems of power and oppression in higher education that they were originally meant to address"[4] and asked the following questions of the audience: How does the

Open movement reinforce Western dominance and colonialism? How does a lack of diversity impact Open advocacy work?

Jasmeen Patheja, founder and director of Blank Noise,[5] a community of citizens working to face sexual and gender-based violence. Patheja spoke of the work centered on sexual assault in public spaces, particularly street harassment in India known as "Eve Teasing." Patheja began photographing men who were harassing her and then sharing the photographs online in an open forum. A community began to form in this digital space, whereby "Action Sheroes/Theyroes/Heroes" could confront this sexual violence and assert the right to live free from fear. In a powerful and moving moment, Patheja asked the audience who could remember the clothes they wore when they experienced sexual violence. Many people raised their hands. To this end Patheja spoke of the #INeverAskForIt campaign, which physically and digitally displays crowdsourced garments from survivors of sexual and gender-based violence along with garment testimonials gathered via street and campus interventions, exhibitions, and workshops. By 2023, Blank Noise envisions 10,000 garments collectively occupying public spaces. Additionally, an online "Museum of Street Weapons of Defence"[6] grows with donated digital exhibits.

Johnson reiterated that Open must be inclusive of trans, nonbinary, and other marginalized communities. She expressed that when identity expression and education is denied, individuals can become invisible. Johnson discussed the very interesting IN-VISIBLE project. This open research and technology maps and monitors institutions that have inclusion and access policies for trans and inter communities in an attempt to sensitize institutions and administrators.

Albornoz spoke of reimagining open science through a feminist lens via her

Conclusion

Being part of a writing group makes the journey to publishing, and eventually tenure, a more social and pleasant process. Sound advice and encouragement with a bit of accountability mixed in has been a great recipe for us, and we encourage you to start your own group and realize those publishing dreams.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. Ellen Daniell, *Every other Thursday: Stories and strategies from successful women scientists* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2008).

2. Paul J.Silvia, *How to Write A Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2014).

3. Christine Carter, *The Sweet Spot: How to Find Your Groove at Home and Work* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2015).

4. Matt Sandrini, "Time Zillionaire," www.timezillionaire.com.

5. Cal Newport, *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2016).

6. Cal Newport, "Study Hacks," calnewport.com/blog/.

7. "Freedom," https://freedom.to/.

8. "Do More and Have Fun with Time Management," Cirillo Company, October 18 2017, https://cirillocompany.de/pages/pomodoro-technique. ℀

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work with the Open and Collaborative Science in Development Network, whereby multiple projects in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia are using open science as a strategy for risk and harm reduction and as a process to address our noninnocence and responsibility. She outlined how the community/researcher relationship is never neutral, especially when privilege and conflicting agendas create complex working environments.

The panel ended with Leslie Chan, associate professor in the Centre for Critical Development Studies at the University of Toronto, who fascinated us with a discussion on how technology and algorithms are not neutral, but that they are written for a specific form of success and can be harmful. Chan also spoke of "Plan S," an initiative for open access science publishing, and its problematic dependence on article processing charges, which in turn can create new inequalities in publishing by empowering the already powerful.

Thank you, ACRL, for this unique opportunity. We look forward to serving on ReSEC and continuing to put the conversation of OpenCon into action.

Notes

1. M. Altman and C. Bourg, "A Grand Challenges-Based Research Agenda for Scholarly Communication and Information Science," MIT Grand Challenge PubPub Participation Platform (2018), https://doi.org/10.21428/62b3421f.

2. https://doathon.opencon2018.org/participate#projects.

3. https://github.com/sparcopen/doathon/issues/87.

4. OpenCon2018, "Diversity Equity and Inclusion in Open Research and Education," https://opencon2018.sched.com/event/H9h6/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-in-open-research-and-education.

5. http://www.blanknoise.org/.

6. http://www.blanknoise.org/museum-of-street-weapons-of-defense/. ℀