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Truth or Consequences: Academic Instruction Librarians as Information Literacy and Critical Thinking Activists

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Abstract

The graphic edition of Snyder's *On Tyranny* (2021) states "truth dies in four modes," which is a contemporary synthesis connected to Klemperer's *Language of the Third Reich* (1957). The researchers connected these four modes to information literacy (IL) instruction—but would others? The researchers surveyed academic librarians engaged in IL instruction on whether they felt they addressed any of the modes in their work. The researchers also asked whether they believe the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* works to circumvent any of the four modes. Nearly 150 librarians responded and, while most respondents were unfamiliar with the two texts referenced and their thoughts were mixed, many saw their work and the *Framework* as antagonistically related to Mode 1 (Open Hostility to Verifiable Reality). This paper discusses survey results and their implications for better understanding of how academic librarians engaged in IL instruction view their work in a socio-political context.

Keywords: information literacy, academic library instruction, activism, critical thinking, *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*

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Truth or Consequences: Academic Instruction Librarians as Information Literacy and Critical Thinking Activists

The Polish Protestant philosopher Victor Klemperer kept a diary during and after the rise of Hitler, Nazism, the Third Reich, and World War II (WWII). Within his diary, he developed a theory of language—language he considered the “breeding ground” for much of what occurred (Klemperer, 1957/2013, p. 2)—which he later published as *The Language of the Third Reich: Lingua Tertii Imperii: A Philologist’s Notebook* (often referred to by the Latin initials, LTI) (Farrell, 2021). Based on the work of Klemperer, Timothy Snyder established four “modes” by which “truth dies” within his book (2017) and subsequent graphic novel (2021) *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*. Among these twenty lessons are such chapters as “Be reflective if you must be armed,” “Make eye contact and small talk,” “Learn from peers in other countries,” “Be as courageous as you can,” and “Listen for dangerous words.” (Chapters, or lessons, are organized and called by the same headings in both Snyder’s book and his graphic novel.)

Snyder’s work intersects with Klemperer’s in Chapter 10, “Believe in truth,” where the four modes, synthesized from Klemperer’s diary, are defined as:

- *Open Hostility to Verifiable Reality* - “presenting inventions and lies as if they were facts” (Snyder, 2021, p. 58).
- *Shamanistic Incantation* – “endless repetition, designed to make the fictional plausible and the criminal desirable” (Snyder, 2021, p. 59).
- *Magical Thinking* – “the open embrace of contradiction” (Snyder, 2021, p. 60).
- *Misplaced Faith* – “self-deifying claims” (Snyder, 2021, p. 61).

The intersection between Klemperer and Snyder helps to highlight that, across the decades, underdeveloped critical thinking skills and limited abilities to interrogate systems or parties of power can lead to a democratic society’s demise. Klemperer’s published diary, employed as a lens in Snyder’s work, during an age when mis- and disinformation have been used (once again) to further political parties’ agendas, starkly highlights that these dangers are cyclical, especially if not adequately addressed. It is in this space that the work of librarians can be shown as vital to combatting a reprisal of the past through critical information

literacy practices and instruction in higher education, and where our work must heavily focus going forward in order to help produce critical-thinking global citizens.

The four modes have become urgently relevant once again in the present day as seen by the surge in movements to quash social justice issues and the presence of antithetical viewpoints under the guise of "truth"—a concept additionally troubled by the advent and dissemination of mis- and disinformation. A specific and salient example of these modes today can be seen through the proliferation of election denial stemming from Trump's loss of the 2020 presidential election, and the subsequent "fact-finding missions," insurrection, lawsuits, investigations, and trials that ensued. Each of these were based on a complex interplay between critical thinking skills, information literacy, and—the authors assert—all four of the modes as defined by Snyder in the list above. Individuals resisted verifiable reality in favor of an elaborate conspiracy theory/creation that better fits with the narrative they would *like* or prefer to hear. Verbiage was repeated, from a position of power, that fanned the conspiratorial flames and led to the embrace of Trump's claims through misplaced faith in Trump and displaced faith in facts and evidence.

A connection between politics, librarianship, critical thinking, and information literacy can be seen through the recent assaults on libraries and free speech; the banning of books from both local and state levels of government across the United States have brought into focus that librarians are not neutral purveyors of information, but are actively involved in the struggle for freedom of speech and information, even if only in their classrooms (American Library Association, 2021; Collins, 2023; Hoover, 2018; Logsdon & Leebaw, 2021; National Coalition Against Censorship, 2023). Even more disconcerting is the recent rewriting of educational curricula in Florida by the state education board that says any teachings around slavery must highlight the "personal benefits" they received from being enslaved (such as trade skills "learned") (see, e.g., Breen, 2023).

It is in this vein that this study sought to use Snyder's rereading of Klemperer's work as a lens to historical information restriction in order to juxtapose previous political oppressions/infringements with contemporary ones, and how those can affect instructional environments. In order to do so, two research questions were investigated:

- RQ1: What (if any) connection can be made between Snyder's four modes and the *Framework*?

- RQ2: What (if any) connection can be made between Snyder's four modes and librarians' instructional practices and efforts?

The exploratory research conducted through this study aimed to gain respondent perspectives on each of the modes by which truth dies, as well as whether and how the respondent believes each of the modes is addressed in the *Framework* and/or respondent's information literacy instruction.

Literature Review

Beyond the core texts already noted in this study, there is evidence connecting the work of librarians and libraries to political movements, resistance movements, activism, and social justice. Stubbings' 1993 book highlighted the impact ("casualty") of libraries during WWII in the United Kingdom and Germany; Valencia (2002) highlighted the recurrence of similar tensions between libraries and nationalism within the 20th century. Leavitt (2015) used these and other sources to document the threats to and efforts of British libraries to protect library collections during WWII—when much of the protective efforts would have been impossible without the involvement and actions of librarians. But such issues didn't dissolve with the end of WWII. Greening's 1995 article "Ten Years in the Life of Russian Libraries" discussed the impacts of perestroika (restructuring) on Russian libraries, and the worlds of "authors, publishers, booksellers, librarians, and readers" (p. 113), in the late 20th century.

Around the same time as Greening's article, Spain (1996) wrote a study guide for librarians regarding libraries' roles in Russian national memory, stating, "Libraries are the souls of memory. Russian libraries face an extremely important role as the skins of the past are shed for a new soul" (p. 73). This has clear parallels to the verbiage and intentions of the modes, especially with regard to verifiable reality. With perestroika, Spain stated, "library collections were opened and many previously hidden works were made available" (p. 73). Spain also noted the use of political and party language within various sources and various programs (e.g., the Book Aid Plan and the International Book Exchange Fund) that donated books to Russia/the Soviet Union. Beyond these acknowledgments of libraries as facilitators of knowledge and national memory, Stoica (1995) reflected on the impacts of a totalitarian regime on university libraries:

During almost 50 years of totalitarianism, the Romanian libraries suffered a long period of international isolation and a continuous diminution of their collections

from an informative point of view. The negative effects of this half century also exercised a bad influence over some other activities of the libraries (the quality of services and personnel, and on the other hand the quality of equipment and even the buildings), and finally decreased the level of their involvement in university life. (p. 17).

Terms like isolation (within and beyond their state), influence (as in control, financially and qualitatively), and diminution (as in a lessening of) speak to what university libraries and their librarians experience in totalitarian scenarios, and also hint at the influences that can tiptoe a population toward the modes of magical thinking and misplaced faith.

The transition can be made, then, to the connection of information literacy and critical thinking to these modes and strategies to resist them. Building on Rood's (1941) declaration of the "importance of the individual" in maintaining democracy and human liberties (p. 99), Angell's 2010 piece for *Library Student Journal* (though focused on the PATRIOT Act), stated:

Defined as the practice in which an autocratic conglomeration of individuals attempts to dictate the beliefs and behaviors of others, totalitarianism works to suppress individuality, privacy, and forms of creative expression which do not conform to the leaders' socio-political agenda. Historically, libraries are prime targets of restriction under totalitarianism, with the state both carefully regulating disseminated materials and policing citizens' access to information. (para. 2)

This emphasizes the powerful positioning of libraries in resisting restrictions to information and knowledge (and "truth"). A recent article from Romanian scholar Băiaș (2020) addressed the intersection of critical thinking, activism, and applied ethics, noting "critical thinking is a tool for training young people in a democratic society. It is a modality of education in the spirit of individual freedom" (p. 19). One can easily see how Snyder's modes and a totalitarian/tyrannical regime—even a burgeoning one—would be at odds with the habits of mind involved in information literacy and critical thinking. Băiaș went on to state that "many consider [critical thinking] to be one of the few 'weapons' that a rational citizen can use against propaganda, manipulation, misinformation, and fake news in the media and social networks" (p. 19)—and thus it can serve as a tool of resistance against these modes by which the light of truth can be extinguished.

These concepts have bridged into libraries through the formal introduction of critical librarianship (or #critlib), which has used critical theories in an effort to disrupt and ameliorate (if possible) systemic prejudices and injustices within library services and resources (Elmborg, 2006). While this is a growing movement and community within libraries, it is by no means widespread nor universally adopted by librarians at large; indeed, the work of critical librarianship and the fight for transparency and "truth" is ongoing. Many librarians across the country currently serve as activists as well as educators within their classrooms (e.g., Drabinski, 2017; Goodsett, 2020; Goodsett & Schmillen, 2022; Oltmann, Knox, & Mabi, 2022; Seale, 2020), actively working to mitigate the mis- and disinformation in their students and serving as examples for other librarians with instructional responsibilities. While the literature has provided examples of critical librarianship in practice (e.g., Tewel, 2018), this study seeks to gain a larger insight from librarians across the country in regard to their critical practices by framing their efforts concerning the preservation of a democratic society.

The researchers thus investigated the connections between Snyder's four modes, the *Framework*, instructional practices of academic librarians, and the role(s) these librarians perceive and believe they play in the development of an information-literate population that can think critically and participate mindfully in democracy.

Methods

Instrument, Queries, and Procedures

Given the interest in critical thinking skills, information literacy instruction, and potential intersections between the aforementioned, the *Framework*, the work of Snyder (*On Tyranny*, 2021), and/or the work of Klemperer (*Language of the Third Reich*, 1957), the researchers felt an exploratory study was in order. Further, by utilizing a survey-driven approach, the study would gather responses from a larger number of participants than would be permitted by other methods such as an interview-style approach (see Appendix for the full survey.) The first four survey questions focused on the respondent's instructional role at their institution, their current career level, their institution type, and whether they teach a credit-bearing information literacy (IL) course. The next two questions asked about the level of familiarity respondents had with Snyder's *On Tyranny* and with Klemperer's *Language of the Third Reich*. The remainder of the survey focused on acquiring participant feedback regarding whether a particular mode is at all addressed in the *Framework* and/or in their individual information

literacy instruction efforts. Mode definitions preceded the question sections pertaining to each mode for participants' convenience. These definitions were derived using quotes from Snyder's work and sought to show the connection to that specific text (which indicates it synthesizes Klemperer but which itself does not include citations to Klemperer's work other than, broadly, the book *Language of the Third Reich*). See Appendix for the full definitions.

All participants saw the final two questions, open-ended queries seeking qualitative responses regarding the potential broader roles of academic libraries and of academic librarians, beyond instructional roles, with the resistance of these modes. The researchers anticipated that respondents may envision resisting these modes within the broader missions of their libraries or work of academic librarianship.

Study Sample

As academic librarians engaged in various forms of information literacy instruction and invested in critical thinking skills development in post-secondary students, the researchers decided to specifically approach similar study participants—academic librarians engaged in some form of information literacy instruction work for the participant pool. To this end, they identified the intended audience for the survey as academic librarians involved in information literacy instruction, including those in leadership/administration positions. The researchers further clarified in the call for participants, “You do not need faculty status, deep fluency with the ACRL *Framework* (or with Klemperer's writing), or a role teaching a credit-bearing information literacy course to participate. Just a position in an academic library where you teach information literacy-focused content as part of your job.” With this in mind, they posted their survey to a number of relevant listservs: the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)'s Instruction Section (IS), Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, University Libraries Section (ULS), College Libraries Section (CLS), Policy, Politics and International Relations Section (PPIRS), Science and Technology Section (STS), Education Research Libraries Discussion Group, and the Health Sciences Interest Group (HSIG). Initial posts were sent out in late September 2021 and the survey closed on November 23, 2021.

Regarding their instructional efforts, participants were asked which best fit their instructional role: primarily an IL instruction librarian, an academic librarian who occasionally conducts IL instruction amongst their other duties, or a library leader/administrator who occasionally conducts IL instruction amongst their other duties. This question helped establish the amount of instruction the participants engaged in as well

as their positioning/role within their library. Researchers also asked whether participants were an early-career librarian (<10 years in field), a mid-career librarian (10-20 years in the field), or a long-time librarian (< 20 years in the field), thinking respondents' perspectives on the topics within the survey might (or might not) intersect with career stages. Participants were also asked their institution type (public, private, or for-profit)—anticipating respondents may or may not have different perspectives correlating with their institution type—and whether the respondent teaches a credit-bearing information literacy course (of any number of credits).

Limitations

The authors acknowledge this study had several limitations, due in part to the exploratory nature of the survey itself. As the intention of this research was *not* to draw concrete conclusions, establish theories, make broad generalizations, or respond to hypotheses, the study is limited by its own goals and participants' responses. The researchers did not conduct any follow-up interviews with participants and only academic librarians engaged in information literacy instruction were pursued for participation. It is likely that librarians beyond academia may have a useful perspective to lend to the ideas explored by this survey. It is also possible that follow-up interviews would have yielded a deeper, more thorough conceptualization of academic librarians' thoughts regarding the role information literacy instruction and/or the *Framework* may play in anti-totalitarian, anti-tyrannical critical thinking skills development within students.

The survey noted that participants need not have deep familiarity with *On Tyranny*, with *Language of the Third Reich*, or with the *Framework*, but some participants shared that the survey took more time than estimated partly due to its reflective nature and partly due to the level of familiarity they had with the texts it references. Midway through the survey, the researchers adjusted calls for participation to indicate 10–30 minutes to complete the survey. It is possible that some respondents did not complete their submission due to the extended time needed to complete it.

Several demographic questions were not asked that could have been useful, such as respondent gender, race/ethnicity, and job category (e.g., tenured faculty, non-tenured faculty, staff, etc.). The researchers sought responses and perspectives outside of these variables but recognized the value such data could have toward correlations and data analysis as well.

Results

Participants, Demographics, and Familiarity

Of 137 respondents, 19 (14%) completed 10% or less of the survey. Exports of this data showed no responses to demographic, text familiarity, and/or mode-related questions posed by the survey. The data that follows therefore addresses the 118 respondents who completed greater than 10% of the survey. Survey participants were early- and mid-career academic librarians (fewer than 20 years in the field; $n = 45$ and $n = 46$, respectively) at public institutions ($n = 83$). According to 2020 data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), roughly 78% of students enrolled in degree-granting post-secondary institutions were enrolled at public institutions, while 20–21% of students were enrolled at private, not-for-profit, degree-granting, post-secondary institutions. Less than 2% of students were enrolled in private, for-profit, degree-granting, post-secondary institutions. This is roughly representative of this study's data in which 72% of respondents worked at public institutions and 28% worked at private institutions (no respondents indicated for-profit affiliations.)

Most respondents were not in leadership or administrator roles in which they engaged in some information literacy instruction ($n = 16$); 86% of participants identified as academic librarians primarily involved in information literacy instruction ($n = 53$) or an academic librarian who occasionally conducts information literacy instruction amongst their other duties ($n = 46$). While some participants did teach credit-bearing information literacy courses ($n = 19$, or 17%), most did not ($n = 96$). Per a recent article by Jardine et al. (2018), the authors believe the respondents were a fair representation of librarians engaged in credit-bearing information literacy courses (19% in the article, 17% among our participants).

In line with researchers' expectations, respondents were rarely familiar with the texts *On Tyranny* or *Language of the Third Reich*, though there was slightly more familiarity with *On Tyranny* (17%) than with Klemperer's work (10%). As noted in the directions to participants, the researchers did not feel familiarity with these two texts was critical for conceptualizing whether the description of each mode had any relevance or connection to their work within information literacy instruction, to the *Framework*, or to the work of academic libraries and librarians broadly. Thus, while familiarity was low, researchers did not perceive this factor as an issue for the results, just as useful data to have.

The tables and figures below summarize participants' responses to the survey questions about the four modes. Further details are provided in the sections below for each mode.

Table 1: Association of Modes with *Framework* and IL Instruction Efforts

Mode	In <i>Framework</i>			In IL Instruction Efforts		
	Yes	Maybe	No	Yes	Maybe	No
Mode 1, Open Hostility to Verifiable Reality	28 (29%)	45 (47%)	22 (23%)	38 (50%)	26 (34%)	12 (16%)
Mode 2, Shamanistic Incantation	5 (7%)	21 (31%)	41 (61%)	11 (16%)	19 (28%)	37 (55%)
Mode 3, Magical Thinking	8 (13%)	15 (23%)	41 (64%)	14 (23%)	18 (29%)	30 (48%)
Mode 4, Misplaced Faith	17 (28%)	18 (30%)	26 (43%)	22 (36%)	15 (25%)	24 (39%)

Table 2: Association of Frames with Modes

	Authority Is Constructed and Contextual	Information Creation as a Process	Information Has Value	Research as Inquiry	Scholarship as Conversation	Searching as Strategic Exploration
Mode 1, Open Hostility to Verifiable Reality (n = 61)	35	1	10	8	6	1
Mode 2, Shamanistic Incantation (n = 26)	4	9	5	3	5	0
Mode 3, Magical Thinking (n = 23)	12	2	1	4	4	0
Mode 4, Misplaced Faith (n = 26)	15	2	2	2	4	1

Figure 1: Percentage of Respondents Who Saw Connections Between Snyder's Modes and the *Framework*

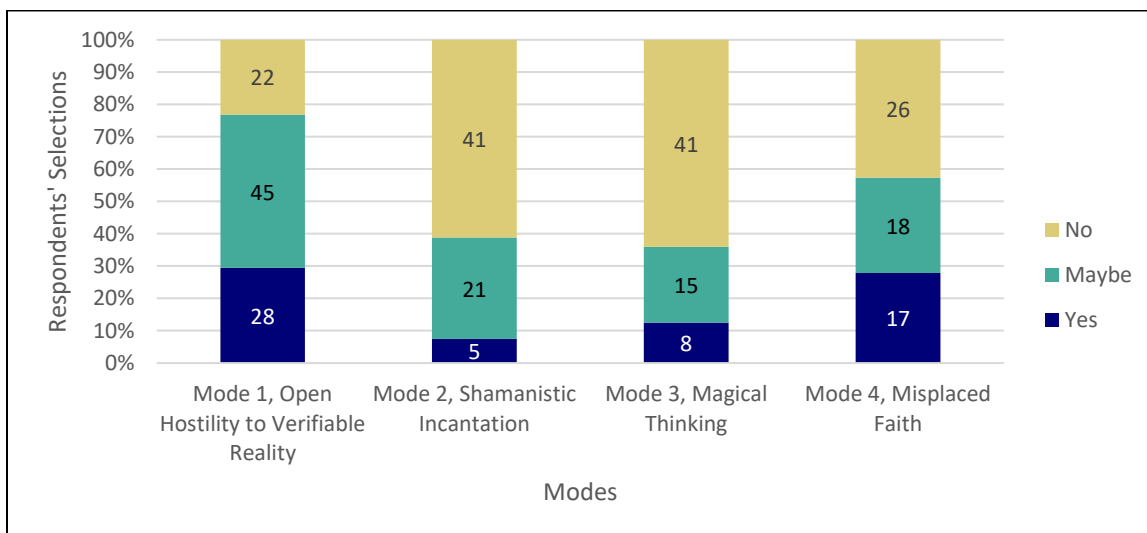


Figure 2: Percentage of Respondents Who Saw Connections Between IL Instruction Efforts and Snyder’s Modes

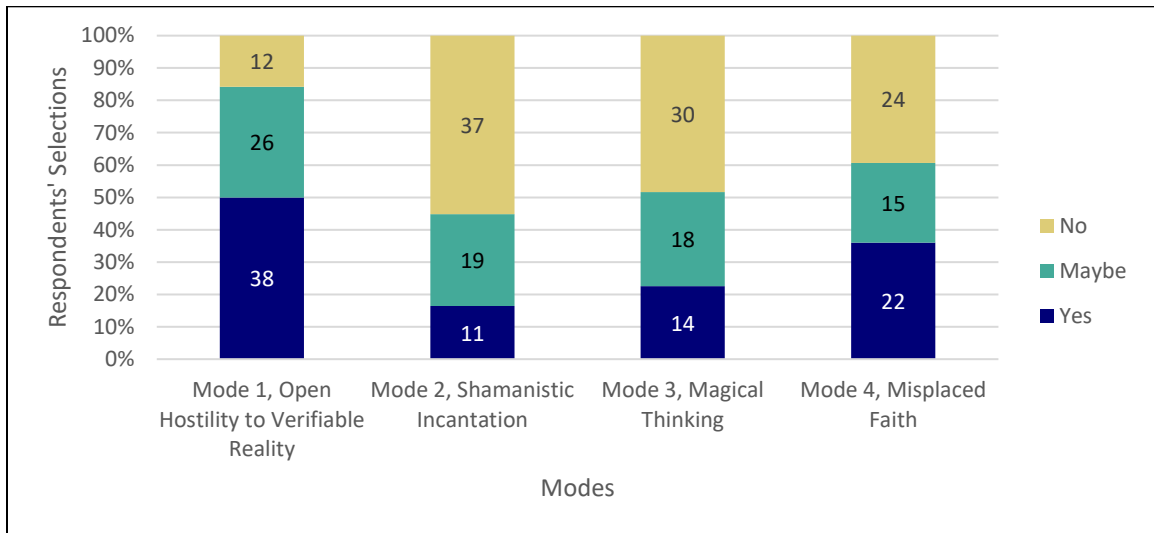
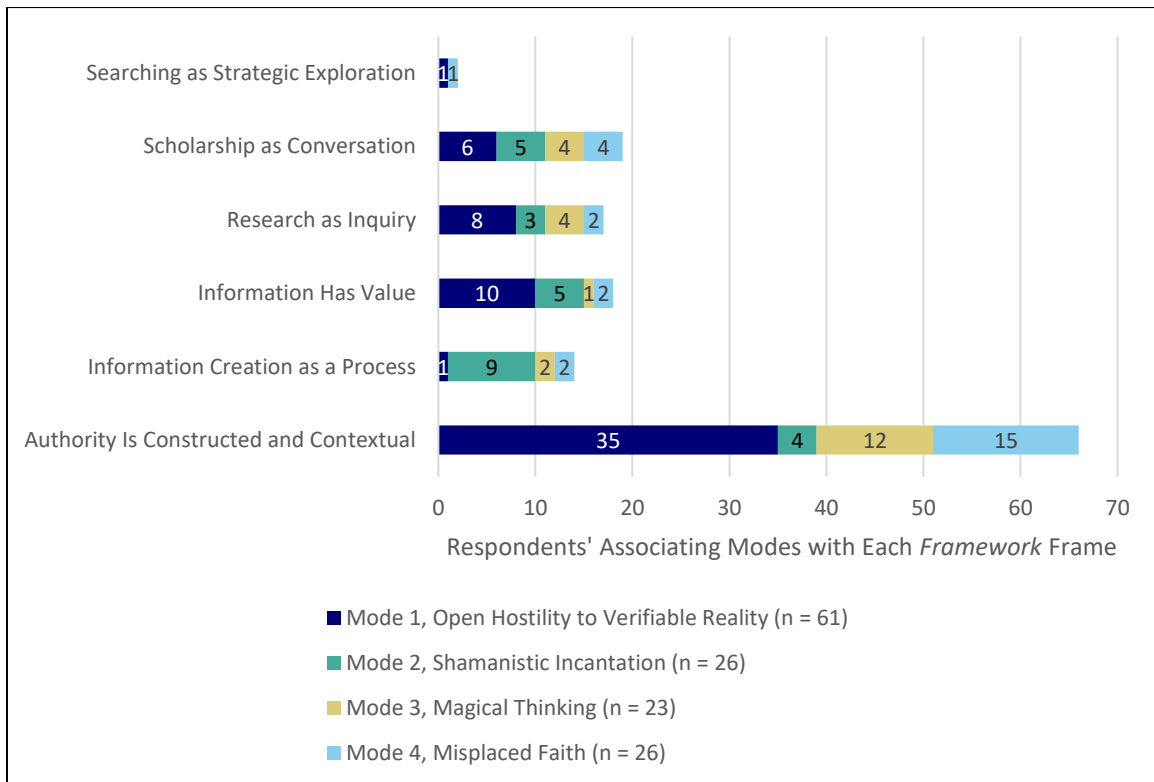


Figure 3: Associations Between Snyder’s Modes and Framework Frames



Mode 1: Open Hostility to Verifiable Reality

Three-quarters of the survey participants ($n = 73$; 76%) indicated that they believe (or could see how) the *Framework* and/or their instruction connects with the concepts described in Mode 1: Open Hostility to Verifiable Reality (see Table 1). Of those “Yes” and “Maybe” responses, most participants connected Mode 1 to the “Authority is Constructed & Contextual” frame of the *Framework* ($n = 35$) (see Table 2 and Figure 3); 10 participants connected with the “Information Has Value” frame; and eight and six participants connected with the “Research as Inquiry” and “Scholarship as Conversation” frames, respectively. One respondent each noted a connection with the “Searching as Strategic Exploration” and “Information Creation as a Process” frames.

When asked how they saw the connection of Open Hostility to Verifiable Reality, respondents expressed concerns regarding subjectivity, various biases, the role of search engines, and the role of “power, truth, and identity.” One respondent noted the active engagement that information literate individuals have with information (rather than passive reception/ regurgitation of information). The latter came up in different ways in other responses as well, such as stressing the challenges of narrow reading and listening behaviors, where an individual only seeks out information from preferred venues regardless of factuality, authority, or trustworthiness, thus reinforcing all their existing views. This speaks to the exact issue of contextualized authority (roughly, the “Authority is Constructed and Contextual” frame) as well as to a lack of deep understanding of and appreciation for “Information Creation as a Process.” Keenly, one respondent reflected that “where we put our trust indicates our values, beliefs, and opinions regarding weights of context and construction of human systems and history”—which connects back to the emotionally-charged aspects of the topic at hand and ties into many socio-political issues which could lead toward (or away from) tyrannical circumstances and their ilk.

Respondents overall noted a variety of ways they believed they approached Mode 1 in their instructional efforts. Areas of connected focus included teaching about confirmation bias, one’s worldview, headlines, and the value of reading information in-depth rather than at a surface level; discussing the role of authorial agendas in how we perceive and use information; intentionally having students work against confirmation bias by reading content in opposition to their existing beliefs or values and reflect upon their reactions to that reading; and considering the role of the filter bubble or echo chamber of search engines tracking our searches and delivering information to us. Others noted investigating how

language and images work to appeal to readers in targeted ways for their intended audience; integrating storytelling into the session to build context around issues of too little and too much information to sort through in order to establish “truth” and/or “reality” and the problem of having a “single narrative/source”; fostering skepticism and independent verification actions; sharing and examining the ways in which one can skew data or otherwise leave out/misrepresent information and the reasons someone might do that; presenting information about cognitive bias alongside identity preservation bias and other issues that make changing one’s opinion challenging; and using acronym-based mnemonic devices (e.g., the CRAAP test, or PROVEN). One respondent noted that they do not have much autonomy in their one-shot instruction sessions—a factor that could limit their ability to cover topics like those mentioned here. Given the fact that many other librarians may experience such restrictions to their session content, it is likely this impacts other librarians, too. Supplemental resources like LibGuides may provide opportunities to circumvent these challenges and share valuable information and skills (e.g., about evaluating sources) with constituents.

Mode 2: Shamanistic Incantation

Relatively few survey participants indicated that they believe (or could see how) the *Framework* ($n = 26$, or 38%) and/or their instruction ($n = 30$, or 44%) connects with the concepts described in Mode 2: Shamanistic Incantation (see Table 1). Of those “Yes” and “Maybe” responses, participants connected Mode 2 to the frames “Authority is Constructed & Contextual” ($n = 4$), “Information Creation as a Process” ($n = 9$), “Information Has Value” ($n = 5$), “Research as Inquiry” ($n = 3$), and “Scholarship as Conversation” ($n = 5$) (see Table 2 and Figure 3). No respondents indicated Mode 2 connected with the “Searching as Strategic Exploration” frame.

When asked how they saw the connection of Shamanistic Incantation to the frames, several respondents noted that misinformation and propaganda employ repetition of a narrative to inculcate their audience and that these types of information are created with specific purpose and intent. One participant usefully quoted the *Framework* itself, noting the shift from novice to expert regarding the “Information Has Value” frame, which states: “Experts understand that value may be wielded by powerful interests in ways that marginalize certain voices. However, value may also be leveraged by individuals and organizations to effect change and for civic, economic, social, or personal gains” (ACRL, 2015, p. 16). These verbs—to wield, to leverage, to effect, to marginalize—are all power-related terms, and so it

should come as no surprise that this mode connects with concerns and discussions of misinformation and propaganda.

This connection between the frames and participants' instructional efforts manifests in their instructional practices by using contrary opinions or sources to illustrate what confirmation bias looks like and the reinforcement of a consistent view or narrative from biased sources. Others noted integrating resources from the Dangerous Speech Project, such as a video addressing dehumanization tactics and language which are recognized precursors of genocidal actions, and the role repetition can have in truth-forming, as in one has heard something so much that it *must* be true. The latter also relates to concepts of "loudness," where the loudest voice may not be the truest or most honest or most well-intentioned. While librarians may not be "loud" in their means of working such concerns into their instruction, nonetheless these concerns are clearly there within their teaching, complementing the instruction as a whole.

Mode 3: Magical Thinking

Relatively few survey participants indicated that they believe (or could see how) the *Framework* ($n = 26$, or 38%) and/or their instruction ($n = 30$, or 44%) connects with the concepts described in Mode 3: Magical Thinking (see Table 1). Of those "Yes" and "Maybe" responses, participants connected Mode 3 to the frames "Authority is Constructed & Contextual" ($n = 12$), "Information Creation as a Process" ($n = 2$), "Information Has Value" ($n = 1$), "Research as Inquiry" ($n = 4$), and "Scholarship as Conversation" ($n = 4$) (see Table 2 and Figure 3). No respondents indicated Mode 3 connected with the "Searching as Strategic Exploration" frame.

When asked how they saw the connection of Magical Thinking to the frames, several respondents noted that failure to maintain a skeptical or critical awareness when it comes to information and its authors can lead to abject belief without substance. One respondent mentioned reflecting upon the "Research as Inquiry" frame, where magical thinking in this context might be similar to or amount to the "willful disregard of inquiry." One could see how this mode, combined with Shamanistic Incantation and Open Hostility to Verifiable Reality could lead to some complicated, highly charged, difficult-to-change, and potentially dangerous ways of thinking and being in the world. Another respondent noted a connection with the "Information Has Value" frame and concerns that "[ceasing] to see or recognize the value of information" could lead to a lulling effect akin to Magical Thinking—a dangerous

form of complacency that could end in susceptibility to information “regardless of its accuracy.” Within the “Authority is Constructed and Contextual” frame, per one participant, readers should note the following disposition: “develop awareness of the importance of assessing content with a skeptical stance and with a self-awareness of their own biases and worldview” (ACRL, 2015, p. 13), hearkening back to comments in previous modes regarding the special importance of skepticism, biases, and one’s worldview within the conversation of academic library instruction’s (and librarians’) ability to educate on, and against, the markers of tyrannical leaders and societies.

This connection can be seen in their instruction by instilling in their students (through exercises or group work) the mindset that all content is biased in some way as it brings in the author’s lived experiences, and that information intending to elicit an emotional response should be questioned and dissected. Creative methods of connecting students with this mode included integrating in social media channels, e.g., Twitter, and considering whether “experts” who provided information that “looked good” (which the respondent felt had similarities to the function of Magical Thinking) actually had evidence, etc., for the claims they made. Reading strategies also came up, specifically lateral reading, which highlights an under-discussed role of academic librarians—educating on strategies for consuming (e.g., reading) information reflectively and effectively.

Other research-related activities that came up within their instructional efforts included teaching about skills for “digging deeper,” evaluating authors, topic selection strategies (“[choose] a topic that interests you but where you haven’t already made your mind up”), the value of addressing opposing viewpoints to yours and that of your evidence, working to instill “flexible thought patterns” (“how a source might be interpreted differently in different contexts”), informing regarding “rhetorical modes of persuasion,” helping students understand and acknowledge their “emotional response to disinformation,” identifying the process of information creation, and discussing the concept of “[holding] space for multiple truths” and developing a “tolerance for ambiguity.” These instructional efforts in particular also have nods to concerns and instructional approaches to Shamanistic Incantation in particular, again highlighting the interconnectedness of the frames with information literacy instruction and the modes. One participant noted celebrating Media Literacy Week with an interactive propaganda display where participants work to identify the techniques at play—but not all libraries may have institutional support and comfort with such initiatives or librarians with the subject expertise.

Mode 4: Misplaced Faith

Relatively few survey participants indicated that they believe (or could see how) the *Framework* ($n = 26$, or 38%) and/or their instruction ($n = 30$, or 44%) connects with the concepts described in Mode 4: Misplaced Faith (see Table 1). Of those “Yes” and “Maybe” responses, participants connected Mode 4 to the frames “Authority is Constructed & Contextual” ($n = 15$), “Information Creation as a Process” ($n = 2$), “Information Has Value” ($n = 2$), “Research as Inquiry” ($n = 2$), and “Scholarship as Conversation” ($n=4$) (see Table 2 and Figure 3). One respondent noted a connection with the “Searching as Strategic Exploration” frame.

When asked how they saw the connection of Misplaced Faith to the frames, respondents remarked that trust (and therefore authority) can be heavily influenced by identity, belief, and confirmation bias, which actively counteracts evidence. This informational deification is most often consciously crafted to exert power and influence over an audience and can be difficult to overcome. Concerns arose, again, over the issue of hearing/reading a “single voice” as well. One participant rightly commented that truth as well as what is credible/authoritative often “evolves and changes over time” (including information within scholarly articles, which can trouble students who mistake “reputable” or “evidence-based” for “fact” and “truth” in their dialogue with their assignments and their sources). Another theme that arose here was the value of taking an active role in information seeking and evaluation, which aligns with comments given under Mode 1.

The connection between this mode and the respondents’ instructional practices was similar to previous modes in that authority and who it is given to speaks largely to the audience’s own biases, so helping students understand their own perspectives and those of others can dispel Misplaced Faith. One respondent even went so far as to note that Misplaced Faith is counteracted by “the overall empowerment of students through every lesson.” This not only speaks to the ability of the librarian to impact student development in regard to the topics of this paper, but also—correctly and importantly—to the role their faculty play, too. Further, another participant highlighted the important role that encouragement can have— “[encouraging] students to reflect critically on why they have chosen to accept the authority of those whom they consider authoritative, and possibly on reflection to reject that authority”—a beneficial but daunting task. Perhaps, though, in owning the difficulty of such a task, particularly the latter half of it, students better understand the strength and power

that the authority we subscribe to, place on, and experience from others can have such a significant impact.

The Role of Academic Libraries and Academic Librarians

Fifty-seven participants shared qualitative feedback regarding the question “Do you think *academic libraries* have a role in addressing any/all of these 4 modes by which truth ‘dies’ (according to Klemperer)? Why/Why not? How?” and 47 declined to respond to this question. Of those responding, 28 indicated they felt academic libraries have a role, and a total of 10 indicated some trepidation or deliberation regarding the why or the how of that role (see Table 1). Fifty-three participants added their response to the final question, “Do you think *academic librarians* have a role in addressing any/all of these 4 modes by which truth ‘dies’ (according to Klemperer)? Why/Why not? How?” with fifty-one respondents declining to respond to the question. Of the 53 respondents, three indicated they thought the question was a duplicate/repeat of the previous one, so effectively only 50 responses were gathered regarding the final question of the survey. Nearly 20 respondents indicated they felt academic librarians have a role in addressing the modes, with 12 of these indicating some trepidation or deliberation about how and why they do so.

The majority of respondents agreed that libraries and librarians have a role to play in counterbalancing the four modes in which truth dies. Through skills like critical thinking and resource evaluation, respondents noted that the library may be the only point of consistent contact that students have with questioning their resources and research practices in order to uncover and mitigate biases. One respondent noted that while librarians often speak about looking for biases, not enough time is spent on teaching students how to really assess biases, understand their own inherent biases from their lived experiences, and how those experiences have shaped their worldview/perspectives and therefore the information they encounter. Another respondent states that “critical thinking has become a priority but no one’s responsibility,” emphasizing the librarian’s importance in a student’s college career, and the expertise that can be offered.

Other respondents offered that by teaching students to be more civic-minded and active participants in the information cycle rather than passive consumers, libraries can give students the skills to be critical thinkers outside of the academy as well. However, a significant number of respondents stated that librarians were either not expert enough to speak to the modes within their instruction meaningfully, or that there was not enough time or support from their institution to do so. Institutional politics or the lack of

instructional collaboration were also mentioned as being limitations for meaningful content beyond bibliographic instruction. Also, while the predominant way respondents saw libraries and librarians playing a role was through instruction, collection development policies were also mentioned as other points of access to address efforts in upholding truth and evidence-based research.

One sentiment that ran throughout the qualitative answers was the lack of time that librarians (and in effect, libraries) had with their students in order to delve into these deeper-level connections that arose between the modes and frames. Most of the respondents only had interactions with students during one-shot sessions, and even the number of those interactions was limited. An interesting question to ponder is: How can we as librarians affect these deeper-level conversations and thinking with our students on a more regular basis? Whether through more vocal advocacy measures to an institution's administration and/or teaching faculty about the importance of expanding student exposure to librarians, or through more tailored instructional exercises employed in the one-shot session, or even through faculty-incentivized student participation in library-led workshops or learning modules—what is within our means and how can we address them? One respondent noted that these topics are perhaps best addressed in settings that are not voluntary for students and that do not permit easy compartmentalization of the content; instead, they recommended it be fully integrated into the curriculum and delivered by instructors with a variety of relevant specializations.

Similarly, another librarian stated that “in order to educate people to not blindly consume bias, hate, propaganda, etc., and to be able to distinguish between information and mis/dis information, we must take every opportunity that we, as librarians and information specialists, can in imparting critical knowledge.” The use of “we” here may also indicate librarians and information professionals have an opportunity to work individually and collectively toward these ends. One participant noted the dangers of a “checklist” approach to these concepts (e.g., “Beware of these four things...”), especially one handled in a cursory, over-simplified manner as part of our “regular” one-shot sessions typically focused on, say, database searching strategies. They wrote:

Maybe, if a librarian has the time and funding to create a credit-bearing course dedicated to investigating notions of truth in conjunction with notions of mis- and dis- information. The course would have to have large sections designated to philosophy, social theory, cultural theory, history, and analysis of ideological

thinking for students to have a fully contextualized discussion. In that case, it could be inspiring and useful [...] However, to slip in a lesson called "4 modes by which truth dies" in a thoughtless way (a way that could be easily misunderstood), and alongside typical IL content like how to structure a search in a database, could come across as ideological and poison students' trust in librarians as sources of skills for finding information [...] I am not an expert, but to thoughtfully teach the experience and knowledge of genocide as a way to analyze truth would need to include perspectives from many different societies, cultures, and individuals' unique experiences of genocide, oppression, propaganda, imperialism, colonialism, widespread discrimination, racism, and hate. This could be a very rich, vital, informative, and life-changing discussion, but it doesn't come down to a checklist of 4 items [...] Include it in a thoughtful way, or don't include it at all. You risk the loss of the beauty, meaning, and truth of the message otherwise.

In addition to the idea of a credit-bearing course such as the one described above, other participants were also interested in "library-created (or supported) modules about the information life cycle, when to use different types of information resources, and how to discern propaganda/rhetoric"—this may prove particularly useful for short-staffed, thinly-spread academic library organizations, and those who may not have a deep bench of subject expertise to draw upon in order to create such modules themselves. We may also need more professional development within media studies—rather than library science—in order to foster the skills we need within our library professionals in order to combat the issues discussed here.

In addition, the researchers would also like to note an important quote from a respondent, "I don't have the time or mental capacity to go deeper right now and I apologize because I believe you're conducting important research here." Librarians, like everyone, need and relish opportunities to have sufficient downtime to reflect in order to make progress, consider solutions to problems, brainstorm, take in ideas, remain open to serendipity and information, and much more. The researchers dearly understand the complexities of trying to reply to what were intended to be exploratory and thought-provoking ideas and statements within an active academic semester and wanting to participate purposefully and thoughtfully. Not only are generalizations from this data not necessarily possible or desirable due to the exploratory nature of this research, but the fact that librarians need time and space within their cognitive load and within their schedules to reflect on such ideas and

questions as those put forth here indicates that there are potential areas for improvement within librarian workloads in order to facilitate such reflections and conversations.

Discussion

Results of this exploratory study indicate with some conviction that there is a place for academic libraries and academic librarians working against the structures and habits of (burgeoning) totalitarian, nationalistic, and/or tyrannical systems. This is (perhaps unsurprisingly) evident in librarians' responses regarding core values (e.g., openness, an information literate society, credibility) and developmental efforts (e.g., critical thinking and information literacy). There are also (again, perhaps unsurprising) hurdles and challenges to fully embracing these potential roles, including the limitations of one-shot instructional sessions, the need for supplemental instruction opportunities or the creation of standalone instructional tools, and the need for librarians to have additional training in these values and concerns (e.g., [discussing/spotting/etc.] propaganda, media literacy, ethics).

Also evident in the survey responses is the fact that more librarians feel they address the modes in some way, shape, or form, through their instructional efforts than feel they see ways to approach these modes through the *Framework*—a key guiding document for information literacy instruction efforts among academic librarians. In addition, one participant noted that the *Framework's* stricter focus on scholarly content over popular may have limited the visibility of the propaganda strategy of repetition (i.e., Snyder's Shamanistic Incantation) for survey respondents. While this is not necessarily an issue—that the modes are not easily addressed through the frames—it may be worth considering in the pursuit of additional/companion documents to the *Framework*. Understandably, librarians most commonly associated the frame “Authority is Constructed and Contextual” with the modes put forth in Snyder's work and this study, with all other frames falling into various, more limited levels of potential utility.

Future research should consider exploring the role of the Authority frame in its ability to combat authoritarian and totalitarian information environments. Additional directions might include further exploration of the intersection between the values identified here and Snyder's modes, delving more deeply into librarians' challenges and limitations in approaching these topics and concerns, and differences between how public and academic librarians approach these modes.

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Appendix: Survey

The Purpose of this Survey

This October (2021), a graphic novel version of Timothy Snyder's *On Tyranny* (2017) will be published. On reading an advance copy of the graphic novel, the researchers got to thinking about Victor Klemperer's *Language of the Third Reich* (1957) and Snyder's summation of Klemperer, that "truth dies in four modes," and whether information literacy (IL) instruction (and/or other literacy-focused instructional efforts) approach any of these modes and, if so...how?

The Intended Audience for this Survey

Academic librarians involved in information literacy instruction, including those in leadership/administration positions. You do not need faculty status, deep fluency with the ACRL *Framework* (or with Klemperer's writing), or a role teaching a credit-bearing information literacy course to participate. Just a position in an academic library where you teach information literacy-focused content as part of your job.

By clicking the arrow below, I signify my consent in participating in this study. I also understand:

- participation is optional,
- no questions require a response,
- there are no benefits to my participation (other than to
- potentially generalizable knowledge),
- I will receive nothing in exchange for my participation, and
- no identifiable data will be collected as part of my participation (my response will have a unique ID from Qualtrics)

About You

1. My IL instructional role is... (choose one)
 - I teach a credit-bearing information literacy course.
 - Primarily an IL instruction librarian

- An academic librarian who occasionally conducts IL instruction amongst my other duties
 - A library leader/administrator who occasionally conducts IL instruction amongst my other duties
2. I am...(choose one)
- an early-career librarian (<10 years in field)
 - a mid-career librarian (10-20 years in the field)
 - a long-time librarian (< 20 years in the field)
3. My institution is...(choose one)
- Private
 - Public
 - For-profit
4. My level of familiarity with Snyder's *On Tyranny* is...(choose one)
- Non-existent
 - Some
 - Considerable
5. My level of familiarity with Klemperer's work/perspective is...(choose one)
- Non-existent
 - Some
 - Considerable

The questions to follow have the same structure:

- Information about the mode (by which "truth dies");
- Whether you believe that mode is addressed in the ACRL *Framework*;
- Whether you believe you at all address this mode in your information literacy instruction efforts and, if so, where/how

Mode 1: Open Hostility to Verifiable Reality

"You submit to tyranny when you renounce the difference between what you want to hear and what is actually the case. This renunciation of reality can feel natural and pleasant, but the result is your demise as an individual--and thus the collapse of any political system that depends upon individualism. As observers of totalitarianism such as Victor Klemperer noticed, truth dies in four modes. The first form is the open hostility to verifiable reality, which takes the form of presenting inventions and lies as if they were facts." (Snyder, 2021, p. 58)

6. Do you believe the concepts described in the description of Mode 1: Open Hostility to Verifiable Reality (above) are addressed at all in the ACRL *Framework*? (choose one)
 - No
 - Maybe
 - Yes
7. If you answered "Yes" or "Maybe" to the question above, where/how? (text box)
8. Do you believe that this concept (Mode 1) is at all addressed in your information literacy instruction efforts/sessions? (choose one)
 - No
 - Maybe
 - Yes
9. If you believe, or think you might, address Mode 1 (Open Hostility to Verifiable Reality) in your IL instruction...share with us what that means for you. How do you do this? What learning outcomes, plans, activities, etc., do you utilize? (text box)

Mode 2: Shamanistic Incantation

"The second mode is shamanistic incantation. As Klemperer noted, the fascist style depends upon "endless repetition, designed to make the fictional plausible and the criminal desirable." (Snyder, 2021, p. 59)

10. Do you believe the concepts described in the description of Mode 2: Shamanistic Incantation (above) are addressed at all in the ACRL *Framework*? (choose one)
- No
 - Maybe
 - Yes
11. If you answered "Yes" or "Maybe" to the question above, where/how? (text box)
12. Do you believe that this concept (Mode 2) is at all addressed in your information literacy instruction efforts/sessions? (choose one)
- No
 - Maybe
 - Yes
13. If you believe, or think you might, address Mode 2 (Shamanistic Incantation) in your IL instruction...share with us what that means for you. How do you do this? What learning outcomes, plans, activities, etc., do you utilize? (text box)

Mode 3: Magical Thinking

"The next mode is magical thinking, or the open embrace of contradiction. [...] ...Accepting untruth of this radical kind requires a blatant abandonment of reason. Klemperer's descriptions of losing friends in Germany in 1933 over the issue of magical thinking ring eerily true today. One of his former students implored him to 'abandon yourself to your feelings, and you must always focus on the Fuhrer's greatness, rather than on the discomfort you are feeling at present.'" (Snyder, 2021, p. 60)

14. Do you believe the concepts described in the description of Mode 3: Magical Thinking (above) are addressed at all in the ACRL *Framework*? (choose one)
- No
 - Maybe
 - Yes
15. If you answered "Yes" or "Maybe" to the question above, where/how? (text box)

16. Do you believe that this concept (Mode 3) is at all addressed in your information literacy instruction efforts/sessions? (choose one)

- No
- Maybe
- Yes

17. If you believe, or think you might, address Mode 3 (Magical Thinking) in your IL instruction...share with us what that means for you. How do you do this? What learning outcomes, plans, activities, etc., do you utilize? (text box)

Mode 4: Misplaced Faith

"The final mode is misplaced faith. It involves the sort of self-deifying claims the president made when he said that 'I alone can solve it' or 'I am your voice.' When faith descends from heaven to earth this way, no room remains for the small truths of our individual discernment and experience. What terrified Klemperer was the way that this transition seemed permanent. Once truth had become oracular rather than factual, evidence was irrelevant." (Snyder, 2021, p. 61)

18. Do you believe the concepts described in the description of Mode 4: Misplaced Faith (above) are addressed at all in the ACRL *Framework*? (choose one)

- No
- Maybe
- Yes

19. If you answered "Yes" or "Maybe" to the question above, where/how? (text box)

20. Do you believe that this concept (Mode 4) is at all addressed in your information literacy instruction efforts/sessions? (choose one)

- No
- Maybe
- Yes

21. If you believe, or think you might, address Mode 4 (Misplaced Faith) in your IL instruction...share with us what that means for you. How do you do this? What learning outcomes, plans, activities, etc., do you utilize? (text box)

Your General Thoughts

22. Do you think *academic libraries* have a role in addressing any/all of these 4 modes by which truth "dies" (according to Klemperer)? Why/Why not? How? (text box)
23. Do you think *academic librarians* have a role in addressing any/all of these 4 modes by which truth "dies" (according to Klemperer)? Why/Why not? How? (text box)