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Group Therapy - A Case of Discredited Research

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critiques have displayed the results of the often erratic nature of the scanning that **Google** contractors have performed, complete with smudges, misaligned pages, and even pages containing images of the scanners' thumbs. But the problems go beyond simple quality of reproduction. There is a serious concern about metadata here, too, from a scholar's point of view. As **Geoffrey Nunberg** so devastatingly catalogued in his article for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (August 31) titled "**Google's Book Search: A Disaster for Scholars**," the current metadata "are a train wreck: a mishmash wrapped in a muddle wrapped in a mess." **Nunberg's** survey covers errors in dates, problems with classification, and mismatches of titles and texts. I particularly sympathize with his critique of **Google's** decision to use BISAC codes to classify books. "Why," he wonders, would **Google** "want to use those headings in the first place"? As **Nunberg** notes, "The BISAC scheme is well-suited for a chain bookstore or a small public library, where consumers or patrons browse for books on the shelves. But it's of little use when you're flying blind in a library with several million titles, including scholarly works, foreign works, and vast quantities of books from earlier periods. For example, the BISAC Juvenile Nonfiction subject heading has almost 300 subheadings, like New Baby, Skateboarding, and Deer, Moose, and Caribou. By contrast, the Poetry subject heading has just 20 subheadings. That means that **Bambi** and **Bullwinkle** get a full shelf to themselves, while **Leopardi**, **Schiller**, and **Verlaine** have to scrunch together in the single heading reserved for Poetry/Continental European. In short, **Google** has taken a group of the world's great research collections and returned them in the form of a suburban-mall bookstore." For most university press books, I can attest, the BISAC codes compel one to be very creative in trying to use enough codes to represent the subject of a scholarly book at all adequately. Just to give one example, there is no way of straightforwardly identifying a book about modern Latin American politics. One has to cobble together a set of codes covering History/Latin America/General, History/Modern/20th Century, and Political Science/Government/Comparative at a minimum. And to identify a book in feminist philosophy, one has to leave the category of philosophy altogether to find any code representing feminist or gender studies (under the main rubric of Social Science). **Google's** decision to employ BISAC codes is yet one more glaring revelation of how skewed the Settlement is toward the interests of trade-book authors and commercial trade-book publishers rather than academic authors and academic presses. And the irony of it all is that the vast majority of books now among the ten million **Google** has in its database are academic books, making **Book Search** a potential boon for scholars everywhere — if only **Google** had talked with the right publishers to begin with!

Group Therapy — A Case of Discredited Research

Column Editor: **Jack G. Montgomery** (Associate Professor, Coordinator, Collection Services, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY) <jack.montgomery@wku.edu>

*Column Editor's Note: I posted this question to **COLLDV-L** and received a host of thoughtful answers that span the range of opinion on this complex issue. I sincerely thank all those who weighed in on this question. A similar issue has arisen concerning **Disney's Baby Einstein** product. (See the *New York Times* 10/23/09 issue http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/24/education/24baby.html?_r=1) however, the following answers concern the **Bellesiles'** book. — JM*

GRIPE: Submitted Anonymously. In the September 2009 issue of *Against the Grain* was an article by **Steve McKinzie** of Catawba College entitled "The case for getting rid of a celebrated book." In his article, **McKinzie** discussed the discredited title *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* by **Michael Bellesiles** which was first given the **Bancroft Literary Prize** in 2001. Later in 2002, the prize was withdrawn and the author discredited due to professional scholarly misconduct with regard to the research and its presentation. **McKenzie** made the case for removing such a book from the library's collection. Although I understand **McKenzie's** argument, I am personally confused as to what our responsibility is in such matters. I would like to hear from other librarians but would like to remain anonymous. Can you help me?

RESPONSE:
Submitted by **Linwood DeLong** (Collections Coordinator, University of Winnipeg Library, Winnipeg, MB, Canada)

I am a Canadian and therefore possibly not totally qualified to weigh in on this one, but because it is an intriguing topic, I will do my best.

To me, the issue should be first and foremost, the quality of the books in our collection. If we discovered that a history book about any topic was full of factual errors, based on faulty research, citing phantom sources, etc. then we would remove the book for those reasons. We remove many old books because they contain outdated information — a book about the U.S. that refers the "48 states and their capitals" would disappear from our shelves, unless it were a famous travel book, such as **De Tocqueville's** accounts of his travels.

Books that take a controversial stand — we had a recent, highly publicized case in Canada about a book published by **McGill Queen's University Press** that took a very contro-

versial stand about native peoples' issues — are different. Our library, probably many libraries, bought the book, because it presented this viewpoint and would enable students to study the articulation of the viewpoint and respond to it. At the far end of this spectrum are completely nonsensical books (we all see promotions for self-published books) that are so un-scholarly that they are not useful at all in our collections. We don't buy those.

We probably have some books in our collection that deny that the Armenian genocide ever occurred. Many of us would dispute this, but propaganda material (if it is clearly understood to be so) can still be useful, again for study and research purposes.

I'm starting to stray a bit from the topic. If we had *Arming America* in our collection, or a book about a medical topic in which the results were demonstrated to be false because of the use of phantom data or the deliberate misuse of existing data, I would argue for the removal of the book from our collection.

I guess that I am trying to draw a line between factual inaccuracies, misrepresentation of data, etc. and controversial opinions. It appears, from what I saw in the email on **COLLDV-L**, that *Arming America* is of the first type.

I enjoy collections development problems or challenges and would be pleased to respond to others, if you think that my response is useful.

RESPONSE:
Submitted by **Sarah Tusa** (Associate Professor, Coordinator of Collection Development & Acquisitions, Mary & John Gray Library, Lamar University, Beaumont, TX)

First of all, I must admit that I am not familiar with the details of the complaints against the author's research conduct or methodology, but it would seem that the validity of the information presented in the book was very probably tainted by the improper research and invalid presentation of the research results, then that book is very similar to an outdated edition of any other book. If the author were to produce a revised (and corrected) edition, we would definitely withdraw the original edition. Some larger, more comprehensive (probably **ARL**) libraries might make the argument to keep the original, tainted edition as a part of publishing history. However, I personally would be tempted to withdraw the *Arming America* book even without the prospect of getting a new, revised edition, for the same reason that we withdraw out-of-date medical books: We at least *attempt* to minimize the amount of outdated or invalidate and/or discredited information that our students can get their hands on in our library.

continued on page 60

Group Therapy from page 59

I don't consider it censorship, if the errors in research and in the end product are documented. As an integral part of a teaching institution, the library has a responsibility to try to provide the most valid and up-to-date information possible. If we had the space to keep such a book, I suspect that we would put a note in one of the 500 fields of the marc record to cite the documented grievance against the book and place a similar note inside the front cover. To allow this book to be published and then to award it before discovering the problems with the research makes me wonder about the due diligence of those involved in the publishing and then the awards process. However, a book with discredited information does not really have a place in our library, as far as I am concerned. I would, however, take into consideration the extent to which the validity of the information is compromised — and hope that there are reviews to guide in that determination.

RESPONSE:

RSubmitted by **Meris Mandernach** (Collection Management Librarian/ Chemistry Liaison, JMU Libraries & Educational Technologies, **James Madison University**, Harrisonburg, VA)

I think that a discredited book would likely get more use in a library collection due to the hype around the situation. I think that if it falls within the guidelines of the weeding policy then it could be removed, but if not, then it could become a teaching moment and used as an example during instruction of what constitutes scholarly misconduct.

RESPONSE:

RSubmitted by **Paul Metz** (Assistant to the Dean for Special Projects, University Libraries, **Virginia Tech**, Blacksburg, VA)

The question you posed on **COLLDV-L** never came up quite that directly in my 20 years as head of collection development at **Virginia Tech**, but for what it's worth here's some of what I did, and some of what I think I would or would not have done, when/if such issues arose: **Fatwa vs. S. Rushdie**, we put *The Satanic Verses* on Reserve for its own protection "room temperature confusion" (if you remember the cold fusion controversy out of Utah), Soviet-style Lamarckian evolution (hopelessly wrong), other discredited science — we never went looking for it because we weren't going to pull it from the stacks even if we found it. You have to trust your readers, and I think that in the case you cited in your note that's what I would do — in other words, nothing.

Errata slips sent by the publishers of (usually) scientific journals — we were happy to tip them into the issues, though I'm not sure we always followed through and did so.

One of the most interesting issues for me was gift items. I didn't mind having the very occasional book saying that global warming was all wrong, the occasional DVD from Scientology, the occasional item arguing against any

gun regulation, because I think there's a place for all views even if I find them nutso. But I was cautious and took only the occasional representative piece because I know that in these debates, one side is always much better funded than the other and so to take gifts too openly actually feeds a bias... just as the rich right in this country has very cleverly done by founding and underwriting innumerable "objective think tanks" like the **CATO Institute**.

RESPONSE:

RSubmitted Anonymously.

This sort of question came up in my library some years ago regarding a book by **Louis Farrakhan**. My opinion is that however a librarian may find a book reprehensible, and even if the material therein is considered or proven false, a decision must be made on the basis of the importance of the title for research and teaching. There are many books in the library based on incorrect or deliberately misleading research. **Mein Kampf** comes to mind. I think as a university library these materials must be made available to established scholars and budding scholars. Learning critical thinking and reading is part of the education process. In the case you cite, it appears that the history prize was taken away, which seems right for that body, however it is up to the librarian to decide the importance of the book for his collection. In this case since it is a controversial book I would keep it in the collection.

By the way we kept the **Farrakhan** book despite the demands of a member of the university community.

RESPONSE:

RSubmitted by **John P. Abbott, MS** (SMLS (Coordinator, Collection Management University Library, **Appalachian State University**, Boone, NC)

I thank **Mr. McKinzie** for raising the issue and opening an interesting discussion.

My view is retain it and forget about it. The postmodern library does not pretend to arbitrate absolute quality or accuracy in the materials it holds. If librarians understood deeply the areas in which we collect, we would know that there are thousands of books on our shelves containing false or erroneous content. Almost every book I read in an area I understand well contains significant errors due either to typos, poor editing, or insufficient research. By **McKinzie's** standard, we would block access to almost all Websites because they are inaccurate and knowingly inaccurate. Students today, after a life of Web-searching, are deeply skeptical and are unlikely to be significantly misled by **Bellesiles'** book unless it is the only work they consult for their pro/con Eng 101 paper.

Out of date health works and other works that clearly put a reader in known danger deserve examination for w/d on the basis of content, but little else. Books are w/d everyday for lack of use or poor condition, but much rarely on a judgment about the scholarly quality of content.

Other books offer more significant challenges, e.g., *The Anarchist's Cookbook* flap of a decade ago. Here some of the "recipes"

were rumored to blow up someone who cooked them. Here the danger was much more real. **William Powell**, the author, has publicly repudiated the book on **Amazon**: http://www.amazon.com/Anarchist-Cookbook-William-Powell/dp/0974458902/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1258038076&sr=1-1. A quick look at **WorldCat** indicates that 100s of libraries still hold the book.

Any danger, lack of quality, or betrayal of the scholarly enterprise by **Bellesiles'** book seems trivial in comparison.

RESPONSE:

RSubmitted by **Jack G. Montgomery** (Associate Professor, Coordinator, Collection Services, **Western Kentucky University Libraries**, Bowling Green, KY)

This is a familiar topic for me. My friend and colleague, **John Budd** conducted his own research of **Medline** from 1966 to August 1997 revealed that 235 articles had been retracted, 86 of which were deemed to be due to misconduct. It was alarming to learn, however, that these 235 articles had been cited 2034 times even after the retraction notice had appeared. This issue speaks to long-term, largely irresolvable problems with the whole process of academic research and ethical standards.

As to this book, my thoughts and suggestions are as follows: I did not remove the discredited book from the shelves as, even as a fraudulent piece of scholarship. It could be an object of study for research on academic fraud. I did however, glue a disclaimer inside the book stating the issue but also stating that the book is retained for historical purposes and warning the patron to use this material at their own risk. Here is a sample label that was placed across from the title page of *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture*.

"Attention: Discredited Research! Please be aware that this book and the research contained within it has been discredited and the research declared fraudulent by the peer-review process. We are retaining this title in our library for historical purposes only. Use this book at your own risk! **WKU Libraries.**"

RESPONSE:

RSubmitted by **Douglas Black** (Collection Development Librarian, **North-ern Michigan University**, Marquette, MI)

While **McKinzie** does have a point regarding responsibility for our collections, I'd say his argument presents a false dichotomy between avoiding censorship and maintaining our integrity. As knowledge advances and cultural perspectives develop and change, it's worth recording not only the honest errors arising from what simply had yet to be learned but also the hiccups and blind alleys arising from human nature. While **Bellesiles'** intellectual fraud doesn't rise to the level of Ptolemaic texts or **Mein Kampf**, I think the general principle still applies.

The fact that *Arming America* is unreliable gives it some value as part of the cultural debate surrounding its topic. From that perspective, it's reasonably good material for

continued on page 61

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Group Therapy from page 60

studying American political/cultural history. Alerting readers to the book's history and current status, perhaps by taping or tipping in a respected review, or the publisher's press release announcing the prize rescission (like errata), makes good sense. We routinely try to publicize our collections and let potential users know what great materials we have available; likewise, added information about individual items can enhance their value. I think that's a more balanced approach to this particular dilemma than deaccessioning the book as if it had never appeared. The fact is that it did appear and has had some influence — both as it was intended and in how scholarly research is received — and librarians do have a role to play in recording those events as part of the human record. So much for a short comment... I'm looking forward to the compiled responses!

RESPONSE:

Submitted by **Christy J. Wrenn**
(Director of Library Services, **Centenary College of Louisiana, Magale Library**, Shreveport, LA)

As well as I remember, our good friend **Oprah Winfrey** was in this same pickle once when she interviewed **John Frey** regarding his book "A Million Little Pieces." Boy was her face RED after the interview! However, her endorsement turned it into one of the top

selling books of 2005, but she felt conned by the author. That book was not pulled from bookstore or library shelves.

This is the same type of situation with **Steve McKinzie at Catawba College**. **Mr. McKinzie** felt that he had to become one of the Library Police and save a college student(s) from ever reading this book, or using it as a reference in a term paper. According to him, this book did not stack up or was not written in a way that someone else thought that the book should have been written.

I have been in the librarianship field for 35 years, and the last time I heard, there was still a human right called "Intellectual Freedom" that said we could read what we wanted to read. The part of libraries and librarians is to make available materials for patrons to read, not be judge because of award activity or people groups to pull materials from shelves. When we do this we are taking the "Critical Thinking" development away from our young developing college minds that have not yet encountered all those GOOD or BAD things out in the world yet. 🐼

Rumors from page 30

been appointed Director of the Libraries at **KAUST (King Abdullah University of Science and Technology)**. He assumed his duties in September 2009. **KAUST** is an international, graduate-level research university dedicated to inspiring a new age of scientific achievement. The University is set to open in September 2009 with degrees in 11 fields of study. The core campus is located on more than 36 square kilometers along the Red Sea at Thuwal — about 80 kilometers north of Saudi Arabia's second largest city, Jeddah. www.kaust.edu.sa/

My son **Raymond** went to **West Point** many years ago so I was interested to read that **Bryn Geffert**, library director and associate professor

of history at the **U.S. Military Academy at West Point**, has been named **Amherst College's new librarian of the college**. **Geffert** will start work at **Amherst** on Jan. 21, 2010. Particularly interested in research instruction, in libraries' efforts to guide the changes afoot in academic publishing and in facilitating the digitization of special collections, **Geffert** was the "unanimous and enthusiastic choice of the search committee," according to Amherst Dean of the Faculty **Gregory S. Call**. **Geffert** became the director of **West Point's library** in 2008 and went on to help open and oversee the institution's new library. A high school basketball and football official, **Geffert** also enjoys cross-country skiing and running and expressed delight about moving to a state "that enjoys good snowfalls and the Boston Marathon." And I would say that's a good thing! www.amherst.edu/

continued on page 62