Article

Useful Divides:
Games of Truth in Library and Information Studies Research and Practice

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ABSTRACT

For much of its history, the work of knowing the library has been said to be riven with divides—between academics and practitioners; between theory and practice; between thinking and doing. There is now a sizable literature in library and information studies that seeks to measure, diagnose, and mend these gaps. This paper interrogates this discourse of division in LIS research and practice. We explore its history, the uses to which it is put, by whom, and to what ends. Rather than seek to bridge the divide, we occupy it, as a space of friction, discomfort, and possibility. Drawing on a vast corpus of academic and industry texts that engage with the gap discourse, we approach these as "games of truth," as systems of knowledge that produce and reinforce certain ways of being. Using this approach, we highlight how the divide sustains power relations between different groups and constitutes specific forms of knowledge (and not others) as useful and relevant. Seeking to challenge the underlying logic of the divide and its effects in the world, we approach these descriptors in a relational, rather than absolute, sense. Through this excavation, we invite a critical praxis that sees usefulness and relevance as not that which is inextricably aligned to instrumentalism, nor the domain of specific social groups. Rather, we suggest that adopting a critical praxis means reorienting use, using knowledge to advance a mode of living differently, of changing the shape of the world, and of asking what can be done in the face of inequality and indifference. With this in mind, we put forward an alternative mode of understanding use in LIS: as a collective resource that we

draw upon to challenge inequalities, to understand and repair past wrongs and continued silences, and to challenge the role of libraries and other institutions in constructing and legitimizing broader power divides in society. These, we suggest, are gaps worth challenging.

INTRODUCTION: A DIVIDED FIELD

For much of its history, the work of knowing the library has been said to be riven with divides—between academics and practitioners, between theory and practice, between thinking and doing. "Practitioners," we are told, "write primarily for practitioners," while "academics…write mainly for academics."[1] There is now a large body of library and information science (LIS) literature that seeks to diagnose and mend this gap. As the narrative goes, research needs to be more practical, communicated in a way that practitioners can understand and put into action.[2] Meanwhile, practitioners need to improve their research literacy, learn to become adept in theory, and begin to conduct research themselves.[3] Both need to try to understand each other by changing how and where they communicate.[4] For others, the gap has become a chasm, seemingly unbridgeable.[5] Others seek to identify the root cause of this division: the higher education

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[1] Christian Schlögl and Wolfgang G. Stock, "Practitioners and Academics as Authors and Readers: The Case of LIS Journals," *Journal of Documentation* 64, no. 5 (2008): 661, https://doi.org/10.1108/00220410810899691.

[2] Gaby Haddow and Jane E. Klobas, "Communication of Research to Practice in Library and Information Science: Closing the Gap," *Library & Information Science Research* 26, no. 1 (2004): 29-43, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2003.11.010; Schlögl and Stock, "Practitioners and Academics as Authors and Readers"; Charles R. McClure, "Increasing the Usefulness of Research for Library Managers: Propositions, Issues, and Strategies," *Library Trends* 38, no. 2 (1989), https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/handle/2142/7658.

[3] Rebecca Watson-Boone, "Academic Librarians as Practitioner-Researchers," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 26, no. 2 (2000): 85-93, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0099-1333(99)00144-5; Andrew Booth, "Bridging the Research-Practice Gap? The Role of Evidence Based Librarianship," *New Review of Information and Library Research* 9, no. 1 (2003): 3-23, https://doi.org/10.1080/13614550410001687909; Paul Genoni, Gaby Haddow, and Ann Ritchie, "Why Don't Librarians Use Research?" in *Evidence Based Practice for Information Professionals: A Handbook*, ed. Andrew Booth and Anne Brice (London, UK: Facet Publishing, 2004), 49-60, http://doi.wiley.com/10.1111/j.1471-1842.2004.00544.x.

[4] Michelle Dalton, "A Dissemination Divide? The Factors That Influence the Journal Selection Decision of Library & Information Studies (LIS) Researchers and Practitioners," *Library and Information Research* 37, no. 115 (2013): 33-57, https://doi.org/10.29173/lirg553.

[5] Lynne McKechnie et al., "Communicating Research Findings to Library and Information Science Practitioners: A Study of ISIC Papers from 1996 to 2000," *Information Research* 13, no. 4 (2008), http://informationr.net/ir/13-4/paper375.html.

sector,[6] LIS academics in their "ivory tower,"[7] or practitioners who are unwilling to relinquish the fiction of a neutral profession.[8]

This article is about this discourse of division in LIS research and practice. We explore where it comes from, the uses to which it is put, by whom, and to what ends. Rather than seek to bridge the divide, we occupy it, as a space of friction, discomfort, and possibility. Drawing on the extensive corpus of academic and industry texts that engage with the gap discourse, we approach these as "games of truth"—that is, as systems of knowledge that produce and reinforce certain ways of being.[9] Foucault's idea of "games of truth" can be thought of as institutionalized regimes of knowledge that shape, reinforce, and naturalize hierarchies of value. By dividing research, certain ways of knowing the library (particularly instrumental and managerial approaches) have historically been promoted as "useful" knowledge. We suggest this divide is productive— in that it sustains power relations between different groups and constitutes specific forms of knowledge (and not others) as useful and relevant. As such, throughout the twentieth century, so-called useful knowledge has become embedded in institutional contexts (e.g., professional associations, universities, journals) as the library is measured, compared, and optimized according to the logics of instrumentalism.

Seeking to challenge the underlying logic of the divide and its effects in the world, we approach use in a relational, rather than absolute, sense. We reframe the familiar question—is LIS research legitimate only if applied to practice or is it a legitimate intellectual exercise in its own right?—instead asking, to whom is knowledge useful or relevant? Rather than distance ourselves from use, following Sara Ahmed, we "respond to the problem of instrumentalism not by rejecting the idea of useful knowledge but by calling for knowledge that is useful to others, with this 'to' being an opening, an invitation, a connection."[10] Rather than knowledge that can be put to use by the manager, the entrepreneur, the administrator, and the productive citizen, what if we start by analyzing

[6] Bill Crowley, "The Control and Direction of Professional Education," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 50, no. 12 (1999): 1127-1135, https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-4571(1999)50:12<1127::AID-ASI16>3.0.CO;2-5; Sarah McNicol and Clare Nankivell, *The LIS Research Landscape: A Review and Prognosis* (Birmingham, UK: Centre for Information Research-University of Central England, 2003).

[7] Linh Cuong Nguyen and Philip Hider, "Narrowing the Gap Between LIS Research and Practice in Australia," *Journal of the Australian Library and Information Association* 67, no. 1 (2018): 3, https://doi.org/10.1080/24750158.2018.1430412.

[8] Archie L. Dick, "Epistemological Positions and Library and Information Science," *The Library Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (1999): 305-323, https://doi.org/10.1086/603091.

[9] Michel Foucault, "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom: An Interview with Michel Foucault on January 20, 1984," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 12, no. 2-3 (1987): 112-131, https://doi.org/10.1177/019145378701200202.

[10] Ahmed, *What's the Use?: On the Uses of Use* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 222.

the library, as science studies scholar Susan Leigh Star encouraged, from the perspective of "the monster, the outcast", the unnameable, or "the *as-yet-unlabelled*"?[11] That is, by attending to those whose work is undervalued or ignored, of those who stray from accepted norms, and of those who occupy multiple marginalities?

We start this paper by exploring how such divides in ways of knowing the world have been constructed and reinforced from the eighteenth century. We then explore how ways of understanding useful research became embedded in institutional contexts through the establishment of LIS graduate schools and academic journals in the early twentieth century. Associating use with instrumentalism was reinforced as the library was positioned as a vendor of useful reading in the service of self-disciplined citizenry. This laid the foundation for a discourse of division in mainstream LIS research and practice, that became the subject of scholarly and professional debate throughout the late twentieth century. From here, we trace the emergence of efforts to bridge the gap between research and practice and consider the question of who benefits from these efforts. Focusing on the Australian context, where the gap thesis persists, we trouble the logic of cleaving off some ways of knowing the library from others, pointing to examples where the institution of the library is productively framed within its broader social and political context. These examples, show the potential of residing in in-between zones, which offer a vantage point where taken-for-grantedness can be denaturalized and reimagined. Finally, we invite an alternative to either conflating useful knowledge with instrumentalism in LIS research and practice or rejecting the category altogether. Instead, we position use as a collective resource that we can draw on to challenge inequalities, to understand and repair past wrongs and continued silences, and to challenge the role of libraries and other institutions in constructing and legitimising broader power divides in society.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF DIVIDING KNOWLEDGE

The definitional divide between thinking and knowing is a relatively recent innovation in the English language. The cultural theorist Raymond Williams notes that "experience" and "experiment" were largely interchangeable until the eighteenth century.[12] The emergence of the experiment as a distinctive mode of getting to some kind of generalized, external knowledge (science) meant that experience and experiential knowledge "would

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[11] Susan Leigh Star, "Power, Technology and the Phenomenology of Conventions: On Being Allergic to Onions," in *A Sociology of Monsters*, ed. John Law, 1991, 26-56 (London, UK: Routledge, 1991), 29, 39.

[12] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013), 233.

then be marked off as *not science* but something else.”[13] This lay the groundwork for a crisp distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge. [14] These distinctions hardened in the nineteenth century as the experiment and science steadily emerged as exclusive modes of getting to the stuff of truth, reason, and rationality.[15] The expert emerged as the harbinger of truth, recreating various understandings of the world in replicable ways as empirical facts.[16]

It is no accident that the nineteenth century is also when the modern library, an Enlightenment project, emerged. By promoting reading (of a specific kind), the library had its own role in helping one get to the facts. Philosopher Michel de Certeau suggests that “the ideology of the Enlightenment claimed that the book was capable of reforming society, that educational popularization could transform manners and customs, that an elite’s products could, if they were sufficiently widespread, remodel a whole nation.”[17] Importantly, the library was to be a site of instrumental, rather than leisurely, reading.[18] This was the innovation of “practical” knowledge. Within this context, the library was situated as a site of production—the very site where reading was to be productive. Professional library staff would direct the reader away from mere entertainment towards “useful knowledge.”[19] By curating the “best reading,” the specter of the crowd would be tamed, building a class of better-behaved citizens, informed consumers, and educated people.[20]

One way to transform the crowd into individuals oriented towards productive ends was so-called “useful knowledge,” curated and disseminated through the library. As part of a whole host of “educative and civilizing agencies” like the museum, the public

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[13] Williams, 234.

[14] Williams, 233.

[15] Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability: A Philosophical Study of Early Ideas about Probability, Induction and Statistical Inference* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[16] Douglas R. Holmes and George E. Marcus, “Cultures of Expertise and the Management of Globalization: Toward the Re-Functioning of Ethnography,” in *Global Assemblages*, ed. Stephen J. Collier and Aihwa Ong (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2005), 246, https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470696569.ch13.

[17] Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 166.

[18] Sean Cubitt, *Digital Aesthetics* (London, UK: SAGE Publications, 1998), 11, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/monash/detail.action?docID=1024100.

[19] Wayne A. Wiegand, “To Reposition a Research Agenda: What American Studies Can Teach the LIS Community about the Library in the Life of the User,” *The Library Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (2003): 369-382, https://doi.org/10.1086/603438.

[20] Wayne A. Wiegand, “Libraries and the Invention of Information,” in *Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. Jonathan Rose, Simon Eliot, and Rob Banham (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2008), 531-543.

school, and the penitentiary, the library developed "a new pedagogic relation between state and people" as well as subduing the "specter of the crowd." [21] Perhaps not surprisingly, the class of people who set the conditions for what constituted useful knowledge was a relatively homogeneous group. As Wayne Wiegand notes, it was usually those with enough resources to create subscription libraries, the base from which the Carnegie model of public libraries emerged.[22] As subscription libraries transformed, with the help of private capital, to public libraries, they faced a resistant public (that wanted novels). The libraries reached a compromise: "two books per visit, but only one could be a novel."[23]

      We recount this familiar story as it bears on the ways in which the library emerged as a subject of inquiry in its own right and with it, the steady emergence of LIS as a research discipline. Within the civic, pedagogic vision of the library, the librarian was to be a neutral arbiter that optimized access to that information which could be put to productive ends. Within this mold, the role of any form of systematic inquiry of the library would be to ask how to enhance access, and to better understand the user so as to diminish barriers they may experience in locating the best reading to fulfil their educative needs. The focus, therefore, is on resolving deficiencies, fixing problems, and guiding those who stray from the norm back to it. Within this context, LIS research emerged to have a natural alliance with utilitarianism—"the working philosophy of a bureaucratic and industrial capitalist society."[24] According to utilitarian philosophy, the key marker of value was "whether something was useful to people, and specifically…to the majority, 'the greatest number.'" [25] This specific configuration of use colors the emergence of librarianship as both a profession and as a research field in its own right.

A USEFUL PROFESSION IN NEED OF A USEFUL RESEARCH AGENDA

While the formalized education of librarians in Europe and America started in the 1880s, it remained "an undergraduate specialty" until the 1920s.[26] Institutionalized LIS research, at least in North America, Europe, Australia, and India, grew out of a deep anxiety that librarians would not be taken seriously until they embarked on research of their own.[27]

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[21] Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London, UK: Routledge, 1995), 72.

[22] Wiegand, "To Reposition a Research Agenda."

[23] Wiegand, "Libraries and the Invention of Information," 538.

[24] Williams, *Keywords*, 276.

[25] Williams, 276.

[26] Frederick J. Stielow, "Library and Information Science Research," in *Encyclopedia of Library History*, ed. Wayne A. Wiegand and Donald G. Jr. Davis (New York: Routledge, 1994), 338.

[27] Stielow, 338.

As Stielow notes, "librarianship was riven by an academically imposed inferiority complex and linguistic dilemmas on the meaning of research for an applied and service field."[28] Indeed, fifty years on from the first formal programs to train professional librarians, an institutionalized research agenda had failed to materialize. Opening the inaugural issue of *The Library Quarterly* in 1931, C.C. Williamson complained that there was:

> No organized or co-operative plans…no money appropriated anywhere… specifically for research in library service. Not a single person employed anywhere by a library or library system to study problems of library service. No research fellowships. No research professorships. Incredible? Yes, but true.[29]

Until librarians began to take to their problems with a "scientific spirit and attitude," Williamson suggested, they would continue to "be looked upon as clerks and routinists."[30]

From these anxious roots in the early 1930s, LIS research developed with the help of private capital. Following Williamson's early pronouncements on the substandard state of education for librarianship in his 1923 report, the Carnegie Corporation committed $25,000 to start the library research journal *The Library Quarterly*, which published its first issue in 1931. A key development in this period was the establishment of the Graduate Library School (GLS) of the University of Chicago in 1929, which, importantly, absorbed the quantitative ethos of the Chicago School of Social Science.[31] GLS founder Douglas Waples wrote the first textbook on LIS research, *Investigating Library Problems*, which set the agenda for LIS research throughout the rest of the century, wedding "social science empiricism" with "hypothesis testing sanctified by mathematical formulae."[32] Archie L. Dick notes that the profession embraced the ideals of neutrality and objectivity in pursuit of its (social) scientific status, seeking to develop laws and generalizations that were applicable to library-related activities.[33] LIS research was to provide a way for librarians to "make decisions without seeming to decide"—to assert a neutrality based on standardized, rather than idiosyncratic, decision-making.[34] For the next forty years,

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28 Stielow, 342.

29 C.C. Williamson, "The Place of Research in Library Service," *The Library Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1931): 5, https://doi.org/10.1086/612836.

30 Williamson, 11.

31 Bluma C. Peritz, "The Role of Research in Librarianship-The View of the Early Thirties in the United States," *Libri* 33 (1983): 83-91.

32 Stielow, "Library and Information Science Research," 339.

33 Archie L. Dick, "Library and Information Science as a Social Science: Neutral and Normative Conceptions," *The Library Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (1995): 221, https://doi.org/10.1086 /602777.

34 Theodore M. Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 8.

research in librarianship privileged a focus on optimizing library processes, with a distinct focus on the needs of professionals.[35] Within the fledgling discipline, the philosophy of utilitarianism was twinned with the allure of science. From this beginning, we can already see the emergence of a research agenda that is useful for some and not others, while naturalizing power relations through a veneer of objectivity.

This focus on taking to library-related problems with a "scientific spirit and attitude" colors the dominant articulation of "use" in LIS. The varied life of the concept in LIS research and practice has been unpacked by Rachel Fleming-May, who notes that use in LIS is both widely used and ill-defined. This has left librarians "puzzled over a way to measure the impact of library use for centuries."[36] A dominant mode of understanding use is through the metric of the "instance," which fits neatly with the desire to enumerate, measure, and optimize the library. "Use" becomes that which "can be recorded and quantified, such as books circulated, interlibrary loan requests filled…reference questions answered…door counts, the removal of individual items from the library shelf, and documents downloaded from a database."[37] That which is knowable is synonymous with that which can be enumerated, compared, and optimized.

The trust in numbers that colors how usefulness and practicality are defined in LIS research has been reinforced by a political economy of scholarly knowledge production that privileges instrumentalism: solving problems, predicting outcomes, and resolving ambiguity. Reflecting on the UK context, John Feather notes that throughout the last quarter of the twentieth century, funding from the British Library Research and Development Department pushed LIS research further into specific areas like information retrieval and library automation.[38] The focus was distinctly instrumentalist, privileging relatively short-term "practical" benefits. That which was practical was that which could be measured and optimized, improving economic efficiency and enhancing productivity. This describes a very limited class of qualities or interests, reinforcing the library as a site in service of economic production whilst obscuring it as a political site.[39] While the categories "useful knowledge" and the "best reading" had given way to a more generic

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[35] Peritz, "The Role of Research in Librarianship—The View of the Early Thirties in the United States."

[36] Rachel A. Fleming-May, "What Is Library Use? Facets of Concept and a Typology of Its Application in the Literature of Library and Information Science," *The Library Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (2011): 316, https://doi.org/10.1086/660133.

[37] Fleming-May, "What Is Library Use?" 312.

[38] John Feather, "LIS Research in the United Kingdom: Reflections and Prospects," *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* 41, no. 3 (2009): 173-181, https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000609337096.

[39] Richard H. Brown and Beth Davis-Brown, "The Making of Memory: The Politics of Archives, Libraries and Museums in the Construction of National Consciousness," *History of the Human Sciences* 11, no. 4 (1998): 17-32, https://doi.org/10.1177/095269519801100402.

product ("information"),[40] the role of the library remained the same—to develop the most efficient way to deliver information and to be "a machine for retrieving information."[41] The librarian was there to grease the wheels, oil the chain, not to question the direction the machine is steered in, or the logic of its operation in the first place. That seen as adjacent to this aim was split off from the realm of the practical.

Quinn and Bates, among many others, have observed "a trend within library management research to adopt approaches from the corporate business management and strategy literature as a lens through which to understand, develop, and promote LIS practice."[42] They argue that these approaches frame the type of research outputs considered useful to the field; that is, data and other evidence necessary to support a managerial agenda—metrics to calculate, compare, and optimize the library as a productive institution. This approach centers practicality as the "dominant ideology" of LIS.[43] Indeed, managerial, and economic concepts such as efficiency also frame how practitioners represent and understand the benefit of research. Surveys of practitioners suggest research is seen as a useful instrument for "libraries and their parent organizations to systematically enhance their business operations, improve programs and services, and better meet the needs of clients."[44] LIS, from this perspective, is composed of a series of functions or tasks to be mastered rather than questioned or critically engaged.

THE LIFE OF THE GAP IN LIS RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

To an extent, the gap between academic and practitioner, between theory and practice, and between thinking and doing in LIS research and practice goes back to the establishment of the discipline. As mentioned in the previous section, the GLS in Chicago sought to eke out a research agenda that resolved ambiguity by measuring, comparing, and optimizing library-related activities.[45] Experiential knowledge and observation of the world was to compete with (rather than complement) what the numbers indicated. This

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[40] Wiegand, "To Reposition a Research Agenda."

[41] Sean Cubitt, "Library," *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 2-3 (May 1, 2006): 581, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276406063783.

[42] Katherine Quinn and Jo Bates, "Resisting Neoliberalism: The Challenge of Activist Librarianship in English Higher Education," *Journal of Documentation* 73, no. 2 (2017): 320.

[43] Lilian Oyieke, "Theoretical and Practical Implications of Power Dynamics in Academic Libraries," in *Critical Librarianship*, ed. Samantha Schmehl Hines and David H. Ketchum, vol. 41, Advances in Library Administration and Organization (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2020), 5, https://doi.org/10.1108/S0732-067120200000041002.

[44] Nguyen and Hider, "Narrowing the Gap Between LIS Research and Practice in Australia," 4.

[45] Peritz, "The Role of Research in Librarianship—The View of the Early Thirties in the United States."

is an attempt to split off mere experience from the kind of generalized, external knowledge that library research aspired to. "A decision made by the numbers (or by explicit rules of some other sort) has at least the appearance of being fair and impersonal. Scientific objectivity thus provides an answer to a moral demand for impartiality and fairness," Porter notes.[46] Performing the function of a neutral vendor of information, the library sought to avoid claims of arbitrariness and bias in the selection and provision of library materials through measurement, comparison, and optimization.

A well-cited LIS textbook, *Basic Research Methods for Librarians,* originally published in 1985 and now in its fifth edition, opens by dividing research into two camps: basic and applied research. [47] "*Basic research*," the authors suggest, "is primarily interested in deriving new knowledge" rather than applying such knowledge "to specific, practical, or real problems."[48] "*Applied research*," on the other hand, "emphasizes the solving of specific problems in real situations."[49] Despite the book's somewhat misleading title, its authors emphasize that LIS research is overwhelmingly of the "applied" stripe. Yet, beyond the binaries of basic and applied, the authors suggest the fundamental philosophy that underpins LIS research is whether or not it is useful to library problems: "the crucial factor is not whether research is pure or applied but whether it is relevant."[50] There is a presumption in this description about to whom knowledge will be relevant. We must assume that "relevance" in this context refers to, as the authors go on to highlight, the ability of research to offer "practical applications for the improvement of practices in actual library operations," enable "library managers to make intelligent decisions," and optimize service delivery.[51] That which sits outside this narrow class of uses is presumably irrelevant, at least as far as the library profession is concerned.

At least from the 1980s, there has been growing commentary on the gap between academics and practitioners, and between research and practice. In a way, *Basic Research Methods for Librarians* can be read as attempt to remedy this gap by giving library professionals the tools to produce "relevant" knowledge to increase the efficiency of library operations. The gap thesis assumes that practitioners are practical and practice-focused, interested mainly in applying solutions to specific challenges in the workplace. Conversely, academic LIS researchers are often represented as wedded to, as Linh Nguyen notes in the Australian context, "a culture that may assume that research belongs to an

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[46] Porter, *Trust in Numbers*, 8.

[47] Lynn Silipigni Connaway and Ronald R. Powell, *Basic Research Methods for Librarians*, 5th ed, Library and Information Science Text Series (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2010).

[48] Connaway and Powell, 2.

[49] Connaway and Powell, 2.

[50] Connaway and Powell, 2.

[51] Connaway and Powell, 7-8.

ivory tower and is not relevant to practice."[52] These two views of the world are presented as epistemologically and ontologically irreconcilable.[53]

This gap has been measured, mended, bridged, and dismissed, forming the topic of a sizable body of literature.[54] Taking the gap as their topic, Nguyen and Hider argue that one of the reasons for such divides "may be that practitioners hold different

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[52] Linh Nguyen and ALIA, *Relevance 2020: LIS Research in Australia* (Canberra: Australian Library and Information Association, 2017), 7, https://read.alia.org.au/relevance-2020-lis-research-australia.

[53] McKechnie et al., "Communicating Research Findings to Library and Information Science Practitioners: A Study of ISIC Papers from 1996 to 2000."

[54] Charles R. McClure and Ann Bishop, "The Status of Research in Library/Information Science: Guarded Optimism," *College & Research Libraries* 50, no. 2 (1989): 127-143, https://doi.org/10.5860/crl_50_02_127; McClure, "Increasing the Usefulness of Research for Library Managers"; Booth, "Bridging the Research-Practice Gap?"; Haddow and Klobas, "Communication of Research to Practice in Library and Information Science"; Marisa Ponti, "Peer Production for Collaboration between Academics and Practitioners," *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* 45, no. 1 (2013): 23-37, https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000612438430; Nguyen and Hider, "Narrowing the Gap Between LIS Research and Practice in Australia"; Philip Hider, Hollie White, and Hamid R. Jamali, "Minding the Gap: Investigating the Alignment of Information Organization Research and Practice," *Information Research* 24, no. 3 (2019), http://informationr.net/ir/24-3/rails/rails1802.html; Feather, "LIS Research in the United Kingdom"; McKechnie et al., "Communicating Research Findings to Library and Information Science Practitioners: A Study of ISIC Papers from 1996 to 2000"; Haddow and Klobas, "Communication of Research to Practice in Library and Information Science"; Lili Luo, "Fusing Research into Practice: The Role of Research Methods Education," *Library & Information Science Research* 33, no. 3 (2011): 191-201, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2010.12.001; Dalton, "A Dissemination Divide?"; Helen Partridge et al., "Bridging the Library and Information Science Research – Practice Gap: A Panel Discussion," *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 56, no. 1 (2019): 561-564, https://doi.org/10.1002/pra2.92; Ponti, "Peer Production for Collaboration between Academics and Practitioners"; Marisa Ponti, "A LIS Collaboratory to Bridge the Research-practice Gap," *Library Management* 29, no. 4/5 (2008): 265-277, https://doi.org/10.1108/01435120810869066; William A. Crowley, *Spanning the Theory-Practice Divide in Library and Information Science* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005); Samuel Makin, "The Research-Practice Gap as a Pragmatic Knowledge Boundary," *Information and Organization*, February 10, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infoandorg.2020.100334; Genoni, Haddow, and Ritchie, "Why Don't Librarians Use Research?"; Birger Hjørland, "Library and Information Science: Practice, Theory, and Philosophical Basis," *Information Processing & Management* 36, no. 3 (2000): 501-531, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0306-4573(99)00038-2; Hjørland, "Information Science and Its Core Concepts"; Hamid R Jamali, "Use of Research by Librarians and Information Professionals," *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-Journal)*, no. 1733 (2018), https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/1733.

viewpoints." Drawing on a survey of Australian library workers, they suggest that "while theorists think that research must be rigorous and sophisticated, their [practitioner] counterparts expect something pragmatic, relevant, applicable to everyday practice."[55] There was a view among practitioners surveyed that "research, which tends to be carried out in academia, does not always originate from practice, nor necessarily solve problems in, or even guide practice."[56] Similarly, Haddow and Klobas surveyed the literature on the "research–practice gap," identifying "eleven gaps between practice and research."[57] Prominent among these perceived gaps was a "relevance gap," a schism between what constitutes a "problem" worthy of investigation in research and practice. The solution, the authors suggest, is to get practitioners involved in research, and improve how academic research is communicated to make it more "relevant" to practice.[58]

It is worthwhile pausing here to consider both the function and effects of relevance on how the library is known and acted upon. What is the use of seeing LIS research as a practical or professional field rather than a scholarly or scientific one?[59] Or, as Sara Ahmed commented, how is this is discourse of practicality "called upon to do certain kinds of work?"[60] We suggest that the association of useful and relevant research with instrumental, calculative ways of knowing aligns the library with a market logic and its mechanisms for demonstrating value.[61] Within this logic, relevant research is constrained in the scope of the problems that LIS should usefully contemplate. Defining some ways of knowing the library (and not others) as relevant shapes the kinds of questions that can proceed. We can think of the gap thesis as part of the "games of truth" Foucault described—as part of "ensemble of procedures" that make some ways of knowing seemingly and unproblematically useful, and others not. It is worth considering the ways of knowing ignored, the questions not asked, and the spaces closed off through these games of truth.[62]

Indeed, while narratives of the gap grow (and with them, the gap itself), a parallel literature has pointed to a perceived lack of practitioner interest in critical or theoretical

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[55] Nguyen and Hider, "Narrowing the Gap Between LIS Research and Practice in Australia," 3–4.

[56] Nguyen and Hider, 3.

[57] Haddow and Klobas, "Communication of Research to Practice in Library and Information Science," 31-32.

[58] Haddow and Klobas, 33.

[59] Birger Hjørland, "Information Science and Its Core Concepts: Levels of Disagreement," in *Theories of Information, Communication and Knowledge: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, ed. Fidelia Ibekwe-SanJuan and Thomas M Dousa, Studies in History and Philosophy of Science (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2014), 207, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-6973-1_9.

[60] Ahmed, *What's the Use?* 4.

[61] Foucault, "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom".

[62] Katherine Quinn and Jo Bates, "Resisting Neoliberalism: The Challenge of Activist Librarianship in English Higher Education," *Journal of Documentation* 73, no. 2 (2017): 317-335.

approaches.[63] This is represented as a threat to the very sustainability of LIS as an academic discipline and indeed, of the professional status of librarians. Benoit notes, for instance, that there "are unflattering views of LIS as a research field and uncertainty over its practice and future development" noting further that "others deride LIS for its lack of theoretical foundations."[64] Supporting this view, Andersen argues that a fundamental reason for this "unflattering" reputation is that "the curricula and professional literature of LIS are today filled with technical and managerial language, and technical and managerial perspectives and writings." He continues, suggesting that this tendency is not confined to practitioners but is a "discourse-style…widespread in scholarly literature" that "inhibits the field's ability to engage in exchanges with other academic disciplines."[65] Following these concerns, Leckie and Buschman have concluded that "LIS cannot forever remain innocent of the debates and the progressions of thought that have characterized broad realms of theoretical influence in the humanities and social sciences and still maintain its place within those constellations of research and practice."[66] It is little wonder that some see the gap as intractable.[67]

The gap reveals a long-held schism in LIS research: was LIS research legitimate only if applied to practice? Or was LIS research a legitimate intellectual exercise in its own right? From this, narratives emerge of a discipline suffering an existential crisis. From here, echoing C.C. Williamson's comments in the inaugural issue of *The Library Quarterly* over half a century earlier, discussion and debate flows on the need for firm philosophical and epistemological underpinnings to legitimize LIS research.[68] As LIS faculties began to

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[63] Recent literature has also encouraged practitioners to adopt critical and theoretical approaches. See Emily Drabinski and Scott Walter, "Asking Questions That Matter," *College & Research Libraries* 77, no. 3 (2016): 264-268, https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.77.3.264.

[64] Gerald Benoit, "Critical Theory and the Legitimation of LIS," *Information Research* 12, no. 4 (2007): 1-16.

[65] Jack Andersen, "Information Criticism: Where Is It?" in *Questioning Library Neutrality: Essays from Progressive Librarian*, ed. Alison Lewis (Duluth, Minnesota: Library Juice Press, 2008), 97-108.

[66] Gloria Leckie and John Buschman, "Introduction: The Necessity for Theoretically Informed Critique in Library and Information Science (LIS)," in *Critical Theory for Library and Information Science Exploring the Social from across the Disciplines*, ed. Gloria Leckie, Lisa M. Given, and John Buschman (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2010), 16.

[67] Andrew K. Shenton, "Uniting Information Behaviour Research and the Information Professional: Identifying the Key Journals," *Library Review* 59, no. 1 (2010): 9-23, https://doi.org/10.1108/00242531011014655.

[68] Dick, "Epistemological Positions and Library and Information Science"; John M. Budd, "An Epistemological Foundation for Library and Information Science," *The Library Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (1995): 295-318, https://doi.org/10.1086/602799; Dick, "Library and Information Science as a Social Science"; Gary P. Radford and John M. Budd, "We Do Need a Philosophy of Library and Information Science—We're Not Confused Enough: A Response to Zwadlo," *The Library*

drop the "library" from "library and information science," or rally under the "iSchools" banner, a discourse emerged of a profession and discipline suffering an identity crisis.[69] For some, these moves in higher education were seen as further proof that LIS research was drifting away from the world of practice further toward "the often-esoteric value system of a research university."[70] The "void," as Bill Crowley put it, was at times, seemingly "beyond bridging."[71] These debates again frame usefulness and relevance as absolutes, presupposing the uses to which LIS should be put. Approaching these categories relationally, the question that the categories of pure and applied or useful or useless prompt us to consider are "how do we make or judge things to be the one or the other?"[72] What are the games that underpin these taxonomies of value? And can we possibly conceive of a use without pre-empting its possible usefulness?[73]

      As we have outlined, through the regular rehearsal of the research-practice gap, dominant strands of LIS research constitute specific forms of knowledge (and not others) as useful and relevant, essentially splitting off some concerns and activities from others. At this juncture, it is worth considering: to whom is knowledge useful or relevant? For McClure, the target audience for research should be the decision-maker, the manager, the administrator: he states that "the gap between library managers' need for management data to help them resolve problems, and the research community's ability to meet this need must be bridged."[74] Thirty years on, this narrative is regularly rehearsed to reassert the core function of LIS research as to help "libraries and their parent organizations to systematically enhance their business operations, improve programs and services, and better meet the needs of clients."[75] Relevant knowledge is that which

Quarterly 67, no. 3 (1997): 315-321, https://doi.org/10.1086/629965; Jim Zwadlo, "We Don't Need a Philosophy of Library and Information Science: We're Confused Enough Already," *The Library Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (April 1997): 103-121, https://doi.org/10.1086/629928.

[69] John Leslie King, "Identity in the I-School Movement," *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 32, no. 4 (2006): 13-15, https://doi.org/10.1002/bult.2006.1720320406; Shubha D. Patvardhan, Dennis A. Gioia, and Aimee L. Hamilton, "Weathering a Meta-Level Identity Crisis: Forging a Coherent Collective Identity for an Emerging Field," *The Academy of Management Journal* 58, no. 2 (2015): 405-435.

[70] Crowley, "The Control and Direction of Professional Education," 1132.

[71] Crowley, 1131.

[72] Marilyn Strathern, "Useful Knowledge," in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. 139 (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006), 73, https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk /documents/2027/pba139p073.pdf.

[73] Strathern, 103.

[74] McClure, "Increasing the Usefulness of Research for Library Managers," 293.

[75] Nguyen and Hider, "Narrowing the Gap Between LIS Research and Practice in Australia," 4.

measures, enumerates, and compares, allowing the library to be optimized as a site of information and service provision.

As Sara Ahmed notes, "use brings *things* to mind."[76] By evoking use, the gap thesis reflects the idea that research should be a product, an instrument, or a thing, rather than a process. Use, conceived as an implement (a tool, device, or instrument), "refers to speaking about the use of libraries to solve 'concrete, specific tasks' as if one were making use of tools," Fleming-May suggests.[77] This conception of research means its use is instrumental, characterized by a focus on "educational, self-improvement, or practical matters."[78] As such, an "aesthetics of instrumentality" animates the construction and maintenance of the gap: gaps must be filled, walls must be broken down, bridges must be built.[79] In order for knowledge to be relevant, knowledge must be put to use.[80]

MAKING THE LIBRARY USEFUL TO OTHERS

There are some questions that cannot be asked, nor answered, by LIS research constrained by its need to be relevant. Knowledge-making practices embedded in institutional contexts (e.g., professional associations, universities, journals) constitute games of truth, where taxonomies and hierarchies of value harden. This play of power makes the idea of categorizing ways of knowing the library as useful or useless, relevant or irrelevant, a straightforward, unproblematic matter. Crucially, a focus on measuring and optimizing access to information limits understanding of the other key roles the library plays, how the institution shapes—and is shaped by—various social and political dynamics, and the role of libraries in constructing and legitimizing broader power divides in society. Wayne Wiegand has reflected that he could only develop a historical understanding of the social role of libraries "by tapping deeply into non-library and information studies literature that addresses reading and place."[81] A focus on information distracts from the other roles libraries play, reinforcing the "tunnel visions and blind

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[76] Ahmed, *What's the Use?* 6.

[77] Fleming-May, "What Is Library *Use*?" 311.

[78] Fleming-May, 311.

[79] Hirokazu Miyazaki and Annelise Riles, "Failure as an Endpoint," in *Global Assemblages*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), 326, https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470696569.ch17.

[80] Strathern, "Useful Knowledge."

[81] Wayne A. Wiegand, "How Library and Information Studies Research Is Shortchanging Libraries," *Inside Higher Ed* (blog), October 17, 2016, https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/10/17/how-library-and-information-studies-research-shortchanging-libraries-essay.

spots" that Wiegand complained plagued LIS research throughout the twentieth century.[82]

Treating only as relevant that which is within the four walls of the library (or the many screens that library collections are accessed from) also limits understandings of how the library is implicated in larger social, economic, and political processes. This is what Blackburn calls the "micro-perspective" that dominates LIS research. From this vantage point, "consideration of macro-level phenomena like race and power is invisible."[83] However, as an institution, the library clearly influences, and is influenced by, social, political, and economic dynamics. In this regard, widening the scope of inquiry has significant benefits. Daniel Greene's recent book, *The Promise of Access*, is an example of these benefits.[84] Through an ethnography of three institutions in Washington D.C. (a charter school, the public library network, and a tech start-up), Greene explores how these organizations are entangled in, and help constitute, larger political arrangements. These arrangements position access to technology as a solution for urban poverty, or what Greene calls the "access doctrine":

> The access doctrine decrees that the problem of poverty can be solved through the provision of new technologies and technical skills, giving those left out of the information economy the chance to catch up and compete…Schools and libraries threatened by fiscal austerity or accusations of obsolescence embrace the access doctrine as their mission in order to restore their legitimacy, garner much-needed resources, and simplify the host of social problems with which they are confronted daily.[85]

This allows us to see how the public library becomes framed as a "professional space that trained future digital professions," where "patrons could find—through new tools or skills—new opportunities for competition".[86] Likewise, in the Australian context, Wyatt, Leorke, and McQuire show how large public libraries become implicated in the logic of

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[82] Wiegand, "Tunnel Vision and Blind Spots."

[83] Fiona Blackburn, "Cultural Competence: Toward a More Robust Conceptualisation," *Public Library Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (2020): 239, https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2019.1636750.

[84] Daniel Greene, *The Promise of Access: Technology, Inequality, and the Political Economy of Hope* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021). See also Maura Seale, Alison Hicks, and Karen P. Nicholson, "Toward a Critical Turn in Library UX," *College & Research Libraries* 83, no. 1 (2022): 6-24, https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.83.1.6.

[85] Greene, 7.

[86] Greene, 40.

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the "digital economy" and the "creative cities" agenda.[87] As elsewhere, for Australian libraries, "pivoting to the digital era" means reorienting and reinforcing the library as a tourist destination, a site for atomized knowledge workers to base themselves, and a space of enterprise in the "creative city".[88]

Attending to the entanglement of libraries in wider economic and political processes opens up possibilities for seeing how the library influences, and is influenced by, other groups and institutions. If we limit the realm of useful to that produced through rational instrumentality, we can at best seek to measure the effects of wider social, economic, and political processes, remaining blind to their cause and the role of the library in perpetuating or challenging them. Libraries, communities, and other institutions are together entangled in larger economic and political projects. Recognizing our mutual entanglement is not disempowering. With this awareness, we are better equipped to not only understand, but collectively resist its effects.

PROBLEMATIZING THE GAP

As we have outlined, a gap between the supposedly theoretical work of LIS and allied academics and the problem-focused applied research supposedly favored by practitioners is buried deep in the LIS imaginary. The Australian Library and Information Association's recent position paper on the future of LIS research in Australia, appropriately titled *Relevance 2020*, supports the perception that practitioners "assume that research belongs to an ivory tower and is not relevant to practice."[89] The report concludes that "academics and practitioners have different perspectives and expectations (one tends to focus on theoretical aspects while the other wants practical solutions)."[90] Whatever the assumptions regarding divisions within LIS as a discipline of research, it can be countered: within LIS, practitioner researchers have offered the discipline direction in the productive use of theory, and academic researchers have driven projects of practical purpose. For example, interventions by practitioners such as Emily Drabinski, and by academics such as Hope Olson and Melissa Adler in the politics of knowledge organization highlight the contingent and constructed nature of library

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[87] Danielle Wyatt, Dale Leorke, and Scott McQuire, "Pivoting to the Digital Era: State Library Victoria's Redevelopment," *Public Library Quarterly* 40, no. 5 (2020): 406-424, https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2020.1793596.

[88] Wyatt, Leorke, and McQuire, 413.

[89] Nguyen and ALIA, *Relevance 2020*, 7.

[90] Nguyen and ALIA, 20.

classification systems and controlled vocabularies.[91] These contributions highlight the ideological nature of libraries and library systems: they are politics all the way down.[92]

Meanwhile, proponents of the gap thesis effectively silence the work being done to advance a critical and transformative praxis in libraries and allied fields.[93] These perspectives highlight reflexivity and criticality as core values that, while derived from critical theory, are developed and implemented collectively across workplaces, communities, and sites of knowledge production. Worimi archivist and scholar Kirsten Thorpe has suggested that a transformative praxis means taking "a conscious decision to reflect on theory and practice," and collectively building "a reflexive loop for Indigenous community members, practitioners and researchers to work together to expose areas of complexity and to develop pathways for transformation."[94] Rejecting the tendency in the library and archives sector to address "complex problems with practical and temporary solutions," Thorpe suggests that "the complex questions that come into play in library and archive practice need to be considered in relation to theory, and vice versa, [or] a transformation will not come without this dialogue in play." Reinforcing the idea that "academics and practitioners have different perspectives and expectations" effectively

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[91] Hope A. Olson, "The Power to Name: Representation in Library Catalogs," *Signs* 26, no. 3 (2001): 639-668; Melissa Adler and Lindsey M. Harper, "Race and Ethnicity in Classification Systems: Teaching Knowledge Organization from a Social Justice Perspective," *Library Trends* 67, no. 1 (2018): 52-73; Melissa A. Adler, "'Let's Not Homosexualize the Library Stacks': Liberating Gays in the Library Catalog," *Journal of the History of Sexuality; Austin* 24, no. 3 (2015): 478-507, https://doi.org/10.7560/JHS24306; Emily Drabinski, "Queering the Catalog: Queer Theory and the Politics of Correction," *The Library Quarterly* 83, no. 2 (2013): 94-111, https://doi.org/10.1086/669547.

[92] Donna Lanclos refers to the "neoliberal cage of rationality." See Donna M. Lanclos, "Making Space for the 'Irrational' Practice of Anthropology in Libraries," *Canadian Journal of Academic Librarianship / Revue Canadienne de Bibliothéconomie Universitaire* 6 (2020): 1, https://doi.org /10.33137/cjal-rcbu.v6.34621. See also David James Hudson, "The Whiteness of Practicality," in *Topographies of Whiteness: Mapping Whiteness in Library and Information Studies*, ed. Gina Schlesselman-Tarango (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2017), 203-234.

[93] Jodie Boyd and Ian McShane, "The 'Difficult Balance Between Equity and Differentiation': Developing a Transformative Praxis," *Journal of the Australian Library and Information Association* 70, no. 1 (2021): 3-20, https://doi.org/10.1080/24750158.2021.1880357; Kirsten Thorpe, "Transformative Praxis: Building Spaces for Indigenous Self-Determination in Libraries and Archives," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (blog), January 23, 2019, http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2019/transformative-praxis/; J.J. Ghaddar and Michelle Caswell, "'To Go Beyond': Towards a Decolonial Archival Praxis," *Archival Science* 19, no. 2 (2019): 71-85, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-019-09311-1.

[94] Thorpe, "Transformative Praxis."

ignores the important work such as this being done in workplaces, communities, and sites of research to collectively pursue transformation in libraries and across wider society.[95]

The gap also overlooks the multiple communities of practice that we all belong to, many of which converge around the same concerns. Indeed, in our ongoing research on Australia's national and state libraries, we have found many (though by no means all) library workers to be highly reflexive and openly critical about the enduring legacy of colonialism on the institutions in which they are housed, and critical of inequalities in the composition of workforces and collections.[96] Together we have discussed critical theory and have collectively critiqued dominant ways of understanding and accommodating difference. Meanwhile, other library workers who saw the only useful knowledge as that produced by rational instrumentality would often question us on the "usefulness" or "relevance" of our research, questioning the point of critical inquiry to the functioning of their organizations. The point of relaying this is not to debunk the gap as the work of myth, but to question to whom useful knowledge might be useful. As Donna Haraway notes, "knowledge is always *for*…some things and not others."[97] Once we recognize knowledge as inherently situated and partial—always *for*—we are compelled "to cast our lot for some ways of life and not others." "To make a difference in the world," Haraway suggests, "one must be in the action, be finite and dirty, not transcendent and clean."[98]

Lastly, it is not so easy to identify practitioners as perpetrators of myths of library neutrality while simultaneously recognizing the power of the critical librarianship movement within this same body of practitioners. As a movement, critical librarianship seeks to draw alliances across groups of workers and communities to challenge instrumentalist approaches to social justice goals and question the neutrality of library systems, practices, and spaces. Practices of critical librarianship include approaching ethics in library work as a relational process that is navigated and negotiated collectively[99] and the forging of common alliances beyond the boundaries of the library to collectively resist austerity measures.[100] Rather than bridge or fill gaps, these examples surface

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[95] Nguyen and ALIA, *Relevance 2020*, 20.

[96] Jodie Boyd, "I Try… but Do I Succeed?": Representing the Diversity of Australian Culture in the National Library of Australia's Catalog," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 60, no. 6-7 (2022): 536-559, https://doi.org/10.1080/01639374.2022.2089935.

[97] Donna Haraway, "Enlightenment@science_wars.Com: A Personal Reflection on Love and War," *Social Text*, no. 50 (1997): 124, https://doi.org/10.2307/466820.

[98] Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Modest−Witness@Second−Millennium.FemaleMan−Meets −OncoMouse: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 36.

[99] Karen Snow and Beth Shoemaker, "Defining Cataloging Ethics: Practitioner Perspectives," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 58, no. 6 (2020): 533-546, https://doi.org/10.1080 /01639374.2020.1795767.

[100] Andrew Preater, "Widening Participation Praxis and Library Leadership," in *Critical Librarianship: Advances in Library Administration and Organization*, ed. S.S. Hines and D.H.

common conditions and how both theorists and practitioners occupy multiple—and often convergent—communities of practice that weave in and out of the library. Divisions work to keep the critical and transformational work done by both practitioners and theorists elsewhere, discursively separate from the operation of the useful institution. Critical interventions problematize dividing practices and the uses to which they are put, stretching LIS beyond the walls of the library, multiplying, rather than unifying or dividing, the field.

CONCLUSION: OTHER USES OF USE

This article has interrogated the perceived gap between academics and practitioners, between theory and practice, and between thinking and doing, that is constructed and sustained in LIS research and practice. By occupying the gap as a source of discomfort, friction, and possibility, we challenge its underlying assumption that the only useful way to know the library is to enumerate, measure, calibrate, and optimize the library as a neutral vendor of information—that the only useful knowledge is that produced through rational instrumentality. Following Sara Ahmed, we "respond to the problem of instrumentalism not by rejecting the idea of useful knowledge but by calling for knowledge that is *useful to others*, with this "to" being an opening, an invitation, a connection."[101] Adopting a critical praxis means inhabiting use "all the more," using knowledge to advance a mode of living differently, of changing the shape of the world, and of asking, "how to do something, how to be something" in the face of inequality and indifference.[102]

We see three ways to approach the gap thesis—two that continue to slot different ways of knowing the library into hierarchies of value, and another that points to productive possibilities of residing in in-between zones. The first—dividing LIS research and practice—is likely to serve hegemony rather than challenge it, limiting possibilities for collective action. Second—uniting the field—is a zero-sum game, cleaving off some activities from others. Multiplying the field, however, recognizes that we have never been singular: both theorists and practitioners occupy multiple and often convergent communities of practice that challenge mutually exclusive categorization. With this in mind, we might put forward an alternative mode of understanding "use" in LIS research practice: as a collective resource that we draw upon to challenge inequalities, to understand and repair past wrongs and continued silences, and to challenge the role of

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Ketchum, vol. 41 (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2020), 21-40, https://doi.org /10.1108/S0732-067120200000041003.

[101] Ahmed, *What's the Use?* 222.

[102] Ahmed, 222–223.

libraries and other institutions in constructing and legitimizing broader power divides in society. These, we suggest, are gaps worth challenging.

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