

with users. This will require entirely new arrangements for professional work assignments, reporting, and evaluation, where emphasis will be placed primarily on distributed control and independent judgment and decision-making related to ever-changing needs.

A final problem to be solved, and one about which little needs to be said other than its necessity, has to do with educational programs. At the present time, library education programs that supply professionals for academic research libraries are deeply committed to the older paradigm. Programs of this sort will not be very useful to the newer paradigm with its user orientation. Steps must be taken to develop the patterns of thinking, judgment, and methods that will support the new focus.

Of highest importance in this respect would be the development of essential courses that begin with the examination and exploration of users needs and behavior in finding and making use of information.

Conclusion

What has been suggested as problems to be addressed or solved in order to implement a new operational paradigm for academic research libraries could doubtless be greatly expanded and worked out in greater detail. It is hoped, however, that the points made will provide a beginning for that process, assuming, of course, that the analysis of the academic research library on the basis of operational paradigms was accurate to begin with.

The future of reference II: A response

By Cheryl Knott Malone

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When I read an advance copy of Fran Miksa's paper I confess to feeling somewhat alarmed that in one short year of RISC programs, it seemed we had gone from abandoning the reference desk to overthrowing the library as we know it.¹

Professor Miksa first constructs a model of the collection-centered library, then describes the developing anomalies representing user-centeredness: interlibrary service, resource sharing strategies, document delivery, and so on. In holding this model up for our inspection he makes us aware of two important features of our work lives. First, we are operating in a transformative period as we shift our gaze from the collection to the users. And second, he helps us to understand the conflicts we face on the job as a result.

I want to explore these conflicts as a living embodiment of them, for I am both a user-oriented reference librarian and a collection-oriented bibliographer—or vice versa, depending on your interpretation of the paradigm. And I also want to add another element, for these conflicts occur within

complex organizations.

In addition to the historical trends Miksa mentioned briefly, collection development and reference activities have changed in the last several years. Collection development generally has moved out of the hands of faculty and into the library. There were several reasons for this transition: the increasing pressure on faculty to "publish or perish" and the resulting lack of time to handle library collection building; dissatisfaction with skewed collections that reflected a specialist's perhaps narrow interests; the professionalization of librarianship. Full-time bibliographers working for the library began to handle selection, making decisions based on formal policies.²

More recently, the place of collection development has shifted again, in response partly to the increasing quantity and complexity of the materials becoming available. Full-time bibliographers had little opportunity in their daily work to interact with the patrons using the collections they were building. The establishment of reliable approval plans

¹"The Future of Reference: A Panel Discussion Held at the University of Texas at Austin, Spring 1988." *C&RL News* 49 (October 1988): 578-89.

²Thomas F. O'Connor, "Collection Development in the Yale University Library, 1865-1931," *Journal of Library History* 22 (Spring 1987): 164-89.



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moved labor-intensive, title-by-title selection to an outside party, at least for maintaining a core collection. Consequently, large academic/research libraries have begun distributing selection to librarians with some subject expertise who work in other capacities.³

At the same time, reference librarians have begun to work fewer hours at the desk. Twenty years ago reference librarians spent at least half of their workdays at the desk. Today they spend more time elsewhere. It is not that we have become less user-oriented, but more—as the paradigm suggests. We are now engaged in online searching, bibliographic instruction, individual patron consultations, and collection management. Distributed selection seems more heavily weighted in the public services. And I suspect one reason for that is the formal and regular opportunities reference librarians have for discerning patron needs. On some level, we recognize that the collection itself is a public service.

The reference librarian who also has duties as a subject bibliographer represents a microcosm of the kinds of conflicts Miksa has alluded to. Our interactions with patrons inform our selection decisions, not only for reference materials, but for other areas of the collection as well. Our assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of the collection enable us to steer users to acceptable local alternatives or refer them to translocal collections. We mix the patterns that constitute Miksa's paradigm in complicated and ambiguous ways: we consider specific as well as amorphous user needs when approaching collection management. We focus on the collection when we serve patrons. The converse is also true: we focus on the collection as an entity when making decisions that may build on the strengths or fill in or exacerbate the weaknesses. We handle user needs without regard to the local collection, or to any collection whatsoever, at times. Our multiple roles muddle the model.

As a reference librarian I have an obligation to serve the needs of "general" users, whoever they are. As a history bibliographer, I serve those teaching, learning, and doing research in that field. But it is a significant source of conflict when a large academic library strives to serve the masses of students fulfilling immediate course assignments and the individual scholars undertaking challenging, long-term projects. At the reference desk, it is a daily relief to be able to say to umpteen patrons: "Company annual reports? Yes, we have them downstairs on microfiche." As a bibliographer, it

pains me to have to tell a history graduate student that, no, the library cannot afford to purchase the microfilm collection you need to write your dissertation. A cynic would say it is the equivalent of giving the business students a government bailout while expecting the history student to rely on the private sector for travel funds.

If that sounds outrageous, then I've made my second point: when we attempt to do what is best for the collection and for patrons, we operate within a bureaucratic structure where decisions about allocating limited information resources are inherently—but not only—political. The large organization's routines are designed for efficiency and economy of scale. Those routines, along with limited resources, may sometimes thwart user needs. The paradox is that the large bureaucratic structure also makes our mission doable.

And that structure itself is undergoing change. No longer strictly hierarchical, no longer the kind of organization that "defends the status quo long after the quo has lost its status," as Laurence Peter has described it.⁴ The reorganization of collection management and reference has blurred reporting lines; it can help develop staff collegiality and cooperation. Still, it is difficult to imagine one of Miksa's suggestions: abandoning the library as place while retaining influence on the library as political entity.

Every working collection changes every day as individual items circulate, get added, get lost, go to the bindery. Every working user changes as well, developing new needs as the collection changes and as interaction with the collection creates new needs and interests. And every working librarian changes as she assesses the collection, assimilates information from individual users, addresses groups of patrons, and tackles what Goldia Hester last year called the metaquestions. Miksa's paradigm describes what Daniel Boorstin calls a "fertile verge," a creative era when the new clashes with and transforms the old.⁵ At this juncture, we should neither ignore user needs in favor of the collection nor submit to user demands however they alter the collection.

Instead, we should continue to focus our gaze on the place where public service librarians have always focused, on the place where collections and users come together.

⁴Michael Jackman, *Crown's Book of Political Quotations* (New York: Crown, 1982), 14.

⁵Goldia Hester, "The Future of Reference Service: A Response," *C&RL News* 49 (October 1988): 584; Daniel J. Boorstin, *Hidden History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), xiii.

³Association of Research Libraries, Office of Management Studies, *Collection Development Organization and Staffing in ARL Libraries*, SPEC Kit #131 (Washington, D.C.: ARL, 1987).

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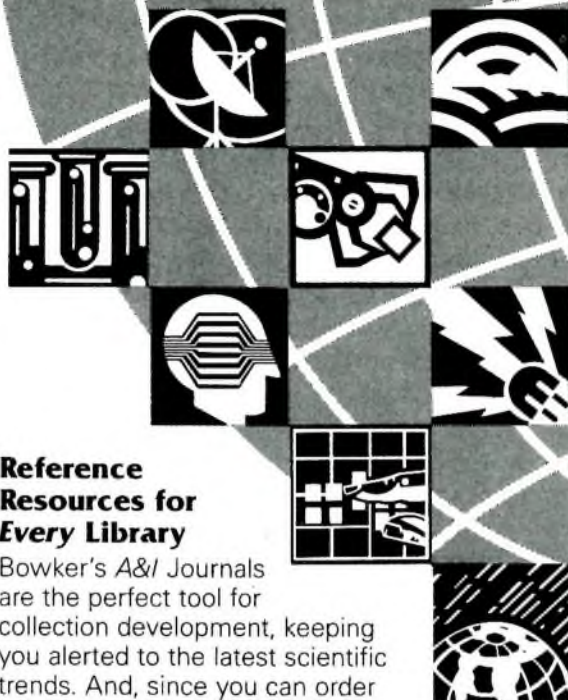
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