Intellectual Freedom: Does It Still Matter in the Digital Age? and Does Anybody Care Anymore?

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Jim Campbell
Yes!
Let’s Ponder a While

• What is Intellectual Freedom (IF)?
• Why does IF matter in the Digital Age - or in any age?
• Who cares about IF?
• What can we do to nurture IF?
• What happens if we don’t?
Three key components
("according to me")
- (Input) Ability to access intellectual resources, anonymously if desired
- (Process) “Intellectual Privacy” (Richards) — Zone of protection that allows freely making up one’s mind
- (Output) Ability to “publish” opinions without fear of official reprisal
Intellectual Freedom

- Some descriptions: UN
  - “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” (Article 18, Universal Declaration of Human Rights)
  - (Very much like Jefferson’s preamble to VA Statute for Religious Freedom 200+ years ago)
Intellectual Freedom

- Some Descriptions: UN
  - “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” (Article 19)
• Some Descriptions: NCTE
  - “All students have the right to materials and educational experiences that promote open inquiry, critical thinking, diversity in thought and expression, and respect for others. Denial or restriction of this right is an infringement of intellectual freedom.”
  (NCTE: Principles for Intellectual Freedom in Education)
Some Descriptions: IFLA

- “IFLA declares that human beings have a fundamental right to access expressions of knowledge, creative thought and intellectual activity, and to express their views publicly. IFLA believes that the right to know and freedom of expression are two aspects of the same principle.”

(IFLA Statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom)
Intellectual Freedom

• Some Descriptions: ALA
  • “Intellectual freedom is the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. It provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause or movement may be explored.”
Why Does IF Matter?

- Basis for Human Autonomy
- Basis for Individual Freedom
- Necessity for Democratic Government
Intellectual Freedom

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Key Components of IF

• Intellectual Privacy
  - Privacy in general is its foundation

• Tools for Intellectual Privacy
  - Physical, e.g.,
    - Ways to access information/culture
    - “Permission” to access
  - Conceptual
    - Ability to utilize tools effectively
      - Education - formal and otherwise
      - Discernment, evaluation, analysis
Privacy in General

• Convenience vs. Privacy
  - Equifax and the like - personal consent?
  - Economic benefit for personal information

• “How public like a frog” - user volunteered personal information

• Corporate web surveillance

• Government surveillance
Privacy in General

- In the Digital Age, all privacy is “contextual” (Nissenbaum)
  - We don’t mind if some people know certain things - it’s necessary for daily life, or we feel we get benefits
  - That doesn’t mean all people should know all things about us
    - Selectively disclose personal information
    - Confidentiality, e.g., health, finances
Intellectual Privacy

“Intellectual Privacy”- “Zone of protection that allows freely making up one’s mind” (Richards)

- This is the second and least discussed of the three key aspects of Intellectual Freedom - and perhaps the most crucial (again, “according to me”)

• Intellectual Privacy - “Zone of protection that allows freely making up one’s mind” (Richards)
Intellectual Privacy

- Crucial in generating new ideas and forming personal beliefs
- Recognized in different ways by:
  - 1st, 4th, and 5th Amendments
  - State library patron privacy laws (48 states)
  - UN Declaration: Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion
Intellectual Privacy

“protection from surveillance or unwanted interference by others when we are engaged in the process of generating ideas or forming beliefs—when we are thinking, reading, and speaking with confidants before our ideas are ready for public consumption”
Intellectual Privacy

“Chilling effect” of surveillance - actual, or simply possible

- Lots of research indicates that people behave differently when they think they are being observed - they move toward the perceived norm
- Basis of “Panopticon” effect (Bentham)
- “The Hawthorne Effect” - Industrial research, cameras in school busses, etc.
So What — Who Cares?

- ALA, IFLA, FTRF, Civil Liberties groups, Libertarians, “Strict Constitutional Constructionists”
- Expand your own list but be sure to include:
  - Libraries and Librarians!
Actions to Support IF

• What can libraries do?
  - **Input**: Do what libraries do
    - Make all kinds of materials accessible to all kinds of people
  - **Process**: Foster and enable Intellectual Privacy
  - **Output**: Facilitate “publishing” ideas
    • Sponsor events of many kinds
    • Some libraries are becoming digital “presses”
Actions to Support IF

- **Foster Intellectual Privacy**
  - Eliminate “surveillance” possibilities as much as possible in the library
    - Minimize Personally Identifiable Information (PII) kept and stored
    - Destroy paper forms and all records not needed, e.g., computer sign-up forms, applications for library cards or programs, etc.
    - Always use “opt-in” rather than “opt out”
    - Have a Privacy Policy and explain it to patrons
Actions to Support IF

- Ensure that electronic records held locally are secure (no small challenge these days)
- Encourage vendors, ILS providers, etc. to retain minimal PII, and ensure PII records are secure
Actions to Support IF

• For personal info that library cannot delete
  - Apply FIPP as practical: Ensure that patrons understand what is being collected, how it is being used, how long kept, etc.
    • Personal info gathered by vendors through use of ebooks, downloaded audio, etc
    • Info kept after patrons have opted into Reader Advisories or other library services
    • Security camera footage, RFID tag info, etc.
Actions to Support IF

- Provide physical tools
  - Access to equipment and instruction on how to use it to find information
  - “Permission” to access information
  - Minimal filtering by library (ALA position)
  - Knowhow to minimize filter “bubbles” by information providers, e.g., “personalization”
  - Copyright understanding, including understanding of Public Domain and Fair Use
Actions to Support IF

• Provide conceptual tools
  - Encourage effective use of library physical tools through education, formal/informal in the library
    • How to use today’s digital devices safely to maximize Intellectual Privacy
    • How to find what a patron is seeking
    • How to use library equipment/tools to maximize accurate information and minimize inaccurate information
No Intellectual Freedom?

- Human autonomy is reduced or dies
- Human potential is reduced or dies
- “Democracy Dies in Darkness” (WP)
- Life becomes a lot less worth living
Intellectual Freedom

Worth the Effort!
Questions?
Comments?
Additions?
Disputations?
Some Sources to Peruse

• *Intellectual Privacy* by Neil Richards
• *Privacy in Context* by Helen Nissenbaum
• http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/advocating-intellectual-freedom
• https://www.ifla.org/publications/ifla-statement-on-libraries-and-intellectual-freedom
Some Sources to Peruse

- *The Filter Bubble* by Eli Pariser
- *The Watchers*, *Harvard Magazine*, Jan-Feb, 2017
- [www.ncte.org/postions/statements/principles-intell-freedom](http://www.ncte.org/postions/statements/principles-intell-freedom)
- [www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/privacy](http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/privacy)