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Information Services within the Addictions Field: An Interview with Andrea L. Mitchell, MLS

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Introduction

An elaborate network of addiction studies libraries and databases were created to support the rise of modern addiction treatment in the United States. The librarians and information specialists who manage these resources represent a hidden dimension of America's response to alcohol and other drug problems. Rarely receiving the public or professional recognition they deserve, these individuals and the resources they command stand as the repositories of the field's history, science, and clinical wisdom. Unfortunately, these addiction studies libraries and databases have been disappearing at an alarming rate. In December of 2013, I had the opportunity to interview Andrea Mitchell, one of the leaders within this arena, about the evolution of information services within the addictions field and the recent erosion of such services. Please join us in this conversation.

Early Career

Bill White: Andrea, after getting your degree at the University of California at Berkeley, you began work at the Alcohol Research Group. Could you tell me how that opportunity arose?

Andrea Mitchell: Yes, it was very strange. I had graduated from Berkeley and went off to Europe for six months to travel and when I came back in February, my job at the Survey Research Center on the campus at Berkeley had been defunded. Dave Nasatir, who was the head of the Center's data library, told me that he would keep an eye out for any positions that might be of interest to me. Shortly after that, Dave called me and said, "Hey, I hear there's a job over at a research center called the Social Research Group. Why don't you apply?" Robin Room interviewed me, and I started on April 1, 1971.

Bill White: In addition to Robin, I associate that organization with such prominent names in our field as Don Cahalan, Genevieve Knupfer, Ron Roizen, Connie Weisner and Lee Ann Kaskutas, to name just a few. What was it like working with such a group of individuals?

Andrea Mitchell: As far as the center was concerned, the years that were the most exciting for me were the '70s and the '80s. What became the Alcohol Research Group was first called the Social Research Group. Those were the years, as you mentioned, that Don Cahalan was the Director, and Robin Room, Ron Roizen, Kaye Fillmore, and Walt Clark were the scientists who were doing research. They worked well together in those days and there was camaraderie in the group. We also had pre-docs or pre-law people, folks like Harry Levine, Larry Wallack, and Jim Mosher. This was a very exciting time for the field theoretically, and the Social Research Group

was way out there in left field. We were even referred to as “renegades” in Conrad and Schneider's *Medicalization of Deviance*, 1st edition, because we did not subscribe to the disease notion. That view made us very different in those days.

Those years for me were the most exciting and the most challenging. We ran a graduate seminar at the School of Public Health at UC Berkeley and Don Cahalan was bringing in people from all over the country to lecture. The focus of our seminars spanned history, theory, treatment, and policy. My primary role was as a research and administrative assistant for the course. For the treatment-focused quarter, I placed students in various job sites around the Bay Area.

When Don retired in '78, Robin Room became the Director, and there were many exciting things still happening. Some of the people that came in later as post-docs or visiting scholars, such as Craig Reinerman, Jessica Warner, and Paul Lemmens, were great to meet and work with, precisely because they were scholars and were always in the library.

Bill White: Could you describe a little more about your role and how it evolved over time?

Andrea Mitchell: When I was originally hired in 1971, I had no intentions of being a librarian. I was hired as a Research Assistant. Don Cahalan, who was very fatherly towards me, wanted me to go to graduate school, but I did not want to go back to school right away. The Research Assistantship job was really exciting, and I did a lot of things that librarians do. I was sent to the library to create bibliographies on different topics that the group was researching, but I had no intention of being a librarian. What happened is that the person who had served as the librarian left at about the time I was hired so I found myself ordering the journal subscriptions and ordering books that were needed. Then it turned out that books and other articles we were collecting needed to be catalogued. With Robin's help, and looking at the cataloguing that had been done before me, I soon was engaging in that activity as a regular part of my job.

I had not had any training to do this stuff. So what happened is that one of the people hired to assist me was at the Library School at Berkeley. She said to me one day, “Andrea, you should go to Library School. So I did and found that I loved it. It was all so relevant to what I had been doing at the Social Research Group. I worked full time with time off to go to class doing my homework at night, being at the library school lab until all hours with all the other students who were also working and going to school, and it just changed my life. I graduated two years later, and I felt like my life was soaring. I had this great job and was part of building this great library collection of alcohol and other drug materials.

SALIS

Bill White: Through the ensuing years, you began to develop a network of relationships with other librarians and information specialists—a network that was later formalized in the creation of Substance Abuse Librarians and Information Specialists (SALIS).

Andrea Mitchell: The woman who spearheaded the creation of SALIS was Jane Bemko. She was at Baylor at the Texas Mental Health Research Institute and part of the Career Teachers. She received funding from NIDA to bring together a group of librarians in the alcohol and drug problems field. I remember Robin Room coming back from a conference in South Carolina and telling me about this conference that was being planned for Houston, Texas, and that he wanted

me to go. So in Houston, Texas, in '78, this group of approximately 25 librarians decided we should form a network and call ourselves, "Substance Abuse Librarians and Information Specialists." And that's how that started.

Bill White: As you reflect back over the work of all of those people who were part of SALIS, how would you describe the role of the Information Specialists in supporting advancements in the field?

Andrea Mitchell: Information specialists are sometimes in quite ambiguous roles. I worked at the Alcohol Research Group and in the library for seven years before I actually had the official document that allowed me to call myself, "Librarian," and there were others who worked in these institutes who did not have library degrees. But they definitely had the experience and the expertise, and that's why we called the organization "librarians and information specialists." George Marcel, who was the NCA information person for so long and who had such a deep knowledge of alcohol policy, is a good example. I think many of them had the expertise and the experience as the formerly trained librarians. This network really expanded when the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention set up RADAR. The RADAR (Regional Alcohol and Drug Abuse Resources) Centers were designated by CSAP to distribute the documents created by the SAMHSA, NIDA, and NIAAA agencies. There was one official RADAR center designated for most states in the US, and then there were Specialty Centers, which did not distribute documents, but were considered centers of excellence with regard to AOD information, as most had special AOD libraries.

Bill White: Do you think SALIS played an extremely important role in really professionalizing information services within the field?

Andrea Mitchell: Yes, particularly through the early work of places like Rutgers and the Addiction Research Foundation. Those were the two big centers.

One of the first projects of SALIS was to create the directory of libraries and information services in the world. That was a labor of love on my part. The 5th and last edition published in 1991 contained information on almost 200 libraries and information centers in the world, and an additional listing of nearly 500 organizations concerned with AOD matters. Following that, SALIS advocated for a thesaurus to assist with cataloguing as well as online searching, and to make the NIAAA alcohol science database publicly accessible. We were successful in both of these endeavors.

Changing Technologies

Bill White: What are your thoughts about the tremendous changes that have gone on in the science and technologies now available to information specialists?

Andrea Mitchell: Penny Page, former librarian at Rutgers Center for Alcohol Studies, wrote an interesting piece for *SALIS News* on her retirement. She talked about how, when she first came to Rutgers, they were still using the print-based indexes and abstracting sources to do bibliographic searches. That resonated for me because in my early years at ARG, I used to go out to the UC Berkeley Libraries to do searches using the print indexes of Psychological Abstracts and Index

Medicus. And then there were the library catalog cards, which in the early days before we had computers, had to be typed using a typewriter. If you had a source with three subjects, you had to type three subject cards. You also had to have author cards and a title card. God forbid if the material had more than one author, and then they all had to be filed. With computers, so much changed. When you made the record for a book or any item you were cataloguing, you only had to type it once; and there was no filing!!

I brought in the first real computer to the Alcohol Research Group in 1982. Before that, ARG used word processors. It was a big deal because it was actually capable of creating a network arrangement where we could link up to eight computers. But we didn't; we only had one. Networked computers would not come until many years later. But that made a tremendous difference in that the scientists could actually search the library catalog from their offices. And for the library, the new online searching meant that we could do bibliographic searches from our desks, using all of the many bibliographic databases available at UC Berkeley, and other catalogs in the US and elsewhere.

Bill White: In the '70s and '80s, NIAAA and NIDA were key sources of information to policy people, scientists, and practitioners. How have you seen their role change over the years?

Andrea Mitchell: They were much more interested in information then than they are now. NIDA and NIAAA once had fully functioning clearinghouses or libraries and their own in-house bibliographic databases. When you wanted to get a search done, you would phone the clearinghouse and request a search on such-and-such and they would say, "Okay, we'll send you the material." You would get a box in the mail with reams of printouts. That's how you got the searches from NIAAA. NIDA actually had several computer hubs where you could go and search their database.

Bill White: It seems strange to me that, as much as the research at NIAAA and NIDA has expanded, the actual information dissemination functions have shrunk over the years.

Andrea Mitchell: That's so true. Compared to earlier decades, NIAAA and NIDA are much less interested in information dissemination. The dismantling of the NIAAA ETOH (alcohol science) bibliographic database and the closure of the NIDA and NIAAA libraries are all indicators of that.

Bill White: For me, the closure of the information services through NIDA and NIAAA and the various clearinghouses feels like we're destroying the history of the field underneath our feet.

Andrea Mitchell: I couldn't agree with you more. And from comments by historians such as Virginia Berridge, Nancy Campbell, and yourself, on the *Collective Amnesia* article in *Addiction* (<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1360-0443.2012.03813.x/pdf>), it does seem to be the case. The ephemeral reports, newsletters, and other "gray literature" of the field are disappearing. The SALIS advocacy committee has been monitoring the closures and downsizing of libraries and information centers since 2004. I think people would be shocked to see the list of more than twenty-five library/information center closures. One can only wonder what has happened to all the materials, the books and documents, newsletters and journals from those libraries and clearinghouses.

Bill White: Do you see this depletion of the information resources as part of a larger erosion of infrastructure of the addiction treatment field?

Andrea Mitchell: I do, and this is what's so sad, Bill. These libraries and information databases have supported many of the frontline people in the treatment arena, and these resources are just disappearing. This is why SALIS got involved with the Internet Archive to digitize books and documents, because they have the equipment and expertise. It's going to take time, but our goal is to digitize every book in the alcohol and other drug field. We're going to do it one way or another.

Bill White: That's quite a vision.

Andrea Mitchell: That's our goal. That's just a tiny subdivision of Brewster Kahle's vision, which is to have a webpage and digital copy of every book ever published. They are going to be a public library on the internet. You will be able to borrow the digitized copy for two weeks. If the Internet Archive owns the book, they can loan it in digital form. The argument is that this is fair use, although that point is still being debated.

Bill White: Before we talked today, I thought this erosion of libraries and databases was kind of uniquely American, but it sounds like this is really an international trend that you're describing.

Andrea Mitchell: Oh, absolutely! Look at what happened in Europe when the Drug Scope Library was shut down in 2008. That library was a goldmine, especially in terms of materials from the alternative presses.

Bill White: What happens to all those materials when such libraries close?

Andrea Mitchell: Well, similar to what happened with the Central States of Addiction library in Chicago, they get boxed up and put into storage or scattered to the winds. That's what has been happening. The Drug Scope Library, as I understand it, has been sent to a larger academic library, but is still "in storage." The Trimbos Library in the Netherlands is now closed to the public, including researchers who do not work in their institute. The Gruppo Abele in Italy has downsized so much it is but a shadow of its former activity. The Archer Tongue Library in Switzerland is closed. God knows what happened to those materials. In France, they had five information centers that have all been collapsed into the OFDT in Paris. I'm sure that much of the materials from those centers were lost. Recently, the largest AOD library in Australia was closed, and others may be on the chopping block. This loss of information infrastructure of the addictions field is a worldwide trend.

Addiction Journals

Bill White: You've served on a number of advisory boards of addiction journals. What kind of trends do you see in terms of the field's scientific and trade journals?

Andrea Mitchell: Well, we have seen a growth in the number of alcohol and drug specialty journals and the recent trend toward more open access journals. I've been attending the ISAJE meetings (International Society of Addiction Journal Editors). At the recent meeting I attended in Spain, there were presentations on three new journals. There's no dearth of journals in the field, and many of those journals have evolved from quarterlies or bi-monthlies to monthly journals. Also, the consolidation of the journals under the three major publishers, Wiley, Elsevier, and Taylor & Francis (Informa), has been one of the reasons that the costs have escalated so much.

The costs for some of these journals are in the multiple thousands. It is not sustainable because libraries do not have the monies. And with the special libraries closing, many of these subscriptions would be cancelled.

Bill White: Related to that is the cost of what it takes for an individual person seeking information to go online and purchase a single article, which has also gotten astronomical.

Andrea Mitchell: Exactly. It is outrageous. What is going on here? It is economically prohibitive to obtain access to the information in many of these journals if you do not have connections to a university library.

Information Sources for Addiction Counselors

Bill White: The demands for addiction counselors to have current and credible information has never been greater in the history of the field, and I'm wondering if there are any tips you have about how frontline counselors can navigate access to such information?

Andrea Mitchell: There are SALIS librarians who may be able to help them, who can be found on the [SALIS website](#). A few SALIS members have their own databases now online. Since the defunding of ETOH, the NIAAA database, these are the best sources of information for frontline counselors, along with PubMed and Psych Info; however, Psych Info is not free, unless you are connected to a university or college.

Bill White: I get a lot of e-mails from counselors that say, "I found this on Google and I want to know if you think it's accurate." Do you have cautions for counselors about the quality of information on popular internet sites?

Andrea Mitchell: Well, the scope and quality of information are certainly problems. People think that Google has everything, but actually it doesn't. To adequately look at the literature, you need to search the bibliographic databases mentioned above. I would caution counselors about Google as a sole source even though I realize that Google Scholar now provides access to a number of good articles.

Bill White: What are some sites that you feel would be particularly helpful to addiction professionals?

Andrea Mitchell: Here are some that come quickly to mind:

- CAMH Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Library http://www.camh.ca/en/education/about/services/camh_library/Pages/camh_library.aspx
- Addiction Technology Transfer Centers <http://attcnetwork.org/home/>
- the ADAI Alcohol and Drug Abuse Institute Library <http://lib.adai.uw.edu/>
- Hazelden Library <http://www.hazelden.org/library>
- Rutgers Center for Alcohol Studies Library <http://alcoholstudies.rutgers.edu>

Bill White: Andrea, thank you for taking this time to share your experience and your ideas about the history and future of addiction libraries and information services.

Andrea Mitchell: It was my pleasure, Bill.

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