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Variations of information literacy and different views on democracy and citizenship

INTRODUCTION
Many activities in libraries and schools aim at strengthening the students’ information literacy, portraying it as tremendously important not only for school work and a future lifelong learning, but also for enhancing their opportunities to participate in the civic society. Research focussing on the relation between information literacy and democracy and citizenship is still scarce. This poster contributes to a critical strand of information literacy research suggesting how a more fine grained analysis of information literacy may be obtained by scrutinising the view on democracy that are drawn upon in the analysis. I draw on findings from my study (1) on young women’s information literacy practices on the arena of sexual and reproductive health.

THE INFORMATION PRACTICES OF CHOOSING A CONTRACEPTIVE
Information literacy is often portrayed as a key for enhancing each person’s opportunities to engage as citizens. However, few empirical studies have looked into information literacy related to democracy (e.g. 2; 3; 4; 1; 5; 6). When a young woman attends a counselling meeting about contraceptives with a midwife at a Swedish youth centre the negotiation between them relates to her identities both as a sexually active person and as a citizen exercising her right to have information about and perhaps pre-

DEMOCRACY AND INFORMATION LITERACY
The significance of information literacy and its democratic dimension vary depending on the understanding of democracy (8). Over time the situation at least to some extent fits a community characterised by multitude and diversity. When midwives meet young women for counselling about contraceptives and invite them to information seeking and use. A liberal view on democracy seems to correspond to a behaviouristic view on information literacy as expressed in

The radical model of democracy and citizenship emphasizes the multitude and diversity of social life. Access to resources is not equally distributed. As identities are in continuous change and flux people belong to several groups with perhaps conflicting interests (9;64). Democracy is never accomplished as an endpoint, but it is an on-going process of dealing with arising conflicts (13). Civic agency is important and engagement in public life is for the common good. As conflicts may be rooted in issues related to citizens’ identities a link between public and everyday life is established (10;93). Theoretically, proponents of critical information literacy (14; 8; 15; 16) have argued for an understanding of information literacy that could be paired with a radical understanding of democracy.

Here it is proposed that information literacy related to a radical view on democracy would entail practices related to information seeking and use in a community characterised by multitude and diversity. When midwives meet young women for counselling about contraceptives and invite them into a conversation about their need for contraception without passing judgement on their previous choices, the situation at least to some extent fits with a radical view on democracy and citizenship (1). Such conversations could be described as practices in which information literacy related to a radical view of democracy are enacted and have the potential to be situations where the sexual and civic identities coevolve.

IMPLICATIONS
If information literacy practices in schools should prepare young people for civic engagement according to a radical understanding of democracy, change is required. The results suggest that it would be of importance to invite the use of a broad range of information sources, online and offline, with varying producers and aims, engaging the students in discussions about how to evaluate them.

REFERENCES


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