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INSC 511

18 April 2021

Scenario 1 of the Ethics assignment addresses the issue of a clerk refusing potentially inappropriate materials to an 11-year-old user, with the book in question being *Fifty Shades of Grey*. This book has been contested for containing explicit sexual content, violence, and being written for a much older, more mature audience. In this instance, there are several factors in play. For starters, in the absence of a parental figure, the clerk is trying to make an ethical decision for a child with little knowledge of his background expectations from home. The patron may be trying to receive the materials without his or her parents knowing because he or she is aware of the explicit content, or it may simply be a case of ignorance in which the child does not realize what the book is about at all. Regardless, the library clerk has put us, as the Circulation Supervisor, in an ethical conundrum and we will have to navigate the circumstance with tact and care. As librarians, there is a responsibility to provide access to materials and information. However, a balance has to be struck between personal ethics and the execution of professional responsibilities. To serve the patron and prevent further issues in providing potentially inappropriate materials to young readers, avenues such as recommending related but more appropriate titles or consulting with parents if available may need to be considered.

The clerk refusing a patron access to materials would be concerning to any manager for a number of reasons. Yes, this is a provocative book, but the library clerk seems to have pushed their morals and opinions on a patron by refusing to loan out this book. Ethical dilemmas like this occur when values are in conflict, which is why the American Library Association's [ALA] Code of Ethics lays out the values to which the library profession is committed to and librarian's

ethical responsibilities to users and patrons in difficult situations. Limiting someone's right to access the requested material goes against ALA's Freedom to Read Statement, Bill of Rights, Core Values of Librarianship, and Code of Ethics. In a similar manner, the Public Library Association [PLA] has core values and a mission statement, and includes a statement addressing issues that all public libraries face, including allowing children access to material not specifically written for them. While the core values of PLA focus more on the librarians' administrative role over service to patrons, their mission statement does include a section on meeting the needs of the community, with children being a part of that community (PLA Mission and Goals, 2018). The Association for Library Service to Children [ALSC] does not have a mission statement, but it does have its own core values of inclusiveness, responsiveness, integrity, and respect (New ALSC Logo). It also has its own initiatives to benefit children, with two of the major initiatives, the Public Awareness, Advocacy, and Legislation and Quicklists Consulting committees, help develop and implement the initiatives, with oversight from the ALSC. Though these do not specifically mention the issue of censoring material from children, the bottom line for these initiatives is teaching children to love libraries and enjoy reading, not to prevent them from checking out certain material.

The framework of modern librarianship is laid out on these principles, which define and guide all professional practice and reflect the history and ongoing advancement of the profession. Libraries depend on the ethical guidelines presented by these associations because, while they feel that they have a moral responsibility to their community and patrons, they must follow the principles of intellectual freedom. Pertaining to the specific case here is statement B.2 Intellectual Freedom in Article V of ALA's Bill of Rights stating "a person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of...age" (2010). The right for any person to use a

library includes access to all of the library's services and materials; therefore, every restriction on library resources or discrimination based solely on "chronological age, apparent maturity, educational level, literacy skills" including minors without a parent or guardian present violates Article V (2010). Again, the question of age restrictions gets brought up in section B.2.1.4, Access to Library Resources and Services for Minors, with a statement that the Association stands for equal access regardless of age, and any policy or procedures that denies minors equal access goes against the ALA (ALA Council, 2006). Children have First Amendment rights, including the right to receive information, just the same as adults, and librarians should not be the limiting factor for their knowledge. According to ALA's ethical guidelines, the library clerk wrongfully denied access of library materials to a patron, and, while they may not have understood their professional duty to provide information access, a well-intentioned worker who thinks they are protecting users from material they deemed harmful is still censorship.

A similar ethical issue happened at Jessamine County Public Library in Nicholasville, Kentucky, when two circulation associates decided the book *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen: Black Dossier* was inappropriate for minors. They found the book to be "pornographic in nature," and thus unfit for circulation at their library. The employee brought her concerns up to her circulation manager, who told her to submit an official request to their collection development committee (Critchfield & Powell, 2012, 8). The review committee read the book and surrounding literature and ruled to keep the challenged book in circulation since it met the criteria listed in JCPL's collection development policy. Rather than refuse check out to a patron, this clerk checked out the book in an attempt to keep the book from others. The two employees were then fired for censorship and restricting the freedom of others on the basis of their personal beliefs; their supervisor stated that perhaps the clerk didn't fully understand what

role libraries serve to community members and what First Amendment liberties they denied through their actions (Critchfield & Powell, 2012). As the supervisor for the clerk, I believe a good approach would be explaining that public libraries work to provide information access and all library users must feel comfortable when seeking out our library's resources and be able to do so without barriers. As a library worker, the clerk must come to understand that their personal beliefs are separate from the professional duty and policy to respect the freedom of library users.

Over the course of ALA's history, it has continually developed and advocated for these core ethical stances; one of the most significant values being Intellectual Freedom. The ALA, with its concrete view of First Amendment rights, claims Intellectual Freedom and censorship opposition is paramount in the ALA's mission. ALA's Core Values state that we must uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist efforts to censor library resources by providing equitable access and unbiased service to all patron requests (ALA Council, 2004; American Library Association, 2010). The principle upholding intellectual freedom and opposing censorship is laid out within the very ethics of the profession and reflected in such long standing causes like the "Freedom to Read" statement, which posits that librarians have a duty to patrons by making it possible for readers to choose freely from a variety of offerings themselves (American Library Association, & Association of American Publishers, 2004). The clerk wasn't intentionally trying to censor library usage or materials, they were simply acting on their own judgement, stemming from feeling socially and morally responsible for a child's well-being, and doing what they thought was right in the moment. However, librarian workers do not need to endorse every idea flowing through the library, and conflict with public interest begins when the worker tries to establish their own moral views as a standard for determining what should be circulated and to whom. As their supervisor, we do not want to dismiss their responsibility by

merely preventing the user from reading works, saying they are not yet prepared for it, and leave it there. ALA supports its position by saying that it is up to the person or the guardians of the person to prepare them for exposure to the diversity of life experiences and to help them learn to think critically about information.

While the principles stated above are supported by most librarians, there can be considerable disagreement, especially where our clerk is concerned. While the ALA supports adults having unfiltered access to material, some argue that children are not just small adults. There is no possible way to censor-proof a library, so some employees may make it their mission to be hypervigilant “on behalf of” children, making sure that the material available will not upset or offend any parent or other adults (Jenkins, 2010). Critchfield and Powell insist that, as managers, we must actively listen to any complaints or objections staff or patrons have, as we serve not just those who agree with us. For librarians, service, as a core value, means helping people find information resources to meet their educational or recreational needs (ALA, 2004; 2009). Since most libraries already provide age-appropriate seating, bookshelves, and wall decorations, their main argument may be that children have no educational or recreational need to access adult material. However, kids are naturally curious and there comes the day when they raise questions that don’t fit with adult values without hard answers. If the clerk insists the availability of the adult books in the library needs to be reviewed; there are very simple alternative methods that can be used to protect the child in question while still protecting their First Amendment rights. CPL’s library director, Ron Critchfield, and circulation manager, David Powell, discuss their library allowing items to be checked out by juveniles on their own account, no parental consent required, but they do require parents to sign for those 17 and under to get a card. When children have a card, parents do have complete monitoring privileges on what they

check out. Their library, like every public library, has a mission to make information freely available to all and has no authority to act in place of parents who know what is acceptable and what should be limited for their children.

However, if an 11-year-old student attempted to check out *Fifty Shades of Grey* in a school setting, then the scenario and the presented solutions would change drastically. A school library does not have all of the freedoms of a public library, and the limitations come with consequences. While public librarians and clerks are guided by the principles put forth by the ALA, school librarians are ultimately governed by policy put in place by the school board. Restrictions established by a school board or administration team do not always align with the ALA code of ethics. The decision making of a school librarian requires a delicate balance in order to meet the needs of a community which consists of students, parents, teachers and administrators. While the stricter school district designed guidelines are established to protect children from early exposure to sexually explicit content and violence, it should be acknowledged that these restrictions can also be a disservice to students. Limiting the books that a student can check out comes at a cost and we will explore that from the perspective of an educator.

Educators would argue that students depend on reading material slightly above their ability to increase vocabulary and reading comprehension. Oddly enough, restrictions put in place by school boards go against this notion and sometimes limit access to material solely based on content. Popular book systems used to manage school collections offer such a feature to allow school librarians to effortlessly uphold such district wide restrictions. Atrium and Destiny, both commonly used book management systems of middle school libraries in the United States, allows school librarians to put age or grade level restrictions on books so that younger students

are not exposed to material deemed too mature for their age group. Additionally, books containing mature content will often be labeled “teen” or “YA” to alert younger students that a particular title is off limits to them. Some middle school libraries will have an “8th grade only” section with content reserved for one third of the school. When limitations are based on age or grade level, there is a risk that librarians are denying students access to higher level reading materials. As a result, students reading above grade level and looking to be challenged may be limited in their selections. These limitations can cause high level, avid readers to become bored with the collection. To combat this issue, middle school librarians will sometimes offer tweens “clean teen” books which contain higher level material, but without sexual content and excessive language. If students find that the school library does not meet their interests or reading level then it could result in them not being a returning patron.

In a typical middle school classroom there will be students ranging widely in levels of maturity and each have differing levels of exposure to more mature content. A student with older siblings in high school is more likely to have encountered teen level content than a student who is an only child or the oldest child in their family. Therefore, a school library should not operate on the assumption that all households have strict guidelines on reading materials. Instead of restricting access to materials, librarians and teachers should instruct students to consider their personal and family values prior to checking out a book. If a book makes a student uncomfortable within the first few pages then they should be encouraged to simply exchange it for another title. Through the process of students evaluating books and deciding if they are a suitable read, students would be learning through trial and error with minimal exposure to mature content. At the end of the day, middle school librarians know their communities and have to

decide what best supports the needs of all stakeholders in their students' education even if they have to enforce policies that run incongruent with the ALA.

Coming up with a separate, yet similar, ethical dilemma came from exploring a situation that actually occurred at a high school this year. There was a final book published this year in a popular book series that is much more sexually explicit than the previous texts in the collection: *A Court of Silver Flames* from *A Court of Thorns and Roses* series by Sarah J. Maas. The librarian purchased it for the library because all of the other books in the series have been very popular and not nearly as controversial. In fact, there are at least eleven other titles by this author currently in the school's library. The nature of his new novel was exposed by a teacher in the school, and then the librarian was faced with a conundrum. The book has already been purchased, there is interest in the title among students, but the content is explicit and potentially very controversial for some parents. Since receiving the book, several students have asked to read it, but the high school librarians are hesitant to check it out. While this situation is comparable to the one discussed above featuring an 11-year-old in a public library, school libraries fall under a slightly different code of ethics. First of all, the user base of a high school is primarily students and largely falls into the category of minors. Even though these students may be approaching adulthood, legally and in the eyes of their parents, they are still children and have to be considered as such. So, with this in mind, having and providing students access to materials must be in line with school and district standards while still maintaining the freedom of choice that students are allowed, even if it is somewhat limited. Ultimately, who is responsible for the potential fallout of an upset parent must be considered. Is it the district, school, or library itself?

With this in mind, there are a few ways in which the librarian could proceed. She could, of course, discard the title and choose not to deal with the controversy potentially spurred by its

content. However, if the duty of the librarian is to encourage students to read and foster a love literature, keeping students from accessing a title based on the librarian's personal beliefs may be counterintuitive to this goal. Librarians could use their own judgement and only allow access to the title to those students who have shown themselves to be mature enough to handle the book's content, but in larger schools, this extensive knowledge of students may not be a realistic basis for checking out a title. Similarly, access could be limited to upperclassmen whose age could imply a level of maturity better suited for such content. In this case, the librarian could then consider utilizing a rating or labeling system in which books with material that is potentially inappropriate for some ages could be identified. This is already done for music, video games, movies, and TV shows, so books in a school library may be a set of materials that should also follow these guidelines. In fact, it actually brings into question if explicit content in literature is actually more acceptable than in other forms of media, since there is not more labeling or restrictions placed on most books. Should there be more accountability for the content of novels, or is this genre more heavily protected under the first Amendment and other legal means? In some libraries, labeling is already being done, despite the popularity of leaving book content more vaguely identified. According to the "Intellectual Freedom Blog" from the American Library Association, "Content labeling is becoming more prevalent in the United States, with labels being placed on library materials warning of sexually explicit content or mature themes" (Dawkins, 2016). While this seems like a pretty logical step, there has been pushback with many claiming that this sort of system is not easily executed in an objective way: "The labeling of material as "sexually explicit" is extremely subjective. What one group of parents deems "sexually explicit" or age inappropriate, may be deemed perfectly acceptable by another group of

parents” (Dawkins, 2016). So, while a labeling procedure may be a useful tool in a library, its implementation would not be without controversy of its own.

In place of labeling, librarians could model procedures often followed by teachers seeking to use controversial titles in the classroom and provide permission slips or logs that parents would have to sign in order for students to check out this book. By doing this, the librarian is placing the responsibility of making this decision for the student on the parent or guardian. This could help alleviate both the concern of the librarian and the liability of the library or school for any parent who may be upset by the content of the title. How much these permission slips could prevent parental backlash and cover the liability of a school or library would probably need to be considered by administrators and whatever legal counsel oversees the school district.

Ethically, situations like this are ultimately more complex than should be apparent. Schools bear the responsibility of students in the absence of parents, and there are many moral gray areas, especially as the students get older. Young adult literature is a broad and diverse genre that often contains texts with material that verges on the edge of adulthood because the readers are also on the same edge of maturity. This has been the case with many popular series like *Harry Potter* and *Twilight*. As the series progressed, the content became more serious and mature which left many parents and readers wondering where the age of appropriateness was from book one to the end. Should students and young readers be forced to stop a beloved series until they are older, or is the content still within their range of maturity and understanding? While this is not a new issue, it is one that should be considered by librarians in all settings as we navigate the moral responsibilities of being the gatekeepers of knowledge and content.

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