

Letters

To the Editor:

I find little to criticize in the specific points made by Nancy H. Larsen Helmick in "Are Patrons Ready for 'Do-It-Yourself' Services?" (*C&RL* 53:44-48, January 1992). Allowing patrons to handle the routine of renewals and other similar transactions through terminals establishes very little risk for the quality of those services. Library clerks acting as clerks are not necessarily going to be more effective than faculty and students acting as clerks. Nor am I surprised at the willingness and even enthusiasm of individuals for taking over these transactions from the understaffed and overworked library workers, particularly when having librarians do it takes longer and causes annoyance.

What I find disturbing is the underlying premise that this is somehow an effective strategy in dealing with budgetary shortfalls. Transferring work from the library staff to the users may or may not be cost effective, but there is no attempt here to find out. The more pernicious tactic, although not addressed in the article, is the transfer of professional information work from the understaffed library to the presumably equally overworked and certainly less qualified user population. We must be careful not to allow the budgetary process to lead us to play games of transferring our costs to others within the same organization, thereby accomplishing little in total. The fact that these games do go on does not make them more responsible as a management tactic. It reminds me of the description of many so-called cost-cutting endeavors: "We are going to have economy no matter how much it costs."

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To the Editor:

Certain conclusions drawn by Pamela J. Cravey in her study on the occupational role identity of women academic librarians have been bothering me since the publication of this article in *C&RL* (52:150-64, March 1991). I had problems with the apparent inconsistencies between the data she presents and her profile of the "average" academic librarian. I was also troubled by the undocumented implications of her discussion of "orientation to the occupational role," that for public, school, and special librarians, their organizations are less complex, their clientele less diverse and demanding, their specializations less deep, their work less intellectually demanding, and their general orientation more determined. These things may all be true, but I found this presentation considerably less than convincing.

The chief problem I had, however, is found in the article's penultimate paragraph. Here Cravey refers to "the theory that the increase of homosexual men into librarianship is linked to fulfillment of the female role." I first found this statement odd, since neither the occupational choice of librarianship among men generally nor the factor of sexual orientation figured in Cravey's study. I then consulted the source for this statement, a footnote in a paper on the history of women in public librarianship. This footnote presents no concrete historical evidence for "an increase of male homosexuals into

librarianship" and offers only unsubstantiated and highly stereotyped speculation concerning the psychology and sociology of gay men, hardly a sound basis for any type of theory. Given that Cravey, earlier in her paper, discusses the profound negative effects that stereotypes have had on librarians and librarianship, one would think she would refrain from trafficking in stereotypes herself and from relying on sources that do so. One might also think that editorial sensitivity would have prevented such aspersions from being cast in a respected professional journal on the professional and personal motivations of any group, particularly a minority, within the profession.

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To the Editor:

"The Library as a Marketplace of Ideas," by Ronald Heckart (52:491-505, Nov. 1991) is an excellent article, but I would have to take exception to Heckart's problem with "carrying the 'marketplace of ideas' so far as to have it become merely a process 'with no ethical or moral content.'" I have no problem with that at all. In fact, in his allusion to the ACLU and the Skokie incident (ACLU defending the right of neo-Nazis to march through a Jewish neighborhood) becoming just such a process "devoid of ethical or moral content," I was, and still am, fully on the side of the ACLU.

To me, this "mere process" of the marketplace of ideas has far more substance and grit to defeat censorship than this attempt to lay the marketplace on an ethical foundation of "self actualization" or "empowerment." I do not need such an additional foundation (nor do I think "intellectual freedom" does), and I am always suspicious of what such a foundation is, and who chooses it or has the right to choose it.

A "process" devoid of "ethical/moral content"? Whose morals, whose ethics? Librarian "interventionists" in collection development, I applaud; librarian "moralists," I abhor.

But again, thanks for the stimulating article, Mr. Heckart.

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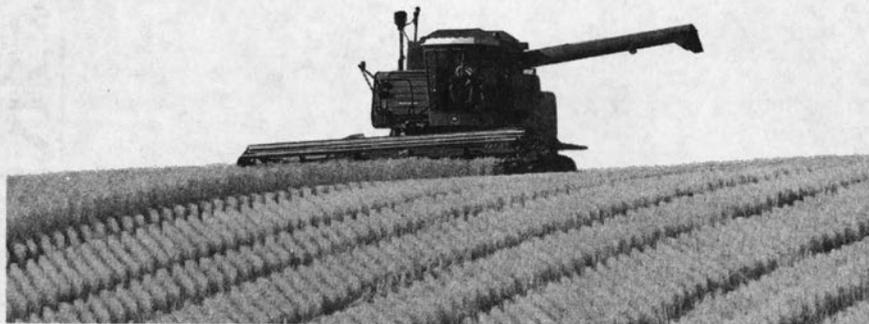
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