

Ethics of Cataloging Roundtable Discussion

ALA Annual 2019

Creative Ideas in Technical Services Interest Group Meeting

June 22, 2019

Cataloging has always implicitly held itself to a standard of professional ethics: provide complete, accurate data that is useful to the user. Increasingly, though, catalogers are being challenged to not only make their professional ethics explicit but also to expand the scope of their ethical considerations to include broader ethical themes such as feminism, post-colonialism, and privacy. As a result, challenges to and critiques of established systems or aspects of systems are becoming more common and librarians must navigate situations in which their understanding of what is ethical conflicts with the practices in place, such as when the preferred name from the Library of Congress Authority Files does not match the name a person or group uses for themselves. This discussion will focus on the types of ethical issues encountered in cataloging, how those issues can conflict with each other, and how changes to increase ethical practice might impact the future work of cataloging.

Discussion goals: To articulate our own ethical frameworks, learn from the perspectives of others, and reflect on our practice as catalogers both individually and collectively.

- Why are cataloging ethics important to you?
- What areas of cataloging do you think are most impacted by ethical issues? Why?
- What ethical issues in cataloging have you heard about but not encountered?
- What ethical issues do you encounter when cataloging? What, if anything, have you done to address ethical issues in your work?
- How would you define your standard ethical considerations when cataloging? What frameworks do you usually try to consider?
- How do you balance between conflicting ethics, such as the librarian ethic of providing the best information to users and the broader social ethic of privacy?
- Have you ever broken or considered breaking implicit or explicit cataloging rules due to an ethical conflict? If so, why and in what way?
- What types of non-librarian ethical considerations should be brought in to cataloging ethics? How might they impact cataloging practice or rules?
- Do you think neutrality is an appropriate ethical goal? Why? Is neutrality in cataloging achievable?
- Is there any single issue you would consider most important or most impactful to address? Why?
- Should we have an official cataloging code of ethics? Why or why not?

Works Consulted

- Bair, Sheila A. "Toward a Code of Ethics for Cataloging" (2005). *University Libraries Faculty & Staff Publications*. Paper 11. http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/library_pubs/11
- Billey, Amber; Drabinski, Emily; and Roberto, K.R. "What's Gender Got to Do With It? A Critique of RDA Rule 9.7" (2014). *University Libraries Faculty and Staff Publications*. Paper 19. <http://scholarworks.uvm.edu/libfacpub/19>
- "Cataloging books about Wicca/witchcraft - 133.43 vs. 203.3 vs. 299.94" email thread. AUTOCAT email list. April 29-30, 2019.
- *Ethical Questions in Name Authority Control*. Ed. Jane Sandberg. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2019.
- "A Fight Over 'Aliens'" and "A Fight Over 'Aliens'--Food For Thought" email thread. AUTOCAT email list. June 21-28, 2016.
- "Inappropriate subject headings" email thread. AUTOCAT email list. June 9-14, 2017.
- "Indigenous subject headings" email thread. AUTOCAT email list. April 3-8, 2019.
- "LCSH" "Illegal aliens" to "Citizens" and "LCSH" "Illegal aliens" to "NONCitizens" email thread. AUTOCAT email list. March 31-April 1, 2016.
- "Power that is Moral: Cataloging and Ethics" ALCTS e-Forum. Hosted by Violet Fox and Elizabeth Shoemaker. ALCTS e-Forum email list. September 5-6, 2017.