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Article abstract

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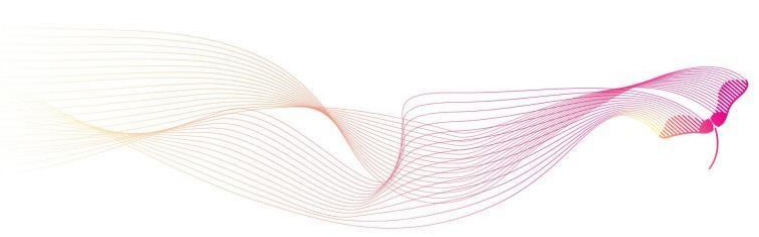
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Is the library for “every body”? Examining fatphobia in library spaces through online library furniture catalogues

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Abstract: Despite Library and Information Science’s engagement with other matters of social justice, nearly no scholarly attention has been paid to fat issues within the library. Through the critical lens of the author’s own experiences as a fat Library and Information Science scholar, a critical discourse analysis of online library furniture catalogues reveals the exclusionary ways in which they perpetuate fatphobic body size standards. Given that library spaces are often considered a cornerstone of modern democratic societies, and that librarianship claims to champion ideals such as universal access to information, the exclusion of fat bodies in library spaces is problematic.

Keywords: Fat Studies, fatphobia, library spaces, library furniture, democracy

Résumé : Malgré l’engagement du domaine de la bibliothéconomie et des sciences de l’information vis-à-vis d’autres questions de justice sociale, presque qu’aucune attention académique n’a été accordée aux enjeux des personnes grosses en bibliothèque. À travers la vision critique de l’auteur, basée sur ses expériences personnelles en tant que chercheur gros en bibliothéconomie et sciences de l’information, une analyse critique du discours des catalogues en ligne de mobilier de bibliothèque met en lumière les moyens d’exclusion par lesquels ils perpétuent les normes de taille corporelle grossophobes. Étant donné que les espaces de bibliothèque sont souvent considérés comme une pierre angulaire des sociétés démocratiques modernes, et que la bibliothéconomie prétend défendre des idéaux tels que l’accès universel à l’information, l’exclusion des personnes grosses dans les espaces de bibliothèque est problématique.

Mots clés : *Fat Studies*, grossophobie, espaces de bibliothèque, mobilier de bibliothèque, démocratie

In the library spaces in which I inhabit, my fatness rubs up on things frequently: most often chairs in meeting rooms, at service desks, in private working spaces, and also in narrow shelving arrangements. As if on cue in these situations, I immediately begin to berate myself. *This wasn't meant for you, you fat fuck. You've reached the limits of how much society can tolerate your size!* This is usually followed by internal negotiations and questioning. *How long can I stand this chair arm digging intensely into my side? Why in the hell do these chair arms narrow in at the legs? Perhaps if I can manage to sit right on the very edge of the chair, but then you'll be in the way, so be prepared to move!* These small interactions with library spaces and furniture are not all-encompassing in my working library career, but they do occur. Their power to signal my lack of belonging in that space could not be clearer. I cannot help but blame myself for the body that I find myself in (my own internalized fatphobia). Nevertheless, I find myself thrown into a reality that is unable to tolerate me. *How can I make myself as small as I can? As invisible as I can?*

In my working career, finding a decent chair to conduct my work in my own space and for group work in meeting rooms is particularly frustrating for me. I loathe the awkwardness and shame of having to make separate arrangements for myself, or to wait while a kind colleague fetches an armless chair from down the hallway, or to instead bear hard chair arms digging into my thighs or torso. *Why can't I just be like everyone else?* I share my sad internal dialogue here in the tradition of other Fat Studies scholars wherein I seek to situate and contextualize this early study of fatness in library spaces through my own lived experiences of being fat (e.g., Bovey 1989; Wann 1998; Murray 2005). However, I will not be offering an in-depth autoethnography of my own fatness in library spaces. I include my experiences in this article because they illustrate the position from which I am engaging in this research. Writing on qualitative research, Palys and Atchison (2008) assert that "validity requires intimacy" (10). Therefore, my fatness provides a perspective through which I can interrogate library spaces and make visible the unconscious fatphobia that is present in libraries in both public and staff spaces. This viewpoint is not always evident to people and scholars who have never been forced to be fat in spaces that were not designed for them. I want to make it very evident that this is a real and present issue in my life and in the lives of other fat people. Libraries are far from the only places where fatphobia exists, but I seek to investigate and challenge this form of discrimination in the sphere—libraries, librarianship, and the academic discipline of Library and Information Science—where I have expertise and influence.

Through their graduate education, librarians are indoctrinated into the ideals of librarianship. Indeed, this is one of the things that librarians profess the master's degree in library science gives them above all else (Garcia and Barbour 2018). In North American libraries, one of the most powerful and enduring ideals is the belief that libraries should strive to offer people universal access to information (Bivens-Tatum 2006; Birdsall 2006/07). Moreover, this belief is part of a commitment to democratic ideals. Following in the tradition of the Enlightenment and the modern age, it is espoused that freely available access aids in the edification of an empowered democratic citizen who is knowledgeable and capable of reasoned arguments. Public

and academic libraries function as public institutions, publicly funded organizations, and public spaces, and therefore are a natural extension of democratic ideals. They have become a sacred civic site and a so-called cornerstone for democracy (Kranich 2020). Librarians, as their inhabitants, are the vanguards and servants of this democratic mission.

Libraries' democratic mission has also led them to engage with social issues facing their communities (Kranich 2020). Librarians and libraries are frequently taking up matters of social justice, especially interrogating the ways in which their services and resources are less accessible to individuals affected by inequalities due to racialization, sex, gender and romantic orientations, disability, and socio-economic class. Advocacy for fat bodies and against fatphobia has been largely absent from these endeavours. A primary goal of this paper is to encourage including fatphobia as a further matter of social justice that should be addressed by Library and Information Science (LIS) and the profession of librarianship. Given LIS's wide and active engagement with matters of social justice, it is surprising that virtually no scholarship or activism has been championed by this community except for two articles (one older and one more recent). Angell and Price (2012) discuss the representation of fat people in the Library of Congress Classification while Versluis, Agostino, and Cassidy (2020) examine the performance of fat femininity for fat female librarians. These articles provide some initial evidence that fatphobia, broadly defined as the fear of fatness or fat people, is present in our library work, our library spaces, and in our information organization schemes.

As my own story of fatness in library spaces suggests, I am concerned that libraries are ill-prepared to serve, support, or provide equal access for their fat users, and that this issue has not yet been adequately addressed in LIS scholarship. This article offers an early critique of fatphobia in library spaces in an attempt to introduce a fat-centred approach to looking at library spaces. Given the cost and time difficulties of performing in-person observational studies of library spaces, this study instead examines the objects which occupy library spaces: library furniture. This article offers a critical discourse analysis of online library furniture catalogues that may be used by library professionals to create their physical library spaces. The analysis rests on an assumption informed by the principle of transitive properties; that library furniture should embody and service librarianship's democratic principle of universal access. Therefore, I examine the language that the catalogues use when body shape, body size, bodily comfort, and fatness are mentioned, either explicitly (directly mentioned) or implicitly (examining what is "left unsaid").

Ultimately, the questions that this research addresses are: 1) what do library furniture catalogues say about fat bodies in library spaces; and 2) what implications does this discourse have for libraries as democratic spaces? This article first provides a brief literature review that includes a general introduction to Fat Studies, fat-related work in the LIS-adjacent field of higher education, as well as a résumé of the two LIS articles on fatphobia mentioned above. Next, I present the procedure for the critical discourse analysis that I followed to conduct the study. The literature review and methodology are followed by results and discussion sections that incorporate some of the main concerns and findings of other Fat Studies scholars. I intend to demonstrate

how my results illuminate ways that these concerns are unfortunately evident in library contexts. Throughout the article, I speak about and refer to libraries generally as the context of concern for two reasons: first, because the library catalogues I examined catered their products to most types of libraries including school (K-12) libraries, public libraries, and academic libraries; and second, because indoctrination into the ideals of librarianship is nearly universal in LIS graduate education and achieved through the influence of the American Library Association's accreditation process.

Literature review

An introduction to Fat Studies

While there have been studies examining weight issues for decades, Fat Studies as an independent area of scholarship started to make a distinct name for itself in the early 2000s. Fat Studies is situated within the larger intellectual traditions of critical social studies and post-structuralist critical theory. Like its intellectual cousins such as women's and feminist studies, queer studies, critical disability studies, and critical race studies, Fat Studies aims to critique the social structures and personal worldviews that perpetuate inequality and oppression. Solovay and Rothblum (2009) define Fat Studies as a "field of scholarship marked by an aggressive, consistent, rigorous critique of the negative assumptions, stereotypes, and stigma placed on fat and the fat body" (2). Speaking more to social conditions in their definition, Rothblum (2011) later defines Fat Studies as a "field of scholarship that critically examines societal attitudes about body weight and appearance, and that advocates equality for all people with respect to body size" (1). As fat and fatness impacts gender, race, ability, and class (among other factors), Fat Studies is necessarily interdisciplinary (Solovay and Rothblum 2009; Harjunen 2009) as well as intersectional (Watkins, Farrell, and Doyle Hugmeyer 2012).

As a broad field of study, Fat Studies opposes the "dominant obesity discourse where fatness is perceived as problematic and dangerous" (Brown 2016, 201). To combat this discourse, Fat Studies seeks to give a voice to the lived experience of fat people (Owen 2008) who have been marginalized by the West's Eurocentric, patriarchal, cis heteronormative, and thin-obsessed society. Fat Studies also seeks to reclaim the word "fat" (Schroeder 1992) from its negative connotations as a mean taunt and seeks to positively affirm fat identity (Saguy and Ward 2011). In addition to its larger political aims, the field also seeks to empower fat individuals.

Scholars under the Fat Studies umbrella have examined a variety of social and cultural phenomena related to fatness. This literature has taken historical and regional approaches to cultural views on fatness (Farrell 2011) and has tackled the societal obsession with body size particularly evident in popular media (Bordo 2004). Much scholarship has been dedicated to the medicalization of fatness and its construction as a public health crisis, as a disease (Campos et al. 2006; Kwan and Graves 2013; Brown 2016), and on the fatphobia present in current medical practice leading to negative physical and mental health outcomes for fat people (Chrisler and Barney 2017). Another prominent trend in scholarship is detailing how fatness intersects with race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Both Pausé (2014) and Prohaska and Gailey (2019)

have examined the intersectional nature of the fat experience and how fatphobia compounds issues already faced by marginalized peoples. As mentioned above, scholarship and empirical studies of fatness center and present the experiences of fat people, which have been collected through qualitative means. Some recent examples include McPhail et al. (2016) who looked at fat women's experiences seeking reproductive medical attention; Wrenn (2017) who examined the experiences of fat vegans in online spaces; and Taylor (2018) who looked closely at the experiences of fat, queer women performing their femininity.

While there has been other work in the field of Fat Studies, this literature review seeks to briefly introduce the field and its goals to situate my own study. Readers looking for a more in-depth analysis of the field as a whole and the scholarship being performed under its umbrella should see Cooper (2010) as well as *The Fat Studies Reader* (Solovay and Rothblum 2009).

Fat Studies in higher education

In addition to the growing number of articles on fat pedagogy (see Cameron and Russell 2016), there has been a growth in scholarship on the experiences of fat individuals in education, particularly higher education. A brief review of the literature in this area provides a bridge from the broad introduction of Fat Studies presented in the previous section to the fat issues in LIS that will follow. As allied fields, education and LIS share similar concerns like teaching and learning, effective learning spaces, educational materials, and the construction of a well-informed citizenry. Thematically, one can separate the literature that explores the experiences of fat individuals in higher education into studies of students and learners and those that concern faculty and employees.

The literature concerning students involves students' experiences with classroom furniture. Hetrick and Attig (2009) present an evocative examination of classroom desks and chairs and how they function on an educational institution's behalf to not only shape students' minds intellectually, but also to shape their bodies by promoting a homogeneously-sized student population; a message enacted through violently rigid and unforgiving furniture. Heather Brown's (2012) dissertation also speaks to the manipulation of fat student identity as it is experienced in the classroom setting. She reports on students who are hyper body conscious because of their fatness who must constantly negotiate their sense of self in relation to the size privileges enjoyed by other students in the classroom and navigate their experiences of their own disparaged bodies (Brown 2012). In a later study, Brown (2018) focuses on fat female learners. Again, identity manipulation through environmental factors and social shame impacts research participants' construction of themselves as learners in the classroom (Brown 2018). Her participants reported that the fatphobia they experienced caused them to question their value as learners and the "validity of their assertions and their right to belong on campus, especially when they felt they were being judged as bodies rather than as learners" (Brown 2018, 14). Optimistically, regardless of the negativity that was experienced by the fat learners, each of these studies also spoke to the resistance that

authors and research participants were mounting against fatphobia through use of their fat bodies as sites of education and activism.

Faculty and employees in higher education are other key groups explored by research within Fat Studies. Among this area of scholarship there is less focus on classroom furniture and greater attention to the working conditions and the identities of fat instructors and higher education employees. A central result of the work in this area is that fat faculty members and employees are perceived as less credible, knowledgeable, and competent by their peers due to their weight (Fisanick 2006; Tischner and Malson 2008) and subsequently face discrimination in the promotion and tenure process (Fisanick 2006). Another central observation is that faculty and employees report being body shamed, verbally abused, and subjected to microaggressions. Hunt and Rhodes (2018) report such activities in various contexts within higher education: student affairs, residence life, and enrollment management. Heath's (2021) dissertation also highlights this prejudice faced by fat employees and notes a lack of resources and support provided to fat individuals, prompting them to consider leaving employment in higher education. Senyonga (2019) provides an intersectional perspective to this body of literature as a black, fat, queer, and femme woman. She writes about how "Black fat women and femmes have been positioned as the antithesis of human" (Senyonga 2019, 222) experiencing oppression along multiple avenues. Despite this attention to dehumanization and oppression, Senyonga's writing is inspirational in its liberatory aims as she writes about using her fat body as a site of critical reflection, education, and disruption. Finally, Cameron (2016) takes a meta-approach to the educational Fat Studies literature and looks at Fat Studies scholars, the challenges they face, and ways they are coming together as a group to cope with these challenges. The current study builds upon the scholarship of fat individuals' experiences with classroom furniture while offering insight into a new but allied context: the library.

Fat Studies in LIS

As I mentioned above, there have been only two studies that have addressed fat issues in LIS. Given the paucity of work with little to link them together, they tackle fat issues in LIS in very different ways. Angell and Price (2012) consider how fatness is represented within the Library of Congress Classification (LCC) scheme. Their article adds to the corpus of other similar works seeking to make visible the ways in which libraries' most widely used knowledge organization tools misrepresent, insult, or invalidate non-white, non-male, non-straight, non-European, non-Christian peoples and knowledge. Angell and Price examine the classifications assigned to books on a Fat Studies bibliography. They discover that the LCC medicalized nearly all of them and report:

Thus, out of all of the fat studies/fat politics titles reviewed, none of them qualified as a social science ([Class] H) in the eyes of LC. The vast majority of the titles were lumped into [Class] R—a decidedly problematic move, as this specific act of classification essentially medicalizes a social and political movement. (Angell and Price 2012, 159)

Class R is Medicine and most of the books fell into the subclasses of RA (public aspects of medicine), RC (internal medicine), and RM (therapeutics, pharmacology). The authors note that this medicalization of fatness is problematic because “people often accept the existence of information and its organization as apolitical and inherent” (Angell and Price 2012, 156). So, by classifying the majority of these works as medical works when they are not (they are works of social science), the LCC presents or creates a reality for both library workers and users where fatness is *uniquely* a medical problem and not a larger socio-cultural phenomenon. Nor does this classification trend contribute to fostering a reality that validates and seeks to address the personal, political, economic, and cultural issues around body size and the stigmatization of larger bodies.

Versluis, Agostino, and Cassidy (2020) contribute the more recent addition to this nascent area of scholarship within LIS. Their article is a labour-focused approach to fatness in libraries. Specifically, they unpack the labour required of fat female academic librarians to present themselves as qualified experts to both their faculty peers as well to students. They observe that “academia ascribes traits of intelligence, confidence, and competency to normative (male) bodies” (Versluis, Agostino, and Cassidy 2020, 68). Thus, to more closely align with this standard, fat female academic librarians must not only invisibilize the feminized service-based aspects of librarianship (and attempt to legitimize themselves as a “real” academic or faculty peer), they must also attempt to invisibilize their fat bodies. They must attempt to perform having a normative body while simultaneously regulating feelings of not belonging in these academic and library spaces, which have not been prepared or designed for their fat bodies. Versluis, Agostino, and Cassidy end their article with a call for more work that addresses issues related to fatness in LIS. The present study is situated as another early foray into this examination of fatness within LIS.

Methodology

Critical discourse analysis

This article takes a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach to the question of how library furniture catalogues and the furniture they sell make a statement about and discuss bodies. This approach was chosen because, as Van Dijk (1995) notes, CDA is a theory and method that is problem and issue-orientated within social spheres that interrogate “power, dominance, and inequality” (18). CDA examines the discourse (i.e., language, communications, messages) as carriers of particular meaning that is, in turn, a larger reflection of the social relationships in which these conversations appear. Again, according to Van Dijk, CDA not only incorporates the study of explicit written language but “pays attention to all levels and dimensions of discourse” and “other semiotic dimensions of communicative events,” (18) which can include implicit messages or meanings which are not specifically “uttered.”

The examination of language is a predominant method of investigation and analysis in Fat Studies. Brown (2016) notes that “fat studies scholars pay a significant amount of attention to language” (203) and the way that it constructs fatness, size, and bodies. Following from its problem or issue-orientation, CDA is necessarily political, which makes it consistent with the goals of the current study to highlight and make

changes to library accessibility policies and practices for planning library spaces that are greatly informed by my own experiences as a fat person. Additionally, CDA maintains “an overall perspective of solidarity with dominated groups” (Van Dijk 1995, 18), and in that vein, I stand in solidarity with my fellow Fat Studies scholars attempting to reveal unconscious fatphobia in our societies.

I followed guidelines on conducting CDA studies by Fairclough (2001). His steps include (1) focusing on a problem that contains a semiotic act, which in this case is the existence of implicit or explicit fatphobia in library furniture catalogues; (2) identifying obstacles to the problem being tackled, here meaning the often unconscious nature of fatphobia itself and the long histories of body shaming and medicalizing fatness; (3) considering whether society “needs” this problem to be resolved for its proper functioning, the affirmative of which is suggested in the literature review through the experiences of fat people; (4) identifying ways past obstacles to fulfilling the goals of the CDA, which here means providing description to interpretive obstacles I faced; and (5), relatedly, reflecting critically on the steps enumerated here to contextualize the knowledge that I am creating through this study.

Procedure

I approached this research task from the perspective of a librarian seeking to design a physical library space. I used the Google search engine to search for the string “library furniture” to identify businesses that use an online presence to sell library furniture. These businesses were confirmed as legitimate by verifying their addresses and visually confirming their physical presence as an operating business with the help of Google Maps. I decided to exclude large “big box” stores (e.g., Staples, Walmart, Wayfair) from my study. While in theory those stores also sell furniture online that could be used in library spaces, I limited my selection to “boutique” library furniture stores that branded or promoted themselves as purveyors of library furniture. Focusing on furniture retailers who specifically target libraries served to maintain the assumption of the transitive property of library furniture carrying librarianship’s values. The initial search revealed ten possible stores. However, I excluded two stores from the original results as I specifically wanted to prioritize library chairs and seating as this type of furniture needs to hold people’s weight (desks and tables do not bear human weight in the same respect). The two excluded stores only sold library shelving and tables. I also excluded desks and chairs sold together as a “combo” unless it was a single, free-standing unit (like a chair with a desk physically attached). While I did not purposefully intend to do so, the analysis is limited to a North American context because the search results only revealed companies established in Canada and the United States that met the criteria. The library furniture stores included in the study catered to a variety of needs; none of the companies suggested that they exclude types of libraries from their target sales demographic. Most catered to specific furniture needs (e.g., seating geared towards children’s areas and classrooms) as well as more general library furniture needs (e.g., for open tabled-and-chaired spaces, semi-private spaces like study carrels, event spaces, and staff spaces).

I constructed a data collection document in a word processor to facilitate evidence gathering (such as direct quotes and measurements) and for notetaking. I

visited each online catalogue's website and examined their chair products landing pages, counted the total number of chair products, and noted how many products had arms. After the landing pages, I examined the individual product pages and noted the weight loads and seat dimensions of chairs when provided, as well as any other features or language used by the vendors or chair manufacturers to describe the products. I then looked at each catalogue's "About Us" page and their home page from header to footer, as well as any other page that seemed relevant, again looking for any explicit or implied mention of bodies, sizes, or weights. I also made notes on the catalogue's navigation structure if it affected the visibility of information about size for the consumer. After collecting all the data in the word processing document along with my initial notes, I reorganized all of this data for ease of performing another round of analysis (such as collecting all of the weight loads together, all of the seat dimensions together, and all of the language together) to better identify larger themes or conclusions.

Findings

Weight load reporting

Can I sit on this without breaking it? Weight load reporting is important because it can provide information about whether a chair product is designed for a fat person. Only four of the eight companies provided weight loads in the specifications for their individual chair products. Of the four companies that remained, there was inconsistency in the placement on the website of these product specifications. The weight loads were often placed one or more clicks deep in the navigation structure launching from an individual product's page. They were not always present on the screen with other product features such as physical dimensions or materials. Two companies had these specifications in a downloadable PDF catalogue, which again would require consumers to search out this information specifically.

The companies studied provided a wide variety of chair products from folding chairs to upholstered lounge seating. For those companies that did report weight loads, there were a variety of weight loads that were reported for their products. Folding chairs professed a weight load ranging from 150 to 165 lbs (68 to 75 kg). Other chairs made typically of wood, plastic, metal, or combinations thereof had various loads ranging from 250 to 500 lbs (113 to 227 kg). The most commonly reported weight loads were in the 250 to 300 lbs (113 to 136 kg) range. One company (Company 8) did have an "Oversize" section of library chairs that included chair products that supported the higher end of the range listed above, typically 480 to 500 lbs (218 to 227 kg).

Seat dimension reporting

I hope this chair is wide enough for my butt. All but one company reported seat dimensions for their products (the one that did not also did not report weight limits). However, all companies did note the total physical volume of their chair products (i.e., total height and depth of the chair), likely for shipping and storage considerations. The companies' products contained a large variety of different seat dimensions with most chairs offering seats 17 to 19 inches wide and 17 to 25 inches deep. Table 1

demonstrates the variety of seat dimensions offered at the lower end of the range. Tables report width by depth in inches and fractions reported in the original documents were converted to decimals. For ease of metric conversion, 1 inch is 2.5 cm. It may be difficult to visualize these seat dimensions, and thus fully understand the implications of what it might mean to inhabit those seats. Therefore, I have provided measurements of some common seats that many people will have experience inhabiting to help them imagine the experience of this seat for a person who weighs twice as much as they do. An economy class airplane seat is usually 17 or 18 inches wide, depending on the airline (SeatGuru n.d.). Industry standards of public transit buses place average seats at 17.5 inches wide (Groark 2005). A typical elongated toilet seat is 14 inches wide by 16 inches deep (Plumbingsupply.com n.d.), while a folding theatre auditorium seat is typically 20 to 22 inches wide (Theatre Projects 2010).

16.25 x 16.25	16 x 14.5	16.25 x 16	17 x 20.5	17.5 x 17.5	17.25 x 15.5	17.75 x 16.75
17.75 x 16.75	18 x 20.5	18.25 x 17.75	18.25 x 18.25	18.25 x 21.5	18.38 x 20.38	18.75 x 20.5

Table 1: "Lower end" seat dimensions

The majority of seat dimensions fall in the lower end of this range demonstrating what the companies believe constitutes an average, usual body. Whether or not they realize it, these companies help determine and reinforce what a normative body looks like. Anything beyond this is considered extraordinary. Seat dimensions that met or exceeded 19 inches wide were considered "generous...to accommodate a wide range of body types" by one company. This generosity of seating space is marketed as one of the product's features on its page, making it distinct from other products. This term was used in an individual product's specification and was not a browsable category; therefore, it had to be discovered serendipitously. Table 2 demonstrates some of the seat widths that exceeded 19 inches.

19 x 19	19 x 19.5	19 x 25	19.75 x 21.63	20 x 18
20 x 21.68	20 x 22.75	20.38 x 20.88	21.3 x 20.9	21.5 x 23

Table 2: "Generous" and greater seat dimensions

Table 3 displays the seat dimensions that exceeded 22 inches wide that were considered "oversize" by Company 8. These seat sizes were available in their specially delimited "oversize" section in their online catalogue.

22 x 23	23 x 23.75	24 x 24
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24 x 35	26 x 26.5	26.5 x 21.5
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Table 3: "Oversize" and greater seat dimensions

These seat dimensions reveal that there is no consistent definition of what it means to provide an "oversized" seat for an individual. There remains a difference of 7 inches between the width of the smallest "generous" seat and the largest "oversize" seat. While the presence of a delimited oversize section by Company 8 is helpful insofar as they actually provide products designed for people who weigh more than the average person, it would be far easier to simply design all products so that they may be universally used by any body.

Portion of chair inventory possessing arms

Please, let there be a chair without arms in this room that I can sit in. Armrests are exclusively designed for the comfort of average sized people. By their design, chairs possessing arms limit the amount of body that can fit on that chair. Larger bodies have to squeeze into these spaces and often experience discomfort with armrests digging into their legs, hips, or torsos. An armless chair, even if it is not specifically designed for a fat person, allows the body to not be constricted by chair arms meant for normative-sized individuals and room to spread one's legs open for comfort. Table 4 shows a table of the amount of chair products that are sold by the eight companies and how many of their chair products possess arms.

Company	Total Number of Chair Products	Number of Chair Products Without Arms	Number of Chair Products With Arms	% of Total Chair Products with Arms
Company 1	67	49	18	26.8
Company 2	9	9	0	0
Company 3	45	31	14	31.1
Company 4	40	36	4	10
Company 5	5	3 (optional 5)	2 (optional 0)	40 (optional 0)
Company 6	42	40	2	4
Company 7	3	3	0	0
Company 8	217	174	43	19

Table 4: Count and percentage of armed chairs by company

The analysis of the library furniture catalogues shows that the majority of chairs sold by these companies were without arms. The greater availability of armless chairs increases the likelihood that they will be selected for use in library spaces. However, it remains

incumbent upon the librarian choosing the furniture within a space to recognize that armed chairs are a potential accessibility issue and to ensure that there is a mix or selection of seating available in public and staff spaces. Armed chairs do, in fact, accommodate other types of disability or impairment for those needing support to help the body move, lift, and rest. This finding is not meant to support the banishment of all armed chairs, but to help a designing librarian realize that offering an easy and accessible choice, whether armed or unarmed, means more dignity for people who are shamefully forced to leave the room or sit on the floor as a self-made accommodation.

Language and values

You're out of place here. I examined the language used in the online furniture catalogues to see if espoused library values extend to library furniture. First, all the library furniture catalogues except one used the descriptor of "library" when classifying the furniture that they were selling. The one exception marketed their chairs as "learning centre" chairs. This company marketed their products towards school libraries in particular and so chose a more inclusive language that would not limit customers to believing the products were uniquely for libraries. Four companies also specifically mentioned library chairs as their classifying category, while the other four used the more generic descriptor of library furniture. I believe that there is a greater expectation for companies who use the word "library" in their furniture marketing to be aligned with the goals and values of librarianship.

More specifically, the language that was used in self-described "About Us" values statements demonstrated that these furniture supply companies used language reflecting user-centeredness and community-orientation to attempt to directly connect their business with librarianship by claiming similar values. More than any other statement, these companies asserted that they could help libraries understand their users better than could librarians by themselves. Furthermore, it would be the company's services and products that would ultimately allow the library to create their physical library space. For example, Company 5 noted that they "ha[ve] the expertise, innovation, and practical product base to provide you with a modern library solution suited for your needs." Again, this language creates an assumption that the company's services and products will meet the universal goals that the library possesses. Similarly, regarding community-orientated statements, Company 1 wrote "we're committed to strengthening the fabric of our community," which also suggests that their products and practices are actually dedicated to this end.

The question that remains from looking at these statements is whether they are meant to be truly universal, and aligned with librarianship's values, or if they are merely a product of generic branding and marketing tactics? Do the companies ignore the fact that fat people use library spaces just as fat people's needs have been ignored in many other public commercial, retail, and transport spaces? Whether a conscious choice as part of the design decision-making process or not, taking these companies at their word rather than viewing these statements as a marketing tactic introduces a situation where librarians concede their ability to consider all of the bodies that might be using their

spaces. Consequently, librarians will be restricted by the limited scope of the products that furniture companies have to offer as they are the all-mighty solution provider.

Discussion

The most generous explanation for the lack of any meaningful consideration of fatness in library furniture catalogues is that they are simply naïve about the needs of super-normative bodies, in a sort of malign neglect. Weight “prejudice is defined by the presence of negative affect” (Crandall and Horstman Reser 2005, 83) and there was no explicit evidence of this negative affect in the language used in the catalogues, so I find it difficult to ascribe outright hatred to these companies’ intentions. Regardless, a less generous and still very unfortunate and hurtful conclusion remains: despite the lack of negative affect, these catalogues are evidence of the reproduction of fatphobia in Western culture and are thus harmful to the well-being of fat people. To paraphrase Hetrick and Attig (2009) they are not “neutral and benign...they are discursive constructions that seek to both indoctrinate students’ bodies and minds into the middle-class virtues of restraint and discipline and inscribe these messages onto the bodies that sit” in the chairs that these catalogues peddle (197). They are gateways to forcing library users to ascribe to a certain body type to participate in library spaces.

These online library furniture catalogues exhibit a severe ignorance of fat concerns in several ways. First, their catalogues provide insufficient information about the products they sell. While seat dimensions were more commonly provided than weight loads, both were not always present on every product. There is an assumption on the part of these companies through the omission of this information that only normative size bodies will use the chair products they sell. However, some dimensions of the product remain important to these companies and their customers for storage, packing or shipping purposes. Therefore, the total volume or dimensions were almost always provided. Dimensions were only acceptable to be included if they were related to profit-seeking, rather than user experience. This puts these companies at odds with the user-orientated language they use on their home pages and “About Us” pages. This lack of information makes it difficult for librarians who design library spaces to do their due diligence when verifying whether all the furniture in their spaces is accessible.

The catalogues also exhibit an ignorance of what fat bodies look like. The most striking example is the smooth-tongued description of a 19-inch-wide seat as a “generous” seat. Those precious extra two inches from the lowest range of 17 or 18 inches only really means that fat people are going to be slightly less uncomfortable sitting on it, especially if it still has arms. Furthermore, the folding chairs that were on offer in all the catalogues only had a weight load range of 150 to 165 lbs, meaning that these companies are perhaps ignorant of all bodies, not just fat ones. The average weight of a man is near 200 lbs, meaning that these folding chairs are not even designed for people of normative size. Again, the language used to describe features of products like, “generous” and “oversized,” demonstrate that the online furniture catalogues assume normative-sized users of the chair products. The terms that are used are always in relation to the products that are normative-sized.

Speaking to the implications of these findings from the furniture catalogues, I further suggest that these catalogues represent a mismatch between public and academic libraries' democratic missions and purposes. These catalogues are one way the public and democratic missions of the library can be "made flesh" in the creation of a public space that is welcoming and usable for all individuals. However, as they exist currently, the catalogues merely reproduce the hegemony of a thin or average body-centric world. Owen (2012) suggests that they reproduce a type of spatial discrimination and enable spatial microaggressions against fat people. They represent a "small nibbling at fat persons' sense of worth, a constant wearing down as a result of small but continuous experiences of not fitting, of feeling embarrassed, of having to demand accommodations or else not receive them at all" (Owen 2012, 295).

As these furniture catalogues are the figurative seeds of library spaces, they can very actively shape the physical experiences of fat library users in library spaces. It can be argued that what may appear to be mindless or careless decisions of design or aesthetics are not merely so but have real implications for the lived realities of fat individuals. Adapting design considerations surrounding chairs in a library space "may seem like an unimportant concern, but it is symbolic, not only of a lifetime experience of pain and exclusion, but also of our culture's complete and intentional ignorance of the physical, spatial needs of persons of super-normative size" (Owen 2012, 294).

Given the library's purported role as an essential space for democratic ends, not only should librarians consider the fatphobia that manifests as spatial discrimination and microaggressions within library spaces (problematic in and of themselves), but ultimately how fatphobia can dictate a fat individual's ability to participate in the library's democratic learning space. Access to public spaces like the library helps define civic participation and thus citizenship (Owen 2012) as well as individuals' roles and responsibilities within a democratic society. Therefore, using size-normative furniture catalogues as tools to construct library spaces works against the democratic mission of the library. I echo Farrell's (2011) question, "Why is body size connected to a 'right to belong'?" (3) not only for questioning why fat people seem to lack the right to belong in a physical space, but also to question whether this right to belong extends to their existence and participation in society.

Perhaps a solution to the problem of fatphobia in libraries as evidenced by library furniture catalogues is to challenge "off-the-rack" approaches to library space planning. Off-the-rack solutions seem ideal as they are often less expensive than custom made furniture. They seem simpler as well since library furniture catalogues present ready-made options for the designing librarian. All they need to do is pick the products and colours. Not a whole lot of thought necessarily needs to go into selecting library furniture. However, the problem with "off-the-rack" solutions is that they offer only the hegemonic default for average- or thin-sized bodies. Huff (2009) argues that mass production only benefits the manufacturers and sellers of such products as it "accommodates manufacturers' desires to maintain high profit margins by producing goods quickly and cheaply, [and] assumes that the consumer's body is mutable and will alter to fit into preconstructed spaces" (176). Library furniture catalogues exist

ultimately to serve the desires of owners and shareholders of these companies, not necessarily the public, and especially not the fat public.

Accessibility and truly universal service costs money and I recognize the challenges, both financially and logistically, that truly universal designs require. Libraries and librarians may be constrained additionally by poor governing bodies, being forced to use pre-approved and contract vendors, or by restrictive bidding processes. However, meeting this challenge results in a society where more than the average-sized person can live in it. All spaces outside of the home should arguably be designed to be universally accessible, but the library more so since universality of access to information (via public spaces) is an ideal they purport to uphold. If libraries fail to be anti-fatphobic in general, and especially in the design of their spaces, how can library users trust their library's sincerity and commitment to their mission? Does this mean that the library is only a public and democratic space for library users who are average-sized or thin? Capitulation to the restrictions of cost, governance, and taken-for-granted operating procedures result in a failure to live up to the ideals of libraries and librarianship, especially if no alternatives or amendments to these restrictions have been sought. The seven principles of "Universal Design" first outlined by Robert Mace in 1997 have been lauded as a logical approach to designing library spaces (Staines 2012). Naturally, a fat-acceptance and fat-accessible approach should be included in this sense of universality. Three principles in particular can include a fat-positive approach: namely, the principles of equitable use, flexibility in use, and size and space for approach and use. For the designing librarian, the principles can act as guiding statements for purchasing library furniture from a library furniture catalogue.

Conclusion, limitations, and future research

This study examined how library furniture catalogues speak about fat bodies in library spaces. As evidenced by the products that are sold by these library furniture companies, the online descriptions of their products, and the language used in branding and advertising, library furniture catalogues perpetuate a societal misunderstanding of how fat people use spaces. By extension, the libraries who use these catalogues to design their spaces are also complicit in perpetuating fatphobia. I have highlighted the importance for libraries to consider and ultimately accommodate fat people in their spaces due to their role within North American democracies. However, this study did not directly observe library spaces to see whether fat people are *actually* accommodated or not within library spaces. The library furniture catalogues stand as a proxy for these spaces for the time being until such studies can be done. Given the paucity of scholarship and research related to Fat Studies within LIS, there is obviously a great need to continue work in this area. Future research that I would like to undertake would involve observational/ethnographic studies of public and academic library spaces, as well as analyses of accessibility documents for their inclusion of fat perspectives. Other work that I would encourage is for scholars to capture the experiences of fat librarians and of fat library users, and to ultimately incorporate fat perspectives into larger library accessibility discourse.

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