The Action of Inaction: Library Neutrality in the Wake of Social Justice

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Access is not neutral

Some definitions

Neutral (adjective): 1. Not engaged on either side
   Specifically: not aligned with a political or ideological group

Neutrality (noun): 1. The quality or state of being neutral
   Especially: refusal to take part in a war between other powers

Objectivity (adjective):
   1. Based on facts rather than feelings or opinions

Intellectual freedom

Intellectual Freedom is still a core value for librarians and patrons.
Every purchasing decision is a non-neutral choice. You don’t have an unlimited budget.
This isn’t censorship, it’s collection development.
Patrons are able to request books/materials through inner-library loans.
Unrestricted (not filtered) access to the internet.
Not all patrons ask if something is a good source.
   - Some assume that if it’s on the shelves in the library it must be true.

Have libraries ever been neutral?

Neutral or objectivity?

Neutral services can be neutral:
   - You can do the job or service they ask for.
Collections must be objective:
   - Meen Kampf is a (horrible and disgusting) account of Hitler’s beliefs.
   - The Global Bell Curve: Race, IQ and inequality worldwide has been scientifically debunked.
Objectivity:
   - We know some things are wrong and shouldn’t be considered. Would you put a “How to Guide” on necrophilia on your shelves?

Non-neutrality in your library

Book displays
Juneteenth celebrations
Pride celebrations
Food programs
Storytime
Book clubs

Why does it matter

Access to the library is a form of civic participation.
Libraries build community, people need to feel safe within that community.
Libraries can serve as a catalyst for fixing social problems.
Libraries should contain books that encourage learning.
Having fun isn’t hard, when you’ve got a library card.

Conclusions

If libraries are neutral:
   - Who are we trying to protect?
   - Who’s comfort are we centering?
   - Who are we valuing in our community?
   - Who has the ability/power to define “neutrality”?
If libraries stayed neutral, someone like me might not get to use one.

References


NOTA: This is a temporary placeholder reference. Please use the actual reference from the document. The reference is likely to be found in the section titled "References."