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Ethics, Libraries and Librarians: an Annotated Bibliography

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Behrman is Community Librarian at a branch of the Fort Vancouver Regional Library. She claims in this short article that the ethical foundations of library science is paradoxical, embracing at once the concept that librarianship ought to be politically neutral and the fact that the values of the profession in America are derived from the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The librarian as individual gets caught in the cross hairs of this paradox and confounds it with the exercise of their personal perspective.


Buchanan teaches in the School for Information Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She notes that the ALA does not require accredited schools of library science to offer specific coursework in ethics. In this paper she presents her findings from a survey of 49 accredited schools of library science concerning their teaching of ethics. Of these she identified 16 as offering dedicated courses in library and/or information ethics. An analysis of course content found there to be broad agreement as to the content of these courses (the ALA code of ethics, fair use and copyright issues, censorship and privacy issues). She recommends that all library science courses offer a course on ethics.
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Budd is a professor in the School of Information Science at the University of Missouri-Columbia. In this article he argues for an ethical framework founded on theories of rights. Unfortunately, Budd's lack of formal training in philosophy results in a clumsy effort in which philosophers belonging to wildly divergent schools of thought get lumped together in an effort to support his ideas. Budd depends on John Rawls' theory of rights for his framework and then tries to shoe-horn in the communicative ethics of Jurgun Habermas as a way for librarians to deliberate and communally accept ethical norms. Mixed in with all of this is discussion of professional codes and values. Budd's concerns and goals are laudable but perhaps he should have sought a philosopher as co-author.


Bunge offers a model for ethical reference librarian-client relationships called the "fiduciary relationship" which acknowledges the librarian's special knowledge and expertise whilst honoring the client's personal competence, authority and responsibility. Bunge posits that the reference librarian must be trustworthy, discrete, candid about their skills and knowledge, competent and diligent in their work in order to have an ethical and successful working relationship with their clients. This article is concise,

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comprehensive and offers a truly practical framework for the reference librarian to reflect on their work and evaluate ethical dilemmas which may arise.


Cain offers a concise outline of the constitutionally protected right of intellectual freedom. She establishes censorship as an impingement on that freedom and explains the various ways that librarians may deliberately or inadvertently censor materials. She claims that resistance to censorship is required to maintain the public's trust in libraries and librarians.


Cooke works for the Baltimore County Public Library. He outlines the tremendous prejudice that GLBT librarians still face in America today and the ethical issues that surround discrimination in the workplace among fellow librarians. He astutely points out that discrimination against people (both co-workers and library users) who identify as GLBT by librarians is in direct contradiction to the American Library Association's code of ethics and that the effect on services provided can be profound. Cooke's work invites the reader to examine whether other prejudices which remain unexamined or acknowledged effect the library and its users as well.

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Dole is University Librarian at Washburn University and Hurych works in the Science and Engineering department of Founders Memorial Library, Northern Illinois University. This article focuses on the stresses that the "information age" has put on librarians. The article fails to adequately define the difference between ethics and values. At the center of the article is an informal "values" survey the authors conducted at two academic libraries, one library class and an international conference. While differences were found in the priorities of the varying groups it was found that the values of service and preservation of the cultural record were strongly supported by all.


Hauptman is a professor at St. Cloud University and the editor of the *Journal of Information Ethics*. In this book he claims that librarians have been acculturated to not consider personal ethics in their work as information professionals. This standpoint is codified in the American Library Association's code of ethics. For Hauptman this is highly problematic for he believes that rather than reflect on ethical dilemmas in the workplace, librarians may take the path of least resistance and blindly adhere to the code. He believes that librarians should consciously make decisions based on the greater good of society instead of merely by the code of ethics.

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Hoffman is the director of the Research Medical Library at the University of Texas. In this paper she reports on the findings of a survey sponsored by the Texas Library Association's Professional Rights and Responsibilities Committee intended to evaluate member knowledge of the American Library Association code of ethics and member attitudes towards it. She reports that participating librarians were largely in conflict with the second provision of the code (protection of intellectual freedom and resisting censorship). Awareness of the code was generally high among participants and low levels of conflict were detected with other provisions of the code.


This curious book is actually a history of the development of the American Library Association's (ALA) code of ethics up until 1985. It begins with a short history of the development of codes of ethics in a variety of professions and places the ALA's code in that larger context. The book includes commentary on the ALA's code of ethics by prominent librarians and ends with a number of case studies in the application of ethical principles. In general, the approach of the text is practical and normative. While it gives a good historical overview it does little by way of analysis and offers little of substance for the librarian with ethical concerns.

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This is a collection of papers presented at the Twenty-First Allerton Institute in 1989 that had as its subject, "professional ethics". Articles cover a wide range of issues including reference work, human resource management, education, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Library Awareness Program among others. Most of the contributors are professors and deans in graduate level library science programs. Articles are thoughtful, concise, and practical in their focus and of great value to the professional librarian seeking information on common ethical issues in libraries.


Palmer is a reference collections coordinator at Cornell University. As a reference librarian with over 20 years of experience she posits that a reference transaction must first be good before we can consider whether it is ethical. Unfortunately she never explains what makes a "good" reference transaction. Instead she proceeds with a loosely organized survey of a variety of ethical situations which may arise in the reference transaction. She concludes that we are kidding ourselves if we believe that we remain neutral and offer equal service to all clients.
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Trushina is Senior Researcher and Assistant Deputy Director of Research at the National Library of Russia, St. Petersburg, Russia. She offers a brief overview of an international survey concerning ethics and librarianship conducted in 2002. She claims that the overriding ethical point of agreement internationally is preservation of intellectual freedom. However, advances in filtering the internet and the belief of many librarians internationally that librarians have a moral obligation to the user means that filters are increasingly being utilized in libraries around the world. While she is apparently comfortable with a higher level of censorship than American information professionals she does caution about the "invisibility" of censorship via filter so that people have no idea what they are even missing.


Wengert teaches in the philosophy department at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This position explains the ease and familiarity he demonstrates with the finer points of current theories of ethics. Wengert claims that reliance on rights theories leads to a narrow way of thinking about librarianship and librarian's relationship to the users they assist. For Wengert, a rights focus can obscure value judgments made by librarians and libraries as institutions.

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