Ruth Monnier, Matthew Noe, and Ella Gibson

AI in Academic Libraries, Part Two

Resistance and the Search for Ethical Uses

Academic Library Workers in Conversation is a C&RL News series focused on elevating the everyday conversations of library professionals. The wisdom of the watercooler has long been heralded, but this series hopes to go further by minimizing barriers to traditional publishing with an accessible format. Each of the topics in the series were proposed by the authors and they were given space to explore. This issue's conversation is the second of two parts that will discuss generative AI and the many concerns that the authors already see playing out in their organizations.—*Dustin Fife, series editor*

Ruth Monnier: We have talked about the concerns that are most urgent about generative AI and its adoption. How can individuals push back, encourage slow intentional adoption, or completely resist generative AI? Do you agree with Violet Fox's recommendations in her zine titled *A Librarian Against AI; or, I Think AI Should Leave*[1]?

Matthew Noe: I love Violet's zine so much; I'm currently giving it out to students during our monthly zine workshops as an example! I think all of her recommendations have merit, but the ones I've been most engaged with are *opt out*, *ask questions*, and *harsh the buzz*. Opt out is pretty straightforward. As of this interview, I have still never knowingly used ChatGPT and as much as possible avoid engaging with the built-in AI tools showing up everywhere. This tactic is going to become increasingly difficult unless/until the world is convinced that embedding environmentally destructive nonsense machines into everything is a bad idea, but refusing to use it is a key step along the way, I think.

Ruth: Yes! It is so hard to avoid using it and even when you don't want to. I have been adding "-ai" to all my search engine queries. What an annoying extra step for a product change that no one asked for!

Matthew: As for asking questions and harshing the buzz, my approach kind of combines the two. Every opportunity I have, I am asking *why* I should want to use generative AI, reminding people about the environmental cost (and asking how it squares with our sustainability commitments), and generally being skeptical of the idea that if only we learn to use this technology, we'll "save ourselves" from obsoletion. US Census data suggests we've lost nearly 80,000 librarian positions since 2006, and the trend has been almost universally downward over that period.[2] Over that same period of time, we've been chasing the hype cycle from one thing to another, and I'd hardly call doing so a success for the profession. Let's learn from past mistakes and focus on our core values, our core missions, and not give our jobs over to technology that tries, and fails, to do what we do.

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Ruth: Librarians are so important to creating communities and providing human connection—in the research process and beyond. Technology cannot create a relationship; it may facilitate, but it does not create.

Ella Gibson: Matthew and Ruth, in my opinion, at this point fully opting out or even avoiding is really hard. It's integrated into so many things that sometimes I don't even realize it. Or I'm seeing faculty across campus encourage students to use it as part of their assignments and then students come to me asking questions. If it's from their professor, I can't really say no to following the instructions. I'm not sure either if faculty realize that students don't understand the risks of using AI and then come to others who are equally lost.

Ruth: Ask questions and harsh the buzz are great options for those who don't want to be known as AI resisters or luddites, unlike you, Matthew, and I! One way to harsh the buzz is refusal to interact with generative AI media (images, videos, etc.) or things that appear to be created with generative AI. Engagement runs the algorithms, so lack of engagement could be slightly helpful. Another thing I tried during Giving Tuesday was to ask organizations what funds I could donate to that did not intentionally use or support generative AI usage. Asking questions of vendors and organizations is a way to push back and show that individuals are not interested in generative AI being a part of everything. We should be advocates for policies that promote clarity about informed consent and data usage from course syllabi and class assignments to IRB projects and employers' surveys. Power dynamics can be hard to navigate, and having clear policies help the less powerful. It should be known if any provided information (data) will or will not be used as generative AI inputs and training.

Matthew: We've talked about our concerns and a little about where our institutions are with this technology. What would you all like to see from our professional organizations on this topic? So far, I just keep seeing a lot of webinars on adopting it as quickly as possible… surely we can ask for better?

Ruth: From librarian organizations, I have seen webinars, conferences, and even taskforces dedicated to supporting generative AI usage. Any mention of the ethics or concerns (including FERPA compliance) is brief and frequently at the end. To the point where it feels like the expectation is that busy and overworked individuals need to investigate harms and ethics on their own time. I agree 100 percent with you, Matthew; we can and should ask for better. Critical thinking is a part of our job, and it does not seem that we are critically adapting this technology. Generative AI is a collective problem for society, so at a bare minimum, organizations must provide space and oxygen for resisters of generative AI.

Ella: I'm seeing a lot of the same things as you, Ruth, and for me, I'd like to see more thought put into why we're having some of these conversations on supporting generative AI and what its adoption means for users. When I was a teacher, I felt like we were still having conversations about the pros and cons of having learners adopt and use different educational technologies. Most of these tools too had been around longer than AI, and the conversations about the implications for student use were more intense in consideration to potential harms. It just seems like the excitement for something new is superseding common sense and that professional organizations and others are essentially promoting that too.

Ruth: When I obtained my bachelor's in education, it was emphasized how important it was to build a classroom community and personal relationships with students. Yet, as you mentioned, Ella, there are still ongoing discussions about current educational technologies and tools before we add in the generative AI integration to those tools and separate

generative AI tools. The constant, invasive surveillance via technology[3] in education detracts from creating authentic relationships. And this on top of the decline in critical thinking and cognitive offloading being discussed in the profession right now.[4]

Matthew: Right! And this isn't a problem limited to just generative AI technology. We've seen evidence that overreliance on things like GPS can have negative impacts on spatial awareness, wayfinding, and multiple types of memory.[5]

Ruth: Technology, in general, but especially generative AI, is helping society lose touch-points of human connection and, in general, thinking skills. Why should I need to use generative AI to figure out what I want to eat for the week?

Ella: Obviously, Ruth, you need AI to make your grocery list because you just can't do it yourself. In all seriousness, though, along that line of thinking, at what point is this data being recorded or saved? Who needs to know what I'm eating or how I'm wanting to write a letter? Why is this being tracked? What is it eventually going to be used for?

Ruth: As a resistor, luddite, and lamplighter on generative AI, frequently I am asked: Would you ever (knowingly) use generative AI? Personally, I feel when this question is asked, it is a reframe of the webinars and topics of "How to ethically use generative AI [product name]" and those who ask might believe that there are ways to ethically use an unethical technology. How would you answer that question, Matthew and Ella?

Matthew: I get this kind of "Well, what about xyz" response constantly, Ruth! Depending on the setting, and the asker, I take one of two approaches to answering. If I think they are asking in good faith, I'm willing to entertain any and all scenarios and discuss potential *good* uses of generative AI. For example, right now I can't think of a scenario in which I would want to use this technology in librarianship, but if I switched lenses to drug development, I can imagine the *potential* value of this technology. "Potential" is a key word here though, since many of the proclaimed victories of this technology have been hyped-up and/or outright misinformation. If, as is more often the case, I'm being asked these questions by someone who either just wants to win an argument or is trying to force adoption on me (two approaches we might call bad faith), I stick to the high-level objections I have: notably, that the environmental and labor costs of this technology as we stare down climate change mean I am not interested.

Ella: Ruth and Matthew, I'm not sure if I've ever been asked this, and honestly, I've tried to engage as much as possible because I want to know as much as possible. I have used Co-pilot at work, but it's led to too many questions of security and privacy and other concerns for me to want to use it expansively. It's a weird conundrum though. It's not in any of my workflows though, and I definitely don't see myself doing anything actively with AI, especially in my instruction practices. I know I'm interacting with it as a byproduct of others' use and in connection to other work though.

Ruth: Ella, I understand it isn't currently in your workflows and we sometimes interact through others' workflows, but I think there are too many ways that we are perpetuating harms and biases built into the training data and the lack of consent in all the processes.[6] Because of the lack of consent in gathering the data and purposely ignoring people's intentions and copyright by scraping the open web, I really worry about another Henrietta Lacks situation where the continuation of harm is unknown and the lasting impact of that.[7]

Matthew: Now, the possible value of generative AI as an adaptive technology is one thing that gives me pause. For my own part, I'm not convinced that the benefits outweigh the

harms right now, but there are others in the disabled communities who think the benefits are worth it. I hope to see more discussion about this in the future—we need it desperately—but I caution anyone against making broad statements about how disabled folks feel about generative AI. There isn't *one* view, and stereotyped thinking isn't going to help anyone.

Ruth: How do you feel when you see things like from Zoom "This meeting is being transcribed for AI Companion" and the only option is to click "Ok"? There is no way to know who is using it or to opt out of it. Just like when I saw on a report from a DigitalCommons repository referral on my published work came from perplexity.ai—negative to zero excitement.

Ella: I mean, it's either you can't opt out, or you're automatically opted in and you don't even know it. I think it was LinkedIn that automatically enrolled me in their "Data for Generative AI Improvement"? Why would I want you to collect even more data from me than I already know you collect?

Matthew: So true, Ella, and if I had one final thought, or plea, to readers it would be this: seek consent in professional spaces before you enable AI tools. While we might disagree about the value of generative AI, or how it interacts with many of our professions' core values, I don't think anyone can deny that these tools pose major privacy risks, and it should be up to each individual whether to take that risk or not. So, before you enable whatever AI companion you've got in mind for virtual meetings, for editing a paper, or for summarizing a conversation, ask and receive consent from every person involved. And respect their answer. ⁊

Notes

1. Violet Fox, *A Librarian Against AI; or, I Think AI Should Leave* [zine], November 2024, https://violetbfox.info/against-ai/.

2. DPE Research Department, "Library Professionals: Facts & Figures," *Department for Professional Employees (DPE) AFL-CIO*, 2024, https://www.dpeaflcio.org/factsheets/library-professionals-facts-and-figures#_ftn1.

3. "Studying Under Surveillance: The Securitisation of Learning," *PrivacyInternational (PI)*, November 7, 2024, https://privacyinternational.org/long-read/5463/studying-under-surveillance-securitisation-learning.

4. M. Gerlich, "AI Tools in Society: Impacts on Cognitive Offloading and the Future of Critical Thinking," *Societies* 15, no. 1 (2025), https://doi.org/10.3390/soc15010006.

5. Louisa Dahmani and Veronique D. Bohbot, "Habitual Use of GPS Negatively Impacts Spatial Memory During Self-Guided Navigation," *Scientific Reports* 10, no. 6310 (2020): 1–14, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-62877-0; Rebecca Solnit, "I told you it was bad. Paper maps are good. Winging it is good. Getting mildly lost is also good" Facebook post, July 6, 2022, https://www.facebook.com/rebecca.solnit/posts/pfbid02DMWkjpbvYJt-3V6pC71zvMonHDoxLEJ5NpzvZP2YSWPV6C2LR7Ac55jSczVVC7sfHl.

6. Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (NYU Press, 2018).

7. Rebecca Skoolt, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (Crown, 2011).

GLSEN. *Access:* https://www.glsen.org/.

Founded by a group of teachers in 1990, GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network) was formed to support student-led activism and movements for LGBTQ+ rights, spawning initiatives such as the Day of Silence and Ally Week. The organization's website serves to inform about the organization, but more importantly, shares the resources they have developed over their thirty-five-year history.

Under the "Our Work" tab, users will find the information from the GLSEN Research Institute quite useful. A robust collection spanning two decades, one can find reports and briefs on the national, state, and local level. GLSEN provides a report card for each state, rating their policies and practices on a wide range of areas related to education and access. From basic laws preventing discrimination to inclusive curricula, the report cards provide an overall grade for each state. Last reported in 2021, the overall map provides a grim assessment overall, with half of the states receiving a D or an F. In addition to the extensive reports, the site also provides information on how to get involved as an advocate through local chapters and actions throughout the United States.

There have been few times in recent history when the queer community was in the crosshairs of the United States government than it is now. Much of political fear mongering has focused on education and dismantling policies that ensure safe and equitable schools for LGBTQ+ students and allies. At a time when unbiased research on the LGBTQ+ community is being erased from government pages, it is vital to have independent organizations like GLSEN to fill the void. —*Bart Everts, Rutgers University Libraries, bart.everts@rutgers.edu*

National Organization for Rare Disorders. *Access:* https://rarediseases.org/.

The National Organization for Rare Disorders (NORD) is a nonprofit organization created to connect patients/caregivers of patients suffering from a rare disorder with medical professionals, support groups, clinical trials, researchers, and financial assistance options. The intended user and primary client of this site is the patient. NORD provides access to information about rare diseases and a directory of certified medical practitioners so the patient knows where to get expert help. Also provided are links allowing users to search for clinical trials that might offer some relief of symptoms and support groups for specific diseases. The site provides information for finding certified caregiver aid and financial assistance for treatments and medications.

Like most nonprofit organizations, an important part of NORD's revenue stream is donations, and the "Donate" button is prominently displayed on the website. NORD also receives funding from grants, membership dues, conferences, and events. "About Us" gives the user access to the organization's vision and mission statements, history, leadership, board directory, and financial information for the past several years. It also lists NORD's Scientific and Medical Advisory Committee comprised of physicians and researchers who are the organization's resident experts on rare diseases.

Academic researchers and students may find the NORD Rare Disease Database useful. It is searchable or can be browsed by alphabetical order. Records include a brief description of

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the disease with a list of available synonyms. Diseases with an asterisk have more detailed NORD Rare Disease Reports written by medical professionals for viewing. Reports include an extend summary/overview of the disease, a brief history, a list of programs and resources, and patient organizations. One of the options under the "Advancing Research" tab for researchers is "request for proposals" and a list of partners that may be willing to provide funding for research involving rare diseases. NORD partners with health-care professionals to provide Continuing Medical Education courses on rare diseases. —*Meredith Ayers, Northern Illinois University, mayers@niu.edu*

A Vision of Britain Through Time. *Access:* https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/.

Created by Humphrey Southall and the Great Britain Historical Geographical Information System project, A Vision of Britain Through Time is an aggregated collection of statistical, geographical, and historical information about Great Britain.

A Vision of Britain is a wealth of knowledge, with access to statistical information from British census information dating back to 1801. Users can search by place from the homepage or click on areas from a map of Britain. Census data is available up to 1971. (For more up-to-date data, please visit the British census website.) Census reports are organized by year and geography. Term searching through multiple census years is available, and results are listed in chronological order. The statistical tables are generated in HTML and are simple to read. Full raw data downloads can be accessed in CSV format for more advanced analyses. Census topics include population, industry, social structure, poverty, housing, and more. Having familiarity with the website is very helpful; novice users may need to take some time browsing in order to find information.

One of the more intriguing features is the plethora of maps hosted by A Vision of Britain. Users can access maps that are color-coded based on historical demographic statistics like birthrates, employment, and other census information. Geographical maps are also available. These maps have an interactive feel, as users can zoom in and out. More specific maps appear and reveal more granular information as users zoom closer into areas they are interested in. The variety of maps includes topographic, boundary, and land use maps. Detailed charts and graphs that tell a narrative about life in Great Britain over a period of time are also available. Individual counties and other places have statistical visuals available that can be used to compare regions with national trends.

Adding to the narrative nature of A Vision of Britain are the "Travel writing" and "Learning zone" components of the site. These sections feature samples of historical writing from famous authors and include a search option. The "Learning zone" has constructed presentations that explain the data, and it provides some background context to the information. Having these excerpts and narrative features makes the site more of a historical encyclopedia rather than a site to ingest and export demographic data.

Overall, A Vision of Britain offers a fascinating wealth of information that is simple to navigate. Some data is missing or unavailable for select geographies. The functionality is perfect for those doing light research or those who struggle to generate data from advanced census tools. —*Christopher M. Hulsman, SUNY Buffalo State University, hulsmacm@buffalostate.edu* ✌