

Please note: Due to the controversial nature of this week's lesson content, it is especially important to be diplomatic and courteous on the discussion board. Please reread your posts before hitting "submit" to be sure your tone is appropriate and professional. Thank you in advance.

For your initial post (due Saturday), please respond to any of the following questions:

1. Wessells presents a different type of ethical dilemma than those presented in the rest of the articles or the lecture notes, but this perhaps is a scenario that we are more likely to encounter than some of the others. When dealing with questions of religion, morality, ethics, etc. at the reference desk, what approach might you see as both professionally and personally acceptable? When considering this question, try to push yourself to think of reference questions that would test your ability to be neutral. Can you think of a situation when you would compromise your stated principles?
2. Respond to one of the following quotations found in the lecture notes: "No politics, no religion, no morals" by Foskett or "Find all requested material. The librarian is not in the position of being a judge" by Katz. Argue in favor or against one or both of these quotations. In your response, you might consider McMenemy's analysis of Foskett's argument and/or Sturgeon's perspective about the ALA Code of Ethics.
3. Neuhaus discusses the issues of patron confidentiality in digital reference. Continuing our discussion from last week, how might Neuhaus' analysis inform your views on this issue? Keep in mind that this article was published in 2003, so some of the details about various chat programs will likely have changed by now, but the overall points of his article are still valid.
4. Respond to any other idea that struck you in the lecture notes or readings for this week.

As I was reading Paul Neuhaus' article, "Privacy and Confidentiality in Digital Reference," I was reminded of an article I read in LIBR 200 about whether or not the reference librarian-patron relationship should be a privileged relationship, much like the relationship between lawyers and their clients and doctors and their patients. The article, "Should There Be 'Privilege' in the Relationship Between Reference Librarian and Patron?" (2004), by Brice Austin presents eight different arguments and counter-arguments as to why or why not patrons and librarians should have this level of protection. Some of the arguments and counter-arguments are very compelling.

For example, in exploring whether or not the patron-librarian relationship is different from the relationships between doctors and patients, lawyers and clients, or clergy members and their penitents, Austin remarks that one argument people can make against librarians and patrons falling under the privileged relationship category is that paper records are not kept. He makes the counter-point that other professions who do have privileged relationships don't always keep records either. He also states that sometimes librarians actually do keep records in cases of "long term collaboration between librarian and researcher" or emails that, although can be deleted, can be "potentially accessible" (p. 303). As Neuhaus makes clear in his article, there are many privacy issues regarding digital records in today's environment of which librarians need to be aware, not excluding the fact that some vendors store digital reference transactions anywhere from a few months, "while others maintain the records indefinitely" (p. 28). Austin ends his argument that "regardless of whether or not there is a written record," without librarians having a privileged relationship with their patrons, they can be "called to testify in court" (p. 303).

Austin's article provides much food for thought. The full-text can be retrieved through the King Library. The citation is listed in my references below.

One thing I greatly appreciate from Neuhaus' article is that he provides a list of criteria for creating privacy policies that addresses the concerns he makes throughout the article. This is very useful. I intend to keep this article handy when I get my first library job that involves reference.

Austin, B. (2004). Should there be "privilege" in the relationship between reference librarian and patron? *The Reference Librarian*, 87/88, 301-311.

Neuhaus, P. (2003). Privacy and confidentiality in digital reference. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 43(1), 26-36.