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LIS 600-02: Foundation of Lib / Info Sci (FA24)

Assignment #3: The journal literature of LIS paper

October 16, 2024

LIS Journal of Interest - "The Reference Librarian"

Purpose within the Profession: *The Reference Librarian aims to be a standard resource for everyone interested in the practice of reference work, from library and information science students to practicing reference librarians and full-time researchers. It enables readers to keep current with best practices in instruction and reference services. up with the changing face of reference, presenting new ideas for consideration.*

Issues of "The Reference Librarian to be Discussed -

"Patrons with Disabilities or Problem Patrons: Which Model Should Librarians Apply to People with Mental Illness?" by Thomas E. Hecker. The Reference Librarian Volume 25, 1996 - Issue 53

"Navigating Mental Health and Wellness in Communities: A Review of the Literature and Implications for Libraries, Librarians, and Library Workers" by Neil D. Grimes. The Reference Librarian Volume 65, Sep 2024 - Issue 1-2

Both selected articles, published 28 years apart, implicitly ask the question "how can libraries better serve the needs of mentally ill patrons"? In the 1996 article, "Patrons with Disabilities or Problem Patrons: Which Model Should Librarians Apply to People with Mental Illness?" by Thomas E. Hecker, the author poses if "mentally ill" patrons should be treated as "problem patrons" and argues that by definition, mentally *ill patrons* should be treated as *ill persons* with disabilities and protected as such by *Americans with Disabilities Act.* I would argue that although at first seemingly progressive sounding regarding mental illness stigma, this binary argument (*problem patron* or *disabled*) has not aged well since it was first published 28 years ago. For starters, the article identifies mentally ill patrons as those patrons that exhibit "abnormal behavior" and behavior "appropriate… in a mental ward," and is limiting and stigmatizing. I assure you (and data supports) that this type of ad hoc diagnosis is not helpful or accurate. I would argue that many if not most of the mentally ill patrons of the library do not exhibit abnormal behavior, or if they do it is very nuanced. These patrons are not likely to act in a disruptive manner or volunteer the type of mental illness from which they suffer. Instead, they suffer from invisible disabilities.

Behavior that is an object for diagnosis and study for psychiatrists-appropriate in a sense in a mental ward-can be inappropriate and disruptive in the library, where it is not of clinical interest but simply causes discomfort for workers or patrons.

Clearly mentally ill patrons in the library are not "abnormal." Research supports that a great number of mentally ill persons frequent libraries. Defining such patrons as mentally ill based on the criteria of appearing "appropriate in a sense in a mental ward" is incredibly stigmatizing and just not accurate. Invisible disabilities, which mental illness frequently presents as in public spaces are by definition invisible and also disabilities. For example, consider these invisible disabilities and behavior accompanying them -

Invisible disabilities are physical, mental, or emotional impairments that are not immediately obvious to others. Including mental health conditions, including anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, personality disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder. - The Invisible Disabilities® Association (IDA), 2024, https://invisibledisabilities.org

For some with invisible disabilities it can be difficult to ask for help because it may mean disclosing their disability. "Library Services to Disabled Students: Outreach and Education." L ~ M .Kaly. The Reference Librarian Haworth Press. lnc. No. 53, 1996.

The 1996 Reference Librarian article is about the problem of mental illness in the library. The 2024 article is about evidence-based ways in which to support patrons experiencing mental health challenges. The 1996 article uses language like disability, mentally ill, abnormal, manifestation, norms, problem, discomfort. The mentally ill patron is clearly labeled as "other" and identified by "crazy" behavior which must be tolerated (by law). In contrast, the 2024 article uses terms like support, service, mental health, communities, emotional well-being, safe-haven, information. Both tables of contents reflect this juxtaposition of language.

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Needs of Special Populations

Library Services tot Traditionally Underserved Groups

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Articles in this table of contents trend toward the social, interactive and holistic.

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In conclusion, the article from Issue 53 did not feel like it was interested in anything other than grouping, labeling and tolerating mentally ill patrons in the library. In contrast, the Issue 65 article was interested in engaging mentally ill patrons "where they're at" as part of a layered, nuanced library community.