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# The Library as Safe Space

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The Library as Safe Space

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## Abstract

Purpose: The author of this chapter will explain how libraries define safe space through policies, procedures, and professional codes of ethics. The chapter will generate a history of the concept of libraries as safe space, will explain how libraries attempt to create safe spaces in physical and online environments, and will show how library practices both help and harm patrons in need of safe space.

Design/methodology/approach: This chapter provides a review of the literature that illustrates how libraries provide safe space—or not—for their patrons. The author will deconstruct the ALA Code of Ethics and Bill of Rights to demonstrate how libraries remain heteronormative institutions that do not recognize the existence of diverse patrons or employees, and how this phenomenon manifests in libraries.

Findings: Libraries, either through their physical construction or through policies and procedures, have become spaces for illegal activities and discrimination. Populations who would be most likely to use libraries often report barriers to access.

Practical Implications: Libraries should revisit their policies and procedures, as well as assess their physical and online spaces, to determine whether or not they truly provide safe space for their patrons. While libraries can become *safer* spaces, they should clearly communicate what types of safety they actually provide.

Originality/value: This chapter offers a critique of libraries as safe spaces, which will challenge popular opinions of libraries, and compel the profession to improve.

*Keywords:* Safe space, libraries, LGBT, homeless, disabled, people of color, refugees, crime, censorship, privacy, security, discrimination, library ethics

In the twenty first century, libraries open their doors to a more diverse clientele than ever before in history. Twenty first century library employees also are more diverse than their predecessors. As more people—whether patrons or employees themselves—seek sanctuary, privacy, information, assistance, or social opportunities in the library, library administrators must reconsider whether their libraries provide equal, empathic, nonjudgmental service to everyone, have resources for everyone and representing all community members, spaces for different types of activity, and provide equal access to all of their resources and services, with no judgment passed and no questions asked about why someone would want such resources and services, or even why someone would want to challenge them. This, ideally, is how libraries provide safe space for the community.

Libraries do not have to conform to any legal requirements to provide safe space for people, although they must conform to city, state, and federal anti-discrimination ordinances, the American Disabilities Act, and civil rights legislation that impacts the hiring of minorities, the disabled, and veterans. Library employees may adhere to their professional code of ethics, but so often a disconnect exists between ideals and the realities that library employees construct for themselves and their patrons. Even the layout of physical or online library spaces leads to lack of safety for multiple populations. For these reasons, it is important for library administrators to understand the definition of safe space, how libraries interpret safe space and attempt to create it for resources, patrons, and employees, and the challenges of providing safe space for everyone and everything. It is the author's hope that this book chapter will inspire libraries to review their mission and vision statements, policies and procedures, customer service practices, and their physical and online spaces to truly meet the needs of patrons around the world.

### **Definition of Safe Space**

Higher education professionals first employed the term “safe space” during the Civil Rights movement, when rethinking learning environments for African-American students on predominantly white campuses (Booker, 2007). The feminist movement also used the term “safe space” to describe a place where survivors of rape or incest could talk about their experiences without judgement, as well as a space that would not allow anti-feminist viewpoints (Campbell, Sefl, Wasco, & Ahrens, 2004; Carroll, 2015). In the 1990s, higher education professionals began to apply the term “safe space” or “safe zone” to spaces created for LGBT<sup>1</sup> populations to congregate without the influence of homophobic, lesbophobic, biphobic, transphobic or heteronormative biases (Poynter & Tubbs, 2007, p. 122-123) or forums devoted to the discussion of difficult topics, such as racism or LGBT issues (VanderStouwe, 2015).

A generic definition of “safe space” in the higher education environment is a space where faculty, staff, and students can feel secure and free to express themselves, learn, and achieve without censure or harm (Booker, 2007). It also is a term for an area or forum where a marginalized group is not supposed to face stereotypes or further marginalization (Geek Feminism Wiki, n.d.). While critics claim that safe spaces actually restrict freedom of speech or “authentic” academic discourse (Harris, 2015; Shulevitz, 2015), students and faculty both clamor for civility and collegiality in the higher education environment, whether created by ground rules for behavior (Arao & Clemens, 2013) or “trigger warnings” on readings or films for students (National Coalition Against Censorship, 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> LGBT in this chapter is an umbrella acronym that will stand for all identities on the queer spectrum, including but not limited to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, questioning, queer, asexual, pansexual, and all non-binary identities.

Safe spaces can exist in physical or virtual environments. Ground rules for behavior, the presence or absence of particular people, geography, and engineering can provide the foundation for a safe space. With that said, are libraries safe spaces?

### **Definition of Safe Space in Libraries**

Libraries define “safety” through policies and procedures to protect employees, patrons, library resources, and the physical building itself from harm (Alliance Library System, n.d.; Graham, 2013; Halsted, Clifton, & Wilson, 2014). Libraries have designed smart practices for handling emergencies (Halsted, Clifton, & Wilson, 2014), cybersecurity (American Libraries Association, 2015), and “inappropriate” behavior (Alliance Library System, n.d.; Graham, 2013); quite often they perceive innovations as disrupters and potentially dangerous (Alliance Library System, n.d.; Graham, 2013). At the same time, most librarians—particularly LGBT librarians—assert that libraries are safe spaces for all who are different (Carmichael, 1998; Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, 2015; Kester, 1997; Nectoux, 2011; Schrader, 2009; Vailancourt, 2013) and that librarians should take the lead in teaching the community how to maintain the library a safe space for learning and expression (Gittings, 1990; Mehra & Braquet, 2007).

As reading groups, literacy programs, social services, and community engagement activities sprung from libraries, inadvertently the libraries provided a “third space” perceived as a safe space (Brewster, 2014; Elmborg, 2011; Goulding, 2005; Ruhlmann, 2014; Shoemaker, 2011; Simpson, 2014). For the unemployed, a library provides free computers with Internet access to search for employment and apply for jobs. For homeless patrons, a library provides shelter from the elements. For the bullied, it provides sanctuary. For recovering addicts, it provides resources and activities in a substance-free environment. For parents, it provides a space that they perceive

as monitored and safe for their children. As librarians took note of the increasing diversity of their patrons and their needs, librarian perception of their role and their space began to change.

While libraries have not traditionally used the term “safe space” to describe themselves or the environments that they create, librarians commit to a code of ethics that, if practiced, would make libraries a safe space for information gathering and exchange. This would involve protecting freedom of expression, fighting censorship, respecting diversity, and protecting individual privacy, for patrons and coworkers alike. If librarians conduct their work with these core values as their framework, then all libraries, ideally, would be safe spaces for learning, teaching, and sharing for everyone.

### **History of Libraries as Safe Spaces**

#### **Library as Safe Space for Things**

From the beginning of time, libraries had served as safe spaces for *things*—clay tablets, scrolls, books, and other sources of information. Prior to the invention of the printing press, such objects were labor intensive to produce and difficult to acquire. The information that they contained was also of great value, and the only people who could read them were clergy, nobility, physicians, scientists, and merchants. These first libraries, not open to the public, were kept cloistered in monasteries or convents, or in secluded palace chambers. Invading armies often pillaged such libraries and transported the collections back to their homelands with imprisoned clergy or other servants who could help the new ruling class make sense of them. For these reasons, early librarians chained books to shelves and focused on security of these resources over the needs of people.

Modern library emergency and disaster plans focus more on the protection of resources, and the valuation of lost resources, than they do people (Alliance Library System, n.d.; Graham, 2013; Halsted, Clifton, & Wilson, 2014). While library administrators strive to reconstruct their physical library spaces to welcome people, they must also consider climate-controlled environments for print materials, expensive security systems, surveillance cameras, and the employment of public safety or police officers to patrol the building. This age-old mission to protect *things* also extends to the library's online resources. Publisher license agreements and multiple online resource platforms create barriers to access and resource sharing. Online resources also have complex maintenance and backup plans, accessible only to those with passwords, for fear of theft, hacking, or terrorism.

### **Library as Safe Space for People**

The first free public libraries opened in the North American colonies in the eighteenth century, and in United Kingdom under the Public Libraries Act of 1850. Social reformers believed that they should encourage “the lower classes” to spend their free time on “morally uplifting activities” such as reading. Immigrants attending night school or seeking respite from overcrowded tenements would seek out their community library to study or learn on their free time. As more mothers went to work full time, the library began to serve as a space perceived as safe for their children to do their homework or participate in wholesome after school activities.

Josephine Adams Rathbone drafted the first “suggested” American Library Association Code of Ethics in 1930 (American Library Association, 2016d). While a great deal of the document details how a public library should be governed and organized, Rathbone introduced some progressive concepts of librarianship for the time, noting that libraries are for *people*, and not *things*. The first paragraph of this document states:



The library as an institution exists for the benefit of a given constituency. This may be the nation, a state, a county, a municipality, a school or college, a special field of research, industry or commerce, or some more limited group.

(Rathbone, as written in the Bulletin of the American Library Association, Vol. 24, No. 3, March 1930, para. 1, published online by the American Library Association, 2016d)

“Section B. Librarian” defines librarian, their role, and their duties. Under “2. Librarian and constituency”, Rathbone hints at how the librarian should provide a safe space:

The librarian, representing the government body, should see that the library serves impartially all individuals, groups; and elements that make up its constituency. In the case of the public library as a non-partisan institution the books purchased should represent all phases of opinion and interest rather than the personal tastes of the librarian or board members. In an official capacity, the librarian and

members of the staff should not express personal opinions or controversial questions, as political, religious, or economic. issues; especially those of a local nature (Rathbone, as written in the Bulletin of the American Library Association, Vol. 24, No. 3, March 1930, published online by the American Library Association, 2016d)

In the early twentieth century, a time spanning two world wars and the emerging Cold War, people often equated neutrality with safety (Office of the Historian, n.d.). Authority figures or public spaces that expressed no opinions on religion, race, politics, or sexuality provided a welcoming environment for everyone, a non-judgmental zone focused on community building.

During a time of segregation, Jim Crow laws, criminalization of LGBTIQ people, rising anti-Semitism, and sterilization of those deemed “unfit”, Rathbone’s statement was radical for its time. In describing how librarians and staff should relate to the public, Rathbone states the following:

The staff owes impartial, courteous service to all persons using the library. Among the patrons entitled to use the library no distinctions of race, color, creed or condition should influence the attitude of the staff, and no favoritism should be tolerated. On the other hand, a cold officialism is to be avoided and a cordial attitude which welcomes approach should be manifested by those in direct contact with the public (Rathbone, as written in the Bulletin of the American Library Association, Vol. 24, No. 3, March 1930, Section C. “The Staff”, part 2., “Relations to the public”, para. 2, published online by the American Library Association, 2016d).

Rathbone’s proposed professional code of ethics for librarians would cause predominantly white librarians to question how they would treat African-American patrons, or even welcome them into the building. It would also cause librarians to question any personal classist or ableist perspectives that would influence how they would provide space and service for patrons. This initial code of ethics for American librarians marked the origin of when librarians realized they must provide something deeper for patrons than books and quiet rooms.

Rathbone also described appropriate ethics and behavior for staff, and recognized how staff relations had an impact on library space and service:

The atmosphere of the library is disturbed unless the workers preserve harmony and a spirit of cooperation among themselves; hence the staff relations, while impersonal within the building, should be friendly. Envy, jealousy, or gossip should have no place in a library staff. (Rathbone, as written in the Bulletin of the American Library Association, Vol. 24, No. 3, March 1930, Section C. “The Staff”, part 1., “Loyalty”, para. 1, published online by the American Library Association, 2016d)

Without librarians and staff modeling appropriate behavior amongst themselves, Rathbone believed, there would be no way to maintain a positive, judgment free atmosphere in the library for patrons. While no terminology existed for it at the time, Rathbone’s sentiment plants a seed for ground rules of safe space decades later.

In 1939, the American Library Association voted to adopt a more concise code of ethics that erased Rathbone’s calls for neutrality, friendliness, and acceptance of diversity (American Library Association, 2016b). In fact, the new code of ethics stated that librarians should practice some form of employment discrimination:

21. In view of the importance of ability and personality traits in library work, a librarian should encourage only those persons with suitable aptitudes to enter the library profession and should discourage the continuance in service of the unfit (CODE OF ETHICS FOR LIBRARIANS, as written in the Midwinter Council Minutes, *American Library Association Bulletin*, 22 (2), 1939: Section IV:

Relation of the Librarian to His Profession, American Library Association, 2016b).

During an era of white Christian supremacy, eugenics, and national discrimination against the disabled and LGBTIQ individuals, the term “unfit” implied that any perceived weakness was biological and fixed. The 1939 Code of Ethics approved by the American Library Association does not go ahead to define abilities, aptitudes, and personality traits required for library work, which might have resulted in discrimination in hiring, retention, and promotion of librarians and staff that would today be considered illegal. If librarians and staff were encouraged to “weed out” those deemed “unfit” without standard benchmarks for the profession, this could have caused disharmony among the staff, and may have led to what we now call microaggressions among employees, as well as employees exhibiting microaggressions to patrons. Because library administrators and librarians were strictly ordered to keep any negative internal politics confidential, few reported incidents of discrimination in library workplaces exist. Library employees, under the umbrella of American Library Association guidelines, may have policed each other.

One year after the approval of the 1939 Code of Ethics, the ALA Council established the Intellectual Freedom Committee (American Library Association Archives, n.d.) This new entity, with the full name of “the Committee on Intellectual Freedom to Safeguard the Rights of Library Users to Freedom of Inquiry”, primarily concerned itself with unbiased book selection, open meeting rooms, censorship, and providing access to all library patrons (American Library Association Archives, n.d.). The committee’s first major crisis came during the McCarthy era (1947-1954), when librarians in the United States were pressured to censor collections and root out colleagues deemed “Communist” (Francoeur, 2006). The right wing’s definition of “Communist” included early civil rights activists and homosexuals. Employees seeking employment in state-

sponsored public services—including public and school libraries—had to take a “moral fitness” test, which would have kept LGBT people out of library jobs

(the Williams Institute, n.d.). In a report published by the Williams Institute:

The federal government created and popularized justifications for excluding “homosexuals” from the workplace and then state, municipal and private employers followed suit. Between 1946 and 1969, witch hunts for LGBT public employees by their employers meant they were fired *en masse*, not on an individual basis. While these purges saw thousands of employees fired, thousands more were investigated and harassed, and hundreds of thousands of employees were forced to swear that they were not homosexual, forcefully sending the message to all LGBT public and private employees to stay in the closet”

(The Williams Institute, n.d., p. 5-2, para. 2).

During the McCarthy era, librarians suspected of being queer were harassed and fired in California, Florida, Iowa, Massachusetts, Texas, Oklahoma, Idaho, North Carolina, New York, South Carolina, Ohio, and possibly in other states where individuals did not sue or do anything else to further “out” themselves (The Williams Institute, n.d.). While libraries may or may not have been safe spaces for queer patrons at that time, they definitely were not safe spaces for openly queer employees. This would have created a vicious cycle of unsafe space in libraries for all LGBT individuals. It took LGBT activists not employed in libraries, such as Barbara Gittings, to organize librarians and advocate for adding positive, truthful LGBT resources to collections

and eliminating LGBT discrimination in library employment, because those working in the field felt unsafe voicing their opinions on the matter (Gittings, 1990).

Most public libraries in the Jim Crow South were situated in white communities and excluded millions of African-Americans before desegregation (Graham, 2001, p. 2). According to Graham, white librarians in the South sympathetic to the black Civil Rights movement were discriminated against in employment and in their communities, pressuring most white librarians in the South to remain silent on the issue of desegregation in libraries or adding pro-Civil Rights materials to library collections (Graham, 2001, p. 5). Black activists not working in libraries, as well as white Civil Rights activists from other parts of the United States, were the ones who took an active role in desegregating southern libraries. While librarians who supported desegregation and equal opportunity did exist in Southern libraries—Juliette Hampton Morgan, Emily Reed, and Patricia Blalock are prominent examples—many either did their work quietly, behind the scenes to avoid termination, or simply did nothing. It is quite possible that most Southern white library administrators, librarians, and staff, brought up and educated in the Jim Crow South, wanted to maintain the status quo or did not believe that blacks were qualified to work in white libraries. To this day, across the United States, people of color are underrepresented in library employment at all levels, in all libraries, in part due to this racist library legacy (Switzer, 2008; Vinopal, 2016).

### **Library as Safe Space for Ideas**

The fall of McCarthyism and federal civil rights legislation made the American Library Association (ALA) rethink its Code of Ethics. After forty years, ALA revised its Code of Ethics several times; once again the focus of librarian work shifted, from *protection of things* to the

*servicing of people to the protection of ideas and the flow of information* (American Library Association, 2016c, para. 2). In 1981, ALA published its “Statement on Professional Ethics”, which said:

Librarians significantly influence or control the selection, organization, preservation, and dissemination of information. In a political system grounded in an informed citizenry, librarians are members of a profession explicitly committed to intellectual freedom and the freedom of access to information. We have a special obligation to ensure the free flow of information and ideas to present and future generations.

(American Library Association, 2016c, para. 2)

The 1981 ALA Statement of Ethics charged librarians with some duties, several of which would be backed up by federal and state legislation. As part of their job, librarians “...must resist all efforts by groups or individuals to censor library materials” (Section II, American Library Association, 2016c), “...protect each user’s right to privacy with respect to information sought or received, and materials consulted, borrowed, or acquired” (Section III, American Library Association, 2016c), “...adhere to the principles of due process and equality of opportunity in peer relationships and personnel actions” (Section IV, American Library Association, 2016c), and “...distinguish clearly in their actions and statements between their personal philosophies and attitudes and those of an institution or professional body” (Section V, American Library Association, 2016c). While librarians incorporate these duties into their policies and procedures today, ALA revised its ethics again in 1995, stripping it of any legal obligation but stating that “[these are]

the values to which we are committed...The principles of this Code are expressed in broad statements to guide ethical decision making. These statements provide a framework; they cannot and do not dictate conduct to cover particular situations” (ALA Code of Ethics, 1995).

The 1995 ALA Code of Ethics becomes separated from federal and state law, yet includes principles that exist in the most current ALA Code of Ethics, and have the potential to create safe space:

- I. We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests.
- II. We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.
- III. We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted.
- IV. We respect intellectual property rights.
- V. We treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairness and good faith, and advocate conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees of our institutions.
- VI. We do not advance private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues, or our employing institutions.
- VII. We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources.
- VIII. We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession

(ALA Code of Ethics, 1995, American Library Association, 2016a).

The 1995 ALA Code of Ethics, without stating it outright, provides the foundation for library as safe space. Section I of this code states that the highest level of service to patrons is “accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests”, which would imply non-judgmental treatment of patrons. Section II reaffirms the librarian’s commitment to resist censorship and uphold intellectual freedom, which would include protecting freedom of expression, thought, and



exchange of information. Section III strengthens this commitment to protecting intellectual freedom by stating that librarians will protect the privacy of all patrons engaged in information seeking and exchange. Sections IV and VI imply that libraries will not corrupt the free flow of information and ideas by giving patron data to private companies, and will not exploit content creators or patrons in any way for financial gain, thus making libraries safe spaces from laissez-faire capitalism. Last but not least, Section V commits librarians to fair and non-judgmental treatment of their colleagues, as well as protection of their rights and well-being in the workplace. This is also the first time when the ALA Code of Ethics is written from the perspective of all librarians, with each statement starting with “We”, as opposed to directive statements starting with “Librarians will”. It is possible that, for the first time, library administrators, librarians, and library staff are more united in their adherence to these principles to create safe space than ever before in history.

### **The International Federation of Libraries and Archives (IFLA) Code of Ethics**

The International Federation of Libraries and Archives (IFLA) was founded in 1927 (IFLA, 2015b). Prior to IFLA, the League of Nations’ Commission for Intellectual Cooperation was established in 1925 to reverse “the extensive damages wrought by World War I, not only in intellectual and cultural domains but in the fields of economics, technology and politics” (Wieder, 2011, p. 12, para. 4). Librarians from different countries attended the League of Nations’ Library Conference to affirm their commitment to worldwide cooperation, sharing of information resources, and cultural understanding across national frontiers, as well as to assert themselves in cultural policy (Wieder, 2011, p. 13, para. 1).

IFLA founder Gabriel Henriot’s original focus was on the exchange of bibliographic information among nations and uniting library professional associations of all countries into one

“superbody” (Wieder, 2011, p. 13, para. 1). Later on, IFLA organizers decided that the purpose of IFLA international conference would be to address “questions of a truly international character, related to international problems or problems of general interest, and of concern to a number of countries” (Wieder, 2011, p. 15, para. 1). After World War II, countries around the world suffered devastating “material and intellectual losses”—in particular, theft or destruction of collections or entire libraries, the persecution and murder of people involved in library work, the book trade, and publishing, and new geographic and political challenges (Wieder, 2011, p. 25, para. 3).<sup>2</sup>

In 1947, IFLA President Godet stated that librarians have a “cultural responsibility” and a “humane rather than purely professional mission of international solidarity” when reconstructing libraries and rebuilding international ties (Wieder, 2011, p. 25, para. 3). In the same year, IFLA and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) signed a formal agreement to work collaboratively on shared concerns (Wieder, 2011, p. 26, para. 1). E.J. Carter, UNESCO representative at IFLA sessions, stated that libraries are “active and living demonstrations of UNESCO’s basic ideas and practice” (Wieder, 2011, p. 26, para. 2). UNESCO promotes the culture of peace and non-violence—creation of safe space for all the world’s people--which the organization defines as

...a commitment to peace-building, mediation, conflict prevention and resolution, peace education, education for non-violence, tolerance, acceptance, mutual respect, intercultural and interfaith dialogue and reconciliation.

(UNESCO, n.d.)

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<sup>2</sup> While Wieder does not state this outright, out of respect for the German speaking IFLA members as well as his German publisher, a significant percentage of damage to library collections, libraries, library professionals, writers, publishers, and book sellers was overseen and approved by the Nazi Party to eliminate Jewish, LGBT, and other “deviant” existence from media production, education, and culture of the Reich.

In 1997, IFLA founded the Committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) (Byrne, 1999). According to the IFLA website

FAIFE is an initiative within IFLA to defend and promote basic human rights defined in Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights...FAIFE monitors the state of intellectual freedom within the library community world-wide, supports IFLA policy development and co-operation with other international rights organisations, and responds to violations of free access to information and freedom of expression (IFLA, 2015a).

In 2012, FAIFE established the IFLA Code of Ethics for Librarians and Other Information Workers (IFLA, 2012). While the FAIFE mission is primarily to “Raise awareness of the essential correlation between the library concept and the values of freedom of expression” (IFLA, 2014), the IFLA Code of Ethics is grounded in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 19 in particular), and charges librarians with social responsibility:

Article 19 expressly sets out a right to “Seek, receive and impart information and ideas in any media regardless of frontiers” which provides a clear rationale for libraries and the practice of modern and progressive librarianship...The emphasis on information rights in turn obliges librarians and other information workers to develop a principled critique of relevant law and to be prepared to advise and, if appropriate, advocate the improvement of both the substance and administration of laws (IFLA Code of Ethics, 2012, Preamble, para. 6).

In short, what the IFLA Code of Ethics suggests is that *librarians around the world should work to reform existing laws that prevent the formation of safe space for expression, learning, and diversity outside of the library so that safer spaces can exist inside of the library.*

According to IFLA, librarians should go far above and beyond staying silent in the stacks protecting books from theft. Librarians around the world, according to IFLA, are committed to defend “information rights”—the rights of all people to have equal and unfiltered access to information, to education, to the Internet, as well as to create and share information—without fear of persecution.

The IFLA Code of Ethics has six core principles, each explained in great detail: 1. Access to information, 2. Responsibilities toward individuals and society, 3. Privacy, secrecy, and transparency, 4. Open access and intellectual property, 5. Neutrality, personal integrity and professional skills, and 6. Colleague and employer/employee relationship (International Federation of Libraries and Archives, 2012). While the IFLA Code of Ethics states that “[T]he core mission of librarians and other information workers is to insure access to information for all” (Section 1. Access to Information, para. 1), it grounds this core mission in human rights and providing safe space:

In order to promote inclusion and eradicate discrimination, librarians and other information workers ensure that the right of accessing information is not denied and that equitable services are provided for everyone whatever their age, citizenship, political belief, physical or mental ability, gender identity, heritage, education, income, immigration and asylum-seeking status, marital status, origin, race, religion or sexual orientation.

(Section 2. Responsibilities toward individuals and society, para. 1)

Librarians and other information workers respect the protection of minors while ensuring this does not impact on the rights of adults.

(Section 2. Responsibilities toward individuals and society, para. 5)

It is possible that librarians around the world may experience dissonance between the IFLA Code of Ethics, the laws and practices of their nations, and how those impact definitions of library as safe space. The Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Egypt, is one such example. During the Egyptian Revolution of 2011, the library employees of Bibliotheca Alexandrina formed a human shield outside of their library to protect it from anti-Mubarak protesters (Youssef, 2011). They risked their personal safety to defend the resources and treasures within the library, with the cry “This is our Library. It belongs to our children!” The Bibliotheca Alexandrina, spared from destruction, sent the following message:

Because this valuable resource was spared a violent end, it can now be a cornerstone for rebuilding the new Egypt. The library will lead the movement to collect, organize, and make public the artifacts and evidences of this revolution. Those standing arm in arm around this building have come to represent the new Egypt, where the diverse population appreciates that libraries are not just buildings with books. Libraries are the gateways to knowledge and knowledge is the foundation of empowerment (Youssef, 2011, para. 13).

While the Bibliotheca Alexandrina views itself, and libraries in general, as gateways to knowledge, and a national leader in archiving the revolution, its librarians prioritize the Bibliotheca Alexandrina as a safe space for *things*, but not necessarily a safe space for *people* or *ideas*. Islam is the state religion, and Sharia the foundation of Egyptian law. LGBT rights do not exist in Egypt, and any LGBT presence in media is censored by the government. At the same time, a search of Bibliotheca Alexandrina’s catalog reveals that it has books about LGBT topics, including titles written by LGBT authors, in English, French, and other languages. While the mission

of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina states that it “aims to be: A center of excellence in the production and dissemination of knowledge and to be a place of dialogue, learning and understanding between cultures and peoples” and lists one of its main objectives as “aspir[ing] to be a center for learning, tolerance, dialogue, and understanding” (Bibliotheca Alexandrina, n.d.), the Bibliotheca Alexandrina—an institution that hosts multiple international library and book related conferences each year—may balk at inviting speakers from other countries with particular backgrounds. This is what happened to the author of this book chapter. After receiving an invite through LinkedIn from a librarian at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina to speak about EBooks and EReaders, the author was asked to send her CV to be reviewed by the Board of Directors. As the author also does extensive research and work in LGBT Studies and Jewish Studies, and happens to be a Jewish lesbian from the United States, she had received no response back from the BA, and all communication with the BA librarian ceased. This incident is evidence that BA administrators and librarians may be able to provide safe space for books about Jewish lesbians, but may not be able to provide safe space for real ones.

### **Comparison of the ALA and IFLA Codes of Ethics**

Ethics of librarianship can provide a frame for library space. Ideally, professional codes of ethics guide the practice of library employees--how they should treat each other and their patrons, the nonjudgmental respect they should hold for all perspectives, whether in the resources they acquire or the people who frequent their space, as well as the privacy that patrons should have when checking out materials or using library computers. If we compare the ALA and IFLA library codes of ethics, one would see some similarities, and also some things that are contradictory, or absences of language that could lead to discrimination against employees or patrons.

In its Preamble, the IFLA Code of Ethics identifies “information rights” as human rights, as defined in Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (IFLA, 2012, para. 5). This implies that one role of the librarian is to uphold and defend human rights. This notion is confirmed in the following paragraph, where IFLA empowers librarians “to develop a principled critique of relevant law and be prepared to advise and, if appropriate, advocate the improvement of both the substance and administration of laws” (IFLA, 2012, Preamble, para. 6). This could include advocating for the improvement of laws related to privacy, personal safety, and expression, which not only helps create safe space in the library but in the outer community, the nation, and the world. The ALA Code of Ethics, on the other hand, does not dictate that librarians challenge the law. Instead, it simply provides statements to guide ethical decision making, and allows librarians to determine for themselves whether they should take an active or passive role in the following activity:

We significantly influence or control the selection, organization, preservation, and dissemination of information. In a political system grounded in an informed citizenry, we are members of a profession explicitly committed to intellectual freedom and the freedom of access to information. We have a special obligation to ensure the free flow of information and ideas to present and future generations.

(ALA Code of Ethics, para. 3)

Both the American Library Association Code of Ethics (1996) and the International Federation of Libraries and Archives Code of Ethics (2012) express a commitment to intellectual freedom, fighting censorship, and making information as transparent and easily accessible as possible. They also state that librarians should provide resources and services that represent all viewpoints, as well as courteous, equitable service to all, regardless of their personal viewpoints. The ALA

Code of Ethics uses the term “unbiased” to express the core value that librarians should not allow “personal convictions” to “interfere with” collection development, access, service, or the “aims of our institutions” (Section VII). The IFLA Code of Ethics, however, employs the term “neutrality”:

Librarians and other information workers are strictly committed to neutrality and an unbiased stance regarding collection, access, and service. Neutrality results in the most balanced collection and the most balanced access to information achievable (Section 5. Neutrality, personal integrity and professional skills, para. 1).

This statement conflicts with IFLA’s statement in the preamble about how librarians should critique and reform laws that impact information rights. Neutrality as defined in the United States or other countries with legal and political systems that protect freedom of speech and civil rights cannot be the same as neutrality as it would be defined in a country whose political and legal system allows for nation-wide censorship and legalized discrimination. Libraries depend on government funding, which make them representatives of the state. State funded institutions, whether organizations of people, physical buildings, or online entities—whether consciously or not—promote the racial, ethnic, religious, and hegemonic norms of the state (Szulc, 2014, p. 3-4). How do librarians in China, where the government does not even allow its citizens unfiltered access to Google or Wikipedia, uphold this code of ethics when they are government funded employees who must also uphold the law of the nation? If a Chinese librarian truly takes a neutral stance on collection development, access, and service as defined by American librarians, he or she may be breaking the law. If a Chinese librarian takes a neutral stance on their work as defined by the Chinese government, neutrality would mean conformity to the party line.



In Section 2: “Responsibilities toward individuals and society”, the IFLA Code of Ethics states that librarians and other information workers “promote inclusion and eradicate discrimination” by making access to information available to everyone, and to provide equitable services for everyone (IFLA, 2012, Section 2, para. 1). IFLA spells out that information and services provided by libraries must be made available to everyone regardless of “age, citizenship, political belief, physical or mental ability, gender identity, heritage, education, income, immigration and asylum-seeking status, marital status, origin, race, religion or sexual orientation” (IFLA, 2012, Section 2, para. 1). Later on in Section 6: Colleague and employer/employee relationship, the IFLA Code of Ethics states “Librarians and other information workers oppose discrimination in any aspect of employment because of age, citizenship, political belief, physical or mental ability, gender, marital status, origin, race, religion, or sexual orientation” (2012, para. 2). This section also states that libraries should “respect the protection of minors while ensuring this does not impact the information rights of adults” (IFLA, 2012, Section 2, para. 5).

The ALA Code of Ethics remains more vague in whom it protects than many city and state anti-discrimination laws; it simply states that library employees should provide equitable resources, services, and treatment to everyone. At the same time, not naming the different groups that libraries serve can render them invisible, and some library employees in the United States still believe that “We do not have [fill in the blank] patrons come to our library”. At the same time, a significant percentage of vocal librarians believe that libraries should uphold standards such as provision of gender neutral bathrooms, programs for homeless patrons, and maximum access to resources and services for the disabled and for minors. They believe that libraries should engage in the fight against oppression of people of color, LGBTIQ populations, the undocumented, and other disenfranchised groups. And yet, the ALA Code of Ethics does not

state outright for whom are libraries, and whom they serve and protect. In the meantime, the International Federation of Libraries (IFLA) has spelled out all protected classes that libraries should serve and represent, even though a significant percentage of libraries around the world are located in countries where the government censors information and makes certain identities illegal. It is difficult to say how librarians in parts of the world that legalize and enforce discrimination can adhere to Section 2 of the IFLA Code of Ethics.

In Section 3. Privacy, secrecy and transparency, IFLA confirms the library's role in protection of patrons: "The relationship between the library and the user is one of confidentiality and librarians and other information workers will take appropriate measures to ensure that user data is not shared beyond the original transaction" (IFLA, 2012, Section 3, para. 2). While it is unclear how librarians working in countries where the government has the right to monitor people's online activity can prevent this from taking place in their libraries, at least the IFLA Code of Ethics states that they must make their best effort in fighting invasions of privacy, while at the same time demanding that government and business information is "opened to the scrutiny of the general public" (IFLA, 2012, Section 3, para. 3). In effect, librarians are charged with providing safe space for the people while challenging their governments. The ALA Code of Ethics, on the other hand, provides one sentence about privacy: "III. We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted". Perhaps ALA can keep their statement simple because laws of the United States already provide some protections to rights to privacy and confidentiality, though not always in online environments, and American librarians have always challenged legislation that would force them to monitor the online behavior of patrons or release book circulation records to the authorities.

Is it possible, then, that around the world, all libraries of all types can serve as true safe spaces for their patrons, for controversial ideas, and for library employees themselves? What is the reality of what libraries can provide for their patrons? Can they protect them from the outside world as well as dangers that could occur in the building itself? Can they train all librarians and paraprofessionals in cultural competence and empathy, to follow their heart before following a rule, or even create the space for all employees to update their rules as situations come up, or recognize rules as guidelines and not absolutes? Do library employees themselves work in a collegial, democratic environment where their perspectives and expertise are valued and empowered to take ownership of the place where they work? This is how safe space in the library happens.

### **How Libraries Create Safe Space**

#### **Library as Safe Place**

Due to its historical connection with scriptoria and the acquisition of religious texts, early libraries were considered sacred spaces for quiet contemplation or discussion of scripture (Maxwell, 2006). The monks or nuns working in the library may also have taken a vow of silence, which would have encouraged patrons to lower their voices while in the library. Clerics working in the library kept close watch over the collection as well as peoples' behavior. This tacit agreement to maintain a quiet space under the watch of a higher power, in the presence of holy wisdom, possibly would have prevented employees and patrons from disturbing each other while working and studying. At the same time, these ancient and medieval libraries only opened their doors to fellow clerics or scholars who shared common values and etiquette. As library spaces became larger and more inclusive, attempting to meet the needs of more diverse populations, it became more difficult to maintain the library as a safe space.

Neither the ALA Code of Ethics nor the IFLA Code of Ethics address actual library spaces in any detail. They do, however, talk about making all information, resources, and services as accessible as possible, and providing equitable resources and services to everyone. Equitable resources and services, however, do *not* meet everyone's needs. People coming to the library for a quiet place to read or study, for example, do not want to be in the same room where everyone is allowed to talk. Open stacks and computer labs are often difficult or dangerous for wheelchair-bound patrons to use.

According to a recent Pew Internet survey, when asked what people want from their libraries, no one specifically identified "safe space" in their responses. At the same time, Pew Internet survey did not use those terms to describe library space. When asking survey participants to note how important it is for public libraries to provide certain things, "Quiet study spaces for adults and children" was the closest option that they provided to describe a potentially safe space (Zickuhr, Rainie, & Purcell, 2013a). When asking survey participants about how public libraries could change the way they served the public, "Have more comfortable spaces for reading, working, and relaxing at the library" and "have completely separate locations or spaces for different services, such as children's services, computer labs, reading spaces, and meeting rooms" were the closest options that they provided to describe potentially safe spaces. Pew Internet Survey did not include any questions that specifically asked participants whether or not they felt safe at their libraries; it is possible that the Pew Internet survey designers assume that libraries are automatically safe spaces.

In academic libraries, the phenomenon of "library anxiety" often renders libraries and library employees unsafe for students (Bonnand & Hansen, 2015; Mellon, 1986; Soria, Nackerud, & Peterson, 2015). Students often find academic libraries overwhelming, and feel intimidated by

librarians, who they often perceive as judgmental and “knowing everything”. For this reason, only a small percentage of students actually visit the Reference Desk, go to the stacks to search for materials, or even visit a Circulation Desk to check out materials.

### **Crime in Libraries**

The ALA Code of Ethics and IFLA Code of Ethics do not provide guidance for librarians on how to handle illegal activities in order to keep their libraries safe. Few people think about libraries as the scene of any type of crime, because they often associate libraries with learning, leisure, and community building. Most national surveys that collect crime statistics, such as the National Crime Victimization Survey, do not ask participants for specific information about where they experienced theft, harm, or vandalism; libraries are often included in “inside school building”, “on school property”, “parking lot or garage”, or “other” (Catalano, 2016; U.S. Department of Justice, 2008).

Some places in library buildings are unsafe for patrons. These places include public restrooms, unattended stacks, and computer labs—especially in large library buildings during evening hours (Pearson, 2014, p. 378). For certain patrons, unquiet, crowded spaces could cause disturbance (Gordon-Hickey & Lemley, 2012; Kernodle, 2014; Madriaga, 2010). Due to the valuable resources that they hold, libraries are also popular sites for theft. Vandals of all backgrounds willfully destroy library property through tagging or defacing books or posters that contain images or content that trigger hateful reactions. Neither the ALA Code of Ethics nor the IFLA Code of Ethics address how librarians should address unwanted behaviors in library spaces.

Public library users are most likely to be children and young adults (Zickuhr, Rainie, & Purcell, 2013b), female identified people (American Library Association, 2015b), and anyone who may need a quiet space to rest, study, or look for employment. In urban centers, public libraries also serve large populations of homeless people of all ages, the disabled, the unemployed, veterans, and undocumented immigrants or refugees. Each of these populations faces unique challenges with their environments, which may come into conflict with existing design of physical facilities, as well as library policies and procedures. They are our most vulnerable populations, people who may be likely victims of crime or suspected of “inappropriate behavior”.

Perpetrators may share some characteristics with those patrons who have special needs. For this reason, some library employees may have biases against particular types of patrons and treat them more brusquely than other patrons. Large urban public libraries often have security guards or police patrolling one or more floors, which could add to patron anxiety in the library. Some large urban public libraries have hired social workers and formed committees to better address the needs of special populations and make their libraries more welcoming, accepting places for those populations that seek out library spaces for safe spaces (Barrows, 2014; Venturella, 1991).

School libraries have a long history of restricting access to information and resources, as well as self-censorship. They are also still used as centers for disciplinary action, such as after school detention, where students are forbidden to talk or even do homework. Last but not least, school districts with decreasing budgets will hire a paraprofessional—or even a volunteer parent—to run the “school media center” if state laws do not demand that school districts must have an MLIS-holding librarian. Lack of appropriately trained people running school media centers may inadvertently cause harm to students.

K-12 school buildings have a higher level of security than public or academic libraries. To reduce the possibility of drug dealers, gang members, shooters, or other dangerous elements coming on campus, visitors without appropriate ID or who do not pass a security check will not be allowed on campus. While this reduces the possibility of outside offenders harming students, it does not reduce the possibility of students harming each other, or teachers harming students.

### **Theft**

Since ancient times, theft is the most frequent crime committed in libraries (Griffiths & Krol, 2009, p. 6). For this reason, libraries have the most advanced policies, procedures, and strategies to protect their resources (ACRL, 2016; Bell, 2012; Scott, n.d.; Smith, n.d.). Theft in libraries includes patrons stealing property belonging to each other, or from library employees, or even library employees stealing from patrons, as well as individuals stealing library resources. If someone brings their laptop to the library, and has to leave it unattended for a few minutes to use the restroom, they should expect to find it sitting there when they return. At the same time, the library can make no guarantee that the laptop will still be there. For this reason, libraries will post signs at tables for patrons to take responsibility for their belongings, and to contact the library staff if they witness a theft.

Large urban public libraries are the libraries most likely to experience theft, but it could happen anywhere. Even though the library may have cameras, guards, and security systems in place, many unsupervised spaces remain in libraries (Pearson, 2014, p. 378). Depending on the value of the item stolen, and to whom it belongs, the library might not even do anything to assist the patron in getting back their property. If the victim of the theft is from a population that fears authority figures, the odds of the victim even approaching library employees—let alone the security guard or police officer in the building--to report the theft is very small.

## **Vandalism**

Books and library buildings are helpless victims of vandalism—the willful destruction of property. Since ancient times libraries have been subject to vandalism during times of war and peace. In academic libraries, competing students may tear important pages out of books or journals to keep their classmates from finding sources for their research. In all libraries, people find graffiti on tables, in the stacks, in books, and on bathroom walls. Acts of vandalism can intimidate people if they include hate speech and symbols of hate such as slurs and swastikas. Vandals are rarely caught, but library employees and other patrons get to see the results of their work.

Some libraries have turned acts of vandalism into teachable moments. A public library in San Francisco had a significant number of LGBT-themed books desecrated by a vandal ; the administrators decided to take those damaged books and turn them into an art installation. The author of this book had discovered that, in the first volume of the encyclopedia series *Music of the 1980s*, the photograph of Boy George on the cover, and every photo of him thereafter, had a swastika carved into his forehead with the word “fagot” written above it. She removed the book from the collection right away, had the volume replaced, and used it as an artifact to teach students about anti-Semitism and homophobia in the local community.

## **Voyeurism**

As smartphones with cameras have become a common accessory, a popular pastime for people is to capture a photo or video of whatever catches their attention and share it with friends on social media. Some people violate the privacy of others by filming or taking photos of them while they are undressing, bathing, or using a restroom. An increasing trend in voyeurism has been observed in libraries, where men sneak into womens’ restrooms and watch them through



their smartphone cameras (Donelan, 2014; “Man arrested for voyeurism at library”, 2014; O’Connor, 2015; Parrish, 2013; Phelps, 2013; Pulkkinen, 2014; University of Guelph, 2013).

It is possible that this trend has led to anti-transgender legislation in multiple states that polices bathroom usage.

### **Sex in the Library**

Some people—librarians included—believe that the library is an appropriate place to have sex (Chen, 2010; Hewett, 2014; Humphreys, 1975, p. 3; Knowles, 2006; Manley, 1993, p. 217). For those who do not have a private space of their own, and no money for a hotel room, library space in the stacks or an unattended study room may suffice. Also, as the library is perceived as a safe, quiet space by some people, it may be the ultimate place for physical intimacy. College students provide advice to each other on how to do it in the library and not get caught (Hewett, 2014). The gay community, in part due to persecution, has sought out public library restrooms for “the tearoom trade” (Humphreys, 1975, p. 3; Knowles, 2006). People do not always know that sex in public areas is considered a crime in most countries, with the greatest consequences for LGBT individuals. If a library employee catches two people in the act, they do not always receive training on how to respond. They will have to ask themselves the following questions to assess whether or not to involve local police:

- Are both people of age?
- Is this sexual activity consensual?
- Is this sexual activity a business transaction? (i.e., are the sexual partners a prostitute and their customer?)
- Are one or more of these people under the influence?

Sex in the library threatens the safety of one's sexual partner, the initiator, as well as the library employee or patron who may catch them in the act. And yet people continue to find the library a popular spot for cruising and hookups. A review of Craigslist "Casual Encounters" and "Missed Connections" sections from regions across the United States will reveal posts from people who saw others in libraries, and would like to meet them again for sex—perhaps in the library. Child molestation also takes place in libraries. Child molesters scout locations such as schools, parks, and other areas such as libraries where children are likely to be present. Children have been accosted by pedophiles in public libraries in several states; in some cases the library did nothing and the perpetrator remained at large (Cassi, 2016; Yamamoto, 2016).

Most cultures have taboos surrounding frank talk about sex. If people talk about sex in the library, it could make people uncomfortable, or could lead to accusations of sexual harassment. This has an impact on if and how librarians receive sexual harassment/assault training, or what to do if they come across a sex act at work.

### **Library as Friendly Face**

The IFLA Code of Ethics charges librarians with providing some form of literacy instruction. This could include print literacy, information literacy, digital literacy, and even emotional literacy. In effect, this charge to provide education renders the library into a classroom. As librarians must also remain neutral and not allow personal beliefs to impact how they carry out their duties, the library, ideally, should be the most non-judgmental, safe, and vibrant of classrooms.

Critical race theorists, feminist theorists, and queer theorists attempt to construct their classroom as a safe, nonjudgmental space for sharing and discussion through pedagogy. Based on Friere's model of pedagogy for the oppressed, feminist pedagogy is an educational movement

that changes the power dynamic from teacher versus student to humans learning together (Accardi, 2013). The goal of this pedagogy is for the teacher to serve as a “guide on the side” and a facilitator of learning, allowing students to bring their realities to the classroom and find meaning through that reality. Feminist pedagogy empowers the teacher and student to take action on solving problems together, rather than focusing on learning the right answer. As librarians engage with diverse patrons to help them locate information, or teach them how to find and evaluate information, they are starting to embrace feminist pedagogy as a strategy to create non-judgmental safe space for learning and sharing of information. Successful makerspaces, hackerspaces, creativity labs, media studios, Wikipedia events, and engaging library instruction sessions all employ elements of feminist pedagogy to build a community of learners and a safe space for learning.

Minorities and vulnerable populations feel more comfortable interacting with library employees who share common backgrounds with them or show that they are allies. This is particularly true for the LGBT community, teens, people of color, and people who speak minority languages. Even libraries that show awareness of the needs of their patrons without calling them out is greatly appreciated. For example, libraries that provide print brochures for the homeless on where to find food, clothing, housing, and medical services in strategic locations of the library do a great service to those individuals who may be too intimidated or ashamed to seek out someone in the library for help.

The American Library Association (ALA) identifies libraries as “anchor institutions”, which serve their communities by fulfilling the mission of “creating a more democratic, just, and equitable society” (Rosa, 2014). To fulfill this mission, libraries acquire books written by and about people and issues from a wide variety of backgrounds and viewpoints. The fact that librarians are charged with the responsibility of providing collections that represent all peoples and

points of view makes a big difference to underrepresented people in the community. This availability of books, whether appropriate or not, has led people from the LGBT community to view libraries as a safe space, or even to pursue librarianship (Carmichael, 1998; Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, 2015; Kester, 1997; Nectoux, 2011; Schrader, 2009). At the same time, censorship and Internet filtering and monitoring continues to smear the library's friendly mask.

### **Censorship: "We Must Protect Our Children!"**

The ALA Code of Ethics and IFLA Code of Ethics both charge librarians with resisting censorship and any other activity or law that restricts the free flow of information. Censorship violates the concept of library as safe space for things, people, and ideas. At the same time, public and school librarians still choose not to provide certain materials to their users to avoid community backlash.

Ironically, a significant number of librarians believe that censorship creates safe space. It is possible that the way women are raised to conform to particular heteronormative values may influence their attitudes toward freedom of information. An international survey conducted by the Georgia Institute of Technology's College of Computing determined that married women with children under sixteen years old are most likely to support Internet censorship (Depken, 2006). While a mother's instinct is to protect their children from harmful influences, which does affect female librarian attitudes toward censorship (Barbakoff & Ferrari, 2011), the driving forces behind most female librarian self-censorship are often obedience to authority and fear of how others may perceive them (Downey, 2013). These attitudes that influence collection development and access to information may cause populations such as the LGBT community to abandon libraries and look elsewhere for information and support.

In the first national survey of school media specialists, *School Library Journal* discovered that 70% of the librarians surveyed would not buy titles considered controversial out of fear of attacks from parents (Whelan, 2009). According to the same survey, the most frequently cited reasons school librarians gave for not purchasing materials for their collections included sexual content (87%), objectionable language (61%), violence (51%), and homosexual themes (47%) (Whelan, 2009). As LGBT books often contain (or are perceived to contain) sexual content and homosexual themes, they are most at risk for librarian censorship (Downey, 2013; Whelan, 2009). The fear of parental and community censure even causes some librarians not to acquire books that receive awards from American Library Association, just because the book may have one objectionable word (Downey, 2013; Whelan, 2009). School and public librarians will choose to “self-censor”, especially when it comes to LGBT materials. they will either choose not to select LGBT materials, will shelve LGBT materials in hidden locations, fail to promote LGBT materials, “hide” LGBT materials during processing and cataloging, or remove LGBT materials from their collections completely (Wexelbaum, 2015).

Cataloging and shelving practices also cause libraries to restrict access to information, or render library space unsafe for LGBT information seeking (Wexelbaum, 2015).

If libraries censor LGBT things and ideas, they inadvertently make the statement that libraries are also not a safe space for LGBT people. Librarians working in public libraries and K-12 school media centers in the United States are most likely to restrict access to LGBT online content. Whether through filtering, inappropriate cataloging practices, failure to promote LGBT resources through the library website, or not selecting particular LGBT eBooks for patron-driven acquisitions systems, people seeking out LGBT information online at their public libraries or school media centers might be denied access. Children and teenagers, people with disabilities,

the homeless, and the transgender community are populations most frequently affected by such intentional or accidental online censorship (Wexelbaum, 2015). These are the populations most in need of online information, as they perceive face to face conversations with library employees about LGBT topics as unsafe.

### **Internet Censorship**

Most Americans do not believe in Internet censorship. According to the Global Internet Survey of 2012, only 28% of respondents from the United States strongly agreed with the statement “The Internet should be governed in some form to protect the community from harm”, compared with 50% of all respondents from the twenty countries surveyed, and only 22% of respondents from the United States strongly agreed with the statement “Censorship should exist in some form on the Internet”, compared with 35% of all respondents (Internet Society, 2012). At the same time, Americans take a more conservative view of what children should be allowed to see online than in some other countries. This fear of child traumatization has led the United States to pass some of the most restrictive Internet monitoring and filtering laws in the world so that the Internet would become a “safe space” for minors.

Congress passed the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998 (COPPA) to regulate the ability of children 13 years of age or younger to visit particular websites or provide their personal information on those sites without permission from a parent or guardian (Federal Trade Commission, n.d.). Next, Congress enacted the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) in 2000 in response to concerns regarding children’s access to online content perceived as obscene or harmful (Federal Communications Commission, 2014). CIPA mandates that all schools and libraries receiving federal funding for Internet access through the E-rate program must block or filter any online content considered “(a) obscene; (b) child pornography; or (c) harmful to minors

(for computers that are accessed by minors)” (Federal Communications Commission, 2014). CIPA also requires that school “Internet safety policies must include monitoring the online activities of minors” (Federal Communications Commission, 2014). Schools applying for E-rate funding for the first time must demonstrate compliance with CIPA. While the Federal Communications Commission states that “CIPA does not require the tracking of Internet use by minors or adults”, in 2001 the federal government passed the USA PATRIOT Act, which empowers the federal government to monitor the online activities of any individuals believed to be a threat to domestic security, or to request that people who observe any suspicious online behavior to contact the authorities.

Net Nanny is the most popular is the most popular filtering software in the United States (10TopTenReviews, n.d.). It allows administrators to monitor the online activities of anyone logged into a “Net Nanny protected” computer, as well as restrict or deny access to social media sites, blogs, or websites that contain particular keywords or images. Net Nanny can restrict or deny access to websites located through Google searches or visits to specific URLs typed into the browser. The administrator can choose the level of restriction, keywords, and URLs that he or she does not want computer users to see. Net Nanny produces a filtering software for schools and libraries called ContentWatch for Education which has the same features as Net Nanny but is licensed for use in public computer labs, classrooms, or on mobile devices owned by the institution (ContentWatch, 2014).

Children and teens who visit libraries to use the computer labs are restricted to using those computers set up with Internet filtering software. This is especially the case for public libraries that serve as the de facto libraries for their local school districts (Barbakoff & Ferrari, 2011). Patrons must log into the public access computers with their library barcode and unique

password; once logged in the computer will begin to time and record their activity. Adults who use the computer labs in public libraries also have their activity timed and recorded. While public libraries are not required to provide information about the online activities of their patrons to outside authorities, they may keep track of the online activity of patrons accused of viewing pornography on public access computers, or patrons attempting to hack into particular sites. Computer users may or may not know that their computer activity is being monitored, or that filtering software is denying them access to information, unless they have learned about that information from another source.

Internet filtering violates both the ALA Code of Ethics and the IFLA Code of Ethics and should be revisited. It creates an information and digital divide between students in underserved and affluent school districts, as well as poor individuals without their own devices and wealthy ones with access to their own personal filter-free devices (or the technical skills to hack the filter) (Batch, 2014). Filtering may also pose a barrier to those with visual, auditory, and learning disabilities, as filtering software may impact captioning, website layout, availability of images, or speech to text / text to speech functionalities in word processing programs and dictation software (van de Bunt-Kokhuis, Hansson, & Toska, 2005). Public and school libraries without LGBTIQ print collections that program their Internet filters to restrict access to websites and social media sites that include neutral and positive LGBTIQ-related URLs, keywords, images, and social media sites violate the ALA Code of Ethics and the IFLA Code of Ethics in restricting access to information and allowing personal beliefs to impact library resources and services.

While Americans often criticize other countries for implementing laws that restrict all citizens' access to online content addressing LGBTIQ subjects or other content deemed illegal by their governments, Americans feel the need to "protect" children and teens from content they



perceive as “inappropriate.” Librarians, pressured by the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) and the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Rule (COPPA), as well as the desires of concerned parents, are reconsidering “freedom of access” to anything that the community would consider pornographic or sacreligious. At the same time, use of filters to restrict non-pornographic online LGBTIQ content in American libraries is now leading to lawsuits (Wexelbaum 2015). Librarians who must comply with CIPA and COPPA need more training on how to employ filters without restricting content or online spaces appropriate for minors.

Libraries situated in religious communities must walk a fine line between respecting community beliefs while remaining true to their code of ethics. For example, a public library situated in Amish country has worked out a policy for Amish parents to determine whether or not their children could access computers and the Internet. Amish children whose parents would not allow them to use computers and the Internet would have their library cards marked to indicate such, and their account IDs and passwords would not allow them to log on to computers. At the same time, Amish children often have non-Amish friends, who have no restrictions on their computer and Internet access. If all of the children use computers in the same age-restricted area, librarians will not keep Amish and non-Amish children from socializing at computers, or looking at each others’ screens.

### **Library as Safe Space for Employees**

Both the ALA Code of Ethics and IFLA Code of Ethics stress the importance of collegial relations among library employees, respect for the diverse opinions of coworkers, and equity in all matters related to recruitment, interviewing, training, and promotion. As Julia Rathbone had stated in 1930, the quality of library employee relations directly impacts the atmosphere of the

library. If patrons witness library employees quarreling, gossiping, or making judgmental statements about others, they will think twice about approaching them for assistance.

Popular perceptions of library employees range from “sexless middle aged white ladies with glasses, sensible shoes and bad hair” and “know-it-all effeminate men”. Within the profession itself, librarians view themselves as “cool sexy nerds”, “emerging technology experts”, and “social justice warriors”. On personality inventories, librarians tend to score as introverted and passive-aggressive, and do not score as well on critical thinking, active listening, or empathy as people in similar professions (Maxwell, 2006, p. 32). The combination of inflated self, passive-aggressiveness, low empathy, and poor interpersonal skills in library employees makes for a potentially unsafe work environment. Bullying takes place in the library workplace, as does authoritarian, patriarchal leadership.

A gender imbalance exists in librarianship. More than 80 per cent of library employees identify as female (ALA Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services, 2012). Male librarians often face discrimination among their female colleagues as well as patrons (Blackburn, 2015; Carmichael, 1994). At the same time, library administrators are disproportionately male, as are library employees in systems and technology (Record & Green, 2008, p. 194). While male and female librarians share some common personality traits such as commitment to service, attention to detail, and intellectualization that make them both drawn to library work (Maxwell, 2006, p. 31), men and women are socialized differently and often clash over communication styles, project management styles, leadership styles, and pedagogical styles (Bussey & Bandura, 2005; Schwartz & Hanson, 1992). These clashes increase in intensity between male-identified and female-identified library employees of different generations, and those with “traditionalist” and “futurist” mindsets about librarianship (Gorman, 2004; Harris, 1999; Record & Green,

2008). The working culture of librarians can inhibit safe spaces—particularly safe spaces for digital scholarship—in the library if librarians with a “directive” working and management style, as opposed to those with a “connective”, feminist pedagogy-based working and management style, are in charge of library technology (Record & Green, 2008).

Introverted library employees must interact with a wide range of personalities among their colleagues as well as among their users. Library employees do experience harassment and microaggressions from patrons as well as colleagues. They may be afraid to speak up or unaware of who in the library organization can help them. New library employees under the misconception that library work would limit their interactions with people are often not prepared to communicate with diverse communities, even though they personally may consider themselves an ally of diverse communities. In fact, these library employees may see patrons with behaviors and personalities that they view as challenging as “problem patrons” who obstruct their work. Burn-out is common for librarians who work among the public, particularly for introverts who need time to themselves to recharge their batteries.

Library administrators need to get to know their employees, listen carefully to their concerns, and address their strengths and weaknesses through training and assigning them to tasks that match their personalities and skill sets. It is unethical for supervisors to place employees in unsafe workplace situations. When libraries employees have confidence and ownership in their duties, and know that they have support from administration, they are more likely to take risks, collaborate with others, and present a friendly, non-judgmental face to patrons.

### **Future Research and Recommendations**

In reality, libraries are not always safe spaces. The library profession favors certain ideas over others; the perspectives and values of library administrators, librarians, and staff often come into conflict. Ideological clashes between librarians and community members take place on a regular basis, sometimes escalating to litigation. For this reason, it is important for library employees to understand the concept of safe space and how to reconstruct the library as a safe space within the framework of the ALA and IFLA Codes of Ethics.

At this time, no library-specific safe space assessment tools exist (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008; Rankin & Reason, 2008). To date, no research exists on library employee or patron awareness of library code of ethics, or how well their libraries adhere to those ethics. This is an emerging field of research as libraries aspire to become safe spaces in their communities.

Campus climate assessments could provide models for library-specific safe space assessments. Women, LGBT populations, people of color, people of different religious faiths, and the disabled are often sought out to provide a holistic assessment of barriers to success on their campuses in the form of holistic campus climate studies (Britton, Baird, Dyer et. al, 2012; Hart & Fellabaum, 2008; Manning, Pring, & Glider, 2014; Mayes, 2014; Rankin & Reason, 2008; Vaccaro, 2014; Vogel, Holt, Sligar, & Leake, 2008). While the term “safe space” never appears in these holistic campus climate assessments, campus climate studies often require that students, faculty, staff, or administrators address barriers to equal opportunity or hostile environments that they have experienced while on campus (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008; Rankin & Reason, 2008). Existing assessment tools focus on interactions with others, comments that they hear from others, trust, comfort levels in the classroom, dormitories, and administrative offices. Such information

is also of great interest to library administrators and librarians, as their professional code of ethics drive them to create welcoming environments without barriers to information, resources, or services.

Academic libraries often use LibQUAL+ to assess patron satisfaction with library resources and services. The web-based quantitative LibQUAL+ survey, developed by the Association of Research Libraries and Texas A&M University, includes “22 core survey items [that] measure perceptions of service quality in three dimensions: Affect of Service, Information Control, and Library as Place” (LibQUAL+, 2016). Questions in the Affect of Service and Library as Place categories have the capability to provide some introductory data about library climate and perceived safety within library spaces for learning, working, and leisure. The more recent MISO Survey asks similar questions about ease of access to resources and services, perceptions of library space, and the quality of customer service. While many libraries do use LibQUAL+ and MISO results to improve their library resources and services, no research literature exists to show how libraries take data from this survey to intentionally build safe space.

Most safe space policies have been developed by female-identified or LGBT communities. Most of them involve ground rules for behavior or discourse in a shared temporary space (such as workshop or a multi-day conference) or a permanent physical or online space. Such safe space policies may also prove appropriate for library employees, library users, and interactions among these groups. Here are some safe space policies and best practices that the author believed could be applied to libraries, as they are compatible with the ALA and IFLA Library Codes of Ethics:

LadyHacks. (2016). Safe Space Policy. <http://ladyhacks.org/about/safe-space-policy>

Larson, K., Mizuko, I., Brown, E., Hawkins, M., Pinkard, N. & Sebring, P. (2013). *Safe space and shared interests: YOUmedia Chicago as a laboratory for connected learning*. [PDF file]. Irvine, CA: Digital Media and Learning Research Hub. Retrieved from <http://dmlhub.net/wp-content/uploads/files/SAFE-SPACE-final-with-addenda.pdf>

Radical Librarians Collective. (n.d.) Safer Spaces Policy.

<https://rlc.radicallibrarianship.org/safer-spaces-policy/>

Safe Space NYC. (2010). Privacy policy. [http://www.safespaceny.org/safespace/footerpage\\_1/](http://www.safespaceny.org/safespace/footerpage_1/)

Prior to developing safe space guidelines for patrons and library employees, library administrators may want to take the following actions, involving all library employees in the process:

*Review all mission and vision statements, policies, procedures, and strategic plans for the library.* How do these documents address library as safe space in alignment with IFLA and ALA Code of Ethics? If they do not, does the strategic plan include any goals to revisit these documents with the intention of improving the climate, identifying safe spaces within the library, or improving such spaces?

*Develop equitable, enforceable guidelines for behavior in the library that make the library a safe space.* What type of rules for behavior does your library have? Do they emphasize courtesy and non-judgmental, collegial behavior that stimulates community building, or do the rules simply tell patrons what they can't do? Review your library's rules for behavior, and rewrite them through a differently abled, anti-racist, anti-classist, feminist, LGBT-friendly lens.

*Assess how your library meets community desire for a “third space”.* What type of rooms and spaces does your library have? For what purposes were these rooms and spaces originally designed? Do they meet current community expectations? What needs to be changed?

*Provide signage that clearly describes how each space in the library should be used.* Some libraries have designated certain floors as completely quiet zones, while others (usually the first floor) is a talking and noise zone. Staff will then have the right to gently guide patrons who have particular needs to appropriate places in the building.

*Install security cameras in secluded areas of the building.* Police, public safety, or security presence alone within the building is not effective. Posted signs about security cameras and the consequences of certain crimes *is*. Assigning one officer to monitor the cameras during hours of operation will allow them to contact emergency personnel immediately should criminal activity take place in the library.

*Implement a book searching/pick up service.* In large libraries, multiple stacks devoid of people often frighten patrons. Inform patrons that they can request books from the collection directly from the catalog; library staff will search for the desired titles and contact patrons via text, email, or their online messaging service of choice when books are available at the circulation desk.

*During outreach efforts, find out why people in the community **don't** visit the library.* How do non-library users in the community perceive the library space? What do they perceive is not present, or unsafe?

*Evaluate promotional materials, exhibits, social media, and the library website for diversity.* Do library promotional materials and the library website reflect the diversity within the community?

Are library promotional materials and the library website available in the languages that the community speaks? Do photos of people include images of male-identified people, people of color, the LGBT community, non-Christian peoples, differently abled people, and the homeless within your community? Are physical and online book displays and new materials lists inclusive of diverse populations within the community?

*Turn promotion of library materials into a community building effort.* Librarians should check their online catalog, EBook collections, and streaming audiovisual collections for content for and about diverse populations, particularly LGBT populations. If the content exists, the librarian should investigate how it is being promoted through the library webpages. If there is no mention of these resources as they are acquired, no subject guide, or no mention of such resources during LGBT History Month, Pride Month, or any other ethnic or religious-themed day, week, or month, the librarian should investigate why that is. If no one on staff has time to develop those online resources, and if the library has a volunteer program, the librarian should ask potentially interested teens or library school students if they would like to help. The librarian and volunteers may want to review the webpages of those libraries that do promote LGBT content to determine if they should make improvements. If the community is unreceptive to promotion of LGBT content on the library webpage, create a moderated Facebook, Tumblr, or GoodReads account and provide a link on the appropriate webpage or library social media account. Interested library patrons can join, learn about LGBT or other controversial library resources, and connect with new friends in the community.

*Provide ongoing, reflective, critical cultural competency training for all library employees.* Safe space training, along with all other cultural competency trainings, should not be one-shot efforts. All library employees should set a personal and professional goal each year to address a bias or



blind spot that they may have, and administration should schedule a weekly or monthly time for employees to come together, share their process in achieving their goals, discuss where they may be struggling, and provide support for one another in a non-judgmental space.

*Own up to self-censorship and restrict the urge.* Have an open, non-judgmental discussion about self-censorship practices, and come up with strategies to change those thought processes and behaviors—particularly if these self-censorship habits do not match the personal attitudes of librarians and staff toward diversity and social justice. Form a committee of library staff, parents, teachers, teens, and community members to test their Internet filtering software and record what websites get restricted. If the filter goes so far as to restrict access to interactive, collaborative resources such as Google Drive or online encyclopedia entries about LGBTIQ issues, the committee will need to discuss effectiveness of the filter and identify a process to determine what should be restricted without eliminating non-controversial resources or violating the American with Disabilities Act (Wexelbaum, 2015).

*Do not use the library for disciplinary action.* People who have bad memories of libraries often had hours of school detention there. Libraries are for education, reflection, leisure, community events, discussions, and naps.

A library is a public space. Laws, codes of ethics, employees, and the community all help maintain the safety of the space. It is up to the library to teach people how to do their part in maintaining the library as a safe space for things, people, and ideas so that it truly will be a space open to all people, all the time, without judgement or exception.

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