

November 2013

## Adventures in Librarianship -- Fear Factor

Ned Kraft

*U.S. Department of State*, [kraftno@state.gov](mailto:kraftno@state.gov)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Kraft, Ned (2013) "Adventures in Librarianship -- Fear Factor," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 15: Iss. 4, Article 32.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4499>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

and witty guide” are somewhat misguided. My feeling is that for this book they would have done better to stick to a more classic, staid and stodgy reference book approach for its packaging and promotion. This is not to say that the book is totally dry. It will be very interesting, if not

Sarkodie-Mensah, Kwasi, ed. *Helping the Difficult Library Patron: New Approaches to Examining and Resolving a Long-Standing and Ongoing Problem*. New York: Haworth Information Press, 2002. 0789017318. 303 pages. \$49.95.

Reviewed by **Debbie Vaughn**

Though the title is more than a mouthful, *Helping the Difficult Library Patron: New Approaches to Examining and Resolving a Long-Standing and Ongoing Problem* is a dense yet graspable collection of essays sure to engage any public service librarian. Edited by **Kwasi Sarkodie-Mensah** and co-published simultaneously as *The Reference Librarian*, numbers 75/76, this volume brings together twenty-five articles concerning descriptions of and a variety of methods for dealing with less-than-ideal patrons and patrons’ problems.

The book is divided into three sections: “The Nature of the Problem,” “The Problem Patron in the Electronic Age,” and “Providing Solutions to the Problem.” **Sarkodie-Mensah’s** introduction, albeit brief, aptly ties together the compositions. Each article begins with an article summary and relevant keywords, and ends with references. Disappointingly, **Sarkodie-Mensah** does not ex-

actly amusing to Anglophiles, Americanists, and semioticians.

Although these books exhibit a similar *joie de vive* with their cute titles and attractive covers, they really are suited to different audiences and purposes. **McKean’s** book would make a great coffee table or gift book while **Hargraves’** book would make an excellent addition to a public or academic reference collection.

pound upon or even overview each section. Furthermore, it might be beneficial to have summaries of individual contributions as other editors have done with **Haworth Monographic** “separates.”

Admittedly, twenty-five articles is a hefty collection. But as long as there are libraries and difficulties, there will be difficult library patrons. Scanning the table of contents made me momentarily question the inclusion of some of the pieces. At first glance, **Gary Kenneth Peatling’s** “Historical Perspectives on Problem Patrons from the British Public Library Sector, 1850-1919” seems more like a thesis or dissertation than an approach to resolving ongoing patron problems. Immediately, though, **Peatling** re-



veals the importance of looking at the historical perspective. Likewise, some titles at the outset seem redundant: “Help Yourself: Front-Line Defense in an Academic Library,” “The Difficult Patron Situation: Competency-Based Training to Empower Frontline Staff,” and “Core Competencies of Front-Line Employees: The German Contribution to a New Service Culture.” Yet each of these essays speaks in a unique voice and provides distinct information for frontline library personnel. It also might seem somehow inefficient or outmoded to devote an entire section to “The Problem Patron in the Electronic Age.” It is, indeed, challenging to publish relevant and current information about technology in book form, for as soon as it hits the printed page it is often defunct. Even articles that specifically address patrons’ interactions with the Internet and other ever-evolving resources offer timeless approaches to such issues. For example, **Sara Baron’s** “Problem or Challenge? Serving Library Customers That Technology Left Behind” blankets computer anxieties with more enduring information about learning theories and information literacy.

Praise on the back cover of *Helping the Difficult Library Patron* exclaims “Finally! A book that fills in the information cracks not covered in library school about the ubiquitous problem patron.” I couldn’t agree more. This book is invaluable for initiation into library public service and an excellent tool for professional development. 🐾

## Adventures in Librarianship — Fear Factor

by **Ned Kraft** (Ralph J. Bunche Library, U.S. Department of State) <kraftno@state.gov>

As a service to our readers, *ATG* offers this list of phobias and anxiety disorders peculiar to our profession. We believe that recognizing our problems is the first step toward overcoming them. If you find yourself described below, don’t be ashamed. Help is available.

**Nomatophobia:** Fear of name authority files.

**Generalized Anxiety Disorder:** Occurs primarily among special librarians who fear their collections are becoming too generalized. Sufferers exhibit a strong aversion to printed materials outside a specific subject area, or, concurrently, an aversion to printed materials within the preferred subject area but written for a lay audience.

**Anuptaphobia:** Fear of staying single. Experts disagree as to whether this

meets the classic definition of phobia as an “unreasonable” fear.

**Fiscal Panic Disorder:** Most common among library directors who depend on lapsed salary for their book purchasing budgets. Symptoms include sweating, pacing, and self-mutilation.

**Discardaphobia:** Fear of weeding collections.

**Marcophilia:** An inordinate love of MARC format. Sufferers often must be escorted from meetings where MARC is disparaged, and will sometimes sneak volumes of US MARC Format home for bedtime reading.

**Plutophobia:** Fear of wealth. Experts are uncertain why this phobia appears so often among librarians.

**Virtual Anxiety Disorder:** Severe anxiety in-

duced by Web browsing. Sufferers feel lost, directionless, impatient, and tend to doubt their own validity. Some are compelled to tap their fingers and stare without blinking.

**Postalphobia:** Fear of incoming mail. Most commonly observed among serials librarians who develop the delusion that every piece of mail contains the announcement of a serial title change. Reductions of dietary sugar and caffeine have proven effective in the short term.

**Acidic Personality Fixation:** Among rare-book librarians, a sympathetic response to aging books where sufferers feel acidic and brittle, and develop phantom spine problems.

**Stasibasiphobia or Stasiphobia:** Fear of standing or walking. Most common in libraries with extensive “desk-top” resources.

**Loophobia:** Fear of pointing the way to the restroom, common among reference staff in public libraries. 🐾

