

This surprisingly reminds one of the debates on library sanctions against South Africa. The Social Responsibilities Round Table Guidelines adopted by many ALA groups noted in section 2.3: "As professionals, we must strive to balance our methods to promote the free flow of information with work activities that are morally and politically responsible." However, the 1990 ALA membership meeting adopted the guidelines with the following change to meet intellectual freedom concerns: "We note that the lack of the free flow of information to and from the mass democratic organizations and anti-apartheid institutions in South Africa has inhibited the evolution of South African democracy" (1990 Membership Document #4). Intellectual freedom advocates argued that the potential harm resulting from free flow of information to apartheid institutions must be tolerated to uphold a higher moral purpose. However, one must wonder how this applies to the extreme, but real, case of nuclear bomb information that was transferred to the apartheid regime. Or put it this way, should a reference librarian give a skinhead a freely available manual for bomb making, or should such information be freely available on a skinhead Web site?

One common way to deal with these problems is to adopt acceptable use policies. This report gives a number of examples, and here we see real differences between the U.K. and the U.S.; typical U.K. policies are much more restrictive than U.S. policies. For example, from the Suffolk County Council: "We will not censor access to information (any more than we do for books) but you may not look at information which may contravene the law." And, "If we know of sources of such material we will make them inaccessible so that they cannot be found through our terminals."

The report concludes with the following nonconsecutive contradictory paragraphs:

Even so, there must be limits. Just as society will not tolerate the use of the Internet to promote child por-

nography, there must be some extremist content which is simply unacceptable. The promotion of hatred, especially against vulnerable minorities, and incitement to violence have no place in a democratic society. Libraries are at the forefront of this dilemma: just where should the line be drawn?

And,

In the final analysis, librarians can ensure users are aware of the dangers, but they cannot make ethical decisions for them. Attempting to control the material people access would deny them the right to see both sides of an argument, and the freedom to judge for themselves.

An intervening paragraph advocates open access to the Internet, acceptable use policies, and lists of positive and useful Web sites, but the authors do not draw any lines. Where our core values conflict, we may not be able to fine-tune such policies, but we must have tools to approach specific situations in a logical manner. Perhaps the debate on boycotting the apartheid regime in South Africa has provided that tool. Whether in the U.K., Ghana, Thailand, or Brazil, we need to balance intellectual freedom with social responsibility. Each library association, government body, library, and librarian will have to figure out how to implement such balance depending on the local context.—*Alfred Kagan, University of Illinois-Urbana.*

**Brosnan, Mark J.** *Technophobia: The Psychological Impact of Information Technology.* London and New York: Routledge, 1998. 220p. \$75 cloth (ISBN 0-4151-3596-6); \$22.99 paper (ISBN 0-4151-3597-4). LC 97-39321.

This book is not the book I thought it would be. I had mistakenly assumed from the title that it would relate directly to the library profession, imparting sage advice on how to help both users and

staff deal with the increasingly technical nature of our profession as well as with our heightened profile in the much-touted age of information. Not so! Disappointingly, this book focuses almost entirely on a fairly narrow medical interpretation of the term *technophobia*, which is defined as having negative opinions of, or being anxious about, technology, particularly computers. Although the author states that he is not trying to “create a pathology which can subsequently be attributed to particular demographic variables such as age or gender,” in fact, the focus on gender differences in reacting to information technology cumulatively creates this effect.

The author, Mark Brosnan, a lecturer at the University of Greenwich in England, has published widely in the area of cognitive psychology. However, I was disappointed to find little mention of the information professions being affected by this syndrome—only a brief aside questioning whether “traditional skills in librarianship or accounting” are becoming dependent on computer literacy. Research into the plight of the technophobe (depicted here as “someone who perceives their fear of technology to be irrational”) is genuinely interesting to all of us. Unfortunately, the style of the text is so opaque and turgid that the book is in fact a tough read. Some of my negative response to this book is due, I am sure, to the focus on gender differences. Much of the research referred to predates the most recent love affair with all things Web, and if the current trend to shopping on the Internet is taking off as the market hype indicates, many previously self-described technophobes may have already overcome their fears. The ability to shop on the Web will be a boon for other social phobias, such as agoraphobia and claustrophobia. The positive impact of technology on social phobias is not discussed. The opacity of the surveys and research studies left me wondering why a researcher never directly asked the simple question, Why is it that many women do not seem to like playing around with computers all day?

Actually, the data on that topic are out there—and in a much more readable form. Sherry Turkle has written copiously on the effect of technology on society—and she is better able to grab your attention. This book does not reach the level of either Turkle’s *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit* (1985) or her *Epistemological Pluralism: Styles and Voices within the Computer Culture* (1990). Ironically, the most interesting chapter in Brosnan’s work, entitled “Technophobia and Cognitive Style/Spatial Ability,” relies heavily on reiterating the research findings in *The Second Self*, but with no reference to Turkle’s latest monograph, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (1995).

There is an interesting chapter on technophobia reduction, but this is really aimed at helping people who break out in a cold sweat just at the thought of turning on a PC. Brosnan does expand his discussion to include technology avoidance as a valid strategy of resistance to the negative impact of an increasingly technological society. Unfortunately, rationalizing the resistance to technology is excluded from his definition of technophobia. There is naturally a British flavor to this text—not everybody will understand what a “boffy tech” is (*boffin* is a slang term for scientist) unless they are keeping up with Harry Potter’s adventures (in the original)—but this does not detract from the sense of the work.

Brosnan’s aim is to combine research from several different areas—gender differences, self-efficacy, cognitive style—into a unitary picture so as to develop greater insights into how various processes affect computer use and how they interact with each other. His final conclusion is that the finding of higher incidence of technophobia in females only represents “an apparent sex difference and is not biologically-biased.”

This book is not a must-read by any means, but those librarians working in user education and library systems might find interesting some of the re-

search articles cited. The index is quite thorough, and there is an extensive list of references. There are some surprising typos (if anyone has been to the "Navada dessert" recently, let me know how it tasted), which points perhaps to increased use of spell check in the editing department rather than the intervention of human quality control.—*Gillian M. McCombs, Southern Methodist University.*

**Currie, Dawn H.** *Girl Talk: Adolescent Magazines and Their Readers.* Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Pr., 1999. 362p. \$60 cloth (ISBN 0-8020-4415-8); \$24.95 paper (ISBN 0-8020-8217-3). LC 98-932362.

In *Girl Talk*, Dawn Currie examines "the current tension between an analysis of magazines as 'the purveyor of pernicious ideology to be condemned' and their analysis as a venue of woman-centered pleasure to be embraced." Arguing that scholars of women's studies generally have neglected adolescents, she investigates "the ways in which fashion and beauty magazines, as a popular reading medium for young women, present messages of feminism and femininity." Currie focuses on the four leading Canadian teenage magazines ("teenzines")—*Teen*, *Seventeen*, *Young and Modern*, and *Sassy*—as she "explore[s] the popular pleasures of consumption as a serious arena of feminist analysis."

As the first of two overlapping stages of the study, content and thematic analysis of the four magazines discloses that three themes dominate teenzine texts: beauty and fashion, heterosexual romance, and stardom. The other stage consists of individual interviews, supplemented by group discussions to test working hypotheses, with ninety-one girls aged thirteen to seventeen. Previous analyses of magazines have been conducted by scholars who are removed from intended readers in terms of age and education. What sets this research apart is that it emphasizes the views of teenzines' intended audience. Contradicting prior assumptions, Currie re-

veals, for example, that readers prefer text to glossy pictures. Other findings include the discovery that readers do not mimic the fashion and makeup styles they encounter in teenzines; rather, they apply the images and advice to their own efforts to "belong" among their classmates, thus constructing "a social Self that fits into school culture." The author concludes, in part, that "given the absence of positive definitions of adolescents and other signifiers of belonging, teenzines can take on more significance in readers' lives than seems possible to many adults."

Currie, who chairs the Women's Studies Programme and is associate professor of sociology at the University of British Columbia, grounds this complex study firmly in feminist ethnology. As such, it is expert research that approaches its topic from diverse perspectives, including the textual organization of knowledge and the disjuncture between girls' reading of teenzines and adults' reading of women's magazines. The liberal inclusion of excerpts from interviews and discussions empowers teens to speak for themselves about their reading habits and preferences. U.S. readers should note that the book's author and publisher, and the teens being studied, are Canadian; American teens may have different opinions and preferences. Also, British conventions of punctuation (reversed roles of single and double quotation marks) and spelling (e.g., "centre") are used throughout.

The fact that Currie apparently assumes that her readers share her viewpoint (e.g., "How can we, as feminists, take responsibility for reformulating ourselves through new meanings of gender...") may deter those who expect a less partisan interpretation. No history of the book (or the teenzine) will be found here; it is identified as an area for further research. The sociological aspects of the narrative constitute demanding reading, but *Girl Talk* will be worth the effort for librarians, publishers, and parents who wish to understand the interests and