
Affect and Deaccessioning in the Academic Library: Feelings about Books and Place

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ABSTRACT

Human beings, whether acquiring, preserving, or divesting themselves, imbue objects with strong feelings. Affect is at the core of human relationships with books. In almost any interaction with a book, affect takes over beyond essential form and function: a paper, ink, and cloth artifact with text to entertain or impart information. Consequently, so much of work in libraries relates to feelings about books, and to brokering human relationships around books. This study, conceived during a deaccessioning project at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, in 2018, recounts and explores specific affective responses, such as the expressed desire to retain a book for emotional over intellectual reasons, despite a lack of use, as well as examines the nonspecific impulse to retain every volume, which is rooted in the notion that books simply are too precious to discard. Those who love books share such feelings. As we and libraries collect books, they reflect our identities, focus our longings, and show what we care about. What are the cultural constructs that drive human emotions around books and libraries, even though the objects and the repositories have changed dramatically in form, function, and use over the past quarter century?

INTRODUCTION

In a 2016 article in *American Libraries*, librarian and “Booklist” editor Rebecca Vnuk notes that “weeding is not a mechanical process. There is emotion involved.” The author exhorts further that “a patron spies a dumpster full of discarded material and immediately jumps to the conclusion that the library is enacting a modern-day book burning.” Online comments on

the article consist of expansive arguments on each side of the contemporary debate of library as collaborative work and access space vs. library as repository. Vnuk's study provides guidelines for appropriate outreach and publicity around weeding to avoid alarmed patrons, strong negative reactions, and increased worry for staff members (Vnuk 2016). In contrast, this article shifts perspective from how to conduct the weeding process to analysis of the feelings involved. Do patrons experience and express strong emotions such as alarm and outrage when books are thrown away? Why do readers and book lovers react so strongly to discarding books that their behavior could compare to historical atrocities against the printed word? What is it about books and libraries that evoke powerful feelings?

The idea for this study arose in the summer of 2018 during the deaccessioning of collections of books and bound periodicals from Olin Library at Rollins College, a liberal arts institution in central Florida. The weeding was the culmination of a two-year analysis to discard print volumes for which content was replicated in online collections to create additional space for seating and new print books. As library faculty and staff members hauled carts of dusty, unused periodicals out to dumpsters in the parking lot throughout the month of June, members of all library constituencies weighed in on the process. A student cried when they saw the empty shelves and asked the head of Collections and Systems where all the books had gone. Librarians expressed regret at tossing periodicals in their academic disciplines, and amassed piles of rescued volumes to take to their offices. Faculty members who were instructed to pull paper flags from books they wanted to retain went down the ranges of shelving and removed the flag from every title in their discipline. Outside in the parking lot, community members who saw the growing piles of discards repeatedly climbed into the dumpsters to indiscriminately pull books out, regardless of the subject, title, or condition. In all of these activities, if it was a book, it was precious.

BOOKS AS CULTURAL CONSTRUCTS

Material objects are reflections of the cultures that produce them, and similarly, humans' relationships to objects are culturally constructed. Historians, then, read objects for meaning within a specific cultural context. This theoretical framework is fundamental to material culture scholarship. Based on the foundational and enduring work of material culture scholars such as Dell Upton and Henry Glassie, object-oriented analysis can encompass multiple avenues of inquiry (Upton 1983). Object-oriented studies focus on physical attributes such as form, age, structure, and place of manufacture. Socially, culturally, and symbolically oriented studies, often rooted in the disciplines of anthropology and linguistics, move beyond the structure of the object itself and delve into the ways in which artifacts embody the cultures that produce and use them. For example, a socially

oriented study about books might look at the role and significance of book clubs or a public library collection to a specific community. This study comprises a culturally and symbolically oriented analysis of what books in libraries can reveal about shared human behaviors and values, and what books can communicate and signify about the meaning individuals place on them. Human beings value print books beyond their fundamental form and function, and this study analyzes them through this broader cultural lens. Books consist of paper, ink, and a binding and exist for viewing, reading, and the transfer of information. Reasons for individual and collective attachment to print books, however, move far beyond their essential form and usability for entertainment or information. As the writer and critic Walter Benjamin mused in his 1931 essay, "Unpacking my Library: A Talk about Book Collecting," books are not loved for their usefulness ([1931] 1999). Owning and displaying books can serve as outward signs and symbols of erudition, interests, and curiosity. Similarly, print collections are powerful signifiers of an enduring, nostalgic definition of "library" and of shared values and attitudes grounded in an intense emotional need to preserve books even beyond their usefulness.

The cultural community of the book lover is challenging to define because it is broad rather than confined to one race, class, or socioeconomic group. Books can simultaneously reflect, strengthen, and broaden our individual and shared identities. In analyzing bluestocking female readers in Germany and Britain in the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries, Alessa Johns postulates that books have the power to transcend artificial geographic borders and circumvent local customs to create broad communities whose members can delight in information shared in common (2014). Similarly, John Plotz argues in "Out of Circulation: For and Against Book Collecting" that books entice and compel because they hold out "the possibility that others, spread out geographically and temporally, have experienced, are experiencing, or will experience exactly what you experience" (1999, 476). Joan Shelley Rubin, in delving into the history of the history of books, argues that interest in books among scholars lies not simply in intellectual training but rather in a wide range of factors, including social background, emotional makeup, and cultural ethos (2003).

Finally, at its most basic, those who belong to the community of book lovers are individuals "for whom the written word, especially as expressed in printed and bound volumes, is of the first importance" (Vaughan 1983, 85). These include booksellers, librarians, authors, agents, critics, journalists, translators, and, finally and most importantly, an infinite diversity of readers "in full partnership" (85). Bibliophiles, then, those who might climb in a dumpster to rescue any book, impugn a library leader for culling a collection, or cry at the sight of empty shelves, are a broad-based constituency. Individuals will share these feelings regardless of a library's overarching mission. Consider the concept of being "well-read." A love of

books creates a shared social currency, and the sociocultural boundaries are broad.

Culture provides meaning within shared experience. For example, many inhabitants of a variety of discreet cultures understand that the act of shaking hands symbolizes a greeting or the sealing of an agreement. "A symbol stands for its signified because it participates in the nature of the signified" (Maquet 1993, 36). Within the symbolic power of objects, intention is less important than perception. Most of the meanings ascribed through the symbolic function are "grounded in the human condition as experienced by all of us" (Maquet 1993, 37). Displaying books symbolizes membership in the community of readers, or in the community of those who care deeply about books, for many of us retain vast collections of books that we never read, or that are waiting to be read. Concurrently, we brag about the size of our home libraries, or express the angst and despair of hard decisions if we need to cull them. An affective attachment to books, libraries, and their preservation represents a shared humanness. Consider the popularity of celebrity-led literacy initiatives that reach wide audiences across boundaries, and the centrality of libraries as open, democratic institutions that foster personal growth (Gerolami 2018). At their essence, collecting and displaying books and preserving library collections signify that the individual is well-read, or aspires to be well-read.

The transfer of information is fundamental to the alchemy that produces a book lover. Books contain information, but more importantly, readers consume it. Plotz notes simply but profoundly that books promise "internal expansiveness" (1999, 463). It is the promise of learning and personal growth that account for the charisma of the book. Books do not simply exist as objects, however beautiful their bindings or illustrations may be. They embody knowledge any reader can adopt. Discarding a book, then, means more than the loss of a physical object. It can signify the disappearance of knowledge that many worked to produce. The anger and horror individuals express when books are thrown away is rooted in fear that the information, or art in the case of fiction, may disappear and be unrecoverable. Concurrently, bibliophiles view libraries that engage in deaccessioning as failing in their responsibility as keepers of collective knowledge. A commenter on the article "Weeding without Worry" avows that libraries that deaccession violate their trust to preserve and protect the written word (Vnuk 2016). *Trust*, *preserve*, and *protect* are highly charged words that signify important human acts. Thus, there is a belief that when libraries downsize, they fail on multiple fronts. The phenomenon is irrational because most books are not rare, and part of their ability to provide information lies in their existence in multiples, but emotions by definition are not rational.

Additional elements of the emotional attachment to books are challenging to define in part because book lovers themselves cannot explain

them. Nicholas A. Basbanes famously calls book collecting “a gentle madness,” as if the intense love of books results from a genetic predisposition and therefore cannot be fully understood or controlled (1999). Some bibliophiles report that they cannot trace the origin of their love for books, and describe the interest to cherish and hoard them as living as the willing victim of a spell (Mott 2012, 530). Many members of the community of book lovers speak and behave with intensity. Consider the critics of libraries who believe every book must be retained, as well as the keepers of personal libraries who freely acquire and cannot bring themselves to discard a single book. Basbanes’s book on collecting and library collections abounds with descriptions of collectors and librarians as “obsessed,” “possessive,” “consumed.” The parallels to the intense emotions of a love affair are inescapable. Few human emotions are as powerful as the headiness of love and the grief of loss. Bibliophiles live in thrall to the former and work to head off the latter in both private and public collections.

THE MATERIALITY OF BOOK ENVIRONMENTS

Material objects define us. Built environments, homes, personal spaces, clothing, and other objects exist as they do because cultures make choices. Consider the basic concept that few individuals would appear in public in pajamas or a nightgown, even if sufficiently covered and protected from the weather, because cultures make rules governing appropriate personal dress for public vs. private spaces. The aspects of our materials worlds involve choice, and as individuals the objects we choose define us and serve as symbols that communicate to others who we are. Symbols are powerful because they communicate; they convey meaning that others in the culture can read and grasp. When book lovers express their passion, either verbally or materially, they signal their membership in the community for whom having one’s “head in a book” or being described as “well-read” are positives; that the expansion and opportunity for growth books promise are important to them as individuals. This holds true for a passion for individual books, as well as for building and displaying book collections. G. Thomas Tanselle, in “A Rationale of Collecting,” concludes succinctly that amassing a collection, an accumulation of tangible things, is a way of finding ourselves (Tanselle 1999). Book lovers, and indeed libraries, are defined by the books on their shelves.

Library configurations, the display of books, and the furniture related to them reflect the value placed on bound volumes. During the Renaissance, shelves developed as a furniture form to display specialized collections of all kinds. Historian of technology and design Henry Petroski points out, perhaps obviously but meaningfully, that a shelf is not a bookshelf until it holds books (1999). Over time the presence, configuration, absence, or movement of shelves have come to define library spaces, and

an alternative view of libraries solely as open, collaborative workspaces without physical books has been slow to develop and subject to criticism. Much like the students who decried the presence of empty shelves or absence of books in their libraries, scholars, librarians, and library patrons "were aghast" when library leaders first began to suggest off-site storage for overburdened libraries (Petroski 1999, 211). A primary and enduring argument against off-site storage is that a book must be readily available to be useful. It is not enough that it is housed nearby. This concern is more emotional than logical, as paging and retrieval systems are growing in speed and efficiency, and continued improvements to public catalogs make virtual browsing increasingly possible. Symbols evoke emotions in their power to signify larger shared concepts or ideals. Physical books on continuous ranges of shelving symbolize that libraries are bastions of collective knowledge. Books provide meaning for library spaces that virtual collections cannot. Libraries still preserve knowledge if collections are virtual: they are still libraries, but are they understood as libraries? The absence of books as physical references to discreet and collective knowledge evokes worry and angst and fuels continued debate about the future of libraries among library professionals and patrons. Conversely, the presence of books is reassuring. Physical collections signal that anything that may be needed is within reach. The ease and ubiquity of virtual collections have not yet overtaken this sense of comfort.

Other furniture connected to books also extend the symbolic message of bibliophilia. Many librarians actively search for and collect old wooden multidrawer card catalogs and display them in homes and offices. The catalogs powerfully serve as direct reminders of the past when collections and their means of access existed solely in hard copy. The catalogs no longer function as intended: they do not hold cards that refer to books upon the shelves. The owners instead repurpose the furniture as storage drawers for small objects or even bottles of wine. The adaptive reuse in no way compromises the form or symbolic function of the catalogs. In fact, the preservation of functional furniture for decorative home and office furnishings enhances the symbolic message by elevating the form into an historic artifact worthy of saving. Card catalogs used to be the direct conduit to books on the shelves. In their reuse, they serve as equally clear references to a life where books are valued in some way. This is why librarians and booklovers love, preserve, and collect old wooden catalogs. It is similar to communities conserving the fabric of historic buildings, even if they must repurpose their interiors for new uses. As human beings, what we save symbolizes what we value for whatever reason. This also is why new library constructions and renovations, and particularly departments of archives and special collections, often incorporate antique card catalogs and desks into their furnishings amidst more streamlined contemporary

interiors. The old furnishings function anew as symbols of the history of the book, and of valuing life and work among books.

AFFECTIVE ATTACHMENT TO BOOK COLLECTIONS

For academic libraries, despite the contemporary primacy of virtual collections, volume count remains as an essential vital statistic signifying a collection's value, and the presence of books signifies "library" within even the most forward-thinking spaces. When Olin Library at Rollins College underwent renovation in 2012 to create a computer-centric 24/7 access floor, the leadership made a decision to retain low shelves housing the reference collection around the perimeter of the banks of computers to retain a "library or bookstore feel." Prime real estate in an innovative space gave way to leaving rarely used books in place so patrons, unconsciously reading the symbolic message, would understand that they were in a true library. The decision acknowledged and incorporated the shared affective response that a library requires books to be understood as such. In the same year, the University of North Georgia built a new campus that included a learning commons with electronic access to collections and a print book delivery plan. Year after year, students interviewed for focus groups about the library space and services ask for a standing book collection because they want "a real library" even though electronic resources abound and print volumes arrive by request within a day or two (Rebecca Rose, Head Librarian, University of North Georgia Cumming Campus, focus-group reports to the author, November 2015, and January 2019). Most recently, announcements about the proposed Obama Presidential Center provoked strong criticism based on plans to have a digital archive rather than a traditional library. Thirty million pages will be available online, but some historians lament the loss of a "true" library and view the plan as "a threat to future scholarship on the Obama administration—and to the presidential library system itself" (Schuessler 2019). Within our culturally constructed contemporary spaces, books are "read" as symbolic of a library and viewed as important to the promise of learning such spaces afford.

Individuals and libraries do not simply collect books, they display them. Personal book collections readily signify and communicate the interests and mindset of the collector. Library collections similarly convey an institutional identity; the ability of the library to reflect breadth and depth and meet needs across multiple disciplines. "The collecting we all do [has] varying repercussions, private and public" (Tanselle 1999, 50). Benjamin referred to personal book collections when he said the most important fate of a copy is its encounter with a collection, and the acquisition of a title is its "rebirth" ([1931] 1999, 22), but it is possible to extrapolate this idea to an institutional context. The intense need to retain is at the heart of regard for private and public collections and, one can argue, library acquisition signals continued rebirth from an individual title to a

part of a collection. Library books also are continuously reborn because they circulate to many readers. Acquisition, collection, circulation, and reading are acts of consumption. Scholars of material culture frequently study patterns of consumption, how goods flow through a community, culture, or marketplace, as indicators of their value (Bronner 1989). Part of the affective attachment to library collections is the feeling of comfort that the books are there, and should remain there, ready to circulate. Economist Marina Bianchi also asserts that collections by nature are never closed because of an “inextinguishable desire” to build (1997, 284). Part of the emotional lure of libraries is the thrill and promise of continual acquisition: deaccessioning invokes ire because it is antithetical to this potential.

The extensive literature on personal book collecting is a separate field of inquiry, but many individuals who respond emotionally to library deaccessioning do so in part because they are avid collectors themselves. Numerous collectors describe an almost boundless need to acquire, and a concurrent wrenching sadness if space or other circumstances dictate downsizing (Best 2012). These personal perspectives can translate seamlessly to attitudes toward the library environment: libraries preserve, and deaccessioning is alarming and painful. Book collectors are often frenzied in their desire to attain comprehensive collections, and librarians often set up extensive approval plans to acquire as many new publications as possible across key fields. Authors such as Elizabeth Bowman who study book collectors report interviewees whose voices deepen with “passion” and quicken with an “adrenaline rush” when discussing favorite books (2001, 2). Bowman further concludes that a rise among African Americans in collecting black authors occurred as one way to acknowledge and preserve underrepresented histories and cultures. This is one example of the deeply self-referential nature of book collecting. Collections must be seen. When Walter Benjamin’s books were packed in boxes rather than on shelves, he lamented, “I cannot march up and down their ranks to pass them in review before a friendly audience” ([1931] 1999, 21). Books must be present.

Librarians and patrons feel strongly about library spaces and collections because big changes challenge the definition and identity of libraries. If the library is at the heart of an academic institution, what is at the heart of the library? For over two decades, academic libraries have been at the center of debates over print vs. online collections, and status as repositories vs. access points. Political discourse in any arena can evoke strong feelings, and changes to libraries involve politics of space. As library professionals we operate on a dialectic that celebrates the contemporary academic library as “third place” for collaboration and access but also requires responding to members of our scholarly communities, often including ourselves, to continue to find ways to make room for print collections,

either on-site or off. An additional challenge within the politics of space arises because libraries are large buildings and many college campuses need more room to accommodate growth and new initiatives. Administrators therefore often look to the library to give up space to other purposes (Thibodeau 2010). Librarians often take a “guardian at the portal” stance in response to shrinking space, and few emotions are as strong as a need to protect something meaningful. When librarians react emotionally to a loss of library space, it also evokes fear that the library’s purpose has been forgotten or devalued. Concurrently, when libraries are able to reclaim their own space through deaccessioning, it can incite fierce debate as to what use of the new space is worthy of the sacrifice of print volumes.

Private and public book collecting are implicitly and explicitly intellectual endeavors. Collections are the outward expression of a mind or minds at work. This is serious business, which accounts for some of the strong feelings around discarding books. Interestingly, it also accounts for a backlash against the use of books solely as decoration. Historian Megan Benton has chronicled a backlash among American intellectuals in the 1920s against the “dubious” use of books in the home for decoration rather than erudition, and that for the critics of the use of books merely as things, “nothing less than civilization itself” was at stake (1997, 289). Arguably, the same debate is alive and well today in home-décor magazines that picture coffee-table books as plant and lampstands, with the books and the information they contain inaccessible under the items for which they serve as pedestals, or lifestyle Websites such as *Pinterest* that show books arranged by size or color for decorative effect. The essential function of books as objects for intellectual improvement accounts for some of the vehemence of the emotions surrounding their use, discarding, or repurposing. Book collections are iterative in ways that other types of collections are not. They are minds amassing the work of other minds: the collective intellectual endeavor represented is weighty, as are the feelings around it.

The minds and emotions at work play out regularly in library workflows. When Olin Library at Rollins College weeded twelve dumpsters full of bound periodicals in the summer of 2018, the library faculty and staff engaged in a retreat to discuss potential uses for the areas from which shelves were removed. The inclusive meeting was a critical activity because so many individuals within the library had strong feelings about the best use of reclaimed space. The opinions were strong because the feelings were strong, and it was crucial to make room for them (Olin Library “Space Retreat” report to the author, July 26, 2018). The final decision divides the new spaces between additional seats for quiet study and more room for new print books for the disciplines that continue to rely on them: History, Art History, and English. The form and function of Olin Library, like those at many other institutions, is the physical embodiment of the past vs. future dialectic. Collaborative work spaces, creative labs,

and computer-heavy spaces for accessing electronic collections are on two floors, while two upper floors offer quiet study environments surrounded by carefully curated print collections that are mission-driven to reflect curricular needs. The library faculty and staff members strongly and cogently justify the need for these varied spaces, and emotions are at the heart of some of the decisions. Affective responses derive from the human notion of “heart.” Feelings reside in the “heart and libraries exist at the heart of the communities they serve” (Cowell 2015). As libraries negotiate the past vs. future dialectic, a central goal is to keep the heart beating and remain viable to the communities they serve.

THE IMPACT OF E-BOOKS

Library spaces and print books matter, and the rise of electronic books have impacted both. Technological advancements, therefore, are inseparable from an analysis of affective responses to reading and information access. E-books are now gaining in ubiquity every day in library collections for popular and academic reading based on continuous improvements to platforms and accessibility, but emotional attachment to print books accounts for some of the slow and sporadic adoption of e-books over the last two decades. Early scholars of e-books cited the electronic book’s inability to “take on and radiate the patina of our relationships” with print books, and predicted that the most important advance would be the development of screen technology to replicate actual print pages (Dorman 1999, 36). Authors and readers continue to reflect, “The feel and look of a book mean too much to me” (Mott 2012, 530). Many readers argue for a preference for print books, and such statements of meaning contain a depth of emotional attachment. Contemporary college curricula include multimodal assignments, but print text is one mode that remains alive and well, despite recurring predictions that print books will disappear. Professors in many disciplines continue to require students to hone their research skills by finding resources in print as well as electronic sources. Academic librarians also work assiduously when deaccessioning to ensure that the same or similar information discarded in print is available electronically. Print books and periodicals continue to endure and inform collections through their retention in new formats, and the extent of preweeding analyses testifies to the depths to which librarians care about libraries as repositories. Librarians worry about information loss.

In the popular-reading arena, independent bookstores endure, rally, and remain viable as resources and centers of discourse about books. E-books and readers are convenient and portable, but interestingly, ease and access have not effected the complete demise of print books (Gallager and Bohme 2009). Many individuals remain attached to books as physical objects and cite an enduring attachment to their feel and smell (Brosius 2006). As to the latter, a wealth of scientific research supports the power

of smell to affect emotions. Sight is an equally important sense that contributes to a love of physical books. E-books are invisible rather than displayed. They cannot provide the physical assurance that information and entertainment are readily available that shelves of books convey. Within a library, perusing an online catalog is an individual, title-by-title pursuit, even when a search results in lists of hundreds or thousands. Aisles of full bookshelves readily indicate strength in numbers; the promise of discovery of related titles.

Implicit in the inability for electronic books to fully transplant print are a reverence for the book as an enduring now-historical artifact, as well as a rising distrust of the ephemeral nature of some digital technologies. Memory-studies scholar Andreas Huyssen has identified a common anxiety in all of us about what is lost through rapidly changing digital environments (Huyssen 2000). The anxiety about loss of information can translate into an often intense desire to save books, or to ensure libraries save them. Those who revere print books believe they are saving and perpetuating something that will last into the future, and this is also an essential confidence placed in libraries.

NOSTALGIA AND LOSS

The rise of electronic resources within library collections evokes strong feelings of loss that feed and intensify the love of print books. At the center of the feelings of loss is nostalgia, a powerful emotion; an “amorphous” but “propulsive force” (Kitson and McHugh 2015, 489). The essence of nostalgia is a love for the past; a fear of losing the past coupled with a desire to regain or retain it. Human beings act out feelings of nostalgia in a variety of ways, but one predominate activity involves surrounding oneself with objects that confirm that the past is still with us materially, and that stave off the sense of impending “lost temporalities” (Chrostowska 2010, 64). Nostalgia in materialistic societies frequently involves “the sensory contact of bodies and things,” and at its heart is a strong emotional sense that drives us to use objects to reduce a distance that “cannot be bridged” (Kitson and McHugh 2015, 490). Think about our contemporary material world where “vintage” or “retro” are part of our shared design and linguistic discourse, or the expansive trade in buying and gifting souvenirs and other objects of memory. Material culture scholars work to demonstrate that objects serve as signs and symbols that can communicate social values, status, and priorities, and that objects provide meaning because the material world involves choices that members of a culture make and recognize as part of shared experience (Upton 1983). Feelings of nostalgia often involve a shared identity and desire to collect, preserve, and display the material past, particularly in the face of change (Cashman 2006).

Nostalgia is one of the principle driving forces within the broad community of book and library lovers. The ire expressed at deaccessioning

is rooted in fear of loss of the library as a repository of shared knowledge, and concern that the libraries of the past where one could surround oneself with books will no longer exist. Print collections look backward. Electronic resources by their nature look forward. Libraries collect prior work, which is central to their value and impact, but the format matters to the community of bibliophiles. Book lovers share an identity that values books as symbols of permanence in the face of change, and engaging in behavior to lament or save collections, even indiscriminate of specific titles, readily communicates membership. The emotions of fear and loss as components of nostalgia are at the root of the shared identity. Walter Benjamin reasoned eloquently that a personal library is a pure extension of the self ([1931] 1999, 28). I have argued that books signify personal and institutional identities as material expressions of minds at work and collected knowledge. Objects have great affective power, and our relationship with them is often multidimensional. We imbue them with meaning and draw meaning from them through choice, collection, and display. Books and affect are at the center of a bibliophile's world, as is a desire for permanence in the face of rapid change.

THE LIBRARY AS MICROCOSM OF AFFECTIVE ATTACHMENT TO OBJECTS

Books are emotional touchstones as cultural signifiers, which is why it is hard to throw them away, or see them thrown away, but deaccessioning is at the heart of library stewardship. While necessary for considerations of collection currency and space, part of the feelings of unease weeding generates stems from the act of throwing out years and decades of volumes that were carefully purchased, retained, and maintained. When weeding, finding a half-inch of dust on an old volume of bound periodicals provides reassurance that the decision to discard was sound: the positive reinforcement helps with the difficult act of throwing away books. While deaccessioning, it also is impossible not to reflect on the past budget allocations and expenditures that went into building a collection. It is unsettling to discard past purchases while working to be a good steward of current funds. Weeding is arguably less concerning when it takes place to replace old, worn books with new copies of the same titles. New replacements help create shelves that invite browsing, a part of the research and discovery process that many scholars mourn in online collections. Weeding and spending are more palatable when the end product is use, not absence. Discarding in contemporary culture also inevitably involves concerns with the environmental impact of throwing books away. In the summer of 2018 at Rollins College, passersby stopped at the dumpsters filled with old bound periodicals and yelled, "I hope you're at least recycling those books"! This thought created feelings of inadequacy, even though the books from less extensive weeding projects consistently go back to the

reading community through resellers such as Better World Books. The project was essential to gain the collection currency and space we needed, but had we explored every option? Recycling and minimizing harm to the environment was not enough to mitigate the feelings of loss occasioned by discarding books, regardless of what we gained. The library life cycle, like the human one, is vulnerable to emotions at every stage.

Librarians need to make room for these feelings as we go about our work and consider the patrons and communities we serve. The emotions around books and libraries are strong enough that we need to be mindful of them as we plan deaccessions, renovations, space reconfigurations, and new buildings. Many of us have experienced negative press over weeding, or situations where students or other patrons have discovered discarded books in a dumpster and intervened in the deaccession process (Smith 2019). While promotion of activities often falls to the bottom of the list in library environments that are typically busy and understaffed, explanatory public relations campaigns will help avoid or mitigate the backlash that many of us have experienced when patrons discover weeded materials. Part of the criticism of the proposed Obama Presidential Center stems from a slow trickle of information that one critic said creates “a fog about what this thing actually is” (Schussler 2019). Fog rolls in quickly within a maelstrom of strong emotions. Activities such as advance notice, media and social media statements that detail the judicious nature of deaccessioning and the positive gains that will result, and giving patrons the option to take books away in institutions where donations are possible may instill some reason into the affective atmosphere around deaccessioning. In trying to counter the criticisms of the Obama Presidential Center, Meredith R. Evans, director of the Jimmy Carter Library and Museum said sagely, “Let’s give the digital a try before giving in to dismay” (Schuessler 2019). In the day-to-day work of library collection management, anticipating and making room for the impending dismay around change may be the answer. Librarians are book lovers, too. Perhaps modeling and eliciting an emotional intelligence of weeding is in order.

Acquiring, using, and discarding volumes in academic libraries mirrors the wider cycle of human interaction with objects. Consumerism, related to consumption, the economic cycle of acquiring, using, and discarding goods, is a central facet of much of human existence. Material culture scholars study the cultural determinants around these activities because the availability, purchase, saving, and discarding of objects reveals who we are (Bronner 1989). Libraries are microcosmic of this cycle. This study has entailed “reading” books within a cycle of consumption led by libraries and book lovers to better understand the often-intense affective attachment to them. As humans we consume books and are consumed by them. “We may think our collections are our own, but we are theirs as well” (Plotz 1999, 478). Our attachments to books evoke strong adjectives such as *avid*

and *passionate*; our efforts around books involve intense feelings that compel us to protect rather than sacrifice. There is an essential humanism to our relationship to books. They embody the thoughts of others, and the cycle of collections inevitably revolves around the most basic feelings of love and loss.

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