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Values and Attitudes of Today's Information Professional

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## Abstract

Changes are constantly taking place in libraries because of expanding information. Information is no longer considered just books or magazines, but computers and the internet also. With these changes which are occurring in libraries, it is important to reflect how they are impacting the role of librarians and the paradigm of their values and attitudes. Ms. Watson in *Mona Lisa Smile* is an example of how the paradigm of information professionals has remained constant. Librarians might have to learn new ways of doing the actual day to day work, with the advancement of information technology, but their values and attitudes of the profession will stay the same.

### Values and Attitudes of Today's Information Professional

In today's world, the paradigm of how we see information professionals, or librarians, has remained constant. Librarians provide a service to human kind in that they assist all levels of learning, by all types of people, and they do so by valuing their commitment to knowledge. Protecting and understanding this knowledge enables the librarian to meet the needs of the information seeker. In watching *Mona Lisa Smile*, Julia Roberts plays Ms. Katherine Watson, an art history teacher desperately trying to get her students to think for themselves, to understand their role as information seekers. The values and attitudes of Ms. Watson are reflected in today's paradigm of an information professional because she rejects censorship, promotes progression of ideas, provides a growth stimulus, and teaches her students to think outside the box.

Rubin (2004), in discussing ethics and access issues, tells us that people should have equally access to information, not censor information, and encourage freedom of intellectual growth (p. 351). Unlike Ms. Watson, who experienced censorship when she was told to change her teaching methods, libraries have had to deal with this problem through the court systems. As Rubin (2004) details:

A library is a storehouse of knowledge. When created for a public school it is an important privilege created by the state for the benefit of the students in the school. That privilege is not subject to being withdrawn by succeeding school boards whose members might desire to "winnow" the library for books the content of which occasioned their displeasure or disapproval. (Minarcini v Strongsville City School District 1977) (p.402)

This court document provides librarians with support that is needed to make all types of information, including literature and internet web pages, available to all users. However, this is not always the case.

Public and school libraries often have played a role in censorship. Some cases were brought on not by principals or parents, but the librarians themselves. Rubin (2004) says much of it was self-imposed by not ordering books they thought would be banned, because the belief was books could actually harm the children (p.190). Rubin (2004) also observed that censorship occurred more often with books that had pictures as compared to un-illustrated ones (p. 191).

Other cases of censorship do have some merit when it comes to protecting the children using libraries. With the explosion of information readily accessible on the internet, risks of not censoring certain websites, or books, could enable children to access the wrong information. However, fighting censorship is a task librarians do not take lightly, even though it might be the most demanding aspect of the profession, both legally and morally. As with Ms. Watson, who defended intellectual freedom by ending her career at the college because she would not be censored, libraries have a responsibility to patrons to protect all materials.

Librarians have typically been instrumental in promoting progression in technology related areas because it is their professional responsibility to provide the means necessary for patrons to get all the information they can. Historically, libraries have moved with the times, from writing on parchment, to the invention of the printing press, to computers and the internet. With each advancement in the way information is handled, librarians have considered what the patron might need to access the new development. It is the same with Ms. Watson when she is having her students look at the Jackson Pollock painting. She wants the students to consider the evolution of the painting in comparison to the previous art styles they had been seeing. What other access would these students have had to the painting if she had not shown them? Ms. Watson was providing up-do-date information for her students and the painting itself was the method in which the information was presented, much like a librarian of today would provide a

patron access to books or the internet.

Librarians value the information age because it brings a much needed resource to patrons. Librarians must also, as a result, learn new technologies to adapt to their environment and provide services to patrons. As Sacchanand (2000) states, “information professionals need to remain on the cutting edge. Their learning should be constant to develop as professionals. Librarians must adapt to new environments that are conducive to learning. The library should, as a place of education, provide a professional community of learners where everyone is both teacher and learner” (abstract). Again, Ms. Watson is practicing this important attitude by seeing the Jackson Pollock painting for the first time and listening to the reactions of the students. She is learning right along with the students.

Librarians also are encouraged to be a growth stimulus to many young patrons. This is especially evident in school and public libraries. Children grow up reading about subjects that interest them, and expand into researching subjects later in their schooling. Librarians facilitate this process by guiding the students from a basic reader in elementary school, to a developed intellectual in later years. This can be seen as Rubin (2004) states John Dewey’s principles of learning from the 1920s were part of the progressive education movement that introduced new educational theories, in which contributed to the emergence of the modern school library and its mission. These principles stated “a child’s growth and development, rather than subject matter, should be central focus of the school; education should involve children learning through a variety of experiences and exploring a variety of subjects; children learn best when they are exploring subjects of interest to them; and schools should be a social experience that teaches the child how to be self-directed” (p. 283).

As an information professional, Ms. Watson shows us these principles as she is teaching her students. During the first class, the students are very prepared, having read the entire text book and practically memorizing it. Ms. Watson guides them during the subsequent classes to think for themselves, to answer what they are feeling, rather than reading someone else's words in a text book. In this way, Ms. Watson is a growth stimulus, making sure her students discover different techniques of learning through the course of the semester.

Librarians also promote patrons to think outside the box, or to influence the outcome of something with their minds. As Sacchanand (2000) states, "changes are taking place in society. The explosion of knowledge and information technology has virtually altered the characteristics of the learning environment, paving the way for new learning experiences" (abstract).

Librarians are instrumental in providing many avenues in retrieving the information patrons need, in many different ways. These avenues include books, television, CD-ROMs, DVDs, VHSs, computer databases, and the internet. Rubin (2004) says "as students increasingly view the Web as the most common channel to get information, librarians play a special role in indentifying the many resources that are available in the Web environment, and in training and educating both students and teacher on how to locate and evaluate Web sites" (p. 396). If librarians can help patrons research information they need using a variety of different methods, then patrons can develop a new way of studying.

This is evident with Ms. Watson when she is rewarded at the end of the semester with many different paint-by-number Van Gogh sunflowers. Even though Van Gogh had originally painted the sunflowers, the students could still come up with their own interpretation of the painting. Ms. Watson had provided this knowledge throughout the semester for the students to

influence the outcomes of these paintings. They developed a new way of looking at art, through the eyes and words of Ms. Watson.

Information is expanding on a daily basis and librarians play a vital role in supplying access to the patrons, young or adult. As with Ms. Watson and her Van Gogh paintings, librarians are opening the eyes to many patrons by showing them a whole new world in electronic information. It is a new form of information and a new responsibility of information professionals to add to their paradigm. Rubin (2004) questions “whether the new information technologies create a new social context that changes the meaning and significance of libraries and librarians” (p. 482). With the changes occurring in the information availability and frequency, it appears evident this change in meaning is happening.

Librarians, as information professionals, have many of the same values and attitudes as Ms. Watson in *Mona Lisa Smile*. These values and attitudes are reflected in today’s paradigm of librarianship in a variety of different ways. With this paradigm, information professional’s roles in the future will be the same as the past; to provide accurate, up-to-date information to all patrons, regardless of race, ethnicity, age, gender, or income level.

### References

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