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Personal Bias in Library Collections and Services

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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:


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.


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.


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. College and

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) Venture into Cultures: A Resource Book

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. Wilson Library Bulletin

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.) Diversity
Now: People, Collections, and Services in Academic Libraries.

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

Pratt, Allan D. Are We Really Infallible at Book Selection?

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

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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books and videos of interest to library service (whole bibliographies and videographies are especially welcome); tackling pressing social or professional issues; and publicizing diversity related events or conferences. Review the Submission Guidelines and Editorial Calendar for more information.

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