LISTEN AND LEARN SESSIONS

Applying Ethics in Evolving Librarianship

Intersectionality Implications in Ethical Decision Making

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ABSTRACT Librarianship and cultures are changing, which impacts what ethics and virtues remain and how they are prioritized. Ethical Decision Making (EDM) is when values or ethics conflict. To make decisions that decrease bias and marginalization, one needs to consider not just the surface characteristics of those involved, but the full identities so that one does not inadvertently amplify oppression. Using intersectionality seeks to understand the multiple identities of people towards that end. Applying the University of Michigan's Social Identity Wheel helps the reader find their identities and consider internally the need to build trust so others can share their full characteristics. When librarians consider intersectionality in EDM, they can navigate changes in ethics and the concomitant conflicts in ways that benefit all stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

Ethics, acting according to one's values or virtues, is a core part of librarianship and religion. As librarians and library associations

reevaluate and restructure the values of librarianship, there is an increase in the situations where those values conflict. Ethical Decision Making (EDM) is how one decides where one or more of one's ethics or virtues are conflicting. When seeking to balance the conflicting ethics, the impact on the people involved is a consideration. Since each person is thick and multi-dimensional, using intersectionality encourages decision makers to consider how negative effects can increase for some people while attempting to decrease them for others. This article introduces EDM and intersectionality and some research on them, promotes a worksheet of intersectionality for the reader's self-discovery, and demonstrates how the two ideas work together to create more ethically and socially responsible decision making.

ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

EDM does not have a large body of work in librarianship, but it has substantial literature in the fields of business, nursing, and social work. Using this larger pool of research, EDM as a subject has four branches in two categories. One category provides models for applying ethics to decision making, and the other provides research into how ethics is applied. The Theory category contains the Normative and Meta-ethical branches. Normative concerns itself with the big picture of EDM, how moral systems are structured. Meta-ethical builds on normative and looks at the meanings of and reasons for EDM.

The second category of EDM studies is Practical. The first part of Practical is Descriptive, and it seeks to describe the EDM of groups and cultures. Many Descriptive works are based on surveys of political, cultural, or economic groups, and lists what the common virtues are for a group, as well as how that group normally prioritize them. The last branch is Prescriptive, which seeks to convince others of the importance and usefulness of EDM and to train them in using EDM. Using these four categories, this article will look at two Descriptive articles that are meta-analyses of the literature and EDM models.

O'Fallon and Butterfield's 2013 article analyzed 174 business articles on EDM in the late 1990s and early 2000s (213-263). They considered what types of factors those articles listed, and in their tables, grouped the factors into three types: individual factors, organizational factors, and moral intensity. They defined moral intensity as "the magnitude of consequences and social consensus" around

breaking a virtue or value (O'Fallon and Butterfield 2013, 213). Moral intensity is seen in the discomfort felt in considering or breaking an ethic, whether internal discomfort (individual) or external (organizational). As ethics is prioritized in different ways in different cultures or groups, decisions that might be obvious to some are painful to consider to others.

Lehnert, Craft, Singh, and Park review 121 qualitative EDM studies over 10 years in the field of business, considering how much effect various factors held. They grouped the factors into 12 categories: attitude/awareness/perception, behavior, code of conduct, corporate social responsibility, education, fraud/corruption, entrepreneurship and leadership, moral responsibility, organizational behavior/strategic management, religion, stakeholders, and values and beliefs (Lehnert et al. 2016, 498-537). These authors found many similarities with O'Fallon and Butterfield's smaller list of types, as many of the 12 can be seen as either personal, external, or organizational. One of Lehnert et al.'s lists stands out from the other types: stakeholders. Stakeholders include the decision maker, as it is their ethics involved in the decision, as well as the other actors whose ethics should be considered before they are affected. If librarians seek to acknowledge their privilege while increasing the voices of the marginalized in librarianship as part of their EDM, intersectionality provides a way to listen for multiple voices of stakeholder representation in the decision-making process.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality started as a mathematical concept in the mid-20th century as the idea that items of a set might have multiple things in common (OED Online). An example: a set of apples might include red, pink, and yellow apples; and it might also include a range of sweetness, from sugary to tart, and a range of textures. Kimberle Krenshaw expanded intersectionality into socio-legal spheres of thought in 1989 by demonstrating that people and systems of hegemony are multifaceted (Crenshaw 1989, 139-167). Since they both contain multiple characteristics, it leads to several ways that ethics and values can conflict and build into non-obvious effects of oppression. Krenshaw uses the case of DeGraffenreid v. General Motors as an example of how a program to help hire women was used to promote White women over Black women, and how a diversity

program preferenced Black men over Black women. Thus, the two programs, while helping some disadvantaged groups, made it worse for another group. Using intersectionality during EDM seeks to identify stakeholders who can raise issues in ways to reduce the amplification of discrimination instead of creating results that increase systemic injustice.

Intersectionality is not an excuse for those with privilege to find an area where they are disadvantaged and then claim to be diverse. Instead, to use Clifford Geertz's idea of thick descriptions, it is to see people as complex and find where one's stakeholders are marginalized in multiple ways (Geertz 1973). An example is the use of subtitles in training videos displayed for a group. Some people with disabilities, such as those with hearing loss, appreciate the subtitles, but some who self-identify as having ADHD find the changing words distracting. This is an example of physical disabilities getting preferenced over mental disabilities, an issue surfaced in Gibson, Dowen, and Hanson's article (2021). Having people from both groups working together to reduce barriers for all resulted in multiple solutions, including working to find font styles and formats that are less distracting, having transcripts on the side of the video, and offering printouts of the transcripts for those who want them. Considering the intersectionality of people with disabilities promotes disability justice, where solutions are generated by those disadvantaged in multiple ways, instead of ideas pushed on them by those privileged in these areas. When EDM uses disability intersectionality, improving access for some usually provides better access for all.

INTERSECTIONALITY CONSIDERATIONS IN EDM

The American Library Association's Professional Ethics page added a ninth principle in 2021:

> We affirm the inherent dignity and rights of every person. We work to recognize and dismantle systemic and individual biases; to confront inequity and oppression; to enhance diversity and inclusion; and to advance racial and social justice in our libraries, communities, profession, and associations through awareness, advocacy, education, collaboration, services, and allocation of resources and spaces.

As librarians seek to integrate the ethics encoded in this principle, intersectionality challenges us to accept that virtues might change

or be reprioritized. Ettarh calls librarians to evaluate if some of our core values, such as being neutral and objective, can still be prioritized if librarianship is creating a new table of desired social goods (Ettarh 2014, 1-5). Lee and Morfitt demonstrate from the literature review and their personal experiences that definitions and displays of competency can be culturally biased, leading to misinterpretation and creating barriers and burdens for librarians of color (Lee and Morfitt 2020, 136-147). As librarians seek to integrate intersectionality into their EDM, it can move decision makers from checklists into building relationships with stakeholders.

SOCIAL IDENTITY WHEEL

Self-discovery is an important step in finding one's privileges and disadvantages. The University of Michigan's Social Identity Wheel and its accompanying lesson plans are effective means of finding one's social groups (University of Michigan 2022; The Program on Intergroup Relations, University of Michigan 2022). The list of identities can be used multiple times, with several questions to consider as one reads each idea. The first time through the list, record what self-identity comes most immediately. On another time through, consider what labels others might give you, or consider what identities you might want to learn more about yourself. The following are the identities on the Social Identity Wheel:

- Ethnicity
- Socio-economic status
- Gender
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- National origin
- First language
- Physical, emotional, developmental (dis)ability
- Age
- Religious or spiritual affiliation
- Race

After writing your responses, consider which are your privileged and marginalized identities. What items on the list stood out at easiest to answer and which took more thought, even for the quick responses? If one uses the list at different times, it can become apparent that some identities are pushed forward, and others are hidden. Likewise, stakeholders might have some characteristics that they push out and are easy to be considered. If librarians are to consider the intersectionality of their stakeholders, they must develop relationships with those stakeholders until trust is established and the hidden identities can come forward. Only when one moves beyond checklists to a foundation of trust, can intersectionality truly be implemented into EDM and librarianship.

CONCLUSION

Librarianship is changing, as are its values and ethics. Those changes will give rise to conflicts between ethics, necessitating EDM. As librarians seek to increase diversity and reduce inequity, stakeholders must be considered in their fullest, which is best accomplished with intersectionality. To do that, librarians should develop relationships with their stakeholders so the stakeholders have a level of trust where they can share their self-identified intersectional characteristics. Librarians apply those characteristics to EDM models and actions to increase the voices and representation of those marginalized.

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