

# Transcript from November 21, 2021 Podcast

**[Rachel]**

Hello everyone and welcome back to Librarianshipers, where we add the spark back into your relationship with libraries. I'm Rachel and joining me this week are Stephanie and Sarah.

So, before we begin, let's take a moment to acknowledge that I'm recording from Whitby Ontario. I'm proud to acknowledge the lands, the people of Mississauga and Scugog First Nations, which is covered under the Williams Treaties. We are situated on traditional territory of Mississaugas, a branch of the greater Anishinaabeg Nation, which includes Algonquin, Ojibway, Odawa, and Pottawatomi. Sorry.

**[Stephanie]**

Hi, and I'm going to be saying on behalf of me and Sarah who are joining you today from Treaty 7 land. We'd like to acknowledge that this is the... the traditional territory of the Blackfoot Confederacy, including the Siksika, the Kainai, the Piikani, it's also the Tsuut'ina, and the Iskia Nakoda and the Metis nation of Alberta Region 3. Now known as the Treaty 7 region of Alberta.

**[Rachel]**

Right, that's fantastic. So, this week, we're going to be discussing a major development in the LIS community with the role of Artificial Intelligence or AI in library and information settings with some of the potential benefits and harms arising from the use of this technology.

Of course, although we hope our conversation today is thought provoking, we really want to take a second to remind you that any views or opinions expressed on this program, that myself or my wonderful guests have individually, we are only speaking to our own knowledge and experience and as always feel free to tweet us to join the conversation @libship, that's L-I-B-S-H-I-P. We love hearing what you guys are thinking.

So, many of you have noticed, that AI is a growing trend in technology over the past several years. It's sparked many conversations on how it can be utilized in different industries, and that includes libraries. The LIS community has potentially a vital role to play in the development's information infrastructure.

So, let's talk a little bit about what AI is. In a paper published by the CFLA, AI is defined as an intelligent agent that can take on an environment which is it in to maximize a goal. The IFLA came out with a statement on AI and libraries in 2020, where they outlined the potential benefits and pitfalls on the development and usage of AIs by library employees and users.

They provided several examples of how libraries can use AI in areas such as: translation of sites and materials, searching improvements, chatbots, and to improve accessibility for users, that's just to name a few. However, the IFLA also found several areas of concern, where AIs could end up gatekeeping information, infringing on intellectual freedoms, and replicating biases in datasets. They concluded that it was important for libraries to be involved in AI development and research to ensure that the technology is being used and created ethically, such as protecting the privacy of users. Libraries can also contribute to the continuing and offer training on media and information literacy for users in the use of AI to evaluate the information that it provides.

So, an article by Ben Johnson discusses how despite the growing trend of using technology in libraries to fulfill information needs, there is also a lack of transparency in their decision-making process. So, even with the integration of AIs in library spaces, a librarian is still incredibly important because they can explain the process in the different ways that the patron can understand something, rather than an AI can currently is unable to do.

So, what do our wonderful guests today think about AI in libraries? Is it a relationship we should be rooting for or is it one that's a little bit more complicated? I'm just going to start with you Stephanie.

**[Stephanie]**

Thanks so much! You know, as you said I know that libraries have already begun using a variety of AI for a number of things, like chatbots, to help answer questions about library services. But one thing that really sticks out to me, as a concern, is how AIs can reinforce bias. It's been a hot topic in the news for a while now and we've seen time and time again where the AI algorithms discriminate based on race, gender, and a variety of other factors. For example, in the US researchers found that an algorithm would favor white patients over Black patients when predicting which patients would likely need more medical care. While race wasn't listed as part of the dataset, a related variable of healthcare cost history was found to be the reason for this discrepancy.

As members of the LIS community, it's good to be always thinking about how our professional ethics and standards align with these changing technologies. With that in mind, I'm curious what you guys think about how we can ensure this type of thing doesn't happen in libraries, which are meant to be spaces for equitable access for the public.

**[Sarah]**

You make an excellent point, Stephanie, about AIs potentially bringing or worsening biases in library spaces. Like you mentioned with AI bias, it is difficult to ensure that no prejudiced assumptions are encountered by the AI while it's being developed or trained. I think it's helpful to be able to identify potential biases early on to minimize harms, such as acknowledging biases

in library classification and cataloguing. We know that it exists, and we can use that information when training AIs to reduce the bias.

Also, a statement by ALISE recently talked about the importance of diversity in discussions around AI to reduce the negative impacts. It's been argued that having diverse and inclusive teams developing AIs, can help prevent the biases that you mentioned by training them using the data that the team has gone through and reduced or accounted for the bias.

**[Stephanie]**

Yes, I agree, I think that having diverse teams working on AI can help eliminate some of the biases it can produce. But I do think there are lots of areas where bias can still remain. Rachel mentioned earlier about how there is a lack of transparency around how AIs and algorithms operate. Because of this, they can't explain their methods or processes, and it can decrease the amount of accountability for the decisions that they make.

The ALISE statement also references how Google hired and then fired one of their employees, Timnit Gebru, for her criticism of the unethical AIs. Which makes me wonder if biases can be removed or reduced if the diverse teams that were wanting to work on them are at risk of losing their positions for making criticisms or feel pressured to just let things slide.

**[Rachel]**

That's very interesting. Do you think there's an area where having librarians involved in developing and advocating for transparency would be helpful in these situations?

**[Stephanie]**

I definitely do, I think it could. Going back to the IFLA statement and what you had mentioned earlier, it can be helpful to have librarians involved in discussions about AIs to ensure that they're being developed ethically. As well as being involved in discussions about the AI policies to ensure their focus on human rights. The CFLA has stated that librarians can also help by advocating for transparency and open access to AI algorithms and datasets, which can also help with identifying the potential biases and ensure librarianship's foundational beliefs of patron privacy and intellectual freedom are being upheld.

**[Sarah]**

Having librarians advocating for transparency could help ensure that the AI technology doesn't unfairly target members of marginalized groups. On YouTube, Burgess discusses potential benefits and harms of AI technology on disabled communities, such as increasing accessibility,

protecting their privacy, and knowing who is monitoring the development and outcome of the technology. Which ties into what Lankes has been saying about how professionals in the LIS fields should take a stance and advocate on behalf of communities, for privacy, transparency, and for the public good when it comes to how AIs use and collect data.

Libraries are also places where many people come to learn new skills, so IFLA does suggest that they could also be used to teach, not only about the uses of AI, but potential benefits and impacts as well.

Also having good policies around ethical AIs would be fantastic as well. I know Canada has adopted a Declaration on Ethics and Data Protection in Artificial Intelligence endorsing the topics that we've been discussing, such as transparency, privacy, and preservation of human rights. The European Union has also developed a framework with accountability and transparency in relation to algorithms, something that Canada should look into establishing. Librarians and other workers in LIS fields can advocate for the implementation of recommendations such as the ones recommended by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada. They suggest updating the private-sector privacy laws in Canada to better protect privacy rights in light of recent developments in technology including AI.

#### **[Rachel]**

No, absolutely, that's very interesting. I think you guys have covered a lot in how libraries and LIS professionals can help with reducing bias and other risks associated with AI technology being integrated into libraries. We also touched very briefly on some of the advantages that AI can bring to libraries. Now, let's, we're going to take some time and hop over to Twitter and see what some of our listeners have to say.

So, hopping over to the lib twitter. It looks like user @librarylooker43 talks about how AIs are being integrated into law libraries such as chatbots that can be consulted by attorneys who in the past would contact a law librarian. There's a possibility of seeing AIs taking over positions that are currently being held by librarians. So, what do we think about that?

#### **[Stephanie]**

Well, I'd like to speak to that if I may. Because, you know, as we know, growing automation has long been and, I believe will continue to be, a concern in the field. I think this is where the trust that people have in librarians and other information workers really comes into play. They see librarians as trustworthy sources of information and if librarians trust the technology, I think that the public will as well. I recently read an article that also discussed the use of AI in law libraries. Essentially the idea that since the law librarians are already practiced in teaching students and associates with searching, they can apply their expertise to help train the AIs as well. I believe that multiple articles have mentioned that AIs do still require the help of librarians to be interpreted and developed ethically. It can be argued that the AIs can take easier questions and

leave librarians with more time to teach and handle the more difficult requests. In most cases, AIs usually only handle, you know, the basics and the more complicated things can still go to librarians to answer since they are able to explain their thought processes and their methods.

It also relates to how libraries are involved in teaching media and information literacy. If libraries are also involved in teaching about AIs, as we talked about earlier, it can help people identify, you know, if they've been receiving misinformation or other ways that AIs may be biasing their results. I don't think that librarians as teachers, in information or technological literacy, is going to be going away anytime soon.

**[Rachel]**

No, absolutely, and hopefully the librarians will continue to be employed just in different roles than the ones that they've traditionally held and they'll be doing different tasks.

So, popping back over to Twitter, another listener Booklover87 brings up a tool called Readtelligence which uses AI to analyze ebooks to support metadata and return more effective searches in collections and they want to know what our thoughts about that are. So, what are we thinking about that one?

**[Sarah]**

Oh, I've read about that one. One of the ideas behind using Readtelligence is that current searches really only analyze the keywords in descriptions, metadata, and whatever keywords people believe are relevant. But with Readtelligence it scans the entire text to, like @booklover87 says, return better searches. Especially with finding titles that may have more shallow metadata structures, such as books that come from small publishers that don't have the resources that bigger publishers have to create thorough descriptions and metadata sets.

Of course, as we touched upon earlier, cataloguing is subject to bias as well. Being able to recognize that will allow the AIs to be trained to avoid it. In addition, allowing open discussion, criticism, and putting policies in place for things such as equal access to algorithms and datasets, would help support people who are working to manage bias in AIs while reducing any harms that they may cause.

**[Rachel]**

No, absolutely! I think all of our guests today have raised some very thoughtful and provoking concerns about AI and what we can do as informational professionals to help ensure that we don't simply reproduce biases and systematic discrimination unchallenged.

But, unfortunately, that's all the time we have today. Thank you to everyone for tuning in and sharing your thoughts with us. Please do continue to tweet at us about the topic that we discussed today or any requests for topics that we could do in the future. As always you can find more information on us through our website which will be linked below!

So, a big thank you so much to my guests, Stephanie and Sarah for joining me today and sharing your insights. Fantastic to have you guys on. And, as always, a thank you to our sponsors, SLIS and Samek Industries, thank you for your support, this podcast would not be possible without you.

So, please join us next week where we'll be discussing unruly patrons and other aspects of librarian safety in our next episode of Librarianshipers. Take care everyone!