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Research article

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The Self and Others: Revisiting Information Needs and Libraries as Public, Social Institutions in a Post-truth World

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Abstract: The post-truth era and the increasing ease with which fake news is disseminated and consumed is a wicked problem that invites re-examination of the media environment, algorithmic authority, library and information science (LIS) professional practice, and what people bring to information interactions in terms of cognitive biases and worldviews. Fake news has social consequences such as undermining civic discourse and democracy, and inciting hatred. Consequently, the role of libraries as public, social institutions embedded in democratic societies and the relational aspects of information needs are important to consider. An alternative framework, the decent society, a society in which its attendant social institutions do not humiliate, is explored. An example from the Toronto Public Library (TPL) is used to illustrate the ways in which a social institution can uphold the principle of non-humiliation in an increasingly politicized world.

Keywords: fake news, decent society, cognitive biases, relational information needs

1 Introduction

Since the 2016 US election and Brexit, two concepts have come to the fore in popular consciousness and parlance: post-truth and fake news. Post-truth is defined as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" ("Post-truth," 2019) whereas the definition for fake news is contested, as the phrase has become shorthand to describe a wide range of information types and related behaviours and interpretations. It can refer to news that is actually fake, false, or misleading, or refer to news that someone does not agree with. In this way, fake news often acts as a rhetorical device that can signal distrust of the government and media, serve as a blanket dismissal of information that one does not agree with, or indicate a politician is living in an alternate reality unmoored by facts (McFarlane, 2018).

Post-truth and fake news are nothing new and are "endemic to the history of Western thought as originally expressed in the Platonic Dialogues" (Fuller, 2018, p. 181). However, the online environment of which it is emblematic and symptomatic is a wicked problem. Wicked problems are resistant to resolution; they are social, economic, and political problems that do not have an immediate solution; they require the work and effort of many people working across a variety of disciplines; and they are often interconnected with other problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973). In the case of fake news as a wicked problem, technological advances and algorithmic authority have facilitated the ease and ability to access and spread misinformation and disinformation. Simultaneously, individuals increasingly privilege personal beliefs over facts, or deny facts outright. These and other information pathologies have profound effects and consequences that

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reverberate through every sector of society which can ultimately undermine trust in social, democratic institutions (Bawden & Robinson, 2009; Fallis, 2015; Froelich, 2017). While wicked problems cannot be fixed, the negative consequences of them can be mitigated by infrastructure, systems, and by positioning culture in a broad trajectory of new and desirable actions (Kolko, 2012).

Library and information professionals, researchers, and educators—and libraries themselves, as democratic, social institutions—have important roles to play in addressing the wicked problem of fake news and post-truth. How do LIS professionals respond to politically fraught events, challenges of posttruth, and people privileging personal beliefs over facts, while upholding professional values? To answer this question, the first part of this paper examines the concepts of, and the conditions that give rise to, fake news and post-truth including a brief overview of our current media environment, the impacts of algorithmic authority, and a brief examination of select aspects of the "self"—who individuals are and what they bring psychologically, cognitively, and emotionally to their interactions with information. Next, the potential of libraries as institutions that can mitigate the negative consequences of fake news and post-truth is examined by considering the decent society (Margalit, 1996)—a society in which its members are not humiliated by social institutions. An example drawn from the Toronto Public Library (TPL) about a controversial room booking is used to explore the possibilities of the decent society. Finally, the concept of need is reconsidered by drawing upon Ignatieff's (1986) work on the silent relations that members of democratic societies establish to address individual needs and the needs of strangers. Reframing needs as social relations and considering how these relations might manifest allows for consideration of the library as a social institution that supports a decent society and promotes the public good in a polarized, politized, and post-truth world.

2 Background context

In his book *The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life*, Ralph Keyes (2004) explores the conditions that have ushered in the post-truth era: the disconnect between the incentives to lie and little disincentives for lying; the increasing influence of entertainers, celebrities, and postmodern, rock star academics; ethical relativism; Boomer narcissism; the rise of the Internet; and the decline of community. Keyes argues that these conditions have contributed to normalizing deception in all facets of life. Keyes defines post-truth as the ability to "tamper with the truth so we can dissemble without considering ourselves dishonest" (pp. 12–13). For Keyes, post-truth is a moral problem in which we reconcile our lies and dishonesty not by reflecting and examining our behaviours, but by massaging and justifying the rationale for our dishonesty or simply modifying our values in order that we do not perceive ourselves as unethical.

A term related to post-truth, "truthiness," was coined by the comedian Stephen Colbert in 2005. Truthiness is "the quality of preferring concepts or facts one wishes to be true, rather than concepts or facts known to be true" (Colbert, 2005). While Keyes's book discusses ethics, truth, dishonesty, and lies, truthiness suggests that not only do facts not matter, but that the only truth that does is one's own. Truthiness and post-truth as they are used in current parlance alludes to the interplay between the certainty of emotions, personal beliefs, and worldviews over information, facts, or "truth." Some posit that human beings are hard-wired for post-truth because we are "essentially a meaning-making creature. Our desire for significance in this life is every bit as strong as our need for food and shelter . . . we are incapable of accepting that much of life is inexplicable" (Campbell, 2011, p. 50).

Another facet of post-truth is the outright denial of facts; especially those facts that contradict held beliefs. Examples such as climate change denial are at the ready; however, each one of us engages in cognitive dissonance—the uncomfortable feeling of simultaneously holding contradictory views (Festinger, 1957). In order to assuage these feelings, humans are driven to maintain consistency and balance in our beliefs. There are three ways to alleviate the tension associated with cognitive dissonance: change attitudes or beliefs to bring the dissonance into alignment; acquire new information that either supports the changed belief or reinforces an existing one; or reduce the importance of the attitude, belief, or value (Festinger, 1957). The denial or diminishment of facts and the rejection or dismissal of new information are common strategies used to maintain consistent beliefs.

Complicating this context are the Internet, mobile devices, powerful algorithms, information glut, and data glut. These technologies influence and shape our perceptions of reality, sap our time and attention, determine what knowledge "counts," blur boundaries between pull media (media that one controls and can turn on or off) and push media (media that communicate messages whether they have been invited by the receiver or not), and create echo chambers that reflect our beliefs and that often result in increasingly rigid and extreme views (Aiken, 2016; Andrejevic, 2013). Furthermore, post-truth is often associated with deleterious effects such as shaming, blaming, and scapegoating online, declining mental health and well-being, and the erosion of democracy and public discourse.

3 Media manipulation

In his book *Trust Me, I'm Lying*, Ryan Holiday examines the "twisted economics of the Internet" that create incentives that make traffic more important, and profitable, than accurate and quality content. In order to generate profit, blogs need "stories" to cover and high traffic, which often leads to made-up, sensational, and exaggerated stories, where there are no disincentives for lying and no fact-checking. Holiday argues that the pyramid structure of online content renders the media vulnerable to manipulation. At the bottom tier of the media pyramid are the smaller bloggers and journalists who must write several articles every day and acquire hits in the millions if they are to make a living. This renders bloggers ripe for manipulation by companies offering gifts in exchange for product coverage and reviews and exploitation by being sent deliberate leaks and press releases to generate coverage in a practice known as HARO (help a reporter out). If stories are picked up by more legitimate middle-tier players (which they often are), bloggers can then link to them, giving the story greater credibility whether it is deserved or not. At the top of the pyramid are the major websites and TV channels who scour the mid-level for material that is then developed into "national conversations." Holiday argues that it is possible to feed anything up this chain; it is all about traffic. However, Holiday cautions that "[t]he constraints of blogging create artificial content, which is made real and impacts the outcome of real-world events" (p. 15)

Other aspects of the media environment that are relevant to post-truth are saturation, ubiquity, and connectedness. Two examples are illustrative. In the aftermath of the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013, Holman, Garfin, and Silver (2014) examined what caused people more acute stress: being at or near the bombing itself or being exposed to it in the media. They found "[r]epeated bombing-related media exposure was associated with higher acute stress than was direct exposure." Although this finding seems counterintuitive, it can be interpreted in a number of ways such as being present at the scene allows a person to act which is less stress-inducing than passively receiving information. However, what this study indicates is that ubiquitous and saturated media coverage of horrific events stokes our fears. In terms of the connectedness of the media ecosystem, Albright (2016) published a visualization of a merged left-wing and right-wing post-election media ecosystem in the United States. Albright found that the right-wing media is linked in everywhere such as Twitter, Pinterest pages, small issue-based websites, large news websites, and WordPress along with ties to many of the most popular Internet sites: Wikipedia, YouTube, Google, Facebook, and Reddit. Right-wing sites are linking heavily into most of the left-wing news media, the major news players, and also to each other. Conversely, the left-wing media lacks diversity, are not linked into most of the right-wing sites, and are not found in as many places across the network compared to right-wing sites. It appears that there is a "left-wing" news media/journalism bubble. (Please see: https://medium. com/@d1gi/left-right-the-combined-post-election2016-news-ecosystem-42fc358fbc96)

4 Algorithms

Further complicating the media environment are the impacts and effects of algorithms. In LIS, algorithms play an increasingly important role in producing content and mediating the relationships between journalists, audiences, and media products of which libraries are comprised. They shape our information landscape, information needs, and searching behaviour; and algorithms increasingly mediate all aspects

of our lives and make important, consequential decisions while largely operating in black boxes (Day, 2014). Day argues that "algorithms and indexes have become both more opaque and more mobile, hiding the logical and psychological assumptions that are very clear in traditional top-down and universal classification and taxonomic structures, as well as in other professional information techniques and technologies" (2014, p. 4). While Library of Congress classification schemes are imperfect, the processes and assumptions inherent in the classification scheme can be scrutinized, critiqued, and perhaps corrected. Day (2017) points out the indexical nature of algorithms in that many searches are for information that informs and shapes taste and habits, and argues that this information does not create knowledge, nor are these sources vetted by a knowledge institution. Furthermore, Thomas (2012) argues that social computing algorithms play a central role in organizing social space and personal identity by privileging popular personal or social choices. When personalized information is closely tied to perceptions of identity it becomes much more difficult for people to reliably judge information, leading to echo chambers.

Not only are algorithms increasingly mediating our interactions with information and shaping social space and personal identity, there is the problem of algorithmic authority, which is defined as "the authority of algorithms to direct human action and to verify information, in place of relying exclusively on humans" (Lustig & Nardi qtd. in Sundin et al., 2017, p. 228). In their study of online searching, Sundin et al. (2017) found that people outsourced assessment of information to Google and they placed high attribution of authority and trust to search engines. Sundin et al. (2017) found two contradictory things happening in search behaviour: people neglect to understand the complexities involved in searching for and understanding simple information, and complex tasks such as scrutinizing information to determine authority and filtering practice are understood as simple. Furthermore, not only has Google, for example, been labelled "'a status-authoring device' because it constructs a hierarchy of importance of information rather than just representing it" (Sundin et al., 2017, p. 15), Noble's (2018) book Algorithms of Oppression documents the negative biases against women of colour that are embedded in algorithms in search engines, even when these biases are unintended. A study on transactive memory carried out by Fisher, Goddu and Keil (2015) indicates that searching the Internet effects people's perceptions of self-knowledge. In a series of experiments, people were asked difficult questions such as why there are phases of the moon and how glass is made. One group was allowed to look up the answers on the Internet while the other group was not. Compared to the other test groups, the participants who'd been allowed to do online searches vastly overestimated their ability to answer new, unrelated questions correctly even when participants retrieved irrelevant or no results. Access to search causes an illusion of understanding, falsely inflating people's confidence that they know the answers. We are "so deeply plugged into the Internet, we misattribute the connection to knowledge to actually having the knowledge ourselves" (Fisher, Goddu & Keil, 2015). These findings indicate that Google and its algorithms do not just impose an order of knowledge on people, but that people also use searching as a way to strengthen their arguments and to confirm their bias. Search engines and online recommendation services are colonizing our life-worlds, influencing what information we seek, and more importantly, shaping the very questions that we ask.

5 The "Self"

The study of information behaviour (the study of information needs, seeking, use, and sharing) and information contexts including information worlds, environments, overload, and how people allocate attention, filter, and consume information (Bawden & Robinson, 2009) take on particular resonance in the post-truth era. Within an information rich environment, people interact with information in ways that are serendipitous, purposeful and passive, and intentional and unintentional (Case & Given, 2016; Erdelez, 1999; Fidel, 2012; Wilson, 2000). People interact with information in order to accomplish action: construct accounts, solve problems, justify beliefs, make decisions, tell stories, and make sense of themselves and the world (Rasmussen & McKenzie, 2011). And, people bring their beliefs, knowledge, experience, and biases to bear in complex and often unconscious ways when they interact with information (Wathan & Burkell,

2002). Please see Cooke (2018) for a more comprehensive examination of fake news, the media environment, information behaviour, and information literacy in a post-truth world from an LIS perspective.

Fake news invites LIS scholars and practitioners to scrutinize the internal conditions that people bring to information interactions. Psychology literature is replete with studies on confirmation bias, emotional bias, motivated reasoning, and attribution theory. These cognitive biases have enabled humans to survive, cooperate, and collaborate with each other. However, they also work against us in thinking about complex undertakings such as addressing climate change, voting in our own self-interests, and debating ethically complex ideas. The following section highlights a few relevant concepts that discuss the internal conditions that people bring to their interactions with information.

6 Cognitive biases

Human brains are designed to filter sensory input to avoid being overwhelmed, which is coupled with a series of cognitive biases that hinder our ability to view information objectively. One of the most frequently discussed cognitive and psychological biases is the Dunning-Kruger effect, which posits that incompetent people are too incompetent to know that they are incompetent (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). This has significant implications for information literacy as evinced in a systematic review of 53 English language studies which concluded that the theory was indicative of self-assessment of information literacy skills in that most low-performers overestimated their skills (Mahmood, 2016).

Another well-known cognitive bias is confirmation bias. People tend to seek information that confirms pre-existing beliefs and prejudices and ignore, dismiss, or devalue information that contradicts or challenges pre-conceived notions. McNerney (2011) argues that "While this helps us survive, it's a subjective trap; by only seeing the world as we want to, our minds narrow and it becomes difficult to understand opposing opinions" (para. 11). Confirmation bias blinds us to the potential value of new information and it blinds us to "facts."

Attribution theory, on the other hand, is concerned with how and why ordinary people explain events as they do. It deals with how the social perceiver uses information to arrive at causal explanations for events. It examines what information is gathered and how it is combined to form a causal judgement (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Attribution can be internal or external. Internal attribution is the process of assigning the cause of behaviour to some internal characteristic, rather than to outside forces. When we explain the behaviour of others we look for enduring internal attributions, such as personality traits, motives, or beliefs. Conversely, when explaining our own behaviour we tend to make external attributions—assigning the cause of behaviour to some situation or event outside one's control rather than to some internal characteristic. Within the context of fake news, if someone else shares a fake news story we might attribute that to his or her political ignorance or prejudice but if we share a fake news story, it is because we were duped, the content of the story is still important, or we won't accept that the story is actually fake news.

Motivated reasoning, on the other hand, is the application of ideological filters that are influenced by our belief systems. Lenker discusses motivated reasoning as it relates to political information and information literacy, and writes that it is the frequently unnoticed tendency to:

- (1) avoid or dismiss new information that challenges existing beliefs and
- (2) readily accept new information that appears to conform with prior beliefs.

Not only do we have ideological filters that make us prone to privileging certain types of information over others, our brains are wired to make fast judgements, which are not always logical. In this way, people's fears do not align with actual risks. In our responses to events, emotional reactions happen before logical reasoning. At the same time, fear strengthens memory so we remember a terrorist attack or a one-off plane crash and not the horrors we see daily such as car accidents. As a result, we overestimate the odds of dreadful but infrequent events and underestimate how risky ordinary events are. For example, after the terror attacks of 9/11, people flew less and drove more. The result, estimated Gigerenzer (2003), a German risk specialist, was that 1,595 more Americans died in road accidents during the 12 months after 9/11 than would have otherwise.

In addition to cognitive biases and filters, humans have a wide range for the need for cognition (NFC) which refers to an individual's tendency to engage in and enjoy activities that are challenging and require thinking (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982; Petty, 2009). The concept has direct implications for LIS, as individuals with high NFC tend to actively seek information and expend more effort in searching, analyzing, and contextualizing information (Verplaken et al., 1992). In their study of 364 university students, Mokhtari, et al. (2013) found that high NFC individuals had significantly different information seeking behaviours compared to low NFC individuals. High NFC individuals a had greater ability to search for information, express information needs, evaluate and critique the authority of retrieved information, and use the information acquired than low NFC individuals. Furthermore, low NFC individuals will participate in such activities only when there are external incentives to do so (Mokhtari, 2013). Similarly, Juric (2017) found that reading was "an optimally challenging activity for those who seek the joy of effortful thinking" (n.p.). For low NFC individuals, special circumstances such as unexpected arguments (e.g., sensationalized fake news) are motivating. It is important to note that NFC is not indicative of ability to think but rather how much one enjoys it.

In LIS, two concepts have particular resonance in the post-truth era: credibility and cognitive authority (Rieh, 2010; Wilson, 1983). In her encyclopaedia entry on credibility and cognitive authority, Rieh (2010) argues, "The perception that a source is fair, unbiased, and truthful contributes to the trustworthiness of information. Trustworthiness is, however, not a synonym for credibility because people also must recognize expertise in order to deem information credible" (p. 1337). This is a crucial point—"Credibility does not reside in the information object, source, or person. . . . It is people who ultimately make judgments of information credibility" (p. 1338). People bring their own experience, knowledge, and beliefs to credibility judgements, and in her review Rieh emphasizes that credibility judgements are highly subjective, dependent upon people's own knowledge and expertise, and are not based on fairness.

Rieh (2010) highlights research that demonstrates how beliefs, experience, and personal knowledge precede people's credibility assessments of information. Credibility judgements are situated social practices, which mean that credibility judgements, as in any information activity, are shaped in relation to the situation in which they are carried out. The social context in which credibility assessments take place present interesting areas for further inquiry and research in LIS. Importantly, in terms of the post-truth era, is that assessing credibility, authority, and trustworthiness can be conceived of as ongoing information activities that can be learned.

Finally, the post-truth era invites careful examination of matters of epistemology and knowledge construction. Swanson's (2006) work on personal epistemology—"how individuals understand knowledge, how this understanding impacts knowledge construction, and how this can be applied to educational practice" and its connections to information literacy are a promising alternative direction. Swanson argues for the possibilities of personal epistemology in that it "seeks to explore changes in beliefs and understandings about knowledge" (p. 107). Whereas Swanson's work focuses on personal epistemology, Geertz (1983) argues that entities that we normally conceive as individual, internal mental states such as memory, cognition, and perception, are "directly social affairs." In the post-truth era, the social aspects of knowledge, such as how communities decide and come to know what is a fact is based upon agreement and consensus, are increasingly important. If that consensus or fact is wrong or erroneous, it does not matter because the community deems the knowledge accurate.

The first portion of this paper explored the broader media environment, algorithmic authority, and a few cognitive biases that shape the information environment and information interactions. LIS professionals can respond to these challenges in myriad ways: information literacy, collection development, programming, and by carefully examining how big technology companies such as Google use people's data, render search results (and the ways in which people and results are represented), and the roles and responsibilities of LIS professionals to inform people about surveillance and protect their privacy.

Much more insidious consequences of fake news are the ways in which it along with social media can undermine democracy, ferment mistrust of social institutions, and incite hatred. For example, due to the Cambridge Analytica scandal and Brexit, a 2018 parliamentary committee report from the United Kingdom warns that fake news, disinformation, data manipulation, and social media threaten the future of democracy

and it urges immediate action by the British government to address this issue (House of Commons, 2018). In Brazil, misinformation on social media has been cited as influential in the election of far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro with supporters chanting "Facebook" and "WhatsApp" in celebration of his victory (Doctorow, 2019; Nemer, 2018). There are many examples of fake news stories that have real-world consequences including 2016's "Pizzagate," in which a gunman traveled to a pizzeria in Washington, DC and fired three shots in the restaurant, intending to save children trapped in the restaurant's basement from high-ranking Democrats linked to a child sex slave ring. Another tragic example includes the radicalization of Dylan Roof who retrieved disinformation, racist, and hateful information from Google when he allegedly searched for "black on white crime" and later massacred nine African American Christians attending a study group at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church (Noble, 2018). These few examples illustrate the power of fake news and social media to shape elections, incite hatred, and undermine democracy, the public sphere, and civil discourse. Because libraries are embedded social institutions, it is imperative that LIS educators, researchers, and practitioners scrutinize the ways in which libraries might mitigate some of the negative consequences or effects of the wicked problem of fake news and post-truth. The following portion of this paper now turns to the decent society as an alternative framework for conceptualizing the role of libraries in the post-truth era and concludes by revisiting the concept of needs within a broader social and relational context.

7 The Decent Society

In much LIS discourse, rights are a central feature—the right to send and receive and access information in its myriad forms, upholding core values of the profession such as intellectual freedom, and the field's social justice orientation is a rights-based one. In his book *A Theory of Justice* Rawls (1971) states that justice entails two principles: "First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others. Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage" (p. 60). Rawls' just society is concerned with the distribution of primary goods such as basic liberty including freedom of speech and he argues that justice is the central concern of social institutions in a just society.

While Rawls highlights justice as the basis for societies, Margalit argues for a decent society as an organizing principle (Margalit, 1996). The decent society is one that does not humiliate and where institutions do not humiliate. The rationale for the negative position—not humiliating—is that it is easier to recognize evil than promote good, goods or benefits are a by-product and cannot be produced directly, and it is easier to recognize humiliation than respectful behaviour. Margalit states "Humiliation is any sort of behaviour or condition that constitutes a sound reason for a person to consider their self-respect injured" (p. 9) with the characteristic that it "is a contagious emotion. . . It is an emotion we can feel merely by identifying with victims even if we are not one" (p. 32). Humiliation often entails treating humans as objects, machines, non-human animals, or as sub-human (e.g., treating adults like children). A decent society is one based on not injuring a person's self-respect or one's sense of value, and differs from a just or rights-based society. Margalit argues that humiliation does not mean that one's rights have been violated but rather that one is incapable of demanding them. A decent society is concerned with respect, recognizing and acknowledging others' social identities and capacity to change, rejecting stigma, and most importantly, rejecting cruelty.

Cruelty is the ultimate evil. . . Humiliation is mental cruelty. A decent society must be committed to not only the eradication of physical cruelty in its institutions but also to the elimination of mental cruelty caused by these institutions (p. 85).

Social institutions and encompassing groups are two key features of the decent society. Margalit suggests that institutional humiliation is more damaging than individual humiliation because the institution represents society as a whole and consequently, institutional rejection is rejection by an entire society and not individuals. A decent society, and its inherent social institutions, does not injure the civic honor of its members or demonize those who are dependent on the institution and nor "does it support any symbols that are directly explicitly or implicitly against some of the citizens of the state" (p. 161). A decent society

is comprised of encompassing groups that include community and culture. They have the following characteristics: membership through mutual recognition; importance of self-identification; and belonging over achievement. People can be members of any number of encompassing groups. Margalit proposes that a critical stance with an encompassing group is not necessarily a humiliating one. The caveat is that "whatever you offer others you are willing to take yourself. Humiliation is what you offer others that you would consider humiliating" (p. 181). However, a decent society maintains "a presumption in favour of the interpretation given by vulnerable communities as to the humiliating nature of the gestures directed at them" (p. 183).

8 Toronto Public Library

The following example of an incident that occurred at the TPL (Canada's largest city and public library system) is helpful to better understand how libraries, as social institutions, might support a decent society. For background context, it is important to note that in Canada freedom of expression is guaranteed by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and that the *Charter* also recognizes that freedom of expression is subject to three limitations: advocating genocide, publicly inciting hatred, and promoting hatred. Conversely, in the United States hate speech is protected by law as an aspect of free speech.

In July 2017, the TPL rented a room for a memorial to be held for Barbara Kulaszka, a lawyer and former librarian, who defended far-right causes such as self-proclaimed white supremacist Paul Fromm, the founder of the Canadian Association for Free Expression, Holocaust denier Ernst Zundel, and free speech cases. The library received approximately 1,600 mostly negative calls from the public, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, the mayor of Toronto, and others to cancel the event, and with James Pasternak, a city councillor, stating that "Those tied to hate and bigotry have no place in our libraries" (Toronto Public Library, 2017). When Paul Fromm made the request for the Kulaszka memorial, the TPL immediately sought legal advice from the City of Toronto, who suggested TPL does not have the grounds to deny the booking based on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Library's own Rules of Conduct, or other library policies such as thirdparty room booking procedures. TPL noted that the nature of the event was a memorial and therefore did not contravene library policy. Furthermore, the TPL argued that "From the Libraries perspective, values enshrined in the *Charter* and in particular, the principles of freedom of expression, are core to the Library's mission and values" (Toronto Public Library, 2017). The TPL issued a statement stating that they do not tolerate hate speech but that they "cannot deny bookings from the community that are in accordance with the law and library's policy and rules of conduct" (Toronto Public Library, 2017). The memorial went ahead without incident. Approximately 20 people showed up to the event, extra security were on hand, and extra staff were on hand to answer the media's questions.

In the aftermath of these events the library board unanimously voted in a new policy that explicitly states that room bookings will be denied or cancelled when the library "reasonably believes the purpose of the booking is likely to promote, or would have the effect of promoting, discrimination, contempt or hatred of any group, hatred for any person" (Toronto Public Library, 2017). In an interview with the right-of-centre newspaper, the *National Post*, Vickery Bowles, the City Librarian, said that "The revised policy would not change the decision about allowing the (Kulaszka) memorial" (Selley, 2017). Prior to the revised policy change, Fromm attempted to make another third-party room booking by inviting Victor Fletcher, editor of *Toronto Street News*, a newspaper described the by the Southern Poverty Law Center as "anti-Semitic" and "conspiracy-mongering", and the Canadian Jewish Congress filed a human rights complaint against the paper after an article called for the murder of "Jew bankers." The library refused this booking based on the distinction between the purposes of the two events rather than judging the invited participants alleged personality characteristics (Selley, 2017). "It would not be reasonable for us to expect there would be hate speech at a memorial service," she [Bowles] says. By contrast, she argues, it was reasonable to expect there could be at an event where the proprietor of an anti-Semitic conspiracist rag was holding court about his rag" (Selley, 2017).

This incident was framed as a debate about speech by a wide variety of parties. Some, including the conservative *National Post*, viewed it as "an imperfect stand for free speech." Others viewed the approach

of the library as condoning hate speech and groups. However, from the perspective of a decent society, and not one of free speech, the decisions of TPL to allow the memorial service, based on the purpose of the event, and *not* based on the alleged characteristics of the people attending the event, is a crucial distinction. Furthermore, the decision to disallow the booking of Victor Fletcher, based on the discussion of a "newspaper" that condones humiliation, i.e., self-injury to other people, supports Margalit's vision of a decent society. In this case the TPL did not demonize the people who wished to use the social institution by booking a room for a memorial, and nor did they allow a group to use the social institution to humiliate others.

Recently, the American Library Association (ALA) Council voted 140-4 to rescind a 2018 update to the ALA's "Meeting Rooms: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights." The proposed amendments included references to hate speech and hate groups.

The proposed revision stated:

Public libraries are bound by the First Amendment and the associated law governing access to a designated public forum. A publicly funded library is not obligated to provide meeting room space to the public, but if it chooses to do so, it cannot discriminate or deny access based upon the viewpoint of speakers or the content of their speech. This encompasses religious, political, and hate speech.

If a library allows charities, non-profits, and sports organizations to discuss their activities in library meeting rooms, then the library cannot exclude religious, social, civic, partisan political, or hate groups from discussing their activities in the same facilities. (Yorio & Peet, 2018, n.p.)

The ALA's decision to rescind supports Margalit's notion of a decent society as the entire purpose of a hate group and hate speech is to humiliate. The concept of the decent society offers an alternative framework to consider the roles and responsibilities of libraries in the post-truth era by placing humiliation (a social phenomenon) alongside individual rights. This shift in focus entails revisiting needs.

9 Revisiting Needs

Scholars from a range of disciplines have long debated the concept of human needs. They question what needs are critical in developing a meaningful human life beyond primary needs of food, clothing, shelter, and water. Lederer (1980) argues that political autonomy, communication, production, and reproduction are also primary human needs, and Murray (1938) and Max-Neef (1992) argue that the need for cognition, the need to understand and perhaps even share what our senses tell us about the world, learning, curiosity, leisure, and imagination are both primary needs and information needs (cited in Case & Given, 2016).

Information needs are multi-faceted, are not always instrumental, and are often difficult to conceptualize, to recognize, and to distinguish from wants and desires (Case & Given, 2016). There is a lack of consensus in the LIS literature regarding a definition of information needs or how to operationalize them although they are often derived from a "problem situation" or "task" (Cole, 2011, 2012). Furthermore, needs are difficult to measure because they are often internal and unobservable, they are hard to distinguish from motivation or from information seeking, and they are often ongoing. Savolainen (2012) conceptualized information needs according to three major contexts: temporal and spatial factors, task performance, and communication whereby making sense of a situation required a constructed understanding of information needs. More importantly, information needs are often mediated, and satisfying them may require judgement on behalf of another person. In his book *The Needs* of Strangers, Ignatieff (1986) asks: Can people speak on behalf of other people's needs? This is a critical question for LIS for three reasons: as noted by Mehra, Rioux, and Albright (2010), LIS professionals, in order to fulfill their mandates and professional obligations, determine themselves what they believe their patrons' information needs are and what information, resources, and services are available to whom; fulfilling a variety of needs is fundamental to professional practice; and intellectual freedom, protecting individual rights "to seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction," is a fundamental value of the profession (American Library Association, 2007, 1996).

While studies examine information needs in terms of information retrieval (Cole, 2011) and specific contexts such as small world and life in the round (Chatman, 1991, 1999), needs (and information needs) are rarely considered in relational terms. In his book *The Needs of Strangers*, Igantieff writes about needs in relation to the state and the organization of society by arguing that needs arise within the context of social relations and social institutions. Needs are predicated on a welfare state and they confer entitlements—rights—to other people's resources. While one is not directly paying for public services such as roads, education, or healthcare, using these services provides access to other people's resources. This process establishes a silent relation among members of a society. In this way, the collection of taxes for public libraries, and the collective resources from governments and tuition for academic libraries, establishes a silent relation between people whom libraries serve.

Although much work has been done regarding understanding how individuals and groups interact with information, the relational aspect of recognizing and satisfying information needs is an area that is under-researched. Ignatieff notes that:

Some needs pull people together and some needs pull people apart and that in satisfying our needs we will inevitably alienate some people, create conflict, friction and tension, and participate in practices we might oppose but in which we have no way of dislodging ourselves.

In a post-truth era, recognizing that information needs may conflict with the needs of others may provide a deeper understanding of the relational aspects of satisfying information needs and allow us to question if some needs take precedence over others at certain points of time. For example, perhaps the "need" for a young adult to see a Black Lives Matter poster in the library takes precedent over another patron's "need" for library neutrality. Post-truth brings to the fore the importance of relations with each other—a world in which "relations between people and things has become subordinate in importance and long-range effect to relations among people and among communities of people" (Bruffee, 1986, p. 779). Considering information needs as relational will have implications for LIS practice, the subfield of information behaviour, and the values of the profession.

Ignatieff then argues that one of the ways we can constrain these factions of competing needs is through democracy and "collective constraint on inequalities of fortune." The public library, although imperfect, is a social institution that provides a democratic space in which there is a collective constraint on inequalities of fortune. Libraries as social institutions do, or can, provide information that helps people to flourish, learn, be creative, participate in public discourse, and find meaning. They also serve as important infrastructure and systems that are necessary to mitigate the wicked problem of fake news.

10 Conclusion

Since Keyes' book was published in 2004, the world has suffered a major, global financial crisis (that many suspect has given rise to the alt-right), there is a lack of preparation and planning for continued job loss through automation, and the planet's very existence is imperilled by the devastating effects and costs of climate change and the sixth extinction to name but a few problems (Kolbert, 2014). At a time when collective and coordinated action is necessary, Keyes warns that:

Post-truthfulness builds a fragile social edifice based on wariness. It erodes the foundation of trust that underlies any healthy civilization. When enough of us peddle fantasy as fact, society loses its grounding in reality. Society would crumble altogether if we assumed others were as likely to dissemble as tell the truth. We are perilously close to that point. (Keyes 2016, n.p).

Furthermore, the post-truth era brings to the fore questions about the relationship between information and knowledge. Day (2017) argues that a person who is information literate is a person interested in knowledge. The Internet will not satisfy this user. Education then, requires a politics to support the creation of educated citizens and the production and dissemination of knowledge. Day (2017) states that

Knowledge is hard to create and come by. It requires education, methods, institutions, the preservation, organization and access to valid and reliable documents and data (the information domain traditionally given to libraries), and continuous traditions (p. 59).

The failure of policy and political and social will to support education and knowledge in the ways that Day (2017) describes is evident in fake news.

Our current political, social, and media landscape and rise of fake news invites careful scrutiny of many taken for granted ideas and assumptions in LIS research and practice. While the future of the online information environment is uncertain, libraries and library information professionals are potentially potent nodes in networked infrastructure that can address the wicked problem of fake news and post-truth. In this environment, it is imperative that LIS professionals scrutinize assumptions about information infrastructure including technology, algorithms, and search, pay attention to the media, and understand the political economy of information. Striving to understand the internal conditions, worldviews, beliefs, and biases people bring to information interactions, highlighting the importance of meta-cognition, rethinking information needs and placing them in a personal as well as relational context, can deepen our understanding of ourselves, others, and changing political and social landscapes. In addition, libraries as social institutions meet many of the criteria outlined by Margalit (1996) regarding a decent society and treating individuals in a way that does not humiliate. In a highly politized climate, the decent society framework where social institutions do not humiliate community members may offer another philosophical underpinning to support library policy.

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