Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Public Libraries

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Association of Connecticut Library Boards
February 28, 2024

Terms & Concepts

Systemic/Structural Racism

A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. It identifies dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with “whiteness” and disadvantages associated with “color” to endure and adapt over time. Structural racism is not something that a few people or institutions choose to practice. Instead it has been a feature of the social, economic and political systems in which we all exist.

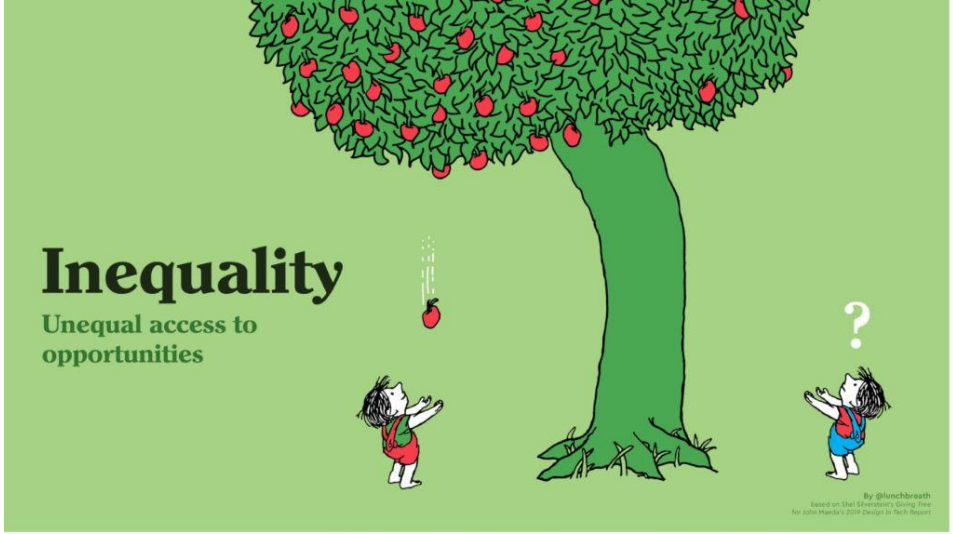
- Aspen Institute

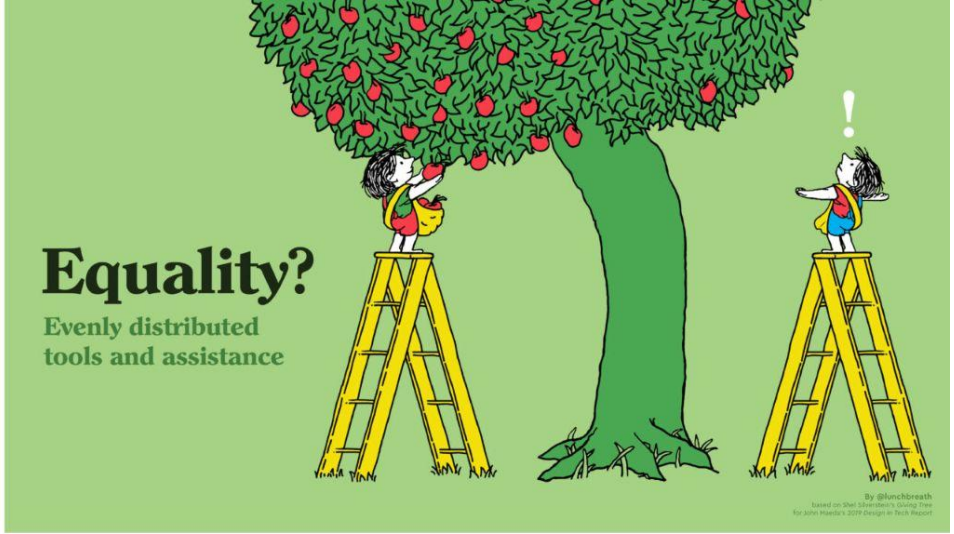
Marginalized Identities

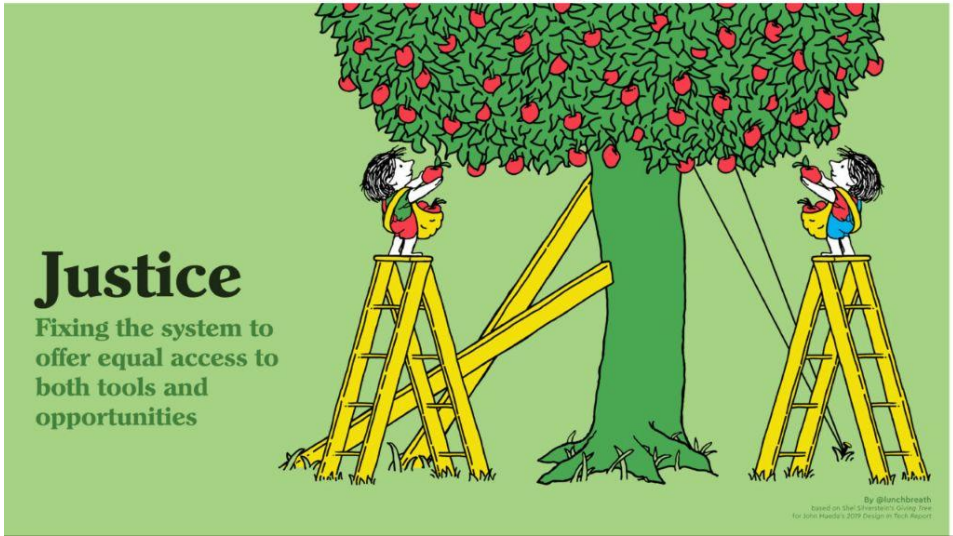
Marginalization is a social process by which individuals or groups are (intentionally or unintentionally) distanced from access to power and resources and constructed as insignificant, peripheral, or less valuable/privileged to a community or “mainstream” society. This term describes a social process, so as not to imply a lack of agency. Marginalized groups or people are those excluded from mainstream social, economic, cultural, or political life.

- University of British Columbia

What is the difference between equality and equity?







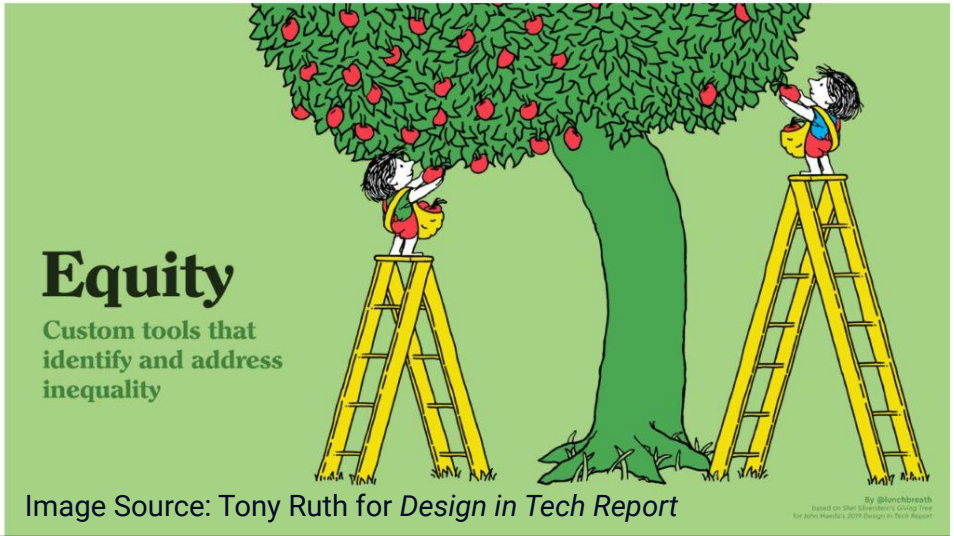


Image Source: Tony Ruth for *Design in Tech Report*

Privilege

Unearned social power accorded by the formal and informal institutions of society to ALL members of a dominant group (e.g. white privilege, male privilege, etc.). Privilege is usually invisible to those who have it because we're taught not to see it, but nevertheless it puts them at an advantage over those who do not have it.

- Colours of Resistance Archive

Implicit Bias

Also known as unconscious or hidden bias, implicit biases are negative associations that people unknowingly hold. They are expressed automatically, without conscious awareness. Many studies have indicated that implicit biases affect individuals' attitudes and actions, thus creating real-world implications, even though individuals may not even be aware that those biases exist within themselves. Notably, implicit biases have been shown to trump individuals' stated commitments to equality and fairness, thereby producing behavior that diverges from the explicit attitudes that many people profess.

- Kirwan Institute

Anti-racism

Anti-Racism is defined as the work of actively opposing racism by advocating for changes in political, economic, and social life.

- Race Forward

Are libraries by nature equitable, anti-racist institutions?

The GARE Report: The Case of Library Fines

Interpersonal Racism may play a role when library staff apply subjective criteria to enforcement of library policies. In the case of library fines, staff decide whether to renew a lost item to give the patron more time, mark it as “claims returned” or waive charges. These decisions are largely based upon staff judgement where implicit bias may play a role.

Institutional Racism is present when a library’s enforcement of fines has a disproportionate impact on people of color, who are overrepresented among low-income populations due to the racial wealth gap.

Structural Racism exists whenever libraries rely on revenue from fines to cover general operating expenses. To the extent that people have difficulty paying these fines, negative consequences (e.g., being blocked from library and computer use, or being reported to a collections agency) are compounded across multiple institutions, contributing to systemic barriers.

***Advancing Racial Equity in Public Libraries*, Government Alliance on Race & Equity (GARE)**

What can libraries do?

EASY: Policies & Procedures

- Go fine free
- Review and change hiring practices
- Make intentional decisions about collection development, programming, publicity, and displays
- Normalize pronoun-sharing

HARD:
Educate & Engage Staff

- Ongoing, engaging professional development that promotes discussion
- Incorporating a commitment to DEI into staff policy
- Requiring a DEI commitment from new hires
- Training in implicit bias awareness and conflict management

HARDER: Educate the Community

- Host public conversations on race
- Make community education on race and inclusion a priority

HARDEST: Drive Community Change

- Be a convener. Create opportunities for community stakeholders and leaders to engage in the work
- Take a stand. Be open about your desire to create change

What three things can you do in the next six months?

Library Board

Support change.

Advocate for funding to support staff development and other initiatives.

Defend the library when challenges arise.

Library Administration

Invest in training.

Be prepared for threats of loss of funding, vandalism, and violence.

Prepare and protect frontline staff.

Library Staff

Learn. Read, attend webinars, and self-paced e-learning.

Speak up to your administration and colleagues about the importance of this work.

Watch your bias when interacting with the public.

Debunking Myths

MYTH:
Libraries are supposed to be neutral
(a.k.a. anti-racist work is political partisanship)

MYTH:
This is a short-term initiative

MYTH:
This is a great PR opportunity for the library

Resources

Advancing Racial Equity in Public Libraries | Government Alliance on Race & Equity (GARE)

Racial Equity Tool | Equity in the Center

Implicit Association Test (IAT) | Project Implicit, Harvard University

Racial Justice & Equity Resource Guide | Wallingford Public Library

National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ)

Drakes and Burton Consulting

Sources

11 Terms You Should Know to Better Understand Structural Racism | The Aspen Institute

Equity and Inclusion Glossary of Terms | University of British Columbia Equity & Inclusion Office

Colours of Resistance Archive

Implicit Bias Module Series | Kirwan Institute

Race Reporting Guide | Race Forward. (2015)

Once More for Those in the back: Libraries Are Not Neutral | Publishers Weekly

Thank You!

Contact

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