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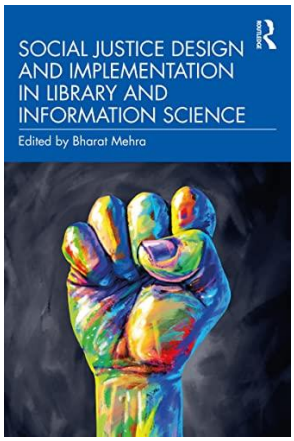
IJIDI: Book Review



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Libraries are in a constant state of flux, reinventing themselves to align with the needs of their community. As part of this metamorphosis, they continue to assess and change their missions and goals. *Social Justice Design and Implementation in Library and Information Science,* edited by Bharat Mehra and published in 2021 aims to give concrete examples of different libraries' approaches their evolution of services, resources, and more than anything, their purposes. The volume comprises eighteen different chapters, each one written by librarians presenting social justice motivated approaches to the field of library and information science. As a librarian living in and serving a rural, primarily low-income community, the book's passion for taking action resonated with me deeply. Additionally, as a new librarian, it is proven examples like these that help shape my practice. Ultimately, this book is a call to action and guide for librarians to improve the lives of people in their community through the conduit of library services.

Paul T. Jaeger's forward starts the book off by deeply tying the tradition of social justice to information institutions. Using missions of longstanding library organizations as the metric, Jaeger concludes, "The modern history of the field of library and information science is a history of continually innovating to promote equity and inclusion for the individuals and communities served by its institutions," even if it not always as clearly codified (p. xvi). He continues to outline historical examples of social justice to cement this legacy, noting that the list does not mean every library has automatically been on the right side of history. Again, Jaeger makes it clear that this kind of action does not happen by accident. It must be purposeful work.

The editor and contributor, Bharat Mehra, continues to expand on this assertion by introducing why a library necessitates strong social justice advocacy, especially in the twenty-first century and during the pandemic era. At this point, the ability to highlight and share accurate information in a sea of mis/disinformation is a vital act of resistance that cannot be done passively. This resistance needs to involve action and not just weak lip service. Mehra is clear on that by stating, "Lacking in today's LIS world is an understanding of the 'how to's' in operationalizing and implementing social justice beyond a 'feel good' and 'loosy-goosy' approach" (p. 13). The book presents an antidote to such half-hearted movement, which is powerful because it shows specific

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actions that library workers and libraries have taken to work toward their social justice goals and weave social justice theory into their everyday practices.

There is no one way to summarize the chapters in the book; they share projects, data, and theories that cover a vast array of topics. Each chapter is a peek into a different approach or project created and carried through by library workers. Reading front to back is a rich and colorful adventure, but as an encyclopedia of ideas to flip through for inspiration, the book stands strong too. To give an idea of the topics covered, the chapters are organized into five different thematic sections (listed below). Each one brings something fresh to the table regarding the role of libraries in people's lives while giving the reader examples of tangible changes that can be made in the way they think about and carry out their work.

Part I, "Emerging responsibilities," starts off with chapters that detail the effect of the pandemic on libraries ("Libraries fighting for social justice during the COVID-19 pandemic") and the unique role of rural libraries as social justice epicenters in their communities ("Role of rural libraries in supporting social well-being in their communities"). While the latter sounds specific to libraries in rural areas, it actually contains insights that rural librarians have gained through their "local nested connections" which librarians in any setting can apply to grow a sense of belonging and inclusion in their communities. As times change, so do people's ideas about the role the library should play in everyday life, and this volume contains many examples of library workers who are ready to embrace these changes.

Part II, "Reflective case practices," is chock-full of tangible examples of positive additions to library ecosystems. Two chapters ("Wilkes County Public Library's involvement in the food justice movements in rural North Carolina" and "A public library's response to substance abuse recovery") outline examples of programs that targeted underserved patrons and coordinated to meet their needs in the library. The two other chapters take a more theoretical approach, one centering on practitioner inquiry as a mode of social justice to create empathetic and supported librarians ("Understanding the librarian identity") and one centering on digital storytelling as a tool for community empowerment when integrated with critical thought ("Digital archives and inclusion of underrepresented groups"). These four chapters outline the steps and stumbles, helpful outlines, and inspirations for all.

Part III, "Reaching out: New research approaches and strategies," focuses on specific communities' use of the library and their unique needs. Two chapters ("Positioning social justice in a Black feminist information activist community context" and "Conceptualizing co-mapping knowledges to promote social justice outcomes with Aboriginal communities through design pedagogy") consider librarianship within different pedagogical and theoretical frameworks to better connect with the community by thinking critically about whose knowledge may be left out of library design. Similarly, the other two chapters look at two different specific populations: migrant Latinas ("Everyday information practices of migrant Latinas living in Boston") and older adults ("Multidisciplinary perspectives for an integrative critical gerontology information framework"). Each chapter asks how a social justice driven agenda can grow the services these populations need in the library. Together, the chapters in this section demonstrate a transformation from simply providing general services to targeting specific needs.

Part IV, "Transforming LIS education," aims to create change from the start through the educational experience of emerging librarians. Each chapter takes on a different social justice perspective that future librarians should be familiar with to form an inclusive professional

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practice. The section opens with a discussion on how LIS programs fail to produce culturally competent librarians, which becomes an issue that is then echoed throughout the field ("The mis-education of the librarian"). From there, readers are provided with a discussion on creating resources with accessibility in mind, which is particularly useful since librarians can be leaders who guide instructors ("Creating accessible learning environments and informing social justice through inclusive course design"), as well as a chapter outlining LIS classes that give students hands-on tools for addressing community homelessness ("The social responsibility of libraries to address community homelessness"). "Indigenous-engaged education" discusses the recruitment and engagement of Indigenous scholars as part of MLIS programs to grow the numbers of Indigenous librarians and LIS academics in Canada and abroad. This chapter bookends the first chapter about shortcomings in LIS education by presenting a case study on actively preparing LIS students to promote social justice in their communities ("Designing for social justice in the MLIS curriculum"). Overall, this section is a powerful answer to many feckless declarations about what changes can be made in LIS to grow diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workforce.

Finally, Part V, "Instruments of action and change," ends the book on a strong note of resilience and inspiration. "An autoethnographic narrative of institutional injustice" plots the journey of one librarian to combat the conservative tide of homophobia and transphobia that swept her campus by creating an LGBTQ+ history project to document people's experiences, starting with her own. The next piece ("Inspiring information communities to advance the UN Sustainable Development Goals") lays out the process of using information action briefs related to the United Nation's own development goals to inspire change concerning social inequalities in libraries. This section ends with an international librarian perspective on social justice initiatives for LGBTQ+ people in libraries worldwide ("Implementation of social justice design in developing international guidelines for LGBTQ+ library resources, services, and programming"). All chapters manage to further these discussions on a broader level than just the individual institutions, reminding us that libraries are part of many different overlapping communities.

If anything, the main shortcoming of this book is its immensity. It is impossible to synthesize all the information and examples in just one book review. As the editor, Mehra presents so many rich texts and each could easily be expanded into a short book on its own. Social justice focused library texts have been popular for many years. However, this book stands out due to its use of concrete examples of success and failure to back up its social justice theory. All library students and/or professionals can benefit from the knowledge in this book at any stage of their careers. As Mehra states in the introduction, it is not enough to simply talk or theorize about social justice as a library pillar; it is the actions taken by library workers to serve their communities that make the tangible difference. This book outlines both the theory and the practice of materially creating the social justice driven libraries the world deserves.

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