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Culturally-Relevant Information Literacy: A Case Study

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RUNNING HEAD: CULTURALLY-RELEVANT INFORMATION LITERACY

National-Louis University
Chicago, Illinois

CULTURALLY-RELEVANT INFORMATION LITERACY: A CASE STUDY

A Critical Engagement Project
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Rob Morrison
June, 2009

Culturally-Relevant Information Literacy: A Case Study
Rob Morrison

Certification:

In accordance with departmental and University policies, this Critical Engagement Project (CEP) is accepted on behalf of Rob Morrison, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) Degree from the College of Arts and Sciences, National-Louis University in Chicago.

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DEDICATION

This Critical Engagement Project is dedicated to my parents, Bob and Barbara Morrison who have supported my lifelong educational pursuits and to my wife Kim, my lifelong partner who has supported me for the entire journey.

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ABSTRACT

Information Literacy is a process for finding, using, evaluating and incorporating information into an individuals' knowledge base. This process has been formalized into the *ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*. The concept of Information Literacy as articulated in the *ACRL Standards* is based on Western knowledge and ways of knowing that resides in academic disciplines. This knowledge is privileged and regarded as universal, rational, and superior to other forms of knowledge and does not incorporate or reflect non-Western epistemologies. This study questioned the universality of this process as reflective of being grounded in Western culture and knowledge.

The purpose of this study was to identify the role of culture in the information-seeking process in order to inform librarians on how they can provide culturally-relevant instruction. This single case study examined the role of culture in the information-seeking process. Students at an academic institution who initially self-identified as Hispanic were interviewed to determine how they located, evaluated, used, and incorporated information into their knowledge base and how they constructed knowledge. Concepts from Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory were used to analyze data. Findings indicated that culture does play a role in the information-seeking process by valuing local, community sources of information, and that students were directed to use academically-approved sources of information in higher education. The influence and role of culture on information-seeking behavior is a complex issue. Librarians and adult educators can develop "critical information literacy" as one means to connect information to knowledge construction.

PREFACE: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCHER

“The power of nature is the power of a life in association. Nothing stands alone.”
Terry Tempest Williams

“To teach is to create a space in which the community of truth is practiced.”
Parker J. Palmer

My assumptions and philosophy of practice

In this section I explain my reasons for choosing this particular topic and who I am as a researcher. In this study I bring certain assumptions and experiences to my positionality as a researcher. I believe that understanding the social and cultural context of information is critical; the American education system reflects a monocultural way of learning and knowing; Western knowledge is representative of a single system of experiencing and making sense of the world; we can and should learn from other cultures. I believe we (educators and librarians) must engage with other cultures and different worldviews to develop meaningful educational practices. Learning for me is a positive act that is multifaceted and should draw from different human experiences.

I view this study as a means to help transform my personal practice and inform librarians on cultural issues related to information-seeking behavior. As a researcher who is also a learner, I will benefit personally and professionally from conducting qualitative research as it “aims to transform *both* the practitioners’ theories and practices *and* the theories and practices of others” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p.568). I share Hemphill’s (2001) goal to “build theories and practices for our field that take us away from perpetuating universal myths” (p.160). I have come to understand that best practices in education replicate certain beliefs in society that are promoted as universal truths.

Information Literacy, in my experience as an academic librarian, is a practice that supports the assumption that there is one “best” way to learn. The *ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*, define Information Literacy as “a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information” (American Library Association, 2000). ACRL is the Association of College and Research Libraries, a division of the American Library Association. These organizations are major professional associations for librarians in the United States. I have worked in academic libraries for my entire career. I have found that standards and best practices are designed within specific cultural contexts, yet promoted as universal processes and ways of learning for all cultures.

When I started teaching in libraries, library user instruction (bibliographic instruction) focused on print tools to find information using a specific set of skills to locate information in academic disciplines. Bibliographic instruction consisted of finding information contained in library collections, specifically, in materials that were valued and used in higher education disciplines based in Western knowledge and organization. Questioning or examining the construction of this knowledge base was not part of my education or early job experience; I assumed this was how the world of information operated and I taught skills on how to access and analyze it. My teaching included evaluating materials through a checklist of attributes that identified materials as authoritative (or not) to academic disciplines. This process was the means for students to become “information literate”, a process that I believed contributed greatly to lifelong learning skills and could be applied to every bit of information in existence.

I always considered librarianship as a place where I could not take sides, lest I contaminate others learning; I have learned that no one, including myself, is neutral. I formerly valorized intellectual freedom, Information Literacy, and free speech without really understanding why; these are complex and layered issues and not simple foundations that are universal or separate from historical, social, and cultural contexts. “Free speech” is not free from power relations, racism, sexism, and other oppressions but is placed on a pedestal in American society and by many in the library profession. I believe in many truths and realize neutrality, rationality, and objectivity can be abused and manipulated through oppressive power structures. Western-based science and capitalism powerfully frame our worldview in a narrow ideological corridor.

In my doctoral studies, I have been exposed to new theories, realities, and perspectives that challenged my deeply embedded beliefs. I began to critically examine my white privilege and to also question the universality and morality of liberal ideology, particularly the concepts of neutrality and objectivity. I now recognize and believe in many truths although I work in institutions of higher education that claim diversity of thought but expect students to learn specific knowledges in the form of best practices that is shaped by a belief that these knowledges represent/lead to collective truths. I believe that truth can be localized in an individual and in a specific culture.

Librarianship is based on the classic liberal philosophy of neutrality, diversity, and intellectual freedom. I have embraced these ideas through my white culture and Western/Eurocentric education. My training as a librarian instilled in me the values of organization, sharing, access, control, neutrality, and power over knowledge. I now critically examine and question universal truths and what Brookfield (2000) terms

“common sense wisdom” (p.40). I learned that knowledge is socially and culturally constructed and is never neutral or objective; context is always critical to knowing and understanding. My journey of questioning professional practice started years ago, and has culminated in this study. I asked myself a critical question: why do I believe what I believe is true?

My position as a critical theorist is the basis for the problem I am investigating in this study: that Information Literacy (as defined in the *ACRL Standards*) represents a Western worldview of knowing and is thus culture-specific and biased. Information Literacy as defined by the library profession, is not inclusive of different cultures and their ways of knowing and can aid cultural assimilation framed as lifelong learning. As an educator, I believe in liberating education and in critically reflecting on professional practice. I will learn from this research and use a critical lens to promote fundamental changes within my profession.

This doctoral program also equipped me to pierce unquestioned beliefs that have been embedded in my practice by expanding my knowledge of hegemony from simply being an exercise of brute force to specific ideologies that are considered normal. I now question if we (librarians and educators) can create “best practices” or effective practices *since learning is always situational*. I am more sensitive to context in the classroom and the complexities of teaching and learning. I introduce content by asking questions rather than relying on the banking (Freire, 2000) approach to learning. Several adult educators, including Ian Baptiste (2000), Stephen Brookfield (1995, 2000, 2005), and Michael Newman (2006) have also challenged me to critically reflect on issues of power and to reconsider my stance as a neutral educator through their writings and experiences.

As my teaching evolved, I realized that a teaching degree/experience was missing from my library education. It took me years to decide on a suitable education program; ones that required tests turned me off—I did not want to be evaluated based on a test. I also wanted a cohort experience where learning was shared by faculty and students. The Adult and Continuing Education program at National-Louis University also emphasized social justice and theories and knowledge outside of “mainstream” education—a perfect fit for me.

My work is not simply a career as a librarian but as a human being who is part of a larger community. I have always believed in public service and contributed in many different ways in the communities where I live. I mostly think of my “work” as helping people, whether it is finding information, learning, or enjoying life. Helping to me is contributing to life and to the community. As a librarian working in higher education for more than two decades, learning and service have been at the heart of my professional activities. My goal as a librarian and as a researcher is to support learning, not to privilege myself, my expertise, or a specific set of skills (Doherty & Ketchner, 2005) above others and various cultures. My teaching matured and evolved over the years, particularly in reflecting upon my practice and ways to provide meaningful experiences to students and to connect them to new ideas, knowledge, and information.

The field of adult education provided theories that helped me to name problems in my professional practice and to work towards positive change. Critical Theory provided me with the tools to examine and uncover assumptions, ideologies, and systemic power structures that exist in society and permeate education. I am learning to critically examine embedded beliefs in my practice using Critical Theory as a lens. This

Eurocentric paradigm is appropriate grounding for me, a librarian, raised and educated in Western culture and ways of knowing and viewing the world.

As an adult educator, I have also placed a critical lens to my white privilege and uncovered ways racism has been internalized. Listening to powerful counter-stories helped bring about this new perspective within me. Stephen Brookfield once described in class how his white, European culture (British) “inscribed” cultural and racist beliefs in him. I realized that white, American Eurocentric culture had done the same to me by providing a privileged view of the world that ignored and oppressed indigenous cultures.

I am learning that my own consciousness has been affected by growing up in white culture and am finally recognizing how I was “taught not to recognize my white privilege” or see myself as an oppressor (McIntosh, 1998, p.165). I have learned how my culture had imprinted racism subtly through acculturation and by “whitewashing” the stories of different cultures from my consciousness by excluding them from my education and culture. In-class discussions on race and power exposed me to new authors (Asante, 1990; Van Sertima, 1976), perspectives, and theories that have helped me to see how deeply embedded racism was in my consciousness where the history, culture, and people of Africa had been scrubbed from my educational experience.

As a white male liberal, and part of the dominant culture, I have experienced how the hegemony of white culture maintains racist practices while adhering to a narrative of a tolerant society. Newman (2006) and Baptiste (2000) also challenged me to reconsider my liberal views of hearing “both sides of the issue,” where oppressors can effectively wield power maliciously and to consider the subjective construction of reality and inevitable power imbalances in society. I learned that I have a responsibility to actively

contest abusive power and oppressors rather than positioning myself as a neutral mediator.

Being “critical”

I consider the act of being critical is to actively engage with various ideas, beliefs, cultures, and experiences. As a researcher, a learner, and adult educator, I am learning how to effectively critique my practice and assumptions. Since learning is always situational to me, I do not believe that effective pedagogical practice can always be consolidated into uniform checklists and standards. The act of being critical is not criticizing, blaming, or attacking; rather, it is a means to achieve greater understanding of the world and how we know what we know and where our beliefs originated and how they are influenced. How we (academic librarians) viewed the world was never questioned.

I believe critiquing one’s practice is a healthy and necessary activity. In the words of Kincheloe and McLaren (2000), I am “a criticalist” (pp. 290-291). I assumed that facts cannot be isolated; everything is contextual and is never fixed, and that certain groups in society are privileged (p.291). I also oppose the hegemony and oppression of Western culture and capitalism. I embrace the notion that “critical theorists want to understand the world in order to change it” (Tierny, 1991, p. 6). I also better understand power relations and see how certain ideologies (beliefs) operate in librarianship: library as central knowledge provider; the privileging of academic knowledge and standards.

I have attended numerous workshops over the years on Information Literacy, including the ACRL Institute for Information Literacy Immersion (program track); ACRL is the Association of College and Research Libraries. The focus was on adapting

and implementing the *ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* for different learning styles and academic cultures but not asking critical questions on why they are necessary and what knowledge base produced them. Over a period of several years, I began to question the universal application of the *ACRL Standards* while I was using them in my teaching. Their unquestioned authority was a foundational question I began to ask myself. Asking critical questions was not part of the library culture, in my experience.

Critical reflection is a vital component to being critical. I have integrated critical reflection into my practice by taking a “critically reflective stance” (Brookfield, 2005, p.303) towards my teaching and learning. Critical reflection is always ongoing, a continuous and healthy process for me that is never stagnant and always revealing. I keep in mind Brookfield’s (2000) advice that critical reflection is “a necessary hedge against an overconfident belief that we have captured the one universal truth about good practice” (p.46). I really question if any academic standards can truly constitute a best practice since this is always a value judgment. My goal is to accomplish what Mezirow (1991) identified as an outcome of critical reflection: “learners who critically reflect upon their beliefs and assumptions frequently come to challenge taken-for-granted social practices, ideologies, and norms” (n.p.). I now challenge and scrutinize my beliefs: what I believe and why I believe; a process that is not embedded in the current mainstream education system.

I have also changed my perspective on critical thinking. I used to believe it was an essential component of Information Literacy and one of the bedrocks of democracy. I have changed my thinking and now believe that one of the bedrocks of democracy is to

connect as human beings first. This is an example of how critical self-reflection has influenced my thinking. I also embrace Newman's (2006) view of critical learning, where the "history" behind an idea or opinion is explored (pp. 240-241). By exploring the history behind an idea or belief, it is possible to reach a greater level of understanding that can lead to new perspectives. I believe this is a means to greater understanding and connecting to other human beings. Critical learning and thinking is deeply complex and introspective process that is becoming an integral part of my practice.

My purpose in teaching is not to assimilate but to create richer learning environments where students participate in their learning. My mistrust of solely using skills-based education was another motivation for conducting qualitative research into the cultural information-seeking experiences of students by hearing stories from their lives. I found in my teaching, a lack of interest and depth with a focus on recursive (repetitive) lessons; I knew there must be more to knowledge and information than mere process. I also desired to move beyond the current education model where the goal is, "learning is for earning" (Cunningham, 1993, p.3). Malcolm Knowles (1975), author of andragogy, a theory on how adults learn, predicted that adult educators "will all become more like librarians" (p.47), a prediction that has not come to pass in my view. I have found in the field of adult education what I consider essential theories and perspectives missing from my professional practice.

In addition to this study, I am collaborating with other Illinois librarians on a "Critical Information Literacy" project, sponsored by the Illinois Center for Information Literacy (<http://il.webjunction.org/il-info-literacy>) to integrate concepts from Critical Theory into Information Literacy. I will use both studies to help inform myself and

librarians on how they can critically examine their practice and Information Literacy from a very different perspective and to engage in the same critical inquiry that we ask of our students.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This Critical Engagement Project (CEP) is a qualitative case study of the information-seeking behavior of Hispanic college students. I am interested in understanding and learning about the role of culture in the information-seeking process. This research study provided me with the opportunity for an in-depth and rich exploration of this topic. To me, research is to engage in asking questions, and to seek understanding.

This study is the result of questions I have concerning Information Literacy Standards as articulated by professional library associations. As a practicing reference/instruction librarian for my career, Information Literacy has always been a reified standard, an entrenched belief that all students must be information literate through a specific process that involves learning how to articulate an information need, find that information, evaluate it, and use it by incorporating it into their knowledge base. I once considered Information Literacy a vital skill for school and for lifelong learning, one that was applicable for every situation; to me this was a universal truth captured in the form of professional standards. In the last several years, I have questioned these assumptions regarding Information Literacy as part of critically reflecting on my practice, who I am and who I serve.

In this chapter, I explain the purposes, goals, and questions guiding this study. I will provide a definition of Information Literacy and detail the problems I have identified with this topic and discuss the significance for librarians and adult educators. I will conclude by explaining the Intellectual Paradigms guiding this study and the Conceptual Frame and specific concepts that were used to interpret the data.

Purposes and Goals of the study

The main purpose of my study was to explore Information Literacy from the cultural perspectives and lived experiences of self-identified Hispanic students at an institution of higher education. I used the definition of Information Literacy from the Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* that are "a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (American Library Association, 2000, p.2). I will refer to these as the *ACRL Standards*. I used the term "Hispanic" to identify students either born in the U.S. or in a Spanish-speaking country.

I selected the Hispanic population as a focus for this study due to the significant growth of this group in America and in Illinois. The United States Census Bureau projected that the Hispanic population will account for 44% of the total US population from 1995 to 2025; Hispanics comprise the second fastest growing population (Campbell, 1996, n.p.). Illinois is ranked number five of all states with the projected largest Hispanic population that is expected to reach 2,275,000 in the year 2025 (Table J). The third largest Latino (Hispanic) population in the United States is in Chicago (Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005). Hispanics, as a broad category for people from Spanish-speaking countries, are and will continue to comprise a significant population in this country and in Illinois; librarians serving this diverse population should understand their cultural behaviors and knowledge.

In this study, I questioned the *ACRL Standards* as a universal process that is applicable for every learner and in every learning environment, regardless of their

culture. I wanted to understand the role of culture in how Hispanic students located, used, and evaluated information as part of exploring culturally-relevant versions of Information Literacy. An alternative to culturally-biased and Western-based standards is important to me because I believe we must learn from different cultures and not impose our (Western) beliefs. This study comprised a critique of my practice as a librarian who teaches Information Literacy skills and uses the *ACRL Standards*; by doing so, I am informing and encouraging other librarians to critically engage in research.

Western knowledge is a specific kind of knowledge and Information Literacy is a process for accessing and using this knowledge. This study questioned the assumption that rational and technical knowledge valued by Western and American culture is natural and superior to other cultures' ways of knowing and understanding. The way we understand knowledge and process information in Western society is incorporated into the *ACRL Standards* as the best and most natural way. This study examined how culture factors into the process people use to find and evaluate information.

I had three specific goals for this study:

1. Identify culturally-relevant information-seeking behavior.
2. To inform librarians on how they can provide relevant instruction for students in different cultures.
3. Critically examine a cultural alternative to the *ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* that is based in Western cultural educational practices.

My personal goal in this study is to inform and transform my professional practice and librarians on how culture is relevant in providing Information Literacy instruction. I

intend to identify culturally-relevant information-seeking behavior that will add to our understanding of how Hispanic students use culture in the information-seeking process. Culturally-relevant instruction is not just adapting a set of standards for a particular culture; it is constructing a process based on a particular culture's way of knowing and processing information.

I focused on behavior that originated in culture, not how an individual constructed their reality. I eventually hope to inform and transform a set of monocultural competencies that are being imposed in education, rather than mutually constructed. Most of all, I wanted to learn from this research experience and not treat subjects as objects; for me it was an opportunity to experience and learn from new knowledge.

Information Literacy

Background and definition

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), is a division of the American Library Association (ALA), a professional organization for librarians in the United States; ACRL focuses on librarians in academic institutions. ACRL has formalized Information Literacy skills as a set of competencies to provide students with the requisite problem-solving skills to succeed academically and as lifelong learners. The current definition of Information Literacy in the *ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* is "a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (American Library Association, 2000, p.2). The information literate individual is expected to be able to:

1. Determine the extent of information needed

2. Access the needed information effectively and efficiently
3. Evaluate information and its sources critically
4. Incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base
5. Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose
6. Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally

The *ACRL Standards* were adopted by the Australian and New Zealand Information Literacy Framework (Bundy, 2004) and by the Society of College, National and University Libraries (2003). All three Standards shared the utilization of an approach to problem-solving that involved collecting information in a specific way and included skills in locating, accessing, evaluating, organizing, and synthesizing information.

The definition of Information Literacy has evolved over the years. The first was coined by Paul Zurkowski, President of the Information Industry Association and defined it in terms of work, problem-solving, skills, tools, and techniques (Behrens, 1994). Librarians in the 1970's recognized the need for a "new set of skills for the efficient and effective utilization of information" (p.316). Behrens reported that in the 1980's, the growth of new technologies required attention to broader educational issues than library collections and that Information Literacy skills needed to be integrated into the academic curriculum. This evolution reflected the identification of specific skills "required for information handling in an information-permeated, technologically advanced society" (p. 317). The explosion of information and technologies were intertwined and influenced the process of defining Information Literacy.

The blueprint for the *ACRL Standards* was published in the 1989 *Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: Final Report*. This report defined the information literacy process as knowing when there is an information need, then finding, evaluating, organizing, and using the information effectively (American Library Association, 1989, n.p.). This process was later fleshed out in the *ACRL Standards* to include objectives and learning outcomes. In the 1990's, Behrens (1994) reported that the definition of literacy was "dependent on the social and individual requirements of a specific society" and "has to be considered in its cultural, social, economic, and political contexts" (p. 318). The *ACRL Standards* were designed to meet the needs of a "specific" society": one that reflected the values of Western culture through an emphasis on a rational process and a fixed, technical control of knowledge.

Statement of the problem

Overview

There are many different ways of knowing and understanding human experience. While the creation and production of knowledge are important, this study focused on information processing or how we find and utilize information that originated from and described knowledge. My position as a criticalist is the basis for the problem I investigated in this study: that Information Literacy, as articulated by professional library associations, represented a Western worldview of knowing and is thus culture-specific and biased; they also reflect and support academic knowledge and culture. The creation of the *ACRL Standards* was not inclusive of different cultures and their ways of knowing.

The *ACRL Standards* are based in Western cultural educational practices. These standards represent a rational and fixed process to describe the world and do not address

different cultures' ways of knowing or understanding information. As a Eurocentric socially and culturally constructed set of skills and system of knowing, the *ACRL Standards* are designed for students learning in Western education systems and about Western culture. In higher education, knowledge is spread through various disciplines that the Information Literacy process guides learners through. A more appropriate term is what Elmborg (2006) called "academic information literacy", which is the "ability to read, interpret, and produce information valued in academia" (p. 196). The assumption that academic skills are universal ignores the learning and knowledge of students in different cultures. Non-Western cultures are ignored in the education system and students are forced to learn universal skills presented as the truth as defined by Western culture.

Information Literacy as defined in the *ACRL Standards* has become reified by the library profession as a universal process and set of skills that "is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments, and to all levels of education" (American Library Association, 2000, p.2). This is a false assumption that every learner in every culture can use this process; the universal application of this process goes beyond the academic knowledge base it is designed to address. I have identified a need to transform the *ACRL Standards* because, in my experience, librarians do not critically reflect on their professional practice. Discussions of power and who benefits from learning a specific process for finding and using information is virtually non-existent in the world of library instruction. The universality of Information Literacy has become an assumed practice.

The *ACRL Standards* require students to recognize different contexts of information creation. This is a specified Learning Outcome located in the section that deals with evaluation, where the student “recognizes the cultural, physical, or other context within which the information was created and understands the impact of context on interpreting the information” (American Library Association, 2000, p.11). How students recognize the different cultural and social contexts of information is an important question and an intriguing problem I strongly felt required investigation.

Information Literacy and Training

One of the primary objectives of Information Literacy has been to support technology and training. The “Information Age” reveals this focus where learning, technology, and work are blended. The change from traditional bibliographic instruction (how to use the library) to Information Literacy was tied to lifelong learning and increased technology according to Bruce (1997). Emerging technologies and economic factors also played a role in the new definition of Information Literacy since the 1980’s. This concept is crystallized by Bruce in *The Seven Faces of Information Literacy*, where Information Literacy “has its roots in the emergence of the information society, characterized by rapid growth in available information and accompanying changes in technology used to generate, disseminate, access and manage that information” (1997, p.1).

Technology was a significant factor in the global economy and driving Information Literacy into a set of requisite, technical skills that could be applied for lifelong learning and earning. In 1998, *A Progress Report on Information Literacy* updated the 1989 report and emphasized the necessity of Information Literacy skills as a

“survival skill” (n.p.) for the Information Age that supported competition and democracy. This report reiterated the need for “economic independence”, and linked to citizens becoming “lifelong learners” (National Forum on Information Literacy, 1998, p.2) in referencing the 1989 report. Both reports emphasized the importance of developing and training information literate workers to support competitiveness in the growing international economies.

The *ACRL Standards* focused on and prioritized repetitive skills that support job training that is reflected in the American education system. Cajete described the purpose of American education as, “the transfer of academic skills and content that prepares the student to compete in the infrastructure of American society as it has been defined by the prevailing political, social and economic order” (1994, p.19). The problem I identified with Information Literacy was that learning and knowledge involve far more than training, yet the *ACRL Standards* outlined a process that used information as though it originated from a single knowledge base and favored process over context. Librarians teach Information Literacy skills “because technical and social changes demand these skills and knowledge” (Strege, 1996, p. 200). These forces originated from Western culture and capitalism.

The international conversation on Information Literacy has focused on the themes of economic development and technology as key tools for the information literate. I reviewed the proceedings from the following reports: *Information Literacy Meeting of Experts*, held in Prague (Cody, 2003); *High-Level Colloquium on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning* (Garner, 2005), and a report on an information literacy summit held by the National Forum on Information Literacy, called, *American Competitiveness*

in the Internet Age Report (Perrault, 2006). These meetings held in 2003 and 2005, included in their recommendations that information literacy/technology is a driving force in economic development and must be integrated into this process. The Boyer Commission's Report, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education* (Andretta, 2005) provided a revealing perspective where "students must become intelligent information consumers who see information as "an essential commodity for survival" (p.26). Information as a consumable commodity is an essential ingredient in capitalism and reflects the real focus on workforce training; a system that is based on competition (survival).

The ACRL, ANZIL, and SCONUL Information Literacy Standards all include similar terminology on the essential need to economically survive in a competitive world and that Information Literacy is applicable to all learning environments. The phrase "essential commodity for survival" is repeated in the various Standards and reports previously mentioned. I believe this reflects the materialist underpinnings of Information Literacy, combining economic survival to lifelong learning, technical skills, and individual success. An example of workforce training in the ACRL Standards is that "Many of the competencies are likely to be performed recursively" (American Library Association, 2000, p.6) and that information can be used to "communicate a product" (p.14). These skills reflect an orientation toward successfully completing repetitive work in a capitalist society.

Information Literacy and Knowledge

Information Literacy is a tool to support learning that is based in Western societies and knowledge systems. The supposition is that learning is universal, economics and competition are natural and that every individual, regardless of culture should learn the same way and process information the same way. I agree with Behrens (1994) that the concept of Information Literacy is abstract. There is an implied assumption that Information Literacy is a relevant process for everyone and that knowledge is also the same. We live in a world where there are multiple ways of knowing and learning; where individuals in various cultures view and experience life from a multitude of perspectives and knowledge (Merriam & Associates, 2007). I believe the abstract nature of Information Literacy reveals that the social and cultural contexts have been bled out of the process and thus reduce knowledge to a single, knowable entity.

Information Literacy has been criticized by researchers as a positivist theory that is neutral and omits the cultural context of information and knowledge production (Tuominen, Savolainen & Talja 2005; Bruce 2000; and Kaptizke, 2003; 2003b). Tuominen et al. summarized the problem that, “complex social practices cannot be captured in simple checklists” (p.337). Information Literacy is positivist because it is a process where information and knowledge are discrete units of reality that are “verified hypotheses established as facts and laws” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p.196). Positivism claims that “objective accounts of the real world can be given” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.27). Information Literacy supports objectivity through a process approach to information where it can be identified, known, and quantified. I believe it is the human

experience, intrinsically bound with culture that is a critical element missing from the Information Literacy Standards. Separating process from context is a classic positivistic tactic where knowledge is discernible through an objective and distanced researcher.

Information Literacy privileges one cultural view of knowledge production. The assumption that academic skills are universal ignores the learning and knowledge of different cultures. Non-Western cultures are superficially treated in the American education system and students are forced to learn “universal” skills presented as the truth. Schools are sites for transmitting cultural values of society (Giroux, 1983, p.267) and so their “main functions of schools are the reproduction of the dominant ideology, its forms of knowledge, and the distribution of skills needed to reproduce the social division of labor” (pp. 257-58). Tierney described the function of schools is to “reproduce existing power relations” by “imposing definitions of knowledge that reaffirm the culture of the dominant” (1992, p.38). The knowledge that is privileged in American schools is Eurocentric. Hunn (2004) and Tisdell (2001) remind us that positivist knowledge discounts affective knowledge and uses objectivity as a key to understanding human knowledge. The *ACRL Standards* utilize a positivist process to access and use a specific knowledge base in academic disciplines.

Positivist knowledge is culture-specific and devalues other knowledge systems. The problem with objectivist truth is that it “falsely portrays how we know” (Palmer, 1998, p.101). Harris, in her dissertation on Indigenous Knowledges, warns that the Western worldview of universal applicability is dangerous because “it conveys a message of superiority over all those who do not hold this view of the world” (2003, p.43). Indigenous cultures have different methods of validating knowledge that are different

from Western ways but are equally valid (p.44). hooks points out that neutral and objective knowledge reinforces white privilege and dominant knowledge through conformity (2003, pp. 128-129). Librarians view libraries as places to access knowledge, yet the *ACRL Standards* did not include diverse voices and ways of knowing when they were created.

Knowledge and information are inextricably linked in our social lives and in our education systems. Tisdell points out that higher education is about “constructing and disseminating knowledge” (2001, p.148). The knowledge in academia is that created and recognized as superior by the dominant culture and this knowledge is Western, Eurocentric, and privileges white males according to Tisdell (2001) and Johnson-Bailey (2001). This knowledge has been “reified,” privileged, and “devoid of passion or emotion” (Tisdell, p.157) where rationality is privileged over emotions (Dirkx, 2001). The *ACRL Standards* provide a rational, objective approach to processing information.

Affective experiences, including emotions, are relevant ways of knowing that are not rational and difficult to mechanically organize through fixed processes. The affective domain can contribute to learning through emotional and spiritual experiences that help provide and construct meaning (Dirkx, 2001; Tisdell, 2001). Africentric knowledge is holistic and provides an instructive example “because it involves the emotional, the rational, the physical, and the ethical” (Hunn, 2004, p.70). Knowing and understanding is not limited to a specific form such as art that is marginalized by “rational modes of inquiry” (Lawrence, 2005, p.4). Lawrence also reminds us that art is indigenous to all cultures and is a way of knowing.

The holistic nature of knowing is critical to the processes we use to process information. How can we process different cultural knowledge when the process itself is grounded in a single culture's worldview and values? Human beings cannot separate themselves from the context and complexity of information in its multitude of forms. I believe we need to revisit a process that is culturally-biased and directs learners to engage with their world in a linear way; a way that distorts reality by structurally removing information from its creation and context.

Information Literacy and Culture

Culture has been acknowledged as an issue in the *ACRL Standards* but I have not seen a serious attempt to actually incorporate cultural beliefs and knowledge into librarians practice or in processes for using information. The *ACRL Standards* have an outcome that requires the individual to recognize the cultural context of information but does not explain how to actually accomplish this task. The ANZIL Standards stated that the information literate person acknowledges cultural issues (Bundy, 2004) and “understands and respects Indigenous and multicultural perspectives of using information” (p.23). Acknowledging, respecting, and understanding a different culture does not equate to incorporating or using knowledge and information like an individual in that culture.

The 2005 *High-Level Colloquium on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning* held in Egypt included insightful criticisms of Information Literacy from different cultural perspectives. Several participants from non-Western countries acknowledged the need to address the context of different cultures. I am including a few examples. One of the “givens” for Information Literacy is that it “needs to be approached within the context

of people's cultural values, societal groupings, and personal information needs" (Garner, 2005, p.30). Ms. Annisa Hassouna noted that "there is a problem in communicating the concept (IL) to ordinary people. It seems very vague, and when translated into Arabic, it seems related to an elite domain, to the privileged people. It's not linked to the daily life of ordinary people, so they don't see the importance to themselves" (p.46). Professor Gloria Ponjuan from the University of Havana thought that every country should develop its own Information Literacy model according to its own condition because "Ideas that take into account the reality of the world, of the regions, of the countries needs to be created, because some models are applicable only for particular situations, and usually not at the local level" (p.51). This leads me back to my belief in learning as a locally situated experience, including knowledge and information.

I have made the argument that the *ACRL Standards* were shaped by Western cultural values that included a rational, positivist view of knowledge and reality. The concepts and language embedded in these standards reflect Western views of capitalism and learning. The universality of skills represents a positivist mentality that the world is knowable and definable through standardized and objective process. I found the following common themes in international standards and conferences on information literacy: lifelong learning, empowering, competition, efficiency, economies, independence, consumers, commonality of learning environments and control. These themes represent rational worldviews that are based in the technical control of information and knowledge grounded in an overriding concern for economic competitiveness and development and privilege the reality of capitalism.

This study seeks to learn from the lived experiences of individuals and challenges the primacy of Western knowledge that excludes other ways of knowing. Fatnowna and Pickett, citing Marika, succinctly state the core issue for non-Western, indigenous people: The “control of curriculum, teaching, learning and literacy is all about power... We need to create the space for us to express ourselves” (2002, p.229). This study recognizes and attempts to help create that space. I agree with Ward (2006) that the Information Literacy conversation “means talking about it differently, and listening to others as well” (p.401). This study is an act of listening.

Significance of the study

Librarians

I hope to use this study to inform librarians on how culture impacts the process Hispanic students used to locate, evaluate, and incorporate information. Librarians will have research that contributes to understanding the importance of learning from different cultures and to critically rethink the *ACRL Standards*. Librarians emphasize lifelong learning and literacy skills that focus on the individual, specific skills and independent thinking that is founded on Western-based ways of knowing. This study will add to our knowledge of Information Literacy from a cultural perspective and how culture affects information-seeking behavior.

Adult education

This study will contribute to the field of adult education by adding to our understanding of culturally-relevant information-seeking behavior. This study focuses on Information Literacy Standards as used and developed by librarians; libraries have played a significant role in adult education and have served as a main knowledge repository in

American education. Adult educator Malcolm Knowles (1975) described the public library as a “central institution” in the “field of adult education” in the 1930’s (p. 43). Libraries played a vital service role for adults and were part of the mission and focus of adult education. The importance of providing culturally-relevant instruction has been advocated by adult educators but is still outside of the mainstream pedagogy; this study intends to contribute to this important discussion.

Libraries are generally regarded as democratic institutions that provide access to information for all citizens as a public service. Public libraries in the United States were once viewed by major philanthropists such as Andrew Carnegie “as an indispensable means of self-improvement” (Kett, 1994, p.25). This type of self-improvement, according to Kett, was based in a belief that libraries would contribute to the dominant culture by helping to solve social problems. As Wiegand (1989) put it, “Good reading led to good behavior” (p. 102). However, many of the individuals funding libraries, like Andrew Carnegie, were acting in their self-interest and “sought to buttress their cultural leadership in the Gilded Age” (p. 208). Libraries were essentially viewed as transmitters of cultural indoctrination by the ruling classes.

Libraries for the public were, philosophically, considered as instruments of social control and thought by significant funders. The rapid industrialization of work, and accompanying changes and new technologies impacted workers and libraries. The turn of the century also brought about a “new conception of culture, grounded in the experience of work” (Kett, 1994, p.223) that would also influence the role of libraries based on the belief that culture was an uplifting force. Knowles characterized the role of libraries, in

the post-Civil war era as, “an integral part of the American cultural and educational system” (1977, p.20). This role included a strong relationship with adult education.

Librarians attended the first adult education conference in 1924 and afterwards appointed a Commission on the Library and Adult Education. This commission, two years later, issued a report stating that a library had “as a fundamental duty the supplying of books and other printed material for adult education activities” (Knowles, 1977, p.112). This led to the American Library Association establishing an Adult Education Board, according to Knowles, which in turn, created a Readers Advisor Service to provide “prepared tailored reading lists for individual patrons” (p.113). Libraries supported “banking” pedagogy in adult education, what Dewey (1966) criticized as vocational education and Lindeman (1989), mechanistic education. Libraries also supported the goal of education for training. Dewey and Lindeman criticized the privileging of technical rationality in learning over critical practice and exploring the social and power constructs of human experience. This study is driven by a critique of the cultural bias of technical and rational processes in the *ACRL Standards*.

One of the criticisms of the field of adult education is that it has turned away from empowering citizens to think critically and support social justice to focus on training for professional vocations. Mezirow (1991) accused the American Association of Adult and Continuing Educators (AAACE) of abandoning the organization’s mission to “effect democratic social change” (n.p.). The abandonment of civil rights and social justice issues in adult education has also been documented by Heaney (1996), Rockhill (1976), Hansman (2001), Lindeman (1989), Dewey (1966), and Cunningham (1993). Their critiques emphasized that adult education reproduced the values and structures of the

dominant culture and transmitted specific knowledge in place of empowering learners and nurturing transformative learning.

The issue of culturally-relevant pedagogy is a neglected issue in librarianship and in adult education. Western practices dominate to the exclusion and detriment of other cultures. Colin (1994) reminds us that graduate curriculum reinforces the Eurocentric perspective and that adult educators must consciously incorporate knowledge that originates from outside the dominant culture. Different ethnic groups are not represented in higher education and “do not see themselves” (1989, p.17) represented in the curriculum, especially African Americans (African Americans). The failure to attend to cultural issues and experiences is in conflict with the ideology that higher education meets every learners needs. The Colin & Guy Interpretive Model of Africentric Curriculum Orientations (1998) argued that the existence of racism mandated an Africentric model for learning that is “culturally grounded” with educational activities that “are reflective of the sociocultural realities and life experiences that are indigenous to that group” (p.47). Education must have a foundation in the lives and personal truths of learners from different cultures, otherwise educators are serving acculturation and training.

Incorporating culturally-relevant practices is significant for adult educators because culture is grounded in different knowledge systems and means of accessing and interpreting information. The findings in Shade’s (1991) review of the literature on patterns of knowing and the process of knowing in Afro-American communities are instructive. Shade found that the primary mode of information induction was kinesthetic and “people took precedence over rules and context” (p.237). African Americans group

information differently than Euro-Americans, for example they sort word lists based on functional use where Euro-Americans use taxonomies and descriptors. The significance is that “this type of learner can conceptualize the world as a whole rather than just in its parts” (p.243) in contrast to the process of Information Literacy that divides this process into discrete parts. Students who process information differently are going to need different “best practices” and standards in order to have their individual needs met, which is a claimed goal of the American education system. This is an example of a different way to make meaning of information that is at odds with academic knowledge that is organized by specific disciplines and accessed in libraries through the use of subject headings (descriptors) originating within these fields of knowledge.

Marginalizing different cultures through promoting Western knowledge speaks to issues of power and oppression embedded in society and education that must be critically examined, illuminated, and confronted. Brookfield, in a communication with Colin, was told that “for many scholars of the African Diaspora the conceptual connections between race (how they identify themselves) and knowledge production is extremely important relative to “meaning, interpretation, and analysis” (2005, p.282). This context is absent from the *ACRL Standards* designed to homogenize knowledge and information processes. Libraries, as repositories of knowledge and sites for learning for adults, did not actively challenge the ideology of Western, capitalist society and in doing so, aided specific Western cultural practices and pedagogy.

Intellectual Paradigm and Conceptual Frame

Introduction

Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory serves as the Intellectual Paradigms for this study. Critical Theory is a social theory for critiquing and changing society. Critical Theory analyzes and exposes systematic power relations that are deeply ingrained and embed inequalities into society. The goal of Critical Theory is to liberate individuals from the negative effects of these inequalities with the goal to enact positive change. Critical theorists believe that certain truths and beliefs are privileged and how we view the world is the result of a layered set of ideologies.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) originated from critical legal studies that examine the continued existence of racism in society (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso (2005). White privilege maintains a dominant position in society through legal structures; Critical Race Theory applies a critical lens to the enduring nature of racism and shares with Critical Theory the goal to uncover structures in society that support inequalities and oppression.

This study used specific concepts developed by critical theorists in the Frankfurt School of Social Theory. I used the concept of Cultural Capital from Critical Race Theory from Yosso (2005), and the definition of culture from Talmadge Guy (1999). Cultural Capital is a concept that relates to privileged skills and knowledge. From Critical Theory, I used the concept of ideology as economic coercion from Max Horkheimer (1972, 1982) and Theodore Adorno (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972), and the concept of technology as a dominating and oppressive force from Herbert Marcuse

(1941, 1968, Kellner, 2001). I also used the concept of hegemony from Antonio Gramsci (Hoare & Nowell Smith, 1971; Forgacs, 2000).

Conceptual Frame

Critical Theory

Critical Theory provides a lens to probe the social, political, and cultural power structures embedded in society. Critical theorists believe that knowledge and reality are not universal and are open to interpretation. Critical Theory examines knowledge and how people know what they know and what is considered truth. Truth is highly subjective and contextual as opposed to being generalizable and objective. Since knowledge is constructed socially, culturally, and within a specific historical context, critical theorists contest reified meanings and ideologies (beliefs) that are considered self-evident and comprise assumptions.

The Institute of Social Research, commonly referred to as the Frankfurt School, in the 1930's and 1940's included these noted scholars: Theodore Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Eric Fromm, Jurgen Habermas, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse. These critical theorists built on Marx's theories of class and economics to develop a social theory for illuminating universal theories and privileged truths operating in society with the purpose to change society for the better. They sought to free individuals and to transform modern society from dominant ideologies camouflaged in societal norms and capitalism they viewed as causing oppression and harm. The Frankfurt School's theorists came out of the postmodernist worldview that recognized how science and rational thinking led to the destructive results of this era's world wars.

Critical Theory is used to understand the complex social contexts that underlie what we know comprise reality in Western, capitalist societies. Critical Theory emphasizes the significance of work and economics, as explained by Kellner (2001) in an introduction to Marcuse's works: "recognizes the responsibility of economic conditions for the totality of the established world" (p. 11). These conditions underpin the lens through which Frankfurt school theorists used in this study viewed the world. Karl Marx initiated a critique of class, labor production, and economics that the Frankfurt School theorists used to include communication and liberation from oppressive forces (Sullivan & Porter, 1997); economic interests are a powerful force in their critiques of society and capitalism. Critical Theory is in this tradition, a critique of modern society and capitalism. This study examines information-seeking processes as part of a system that incorporates oppressive inequalities into life and education by dominant forces.

Critical theorists view knowledge as locally situated and seek to overturn privileged beliefs that dominate and oppress all other forms of knowledge. Critical theorists seek to unravel universal truths that are attainable through objectivity and scientific methodology, and where individuals are neutral seekers of information. Positivists study a reality that is isolated from their lives/experiences and only knowable through scientific research. Horkheimer and Adorno (1972) believed positivism generalized reality. Critiquing positivism was a major goal of the Frankfurt School since positivism described a single reality and thus was considered repressive and denied the existence of various realities/contexts.

My personal philosophy mirrors the goals of Critical Theory's framework that "offers explanations of the world and how to change it toward a goal based on social

justice, emancipation, and empowerment” (Tierney, 1992, p.34). Critical Theory aims to bring understanding and transformation to social problems and in the words of Brookfield (2005), is “intended to free people from oppression” (p.25) and “envisages a more democratic world” (p.27). I believe the *ACRL Standards* reflect a positivist and rational approach to information that reinforces a specific worldview of knowledge that is tied to Western culture and can be oppressive to non-Western cultures.

This study assumes that the *ACRL Standards* privileged one knowledge process over others. Critical Theory examines the “nature of knowing” and “how we take things to be knowledge” (Fatnowma & Picket, 2002, p.80). The problem is that, “what constitutes and is accepted as knowledge is determined by power” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p.349). Merriam & Cafferella, in citing Cunningham and Fitzgerald, stated that there is “truth for a particular culture” (p.349). Different truths are what a critical theorist strives to reveal in order to expose the oppressive and unequal exercise of power. Dominant interests control knowledge, particularly in Western cultures where indigenous, non-Western cultures are devalued. This study questioned the power of academic knowledge and Information Literacy as a universal process appropriate for all cultures since it is based on knowledge as defined by a specific culture--Western.

A major goal for critical theorists is piercing the ideologies of dominant cultures for the purpose of analyzing and unveiling assumptions. Ideology is the accepted beliefs and practices of how people make sense of their experiences and lives in a system where dominant beliefs prevail. Ideology, in Gramsci’s words, is a “system of ideas” (Hoare & Nowell Smith, 1971, p.376) wielded by a dominant minority discretely to control the rest of society. Ideology provides a structure for society and operates through hegemony,

where certain beliefs are internalized even though they may not benefit the individual or a group. Ideologies provide legitimacy to social, political, and educational structures that are considered normal and rarely questioned or challenged. Individuals' interests often contain ideologies that are not in their self-interest. Ideologies are an integral part of power relations and can be used oppressively within a society and against other cultures.

I used the concept of Ideology as economic coercion from Horkheimer and Adorno (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972; Horkheimer, 1982) where technology is a privileged knowledge. Since Ideology "always reflects economic coercion" (Horkheimer & Adorno, p. 167), these interests are always embedded in the prevailing beliefs operating in a capitalist society. The dominant elites who exercise economic control also exercise power through the ideology of technology. Horkheimer and Adorno viewed technological rationale as the rationale of domination, where the ideology of technology coerces, oppresses and alienates individuals in society to the benefit of an elite group.

I also used the concept of Ideology from Marcuse (Kellner, 2001) that modern society used technology "as an instrument of repression and domination" (p.84). Marcuse believed that society was an economic system ruled by natural and objective laws. In his view, Critical Theory can negate society's oppressive systems by illuminating built-in inequities. Horkheimer (1982) also believed that Critical Theory could reveal these inequities or "the prevailing habits" (p.218). To Marcuse, the "technological society" was an ideological term that served as an instrument of repression and domination (Kellner, 2001, pp. 84-85). The rational and technical society reflected an ideology that dominated all aspects of work and life. I used Marcuse's concept of the ideology of technology as instrument of repression.

I used the definition of Hegemony from Gramsci (Hoare & Nowell Smith, 1971; Forgacs, 2000), where the historical prestige of the ruling elites results in the spontaneous assent by the rest of society (Hoare & Nowell Smith, 1971; Forgacs, 2000). Hegemony, as defined in the works of Antonio Gramsci, is the spontaneous assent of dominant ideologies by the elites and also through the coercive power of the state. Society accepts the beliefs and ideologies of a minority without questioning who they really benefit. I focused on the part of Gramsci's definition where society willingly adopts the ideology of a particular group or class. Hegemony is what Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) identified as the naturalized constructs of ideology. Gramsci noted that "every relationship of 'hegemony' is necessarily an educational relationship" (Forgacs, 2000, p.348). Educational institutions comprise one unit in society that replicates dominant ideologies. Hegemony, as a unit of analysis, focuses on accepted ideologies in education.

I used the concepts of power and oppression as expressed in the Ideology of technical and economic coercion as defined by Marcuse, Horkheimer, and Adorno from the Frankfurt School. These critical theorists represent one vision and version of Critical Theory that was appropriate for this study that focused on oppressive elements of Western culture and capitalism operating in education and in current definitions of Information Literacy in the field of librarianship. Technology permeates life and education and is embedded in society and capitalism as an Ideology that is exercised through hegemony. These concepts from Critical Theory are relevant to my questions concerning the *ACRL Standards* as a positivist construction that is geared towards training and privileges a process for acquiring technical knowledge.

Critical Theory and Education

Critical Theory provided a basis to challenge privileged knowledge and to examine the social and historical conditions that gave birth to them in education. Academic institutions are sites for producing and valuing specific kinds of knowledge to be mastered and packaged in specific subjects. Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) described this as “disciplines are manifestations of discourses and power relations of the social and historical contexts that produced them” (p.280). The use of “best practices” in education indicates a single, fixed way to know and operate in the world that can subsume different contexts and situations. Critical Theory is a productive lens to view educational practice by virtue of its goal to provide liberatory experiences by revealing the ideologies operating behind current ways of learning.

Critical Theory is used by “radical” educators to challenge single models of knowledge production. Schools are sites for reproducing society’s beliefs and values and operate to acculturate students ideologically into specific ways of work and life. Critical Theory is used to engage educational assumptions and pedagogies and has offered a means to contextualize the knowledge base that is valued in schools (Sullivan & Porter, 1997). Marcuse (Kellner, 2001) believed that general education had become a place to maintain the social order. Critical theorists in education challenge fixed practices, categorizations, universal values and privileged knowledge that operate in schools and reproduce the dominant beliefs and values (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Endres, 2001; Giroux, 1983 & 1989; Hardin, 2001; Sullivan & Porter, 1997). Critical pedagogy/literacy confront ideologies and best practices in education that value the positivism of science

and favor economic and technical needs. Critical inquiry into the construction of knowledge and learning in education is viewed as one means to enact social justice.

Critical Theory has provided a theoretical basis to engage ideology and break open educational assumptions. Gramsci believed ideology communicated the will of the dominant class through educational institutions including libraries and schools. Giroux (1983, 1989) viewed the role of Critical Theory as a critical engagement with different ideologies in schools, using reproduction and resistance models. Traditional educational theory “suppressed important questions regarding the relations among knowledge, power, and domination” (Giroux, 1989, p.129) and Critical Theory’s role is to unpack these forces. Ideology, to Marx and to the Frankfurt School theorists, according to Giroux, (1989) distorts truth. Liberation from these ideologically-based “truths” is the emancipatory goal of Critical Theory and the recognition of the existence of multiple truths.

Technical knowledge and academic knowledge are privileged and unchallenged in schools. Knowledge is information and work is technique, derived from the positivist, scientific model, where science is an ideology (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Critical Theory challenges oppressive ideologies and traditional knowledge but critical theorists hold different views of the negative exercise of power. Giroux (1983) rejected the Frankfurt School’s idea that oppressive ideologies are the only explanation because schools are sites for diverse types of knowledge, ideologies, and social relations. Power is a complex issue and not always utilized negatively or oppressively; reality is much more complex. The role of schools as neutral transmitters of knowledge is one that critical theorists generally do challenge. Unpacking educational practice into complex knowledge

production and information processes and their various social and cultural contexts motivated this study and is a common goal for educators who embrace Critical Theory.

Critical Theory is used by educators to illuminate dominant ideologies and practices in society with the intent to understand and transform unequal power relations. The goal of many critical theorists is to enact democratic and emancipatory reforms. My study was driven by a critique of Information Literacy as a practice designed to assimilate students into American education and academic culture uncritically and represented a Eurocentric, positivist worldview. My purpose in this study is to question universal skills (“truths”) and a goal is to critique and transform practice by gaining insights into the nature of specific cultural knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) that influences the information-seeking process. I intend to transform and improve my practice based on what I learn from students’ culturally-relevant knowledge. Horkheimer and Adorno (1972) warned that abstraction dominates in society and makes everything in nature repeatable (p.13). Repetition and abstract processes support technical, rational ideologies that I feel require a critical examination and are an essential component in the *ACRL Standards*.

Critical Race Theory--Cultural Capital

I used the concept of Cultural Capital from Critical Race Theory, legal studies that examine the existence of racism in society (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solorzano & Delgado, 2001; Yosso (2005). Critical Race Theory is related to Critical Theory through its critical lens of oppressive racist ideologies operating in society. I used the definition of Cultural Capital from Yosso (2005) “an accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills, and

abilities that are valued by privileged groups in society” (p.76). The units of analysis for Cultural Capital included privileged knowledge, skills, particularly technical skills valued by dominant groups in society and education. Critical Race Theory delves into social contexts and questions the ideology that we have eliminated racism from society—while this study does not focus on racism, Critical Race Theory adds the lens of racism to Critical Theory and the experiences of non-Western cultures to its’ critique of society. The skills of Information Literacy are a form of cultural capital in academic institutions.

Culture

I employed the definition of culture as synthesized by Talmadge C. Guy: “The popular definition of culture has come to refer to the shared values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and language use within a particular group” (1999, p.7). Knowledge that is derived from culture is comprised from truths and knowledge that have local context and meanings to individuals in a specific group. Cultural groups share learning, beliefs, and social relations. I used this definition of culture to examine shared beliefs of a specific community as it pertained to information-seeking behavior, specifically, behavior, language and beliefs. This study is about the significance of culture in the information-seeking process.

Research questions guiding the study

1. How do individuals in Hispanic culture construct knowledge?
2. How do Hispanics locate, evaluate, use, and incorporate information into their knowledge base?
3. How does students’ culturally-relevant knowledge affect how they learn information literacy skills?

These questions reflected my critical view of the *ACRL Standards*. I asked, “What is the role of cultural knowledge in the information-seeking process?” How do Hispanic students use and create information and how does their cultural knowledge affect this process? I wanted to know if students are marginalized by a Eurocentric set of skills, because I assumed that academic knowledge and practice represent one way to experience, know, and explore the world that does not recognize and can oppress individuals from non-Western cultures. What ideologies are embedded in the *ACRL Standards* and who benefits? My questions go to the heart of who has power in academia, who decides what information is acceptable, the processes by which we “know” information is verifiable and true, and how culture influences this process. These questions are directly related to concepts in Critical Theory that seek to unpack and illuminate specific ideologies and cultural practices that are considered normal, shared, and thus universal.

Organization of the study

In Chapter 2, I review the library literature for sources that used Critical Theory to examine library practice, with a focus on Information Literacy. In Chapter 3, I explain the methodology employed in this study and the data analysis process. In Chapter 4, I explain my findings, and in Chapter 5 I present conclusions and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This study examined the Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* from a cultural perspective. I believe these Standards were constructed and operate as a process where knowledge and ways of knowing the world are grounded in Western cultural and educational practices; I challenged what I considered the cultural primacy of Information Literacy. In this review, I examined the library literature for works that included a critique of library practice and Information Literacy from the perspective of Critical Theory and culture.

This review is not exhaustive and does not cover every critical theorist mentioned in the literature. I used an initial starting date of 1996 plus selected significant and relevant sources prior to this date. The salient concepts I explored in the literature within Critical Theory related to my study are: positivism, ideology, epistemology (ways of knowing) and culture. Databases searched for relevant literature included ERIC and Education Research Complete from EbscoHost and the Library Literature and Information Science from H. W. Wilson.

Overview

My initial review uncovered few works prior to 1996 that mentioned or used concepts from Critical Theory. Strege (1996), in her dissertation research on using critical pedagogy to improve Information Literacy, found that librarians did not use critical theories to inform their practice. My review of the literature prior to 1996 confirmed Streges' findings. The lack of a critical practice in librarianship was also

noted by Day, 2001; Harris, 1986; Harris & Hannah, 1993; Kapitzke, 2001, 2003a, 2003b; and Luke & Kapitzke, 1999. These authors pointed to an absence of librarians asking foundational questions concerning professional practices and standards.

Librarians do not view “the library as a mechanism of cultural reproduction” (Harris, 1986, pp. 245-246) and thus do not engage in critical discourses or theories.

The lack of research on the information-seeking behavior of different cultural groups, including Latinos was identified by Huston (1987; 1994) and Metoyer-Duran (1991). These authors noted that academic information is culture-specific and culturally-based. Information is produced, organized, and disseminated within a Western cultural framework that ignores knowledge produced by indigenous groups. This study identified this problem and was designed to add to our knowledge of the role of culture in information-seeking behavior.

The library literature prior to 1996 revealed several authors who laid a foundation for future research using Critical Theory. Harris was the first librarian I located who published prior to 1996 (and referenced by Strege) that used Critical Theory as a framework for change and openly advocated for librarians to critically examine professional practices and assumptions. Harris (1986; Harris & Hannah, 1993) stood out by challenging librarians to adopt critical paradigms by discussing the powerful belief in the neutral role of the library. Later, Wiegand (1999) also noted the absence of critical discourse and theorists in librarianship, where the profession is “trapped in its own discursive formations” (p. 24). Strege (1996) found that Information Literacy must consider the social and cultural practices that serve special interests (dominant culture) and that librarians must take into account the social, cultural, political, historical contexts,

and the cultural capital of students. The Library as a valued transmitter of information and knowledge is a powerful belief that has not allowed room for engaging in critical examinations of embedded beliefs in professional practice.

After 1996, an increased awareness of the lack of critical perspectives pertaining to library practice in the library literature emerged. Bruce (2000) identified reasons for the paucity of critical research in a literature review of information literacy research that explored the historical landscape and identified new, under researched areas. Bruce labeled the time period 1995 to 1999 as the “exploratory years” where different information literacy research paradigms were explored, a moving away from positivist paradigms (p.3). Wiegand (1999) also noted the role libraries play in replicating ideologies and the absence of critical theorists from the library literature. Elmborg (2006) argued for librarians to develop a “critical consciousness” (p.198) and that Critical Theory can help reveal dominant ideologies operating in schools. Critical Theory was specifically identified as one emerging research area by Bruce (2000) and I believe this finding explained the paucity of published research.

In the last ten years, the library literature examining the lack of critical practice in librarianship has also focused on the failure of Information Literacy Standards to address the social construction of knowledge (Weissinger, 2005; Simmons, 2005). Buschman & Brosio (2006) and Luke and Capitzke (1999) acknowledged that as a profession, librarians have not engaged with postmodernist theories, including Critical Theory. Information Literacy does not acknowledge the social process of knowledge production because it is based in a positivist way of knowing that relies on rationality and distanced

observation. Allan Luke (Luke & Capitzke, 1999) and Cushla Kaptizke (2001, 2003a, 2003b) are notable exceptions but these researchers are social behavioral educators.

Critical Information Literacy

The term “Critical Information Literacy” in the literature proposed to redefine Information Literacy to address knowledge construction and to challenge traditional assumptions/definitions of critical thinking and Information Literacy (Doherty, 2007; Elmborg, 2006; and Swanson, 2004). Doherty (2007) summarized the essence of this change by advocating that Information Literacy needed to “open up to all forms of knowledge” (p. 5). The strategy of questioning dominant beliefs to reveal specific forms of knowledge production that are privileged in society derives from Critical Theory and is absent from traditional definitions and discourses of Information Literacy in librarianship.

Critical Information Literacy incorporated a significantly different concept of critical thinking from the *ACRL Standards*. The traditional meaning of critical thinking had been tied to evaluating and verifying information. Being “critical” in the traditional sense, involved detecting flaws, evaluating facts, and authenticating academic knowledge (Kaptizke, 2003b; Marcum, 2002; Strege, 1996). The lack of “criticality” in librarianship lies in this traditional definition (Kapitzke, 2003b) where Information Literacy is limited to being “knowledgeable about information” (Luke & Kapitzke, 1999, p.8). Whitworth (2007) pointed to the need to include “the societal conditions, and assumptions, which lie behind each information search” (p.107) in the processes laid out in the ACRL Standards. This is a substantially different process than using critical thinking to distinguish various containers of information and speaks to the heart of this study. Deeper reflective practice

would examine the knowledge construction process instead of emphasizing the format, process, and packaging of information.

Critical Information Literacy has been linked to critical pedagogy/literacy, where the focus is on the learners' experience and ways of constructing knowledge (Swanson, 2004). Strege (1996) defined critical literacy as a pedagogy that is informed by Critical Theory. The social construction of knowledge must be incorporated as a "critical" examination of the hegemonic and ideological forces embedded in information. Swanson (2004) and Elmborg (2006) argued for developing a critical consciousness using critical literacy/pedagogy because teaching and knowledge are not neutral and are socially situated. The theme of critical consciousness is derived from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000) that is in the tradition of critical theory's changing society by emphasizing liberatory conscientization.

Critical Information Literacy has also been defined within the activist/change frame as articulated by Critical Theory. Doherty (2007) argued that Critical Information Literacy is "a form of activism" and will help "develop an emerging critical consciousness in librarians about their roles" (p. 6). Giles (2002) called for a new worldview in the *ACRL Standards* to include social justice where the goal is to empower people to change their world. Challenging dominant beliefs and academic standards is not a specified outcome in traditional Information Literacy. Critical Theory can challenge and transform Information Literacy from a sacred process to one that recognizes different systems of knowledge production by refusing to adhere to a single way of knowing and processing reality.

Critical Information Literacy would challenge dominant ideologies in education and academia, by exploring different ways of knowing and constructing knowledge. Ward (2006) and Shanbhaq (2006) endorsed redefining and revisioning Information Literacy Standards as a Liberal Art, citing an article by Shapiro & Hughes (1996). This framework would focus on critical reflection involving the nature and construction of information rather than learning a set of skills (Shanbhaq, p.7). Ward (2006) emphasized connecting information to students' lives and engaging through the affective domain, a different way of knowing than the rational grounding process of Information Literacy. Simmons (2005) proposed using Genre Theory as a postmodernist epistemology for critical information literacy to develop an awareness of "the social construction of discourses" (p.302). The objective is to uncover the power relations and different epistemologies at work in academic disciplines. These critical proposals are in the tradition of Critical Theory by challenging and illuminating for students how "knowledge is constructed and contested" (Simmons, 2005, p.308). This study used Critical Theory as the intellectual and conceptual grounding to examine the *ACRL Standards* as a Western-based, positivist view of knowledge that is different from other cultures' epistemologies.

Information Literacy and epistemology

Epistemology is a theory of knowledge on the nature of knowing—how we obtain and construct knowledge. The critical aspect of epistemology is that "different epistemologies promote different forms and ways of knowing" (Kincheloe, 1991, p.67). One of the most common critiques of Information Literacy I found in the literature is that it is a positivist epistemology (Bruce, 2000; Elmborg, 2006; Harris, 1986; Kapitzke, 2001, 2003a, 2003b; Simmons, 2005; Strege, 1996; and Whitworth, 2007). Shanbhaq

(2006) described Information Literacy as positivist because it “is still wedded to a template of what constitutes knowledge and knowing in formal academic settings” (p. 1) and does not support deeper learning and understanding. The *ACRL Standards* are based on a positivist epistemology where learners “can discover a unified “Truth”” (Simmons, 2005, p.299). The complex nature of information, knowledge, and reality (and our perceptions) is subsumed into a process that generalizes and superimposes instead of revealing and understanding.

The critique of positivism is a fundamental goal of the critical theorists from the Frankfurt School used in this study. Critical information literacy can serve as an alternative to positivism, according to Kapitzke (2001), because it is “the social and cultural construction of its pedagogies and in turn, their variable political and discursive outcomes” (p.453). The criticism of positivism reflected a belief that Information Literacy is grounded in a single epistemology and can act as an overriding and oppressive force in understanding knowledge production from different cultures. Information is not a fixed, knowable reality that is separate from the learner; there are always contexts to unpack.

The social construction of knowledge is a major factor in epistemology. Information Literacy does not address the authority and politics of knowledge, and the local and cultural knowledge construction that Critical Theory endeavors to illuminate (Luke & Kapitzke, 1999, p.14). The sociocultural construction of information in order to understand the context of knowledge is a significant outcome for Ward (2006), Shanbhaq (2006), Kapitzke (2001, 2003a, 2003b), and Luke & Kapitzke (1999). These authors recognized the positivist grounding embedded in the *ACRL Standards* and argued for

librarians to explore and to challenge the technical and process-oriented way of engaging with information.

I found substantial agreement among these authors that a new epistemology for Information Literacy is required, since Western education is biased when it comes to valorizing certain kinds of socially constructed knowledge that is never critically examined (Bruce, 2000; Buschman & Brosio, 2006; Day, 2001; Dorner & Gorman, 2006; Elmborg, 2006; Giles, 2002; Harris, 1986; Huston, 1987, 1994; Kapitzke, 2001, 2003a, 2003b; Luke & Kaptizke, 1999; Owen, 1996; Pawley, 1998; Simmons, 2005; Strege, 1996; and Wiegand, 1999). Kapitzke (2001) called for librarians to discard the dominant theory of Information Literacy and use critical information literacy as one that “reframes conventional knowledge of text, knowledge, and authority” (p.453). The way we know is influenced by culture and the *ACRL Standards* privilege the authority of a single culture. This challenge to authority is also a challenge to Western ideology.

Information Literacy and ideology

Ideology is a set of beliefs, values, and practices people use in their daily lives and to navigate society. Elmborg (2006) and Ward (2006) recognized that librarians do not confront nor critique dominant ideologies operating in education and that any critical literacy or critical information literacy must involve different ways of knowing reality. Understanding the social and cultural construction of information must also take into account embedded dominant ideologies. Information Literacy has been articulated as a set of skills for individuals with the embedded assumption that searching, evaluating, and using information is a “socially valued” activity (Tuominen, Savolainen, & Talja, 2005, p.336). The “value” of being information literate is an unquestioned ideology by

librarians due to the cultural practice that information is valued by Western society and academic culture. Ideologies are full of assumptions.

The positionality of librarians in academic culture and adherence to ideology played a significant role in the lack of critical practice. In Critical Theory, positionality is related to issues of power: who has it and how power is exercised. Libraries and library science education replicated academic power structures (Day, 2001; Elmborg, 2006; Harris, 1986; Harris & Hannah, 1993; Pawley, 1998). Elmborg (2006) used the term “academic information literacy” (p. 196) to describe a valued skill students learn in order to master academic disciplinary content. He described this “privileged discourse” (p. 197) as the “grammars of information” (p. 197) that belong to the Anglo, Western, male culture. I agree with this interpretation that confirmed my core problem with Information Literacy. Librarians are well-positioned as gatekeepers of academic knowledge and this status has provided considerable power in the culture of higher education.

Librarians have claimed the role of neutrality, an embedded ideology and valued assumption, and this status makes them “invisible and exempt from critical inquiry” (Kaptizke, 2003b, p.37). Day (2001) pointed out that foundational questions in librarianship are not asked. Ideologies are very difficult to criticize or examine because they comprise powerful beliefs that Owen (1996) confronted by calling for Information Literacy to challenge the prevailing order “with its obligations to act” (p.132). Pawley (1998) identified the control of library and information science curriculum by the dominant class and proposed a class analysis to overcome the embedded hegemony (internalized beliefs) of the dominant culture. This study asks critical questions of

knowledge construction and challenges Western ideology embedded in the *ACRL Standards* that will add to this discussion.

The absence of a critical theory underpinning library practice was also tied to a lack of social theory in Information Literacy (Day, 2001; Kapitzke, 2001, 2003a, 2003b; Luke & Kapitzke, 1999, and Pawley, 1998). Information literacy must include elements of social theory in order to effectively identify the social and cultural construction of information and place knowledge within its context. Day (2001) pointed out that theory must engage dominant knowledge and ideologies and that positivism does not recognize knowledge as socially and culturally constructed. Day (2001) defined theory as the construction of concepts and that Critical Theory applies concepts that are “critical and interruptive” to “commonly accepted practices” (p.116). Critical Theory questions the underpinnings of theory and knowledge that is valorized by academia and the *ACRL Standards*. Day (2001) also viewed Critical Theory as a tool that provided a critical analysis of ideologies operating in society and it is this analysis of power that is resisted by the dominant powers. In my experience, librarians generally resist criticisms of Information Literacy; it is an accepted and generally unquestioned practice.

Information Literacy and culture

Bruce (2000) and Metoyer-Duran (1991) identified research on information literacy in different cultural contexts as areas that were under researched. These studies were separated by almost a decade, indicating that culturally-based research continues to be scarce in the library literature. Defining Information Literacy in a non-Western context was identified as a means to recognize the social and cultural construction of knowledge in different cultures (Dorner & Gorman, 2006; Huston, 1987; 1994). Bruce

(2000) also called for “closer attention to...cultural influences” and “the nature of knowledge, information, and information literacy in different cultures” (p. 10). The problem and explanation, as described by Menou (1983) is that information is culture-specific and that information products and services are Western-based. Culture is the shared beliefs, behaviors, and values of a particular group (Guy, 1999) and Information Literacy is the product of Western culture.

I found different purposes for developing Information Literacy to address different cultures. Huston (1987, 1994) wanted librarians to develop ethnic competence in order to create contextually relevant instruction for students from non-Western cultures. In this case, the focus was on the pedagogy for individual students or groups. Chu (1999) argued for a redefinition and expansion of this term to include relevant pedagogy for “linguistic minorities” and acknowledged the cultural bias inherent in Information Literacy. These authors’ strategy is critical as it included a discourse of power and acknowledged the existence of hidden cultural biases.

Indigenous cultures have their own epistemologies and ways of processing knowledge that are different and subordinated to Western knowledge. The problem is that Western culture assimilates through education and does not accommodate different ways of knowing and learning (Elmborg, 2006; Ward, 2006). Giles (2002) advocated expanding Information Literacy to include indigenous knowledge in order to foster greater appreciation by Westerners for their claims to social justice. This proposal is in the emancipatory tradition of Critical Theory.

The relevant library literature on Hispanics and Latinos using academic libraries was sparse but recognized these students’ different “cultural capital” and learning styles,

and focused on academic achievement and appropriate pedagogy (Adkins & Hussey, 2006; Altshuler & Schmautz, 2006; Mestre, 2004). These studies revealed that these students face standardized tests that are culturally biased and their cultural knowledge is not relevant or acknowledged in the curriculum. This study is about the importance of culture in the information-seeking process and the *ACRL Standards* are geared towards a specific way to know and process information and knowledge.

Conclusion

The critiques of Information Literacy I found in the literature can be tied to the absence of a Critical Social Theory operating in professional library practice (Buschman & Brosio, 2006; Day, 2001; Doherty, 2007; Elmborg, 2006; Harris, 1986; Harris & Hannah, 1993; Kaptizke, 2001, 2003a, 2003b; Luke & Kaptizke, 1999; Pawley, 1998). This literature review supported the purpose and need of this study to provide a critical examination of Information Literacy from a different cultural perspective. There was evidence of a growing awareness and recognition in the literature that librarians need to incorporate critical practices and to challenge ideological assumptions in Western education that excluded other cultures ways of knowing and learning.

Critical Theory challenges the discursive nature of library practice and probes the ideological assumptions embedded in Information Literacy. I found at the core of every critique, the conclusion that new epistemologies are required and the positivist construction of Information Literacy must be challenged and changed. Elmborg (2006) identified what I believe is the core problem: librarianship requires “a theoretically informed praxis” (p.198). The lack of a theoretical underpinning in the *ACRL Standards*

and librarianship is a “critical” missing ingredient in a system that claims to support lifelong learning.

This study focused on Information Literacy as articulated in the *ACRL Standards* that are a part of professional librarian practice. The critiques I found in the literature were related to the problems I identified for this study. To summarize, Information Literacy is a culturally-biased process that was created to support a specific knowledge base (academic knowledge) and way of valuing and viewing the world that is based in Western culture. A profession that is not grounded in critical practice or theory is susceptible to embracing and imposing ideologies that can be oppressive and most certainly exclusive of different cultures.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

Methodology

Study design

The purpose of this study was to identify culturally-relevant information-seeking behavior from Hispanic college students. The questions guiding this study were; ‘how do Hispanic students construct knowledge?’; ‘‘how do they locate, evaluate, use, create, and incorporate information?’’; and ‘‘how do these students’ culturally-relevant knowledge affected how they learn information literacy skills?’’ Qualitative research studies are appropriate for investigating these types of questions that rely on stories and experiences. Qualitative research is a form of inquiry that helps the researcher understand how people ‘‘make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world’’ (Merriam, 1998, p. 5). In this study I attempted to understand the cultural factors affecting information-seeking behavior and learning how participants experienced their world is critical to my understanding.

Qualitative case studies

Qualitative research and qualitative case studies are appropriate to investigate a specific phenomenon or a particular question. Case studies focus on a single or ‘‘bounded’’ case (Merriam, 1998; Stake 1995, 2005). There are clearly defined limits and parameters that must be in Merriam words, ‘‘intrinsically bounded’’ (p.27). According to Yin (2003), case studies are ideal for understanding complex social phenomenon since knowledge and information are constructed and influenced by social and cultural forces. Culture is a significant focus in this study.

The design of this study was a single case study. Case study research is defined by Merriam (1998) as a single unit that is bounded or “fenced in” (p.27). The defining characteristic of a case study, according to Merriam, is “delimiting the object of study” (1998, p.27). I limited this study to a specific group of students at a specific institution and at a single campus who shared a common language (Spanish). This study was also designed to yield “large amounts of rich, detailed information and are useful for supporting information “that helps structure further research” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p.111). I listened to students’ stories and intended this study to contribute towards an understanding of information-seeking behavior that is grounded in culture.

Qualitative research is a type of inquiry that used the lived experiences of individual students as primary research material. Marshall and Rossman (2006) categorized qualitative research into “individual lived experiences, society and culture, language and communication” (p.55). All three factors were embedded in this study and directly related to understanding the cultural issues at work in the information-seeking behavior of Hispanic students. My research questions were suited for a case study as Merriam (1998) stated, they “identify areas of inquiry” (p.60) in interviews and observations. My questions on how Hispanic students “locate, evaluate, use, create, and incorporate information” and “construct knowledge” were areas I wanted to investigate.

The purpose of my study was to contribute knowledge that librarians could use to inform their practice on culturally relevant Information Literacy instruction. Merriam (1998) stated that case studies can be described by their “overall intent” (p.38). My study was intended to interpret and “identify culturally-relevant information-seeking behavior.” My goal to inform and transform professional practice was also appropriate for a case

study. Case study research in education is appropriate for identifying issues and problems in practice and to “challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to the data gathering” (p.38). I identified the *ACRL Standards* as culturally-biased and assumed that culture was a factor in information-seeking behavior. My study drew on a desire to identify and transform what I viewed as oppressive ideologies in education using concepts in Critical Theory.

My study also focused on understanding how students “culturally-relevant knowledge” affected how they learned Information Literacy skills. To accomplish this, I had to “gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved” (Merriam, 1998, p.19). Identifying and incorporating these meanings into my practice was at the heart of my studies’ problem, purpose, and goals. One of my personal goals was to seek insight into cultural perspectives related to information seeking behavior. I “grounded” (p. 30) the case in the culture and perspective of a specific group of students. I am “investigating complex social units, adding knowledge for future research, and striving to improve practice through a case study” (p.41). This study was also “particularistic” as the specificity of focus makes a good design for questions arising from everyday practice (p.29). I questioned the cultural base of Information Literacy and made certain assumptions regarding my everyday practice that I explored in this study.

In this study, I critiqued universal learning and knowledge and avoided generalizations. In other words, I represented a specific case, not the world (Stake, 2005). I had an “intrinsic interest” in the case and it was “instrumental” by providing insight into an issue related to power and learning in education (p.445). My goal was to contribute to the knowledge base of culturally-relevant learning. I utilized a case study as

an effective and appropriate means to help answer questions of how and why according to Yin (2003). I explored *how* Hispanic students located, evaluated, and used information and communicated *why* this was important for librarians' practice.

Participant selection process

Criteria

My criteria for participants were students enrolled at a specific campus (urban) at a specific higher education institution in Chicago, and self-identified as Hispanic. I used the term Hispanic broadly to include students or their parents who were born in a Spanish-speaking country or in the United States. The selection criteria included students who were bilingual and currently enrolled in undergraduate or graduate programs. I wanted to interview students directly without the filter of an interpreter. Gender and specific degree programs were not part of my criteria. I recruited participants through the Hispanic student club and through various informants (students, faculty) at the campus. I also advertised in the Hispanic student club newsletter that was e-mailed to Hispanic students over the course of five months, and once offered a gift certificate for attending an interview. I offered the gift only once as I wanted willing volunteers for the study. A total of three students participated in this case study.

Demographics

Participants were three female students who lived in the Chicago area who initially self-identified as Hispanic. One participant was finishing their undergraduate program in Early Childhood and Psychology, the second participant was finishing a Masters in Human Resource Management, and the third participant was starting a Masters' program in Adult Education. Every participant was bilingual. I did not collect

information on age or on family members other than information that was volunteered in the interviews other than ethnic identity since this was critical to the purpose and guiding questions of this study.

Data Collection

Interviews

My primary data collection tool was the personal interview. Interviews were appropriate for obtaining specific and detailed information from participants on their culture and information-seeking experiences. Interviews were fitting since “Qualitative researchers rely extensively on in-depth interviewing” and were “structured to elicit insiders’ cultural knowledge” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.104). Interviews provided a forum for me to hear participants lived experiences. Interviews were also “useful when the topic is complex” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p.152). Cultural knowledge is complex and required a setting where the researcher can probe for richer details and experiences.

The main purpose of the interviews was to elicit cultural knowledge and experiences from individual students relative to my goal of understanding their culture. The interviews were, in Merriam’s words, “conversations with a purpose” (1998, p.71). My purpose was to dialogue or “converse” with Hispanic students to gain insights into how they located, evaluated, and used information. Interviews offered the opportunity to dig deeper into past experiences and knowledge and served as the most effective means to obtain specific and contextual information.

I used a semi-structured interview to ensure my research questions were asked and to allow room for follow-up questions. Semi-structured interviews start with a core

list of questions to provide guidance for the conversations and to ensure my research questions were asked but also to allow room for new questions based on participants' response. Allowing participants to voluntarily provide explanations on their own revealed additional rich insights related to the study. My questions were designed to provoke stories about culture and academic experiences in locating, evaluating, and using information.

Interviews were held at the campus where students attended classes in private rooms and conducted in English. The interviews lasted around an hour each. I explained the Informed Consent form with each participant and had them sign the form before recording. I started with factual questions concerning participants' degree programs to help break the ice, and then moved on to more personal inquiries. I used the experience of the first two interviews to identify additional probes to elicit "critical incidents" that tied directly into my research questions. Observations were conducted at computers in the library and a computer lab on-site. The first interview was held in February 2008 and the final in October 2008. I held three initial interviews with each participant and then second interviews with the first two participants for a total of five interviews.

Field notes added to data collected in the interviews. Brief notes were taken during the interviews and then more detailed notes immediately following the interviews. The post-interview notes provided time to reflect on participants' words and stories when this information was still very fresh. These notes helped identify issues and themes during the transcript review process. Field notes were appropriate for qualitative research since they added depth and perspective to the interviews.

Observations

Observations were employed to provide additional data to this study. The observations consisted of two participants reenacting an online database search from a prior class assignment. These students repeated a class assignment by demonstrating the process they used to find suitable materials on the Internet and in library subscription databases. I took field notes during the observations and printed selected screens to add to my personal observations and notes. The observations added to the stories told during the interviews and provided a visual means to gain insight into the process participants' used to locate and evaluate information.

Data Analysis Process

To review, the purpose of my study was to explore culturally-relevant Information Literacy from the perspective and lived experiences of Hispanic students at an institution of higher education. I wanted to understand how these students used, located, and evaluated information in order to contribute to librarians' understanding of culturally-relevant information-seeking behavior. The primary goals of this study were to explore a cultural alternative to existing Information Literacy Standards by identifying culturally-relevant information-seeking behavior in order to inform librarians on how they can provide relevant instruction for students in different cultures.

The questions guiding this study were vital components in the analysis of the interviews and data. They are: "How do individuals in Hispanic culture construct knowledge"; "locate, evaluate, use, create, and incorporate information into their knowledge base"; and "affect how they learn information literacy skills"?

I adapted a “Case Analysis Form” from Miles and Huberman (1994, p.78) to initially examine and interpret the interview data (Appendix B). I used a chart to: list main issues and themes embedded in the questions; summarize data for each interview question; list salient and interesting information; identify new interview questions and questions that were not asked. I used this chart for each individual interview as a tool to carefully review each transcript and to summarize data. This initial analysis helped me to determine additional questions relevant to my guiding questions. I compared the initial list of interview questions to the interviews to identify gaps and new pertinent questions.

This process also helped me to flesh out the data into themes through multiple reviews of the transcripts that aided my discovering new meanings. Merriam (1998) advised that categories (themes) should reflect the purpose of the research and that placing themes (categories) in a chart/table is an effective strategy so I combed the transcripts for relevant quotes that matched a particular theme. I organized this information into a second chart called a Data Analysis Form (Appendix C) for each interview that organized data by: themes; related subthemes; research questions with relevant quotes; and major concepts in order to facilitate the analysis. My final strategy involved creating charts graphically displaying major themes and related subthemes, and themes by units of analysis (concepts).

Trustworthiness

I used triangulation to substantiate validity in this study. I accomplished this by using multiple sources to review and analyze the data: interview transcripts; recordings of interviews; field notes; observations; and member-checking. This process provided a layered analysis of the data and helped me to verify interpretations and meanings.

Qualitative data is really the lived experiences of people. I heard stories from my participants that helped me locate “the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.10). I sent each participant a transcript of their interviews and asked for their review to ensure the accuracy and validity of their spoken words and meanings; this is called “member-checking.” I also sent participants a copy of the first chart that summarized the interviews. Merriam (1998) advised that in qualitative research, “What is being observed are people’s constructions of reality—how they understand the world” (p. 203). In order to trust participants’ spoken words and meanings, I confirmed their interpretations directly with their speakers.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

In this section, I present and discuss the findings from the interviews and observations. This section is organized by the questions guiding this study and themes that emerged from my analysis. I will first review the units of analysis, comprising concepts from Critical Theory (Ideology of economic coercion; technical and economic domination/repression; hegemony), Cultural Capital from Critical Race Theory, and culture (beliefs, behavior, language). This single-case study included three female participants. I have changed their names to protect confidentiality and will refer to them as Angela, Rosaria, and Elena. Themes and sub-themes are listed in Appendix D with corresponding links to questions guiding this study.

Units of Analysis

Ideology

Ideology comprises the beliefs, values, and practices of how people make sense of their experiences and lives. I used technical and economic coercion as a concept in Ideology from Horkheimer and Adorno (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972; Horkheimer, 1982) and from Marcuse (Kellner, 2001), technology as an instrument of oppression. The relationship to my study is to determine if these forces in ideology were affecting the information-seeking process of Hispanic students. The *ACRL Standards* are a technical process.

Hegemony

Hegemony is when society willingly accepts the ideologies of a dominant group as being in their best interests. These beliefs become internalized and are considered

natural and “best practices” and thus are never questioned or subject to close scrutiny. Educational institutions comprise one unit in society that replicate dominant ideologies. Hegemony, as a unit of analysis, will focus on accepted ideologies in education from Gramsci (Hoare & Nowell Smith, 1971; Forgacs, 2000).

Cultural Capital

This concept from Critical Race Theory (Yosso, 2005) described privileged knowledge and technical skills that are valued by dominant groups in society. The *ACRL Standards* represent a valued form of Cultural Capital for students to learn in order to access and process specific kinds of valued knowledge in academic disciplines.

Culture

This study is focused on the role of culture in the information-seeking process. From Guy’s (1999) definition, I will focus on beliefs, behaviors, and language that influenced the information-seeking process.

Ethnic Identity (Hispanic)

Introduction

In this section, I discuss ethnic identity as defined by the participants in this study. I initially used the term Hispanic to include students or their parents who were born in the United States or in a Spanish-speaking country. My research questions focused on students in “Hispanic” culture and my first interview question was “describe your ethnic identity.” I am not a member of Hispanic culture and did not want to name participants’ ethnic identity in this study. Culture is a complex issue and I wanted to learn how these students self-identified and described their culture in their own words. I did not limit this study to a specific Spanish-speaking culture. Angela, Rosaria, and Elena were female

and Mexican-American: they were born in the United States and their parents were born and raised in Mexico. All three were bilingual and their first language was Spanish. Identity is bound with culture and language and a key part of the data analysis, in conjunction with information-seeking behavior.

The ethnic categories found in this study were: Hispanic, Latina, and Chicana identity. Hispanic and Latina were used as broad ethnic identifiers, with Hispanic linked to the Mexican-American community. Chicana was a specific cultural identifier used by Angela within the Mexican-American community to identify that community. The two themes that emerged from the analysis were: Imposed Identity and Self-Identity. Imposed Identity comprised ethnic descriptors used in American society to name individuals from Spanish-speaking countries. Self-Identity reflected self-described term that signified a cultural connection.

Self-Identity

Hispanic and Latina

The terms Hispanic and Latina were used interchangeably as ethnic identifiers by Angela and Rosaria. Rosaria noted that “all these terms kind of overlap. They have the same kind of meaning to me.” I did not initially find a strong distinction between the two terms as evidenced when Angela initially responded when asked to describe her ethnic identity, “Mexican or Hispanic or Latino.” The interchangeability of these terms was also apparent when Rosaria, in her first interview stated, “I always refer to myself as Hispanic” and in the second interview, responded “I always use Latina.” The varying use of these terms appeared very natural and in initial conversations appeared to have the

same meaning to Angela and to Rosaria. Elena self-identified as a Latina and linked this term to Mexican-Americans, as her parents were born in Mexico.

Angela and Elena linked Hispanic and Latina to a variety of Spanish-speaking countries and cultures. In Angela's words, the Hispanic community "includes several other cultures...not only Mexican." Rosaria linked Hispanics to people whose parents were from "anywhere in Latin America" and Angela described it as "a general definition of including all the Puerto Ricans, Mexican, Dominicans." Elena also felt Hispanic denoted people from a broad range of Spanish-speaking countries. Angela was familiar with her colleges' Hispanic student club and described the organizations' goal was to inform the community about Latino culture even though she was aware that the membership comprised Mexican students and she did not personally identify as Latina.

Angela expressed a very powerful connection to Mexico and Mexican culture that appeared to me to be at the root of her identity. Angela self-identified as Hispanic through a strong cultural connection with Mexico and that is why she self-identified as Hispanic. In her words, Hispanic is "the word that we use for, to identify the Mexican community." In describing why they (her community) used the term Hispanic, she said: "it's the regular standard" and "always been around me." Angela also stated that Mexicans and Spanish-speakers identified as Hispanics: "I usually tend to put Hispanic, just to describe myself just 'cause that's the culture that I was born in...my native language is Spanish so I usually, like think of myself as Hispanic even though I was born here in the United States...I still have, like, blood from Mexico." The context of this remark came when Angela described how she would respond to someone who identified her as a "Chicano" upon learning that her parents were from Mexico. Elena identified

herself as Mexican-American but not “Hispanic, it’s just not part of my vocabulary.”

Angela, Rosaria, and Elena shared a common language (Spanish) but did not apparently share the same ethnic identity.

Chicana

Angela also identified as a “Chicana.” She identified very strongly as a Chicana, when she stated that this term “is a way of expressing ourselves in our own culture.” Chicana is used with “friends” and “people that we know that we feel comfortable with.” The “we” signifies a Mexican community whose parents were born in Mexico and their children born/raised in the U.S; they are not “100% Mexican” according to Angela. The key difference between the use of Hispanics and Chicanos with both being ethnic identifiers, is that Chicano appeared to be used internally by Angela’s Mexican-American community but not by Rosaria or Elena.

Chicana represented self-expression; a “blending” of two cultures in Angela’s words, “we have adapted two cultures.” I viewed Chicana as a more culturally-grounded identifier, in contrast with the term Hispanic that Angela stated was used with “strangers.” One explanation for this distinction in usage is that Angela believed not everyone was familiar with the term Chicano and the “tendency of (Mexicans) using that word Chicano” in her experience. Angela provided a personal and local explanation for the origin of Chicana: “Chi” came from the word Chicago and “cana” from Mexicana, so a “Chicana” to her was an individual with roots in two countries and in two cultures. This was another powerful indicator that Chicana reflected a culturally constructed identity in addition to Hispanic. Chicana, to her, was used “within our little group...within our culture.”

Rosaria did not strongly identify with Hispanic or Latino/a, and when asked about the word Chicana, responded that she “rarely use” this term and “never seen the term Chicano hardly.” Chicanos were people “from Texas and those areas”; this was clearly a term that held little cultural or personal significance to Rosaria. To Elena, who identified as a Latina, the term Chicana identified Mexicans raised in the United States and were Americanized. She described Chicanas as a subculture of Hispanics, people who were born and raised in California and had lost their accent. Elena tied her accent to her Latina identity. She stated that she did not want to lose her accent “because that identifies me, you know. Tells people where I came from.”

Imposed Identity

Angela, Rosaria, and Elena all identified their ethnicity with different descriptors. Angela identified closely with Chicana and as Hispanic, Rosaria with Hispanic and Latino/a, and Elena with Latina. These three students were Mexican-American, born in the United States and whose parents were born in Mexico. They shared a common language (Spanish) and a common country (Mexico) but did not share a common identity through their use of different terms. Angela did not identify with Latina and Elena did not identify with Hispanic. This finding revealed the complex nature of identity and culture. All three used the terms Hispanic and Latina as broad descriptors and I believe part of this was due to how Mexican-Americans are labeled in American society.

Ethnic identity as described by Angela and Rosaria revealed an “imposed identity” by American society. The terms Hispanic and Latina designated a wide range of Spanish speaking peoples as common descriptors. Angela noted the use of Hispanic and Latino on application forms for school and employment: “usually one category,” and

“the only term they have there is Hispanic.” Her experience reflects a common use of a specific term that does not allow room for other cultural descriptions. Jeria (1999) noted that the term Hispanic was imposed by the U.S. Census Bureau to designate all people from Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries that would include Latin America and Mexico and “its use is political” and has nothing to do with identity (p. 50). This is an example of a dominant culture imposing its reality on another culture by naming its’ identity.

These ethnic identifiers become an imposed choice on official forms when there is no space for “Chicana” or other means to self-express. Angela noted that on employment forms “They have to put Hispanic because there’s no word like, such as Latino on the form.” She also noted that forms have “White” or “American” “or they have Hispanic.” This may explain why Angela used the term Hispanic with strangers: in order to be understood outside of the Mexican community. Chicana was not mentioned as a term employed by the dominant culture in America but was the one ethnic identifier with a strong cultural connection. Abalos (1998) described his personal experience with the Chicano movement in the 1960’s as “self-definition, the creation of one’s own identity” (p. 60) that was not determined by white, European males. As Angela noted, the dominant culture “tend to point us out as Hispanics.” Cultural identity is very personal, and not homogenous. As Abalos (1998) stated, there is “No one Latino story or one cultura Latina” (p.88). In this study, I found this also applies to Hispanic and Latino/a identity.

The term “Hispanic” was linked to “professional” organizations by Angela and Rosaria. Both stated that Hispanic was “used in a professional way” and is “more of a

professional or the appropriate term.” Angela also used with this term with friends “in a professional way we always use the word Hispanic.” Rosaria also linked Hispanic to professional organizations. For Angela and Rosaria, Hispanic was a term that communicated an easily understood identity to the dominant culture (and one that was employed by the dominant culture to identify a broad range of Spanish-speaking people), and identified with respected, educated, and privileged groups. Oboler (1995) pointed out that the term Hispanic “homogenizes class experiences” (p. 2) and lumps together a multitude of peoples from Spanish-speaking cultures. The use of Hispanic is also related to the concepts of Ideology and Cultural Capital that will be discussed in more detail in the next two sections.

Research Question 1: How Hispanic students constructed knowledge

In this section I describe how Angela, Rosaria, Elena constructed knowledge. My analysis revealed two major themes that helped illuminate this process: Family Stories and Trusted Sources. Sub-themes within Family Stories: Education and Motivating Stories. Trusted Sources included cultural resources and people within their community. These themes originated in stories told by Angela, Rosaria, and Elena and emerged out of an intensive analysis of interview transcripts, field notes, and observations relevant to my research questions guiding this study.

Themes

Family Stories and Motivating Stories

The theme of Family Stories represented a vital cultural force in the lives of Angela, Rosaria, and Elena, providing powerful motivations to succeed by obtaining an education. Angela, when describing the value of family to Mexicans (her family), stated

emphatically “family means everything to us.” Angela and Rosaria reported their parents supported and urged them to get a college degree in order to be successful in American society, as a degree represented the requisite credentials to acquire good-paying jobs and standard of living. Angela was strongly influenced by her parents’ stories to get an education and Elena was also supported by her father to get a college degree.

The motivation to succeed by obtaining an education (college degree) originated in family/cultural experiences and shared beliefs, resulting in a powerful grounding to succeed academically. Angela, when referring to her parents, viewed education as “a way of paying them back what they, everything they did for us, like suffering, crossing the border, being humiliated, working hard hours, working very hard and, low paying jobs and salaries.” When asked what story she would pass on to other students, she replied “education is the key to succeed.” Elena expressed a similar view on education that first it is “to know more about the world” and secondly it is needed for survival. Elena also remarked about education, “it’s a need nowadays.” Rosaria relayed that her mother would motivate her to succeed because to fail, “then you would be a loser.”

These stories included parents’ hardships and sacrifice and provided powerful motivations for Angela and Elena to succeed through education. The college degree in Angela’s family represented success and survival. In her words: “They motivated me to continue in school because they made a sacrifice, like leaving everything in their own country to come here to provide us with a better future.” This example of her parents coming to America and denying themselves food “that’s a big motivation and something very powerful...(they) encourage us to continue in school.”

Angela relayed a powerful story of her father suffering great hardships in crossing the border from Mexico to America. She stated that her parents often went without food when dining out to ensure they could afford a meal for their children. Elena's father worked very hard to support her grandparents and did not get a college degree; his work helped pave the way for his children's success. Rosaria's mother encouraged her to succeed in school and used her experiences to help motivate Rosaria when she struggled. The sub-theme Motivating Stories represented a type of story with a specific purpose: for parents to inspire their children to achieve success through education.

Education

The sub-theme of Education reflected a cultural value by Angela's, Rosaria's, and Elena's family. Angela revealed that her parents did not get an education in Mexico because their parents (her grandparents) valued work (farm labor) over education that was "needed to survive." In Mexico, in their culture, education "was not important" to their grandparents; men worked and women stayed at home. In her words, "labor it was, like, a big thing and women staying at home. That was what it was in the culture, that's the culture thing. But now that we live in a society where it's more open-minded, like they see education more valuable than before." Angela emphatically stated that "now we value more education now" in reference to her community of Mexican-Americans. This cultural belief in education was not shared by every generation in Angela's family according to her but was shared in their lives in America.

This change in culture was also apparent in Elena's story. Elena's father initially thought she should stay home and care for her family but did support her seeking a degree when she explained, "these are different years and I have to set an example for my

kids.” Her father’s support was an important motivation for Elena and his support required her to complete the degree; another example of the power of family. Education was a shared cultural belief, transmitted through Family Stories that reflected sacrifice and hardship for a better life.

The concept of Cultural Capital is apparent in the sub-theme of Education. Angela’s, Rosaria’s, and Elena’s families valued education and college degrees as a means to succeed and survive in American society. A college degree represented specific credentials to achieve financial independence in the dominant society and acted as a motivating force in their families and culture. Elena’s desire to set an example for her children blended motivating cultural stories and Cultural Capital. The need to obtain Cultural Capital was internalized culturally and passed along through the Motivating Stories.

Trusted Sources

Trust was another major theme representing cultural knowledge and is linked to the theme of Family Stories. The family stories revealed individuals and community institutions that Angela, Rosaria, and Elena considered reliable and dependable. Trusted community sources and institutions included family members, libraries, friends and church. Angela and Rosaria reported using sources from “trusted” individuals (friends, family, professors, librarians), in their communities. These community sources were considered “natural” and also used by family members. Angela, Rosaria, and Elena’s parents used their children as reliable sources of information. These sources are cultural in that they are located within a particular community and shared by a specific group of people. In Angela’s words, “People that we stay with and have the connection with.”

Libraries also constituted a Trusted Source that was part of their community. Angela described her use of libraries (public and academic) was “more natural for me” signifying an intense connection in her community to this resource. Angela’s friends worked in the college library, and were considered trusted sources in addition to using a library in their community. Angela used libraries in her community (school and public) and stated that she “grew up with this training” where libraries are repositories for trusted and accurate information. Angela used libraries in her community before entering college and as a part of her community these institutions were also part of her culture, a potential explanation for why she felt comfortable finding and using materials. Elena reported using public libraries since the first grade for information (“it was always the public library”) and found using books easier and quicker than the Internet. Angela and Elena had used public libraries in their community from an early age and so they were part of their cultural fabric. Rosaria was “more familiar with” libraries in the city of Chicago and stated that she would use these rather than her community library.

Discussion

The question of how students in this study constructed knowledge is revealed in the theme of Family Stories as being strongly influenced by community and cultural resources as represented by Trusted Sources. Angela and Elena reported using and trusting information from friends, family, and individuals in their communities before entering college; they clearly relied on and used these specific local sources that constituted at least part of their knowledge construction. This study did not find explanations for every facet of knowledge construction; there may be other sources and ways these students found and used knowledge. I did find that cultural knowledge for

these students comprised family stories and community members, including libraries. Angela, Rosaria, and Elena drew on these resources because they were trusted and familiar to their culture.

Family Stories are cultural knowledge. Family is deeply tied into Mexican culture and is part of a particular group and a particular culture. Cultural knowledge is passed along through stories, and shared behaviors, beliefs, and experiences. These stories originated in the parent's and grandparents' lives in Mexico and had a tangible influence on Angela's, Rosaria's, and Elena's motivation to seek an education and to succeed in the United States. Their families all valued education when living in America. Although education was not always a shared, cultural belief in Mexico, according to Angela and Elena, this study did not include interviews with family members for additional insights. The valuing of education could have been influenced by American society, rather than an integral part of Mexican culture. What was clear in the interviews, was a strong belief in the value of education for current Mexican-American families in the eyes of this study's students.

One of the interview questions asked was "What stories do you remember growing up that communicated a lesson to you?" These stories are a vital component of how these students constructed knowledge in this study by valuing information and knowledge originating from family and community, including an education. Angela, Rosaria, and Elena drew on these cultural resources for knowledge. I acknowledge that these may not be the only sources used in their knowledge construction.

Research Question 2: How Hispanic students located, evaluated, used, and incorporated information into their knowledge base

In this section I examine how Angela, Rosaria, and Elena located, evaluated, used, created and incorporated information. Major themes identified include Trusted Sources and Directed Learning that will then be discussed through the concepts of Cultural Capital, Ideology and Hegemony. Angela, Rosaria, and Elena located and evaluated information in sources recommended by trusted individuals. Directed Learning is a theme that reflected a process where these students were “directed” to specific sources by their “Trusted Sources.” I will also explain how the concepts of Ideology and Hegemony, operated in the information-seeking process. I will also describe how the themes of Trusted Sources and Directed Learning embedded specific ideologies that helped students identify reliable materials that were clearly influenced by technical and economic coercion and are different from cultural sources revealed in the theme of Family Stories.

Trusted Sources were individuals and specific materials Angela, Rosaria, and Elena respected, depended on, and valued for reliable information. Angela, Rosaria, and Elena sought information through known community sources and informants, as detailed in the question of knowledge construction. Libraries were part of their communities and served as a natural place to locate information. Librarians and teachers at the public and college level were also specifically identified as trusted sources by all three. These represent internal, culturally-relevant sources since they are an integral part of their community. Trusted Sources in this section and context, represents external sources of information to their community that students are directed to as part of their education, hence the theme, Directed Learning.

Themes

Trusted Sources and Directed Learning

Angela, Rosaria, and Elena reported that they were taught in college how to locate (search for) information by using academically approved materials and processes. This process was described as “guidelines,” “required by professors,” where teachers “showed us,” “guided us,” and “guided me and explained to me.” Angela stated that professors in college “taught us how to find information” an example of Directed Learning that was echoed by Rosaria and Elena. These students learned to “trust” specific sources and materials in their education as directed by teachers and librarians, people that they trusted. Elena stated that her professors provided her with “step-by-step” instructions to locate information. She also stated that “everything was on the syllabus” and students needed permission to deviate from listed sources. Angela had a similar experience, reflected in this summary of what she learned in class: “(the professor) showed me how to research appropriately and find scholarly type articles.”

These Trusted Sources included indicators of academic authority that are different from cultural authoritative sources. Angela and Rosaria’s description of search examples were peppered with the same academic language: “accurate,” “investigation,” “researched by scholars or experts,” “citing sources,” “associations that are known in the field,” and “avoiding plagiarism.” They also mentioned using APA style and online academic databases from EBSCO and Lexis. Rosaria, when reflecting on what she had learned in college, stated that she would “start on the scholarly sources and the more reputable sources” and that in college learned the “technical aspects of searching.”

Angela and Rosaria identified these skills and search strategies as ones learned in college that were different for them before exposure to academic disciplines and terminology.

Evaluating information involved a determination if information was accurate and linked to the academic authority of specific experts. Angela believed materials held in libraries were considered more “accurate” than online sources, reflecting the bias in higher education for academically-approved materials over web site information that may not have been vetted by experts. To Rosaria, an accurate source is “something that is a fact or something that has been researched by experts or scholars.” Rosaria noted that she would begin research by starting “with the more scholarly sources and the more reputable sources.” One insightful comment by Angela reveals the extent of this learning: “we have learned to do that...actually go to people that know what they’re doing.” Rosaria noted that she would “see where they got their sources from” when describing how she evaluated Internet sites.

The evaluation process also included comparing sources. Rosaria and Elena reported they learned to compare different sources and not use just one in college, in contrast to their prior behavior. Elena linked this process to “whatever is required for the assignment” an indication that direction by professors was instrumental. Angela, Rosaria, and Elena reported that their evaluation process before entering college involved finding a source, but this process did not include specific criteria they learned in college from professors.

Authority as a measure of evaluating the trustworthiness of a source extended to academic credentials, professional organizations that are “credible” and information that provided “validity.” Elena reported using known authors and linked them to specific

dates and familiar publishers. She expressed reluctance at using sources that were not recommended or directed from faculty: “Why am I going to be using articles from other students? I don’t know where they got the information from.” Rosaria primarily used sources from professional organizations for her courses since they were trusted by professors, relevant to her degree program, and she was directed to use them.

Angela and Rosaria demonstrated their process for locating and evaluating information, where I observed them recreate a search from a previous class assignment. These observations confirmed the process these students detailed in their interviews. Angela and Rosaria noted they were comfortable searching online and changed their search strategy when directed to by Trusted Sources (professors, librarians, friends) to use materials in libraries and to identify accurate information on the Internet through signifiers of academically-approved sources, including bibliographies and professional associations. Angela noted that she originally used Yahoo to search online but changed her strategy to using Google after recommendations from “trusted” friends and professors. In these observations, Angela and Rosaria looked for indicators of academic authority in the search results: professional organizations, references (citations), journals, and university web sites. Angela and Rosaria mentioned that before college, searching consisted of poking around and not using any specific criteria to find/evaluate information.

Concepts

Cultural Capital

As reflected in the themes of Trusted Sources and Directed Learning, sources used and required in college classes represented specific skills and knowledge that were valued and privileged in higher education and represented the requisite Cultural Capital to succeed in American society. Angela and Rosaria specifically identified materials held in libraries, recommended by professors and librarians, professional organizations, and scholarly articles as sources they were directed to use and to trust as accurate and authoritative. Elena reported sticking to topics and sources in the syllabus and that permission by the professor was required to go outside of these privileged and “directed” resources. These sources of knowledge privileged in academic courses extended to society through professional organizations as evident when Rosaria described how her degree program primarily used sources from specific organizations that became a staple source for her.

Language is a critical skill in Cultural Capital and was a serious barrier for these students in understanding academic terminology. Angela stated that it was difficult to “cut the words” in English, to isolate the “high” portions that could be translated. Angela admitted that she “haven’t mastered the English language 100%” and had very limited English training in school. Elena admitted to needing a dictionary and the need to increase her vocabulary. Angela and Elena used the same word: “higher” to describe academic terminology they had to master to succeed in college courses.

Angela’s account of how language affected her locating information revealed the extent of this problem. She described the process as, “I will get frustrated and that will

stop me from going in there...to look more in depth for the information that I was looking for.” Angela also stated that “sometimes I just stopped” then sought help in a library or from a librarian. Language impacted the process of locating and using information by limiting and impairing these students’ ability to understand academic terminology. Angela’s experience with locating scholarly information demonstrated this challenge:

“Finding an article...it was hard because sometimes...the authors tend to use a very high English level in their writing and it was hard, it is hard sometimes to understand and then I had to go back and write the words that I don’t understand, to go find it in the dictionary or to ask somebody that it was need, who was a native speaker of the language...”

English language proficiency placed these students in a powerless and difficult position in the information seeking process. Tornatzky, Cutler, & Lee found that the lack of English proficiency hindered knowledge acquisition in Hispanic students (as cited in Garcia, Gonzalez, & Grimes 2002). Education in American society is accessible for those who are proficient in English and since education is highly valued, being bilingual is vital to succeeding and obtaining a degree. Angela, Rosaria, and Elena arrived at college lacking the Cultural Capital that benefitted English speakers. The privilege of language skills was a cultural detriment for these students.

Ideology (Economic and Technical Coercion)

Economic and technical coercion were powerful factors embedded within computer and technology training needed for employment and to obtain a college degree for these students. According to Angela, Hispanic families do not have the same

economic capital (cultural capital) as the dominant culture. Hispanics cannot afford Internet access at home and will have a computer, in her experience, only if it is essential for work or for school. The costs of higher education and class schedules were also identified by Angela as barriers to Hispanic families. Seeking the cultural capital to improve the lives of Mexican-Americans, in Angela's story, was difficult because the money to pay for home computers and Internet access necessary obtain an education was not available.

Technical skills also played a role in locating information. Angela and Rosaria mentioned their search for information was hampered by their lack of "technical skills" and information overload (particularly on library web sites). Angela stated that she did not receive much technical (computer) education before entering college. Rosaria listed the main challenges for her in college was: "following the guidelines" and "do it the way it's supposed to be." Preparation for academic culture and technical proficiency were problems for Angela; Rosaria admitted being very comfortable searching "online" before college but did not know the rules or effective search strategies that were taught in college.

A college education is part of the dominant culture's ideology (American society) and also sought after by Mexican-Americans, according to Angela. Education has the power to improve life through the cultural capital gained. Elena stated computer literacy is important and companies required at least a bachelors degree for hiring. Education was culturally valued, by Angela, Rosaria, and Elena and the pressure from the dominant culture in privileging education had an influence on Angela's experience: "Education it's

like everywhere you go they ask you for your education background or do you have a degree.” Elena stated emphatically: “I need a college degree.”

Cultural Capital and Ideology operated in tandem as reflected in the themes of Trusted Sources and Directed Learning. Angela, Rosaria, and Elena were compelled to acquire specific skills (language, technology, academic terminology) in order to earn credentials and a college degree to improve their lives. These skills were also valued by their families and culture, and were a valued Ideology internally and externally by the dominant culture. The economic and technical coercion existed in the pressure to attain Cultural Capital through college degrees when the requisite language and technical skills became obstacles for these students. As Angela remarked, “if you don’t have an education, you don’t get, you won’t have a, a good future and that’s how it is here.” Access to technology (home computer, Internet) was required in education to find information but was not economically feasible for many Mexican-American families but was an essential skill to obtain a college degree necessary to enhance economic status.

Hegemony

Hegemony works with Ideology to internalize the search strategies and sources (the “cultural capital”) valued by higher education. Angela described trusted sources as “true” and “accurate.” She also reported that she identified trusted information through her “feelings” and that some sources feel “right” and others do not. Rosaria stated that when searching, “just to do it the way it’s supposed to be.” These comments indicated a strong acculturation into academic culture that impacted their feelings and emotions. I did not see any doubts or questioning of academic sources or search strategies from Angela, Rosaria, or Elena; these were accepted beliefs. Hegemony is also a possible

explanation for the cultural valuing of education by these students, Angela and Elena in particular since it was an operating ideology in American society.

Discussion

In this study, Angela, Rosaria, and Elena reported locating and evaluating information they were directed to by trusted individuals within their communities and by educators and librarians. I believe this study revealed this relationship through themes of Trusted Sources and Directed Learning by illuminating students' belief in the value of a particular kind of knowledge and information that was generated within their culture and privileged in academia and the dominant culture in American society. These students' information-seeking behavior was not limited to cultural sources. Another factor is that education and educators (including librarians) were valued by Angela's, Rosaria's, and Elena's cultures. Angela, when asked how she knew if someone in her community was knowledgeable, responded "because they have an education."

This belief in scholarly and academic materials as trustworthy also reflected the accepted ideology in education that scholarly materials are superior to and more accurate than other sources of information. The evaluation process for Angela, Rosaria, and Elena, similar to locating information, involved looking for specific indicators and credentials of authority valued by the dominant culture. These criteria comprised the Cultural Capital needed to obtain a college degree and to succeed in the dominant culture.

The theme of Trusted Sources included people and specific materials considered accurate and trustworthy for evaluative purposes. The evaluation process involved confirming information with "trusted" individuals (friends, family, professors, librarians), in their community. Angela, when asked about evaluating information, responded that

she would “go back into my community and talk to people that I trust to see if the information that I received was...correct.” Angela’s friends used libraries and some worked at the college library, providing a stronger and familiar connection to this resource. She also believed library materials were more “accurate” than Internet sources. Elena reported that her father used information from television and newspaper but always “called her first” for reliable information or to confirm what he read/saw. Rosaria reported that her parents also called on her and other family members to locate information. These are internal and culturally trusted sources of information. Angela’s, Rosaria’s, and Elena’s reliance on trusted sources and strategies combined experts, libraries, and members of their community, integrating processes and sources valued by academic culture (external) in combination with their own culture (internal).

The affective domain also signified a deep internalization of a specific kind of learning. Angela could not provide a detailed explanation for her trust in certain sources other than she learned to trust in college and that it felt right and that they were “true.” These feelings may be attributed to a combination of culture, ideology, and hegemony. Angela’s, Rosaria’s, and Elena’s families *valued* education as a means to survive and to succeed in the dominant culture. The acceptance of academically-approved materials is evident in the interviews and observations that they were trusted, directed to, and accepted internally by Angela, Rosaria, and Elena. The emotional and intuitive responses by these students may reflect the intersection of embracing cultural knowledge in combination with adopting (hegemony) the ideology of academic education as part of earning a college degree. The value of libraries is a prime example since Angela and

Elena in particular, discussed the role and importance of this institution in their community lives before college.

This study demonstrated the intersection of Cultural Capital and Ideology in the information-seeking process and behavior. This is supported by the valuing of libraries and education by Angela's, Rosaria's, and Elena's culture, as expressed in the themes of Motivating and Family Stories. These students used information from Trusted Sources (cultural and the Cultural Capital of the dominant culture) that they were directed to use. Their faith in trusted community sources (family and friends) did not change and it was apparent that academic ideology complemented their cultural knowledge. Libraries were considered repositories of reliable, credible knowledge before and after college.

Education was clearly valued by Angela and Rosaria, their families, and by the dominant culture. An education is required to survive and succeed in America by providing the requisite Cultural Capital needed to earn monetary capital. I believe this reflected the ideology of economic coercion from Horkheimer and Adorno (1972), where "ideology always reflects economic coercion" (p. 167). These critical theorists made the point that ideologies limit choices while making the idea of freedom credible since economic interests are at the forefront of any choice. Marcuse's belief that technology was an instrument of oppression (Kellner, 2001) is part of the economic coercion. I believe this dynamic exists in the capitalist system in America. The combination of technical and economic capital privileged the dominant culture that has more money and does not suffer from discrimination: the lived experiences of students in this study demonstrated the oppression that is an integral part of this economic coercion.

Family Stories provided descriptions laced with experiences of oppression and discrimination. Oppression is blatant in Angela's stories of discrimination faced by Mexicans living and working in America and their Mexican-American children. Angela's father's crossing to the United States was the strongest example. In her words, "we (Mexicans) suffer from discrimination a lot." Discrimination is another form of coercion. Mexicans experienced oppressive discrimination by Americans while in pursuit of the cultural capital and lifestyle of the dominant culture. The negative impact of this oppression was reflected in her statement that living in America is "the opposite" of Mexico, and "changed the root of my life." In Mexico, where family is an integral part of life, the need to earn a living and a college education in order to obtain sufficient Cultural Capital in America to improve their lives also consumed their lives. The "routine" in America, according to Angela, "it's just work and school, work and school, or just work, home, work, home." Culturally important activities involving family were subverted—no time for family and cultural activities.

The issue of language also revealed discrimination and is an integral part of culture. For Mexicans who are not versed in speaking English, language is a barrier to learning and reinforced discrimination. Angela described language and learning barriers as "that is something big in our culture too, the language barrier, being afraid of speaking out...or sometimes even being afraid of if we say something and its going to be offensive to the other culture (also referred to as the "dominant culture")." The fear of offending English speakers through mistranslating words in Spanish displays the power imbalance in America between the dominant culture and immigrants (second language English speakers) and is a vivid display of the oppressive nature of this power structure. Angela

related a story from her college classes where the teacher, from the “dominant culture” threatened to fail her due to what was considered poor English language skills. Angela used this as another example of why she was reluctant to speak up in class for fear of punishment. For Angela, these barriers “limited my opportunities” and provided frustrations that prevented her from additional searching and to rely on Trusted Sources for help. Rosaria and Elena did not relate specific stories/experiences of racism and discrimination.

Angela provided an example of discrimination internalized as an Ideology. In Angela’s story, Mexicans were viewed as uneducated or here to steal jobs. She characterized the views of Americans towards Mexicans as “stealing my opportunity.” I find oppressive ideologies at work when she questioned her own ability and stated, “It affect me in a way of that sometimes that they tell you a lot that you’re not able to do that. Maybe they’re right. Maybe we’re not able to learn in this country or maybe we’re mentally disabled.” This incident of self-doubt was a powerful example of the oppressive nature of discrimination and the negative influence of hegemony. The belief that Mexican-Americans were not able to learn or complete jobs like dominant culture English speakers, due to a lack of specific Cultural Capital is tied to the ideology of capitalism: competition, survival of the fittest, and the need to acquire specific technical skills.

Oboler (1995) also found that Hispanics face disapproval from Americans due to the perception that they are taking away jobs; a lack of education is cited for lack of understanding a statement also made by Angela. Abalos (1998) related that for Latinos to escape oppression from dominant culture, they must “assimilate into the official story

of the United States” (p.76). Assimilation may provide an explanation for the assent that is integral to hegemony as acquiring Cultural Capital from American society is vital to succeed. The acceptance of specific beliefs (ideologies) becomes hegemonic when it is viewed in one’s own self-interest. Education and college degrees depended on language skills and a lifestyle that were contrary to Angela’s cultural life but she willingly accepted the value and need to earn these components of Cultural Capital.

This question of how Angela, Rosaria, and Elena used and incorporated information into their knowledge base was apparent in the themes of Trusted Sources and Directed Learning: information was used for personal and college-related reasons. This study discovered insights into the locating and evaluation part of the information-seeking process; Angela, Rosaria, and Elena appeared to seamlessly integrate academic information and sources into their cultural knowledge that was probably influenced by the role and use of libraries in their lives; the data strongly supports this finding. The process by which these students created information was not apparent.

Research Question 3: How students’ culturally-relevant knowledge affected how they learned Information Literacy skills

I believe the analysis from the first two guiding questions was instructive for illuminating how students culturally-relevant knowledge impacted their learning information literacy skills. Angela, Rosaria, and Elena were highly motivated to seek and complete a college degree; this motivation was internal and originated from their culture (family) as evidenced in the theme of Family Stories. This internal, cultural motivation was a powerful driver to acquire the Cultural Capital of academia and to follow their professors’ directions/proscriptions as evidenced in the themes of Trusted Sources and Directed Learning. In this study, I found that according to the experiences of Angela,

Rosaria, and Elena, these students will learn Information Literacy skills if it is part of the Directed Learning process and the Cultural Capital of education.

The language barrier to learning English provided another critical finding. Information Literacy skills involve finding, evaluating, and using information in English. Mastering academic and discipline-specific terminology must be learned and is even more difficult for non-native English speakers as reported by Angela, Rosaria, and Elena, who struggled with “high” words and levels of meaning. In contrast, the value of education placed by Angela’s, Rosaria’s, and Elena’s families positively affected learning since libraries collect, store, and provide knowledge that is valued in academia and American society.

Culturally-relevant knowledge in this study helped Angela, Rosaria, and Elena learn the process of Information Literacy skills. Libraries were already Trusted Sources and their families and culture valued education. Culture is shared beliefs, values, behaviors, and social relations. Culture aided these students to learn academic rules and standards by valuing education and the importance of earning a college degree necessary to support them and their families in the dominant society in America. The cultural shift in the value of education as reported by Angela and Elena *may* have strengthened the shared belief in this value. Both students reported that their grandparents did not value education and favored work (in Mexico) and this resulted in their parents never obtaining a college degree, which in turn, provided additional motivation for Angela and Elena to obtain an education. This was the result of a cultural experience and belief that was not shared by every generation.

Culture also served as an impediment to learning Information Literacy skills. This was evident in the hindrance of language and the stories of discrimination and oppression of Mexican-Americans. Angela provided the most compelling evidence when she spoke about how different life in America was from Mexico. Family, which is so culturally important (also repeated by Elena) to Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, faced obstacles in America due to the pressures of work and finding the time and finances to attend college. A college degree promised the opportunity for a better job, more income, and more security once the requisite skills and knowledge were acquired. Language was one major obstacle and seemed to help fuel discrimination in Angela's stories. The "root" of Angela's life was negatively impacted by the ideology of moving up the economic and social ladder in America through a different cultural way of life.

The process of finding information was also contingent upon a shared language and meaning. Knowledge is not created in a vacuum. Angela, Rosaria, and Elena shared a language and the use of libraries. Knowledge construction is a very complex and situated process, influenced by many different cultural, social, and historical factors. These students did learn the process, despite difficulties, as evidenced by their ability to determine academic sources and use key words effectively.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

I suspected that culture was a factor in the information-seeking process before conducting this study. I now *know* that culture is a factor. I learned from students' powerful stories that provided me with insights into their personal lives and experiences where reality and truths are not always quantifiable or universal. I now better understand the complexities of culture and ideology and how they operate in American society, from these students' stories. I also learned that like Strege (1996) and Tisdell (2001), students bring their own power, privilege, experience, and status (Cultural Capital) to class that are diverse and not the same as the dominant culture. Learning is situational and so is knowledge and information. As educators, librarians have a responsibility to ground our practices, standards, and pedagogy in the lives of other learners, and make more efforts to incorporate their cultural and social practices.

Culturally-relevant knowledge originates in the lives and social practices of individuals in particular groups and societies. Culture has an impact on how we process knowledge and is transmitted through stories. Hartmann (2004) explains, "Culture is made of stories" (p.164). In this study, I found that students' cultural knowledge aided their locating, evaluating, and using information. Delgado Bernal (2002) found that Chicanos/as learn community and family knowledge through storytelling. Libraries and teachers comprised Trusted Sources of information and were part of their communities in Chicago; this trust carried over into college. Angela, Rosaria, and Elena followed directions by embracing/internalizing Trusted Sources and strategies for locating and evaluating information. I did not witness firsthand their library instruction, but it was

evident that these students learned from librarians how to use Information Literacy processes for locating and evaluating academic sources (knowledge).

This study also revealed that academic knowledge is imposed, taught, and directed and very much controlled the information-seeking behavior of students and that it is not grounded in their culture. Angela, Rosaria, and Elena were familiar with American society and its ideologies that impose specific knowledge, education, and a way of life. Adkins and Hussey (2006), in their interviews with Latino undergraduate students, found that they used academic libraries as tools for “navigating the dominant culture” (p. 478). In this study, I found students were comfortable using academic libraries because libraries were part of their communities and their use was necessary to earn the requisite Cultural Capital of the dominant culture in order to succeed. The intersection of trusting cultural (internal) sources and imposed (external) sources was clear, but I was unable to determine if one dominated or if the existence and influence of additional forces were a factor.

This study also revealed cultural barriers to learning. Learning the English language was a “cultural commodity” (Jeria, 1999, p. 54) for Angela, Rosaria, and Elena that they used to obtain an education. The power imbalance between Angela and her learning environment revealed oppressive ideologies that acted as barriers to learning and earning the Cultural Capital of higher education. Technical and economic coercion and oppression was evident in the need for these students to learn to use technology as part of obtaining a college degree in order to “survive.” Angela’s statement that living in America “changed the root of her life” communicated a deep cultural rift that encapsulated the oppressive aspects of American culture and society that dominated her

life. The significance of this finding is that a specific way of life and learning was imposed; one that demanded acculturation by privileging Western ways of knowing (English), including processes that require technical and lingual proficiencies.

These interviews comprised stories from Mexican-American students and were analyzed using concepts from Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory that find modern society encumbered with oppressive ideologies that are not always kind to different cultures ways of knowing and living. I found stories of discrimination from societal expectations and counter-stories of family strength, motivation and determination from Angela, Rosaria, and Elena. At the core of Angela's story was her vision for the future: "most of my friends that I grew up with...our families came here for the American dream, to have a better life and a better future." These students' stories of determination to succeed provided a counter-story to oppression by the dominant culture in American society while they followed the same story in capitalist ideology: working hard, earning money, and acquiring an education.

Implications for librarians and adult educators

This study contributed to librarians' practice by finding that culture is a factor in the information-seeking process: community sources of information were valued by students' culture. Academic librarians must pay more attention to cultural ways of knowing and using information. The *ACRL Standards* are one means to process information that is not based on universal cultural knowledge; situations and lives change, but standards are inflexible by ignoring and not including non-Western epistemologies. Linking knowledge and information processes is one path that will help educators develop a literacy that can connect library instruction, Information Literacy,

and teaching. Librarians must turn to different epistemologies and ways of knowing and experiencing the world and question how fixed processes can dictate learning experiences.

I learned that meeting students' needs and forcing them to learn standards and criteria does not always match their personal and cultural needs or experiences.

A more effective and appropriate path for librarians is to develop "Critical Information Literacy" where learners explore the complex context, creation, and use of information in the assorted social, cultural, and historical frameworks rather than just focusing on containers and privileged sources. Literacy is rooted to language and different ways of knowing; these are the stories librarians should be learning from if we are to fulfill the role of libraries as knowledge repositories for diverse peoples.

We must know more about culture and information before standards can be meaningfully revised. I agree with Strege (1996) who recommended that "Instead of adopting elite ideology, librarians should open up the meaning of information literacy to consider its socially constructed and embedded practices and how these practices rely on beliefs that serve particular interests" (p.200). Information Literacy, as expressed in the *ACRL Standards*, is an "elite ideology." Critical Information Literacy is a means to effectively transform practice using Critical Theory to understand knowledge construction and to engage with information in privileged academic scholarship. Librarians must deeply engage in discussions on literacy and how information is tied to knowledge that expands and does not limit learners to the Western worldview.

This study contributed to adult education by adding to our understanding of the importance of culture in learning and that imposing identity and specific skills can

reinforce oppressive ideologies. Students who learn in different ways must also use processes that reflect/incorporate their culture. Jeria (1999) warned that the emphasis in adult education on training and acquiring skills was “reproducing social inequities that already plague Hispanic Americans” (p.62). This study demonstrated that culture impacts the learning process (in three Mexican-American students) and that the process students use to find and evaluate information must be linked more closely to knowledge construction. Librarians and educators together can engage students and strengthen their learning experience by combining knowledge production with finding and evaluating knowledge (information).

We should always consider the cultural context of information: its meaning and interpretation. We must value different sources of knowledge and types of information instead of valorizing and privileging specific sources; explanations of good and bad information are far too superficial and can reinforce a dichotomized reality. We should ask students to consider why academic, peer-reviewed materials are so important and trustworthy: what makes information that has been filtered and examined by experts so valuable and why do we value this process?

Western knowledge has value because it is produced by human beings. We must extend the same courtesy and recognition to all other human cultures. The emphasis on process is a key issue. Ward (2006) eloquently pointed out the disconnect between process and engaging with knowledge and information by asking a significant question: “Can we be information literate if we possess the technical ability to find and evaluate information, but not the human capacity to experience and value it?” (p.397). I believe

that we can, and the answer lies in understanding and learning from different human cultures.

Answers to questions guiding the study

1. Angela, Rosaria, and Elena *constructed knowledge* from internal, culturally-trusted sources and from external sources in academia approved by the dominant culture.
2. These students *located, evaluated, used, and incorporated information* through a process that included *trusted sources* that *directed* their learning. These originated internally (culture & community) and externally (academic knowledge).
3. Students' *culturally-relevant knowledge aided their learning Information Literacy skills* through valuing education and associated skills. Language and discrimination were impediments to acquiring the Cultural Capital necessary to learn Information Literacy skills and obtain a college degree.

Goals met by the study

1. In this study, I identified *culturally-relevant information-seeking behavior* as sources of information (family, friends, teachers, librarians, institutions, organizations) that were trusted within their local community. Local, community, and culturally-valued sources were important factors in locating and evaluating information.
2. Librarians can provide *culturally-relevant instruction* for students in different cultures by listening to their stories and understanding what is valued in a

particular culture, rather than uncritically relying on fixed standards and practices that reflect a particular (Western) view of the world and reality.

3. In this study, I critically examined the process of Information Literacy as articulated in the *ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*. I learned that a culturally-relevant alternative needs more investigation and may require creating a process for specific cultures. A separate set of Standards could replicate the problems I identified in the *ACRL Standards* that privileged a single culture. Standards reflect a Western worldview and may not be shared by other cultures. Librarians must first learn more about culturally-relevant information-seeking behavior before considering changes in standards.

Recommendations

Qualitative research opens new doors and new perspectives on our world and lives. Stories provide one small piece and can change according to different people and situations. This study included the stories of three Mexican-American female college students who shed light on the role of culture in the information-seeking process. There are more students and more stories to explore, and different ways to discover them. We need to learn more about how different cultural beliefs and behaviors operate in the information-seeking process. However, we must not and cannot continue the colonial practice by Western countries to force other cultures to reveal knowledge. This process must be mutual and based in solidarity and respect for cultures and cultural differences. Indigenous knowledge that is shared only within a particular group is not a resource to be exploited. A more appropriate road to enhanced pedagogy is to engage with other

cultures collaboratively so we can increase our understanding of reality and the human experience.

This study raised more questions than I originally considered. Standards cannot be transformed until we know more about culture and information-seeking behavior. Some cultures may not use Standards or conceptualize learning and knowledge using Western-based tools. One vital question remains; What other cultural factors exist? There are many rich areas to explore and here are a few salient questions I believe this study has provoked:

1. How do different cultures *define* knowledge and information?
2. What does culture mean to people, how do they view this term and what will it tell us about how Westerners define and view culture?
3. How do librarians develop trust and relationships with students from different cultures?
4. How can we link/develop pedagogy to different cultural knowledge bases?
5. What can culturally-grounded epistemologies teach us about Western-grounded standards and processes?

I have the following recommendations based on this study:

Conduct ethnographic studies on information-seeking behavior to obtain deeper insights into cultural knowledge. Merriam & Simpson (2000) describe ethnography as “an account that interprets the data within a sociocultural framework”, and it interprets participants’ “symbolic meanings and ongoing patterns of social interaction” (p.108). Ethnography, according to Merriam (1998) is qualitative research appropriate for

studying “human society and culture” (p.13). Ethnographic studies are an effective method that will add to our understanding of other cultures.

Extend interviews to students’ friends and families to provide additional insights. Visiting and observing students in their community could obtain more depth and perspective about their cultural lives. Expanding the pool of participants may also help uncover different cultural issues. Examples include students who: are not familiar with American libraries and where libraries are not part of their culture; are in their first term of college (freshmen); have not received training from a librarian; and are high school students bound for college. These were not criteria for this study and are worth including in future studies.

Use different lenses and concepts from Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory to study issues of power and culture and how they operate in American society and intersect with other factors. Gender, Africentrism, and LatCrit are lenses that would provide different perspectives and experiences to add to this study’s findings. LatCrit uses the “centrality of experiential knowledge” (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 312) and would address Latinos/as “multidimensional identities” and the “intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression” (p. 312) that this study did not explore in-depth.

Study Jurgen Habermas’ theory of communicative action. Habermas (1971, 1987) was one of the theorists from the Frankfurt School whose concepts were not used in this study. His theory of communicative action involves language and experience where speech is influenced by culture, language, and power. This action is based on how people achieve understanding through communication: How do we get to shared

definitions and check truth and accuracy? Habermas also believed that knowledge is scientific knowledge (defined and imposed by Western culture) and that there are three types of knowledge: technical, practical, and emancipator. Human interests are key factors in this process. Studying how these forms of knowledge and communication embed and reflect different interests would add to this study's findings of ideology and hegemony in operating in education and how language and communication affect information-seeking processes.

Explore how different cultures *define* information and knowledge. How does this definition (and does this) vary in different cultures? Studies focusing on this question could significantly add to our understanding of the social and cultural construction of knowledge and ways of seeing/viewing the world. One approach is to develop Critical Information Literacy and to study how it operates in theory and in practice. Examining assumptions about knowledge and the related social and cultural contexts to complement this process will deepen students understanding and may help connect abstract concepts of Information Literacy into their lives.

Qualitative research is designed to illuminate how people see and experience the world. The three students I interviewed had their own stories. Interviewing and a different group of students may yield different results and insights. I have deepened my knowledge of how culture can impact information-seeking behavior, and I have reaffirmed my commitment to pursuing critical discussions on how to integrate culturally-relevant perspectives into the information-seeking process and definitions of Information Literacy.

Stories represent lived experiences and cultural knowledge. The stories of Angela, Rosaria, and Elena helped me to understand them as people with different experiences and shared values. Stories are fundamental to our way of knowing and communicating knowledge. Angela and Elena noted that “there are a lot of stories” when they were asked what stories had meaning to them. On the issue of language, barriers, and discrimination, Angela unknowingly summed up why qualitative research is important, “We had to learn not to judge people from their stories or from not knowing another language.” This statement connects understanding to learning and is a warning of the danger of forcing specific beliefs and worldviews onto others.

One question we must constantly ask is, What are we learning from our students and what can we learn from our students’ cultural lives? We cannot separate process from knowledge and students’ experiences from their learning. There are many more cultural stories to be heard, and understanding their meaning is a critical goal for librarians and adult educators who are committed to lifelong learning by deeply connecting students to knowledge and to life.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Initial interview

Tell me about your classes

Describe your ethnic identity

What do you find different (*difficult*) about what you the knowledge you are expected to learn in college and what you are expected to know?

How do you define information?

How do you access information for university class research assignment

How do you locate this information?

How do you incorporate information into what you already know?

How do you evaluate information?

What sources do you use, trust, and value?

What feels natural to you when you need to communicate information to a friend or family member?

In your culture, how do you know when someone is “knowledgeable”?

What stories do you remember growing up that communicated a lesson or important information?

Revised after first interview

Tell me about your classes

I am interested in how you define your ethnic background.

 What do you answer to?

 What do your friends answer to?

 What do you consider your community?

Tell me about the time you had to locate information for a research assignment for a specific class.

What information sources are valued in your community?

Tell me about your experience as a student in higher education

What has been the most challenging?

Did your parents tell stories that communicated a lesson or important information when you were growing up?

Revised for third participant

How you define your ethnic identity?

 What do you answer to?

 What communities are associated with these terms?

 What is your community?

Tell me about your academic experience

What did you learn?

What were you expected to learn?

What knowledge or information was new?

How were you prepared for academic coursework?

What technical skills did you need to succeed?

Tell me about an experience when you had to find information for a class research assignment:

How did you find this information?

How did you use this information?

How did you evaluate this information?

know it was relevant?

know it was accurate?

What did you learn from this experience?

At what point did a librarian provide help?

Do you search for information at home for classes?

What sources do you trust and value?

How do you find and evaluate information in comparison to what you already know?

How did you search for information before you took college classes?

How did you evaluate information?

What stories do you remember growing up that taught you a lesson?

Describe how your family feels about education

What sources does your family trust?

What stories would you tell other students?

APPENDIX B

CASE ANALYSIS FORM

Participant Interview: # Site: Date:
1. Main issues and themes
2. Summary information for each question
3. Salient/interesting information
4. New questions
5. What questions were not asked

APPENDIX C

DATA ANALYSIS FORM

Units of Analysis & Research Questions	Themes					
	Hispanic Identity	Chicana Identity	Trusted Sources	Directed Learning	Family Stories	Barriers to Learning
Ethnic identity						
Locate information						
Evaluate information						
Culturally-relevant knowledge (culture)						
Ideology						

Note: this form changed according to the analysis of each interview. Example: Cultural Capital was included under the original heading “Barriers to Learning.” This form displays the common template that was then adapted for each participant and each interview.

APPENDIX D

THEMES

Themes & Sub-themes	Guiding questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trusted Sources & Directed Learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Internal (Cultural; Family Stories) ○ External (Cultural Capital, Ideology) • Family Stories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Education ○ Motivating Stories • Ethnic identity (Imposed and Self-Identity) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hispanic ○ Latina ○ Chicana • Barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Discrimination ○ Language 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Construct Knowledge 2. Locate, Evaluate, Incorporate information 3. Affect learning Information Literacy skills

APPENDIX E

GLOSSARY

ACRL	Association of College and Research Libraries, a division of the American Library Association. http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/index.cfm
ACRL Information Literacy Standards	Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/infolit.cfm
ALA	American Library Association. www.ala.org .
ANZIL	The Australian and New Zealand Institute for Information Literacy. http://www.anziil.org/
SCONUL	Society of College, National and University Libraries. http://www.sconul.ac.uk/
Information Literacy	"a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (American Library Association)