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Personal Bias in Library Collections and Services

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Personal Bias in Library Collections and Services
Sarah C. King
An Annotated Bibliography

Regardless of library type, size, or the number of collecting librarians, selection based on personal values can be difficult or even impossible to avoid. Lack of exposure to varied sources or lesser known points of view can lead to unbalanced collections. Also adding to the difficulty of establishing balanced collections is the demise of the small publisher. Without a varied group of publishers, access to diverse views grows ever more limited. Large publishers that focus on the bottom line are less likely to publish works that may not find a mainstream audience.

While the availability of materials lies outside the control of the average librarian, there are a number of resources designed to help individuals or groups charged with collection development make informed and unbiased selections. The following is an annotated list of some of these resources:

Berman, Sanford. *"Inside Censorship": De Facto Censorship Implicit in Collection Decisions.* Progressive Librarian **18 (2001): 48-63.**

This article, composed by pioneer censorship and Library of Congress Subject Heading bias opponent Sanford Berman, details different types of internal censorship as they relate to circulation, budget, and personal opinion, and explains how to avoid them.

Coley, Ken P. *Moving Toward a Method to Test for Self-Censorship by School Library Media Specialists.* School Library Media Research **5 (2002).**

This article presents a research study that covers the details of self-censorship in school media libraries. Trepidation and fear of challenge are cited as the main causes for censorship in this study.

Dilevko, J, and K. Grewal. *Neutrality and Media Literacy at the Reference Desk: a Case Study.* Journal of Academic Librarianship **24.1 (1998): 21-32.**

The effect of librarian bias on the reference interview is examined in this study. The authors argue that librarians need to be both informed and impartial in order to avoid influencing or discomfiting patrons.

Dilevko, Juris, and Kalina Grewal. *A New Approach to Collection Bias in Academic Libraries: The Extent of Corporate Control in Journal Holdings.* Library and Information Science Research **19.4 (1997): 359-385**

The issue of publisher's influence on balanced library collections is covered again in this article. Rather than evaluating the issue of bias

from a political standpoint, the authors evaluate the limitation of the periodicals available through large publishing firms.

Harmeyer, Dave. *Potential Collection Development Bias: Some Evidence on a Controversial Topic in California.* <u>College and Research Libraries</u> **56 (1995): 101-111.**

This study attempts to analyze the effect of librarian political bias on book selection. Although the research plan is has been much critiqued, the premise is interesting and relevant.

Kuharets, Olga R. (ed) <u>Venture into Cultures: A Resource Book of Multicultural Materials & Programs</u> **. Chicago, ALA (2001).**

Sections of this book feature African, Caribbean, Indian, Jewish-American, Korean, Latin American, Middle Eastern, Native American, and Russian materials designed to help librarians create programs for children. Each area features a short essay, recommended children's books by grade level, websites, videos, audiotapes, and recommendations for programming.

LaRue, James. *Reading with the Enemy.* <u>Wilson Library Bulletin</u> **68.5 (1994): 43-45.**

LaRue offers a witty analysis of the bias and censorship front, and provides us with an excellent example of how to perform well informed collection development.

Neely, Teresa and Lee-Smeltzer, Kuang-Hwei (eds.) <u>Diversity Now: People, Collections, and Services in Academic Libraries</u>. **Binghamton, Haworth Press (2002).**

Examines diversity in collection development and access among other areas of concern.

Pratt, Allan D. *Are We Really Infallible at Book Selection?* <u>Library Journal</u> **120 (1995): 44.**

This interestingly oppositional article claims that since purely balanced collections can never be achieved, librarians should make their selections reflect either one standpoint or the other. Its stance is contradictory to the others cited in this bibliography, but it represents an important alternative solution to the problem of bias.

Warner, J.N. *Moving Beyond Whiteness in North American Academic Libraries.* <u>Libri</u> **51.3 (2001): 167-172.**

This study examines the presence of balance in allegedly diverse university library collections. In spite of a move toward diversity, many libraries are found to be lacking materials on important issues.

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