Intersectionality and Interdisciplinarity: Information Studies and Studies of the ‘Other’

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Although long under-emphasized in information research and education, information studies (IS) has an increasing interest in the “Other.” By Others we refer to those groups that are subordinated or excluded from dominant society or culture(s), and have been organized into particular categories of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class and development, among others. This roundtable discussion aims to examine the ways in which information studies and other fields that study the Other, such as ethnic studies, queer studies, women’s studies, area studies, among others, engage in intellectual discourse, scholarship and education to enhance research and learning. The World Café conversational process will be used to guide the discussion. “The World Café is an innovative yet simple methodology for hosting conversations about questions that matter. These conversations link and build on each other as people move between groups, cross-pollinate ideas, and discover new insights into the questions or issues that are most important in their life, work, or community.” (Source: http://www.theworldcafe.com/) The two main questions, which frame the discussion are: (1) have points of intersectionality been explored and identified to address issues of equity of information access? and (2) has information studies developed an interdisciplinary relationship with any of these fields?

For the purpose of the discussion we will use the following working definitions: 

“Intersectionality” refers to the fact that human identity is indivisible and that the struggle against one form of oppression (such as heterosexism/ homophobia/ lesbophobia/ biphobia/ transphobia) cannot in practice be separated from the many other struggles that members of our communities are engaged in (such as struggles against sexism, ableism, racism, or economic disadvantage). To address oppression effectively, it must be addressed holistically.” (Egale Intersections Committee, 2002 http://www.egale.ca/index.asp?lang=E&menu=40&item=302)

“Multidisciplinarity is a recognition of disciplines working together without integrating their professional or scholarly assumptions or epistemologies. In contrast, "interdisciplinarity" will be used to refer to two or more disciplines that do develop a shared research or subject content interest and integrate to some degree their methodological and conceptual view of the other disciplines in their shared efforts.” (Weech, 2007)

Related questions that will be explored are: Which relationships exist and how did they originate? Are they uni- or bi-directional? What research or programmatic initiatives exist? How are they funded? Which iSchools have faculty, programmatic initiatives or mandated curriculum that enable interdisciplinarity between the above fields? The session will conclude by identifying the benefits and challenges of interdisciplinarity and intersectional exploration between information studies and studies of the “Other” for their respective scholarship and education and in addressing the “isms” in society.