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Assignment #1: Information Policy

Information has always been at the core of librarianship. Librarians and information professionals are charged with collecting, preserving, organizing, and disseminating information to anyone who seeks it. Information policy deals with the implications of disseminating information and the legal ramifications of doing so. After reviewing the information policy selections located on the American Library Association website, I chose to focus on privacy, copyright, and CIPA.

I discovered that privacy is more than keeping mum about people's book choices. It involves a lot of federal government laws. However, it is no longer as simple as the Fourth Amendment right to be protected from unlawful searches. In "Privacy and Legislation," it is clear that there are a number of privacy-related laws that affect libraries. The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act deals with the surveillance of communications that may affect national security. The REAL ID Act concerns tightened security of driver's licenses and identification cards, implementing a standardized format. Since libraries often require ID to be presented when getting a library card, there is a fear that library patrons' privacy could be violated and their circulation activities tracked.

In "Privacy and Confidentiality," I was struck by the following quote: "One cannot exercise the right to read if the possible consequences include damage to one's reputation, ostracism from the community or workplace, or criminal penalties. Choice requires both a varied selection and the assurance that one's choice is not monitored." The freedom to read (or listen to, or watch) whatever you choose is fundamental to libraries, and such information must be kept confidential in order to ensure that library patrons feel comfortable using the library.

Related to confidentiality is the rising use of RFID tags in circulating materials. While convenient for both the patron and the library staff, the tags can be read by anyone with an RFID reader. Therefore, safeguards such as encryption must be put into place to ensure privacy.

I am interested in issues affecting privacy because I deal with them often. In my job as a circulation assistant, I call patrons with materials on hold. If I speak to someone other than the patron, I am sure not to tell them the title of the material on hold because it is a privacy violation. I also feel like there are a lot of grey areas related to privacy: Should a parent be able to ask what fines are on their children's library cards? Should a patron be allowed to check all the family's accounts to see what books are still out? While privacy policies are in place to protect patrons, they can also be inconvenient if a patron wants seemingly innocuous information and you cannot tell them.

Copyright is a multifaceted information policy, especially with the advent of the Internet. In "Libraries and Copyright in the Digital Age," it is asserted that technology and legality often are at odds because the laws on the books were not designed to handle the technological capabilities in place today. While libraries attempt to level the field between copyright owners and users, they also support legislation like the FAIR USE Act. The FAIR USE Act allows six exemptions to the Digital Copyright Millennium Act,

which prohibited the manipulation of technological safeguards in order to use a copyrighted work. The FAIR USE Act would allow screen readers for visually impaired people, film clips for educational purposes, and access to public domain works in addition to exempting libraries who are involved in preservation activities. Fair use limits the exclusivity of the copyright holder, thus allowing a freer flow of information.

The policy of copyright interests me because it is in a constant state of flux. Is something posted on the Internet copyrighted, especially where it is so easy to copy and paste? Is it possible to mold current copyright laws to the digital domain? Recently, Stephenie Meyer found a draft of her latest manuscript posted to the Internet. It was not published under someone else's name, but still her rights were violated. I am curious to see how current copyright laws will change to encompass our increasingly rapid shift onto the Internet.

I chose the Child Internet Protection Act (CIPA) as my final information policy focus. CIPA required libraries and other educational institutions to place filters on Internet content in order to receive financial assistance. However, it was decided that CIPA made libraries violate their patrons' First Amendment rights and certain sections could not be enforced. CIPA was a blanket solution to a problem that affects every library differently and it was unfair to require a form of censorship in order to receive money.

CIPA interests me because I work as a children's assistant and, even though not required, the children's computers in my library have heavy filters on them. When an adult chooses to use one of these machines, they often find that something as benign as their email will not load. While these filters are not in place in order to receive funding, I wonder if they can be considered a violation of the First Amendment. Where does the protection end and the censorship begin? I do not think children should be exposed to the darker, seedier side of the Internet, but should an adult using a children's computer have full (or almost full—these are public machines, after all) access? Am I liable if I forget to enable the filter before a child gets on the machine?

Although these information policies provide guidelines for librarians, I feel like they raise a lot of questions, also. Knowing current legislation is imperative to stay relevant and informed. The rate of change is phenomenal, especially with technology, but asking these questions help information professionals maintain the flow of information while still complying with laws.