

The Ethical Implication of Librarianship and the Notion of Intellectual Freedom Today

Dr Mrs Doris Chinyere Obiano CLN*

Librarian 2, University Library, Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo state, Nigeria

**Corresponding Authors: Dr Mrs Doris Chinyere Obiano CLN, Librarian 2, University Library, Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo state, Nigeria, Email: obianodoris@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, many challenges face the academic sector. Most paramount amongst them is the challenge of librarianship. The questions on what to research, when to research and how to research has continued to become very necessary. This article therefore provides an overview of contemporary ethical dilemmas facing the library system today. By Library system, this article means the library as operational institution and librarians as library officials. This article also considers confidentiality in relation to intellectual freedom as so important and fundamental in any discussion of ethics within the library system.

Keywords: Ethics, Library, Intellectual Freedom

INTRODUCTION

In an age of technology like ours, it has become very important more than ever to reassess the involvement of ethics in the use of library. The aim is to reduce to the barest minimum the abuses inherent in the use of library and the many dark sides of technological researches that have given way to infidelity to contemporary scholarship. Firstly, it must be noted that libraries are great and indispensable repositories for humanity's knowledge; constituting the past, present, and future. While many see libraries as mere storehouses for books. Libraries are more than this as they include many other forms of data and goes ahead to mean a bank of Knowledge implying its indispensability.

That is why, Moya K. Mason posits that data "available in libraries must be accessible to all people, regardless of education, age, or economic status". It then follows according to Moya (2019) that retrieval of particular types of information requires knowledge in an authenticated manner and database searches that seem virtually beyond the capabilities of many users, and particularly of undergraduates starting their university careers. Librarians need to share that knowledge with users, instructing them on how to use electronic resources and the Internet so they can do research on their own, while pointing out the limits and problems associated with electronic research.

With the rise and sophistication of modern technology, the logistics of the workplace

changed forever. New rules are needed to govern behaviour, and to develop procedures for librarians on the frontlines. Hence for Hans Jonas "modern technology has introduced actions of such novel scale, objects, and consequences, that the framework of former ethics can no longer contain them" (Jonas 1984:34). This technological import has opened wider horizons for a neo-orientation strategy that involves key actors in proposing better ways to enhance means of research and ethical pragmatism.

THE PROBLEMATICS OF ETHICS IN INFORMATION HANDLING

It has become a fact that Librarians and information professionals face numerous ethical dilemmas. These dilemmas have become more pronounced in this age because of the sophistication of technology. The problematics remains the place of ethics in library usage by researchers and its management by professionals. However, Jonas 1984 notes that recent years have seen enhanced interest in 'workplace ethics'. The reason for this innovation is that the evolution of modern technology has virtually changed and transformed the nature in which persons and institutions interact with each other and of course within their environment. This point was articulated succinctly by Richard Severson. In his book, *The Recovery of Ethics in Librarianship*. According to him;

Technological innovation, for example, is enabling us to create "brave new worlds"... But automated environments are unfamiliar worlds. Our old intuitive habits of evaluation, which are adequate for determining what is best in traditional worlds, are inadequate in new and different settings (Severson 1995,13).

Bradely Cole affirms this by articulating that with technology man moves higher above his nature, and thus is able to create more potentials that beyond his imagination. Such potentials when applied to librarianship create better ways in its management and sensibilities. Not with standing ethics sets in for moderation and authentic usage. Since it is often only librarians who have the skills to access information from specialized databases, it is important that librarians keep ethics in the forefront.

Some Library Scholars have analysed the state of affairs within the library system stressing that it is critical that information professionals share their knowledge with patrons. They made this recommendation having seen the possibility of occurrence of a rift between those who have to obtain information and those who do not have the opportunity.

ANALYSING THE PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH FAIR AND EQUAL RIGHTS TO INFORMATION

Inherent technologies account for many problems evident in library practices. Along with this are questions of user fees and other basic problems associated with fair and equal rights to information. In realms of concerns, Librarians also need to ensure beyond doubts that the many information and services presented to users bear the following qualities;

- Are current
- Are Timely
- Are authentic
- Are professional
- Are without Prejudice
- And of the highest quality possible.

Hence Mintz (1991) advocates that Librarians must "Collaborate and communicate with library vendors to make sure that the library has the best resources available"

INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

What is intellectual Freedom? Can there be really intellectual freedom? This concept of intellectual freedom has remained a problematic one down the ages. This is because it is very difficult to ascertain what accounts for intellectual freedom since many authors have continued to find out in their empirical studies that knowledge is one and the same, hence one writing a book or an article like this one depends on other works and sources for His or her research. Even if He does not conduct fresh researches from other sources, still much of what He knows is very much dependent not on first class intuition but from that got from experiences in this case , the question to what extent can one be free in intellectual journey? Hence, intellectual freedom remains an indispensable ethical problem to contend with.

How does this discourse concern this research? Lee W. Finks relates intellectual Freedom to the development of new code of ethics as an aid to maintaining this intellectual emancipation. He insisted in 1991 on the essence of developing such code of ethic for librarianship. For him and yet for many other scholars before him, this code will be a sort of gadfly to library professionals and users. Finks had articulated many concerns that would in effect cover the entire methodologies involved in Library management. With the arrival of this code in 1995, it became very much evident that of his concerns were incorporated. What were the contents of this code?

- The Code embodied the belief that a code of ethics for librarians and information professionals must not be a hollow statement written to satisfy the public or library boards.
- For Finks, if such code is to be authentic, it must embody the principles and convictions that librarians have historically considered of value, and should "focus on the way we do our work and whether or not we perform in a way that can honestly be called professional" (Finks 1991, 84).
- Furthermore, as Johan Bekker points out, since society judges a profession by its individual members, all members must follow a clearly defined set of ethical standards (Finks 1991,85).
- Finks notes that ethical issues related to selection of materials and intellectual

freedom should be carefully considered and disseminated by librarians and users in their research analysis. (cf. Finks 1991,89).

Coming to the question of Intellectual freedom, Schweinsburg adopts a workable definition of the phrase with a descriptive analysis. For him the concept depends "...on the assumption that individuals choose the path their inquiries take, but this is often a false assumption. How each selection is made in the process of providing information involves a value judgement" (Schweinsburg 1995,34).

The implication of this is its positive effect that librarians try not to let their personal emotions, ideologies and ambition interfere with their professional activities.

These triadic factors have been noted to be the most visible impediments to Intellectual Freedom. By emotion one does not depend on the information at hand but on personal feelings, by ideologies, one does not analyse critically the state of affairs through combination of information evident in other materials but on self imposed thoughts guided by emotions and by ambition there a total overlook of how the information or project at hand affects the general public but on intellectual pride and autonomy of knowledge. Notwithstanding that the client has no way to judge whether the librarian has acted unethically (Finks 1991,85). Within this freedom, Professional codes imply that librarians must remain true to their functions and thus remain neutral and to provide the information a client requests. In this light Librarians should set aside their assumptions, emotions, ambitions and prejudices to make sure they don't destroy the fundamental principle that underlies librarianship, that is "*the social obligation to allow access to all perspectives*". This also has serious and considerable consequences for the selection of materials.

CONCEPT OF SELECTION IN LIBRARIES

Many Authors have criticized Censorship within librarianship. Schweinsburg, Bekker, Finks and Hauptman decried the effects of censorship and the need for library professionals to avoid it. Included in maintaining the code of ethics in librarianship is the fact noted by Schweinsburg. In his *Professional Awareness of the Ethics of Selection*, Schweinsburg addresses the issue of selection in libraries and writes. According to him, "the fact that librarians must examine and select the materials for their collection may make them de facto censors" (Schweinsburg

1995,34). However, Bekker does not approve this de facto. For him as articulated by Finks, selection must be free of censorship and undertaken for library users, not based on any personal preferences (Finks 1991,87). For Hauptman in appraising the above scholars, these decisions are becoming more important as the price of books and other materials continue to rise, and because libraries face frequent budget cuts. Hence for him, He must within their capacity avoid censorship and duplication of reference materials. Lack of money has always been an issue for libraries, but the problem is exacerbated when so much has to be spent keeping up with new technologies, and meeting public demands. What responsibilities do libraries have to society?

THE ETHICS OF REFERENCE LIBRARIANS: SOCIETY AND CLIENTS

Another basic concern is the *ethical conundrums* faced every day in reference work. These affect both individuals and society. Robert Hauptman examined some of these ethical problems to the forefront through his *unobtrusive experiment*. This was in the bid to see how reference librarians respond to questions of an ethical nature (Hauptman 1990,15). His analysis was as a result of the visit he made to thirteen libraries in 1975 and asked various reference librarians to provide him with information for building a bomb, a bomb big enough to blow up a suburban home. He notes that His request was received in affirmation as not one librarian refused his request. Here he concludes on the dilemma for people working on reference desks everywhere. The question herein is whether librarians blindly serve clients without impeding factors to moral obligation to their society and environment? Where is the place of common good in their profession? This situation was referred to by Hauptman as "dubious professional commitment to dispense information" (Hauptman 1990,15).

He notes that within the ethical code and in order to think equally for the common good, librarians are bound by conscience to withdraw information whatsoever capable of causing harm to the common good. On this Hauptman put asserts "whenever there is a direct conflict between professional ethics and societal good, the latter must take precedence" (Hauptman 1990,16). According to Bekker, there is the need to oblige clients the necessary information needed since they are at service of their clients, however, the love for the society should be the

foremost responsibility as against librarian-client relationship which is in effect only teleological. Thus, "that the professional's first ethical imperative should be altruistic service to the client," however, vocational ethics should take precedence, so it is a librarian's duty to protect society first (Finks 1991,85). If librarians have a code of ethics with clearly laid out guidelines, any information query can be denied with justification.

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

We began by noting the importance of ethics in librarianship, this is because ethics is very much indispensable in the society, given the role of moderation and without moderation the society runs into extinction. One of these ethical codes is the ability of library professionals to remain authentic to their profession.

Most importantly, this article considered the problematics of relationship. Here does the librarian retain his relationship with his Client as seen in the analysis by Hauptman, thereby doing away with other ethical concerns that may endanger the life of the society? The answer hence, remains the ability of the professional to reconcile these relations between the profession and the client and between the client and the society.

According to Rathbun 1993, "arguments have been articulated that sanctions need to be written into a new code of ethics to make sure librarians behave ethically" Here, Gene D. Lanier discusses how a code can be enforced when ethics are so subjective (Lanier 1993,9). He believes that codes should incorporate a series of rules for librarians to follow in the face of "moral questions raised by the diverse applications and growing technological sophistication of computers" (Lanier 1993,10). Lanier thinks libraries of higher standards are possible, if administrators practice and insist on exemplary behaviour from all staff (Lanier 1993,10). Many scholars have noted that the ethical codes in use are obviously inadequate. This is because of the impact of technology today on libraries and their staff. Given the

unpredictable nature of the future, a more frequent review of ethical codes is paramount .

Because librarians possess valuable knowledge, skills, and experiences badly needed in a world of people who must come to terms with the power of information in their lives. We know that free access to information preserves democratic ideas, that information resources must be managed with care, and that the human spirit depends upon remembering the past, sharing the present in community, and dreaming about the future (Smith 1993,4).

REFERENCES

- [1] Finks, Lee. 1991. *Librarianship Needs a New Code of Ethics*. American Libraries, Vol. 22, pp.84-92.
- [2] Hauptman, Robert. 1988. *Ethical Challenges in Librarianship*. Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press.
- [3] Hauptman, Robert. 1990. *Ethical Concerns in Librarianship: An Overview*. In *Information Ethics*, ed. by Anne Mintz, pp.14-23. Jefferson: McFarland.
- [4] Jonas, Hans. 1984. *The Imperative of Responsibility*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- [5] Lanier, Gene D. 1993. *ALA's Committee on Professional Ethics: An Insider's View*. North Carolina Libraries, Vol. 51, No. 1, pp. 9-10.
- [6] Mintz, Anne. 1991. *Ethics and the News Librarian*. Special Libraries, Vol. 82, No. 1, pp.7-11.
- [7] Rathbun, Susan R. 1993. *Ethics Issues in Reference Service: Overview and Analysis*. North Carolina Libraries, Vol. 51, No. 1, pp. 11-14.
- [8] Schweinsburg, Jane D. 1995. *Professional Awareness of the Ethics of Selection*. Journal of Information Ethics, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 33-41.
- [9] Severson, Richard. 1995. *The Recovery of Ethics in Librarianship*. Journal of Information Ethics, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 11-15.
- [10] Smith, Martha M. 1993. *Information Ethics: Freedom, Democracy, Responsibility*. North Carolina Libraries, Vol. 51, No. 1, pp.4-8.
- [11] Tyckoson, David A. 1992. *Wrong Questions, Wrong Answers: Behavioral vs. Factual Evaluation of Reference Service*. The Reference Librarian, Vol. 38, pp. 151-155.

Citation: Dr Mrs Doris Chinyere Obiano CLN, "The Ethical Implication of Librarianship and the Notion of Intellectual Freedom Today", *Research Journal of Library and Information Science*, 3(3), 2019, pp. 10-13

Copyright: © 2019 Dr Mrs Doris Chinyere Obiano CLN. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.