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## **Discussion 2: Library Bill of Rights – Labeling**

*Libraries do not advocate the ideas found in their collections or in resources accessible through the library. The presence of books and other resources in a library does not indicate endorsement of their contents by the library. Likewise, providing access to digital information does not indicate endorsement or approval of that information by the library. Labeling and rating systems present distinct challenges to these intellectual freedom principles.*

### **Library Bill of Rights – Labeling**

#### *1. The exact wording from the interpretation:*

“Viewpoint-neutral directional labels are a convenience designed to save time. These are different in intent from attempts to prejudice or discourage users or restrict their access to resources. Labeling as an attempt to prejudice attitudes is a censor’s tool. The American Library Association opposes labeling as a means of predisposing people’s attitudes toward library resources.”

#### *2. What the ALA is trying to tell you:*

With this statement, the American Library Association (ALA) is telling librarians that they should avoid labeling individual resources or categories of resources in a way that would influence people’s opinions about those resources, including in a way that would make people not want to use those resources. The librarian should strive to use symbols, words and phrases that are neutral over ones that would activate people’s biases. The interpretation suggests that activating people’s biases intentionally in an effort to discourage those people from using a resource is tantamount to censorship.

#### *3. An example of how a librarian could uphold the message:*

One way in which a librarian might avoid bias when coming up with a label for a category of resources is by using gender-neutral language. There might be times when a librarian might want to highlight, for example, the overlooked contributions of women to the space program. In that case, it would be acceptable to have a display that has language indicating the focus on female mathematicians. When labeling a catalog entry, however, the librarian can uphold the ALA’s message by having a single entry for all mathematicians rather than making a separate category for “female mathematicians” or “women mathematicians.” The inclusive, gender-neutral term would avoid drawing a distinction that would imply that “normal” mathematicians are male and that female mathematicians are somehow a subset or separate group.

#### *4. An example of how a librarian could violate the message:*

A librarian could violate the message by using symbols or language that appear to promote a certain perspective in a way that alienates some patrons. For example, a librarian might use a Confederate flag as a symbol advertising the library's collection or display of Civil War material. Patrons would reasonably see the use of this flag by itself as the library taking a pro-Southern stance on the Civil War and even a tacit endorsement of the slavery which the South fought for. This would anger and upset many patrons and discourage their use of those materials, and could even make them feel unwelcome in the library.