

Google Books, Libraries, and Self-Respect: Information Justice beyond Distributions

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ABSTRACT

If Google Books has been successful in furthering the cause of social justice with regard to information, it is along narrowly distributive lines. Drawing on critics of distributive justice and emphasizing the value of self-respect, the author argues that Google's massive digital scanning initiative—especially as compared to the liberal democratic institution of the public library—exposes and exacerbates injustices with regard to information, technology, and institutions that are not easily captured along distributive lines. In particular, attention is paid to three features of the project—the quality of Google's book scans, the politics of online search, and Google's conception of the value of information—as demonstrative of the too-slender foundation for self-respect the Google Books project offers its users.

In the years since the inception of Google Books, much has been written about its supposed benefits, possible pitfalls, and relationship to libraries. Proponents have defended the project by pointing to its potential for expanding social and economic opportunities through a heightened “egalitarianism of information” (Schmidt 2005, par. 9). This sentiment was echoed in Judge Denny Chin's November 2013 decision ruling that Google's book scanning efforts were protected by fair use.¹ Critics, on the other hand, have been hesitant to fully embrace Google Books, arguing that the project may ultimately subvert the promises of equality and opportunity that it claims to further. Siva Vaidhyanathan's (2011) *The Googlization of Everything*, for example, carefully considers the consequences of surrendering control of the world's knowledge—in the digital realm, at least—to a private company. Other discussions warn that Google's values of efficiency and technical rationality have come to supplant the liberal democratic values traditionally bestowed upon books by libraries and threaten to compromise intellectual freedom and other expressive liberties (Waller 2009; Grimmelmann 2010; Zimmer 2012).

1. *Author's Guild v. Google, Inc.* 05 Civ. 8136 (DC, 2013); see <https://www.eff.org/document/opinion-granting-summary-judgment-fair-use>.

These discussions invoke broad questions of liberty, equality, and social justice with regard to access to information today. However, despite Google's claims that it is furthering social justice by means of a heightened "egalitarianism of information," few discussions about the project have thoroughly or explicitly engaged Google Books according to broader theories of social justice. In this article, I outline the achievements of the project as defended by proponents and argue that, if Google Books is indeed successful at furthering the cause of social justice and information, it is successful along narrowly distributive lines. Simply attending to the expanded distribution of books overlooks other features and values—in particular, the value of self-respect—relevant to the pursuit of social justice, as demonstrated by critics of distributive justice. In particular, I draw attention to three dimensions of the Books project that—compared to the liberal democratic institution of the public library—provide too slender a basis for the development of self-respect for its users: (a) the quality of Google's book scans, (b) the politics of online search, and (c) Google's conception of information. I conclude that, although Google Books' successes may work toward social justice in one regard, the project ultimately exposes and exacerbates other injustices with regard to information, technology, and self-respect today, leading us to overlook the value bestowed on books by the context within which they are embedded.

Google Books: A Brief History of Wild Success

Google first launched its book-scanning initiative in 2002, furthering the company's stated mission to "organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful" (Google, Inc. 2015). The project aims to do to the world's collection of printed books what the company has already done for web pages: index their contents, analyze their connections, and make them searchable. In the first few years of the project's development, Google sought support from publishers willing to contribute in-print books to the collection—an effort now known as the Partner Program (Grimmelmann 2009). In 2004, Google announced its Google Print Library Project (Google, Inc. 2004), initially driven by partnerships with libraries at the University of Michigan, Harvard, Oxford, Stanford, and the New York Public Library. The goal of the library project was—and remains—to scan entire library collections for inclusion in the company's books database. For Google, the library project held more promise than the Partner Program for the rapid growth of its collection, since it granted access to many millions of titles with only a handful of partnerships, compared to just hundreds of titles made available by thousands of publishers (Newman 2011, 5). In 2005, Google Print was renamed Google Books in order to better communicate the initiative's mission to the public (Google, Inc. 2005).

Although partnerships with libraries helped rapidly expand Google's collection of book scans, various interest groups and publishers objected that Google's development and maintenance of a vast archive of library collections for commercial benefit represented a violation of copyright (Newman 2011; Samuelson 2009). In 2005, the Authors Guild of America and several

individual authors brought a lawsuit against Google, maintaining that the Books project was a violation of copyright law (Grimmelmann 2009, 3). In 2008, a settlement was proposed that would have—among other things—released Google from liability for both past and future scanning efforts in exchange for \$125 million in compensation (Grimmelmann 2009, 4). The initial settlement was met with much criticism, ranging from concerns over issues of privacy and copyright policy to accusations that Google was being granted an unfair monopoly over the digital books market (Grimmelmann 2010; Zimmer 2012). In response to these concerns, parties to the lawsuit proposed an amended settlement in 2009. The court rejected the amended settlement in March 2011.

As none of the lawsuits forced Google Books offline or prevented Google from continuing its scanning efforts, the project was able to move forward despite litigation.² Eventually, Google Books settled into the broader information ecosystem of the web. The everyday utility of Google Books proved central to Judge Chin's November 2013 decision ruling that Google's book-scanning efforts were fair use. As James Grimmelmann (2013) notes, "The current position of Google Books might have seemed unlikely in the early days of the lawsuit, when Google's book scanning was new and scary. But [the] ruling demonstrates just how much the world has changed. Since Google began its program nine years ago, book scanning has become domesticated, and its benefits are easy to see. What was once viewed almost as science fiction has become part of our daily reality—everyone, it seems, has used Google Books" (par. 2). In his decision, Judge Chin cited as primary benefits of the project increased and efficient access to books, new possibilities for quantitative research of texts, improved access for disabled persons (as with text-to-speech capabilities for digitized text), and the granting of new life to otherwise neglected and out-of-print works (*Author's Guild v. Google, Inc.* 2013, 9–12). He also argued that the service ultimately aids—rather than damages—authors and publishers, since Google links to retailers where a reader or researcher can purchase commercially available titles (*Author's Guild v. Google, Inc.* 2013, 12). In his simplest assessment, Judge Chin argued that "indeed, all society benefits" from Google Books (*Author's Guild v. Google, Inc.* 2013, 26).

The ruling affirmed the optimism of proponents that have long touted the project's social, economic, and educational potential. This potential is perhaps best captured by former Google CEO Eric Schmidt, writing in the *Wall Street Journal* in 2005: "Imagine sitting at your computer and, in less than a second, searching the full text of every book ever written. Imagine an historian being able to instantly find every book that mentions the Battle of Algiers. Imagine a high school student in Bangladesh discovering an out-of-print author held only in a library in Ann Arbor. Imagine one giant electronic card catalog that makes all the world's books discoverable with just a few keystrokes by anyone, anywhere, anytime" (par. 1). Nearly a decade later, the possibilities of Google Books are no longer the stuff of imagination. In purely dis-

2. To date, the project has scanned more than 20 or 30 million books, depending on the source (Howard 2012; Damton 2013).

tributive terms, Google's massive digital scanning initiative has been wildly successful—it has made available online an unprecedented number of books, many of which would otherwise be inaccessible to the wider public. A focus on Google's distributive successes, however, tends to distract from other dimensions of the Books project that are also important to the realization of social justice with regard to information. For example, simple discussions of expanded access make no reference to the value bestowed on books in particular contexts, nor do they help us understand the role of information institutions in supporting the development of individuals' self-respect. To better address these issues in the case of Google Books, it is necessary to attend to the usefulness and limitations of distributive justice before introducing nondistributive dimensions relevant to the project's assessment.

Beyond Distributions: Information, Social Justice, and Self-Respect

The importance of distributive justice—that is, the ways in which a society distributes rights, responsibilities, and resources—has dominated liberal political philosophical discussions since the mid-twentieth century. John Rawls's (1971) *A Theory of Justice* represents the paradigmatic example, offering “in the first instance a standard whereby the distributive aspects of the basic structure of society are to be assessed” (8). In this tradition, individuals are conceived of as (a) possessing some more or less complete set of valued aims, aspirations, or ends and (b) as capable of adopting more or less effective means to those ends. To pursue valued ends, however, individuals need resources. These resources—sometimes referred to as primary goods—are considered indispensable to “advancing the [ends] of citizens understood as free and equal” (Cohen 2003, 108). Rawls's (2001) list of primary goods includes, among other things, basic rights and liberties, positions of responsibility in political and economic institutions, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect (58–59). As primary goods, liberties such as freedoms of conscience and association, for example, offer people the means to communicate and share ideas in order to develop or revise their valued ends. Similarly, income and wealth provide the material means needed to effectively pursue one's plans.³

Many of the most robust accounts of social justice and information focus on information as a primary good. Like rights or income, information is construed as instrumentally important for rational life planning and furthering human interests. Peter Drahos (1996) argues that persons need more than equal rights and liberties to develop and pursue plans and make decisions—they also need information (175). Jeroen van den Hoven and Emma Rooksby (2008) note that “the idea of forming, revising, and pursuing a rational plan subject to the conditions that confront one hardly makes sense without assuming that information relevant to the task is relatively easy to come by” (382). “After all,” Drahos (1996) writes, “the more information

3. It should be noted that the idea of primary goods as an appropriate metric of justice in the first place has been called into question (see Sen 1979; Nussbaum 2006). For a more complete account of the debate between primary goods advocates and capabilities theorists, see Henry Brighouse and Ingrid R. Robeyns (2010).

[people] have about the world to which their desires, purposes and goals relate, the more specific their plans can be" (174). Conversely, "in a world where the amount of information available for planning was ever diminishing, a point would be reached where planning could not take place" (174). These and related discussions capture the instrumental importance of information to the pursuit of human ends.

Understanding information as a primary good also helps orient us toward problems of information inequality exacerbated by the rapid development and adoption of advanced information and communication technologies—it helps us conceive of and offer normative prescriptions for attending to inequalities in the distribution of information (Lipinski and Britz 2000; Van Dijk 2005; Duff 2008). Commonly, these prescriptions take the form of both positive and negative information rights. In negative terms, information rights give expression to the idea that people should not be hindered in their efforts to access information (as evidenced in censorship debates and "freedom to read" campaigns). Drahos (1996), for example, suggests a negative "freedom of information" to sit alongside other basic liberties, such as freedom of expression (176). In positive terms, information rights support claims that information should be provided for and made accessible by the state or other responsible agencies (for example, through libraries or open records policies). Van den Hoven and Rooksby (2008) support information rights in a positive sense when they argue for equal opportunity with regard to information access, since "ensuring a just distribution of information requires not only a just distribution of information liberties for all citizens, but also mechanisms to ensure that people's opportunities to exercise their information liberties are roughly equal" (385). Alistair S. Duff (2011) even goes so far as to rank all possible types of information and put forward a precise theorem for distributing information according to its importance.

However, the dominance of distributive concerns represents a particular limitation of much reasoning about social justice today: by reducing issues of social justice and information to purely distributive terms, all we are left to talk about are problems of distribution. Critics of distributive justice, such as Iris Marion Young (2006), have argued that "while patterns of the distribution of resources, opportunities, and income are very important issues of justice, theoretical focus on them . . . pays too little attention to the processes that produce the distributions . . . [and] obscures important aspects of structural processes that do not fit well under a distributive paradigm" (91). Leftist theorists, for example, point to imbalances in economic decision-making power, arguing that distributions of goods cannot account for structural processes that allow such power to be concentrated in relatively few hands. Disabilities scholars have shown how normative standards of ability shape our world in ways that are biased, as when buildings without wheelchair access impose a normative standard of mobility that excludes many otherwise capable persons. These discussions are attuned to the ways that the design of social, economic, and physical institutions structure decision-making power and im-

pose normative standards that are relevant to social justice but are not necessarily reducible to matters of distribution.

With regard to information, Johannes J. Britz (2008) argues that contemporary reasoning about social justice and information should go beyond distributions to include, among other things, appropriate recognition of the equal worth and dignity of all people (justice as recognition), the active facilitation of opportunities for people to meaningfully participate in economic or political activities (justice as participation), and an understanding of the generative role principles of justice can play in fostering a sense of justice among a population (justice as generation) (1175–78).⁴ Also, patterns of distribution cannot tell us much about the ways information is collected, stored, analyzed, or presented—only about the ways in which it is disseminated. Further, distributive justice values information only as generally instrumental for setting and pursuing particular ends—it makes no reference to the meaning or value bestowed upon goods outside distributions or in particular contexts (Walzer 1984). Simply attending to Google’s expanded distribution of books leads us to overlook the value bestowed on books by the context within which they are embedded.

One dimension of social justice routinely obscured by a focus on distributions is self-respect. Philosophers such as Elizabeth Telfer (1968), Stephen Darwall (1977, 2006), and Robin Dillon (1997) have long articulated the importance of personal dignity and self-respect for social justice. Even Rawls (1971) counts “the social bases of self-respect” in his list of primary goods, going so far as to call self-respect “perhaps the most important primary good” (386). More recently, stand-alone pieces in political philosophy regarding Rawls’s conception of self-respect have further reinforced its importance for both Rawls and for theories of social justice generally (Doppelt 2009; Zink 2011). At the same time, the rise of the capabilities approach to justice has generated valuable discussions of the ways in which distributions of primary goods are insufficient for fully supporting the development of persons’ self-respect (Nussbaum 2004).

Self-respect is important to social justice in at least two ways. First, it serves as an important evaluative criterion in selecting a conception of justice: if a conception provides a more robust foundation for the development of self-respect than do other conceptions and discourages countervailing attitudes (such as envy or spite), then that is to count as a reason in favor of its selection. For example, Rawls (1971) argues that, because his theory supports self-respect founded on the priority and equal protection of basic liberties and not other considerations (such as income or wealth), his conception of social justice ought to be selected over others—in particular, over utilitarian conceptions (476–80).⁵ Second, self-respect confers upon indi-

4. Respectively, Britz’s account of justice as recognition, participation, and generation draws on Lötter (2000), Sen (1993), and Young (1990).

5. More precisely, Rawls argues that these features make his theory more stable than others (his so-called argument from stability). For a more thorough account of the justificatory role of self-respect for Rawls, see Zink (2011).

viduals a sense of their own value and a conviction that their plans of life are worth pursuing (Rawls 1971, 386). Individuals in possession of self-respect have both the motivation and confidence needed to pursue their valued ends (Zink 2011, 332). Conversely, a lack of self-respect—as manifested, for example, in a submission to indignities or a lack of concern over whether one is taken seriously (Darwall 1977, 47–48)—can undermine an individual’s ability to set, revise, or pursue his or her aims.

It is important to recognize that self-respect on this second account is not only a matter of individual motivation but is also socially contingent. In perhaps his most eloquent statement on the topic, Rawls (1999) points out that “our self-respect, which mirrors our sense of our own worth, depends in part upon the respect shown to us by others; no one can long possess an assurance of his own value in the face of enduring contempt or even the indifference of others” (171). Importantly, individuals “participate in multiple contexts of evaluation including networks of friends, family, neighborhood, church, workplaces, political citizenship, national identity,” all of which come to bear on an individual’s sense of self (Doppelt 2009, 132). Consequently, the development of self-respect is intimately tied to one’s place within a larger culture and whether or not that culture forces particular social roles upon certain categories of people (Okin 2004, 202).

The relationship between societal structures and self-respect is explicit in discussions of institutionalized injustice along the lines of race, ethnicity, sexuality, or gender. Both Laurence Thomas (1995) and Bernard R. Boxill (1976, 1992), for example, have shown how the American civil rights movement was not only a process of winning rights for African Americans but also a matter of liberating self-respect. Michele M. Moody-Adams (1992) makes it clear that the possibilities for individuals to develop self-respect are constrained by normative standards of race and privilege embedded in social, political, and economic structures. Similarly, heteronormative standards of sexuality shape possibilities for self-respect for bisexual and homosexual individuals (Mohr 1988), whereas cisnormative standards of binary gender constrain the development of self-respect for transgender or gender-nonconforming individuals. For people with disabilities, social circumstances “question disabled people’s equal social bases of self-respect,” as, for example, through “the reactions by other people to the way they look, act, or simply to the way they are” (Terzi 2010, 163).

The cumulative force of these discussions lays bare the influence of factors such as social norms, built environments, and other entrenched political structures on self-respect. Attending to problems of self-respect in information, then, means paying attention to the structures and systems that permit access. Unfortunately, and as noted by Dillon (2010), the relevance of respect to moral evaluations of informational or technology systems has received relatively little attention (18). Nonetheless, information institutions and the technologies and systems they employ “necessarily [serve] certain goals or interests better than others” (Brey 2008, 17), working to empower some and disempower others—and not in equal measure. In the next

section, I argue that a focus on self-respect offers one way to move beyond distributive concerns in order to complicate the accepted successes of Google Books.

Google Books versus Libraries as Sites of Self-Respect

To be clear, pointing to the limits of distributive justice and foregrounding the value of self-respect do not mean unjust distributions of information are unimportant. As the (too brief) discussion in the previous section shows, attending to distributions is an indispensable part of realizing social justice today. But, at the same time, it is not simply a matter of technological wonder that Google Books enables an imagined Bangladeshi high school student access to an out-of-print text in Michigan. Rather, understanding the limits of distributive justice reminds us that information is ultimately accessed in context, through institutions and systems dialectically shaped by the information they distribute; information both informs and is informed by the values and contexts of providing institutions and systems. In this section, three features of the Books Project—the quality of scans, the “black box” of search, and Google’s conception of information—are presented and discussed. Each of these features presents a challenge to the otherwise accepted successes of the Books project. In particular, it is argued that, compared to libraries, Google’s massive collection of book scans presents too slender a base for supporting the development of persons’ self-respect in any broad or robust sense.

The Quality of Scans

Anecdotal evidence of errors and distortions within Google Books has been available for years. *The Art of Google Books*—a blog dedicated to capturing distortions in Google’s book scans and presenting them as aesthetic objects—has documented many hundreds of errors, from distorted pages to scans partially obscured by human fingers (Goldsmith 2013). According to medieval historian Ronald Musto (2009), these distortions offer a “mutilated” view of the past encoded in texts “rushed through the scanning process so that Google could lay claim to as many artifacts of our cultural past in as short a time and with as small a budget as possible” (Musto 2009, par. 15). More-systematic attempts to address the issue of quality have proved challenging, as the massive size of the Books project makes it difficult to assess the overall quality of Google’s scans or metadata records. In one study, Paul Duguid (2007) zeroed in on a single text—*The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*—to assess the quality presented “to an ordinary user that Google envisages wanting to find a book” (par. 6). His analysis revealed a number of issues immediately relevant to a casual reader: scans accompanied by inconsistent or missing metadata; text lopped off at the margins; and (most egregiously) the outright removal of the book’s iconic solid black page, inserted by the author after the death of one of the story’s characters (par. 13).

Other work has attempted to document errors across a range of pages and texts, but findings have varied greatly depending on the parameters of a given analysis (Gevinson 2010;

James 2010). Conway (2013) reports concerns that the pervasiveness of low-level errors undermines the digitization standards set by other information institutions and normalizes lower standards as simply the cost of building such a massive collection (27). Beyond low-level errors, the random distribution of fatal errors (that is, errors that render a text entirely unfit for use) in the collection also undermines its trustworthiness (Conway 2013). Further, errors or inconsistencies in the scanning process have been shown to produce poor or inconsistent metadata—for example, absent or missing scans for particular records—that further undermine the authority and reliability of the collection (Nunberg 2009; Chen 2012).

From a pragmatic perspective, the existence of hundreds—indeed, even many thousands—of such errors is to be expected from a digital scanning initiative more concerned with the dramatic expansion of access than with the achievement of quality standards set by preservationists or scholars (Leetaru 2008). From this perspective, the existence of low-level error is unimportant since, as Conway (2013) admits, such errors do not generally hinder reading. Consequently, poor-quality scans and metadata can be dismissed as a necessary trade-off in the effort to expand access—in order to widely distribute digital versions of library collections, online pragmatic matters of cost and time must be taken into consideration.

In nondistributive terms, however, the unreliable access afforded by Google Books serves to recast (rather than overcome) the problem of an “egalitarianism of information” as one between those with ready access to alternative information institutions and those whose access to the world’s books is mediated almost entirely by the standards set by Google.⁶ These persistent issues of institutional access and privilege are intimately bound up with the development of self-respect. The subpar access described by Duguid (2007), for example, does not communicate to an ordinary user that her or his reading experience is valued more highly than Google’s desire to quickly and efficiently index massive collections of books. Moreover, the random distribution of fatal error and inconsistent metadata has the potential to frustrate and undermine the confidence of users without access to the additional information-seeking and research support that make up important parts of the value of libraries.⁷ This is not to say that there are no benefits to the massive collection Google has developed, but it does resist the notion that Google Books has gone very far in realizing a heightened “egalitarianism of information” in any broad sense. Understanding the importance of institutional access and privilege for self-respect, in particular, calls attention to the ways Google Books might instead point to further injustices in access to information, privilege, and power.

6. A reviewer of this article pointed out that anyone with an Internet connection has access to resources other than Google Books. Although this is an important note, it does not undermine the Books project’s overall dominance. For example, competitors such as the Open Content Alliance or Project Gutenberg may represent alternative resources, but they cannot compete with Google Books in terms of volume. Further, more than 90% of the HathiTrust Digital Library’s 10 million book scans come from Google (York, 2010; Conway, 2013). As a practical reality, then, Google Books has become the dominant digital library in the world—not only as a stand-alone resource but also as the backbone for other projects.

7. For assessing the value of public libraries in particular, see Jaeger et al. (2011).

The “Black Box” of Search

Google employs a range of tools and considerations in facilitating access to information. Across Google’s various services, users rely on seemingly simple search tools that conceal the complex interplay of computer algorithms, commercial interests, linguistic cues, metadata, and personalized settings that the company uses to deliver results. As Lucas Introna (2005) notes, much contemporary information technology works this way—things such as computer algorithms are “subsumed and black-boxed” in ways that are “not evident, obvious, transparent or open to inspection by the ordinary everyday person” (75). Importantly, this “black box” keeps important questions of ethics and politics hidden from plain view, leaving “technology as such . . . unproblematised” and overlooking the ways it excludes “some and not others—irrespective of whether this was intended by the designers or not” (Introna 2005, 79). As discussions of self-respect, normative biases, and institutionalized injustice in the previous section suggest, however, attending to such matters of inclusion and exclusion is an important nondistributive dimension of social justice.

In their seminal article “Shaping the Web: Why the Politics of Search Engines Matters,” Lucas Introna and Helen Nissenbaum (2000) brought to light various political and moral dimensions of search algorithms such as those employed by Google. They endeavored to show how the technical limitations of algorithmic search leads to “systematic inclusions and exclusions . . . that dictate systematic prominence for some sites [and] systematic invisibility for others” (171). With regard to Google’s web search, for example, it is well known that the company’s PageRank algorithm examines not only the content of a web page but also the type and quality of the pages that link to it. As a consequence, pages with higher ranking tend to be more prominent in lists of search results. For Google, then, relevance is in large part continuous with popularity and visibility—the search engine does not mitigate against arbitrary inequality but, rather, tends to mirror or exacerbate the uneven distribution of links on the web (Diaz 2008, 16). Since the publication of Introna and Nissenbaum’s article, scholars have continued to address problems of information bias, censorship, diversity, and democratic deliberation as they relate to search engine technology (Hargittai 2007; Diaz 2008; Zimmer 2008), driven by “a desire to prevent online information from merely mimicking the power structure of the conglomerates that dominate the media landscape” (Granka 2010, 365). More recently, scholars have also shown how the design of Google’s search-engine algorithms reinforces and perpetuates biases in the representation of particular minority groups. For example, Noble (2013) demonstrates the ways in which Google search results for “Black girls” reduce the identities of Black women to only stereotypical or hypersexualized representations, obscuring the social and political interests of an entire minority group. In terms congenial to the present work, the seeming objectivity of automated search results (as articulated by Noble) serves to reinforce extant racist and sexist attitudes and deny Black women a potential informational basis for establishing self-respect.

Of course, any effort to organize the whole of human knowledge and experience into a set of discrete categories or search terms is inevitably reductionist, incomplete, and biased. Even compared to Google search, the systems for organizing information employed by libraries are far from perfect, as library catalogs continue to perpetuate discrimination in their representations of certain subjects. With regard to the Library of Congress's Subject Headings (LCSH), in particular, notable wrongs include the continuing subjugation of women to men and the mishandling of feminist subjects (Olson 2001), the foreclosure of opportunities for certain types of queer representation (Keilty 2009), the historical maligning of homosexual identities (Adler 2014), and a failure to recognize the long-term social and economic impact of policy and funding decisions based on controversial classifications (Bowker and Star 1999).

Nonetheless, the processes and institutions that produce and perpetuate biases in libraries are not as impervious to critique as is the "black box" of Google's proprietary algorithms. Sanford Berman's (1971) *Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subject Heads Concerning People*, for example, forcefully demonstrated the problems of Western, white, and religious bias reflected in the LCSH and proposed a series of changes to remedy them. Although it is estimated that only about 60% of Berman's suggestions have been implemented (Knowlton 2005), the effective redress of representational wrongs is possible—and, in the case of LCSH, ongoing (Johnson 2010; Berman 2013). At any rate, the comparative accessibility of an explicit and widely disseminated controlled vocabulary such as the LCSH offers a more secure foundation for protest and the exercise of self-respect than the opaque and ever-shifting "black box" of search technology.⁸ This relative impenetrability is especially troubling in light of the power Google has to direct and shape the flow of information online, determining what content to display and what content to ignore in response to a given query.

Google's Conception of Information

Following Vivienne Waller (2009), libraries and Google are ultimately informed by radically different conceptions of the value of information. For public libraries, in particular, the value of information is informed by its role in promoting and preserving a liberal democratic ideal. It is the "grand tradition" of the contemporary public library that ready and equitable access to information is integral to a functioning democracy (McColvin 1956; Waller 2009). As John Buschman (2005) describes, libraries support the existence of a robust public sphere in the Habermasian sense, enacting "the principle of critique and rational argumentation through the commitment to balanced collections, preserving them over time, and furthering inclusion through active attempts to make collections and resources reflect historical and current intellectual diversity" (2). In addition, the tradition of progressive librarianship has helped imbue library rhetoric and practice with a commitment to intellectual freedom that readily ac-

8. For the value of protest for realizing self-respect, see Boxill (1976).

knowledges the role of diverse types of information for supporting freedoms of conscience and association (Samek 2004). Further, libraries support an ideal of equal democratic citizens by rejecting morally arbitrary distinctions between the types of information made available and the types of patrons served (Morgan 2006).

Despite being built on the backs of library collections, the Books project is framed by Google's stated mission to "organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful" (Google, Inc. 2015). Although Google makes an ambiguous moral commitment in its "Don't be evil" motto, the company is not immediately concerned with furthering democratic values, nor does its mission invoke an idea of persons as free and equal citizens. Instead, the value of information for Google is derived from queries and keywords that can be sold for marketing purposes. In order to sell targeted advertisements, the company must demonstrate that it can effectively match information resources to particular queries in ways that are consistent and relevant for advertisers. Although Google Books does not currently feature targeted ads, Waller (2009) shows how the practice nonetheless betrays Google's conception of information as valuable only insofar as it can be harnessed for marketing purposes (par. 11).

The contrast between the value of information for public libraries and Google is fundamental. For libraries, the value of information stems from its value for free and equal citizens; for Google, information is valuable insofar as it is profitable (Waller 2009). This contrast reveals an important difference in the moral and political position of individuals relative to these different information institutions. In a library context, individuals are morally and politically relevant in an immediate sense, implicated in the ideal of information access as necessary for supporting free and equal democratic citizens in a functioning democracy. For Google, the moral and political position of users is marginalized, since the question of information access and retrieval is fundamentally a technical problem of connecting some set of resources to a query within the system for advertising purposes. From this perspective, libraries underwrite the self-respect of persons in the sense described by Rawls—that is, they promote the development of self-respect founded on equal citizenship. If Google supports the development of the self-respect of its users, it does so narrowly—supporting people as mere consumers and not as equal citizens. Although removing books (by way of scanned images) from a library context and submitting them to the control and technical rationality of Google helps to dramatically expand access, it also serves to displace persons as moral and political beings. Individuals seeking information in Google Books are no longer situated as free and equal citizens but, rather, as mere consumers.

Conclusion

If Google Books contributes to the cause of social justice and information, it does so along narrowly distributive lines. However, as discussed earlier, a focus on distributions tends to obscure other dimensions that are equally, if not more, important to the realization of social justice.

In particular, supporting the development of self-respect is integral if individuals are to remain assured of their own value “in the face of enduring contempt or even the indifference of others” (Rawls 1999, 171). Although other scholars have shown how institutionalized discrimination within social, economic, or political structures can serve to disempower individuals along racial, gender, sexual, or other lines, I have argued that surrendering books to Google threatens to undermine the development of self-respect in an informational context. In this respect, Google Books is not successful in contributing to social justice and information but, rather, exposes and exacerbates existing inequalities with regard to information.

Finally, continued attention to the social justice challenges presented by Google Books is necessary in light of the project’s dominance in the contemporary landscape of digital scanning and preservation initiatives. Its massive scope and size have made it difficult for other institutions to justify allocating funds and other resources to developing alternative projects, so that—as Duguid (2007) puts it—Google Books, “by its quantity if not necessarily by its quality, makes the possibility of a better alternative unlikely” (par. 6). Given the inertia of the Books project, the biases embedded in the project’s quality standards, search practices, and conception of information stand to have a profound and pervasive impact on the development of self-respect in informational contexts well into the future.

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