

## 2C—Copyright, User Rights, and the Role of the Librarian

*The Myth of Librarian Neutrality: Adobe Digital Editions and the Digital Rights “Movement,”*  
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A common discourse that arises within the field of librarianship is the importance of the librarian as an objective and neutral professional. According to Michael Harris, “Stability, order and moderation have always been the catchwords to the professional librarian in America, and these have always taken precedence over forceful agitation for human rights” (295). Traditionally, the primary role of the librarian is as a mediator in the public’s access to information and knowledge. This neutrality is the result of one of the core values of librarianship: freedom of expression. The Canadian Library Association’s Position Statement on Intellectual Freedom, for example, states that it is the responsibility of libraries to give “access to all expressions of knowledge and intellectual activity, including those which some elements of society may consider to be unconventional, unpopular or unacceptable” (n.p.). Patrons have the right to receive access to information, regardless of its content, intended use, or the personal beliefs of the information professional. Thus, librarians should provide unrestricted access to information and should build balanced and fair collections. It is in this quest to provide equitable information to all people that libraries have adopted the idea of neutrality.

Luckily, this neutral stance of information professionals is far less pronounced when faced with certain issues that are central to librarianship. Librarians suddenly become much more vocal when faced with instances of restricted information use, such as censorship and copyright. These restrictions also encompass technological barriers, which pose a significant threat to libraries’ provision of free and accessible information to the public. Such is the case with digital rights management, or DRM, in which the repression of digital information is evident. Despite this blatant act of censorship, however, libraries and librarians have, for the most part, chosen to remain neutral on this topic. They continue to occupy the uneven ground between defending user rights and providing fair compensation to copyright holders (Godwin 6).

However, information is not neutral and neither are librarians, as demonstrated on October 6, 2014, with the publishing of a controversial article on Adobe Digital Editions. The report stated that Adobe Digital Editions 4.0, a common application used to access electronic lending libraries, is seriously compromising user safety by logging reader preferences and sending this unencrypted data back to Adobe. The ensuing debate between Adobe and librarians over patron confidentiality suggests that the need for librarian neutrality is a myth—and one that is damaging to the library profession. This paper seeks to examine three main tenets of librarianship: equal access to information, fair dealing, and user confidentiality, in order to show why librarianship cannot remain neutral when it comes to DRM. Librarians must lead the digital rights “movement” in order to continue to provide their patrons with free and equitable access to information.

“Canadian Library Association / Association canadienne des bibliothèques Position Statement on Intellectual Freedom.” *CLA*, 2011. Web. 4 Dec. 2014.

Godwin, Michael. "Digital Rights Management: A Guide for Librarians." Washington, D.C.: Office for Information Technology Policy, ALA, 2006. Web. 3 Dec. 2014.

Harris, Michael H. "Portrait in Paradox: Commitment and Ambivalence in American Librarianship, 1876–1976." *Libri* 26.4 (1976): 281–301. Web. 3 Dec. 2014.