

If access, privacy, democracy, diversity, lifelong learning, intellectual freedom, preservation, and the public good are the pillars on which librarianship serves its community, then understanding how those converge seems to have been the ultimate lesson from my time in SLIS. While the core values have separate definitions, they work together to guide librarianship to the closest concept of equality we may ever know as we use them to define our philosophy of librarianship. But this prized goal of equal access, justice, and democracy is met with a history that has never upheld its end of the bargain even when it was declared “that all men are created equal.” My philosophy of librarianship is the charge of seeking out areas where access to information is threatened as libraries continue to provide equitable service for the public good despite continuing challenges.

Elaine Russo Martin (2020) asserts that “libraries are defenders of human and social justice through providing services and questioning the ideology of library neutrality” (p. 131). Access to all echoes most of our conversations regarding library work, yet so many institutions of higher education and public librarianship began their service far before the Civil Rights Act was signed in 1964. With the scale of history so far dipped to the side of inequality, Martin is right to challenge the idea of neutral service within libraries. Is neutrality the right way to describe how librarians can be stewards of intellectual freedom in honor of the other core values of librarianship? After all, librarians often celebrate Banned Books Week by hosting programming in recognition of standing up against oppressive viewpoints that would try to deny the narratives of most often black and LGBTQIA+ communities. While neutrality is not specifically stated in the “Library Bill of Rights” or the core values, they do urge librarians to provide service in as unbiased a way as possible and not restrict the voices of any member of the community or privilege the voices of any community. Referring to the words of Dani Scott and

Laura Saunders (2021), librarians have already chosen a side that is not neutral. And, in providing reference services, instruction, and collection development, librarians “are making judgments about authority, accuracy, relevance, and credibility” (p. 154). Neutrality is an impossible idea that can only be possible when communities are equitable. Rights, freedoms, and equality are not neutral topics as they assume that there exists populations where those ideals are threatened or have come under threat before. We must take into consideration that our patrons experience barriers and that no matter how neutral our service, they may not be receiving equal service.

The act of library work negates neutrality as library professionals uncover the areas of communities that are receiving inequitable service and try to find balance in the scale of justice. Providing the “same” service for all means that there are patrons who will experience inequality and staying neutral in those instances makes the library inaccessible to those patrons, which is in direct defiance to someone’s right to information. Making library spaces accessible and inclusive are what drives librarians to encourage lifelong learning and stand up for intellectual freedom as part of our responsibility to our communities and how we foster diversity. Librarians respond to the crisis of their communities by offering space for people to assemble and have unrestricted access to information. In order to do that, librarians must first understand what those restrictions are and ensure that they are dismantled.

## References

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