

PROGRESSIVE LIBRARIAN

A Journal for Critical Studies & Progressive Politics in Librarianship

Issue #27

Summer 2006



THE PROFESSIONAL IS POLITICAL

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PROGRESSIVE LIBRARIAN, Issue #27, Summer 2006
Published, produced and distributed by Progressive Librarians Guild
2 issues per year; ISSN 1052-5726
Indexed in Alternative Press Index, Library Literature
Printed by Durland Alternatives Library, Cornell University, Ithaca NY

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THE PROFESSIONAL IS POLITICAL: Redefining the Social Role of Public Libraries

**by SHIRAZ DURRANI &
ELIZABETH SMALLWOOD**

Part 1: Librarians and their Societies

The first question to consider is “what are libraries and information all about?” Let us take an experience from Kenya to answer this question. A library attendant lived in an area that produces coffee. When he went home for holidays one year, he was asked by a number of peasants a simple question: “You work in a university library; you have information from the whole world around you. We want you to answer a simple question for us: we work from dawn to dusk growing coffee, right from tending little shoots, to weeding, to harvesting, to drying coffee beans, day after day, month after month, year after year. We hear that our coffee sells for thousands of pounds in London, yet we do not earn enough from our labour to buy our own coffee in local shops let alone feed and clothe our families. You tell us why not, you who have all the information at your finger tips, you tell us – what happens to our coffee money?”

It was not as if the university library did not have information about coffee. It had one of the best agricultural libraries in Eastern Africa. The library’s collection on coffee and other cash crops was rated world class. Yet the library was not equipped to answer these simple economic-political questions from local peasants.

Now the questions asked by the peasants are fundamental to the work of librarians. The local library did have adequate resources to meet the needs of its users. It is just that its services were not aimed at peasants and workers. More important, the information that was available was depoliticised. It took the agricultural world around it as a reality that could not be challenged. It failed to see the difference between the natural world in which the coffee was grown and the social world, which had created social relations, and which decided on who owned the land, how labour was remunerated and where the profits went. Nor was it considered

necessary to understand and explain that reality, to examine its history and, perhaps to see the need to change that reality – as the Kenyan peasants were demanding.

Globalisation and Effects on Libraries

The key issue then is to decide what the social role of librarians is. Should they take the social, economic and political situation they find themselves in as “given” without understanding why and how we arrived at this situation? Is it their role to dig deeper into “facts” that are given to them by their social environment? Is it appropriate to see the role of librarians in the same light in which Marx saw the role of philosophers: “The philosophers have interpreted the world in many ways. What matters is changing it.”¹

But before we consider the question of librarians trying to change the world, we need to question whether they even interpret their worlds. A large number of professional libraries remain unconnected to the social and political reality around them. Their model of a “global library” is much like McDonald restaurant outlets which serve the same product in every part of the world. While this approach may be a useful one in ensuring a standard level of service, and a useful model for maximising profits for the McDonald chain, it is disastrous for libraries if they want to root themselves in their local communities.

Librarians trained to run such global libraries take professional pride in being “neutral” in the social divide all around them. They thus become increasingly isolated from the majority of people in their local communities. Forces of corporate globalisation then push them even further from their communities by offering to save staff time and mental effort by supplying pre-packaged “bestsellers,” guaranteed to meet the wants of 30% ² of the population – and to boost the profit margins of transnational publishers and booksellers. The success of their libraries is then judged by the number of such bestsellers they manage to loan out. No critical questions are asked or answered here: What is a library all about? What is its social role? Who has the power to make key decisions, and on whose behalf are decisions made?

The “global library,” then, is a standard library service that can be located in any geographical, social or political situation, in any historical period, and still be expected to function normally as a “library.” The global librarians who run these global libraries take pride in their non-political stand, in their “neutrality” in the social struggles going on all around them. They claim to

be outside social struggles taking place in their societies, somehow uplifted to a loftier position by their “professional” training. Their class position in their societies isolates them from the struggles of working people whose basic need for information is ignored by their libraries.

Corporate globalisation can be described as the “process enabling financial and investment markets to operate internationally, largely as a result of deregulation and improved communications” (Collins). We do not intend here to go into details of what globalisation is and how it affects libraries, as this has been dealt with adequately in a number of sources.³ However, a key point that needs to be made is that not only are new technologies making it possible to rationalise tasks and work practices, but it makes it necessary to change at a faster rate as technological progress is changing the world around them. At the same time, many traditional library tasks are increasingly being handed over to private companies, rather than being done in-house. As the whole local authority sector is redefined to become facilitators of service rather than direct providers, significant changes are on the way. Other areas of local authority work are also changing. For example, household waste collection is no longer done by local staff; schools and education are being removed from local authority control. It is inconceivable that libraries will continue existing as they now are for very long.

We are not arguing that all changes associated with globalisation are necessarily bad. But we would like to see more librarians in Britain adopting the 10-point plan, proposed by Mark Rosenzweig, supporting “democratic globalism” as opposed to corporate globalisation:

We shall oppose corporate globalization which, despite its claims, reinforces existing social, economic, cultural inequalities, and insist on a democratic globalism...which acknowledges the obligations of society to the individual and communities, and which prioritizes human values and needs over profits.⁴

Iverson explains how the politics of globalisation affects libraries and their local communities. The inherently political role of librarians is clear:

As our global society becomes increasingly based on the commodity of information, power becomes increasingly focused and managed by those with access to information. Those without such access remain marginalized.⁵

However, Iverson notes, librarians often reject any stated political stance, seeing themselves as “neutral service providers” a position encouraged by their training:

While librarians are trained to maintain an objective or neutral stance they are also expected to make decisions regarding “good” and “bad” materials. Unfortunately, they do not often recognize the inherent bias at work in making these decisions...and generally regard the selection of materials as apolitical.⁶

Few librarians have taken Muddiman’s warning seriously:

Exclusion thus challenges public agencies like the library service to produce policy and practice which will challenge social division and create a harmonious, diverse and more equal civil society where access to knowledge is a fundamental right of social citizenship. If the public library can rise to this challenge it might begin to successfully reinvigorate and reinvent itself. If it fails, then the public library too, like the poor and excluded communities it exists to serve, might find itself consigned to the margins of the “information” society in the twenty first century.⁷

Faced with a situation where libraries are blindly walking into extinction, it is important that those with conviction and commitment stand up for a new role of libraries in society – and actively practice this new role. In the world ruled by corporate globalisation, it is too easy to drift along with the tide of “neutral” librarianship and do nothing to make libraries play a central role in liberating people, their cultures, and their economies from the privatised future that globalisation has planned for them. This is not merely something that might happen in the future. It is already happening, as Rosenzweig points out:

Trade ministers and negotiators alike are under increasing pressure to expose more services, like education, healthcare, culture...to the market powers of transnational corporations.⁸

A new approach, in which real democracy, equality and transparency flourish, is essential.

The Myth of Neutrality

Thus the myth of the “neutral” librarian needs to be exploded. There is no way that librarians are or can be neutral in the social struggles of their societies. Every decision they make – how much to spend on books, which books to buy, what staff to appoint, how to manage the service – is a reflection of their class position and their world outlook.

What librarians do – and don't do – is not merely an academic question. It affects our understanding of our natural and social environment, which, taken in its totality, affects our world outlook, affects what we think and what we do. It influences the minds of the young generation and becomes the prevailing outlook of the adult world of tomorrow.

Manipulation of information, whether conscious or unconscious, is an important matter, not only in local life, but in international relations as well. Recent events have shown how misinformation can be used to generate popular support for wars of somewhat questionable legality, for example when the USA and Britain invaded Iraq, killing thousands of people in the quest for non-existent “weapons of mass destruction”.

If librarians are involved in the world of information, then surely they have social responsibility to ensure that people get correct information. It is a matter of ethics that they challenge misinformation, particularly when this is used by a small, powerful clique to wage wars and kill people on false pretexts. But our average “professional” librarians are too “neutral” – or too scared – to challenge the hand that feeds them. At the very least, they need to make alternate views and opinions as freely available as they do the views of the ruling classes. But this is not what the “globalised librarian” is trained to do. However, many progressive librarians in USA are taking a stand for their and communities' information rights against the USAPATRIOT Act which seeks to take these rights away from people. Their example needs to be followed globally.

Two aspects of the job of a librarian can be seen to be to collect and then to disseminate information, in a relevant form and language, to all those who need the information. This gives librarians tremendous power as it is they who decide what material to acquire and how and when to disseminate it. However, the easy availability of information on the internet is fast changing their monopolistic role as it democratises the flow of information.

Libraries and Society in Britain

There is often a time gap between the emergence of a new social reality and that reality being accepted in people's consciousness. Jacques refers to the gap between the perception and the reality:

we still like to consider ourselves a global player, but in reality we are not: our pretensions are now more like pastiche, substance has been replaced by vacuity... Post-imperial Britain has become deeply parochial – yet we remain almost utterly oblivious of the fact (the liberal elite included).⁹

Thus, lessons and reality of history are shut out from social consciousness by denying the reality of a new world where Britain is no longer the superpower ruling the world, where China is flexing its muscles to become the most powerful nation in the world. Yet most public libraries have very little relevant material in English from or about China – a fact reflected in the lack of awareness among people as a whole about that part of the world.

In a society that has sought to shut out the reality of a new globalised world, it is not surprising that its libraries have shut themselves in a dream world of presumed superiority and “professional” might. The fact that the library world has not come to grips with changes in British society is a reflection of British society as a whole not coming to grips this new reality.

Creating a People-orientated Library Service

There is an urgent need to develop a library service that helps to create a new consciousness among people about their society and also about the position of their country in the context of the wider world. Only on such wider awareness can a people-orientated library service be built. Libraries cannot tell people what their “real role” is. They can only provide information to help people decide for themselves.

If there is going to be a true people-orientated library service, it is necessary that there is a clear understanding of social forces within which a particular library service operates. Librarians face a number of challenges today. Let us look at some of them.

The first need is for all librarians to investigate our society and our communities. Mao’s recommendation, at a political level, is equally valid in the information field: “no investigation, no right to speak.” It is important to understand working people’s lives and struggles, be one of them, and then seek ways of creating a relevant library service.

In all societies with class divisions and class struggles, library services tend to be a service for elite by elite, providing a service to the dominating classes and their allies only. In situations like these, the process of liberating the library service for those previously excluded is the key role of library workers and professionals. The challenge is to develop a service that is open to all irrespective of class, race, gender, ability, age, sexual orientation, political beliefs, etc. The service needs to be an inclusive one which reaches out to all who are currently excluded. Yet this task is not easy. The very language of this struggle has been removed from

the “mainstream” by government action. Thus class differences are not mentioned in government reports and policies; racism is hidden under the bland term “social exclusion” thereby not only removing the reality of racism from public mention, but resistance to it is also disguised as criminal acts or as “terrorism.” No society can be serious about addressing social oppression and economic exploitation when it chooses not to admit the very existence of such.

If librarians are to build truly people-orientated libraries, they will need to stop operating in isolation from the progressive forces that are already struggling for liberation. It is thus important that we develop creative partnerships with progressive forces, such as trade unions, workers’ and peasants’ social, economic and political organisations, youth groups etc. Alliances also need to be made with all those struggling against all forms of social oppression.

But before librarians reach that stage, they need to liberate their minds from the norms of a class-divided society, its social, cultural and political norms. Its information systems and education provides us with a one-sided view of life. We will need to see the whole picture and not just the aspects we are shown. In the library context, we will need to free ourselves from the commandments taught at traditional library schools. We will need to learn not to be “neutral” but, instead, take sides on behalf of those previously excluded in everything we do in order to build an “equal” library service.

As is the case in all social revolutions, there are no specific guide books on how to create a liberated, “open” library service. It is only the actual practice of learning from people that will provide a solution that is relevant to our particular social situation and will help us build libraries without walls.

But just learning from people is not enough. The next, and perhaps the most difficult, step is to turn our ideas into action. This is best done by empowering the excluded so that it is they who decide how our resources are to be used and how our energies are spent. People themselves will then be the best judges of our success or failure. It is in putting these ideas into practice that a people-oriented, “open to all” service can be built.

PART 2: Public Libraries in England

Speaking to the Society of Chief Librarians in June 2004, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Tessa Jowell, posed a number of challenges to the profession:

This is a critical time for the future of public library services. Although for over 150 years, libraries have given pleasure and provided opportunities to learn, it is now time to ensure that libraries are relevant and inviting to future generations...the challenge is to generate new users...it is important to learn lessons about why people do not use libraries – only one third do, so how do libraries attract the other two thirds? ¹⁰

The Secretary of State made it clear that she wants change in public libraries. She explained what needs to happen so that libraries “become, once again, central points in local communities”:

But they can only take back this role if they consult local people, and put them in the driving seat. Not just once, but as a continuous dialogue.¹¹

This challenge, however, is not reflected in the initiatives that the Department of Media, Culture and Sport has taken, primarily through the *Framework for Future*, (F4F) programme.¹² The key development since the publication of F4F has been a programme to put the key points of the Framework into practice, led by the Museum, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA). MLA explains what the *Framework* is all about:

Framework for the Future, published by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in February 2003, is the government’s ten-year vision for public libraries – how libraries can best serve their communities in the 21st century. It aims to promote public libraries, give them improved visibility, and to set out why libraries matter.

The *Framework* aims to do this by focusing on three key areas for libraries to develop: books, reading and learning; digital citizenship; community and civic values.

Recent developments led by Museum, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA)¹³ are positive moves in the right direction and go some way to make up for what some feel to be immense failures of the *Framework*.¹⁴ This includes the “Fulfilling their potential” (2004) programme which provides useful guides to developing services for young people. Other developments include the redrafting of the Public Library Standards, focus on “impact measurement.” It remains to be seen how far, taken as a whole, they will challenge and change the foundations of the public library structure in Britain to ensure they meet the needs of all current and potential users of library service.

At the same time, unless issues mentioned in Part 1 around commodification and globalisation of information, “neutrality” and politics of information services are addressed on a national level, any changes that come about are likely to be partial and not able to address real problems.

Iverson, commenting on the important role that libraries have to play, raises concerns about their role:

I would argue that their role should not be to act in “collusion with the forces which perpetuate disadvantage” but to redefine their role to assist in the establishment of a truly equitable society.¹⁵

British librarians have generally ignored the fundamental issues about the role of public libraries that Iverson raises. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport, through its enthusiastic endorsement of what is perceived by some to be the vision-less F4F, has failed to give leadership to a field desperate for change.

PART 3: The Merton Library Approach

It is in the context of the Secretary of State’s challenge that developments in Merton Library & Heritage Service (MLHS) between 2000 and 2004 need to be seen. Change and development for a relevant service can only be made if a foundation for change has been created.

The following section considers how a changed environment made it possible for a project involving young people to become self-sustaining and, in so doing, create a new model of public library service that sought to place the needs of a particular community at its heart.¹⁶

Creating Conditions for Change – Staffing Structure & Equalities

MLHS’s staffing structure,¹⁷ introduced in 2003, aimed to address some weaknesses identified in the 2000 structure within an overall perspective of developing a relevant, needs-based service. It was partially driven by the need to make savings in the service in keeping with savings being made in the Council as a whole. The structure was split into two distinct “wings”: Operations and Performance Management (O&PM) and Innovations and Development (I&D) in such a way that an equal approach could be mainstreamed. This approach allowed the targeting of services to key sections of communities whose needs have not been fully met. The two-wings approach was expected to ensure that innovative services were

initiated and developed in the I&D wing. The O&PM wing was expected to ensure that the day-to-day existing work of libraries was carried on within a strong performance management culture, guided by policies developed in the I&D wing. Its role was also to ensure that new projects developed in the I&D wing would be nurtured and embedded as part of a mainstreamed service. The majority of the staff and resources were in the O&PM wing.

This approach was meant to resolve some of the contradictions identified in the service during the service review beginning in 1998. These included the contradictions between the needs of current users and potential users; between developing new services and maintaining current ones; between resource allocation for new services and allocations to established services. Implicit in these contradictions were the key contradictions between new ideas and “traditional” ones; between staff and managers who support the “traditional” mode of service and those keen to develop a new model of service to meet new and unmet needs of current and potential users.

Two key requirements were considered essential for the success of the new approach. The first was the support and commitment from senior management in the library service, within the Department, the authority as a whole, and crucially, from Members.

The second requirement was the need to address, in a clear and appropriate manner, clear resistance to change from some senior and middle managers who did not support the change programme and were unhappy about meeting the targets set out in the new programme. Addressing such resistance is considered a key factor in ensuring that planned change takes place.

The existence of this resistance was identified as a key risk factor by the team from the Management Research Centre of the London Metropolitan University which had guided the service through the early period of change as part of an ESF-funded change management and management development programme.

Another area where the Service placed a great deal of emphasis was the need to have a policy approach in all its work. MLHS had a deficit of written policies, resulting in uneven practices between library sites. The aim of the policy approach was to address this deficit through the provision of policies that would, through effective performance management, ensure that there was uniformity in service delivery and resource use. At the same time the mainstreaming of equalities, with responsibility for equalities being transferred from the Equal Access Services cost centre to

individual libraries was also to be governed by the policy and performance management approach, with the overall strategy being decided by the Libraries Senior Management Team.

The staffing structure recognised the fact that public libraries are at a crossroads. The Audit Commission report, “Building Better Library Services” (2002) notes that while libraries have a place in people’s hearts, they “are losing their place in people’s lives.” Libraries thus need to change if they are to be relevant to the communities they serve. MLHS believed that, for public libraries to be relevant, they needed to respond to needs within local communities and that they needed to be well placed to respond quickly to changing needs. This, it was realised, would necessarily involve moving away from the traditional “books based” approach to embrace a closer focus on informal learning through a wide variety of activities, providing information through a variety of means that would help people in many different aspects of their lives. Additionally, it would mean the recruitment of people with the types of skills not traditionally found in libraries e.g. skills in working with youth.

Innovations Project Approach

In order to develop the needs-based approach, MLHS developed a number of strategic partnerships, enabling it to acquire new skills and enabling it to focus on what were key needs in Merton. The development of an innovations projects approach was thus a response to the need for change on several levels. It was recognised that the new staffing structure had to do the following:

- Respond to community needs
- Mainstream equalities
- Develop new skills within the Service

The aim of the innovations projects approach, therefore, was to take a targeted approach to outreach, develop library services based on need, which could then be embedded into mainstream service delivery. Such an approach was a key part of the new staffing structure, which had policy and performance management very much at its core.

The Innovations and Development wing was thus set up with key aims in mind:

- To mainstream equalities through a policy approach (the implementation of which would be performance managed by

- the Operations and Performance Management wing)
- To develop new services and reach out to marginalised groups of people via a programme of “innovations projects” targeted at specific groups
 - To develop policies to support the mainstreaming of new services
 - To ensure that managers and staff at all levels and sites take ownership and responsibility for services to all groups and communities in the catchment area of their site.

It was recognised that library services needed to develop and reach out to a wide range of people. At the same time, budget restrictions did not allow the service to increase the staffing establishment. MLHS’s response was to develop a number of partnerships both within, and without, the Council, allowing it to target key groups of people, using dedicated staff, in developing new services to these groups. Staff were either wholly or partly paid for by the partners.

There was a shift in the service focus as part of the new staffing structure. The previous approach was to devote staff and resources towards Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities. However, this did not allow MLHS to develop services where the needs were greatest, and targeting services to BME communities, irrespective of needs, began to create unnecessary tensions among staff and communities.

The new focus was on age, as age was seen as the one equality issue that cuts across all groups. With a mainstreaming equalities approach the aim was to ensure that, within each age group, all equality aspects are addressed e.g. race, disability, gender etc. By adopting this approach, the Service contributed to community cohesion and reduced the tensions that could exist when one community feels that resources are being directed away from its services to services for other communities in a narrow area. MLHS was therefore taking a needs-based approach to ensure that the limited resources were targeted to meet the needs of current and potential users.

Why the Innovations Projects Approach?

It was decided to use a project approach to bring about change and development in the service. This approach has a number of positive aspects, for example:

- Allowed risk taking
- Could be stopped if they did not meet requirements

- Could be operationalised if successful, thus becoming part of the “mainstream”
- Could develop new partnerships
- Could generate new resources
- Could help connect libraries to sections of the community not using the service before
- Could develop new skills in staff

Space does not permit consideration of all Innovation Projects, so there follows a focus on one project only, Merton Sense, and an examination of its development.

Merton Sense Innovations Project

This section focuses on one of the Innovations Projects, *Merton Sense*, as an example of how libraries can be community, rather than management, driven resulting in relevant, sustainable services responsive to community needs, as dictated by the community itself.

Recent reports on public libraries reveal declining usage of libraries by young people. New and creative ways of reaching them need to be found to attract them to use the service. Discussion with Merton’s Youth Service revealed that young people in a less advantaged part of the borough were interested in exploring creative avenues not available in the local area. MLHS consulted with a group of young people, which revealed that they were interested in setting up and running their own project – a magazine by and for young people. MLHS, seeing this as an opportunity to connect with young people, worked with Merton Youth Service to provide the space, ICT facilities and staff support needed to bring the magazine into being.

Merton Sense Leads the Way

The magazine was called *Merton Sense*, a title chosen by the young people themselves. Its aim was to connect young people, many of whom were from socially excluded groups, with their library service by actively engaging young people in designing the new service. The magazine was then produced by them with financial and management support from the library service.

The first need was to find a home for the magazine. Thus was created the “Youth Space” in the newly established Innovations Unit based at Mitcham Library. The Youth Service provided computers which set the

group going. The young people themselves decided how they wanted the space decorated and what furniture they wanted.

The youth group consisted initially of about 12 young people, and grew to over 45 within the first year. This number has now grown to over 50 young people aged between 14 and 24 years old. The staff time that went into the support of young people producing the magazine was very important to the project. Often, library staff spent additional time in the week working with group members on article writing and graphic design to make their pieces presentable for the magazine. *Merton Sense* works with some writers for whom English is a second language and believes that all young people have something to add, irrespective of their varying abilities. However, such young people benefited enormously from the input of staff who were able to advise them on writing in English. The qualitative nature of staff input enabled young people eventually to write without any assistance and, as such, was highly empowering. The success of *Merton Sense* would thus not have been possible without the commitment and input of MLHS staff.

The group produced the first issue of the quarterly *Merton Sense* in June 2003 with a print run of 1000 copies. A network of writers has been set up with different young people from around the world. Writers from Australia, Spain and the USA have already printed articles and plans are in place to encourage writers from Kenya, Pakistan and Brazil to contribute articles. *Merton Sense* has empowered the young people of Merton to take action and put their views and ideas into a creative and enjoyable experience. The group has learned about writing styles, how to compile a magazine, cohesive teamwork and working to reach deadlines.

Many of the young people involved with *Merton Sense* had never used the library service; some had never even been inside a library! As a result of MLHS initiating this project and introducing young, hitherto, non-users, to the libraries they are all now members of the library service and much more aware of the diverse resources available to them. Libraries have also been an invaluable resource for the group in terms of background information for writing and composing articles electronically and in book form.

A retired journalist who had worked for the BBC was a volunteer through the Lending Time Project. He offered support and advice for a while, from a professional perspective, on how to compile a magazine, and provided invaluable experience on writing styles and skills and on how to compose articles. His involvement was one example of how MLHS encouraged inter-generational work. The magazine has developed in many areas the skills of the young people involved. These include ICT, writing styles and desktop publishing, thus improving their employability and further education

options. The Welcome to Your Library Project, through its connections with Asylum Welcome, provided the group with young people who were new to the country and were from an asylum seeker or refugee background. The magazine gave them the opportunity to interact with other young people who might, or might not have been from a similar background. For those not from a similar background, this experience helped to gain a greater understanding of refugee and asylum seeker issues.

Some Outcomes

The magazine connected many young people, some of whom had never used the library service before, to the libraries, but perhaps *Merton Sense*'s greatest achievement is that it has empowered the local young community and brought a tremendous sense of community amongst the team and its readers.

Among achievements of the magazine, the following can be listed:

- Involves communities: Wide range of youth from different groups are able to speak not only to youth but to the wider community of Merton through the pages of *Merton Sense*. The young people are now openly tackling, maturely, difficult subjects that are of interest to a wide group of people.
- Encourages reading: The use of the internet and library resources to research articles is now commonplace among the young people involved in the Project. *Merton Sense* itself is a literary product.
- Encourages learning: Participants have developed a wide range of new skills in a friendly, informal manner – these had not been provided by the formal educational sector. Besides the “job specific” learning of publishing skills such as ICT, layout, design, desktop publishing, writing styles, artwork, editorial work, etc, the young people have also developed a wide range of social and leaderships skills, such as team working, people skills, dealing with difficult issues in a mature manner,
- Shares information: *Merton Sense* speaks not only to young people, but to the whole community and keeps all informed of a wide range of issues from a youth perspective.
- Has the potential to be developed and adapted elsewhere: The model developed in Merton can work anywhere, with appropriate management support, resources and quality staff input and a trust in young people. In fact, the approach can also be adapted for other projects.

One of the key achievements for all team members, however, is the engagement in a learning process entirely driven by individual wishes to develop in particular areas. Examples include creative writing; journalism; language and communication skills; marketing and fundraising skills. Although informal learning is a key aspect of public libraries, without such a project it would have been extremely difficult for MLHS to offer such a range of relevant, community-driven learning opportunities. The opportunities afforded by this project have led to a number of achievements including:

- Two of *Merton Sense*'s writers were picked up by national magazines to write articles in a freelance capacity.
- Three of the young people involved are now studying towards a career in the media, with *Merton Sense* forming an important part of their portfolios and increasing their employability options.
- *Merton Sense*'s resident poet, Amie Russell, won a local poetry competition in which this project encouraged her to participate and her work will now be published by Xpress in a new poetry anthology book.
- A number of young people have been awarded the Millennium Volunteer Award.

The editor of *Merton Sense*, Duane Melius, recalls what working on the magazine has meant for him:

For the first time since I left school there was a valuable opportunity for me... From here *Merton Sense* began. It has been a joy to watch the birth of an idea and witness its refinement. Being part of *Merton Sense* gives me a sense of identity. It is heartening to realise there are agents in the community willing to give people like me a chance.¹⁸

The magazine has gone from strength to strength and the initial print run has grown from 1000 to 15,000. A *Sense* website has now been developed.¹⁹

Merton Sense – Strategic Issues and Lessons

There is no doubt that *Merton Sense* has played a key role in reconnecting the library service to a large number of young people in Merton. These include not only the ones directly involved in all aspect of producing and writing the magazine, but also hundreds on the mailing list or who get

copies through libraries, youth clubs, schools and in other ways. In the process, the library service was learning a new way of connecting with its potential users. The success of the project was recognised by the Youth Ofsted inspection in 2004:

At the *Merton Sense* magazine group, young people took responsibility for project development, set challenging targets, evaluated their own progress and gained formal accreditation.

One of the areas recognised as requiring attention in local and public service is the need for innovation. The *Merton Sense* project can be seen as an example of an innovative service development, which at the same time helped to develop new skills in managers and staff.

Another issue that should be understood in the context of making organisational change is the need for effective leadership with a clear vision, commitment and a strategy for ensuring success. In the case of Merton, this was certainly available during the period under review. *Merton Sense* also provides a very clear example of how service users can take total ownership of a new service if they are able to influence the direction of the service and are allowed to have control over it. The key point is that an idea and a service should grip their imagination. The young people at *Merton Sense* are keen to keep the magazine going and are developing financial and political skills to meet the needs of this complex project. There are enough lessons here for local government managers to digest.

Conclusion

As societies develop, as new technologies create even more possibilities for growth, the communications and information sectors needs constantly to develop in keeping with major changes in society. There is thus huge potential for developing services that meet the new needs of all people and it is quite possible for libraries to be at the centre of this vastly changing world. Engaging with the traditional library commodity of information in a “non-traditional” way that responds to local contexts, via the involvement of local people in service design and development, will enable libraries to help bridge the gap between the information rich and the information poor. Libraries can thus play a part in better-enabling local people to take informed decisions.

However, realising this potential requires creativity, innovation, commitment and vision on the part of service leaders. Effective leadership in the information field, therefore, is the key to making libraries places where

different social, political and economic forces in conflict can deposit their various views, experiences, knowledge and world outlooks. By ensuring that this contradictory information and knowledge has an equal chance to be acquired, stored, heard and understood, librarians and libraries can, perhaps, find a new social role for themselves. They will then have played a meaningful social role in creating more just and “equal” societies.

As custodians of information, librarians everywhere have a role to play in eliminating the root causes of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and inequality. It is no longer acceptable for libraries and librarians to refuse to acknowledge this social responsibility. The choice is simple: if the information profession does not acknowledge its social responsibility and act upon it, it will no longer have a social role. People will then develop alternative models of information and knowledge communication, which do meet their needs. There will then be no libraries as we know them today. The choice is ours to make – today.

NOTES

1. Karl Marx in his Theses on Feuerbach.
2. “Almost 30 per cent of the population use libraries for borrowing books or other items”. Audit Commission (2002).
3. The politics of globalisation is covered admirably by A. Sivanandan in his article “Globalism’s imperial war” (12 March 2003), available from <<http://www.irr.org.uk/2003/march/ak000008.html>>. The library aspects are covered by IFLA at: <<http://www.ifla.org/III/clm/p1/wto-ifla.htm#3>>; see also Durrani (2000), especially pp.89-94.
4. Ten point programme presented to the groups which met at the Vienna Conference of progressive librarians sponsored by KRIBIBIE (2000) Available from <<http://www.libr.org/PLG/docs.html>>.
5. Iverson (1998/99).
6. Ibid.
7. Muddiman (2000).
8. Rosenzweig, Mark (2005).
9. Jacques, Martin (2004).
10. Jowell (2004).
11. Lend it like Peckham! (2004).
12. DCMS, 2003.
13. See MLA website for further details: <<http://www.mla.gov.uk/index.asp>>.
14. See for example: Durrani, S. (2003) Review of the Framework of the Future. Library and Information Update. March 2003.
15. Iverson (1998/99).
16. This was covered in Library & Information Update 2(8) August 2003, p. 17.
17. This was a British Home Office and Department of Culture, Media and Sport-funded project whereby library services worked with Community Service Volunteers to encourage local people to volunteer their services to local libraries in the aim of service development.
18. Melius, Duane (2003).
19. See: <<http://www.sense.ik.com/>>. The magazine has now been renamed *Sense*.

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ON PRIVACY

by GARY T. MARX

Privacy, like the weather, is much discussed, little understood and difficult to control. It is a multi-dimensional concept with fluid and often ill-defined, contested and negotiated borders, depending on the context and the culture. Along with its opposite, *publicity*, it is nonetheless a cornerstone of modern society's ideas of the person and of democracy.

As the impacts of computerization on society (and the reverse) become ever more apparent, issues of privacy and publicity are vital for understanding society and for the creation of the good society.

Privacy and *publicity* are nouns. For purposes of explanation they can be seen as polar ends of a continuum. This perspective draws attention to the moral or normative aspects of withholding and disclosing of information and asking, or not asking, for information. Depending on the context, social roles and culture, individuals or groups may be required, find it optional, or be prohibited from engaging in these activities.

These in turn involve a broader area called the sociology of information. Governing rules here vary from situations where information must be kept private to those where it must be made public (or, perhaps better, must be revealed – whether as part of a confidential relationship or to the public at large). There is considerable subjectivity with respect to expectations about how information is to be treated.

In contrast, *private* and *public* are adjectives that can tell us about the status of information. They describe whether or not the information is known. This has an objective quality and can be relatively easily measured. For example, the gender of persons we pass on the street is generally visible and known. The information is “public.” In contrast, the political and religious beliefs of pedestrians are generally invisible and unknown.

This essay is forthcoming as an entry in *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, G. Ritzer editor.

Of course, normative expectations of privacy and publicity do not always correspond to how the adjectives public and private are applied to empirical facts. Thus the cell phone conversations of politicians and celebrities that have privacy protections may become public. Information subjected to publicity requirements such as government and corporate reports and disclosure statements may be withheld, destroyed or falsified. Information not entitled to privacy protections, such as child or spouse abuse, may be unknown because of the inaccessibility of the home to broader visibility. Confidential or classified information may be leaked, hacked or mistakenly released.

Privacy and publicity can also be thought of in literal and metaphorical spatial terms involving invisibility-visibility and inaccessibility-accessibility. The physical privacy offered by a closed door and walls and an encrypted email communication share information restriction, even as they differ in other ways. Internet forums are not geographically localized, but in their accessibility can be usefully thought of as public places, not unlike the traditional public square.

Privacy needs to be separated from related terms. *Surveillance* simply involves scrutiny (often using technical means that extend the senses) for a variety of goals such as control, protection, management, documentation and entertainment. It is a way of discovering information. It might involve the obvious invasions of privacy as with selling the results of DNA and other testing to insurance companies, illegal wiretapping or spyware placed on a computer. Yet surveillance can also be the means of protecting privacy. Consider biometric identification and audit trails required to access some databases or defensive measures such as a home security video camera.

Privacy is inherently social. The term was irrelevant to Robinson Crusoe when he thought he was alone on the island. It is social in the sense that it implies an “other” from whom information is withheld, or to whom it is supplied and who might, or might not, be under equivalent expectations to reveal and conceal.

Social roles structure the treatment of information and this often involves issues of power. Thus close friends in an equal relationship are expected to reveal parts of themselves that they would not reveal at the mall or at work. Sharing one’s inner thoughts and feelings is expected to be reciprocal. A relationship of intimacy is partly defined by the mutuality of revelation. This contrasts with the more impersonal roles of doctor and patient. Thus the revelations of a patient to a doctor are not likely to be reciprocated.

Rules regarding who can collect personal information, what is collected,

the conditions under which it is gathered and how it is used (and by whom) are very much connected to social stratification. Rose Coser (1961) uses the felicitous phrase “insulation from observability” to describe the norms and resources that protect the actions of higher status roles in bureaucratic organizations.

Many contemporary concerns over privacy invasion involve large organizations and their employees and customers or police and suspects, professionals and clients, as well as interpersonal relations as with parents and children. In these contexts the rules are relatively clear about who can ask or observe, and who is expected to reveal or is entitled to conceal. Situations involving power differences with respect to gender and ethnicity can also reflect information inequality. On the other hand, maids, valets, butlers, chauffeurs, personal assistants often know a great deal about the private lives of those they work for and this tends to be unreciprocated.

Confidentiality often accompanies expectations of privacy. It reminds us that information issues are fundamentally social. It refers not to the initial revelation or creation of information, but to an expectation that personal information, once legitimately known by others, will be treated appropriately. This may involve sharing it according to established rules (e.g., as in medical treatment involving several specialists who discuss a patient), but otherwise keeping the information *secret* (as with social security numbers that must be given to an employer).

Secret is an adjective like private which can be used to describe the status of information. In restricting information, *secrecy* overlaps privacy. But it goes beyond it to characterize the information protecting activities of organizations, as well as individuals. It generally has a culturally and morally more ambiguous status than privacy.

When personal privacy is viewed as a *right*, it calls attention to the individual's ability to control the release of information. This does not mean that it cannot be shared, but that the individual has a choice. The 5th Amendment for example does not prohibit individuals from offering information, it simply prohibits this from being coercively obtained.

In contrast, the rules applying to secrecy are more likely to involve an *obligation* which prohibits the release of information. This is often accompanied by sanctions for violation. In principle, individuals and organizations don't have a choice about divulging information appropriately deemed to be secret. Such protective rules, along with the fact that the very existence of the secret may be unknown to outsiders, can protect untoward behavior. As Georg Simmel (1950) suggested, the secret, whether legitimate or illegitimate, can also be a factor contributing to group solidarity.

Some Types of Privacy

In the age of new surveillance we increasingly see techniques that break through borders that previously protected personal and organizational data, whether involving computer databases, internet monitoring, video-cams, drug testing, RFID chips or DNA analysis. As a result, questions of *informational privacy*, or the ability of individuals to choose what information about themselves will be offered to others and how this will be treated, are important social issues. Rights to freedom of religion and thought, association and speech are fundamental here.

Another form of privacy calls more explicit attention to behavior itself (rather than information about it) this involves *decisional privacy*. Consider, for example, personal choices involving reproduction and the refusal of medical services, as well as lifestyle issues such as sexual preference. The right to liberty is fundamental to this.

A concept encompassing both of the above involves privacy as *access* to the person. The metaphor of a border or wall surrounding the person can be applied. Is it (and when should it be) impenetrable or porous? To what extent can the individual, in principle and in actuality, control information flowing *outward* involving telephone or computer communication, credit card and other transactions, beliefs and feelings, location, facial appearance, or biometric data such as DNA, voice print, heat and scent?

Conversely, to what extent can the individual control information and stimuli going *inward* sent from others? This goes in the other direction – entering rather than leaving the person. The desire for solitude, often viewed as an aspect of privacy, can be seen here. Individuals seek to screen out undesirable sounds, smells and sights, whether these involve propaganda and advertisements, or unwanted music and cooking smells from an adjacent apartment. This is part of an expectation to be left alone.

The telescreen in George Orwell's novel *1984* illustrates both forms. It transmitted the viewer's image and communication to Big Brother, while simultaneously broadcasting propaganda to the individual. There was only one channel and it couldn't be turned off.

A more descriptive definitional approach simply looks at the institutional setting. Thus we can speak of privacy as it involves consumption, finances, employment, medical, religious, political and national security arenas. We can also consider a particular means used or activity (e.g., locational privacy, communication privacy – whether involving computers, telephones or television). Distinct types of data may be involved – e.g., financial,

genetic or beliefs and these can be expressed in different forms – e.g., as numbers, narratives, images or sound. While there are commonalities, expectations and practices vary depending on the setting, means, activity, content and data form. Social science and philosophy have only begun to disentangle these.

Some Cross-cultural Aspects

While information control is a factor in all societies, and some activities such as procreation and elimination are generally shielded from others, there is enormous historical and cultural variability. (Moore 1984) The Greeks, for example, placed the highest value on public life. One's sense of identity was found there. Privacy, being the realm of slaves, women, and children who were restricted to the home, was not valued. To be private meant *deprivation*. In traditional communal societies where life is lived in close proximity to others, the distinction between privacy and publicity has little meaning.

We also see differences in how contemporary societies protect privacy. With respect to personal information issues, relative to Europe, in the United States there is greater emphasis on the liberty to choose behavior and less government regulation – whether of monitoring in the workplace or of organizations that buy and sell personal information. Large organizations warehouse and sell vast amounts of personal data on the most intimate of subjects, generally without the consent, and with no direct benefit to the subject.

In contrast, the secondary use of information in Europe generally requires the informed consent of the subject. In much of Europe citizens are offered general protection from new, potentially privacy-invasive technologies through Constitutional guarantees involving (a rather unspecific) right to personhood or personal dignity. Europe, Canada and many Asian societies also have privacy commissions charged with protecting privacy and anticipating future problems.

The approach in the U.S. is to regulate technologies on a case-by-case basis as they appear, rather than on the basis of a broad inclusive principle. This is particularly the case for new forms which are dependent on judicial review or legislation specifically crafted for the technique. This in turn is often dependent on some indignation-raising misuse becoming public and a drawn-out political process. Individuals also have greater responsibility for protecting their own privacy, whether through using protective technologies or suing privacy invaders (assuming the invasion can be discovered).

Conceptions of privacy (and publicity as well) are relatively new and are related to the emergence of the modern nation-state and the economic and political rights associated with capitalism and democracy. Rules requiring privacy and publicity are very much a part of the modern state and, while going in opposite directions, developed in tandem.

Private property, particularly the home, suggested a location to be protected from outsiders. A laissez faire marketplace where participants pursued their self-interest required strategic control over information and the idea of information as property. The metropolis, with its social and geographical mobility and larger scale, offered a kind of anonymity unknown to the small village and new means for validating the claims of strangers. Larger living quarters meant more physical privacy as societies became richer. Most homes now have more than one bedroom and individuals have the possibility of their own bed.

Political democracy required both openness in government as a means of accountability and public discussion of issues. The latter required citizens with the liberty to form associations who were free to express their views in the public forums of civil society and who needed protection from government interference. Yet government was also given limited powers to cross personal borders to gather information relevant to health and safety, criminal justice and national security in an increasingly complex and interdependent world.

Privacy is usually thought of as something belonging to individuals. The ability to control information about the self is central to the personhood and dignity implied in the notion of the modern citizen. However the ability to control information is also significant to group and organizational borders. Privacy is a social as well as an individual value. (Regan 1995) For example a legal oppositional political group (or indeed any group) needs to be able to control information about members, resources and plans and to feel that freedom of expression within the group is respected. To the extent that a group's borders are porous – punctured by informers and intensive surveillance – its ability to act strategically is weakened and of course democratic ideals are undermined.

Privacy can be seen either as a commodity or as a right to which individuals are entitled. The social implications of the view taken are quite different. As a commodity, individuals may sell, trade or be coerced into giving away their private information (e.g., for frequent flyer miles or the convenience of using a credit card). They may pay for privacy protection, as well as purchase personal information on others – note the large number of internet sites offering this service.

The U.S. constitution is seen by many scholars to imply a right to privacy, although this is not explicit. Justice William Douglas in *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965) used the term “penumbra” in identifying various places where “zones of privacy” were guaranteed (e.g., 1st, 3rd, 4th and 5th Amendments to the constitution). Some state constitutions (particularly in the Western states) guarantee a right to privacy, as do the constitutions of most European countries. Privacy is also protected by organizational policies and privacy protecting technologies (e.g., encryption, shredders and devices to discover eavesdropping bugs).

The notion of unrestrained, all-powerful, privacy invaders with ravenous and insatiable information appetites waiting to pounce on the unsuspecting individual is too one-sided. Most organizations are inhibited by values and by concern over negative publicity, should they go to far in crossing personal information borders. Furthermore as the work of Erving Goffman (1956) suggests, through manners and rituals we also cooperate, to varying degrees, with each other to maintain individual privacy and self-respect.

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KNOWLEDGE ORGANIZATION FROM AN INSTITUTIONAL POINT OF VIEW: Implications for Theoretical & Practical Development

by JOACIM HANSSON

Knowledge organization and classification research are seen by many scholars as the very epicenter of Library and Information Science (LIS). Whether this is justified is of course arguable, but it is without doubt a subfield in LIS with a strong scholarly tradition, high demands and high ambitions when it comes to theoretical development. At the same time it is firmly rooted in practical librarianship and equivalent professions and practices within so-called memory institutions such as museums and archives. However, I will not limit my discussion to knowledge organization or classification research in a narrow sense, but instead discuss it together with other subfields of LIS like information behavior research and information retrieval. I do not see any sharp boundaries between the different fields of research in LIS, but instead think that the discussion of theory development is of such character that a wide scope and an eclectic approach is needed if we are to connect the actual practice and circumstances of librarianship with current empirical realities of the context in which libraries operate. In the end, since my aim is to provoke thought, I will argue for aspects of institutional theory as a means to finally let go of essentialist thinking on classification and still keep a substance of practice within the denial of absolutes, thus creating an environment for a possible conjunction of contemporary epistemology and critical perspectives within knowledge organization. At base, the argument here is that a better grounded theory and epistemology makes for a more critical, liberatory librarianship.

Contemporary LIS discussions have emerged during the last years that focus on fundamental issues like epistemology, paradigmatic characteristics of the discipline, and a need to move away from what is seen as a fruitless

and old fashioned positivistic point of departure for the discipline as a whole. This discussion has also had several well-argued contributions from the community of knowledge organization scholars such as Svenonius (2000), Smiraglia (2002), Hjørland (1998, 2002), Andersen (2004) and Mai (2004, 2005). I have elsewhere defined the scientific development in LIS by pointing out two parallel and somewhat contradictory “paradigms” or “perspectives” which present us with two rather distinct sets of epistemological and practical prerequisites: one process-oriented (the information perspective) and a second institutionally-oriented perspective (Hansson 2004). These perspectives are also visible within knowledge organization research which, at the same time, can be seen as a meeting point between the two.

Theory in Knowledge Organization and Information Behavior Research

When discussing theoretical developments in knowledge organization research we are dependent on the definition of its outer limits and relations to other subfields within LIS. Basically all formulations of LIS as a scientific discipline can be said to focus on the interrelationship between three fundamental concepts: libraries, information and documents.

The information perspective has, ever since its emergence in the late 1940s and early 1950s, strongly leaned towards the sciences in terms of how to define scientific progress and theoretical development. Its founding concept is information and it has been a constant problem since the concept has been almost impossible to define, and thus there is often a strange absence when trying to sort out what is really being studied. Buckland (1991) states that, among other things, information is always situational. This makes it difficult to produce an information-related theory with any form of generalizable claims, especially if information is seen as something which can be extracted from situational context and studied in itself.

Hjørland has characterized the lack of a clearly defined theory and conceptual consistency as deeply problematic for LIS (2000, pp. 517-519). Despite this, one of the main characteristics of the information perspective in relation to the institutional perspective (to be defined later in this paper) is its claim to hegemony – empirically, methodologically and theoretically (Miksa 1992). In LIS research we find this perspective represented by the majority of influential studies and dominant subfields. The point of departure is the simple “information chain” whether studied from a systems point of view or, since the late 1970s, predominantly from a cognitive (user) point of view. One may, of course, use other terms to label this very broad and

diverse research, such as that of “cognitive constructivism” used by Talja, Tuominen and Savolainen (2005) specifically referring to the cognition-oriented information behavior research of the last three decades.

In knowledge organization theory, cognitive perspectives have not been as dominant as in information behavior research. The reason for this is it is practically impossible, at least in the long run, to avoid connecting knowledge organization and classification research to the actual content of the documents and document collections in relation to the classification and indexing performed. This can seem trivial, but it is actually not, and it is important when we look at the problems of cognitivism and compare them with problems with the institutional perspective – which I will soon address. The problems with the “cognitive viewpoint” (Ingwersen 1992, 2002) are many. Primarily the tendency is not only to deny the information concept its situational characteristic, but also to limit information behavior to isolated individuals. Generally there is a strong movement away from this isolationist view in, for example, contemporary information behavior research and information retrieval, which is going in a direction that better fits the requirements of a socially defined use of information. However, all too often this research does not actually pay much attention to the content which makes information meaningful. This is visible in many high profile studies such as Ingwersen & Järvelin (2005) where an attempt is made to integrate information seeking research into information retrieval along with the “theory” of so-called information grounds by Fisher et al. (2005). However, the research basically just establishes not very surprising facts – like when people talk to each other, for example on buses and in cafés, they exchange information.

Domain Analysis

In recent LIS literature and, more specifically, in the literature on knowledge organization, an alternative to cognitive constructivism or, more broadly, the information perspective has been defined as domain analysis. However, the proponents of domain analysis do not specifically position themselves in the conflict between the information perspective and the institutional perspective. Domain analysis as an analytical point of departure is presented in a rather narrow LIS form by Birger Hjørland (Hjørland & Albrechtsen 1995, Hjørland 2002). It has been fruitful in terms of epistemological rhetoric, but has still to prove itself in practical research. In a special issue of the journal *Knowledge Organization* (No. 3-4, 2003), several good examples were gathered, suggesting that domain analysis actually might be a true development in our theoretical understanding of problems in LIS and knowledge organization (Ørom 2003, Abrahamsen 2003, Hartel 2003).

Epistemologically, however, domain analysis takes a rather traditional realist way of thinking about knowledge organization, classification research and subject analysis. This makes the approach constructive in the analysis of traditional classification, related to disciplinary structures and taxonomical definitions of relation between concepts. What we need in classification research is the development of approaches such as domain analysis, but we also need approaches which can take us further on the path of new a epistemology. Attempts to develop domain analysis in such a direction have been made, for example by Mai (2005). We don't need to leave traditional concept building or theory development, but instead we should use such constructs in combination with established scientific concepts and nontraditional epistemology. Institutional theory is one such theory that may be used in this kind of combination.

Institutional Theory and the Institutional Perspective

Epistemologically, the institutional perspective in LIS has many things in common with domain theory, social constructivism and methodological collectivism. It can also be said to embrace what Talja, Tuominen & Savolainen (2005) call social constructionism – a position close to social constructivism though more directed towards discourse as a tool for understanding the world. Most fundamentally it advocates the view that no (information) process can take place independent of space and time. The processes of document representation and retrieval must have a place in which they take place, otherwise it is not possible to define properly nor assign any significant meaning. In LIS, the institutional perspective represents a way of defining the studied processes as social, ideological, meaningful, and relating to libraries and other memory institutions in a fundamental way. This is not a limitation, but an empirical specification which gives direction to the kinds of delineations necessary if the LIS community does not want to perish among other communities of scholars. It is the social and intellectual connections to these memory institutions (libraries, museums, etc.) that distinguishes LIS from other disciplines and forms the core of its social legitimacy. It thus addresses fundamental issues and questions concerning organizing and making documents available to people from a somewhat different angle than domain theory in that it takes into consideration not only the domains defined in relation to linguistic representations of, for example, an academic discipline, but institutional dependencies that go beyond this linguistic representation. It thus raises epistemological doubt over the representational character of bibliographic knowledge organization systems and opens a variety of interpretations in line with more contemporary epistemological developments such as standpoint epistemologies (Trosow 2002) and neo-pragmatism (Sundin

& Johannesson 2005) which are relevant to everyday librarianship. The origins of the institutional perspective are to be found primarily in political science where institutional theory has developed over several decades, from a system theory approach to contemporary schools often gathered under the label of “new” or “normative” institutionalism (Peters 1999).

Institutionalism, or what might be described as an institutional perspective on LIS problems, is nothing new. In his Sarada Ranganathan lectures from 1967, published in 1970 as *The Sociological Foundations of Librarianship*, Jesse Shera presents a discussion on the relation between graphic communication and institutional dependencies, with examples taken from librarianship. This discussion is a contribution to his general project of creating a social epistemology as a solid theoretical basis for the practice of librarianship (Egan and Shera 1952, Egan 1956, Furner 2004, Zandonade 2004). He pinpoints a problem which is visible in the whole of LIS, but perhaps most in knowledge organization in relation to the discussion of the scientific character of the discipline. In his lecture on “The Library and Knowledge” he contrasts the view of the library and its inherent bibliographic processes as a closed system to one of the library as a dynamic system:

In the past, the library has operated as a kind of closed system. We have built our classification schemes, our bibliographic guides; the whole field of subject analysis of library materials have implied, whether we realise it or not, that the relationships of various segments of knowledge are relatively permanent, that these relationships stand, more or less for all times. The great weakness in the Dewey Decimal Classification and the classifications of his contemporaries was that they all viewed books in a taxonomical sense. (Shera, 1970, p. 90)

The taxonomical character of traditional classification systems is an effect of the contemporary influence of Darwinism, but as Shera continues he distances himself from these postulates by claiming the necessity of viewing the bibliographic processes of libraries as open ended. (In referring to the problem of universal representations depending on both temporal and spatial conditions, one thinks of Birger Hjørland's {1997, p. 86} poignant definition of subject classifications as “the informative potentials of documents.”) Shera continues his argument: “Therefore, in a sense, each generation must recreate anew its bibliographical instruments, its tools, because what was adequate for one generation may be completely inadequate for another. This is one of the great errors that, I think, Bliss made when assuming that he had discovered for the library world ‘the true order of nature.’” (Shera 1970, p. 92) Bliss's view has recently been

dismissed again as obsolete (Broughton et al. 2005, p. 137-138). However, while impossible to uphold an essentialist view of the representational character of bibliographic classification, it is notable that scholars are drawn to this position as though it gives them some sort of comfort in a documentary universe as chaotic and incomprehensible as the one we live with today. One can note this tendency in Maltby & Marcella (2000) and Zins (2004) for example.

Shera's ideas in the late 1960s were progressive enough, but they go only part of the way toward broader notions of defining the order of things in non-essentialist terms. For instance, he makes a rather traditional distinction between institutions and agents in which knowledge stands as a weakly defined institution that employs a number of agents to fulfill its "idea" or its meaning. Examples of such agents are libraries, schools on all levels, and universities. The institution is said to be consisting of certain ideological fundamentals that are to be operationalized by the different agents. Those fundamentals give both the institutions and the agents an essentialist core in relation to which they have to act in ways that can vary over time or generations. How such a core is to be defined is, however, by no means clear. There are several options for definition, but one clearly relevant for classification practice and research is the classical notion of a universe of knowledge, which sets the relations between different topics and disciplines in such a manner that a classification system may represent these relations in a more or less fixed way – thereby replicating the very problems Sera critiqued.

As a cross-disciplinary field within the social sciences, LIS has always been open to the influence of methodological and theoretical developments in the disciplines closest to its area of interests. Sera's discussion is a good example of this. Bringing his argument up-to-date in the landscape of contemporary social science, we can see that issues concerning institutionalism have continued to grow in significance. Discussion on institutional theory has been especially notable during the last two decades. The most prominent "new" institutionalism that has emerged is the normative institutionalism of James G. March and Johan P. Olsen (March & Olsen 1989, Peters 1999). It developed in political science and has proven interesting and fruitful in relation to LIS problems, most notably in analyses of public library development (Audunson, 1999; Zetterlund, 2004), but also in studies in critical classification (Hansson 1999). The most obvious reason for its relevance to LIS research is that, in addition to looking at institutions (fairly common in political science and more compatible with the distinction between institutions and agents as seen in Sera), normative institutionalism emphasises institutional identity made visible through certain values, norms and regulative rules. This

opens up a critically-oriented analysis of political and ideological factors influencing not just libraries and the practice of librarianship, but their role in the information behavior of people. Knowledge organization systems may also be subjected to analysis from a point of view that reveals them as biased in a political and ideological sense, bringing a thrust not possible (and perhaps even unnecessary) if a mere representative position in relation to a knowledge universe or any other absolute entity is stipulated. Classification systems are seen as the tools of librarianship, and as such, subject to the study of the institutional prerequisites that control libraries and other memory institutions.

March & Olsen identify three ways in which change occurs in political institutions. All are relevant in the discussion of the development of classification systems as well as in the analysis thereof:

First, there is considerable mundane adaptiveness in institutions that can be influenced. Although the course of change cannot be arbitrarily dictated, it is possible to influence the gradual transformation by stimulating or inhibiting predictable processes. Second, although the rules and routines of institutional life are relatively stable, they are incomplete. It is possible to influence the resolution of ambiguity surrounding the rules. Third, it is possible to produce incomprehensive shocks in institutions that transform them relatively abruptly. As in the case of mundane changes, the transformation cannot be controlled with any great precision; but change can be produced intentionally (March & Olsen 1989, p. 58).

Mundane change understood this way is consistent with the incremental change Pungitore (1995) identifies as typical for libraries of different kinds. The very “slow” pace of change has been characteristic of traditional classification systems for as long as we have had them. It has been seen as one of the constituent elements in the development of these systems, creating a structure stable enough not to disturb librarians, yet dynamic enough to ensure development in conjunction with society as a whole. Today however, the situation is different. While libraries still change “mundanely” in many ways, the practice of classification and the very fundamentals of knowledge organization are now developing more or less through “shock.” Traditional classification systems as reflections of certain principles of knowledge division, primarily hierachic and taxonomical, stand against individual perceptions that characterize the variety of classification and subject divisions on the internet in various degrees independent of traditional ideals. This juxtaposition is the key problem of practical knowledge organization today. In no other subfield

of LIS do we see such a distinct “before” and “after” in a temporal sense as we do in the relation between bibliographic knowledge organization and the general implementation of the internet about a decade ago (MacLennan 2000).

The boundaries between institutions and agents are not clearly defined in the writings of March and Olsen, but distinctions are made between viewing the organization as an agent or an institution, and viewing the individual in relation to an institution defined at an organizational level (public libraries, academic libraries etc.) or more sociologically (“education,” library sector etc.). Agents, whether individuals or organizations, develop and function within the given institution in accordance with these norms and values, which are seen as governing the manifestations of the institution. The way in which agents adapt is called the logic of appropriateness - contrasted against the logic of consequentiality found in systems and traditional institutional theory. March and Olsen maintain that:

In a logic of appropriateness...behaviors (beliefs as well as actions) are intentional but not willful. They involve fulfilling the obligations of a role in a situation, and so trying to determine the imperatives of holding a position. Action stems from a conception of necessity rather than preference. Within a logic of appropriateness, a sane person is one who is “in touch with identity” in the sense of maintaining consistency between behavior and a conception of self in a social role. Ambiguity or conflict in rules is typically resolved not by shifting to a logic of consequentiality and rational calculation, but by trying to clarify the rules, make distinctions, determine what the situation is and what definition “fits” (1989, p. 161).

Guy Peters takes another approach to the “logic of appropriateness” concept:

The operation of the logic of appropriateness can be seen as a version of role theory. The institution defines a set of behavioral expectations for individuals with positions within the institution and then reinforces behavior that is appropriate for the role and sanctions behavior that is inappropriate. Some aspects of the role may apply to all members of the institution, while other expectations may be specific to the position held by an individual. Further, like organizational culture there may be several versions of the role among which a role occupant can pick and choose.... Despite the somewhat amorphous nature of a role, the concept does provide a means of linking individual behavior and the institution (1999, p. 30).

I contend that knowledge organization and classification research has much to learn from these perspectives. It is fruitful in our context not least in coming to terms with different bias issues that have been the focus of critical classification research since the 1970s. It also suggests a way of approaching new and emerging epistemological positions which constructively question the traditionally assumed representativity of knowledge organization systems, whether the representation is concerned with structures of knowledge or conditions in society. In short, it is a good concept for analyzing change. In an epistemological environment that today is more scattered than ever, normative institutionalism may help bridge the tensions in knowledge organization research and in LIS as a whole by its combination of emphases on individual influences on institutional practices and the influence of institutionally developed norms, rules, and values on the individual. Hence, one might even suggest that the distinction between relativism and the claims to objective knowledge would cease to exist. Such a proposition is crucial in our analyses and development of knowledge organization systems.

Conclusion

The new empirical environment for knowledge organization and classification research calls for ways of thinking that are less concerned with empty information-concepts and cognitive processes, and more in tune with the institutionally and socially defined reality of the systems to be studied and developed. An institutional approach to the problems at hand is needed. Recent years have seen several attempts in this direction. Domain analysis and the increased focus on classification systems as social artifacts (Hansson 1997, 1999) were mentioned. Another is an interest in documents as agents in various social and institutional environments – producing consequences for different practices of document description (Vellucci 1997, Smiraglia 2001). It is no longer only a question what classification does to documents, but what the documents do to classification and the development of collections to which they belong, not just as dead containers of information, but as material carriers of practices, norms and values (Brown & Duguid 1996, Frohmann 2004a, 2004b). Instead of formulating problems of information seeking and retrieval, Frohmann suggests that we talk about documentary practices. Paired with the concept of logic of appropriateness, these concepts might hold major potential in future theory development in knowledge organization and in LIS as a whole.

Approaching an empirical environment that can be labelled as post-modern, we must try to combine the sense of a scattered reality that is inherent therein with a framework of norms and values that can be used to

describe the transformation of knowledge – not from a point of absolutes, but from the point of interests. Attempts to discuss radical epistemological and methodological issues such as neo-pragmatism, standpoint epistemologies, feminism and queer theory have been met with scepticism in the LIS community so far, although several well done studies related to these approaches have been published in different parts of the discipline (Creelman & Harris 1990, Whitt 1993, Olson 2002). In knowledge organization, the pitfalls characteristic of traditional classification and in the writings of Ranganathan (for example) are discussed in ways which indicate a potential for critical perspectives. This discussion gives precedence to the situational character and the dependency of interests of knowledge in bibliographic classification. For our purposes here, it is more important to examine the effects of these dependencies on practical librarianship and the role of classification in defining the normative basis of libraries. This is of particular interest in terms of the relationship between classification and public librarianship which has a far more complex function in society than, for example, academic librarianship.

By taking as a point of departure a new, post-modern epistemology, we might free ourselves from the conceptual bindings that were developed in classification research during the late 19th and early 20th century – logical and reasonable then, but in many cases obsolete today. It must however be combined with a critical perspective that can make this position politically and socially viable. This would also pave the way for a discussion of more intellectual weight than the one that we all know so well, which is predominantly concerned with the advancement of information and communication technology governed by capitalist self interest. Critical readings of current classification systems must be enhanced in order to create an understanding not of the essentialist foundation of knowledge structures, but of the social and cultural relations which form the content and structure of these systems. Competing interests are at play here. The institutional prerequisites for librarianship have changed dramatically and are in constant flux. The concept of the logic of appropriateness (which was not developed within a post-modern conceptual environment) in combination with a general critique of those norms that have made traditional classification systems (such as Dewey, UDC, and the Swedish SAB-system characteristically biased as white, heterosexual, middleclass, Christian, and male) is challenging and worth considering.

If we treat research within knowledge organization as a part of a bigger field of research (Library and Information Science) as I believe we must, the use of normative institutionalism as a bridge between traditional classification research and a post-modern way of thinking about subject analysis will be constructive. Also, the relation between knowledge organization, library

research, and information behavior research is important to acknowledge in practice. And, not least, the acceptance of radical renewal of the epistemological level of classification research would be facilitated. The problems of knowledge organization seem in some cases to be timeless. They are not. The ways in which we approach them must also change with the times. It is time to start questioning the fundamentals of today's approaches. Not only would that give classification research the vital injection that it so badly needs, but it may even help us come up with solutions and theoretical constructs that we so far have had difficulty foreseeing. The general directions are by no means random. They can be worked out to form a basis for what we want to accomplish within LIS – a development of librarianship characterized by firm action for freedom of expression and democracy, and the emancipation of underprivileged groups in society.

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NOTE: This paper was originally prepared to be presented orally as a keynote address for the 16th SIG/CR Classification Research Workshop on October 28, 2005, at the ASIS&T Annual Meeting in Charlotte, NC, USA. I have received good advice during the work on this piece. I would especially like to thank Dr. Jack Andersen, Dr. Olof Sundin and Dr. Angela Zetterlund for their comments and corrections.

WHY HAVE A COMPREHENSIVE & REPRESENTATIVE COLLECTION?: GLBT Material Selection and Service in the Public Library

by STACY H. SIMPSON

In these harried times public librarians are adapting as fast as they can to cope with changes in information volume, format, and user demographics. We wonder how we find time to give much attention to comprehensive collection development. Keeping up with technology, the census and deflating budgets is truly challenging. In recent times, we have seen librarian job attrition, shorter service hours, and slower collection enhancement in our local libraries. It appears something would have to "give" for many public libraries and, indeed, it has.

Just as our local libraries, public libraries throughout the United States are feeling not only the financial pinch, but also the disregard of a government whose priorities are not focused on the institutions that uplift the general population. When the highest national priorities place war, tax cuts to the richest and diminishment of civil rights ahead of funding public libraries, morale plummets. We might begin to think, "Why bother? Our institution is no longer considered important!" But the people still need the libraries to improve their lives and help them preserve what is left of their freedom. Libraries provide access to reliable information the public needs to live, not just intellectually, but emotionally healthy lives. It is therefore imperative that the information needs of the entire population be served diligently, regardless of the obstacles.

Most librarians would agree that information needs should be met, but it is arguable that not all public libraries are meeting the needs of certain segments of the population they serve. For instance, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people appear to be underserved by many public libraries. Jennifer Downey, in her article "Public Library Collection Development Issues Regarding the Information Needs of GLBT Patrons," writes,

despite the surge in gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) awareness and resources that has occurred over the past several decades, the GLBT community often remains the "invisible

minority” (Loverich & Degnan, 1999), especially in the public library setting. Even when librarians work to develop collections that reflect the diversity of their communities, the GLBT segment of those communities often goes unacknowledged (86).

Downey is not alone in this assertion.

Ellen Greenblatt wrote that “Many librarians have never questioned the heterosexism that pervades library services, policies, and collections. In fact, a 1996 article surveying 465 library school graduates found that almost half (47.7%) had not received any information about GLBT issues in their library school curricula.” (Greenblatt). The author of this article is a third-year library science student in an ALA accredited program. She had not been exposed to any GLBT references in classes until the current semester, where some of the readings mention selection of material for this special segment of the community. Greenblatt continues:

A longstanding contention regarding LBGT library service has been the lack of availability of LBGT materials in libraries. Although there has been an enormous growth in LBGT publishing over the last two decades, studies continually show that library holdings fall far short of publishing output. A poll of 250 public and academic libraries conducted by *Library Journal* in 1995 showed that 14% of the libraries had no holdings of LBGT materials while 76% held fewer than 150 titles this despite an estimate that 975 titles had been published in the preceding year. (Greenblatt)

Even more evidence that the GLBT community has been underserved is offered by Greenblatt when she writes that many GLBT people turn to the internet to get their information because libraries are often bare-shelved of GLBT materials and “[t]he use of filters in public and school libraries effectively shuts off this lifeline, creating additional barriers between LBGTQ users and the information and services they seek.” The internet’s pan-sexual content is essentially inaccessible and blocked out by the filters. Greenblatt also noted:

A 1998 study examining the holdings of LBGT classic and award-winning books in major public libraries in the US and Canada found that on average the libraries surveyed held approximately three quarters of the 222 titles examined. While this shows some improvement over the earlier study, one must question why the holdings were not higher considering that the titles in essence formed a LBGT core list. Turning to periodical holdings, a 1996

study found that only 17% of the 92 journal titles examined were held by more than 26 OCLC libraries. These statistics show that LBGT materials continue to be under-selected in libraries.

All of this evidence led Greenblatt to conclude that “LBGTQ users are still vastly underserved and library collections vastly underdeveloped.”

Governing bodies’ sensitivity to public pressures to conform to “community standards” in these more restrictive times is still an issue for librarians. In a 2001 issue of *American Libraries* an article described the March 6th meeting of the Mecklenburg County, North Carolina commissioners where on live television, a man threatened to read from a sexually explicit lesbian-themed book he had checked out of the public library. The man had “...repeatedly complained about sexually explicit library books.” (Goldberg, 31) Though the man was ejected from the meeting and never read from the book, “[a] month later, Mecklenburg County Commission Chairman Parks Helms and Vice Chairman Becky Carney were...responding to Davis’s concerns: In an April 5 joint letter, Helms and Carney advised commissioners that they had instructed library officials to recommend measures to ‘...safeguard [children’s] access to adult controversial books.’” (*ibid*) Adult controversial books most assuredly include GLBT books. Taking this action would likely make any GLBT materials more difficult to find in the Mecklenburg County library or cause these materials to be unavailable to younger people.

The author of this paper became curious about local public library collections and chose to briefly experiment with a library’s online catalog by searching for material with bisexual content. After searching the Scott County (Minnesota) Library’s online catalog using the search keyword “bisexuality,” only four titles appeared in the results, written by three authors, with publication dates ranging from 1995 to 2003. There were a total of six monographs. The Prior Lake branch had three of them. Prior Lake, Savage and Shakopee each had just one book available cataloged under bisexuality. The keyword “bisexual” brought up nine more titles. Among those there were only two novels. There were an unimpressive two books for youth, one book about black men “on the down low,” one about GLBT families, one that was politically-themed, and the others appeared to be autobiographies.

With the burgeoning population of Scott County, one would expect more than a total of thirteen titles when searching under the keywords “bisexual” and “bisexuality.” This author found a grand total of twenty-three monographs. There were no videos, documentaries, audio tapes, compact discs or DVDs under these keywords. Just twenty-three monographs spread

out through the entire county. According to the 2000 United States census, there were 89,498 people in Scott County at that time, and it was one of the fastest growing counties in Minnesota. It has been estimated that roughly 3% of women and 5% of men identified as bisexual according to a study published in 1993 called *The Janus Report*. (Janus 70/Burleson 50)

Though estimates vary, this is probably a conservative percentage. Assuming the population of men is equal in number to women, we could guess that about 4% of the population identifies as bisexual. That would mean there are possibly 3,580 identified bisexuals in Scott County. This author argues wholeheartedly that thirteen titles on this subject are not enough! Twenty-three monographs distributed over seven branches, averaging three per branch, to serve the information needs of over three-thousand people arguably shows materials with bisexual content are under-collected in Scott County Public Library. If someone were trying to learn something about bisexuality anonymously by browsing Scott County Library shelves, he would not be able to find enough material to learn anything. Some may think, “So what! Who cares!?”

Librarians should care pointedly about serving these populations to maintain the very integrity of their profession. American Library Association (ALA), which heavily influences library practices, states that “American libraries exist and function within the context of a body of laws derived from the United States Constitution and the First Amendment. The *Library Bill of Rights* embodies the basic policies that guide libraries in the provision of services, materials, and programs.” (ALA)

Article I of the *Library Bill of Rights* states that “Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.” The Association affirms that books and other materials coming from gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgendered presses, gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgendered authors or other creators, and materials regardless of format or services dealing with gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgendered life are protected by the *Library Bill of Rights*. Librarians are obligated by the *Library Bill of Rights* to endeavor to select materials without regard to the sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation of their creators by using the criteria identified in their written, approved selection policies (ALA policy 53.1.5).

In Article II of the *Library Bill of Rights* maintains, “Library services, materials, and programs representing diverse points of view on sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation should be considered for purchase and inclusion in library collections and programs.” Article V of ALA’s *Library*

Bill of Rights, which is reiterated in the interpretive document, *Access to Library Resources and Services Regardless of Sex, Gender Identity, or Sexual Orientation: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights*, “mandates that library services, materials, and programs be available to all members of the community the library serves, without regard to sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation. This includes providing youth with comprehensive sex education literature (ALA Policy 52.5.2).”

In June 2005, the ALA reinforced its commitment to diversity in collection development by specifically including GLBT material in its document called *Resolution on Threats to Library Materials Related to Sex, Gender Identity, or Sexual Orientation*. The sources of the threats are made clear in the first statement of the resolution: “WHEREAS, some elected officials of federal, state, and local governments have proposed to restrict or prohibit access to materials related to sexual orientation within their publicly funded libraries...” The resolution continues with strong statements on the ALA’s positions on serving the public and explicitly clarifying that materials related to sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation also serve the public’s interests. There should be no doubt in any librarian’s mind that GLBT materials must be included representatively in a public library collection, and be accessible, to properly serve the public. The resolution states:

RESOLVED, that the American Library Association affirms the inclusion in library collections of materials that reflect the diversity of our society, including those related to sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the American Library Association encourages all American Library Association chapters to take active stands against all legislative or other government attempts to proscribe materials related to sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the American Library Association encourages all libraries to acquire and make available materials representative of all the people in our society.

Public library collections need examination and demographics must be studied to determine if their collections’ GLBT material is sufficiently representative of the potential users and adequate to satisfy their needs. Not only should the professional integrity of library service be a motivation to collect GLBT material representatively, but also compassion for the needs of a generally oppressed sub-segment of society. Ultimately, librarianship is a service profession.

Many librarians might not know how important it can be to a person who is afraid to talk or ask about sexual feelings, which manifest differently for the majority population, to have access to information about their brand of sexuality. The collection of these materials is important, not only to the GLBT population. "... [D]o you think that there are no children in your child's classroom or library with lesbian or gay parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, neighbors and friends? What messages are you giving to all children, when you pretend there is only one type of family, and render the rest invisible..." (Howard 1). Non-GLBT people will also use the material. To have an under-representative collection marginalizes the needs of those who want to better understand GLBT friends and relatives.

Young adults are particularly in need of good GLBT library materials. As Downey writes,

Adolescence is tough, and this is especially true for GLBT young adults. GLBT youth experience frequent isolation, which places them at risk for violence, homelessness, substance abuse, and suicide (Hughes-Hassell & Hinckley, 2001), as well as academic failure and dropping out of school (Jenkins, 1990). Librarians are in the powerful and important position of being able to help reduce these risks by providing access to quality GLBT-themed young adult (YA) materials, and by helping direct young adults to GLBT-centered organizations and agencies. Jenkins (1990) states: "Young people often gain their first information about homosexuality from books." Considering the many risks GLBT adolescents face, the importance of providing adequate GLBT-related YA resources cannot be overestimated. *It is no exaggeration to say that the right resources could save a life.* (Downey 86-95) (emphasis added)

It is really that important!

Availability of good GLBT materials in the public libraries is important, but librarians must also be approachable when asked to help locate such material. If a person cannot get to the material needed it is, in effect, not there at all. Librarians need to keep in mind that a patron who asks for GLBT materials may be taking a huge risk of rejection by doing so, particularly if it is a young person. Dr. Ann Curry conducted a research project to investigate "the level of reference service provided by public librarians for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered (GLBT) or questioning [(Q)] youth in the Greater Vancouver area." (Curry 1) A young woman was sent into public libraries in the Vancouver, BC area to ask for GLBT material to help her start a high school Gay Straight Alliance Club, and to record the

reactions and professional responses of the librarians. “The theme of young adults searching for information about their awakening yet puzzling sexual identity appears repeatedly in gay and lesbian autobiographies. Often the school library, a potentially threatening environment, fails to provide any clues, so the public library is the next stop.” (Curry 1)

This study was important, because “research on GLBT youth... reveals the gravity of their ‘at risk’ status and the fear that pervades their search for information...” (Curry 3) Disturbingly, “according to a study by the organization Advocates for Youth, one-third of gay/lesbian youth say they have attempted suicide at least once, about 30% have dropped out of school, and as many as 40% of homeless youth are gay.” (Curry 3) Dr. Curry’s researcher, Angela, approached twenty librarians in various Vancouver libraries and reported “the worst response was silence. No words – just a blank stare. As the silence continued, Angela noted – ‘I was tempted to run away!’ Only when she repeated the question did the librarian haltingly begin to help.” (Curry 8) Angela found

one librarian [who] conducted a partial interview and started to search for sources when he suddenly became agitated, mumbled “So, if you, you know, need...yeah,” turned around, and walked away. Angela waited for several minutes for him to re-appear, but he had indeed done a disappearing act, and was nowhere to be found. In all her encounters, Angela noted that this interaction was perhaps the lowest point, as she waited, hopeful but uncomfortable and unwanted. (Curry 11)

During nineteen-year-old Angela’s search for GLBT information, she found that about half of the librarians she approached were as helpful as they could be, even though in some cases there was no relevant material to be found. In many cases, she was not able to find material without the librarian’s help. Clearly, an adequate collection must be accompanied by excellent and poised reference service. Angela was an adult when she pretended to be a high school student for the Curry research project. This author wonders how many teenagers would have simply left the library after having been treated with silence or left alone with no help to find what they needed.

To have the best collection possible can be extremely important to people. In particular, we have seen that it is very important to have a representative GLBT collection, especially for youth. Librarians are professionally bound to ensure that users of the public library are served equitably. This does not appear to be what is happening for the GLBT patrons in many public libraries. Therefore, public librarians need to take a proactive approach.

They must examine the public collections, gather GLBT demographic information and assess local communities' needs. Public librarians need to make certain GLBT collections are adequate and be sensitive to all patrons' information needs. It is not only professional service to select a comprehensive, representative public library collection – it is truly a service to humanity.

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BRAVERMAN PRIZE ESSAY

BECOMING RESPONSIBLE MEDIATORS: The Application of Postmodern Perspectives to Archival Arrangement & Description

by JOSEPH DEODATO

As a critical theory, postmodernism refers to a critique of Enlightenment rationalism and universalism which emphasizes the role of underlying structures and power relationships in the construction of truth and knowledge. While most academic disciplines and allied professions have been contending with the challenges of postmodernism since at least the 1970s, archival theory and practice has, for the most part, remained squarely rooted in earlier traditions of nineteenth-century positivism. Although the precise reason for the profession's intellectual isolation is unclear, it is perhaps reasonable to assume, as Elisabeth Kaplan does, that by working in relative obscurity for such a large portion of their history, archivists have managed to avoid the external scrutiny and internal pressures to which other disciplines have long been subjected (217). In recent years, however, the increased presence of archives on the Internet, their participation in collaborative bibliographic networks, and the expansion of access to archival holdings, has led to greater visibility and use while giving impetus to a reevaluation of traditional principles and practices. To be sure, some postmodernist ideas have gained ground within the profession, specifically with regard to selection and appraisal where even some of the greatest skeptics have been forced to recognize the apparent subjectivity of deciding which records will be kept and which will be discarded.¹ However, postmodernism has made significantly less headway in the area of arrangement and description, where many established orthodoxies still reign. The failure to question the presumed objectivity of these practices as well as the influential role of archivists in shaping the human record raises serious questions about the issue of social responsibility. Accordingly, the aim of this essay is

to offer a review of postmodern perspectives on archival arrangement and description and explore how they can be employed to enhance social responsibility within the archival profession. In particular, this essay attempts to demonstrate how postmodern ideas can be applied to archival practice by reformulating basic principles of arrangement and description, adding creative modifications to the finding aid, and establishing responsible guidelines for the development of descriptive standards.

Postmodernism and the Archival Paradigm Shift

Although the precise definition of “postmodernism” has been a frequent point of contention, most would agree that its most basic characteristic can be described as an “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard, xxiv). In other words, postmodernism eschews any and all sweeping explanations premised on some version of monolithic human experience. In contrast, postmodernists emphasize the diversity of human experience and the multiplicity of perspectives arising therefrom. At its root lies a rejection of modernist positivism and its allied Enlightenment concepts of rationality, objectivity, and universal Truth. The postmodernist sees in the modernist project an attempt by the powerful to subject subordinate social groups to hegemonic ideologies that ultimately serve its interests. To counter this, postmodernists seek to recover the voices of the marginalized – those whose values, experiences, and worldviews give lie to the metanarrative.

The “grand myths of Western civilization” have been declared dead – but why? As Terry Cook explains, postmodern skepticism coincided with the advance of globalization and the fragmentation of what was once thought to be universal human experience.

The globalization of media and commerce, their enabling world-wide communications of computerized networks and telecommunication satellites, the resultant information explosion in the wired world of instant 24/7 work and recreation, and a concomitant information fragmentation into hundreds of channels, thousands of niche markets, and millions of Web pages – all of these challenge the very possibility of metanarrative (23).

As our awareness of and engagement with the rest of the world increases, so too does our awareness of other voices, worldviews, and realities. In short, society has become more cognizant of what postmodernists simply refer to as the “Other” – “those beyond itself, those whose race, class, gender, or sexual orientation may be different from its own, those who in a globalized community it can no longer ignore when constructing its own identities and composing its own narratives” (Cook, 23). As a result,

many have come to recognize the major metanarratives of the past as offering, at best, partial and incomplete views of social reality. From the postmodernist perspective, every discourse, every text, every document, every artifact, is just one representation of reality; one narrative among many, and inevitably, one constructed by the most powerful elements in society. Nothing is neutral and nothing is objective.

Needless to say, these conclusions have shaken the very roots of academia as theorists from all disciplines seek to reevaluate previously unquestioned assumptions and reformulate first principles. In postmodern parlance, this often takes the form of “deconstruction,” an attempt to de-naturalize that which was previously assumed to be natural. What was once perceived as natural, self-evident, or just plain normal is revealed to be socially and culturally constructed and thus in need of deconstruction and reformulation to better reflect the diversity of human subjectivity. Through deconstruction, postmodernism restores to human perception a sense of ambiguity, fluidity, and multiplicity of perspective that is critical to new, globalized ways of seeing (Cook, 24-25).

Postmodern criticism drives through the very heart of archival theory, discrediting many of its central tenets regarding the nature of records, the presumably unobtrusive role of the archivist, the meaning of provenance, and the character of arrangement and description. As a profession rooted in the earlier modernist framework, Cook warns that archives may be adhering to concepts and methodologies that are no longer viable in a postmodern world. Drawing on the theoretical model proposed by Thomas Kuhn, Cook suggests that the time is ripe for an archival paradigm shift.² Among the theoretical reformulations recommended for incorporation into the new postmodern archival paradigm are the following:

1. Records are not neutral representations of the past, but constructed products shaped by the subjectivity of their creators and contexts of their creation. Moreover, their meanings are neither fixed nor static, but dynamic and constantly evolving in response to changing contexts and uses.
2. Archivists are not passive, impartial custodians of the historical record, but its active interpreters and mediators. Their work determines the context in which records will be understood and used.
3. The focus of archival work must shift from revealing the content of records to revealing their contexts. Adequately documenting the provenance of records requires more than simply identifying the office of their creation, but also their social and cultural contexts, functions, and custodial history (including their history under archival custody).

4. The organization and narrative imposed on records by archival arrangement and description are not objective recreations of some prior existing reality, but representations shaped by the individual subjectivities of the archivist, the institutional requirements of the archives, and the broader cultural and intellectual climates in which they operate.

This is a tall order to be sure, and one that many archivists may be reluctant to accept, but as the remainder of this essay seeks to demonstrate, there are a number of ways in which these critical perspectives can be applied to the practice of arrangement and description in order to provide archivists and their users with the tools necessary for understanding records in a postmodern world.

*Reformulating First Principles:
Incorporating New Understandings of Arrangement and Description*

The first task of the postmodern archivist is to rethink established principles and reformulate them in ways that incorporate new understandings of arrangement and description. Postmodernist criticisms highlight three new ways of looking at arrangement and description – as metanarrative, as mediation, and as social construct. This section looks at founding principles of arrangement and description and the ways in which they can be reformulated to reflect these new understandings.

Arrangement and Description as Metanarrative

Respect des fonds, provenance, and original order are the core principles around which archivists have traditionally sought to arrange and describe records. Taken together, these principles hold that the records created and/or accumulated by a single person, family, or corporate body must be: a) described as one fonds; b) not mixed or combined with the records of any other creator(s); and c) maintained in the original order in which they were used. However, the increasing complexity of modern bureaucratic organizations and their record-keeping systems has presented major challenges to these principles. Modern records are often created, accumulated, and used by a variety of agencies and series of records frequently change custody from one organization to another. This makes the “one collection, one creator” idea of the record group untenable and necessitates an expansion of the conventional conception of provenance. As Wendy Duff and Verne Harris point out, each “new layer or generation of use adds to the provenance and changes the context of the record. All actors are a part of creation, and, therefore, all need to be documented” (271). Furthermore, it is clear that creation is but one aspect of a complex

provenance that also includes the context in which the records were created, the functions they were intended to document, and the record-keeping systems used to maintain and provide access to them.

By adhering to antiquated principles of arrangement and description, archivists fail to document the records' rich contextual relationships, variety of narratives, and multi-provenancial characteristics. In their place, archivists present simplified, monolithic representations of what, in actuality, are much more complex realities. Not only is the process highly selective and culturally subjective, but it also negates possible alternative arrangements and misleads the user into assuming that the archivist's order is natural and absolute. In short, the processes of arrangement and description construct a metanarrative of the record, which privileges one reading of the record – one version of reality – over all others.

Arrangement and Description as Mediation

In advocating the expansion of the concept of provenance, postmodernists go a step further to suggest that provenance also includes the ways in which archivists, themselves, shape the context of the record. Despite having been based on naïve views of the truth-value of records, respect des fonds and the concomitant principles of provenance and original order were well-intentioned attempts to limit potential meddling on the part of the archivist by preserving the physical and intellectual integrity of the records and, therefore, their authenticity and evidential value. But even the strictest adherence to these rules ultimately fails to curb the transformative impact of the archival process. As Tom Nesmith points out, the mere designation of something as "archival" attributes to it a special status and distinctive meaning. "This mediates reality not only by affecting what we can know about the past, but also by saying that this is what we need to know about it" (32). More than this, the way archivists arrange and describe records has a formidable impact on how those records will be interpreted by users. That is to say, if a record's meaning is fundamentally shaped by the processes of its creation, it is also shaped (or perhaps re-shaped) by the processes of its "archivalization." In deciding what about a complex body of records accounts for meaningful order, determining its provenance, highlighting what is believed to be significant about its contents, and assigning names and access points, archivists shape the way those records will be understood and used by researchers. In the postmodern world, records can no longer be perceived as neutral windows to the past for, as Eric Ketelaar states, "the archives reflect realities as perceived by the 'archivers'" (133).

Arrangement and Description as Social Construct

Yet, archivists do not construct representations of their holdings in isolation. Their understandings of the records, and therefore their representations of them, are also shaped by the wider social and cultural surroundings in which they operate. As we have seen, the principles of respect des fonds, provenance, and original order were all based on modernist perceptions of the nature of records. Indeed, archivists have long insisted that their methods of arranging and describing records are naturally derived from the character of the materials themselves. However, the postmodernist critique suggests that archival practices are in fact shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which they are imbedded. According to Richard Brown, “classifications never emerge solely from the material to be classified since our ways of defining the material itself are shaped by the dominant intellectual or political paradigms through which we view it” (25).

This process is readily apparent in archival description where the selection of descriptive terms and access points is shaped by the contextual constraints of language. “Language,” say Sharon Larade and Johanne Pelletier,

classifies and orders the world: it is a means of manipulating reality which has the potential to mislead, misguide, or deceive. Language reflects the inequalities and prejudices of human culture; it also reflects attitudes that demean or discriminate against sexual, ethnic, or cultural identities (99).

Librarians have been vocal on issues of bias in bibliographic description since the 1970s.³ A study conducted by Margaret Rogers in 1993 demonstrated how Library of Congress subject headings discriminated against women by promoting gendered stereotypes in occupational headings. Rogers suggested that the separate treatment given to women in occupational subject headings – such as “Women in politics,” “Women in engineering,” or “Women in management” – implied that it was unusual or perhaps even inappropriate for women to have these occupations (181). Furthermore, the absence of similarly distinct occupational headings for men indicated that it was presumed natural for men to assume these roles.⁴

Rogers’ work is an illustrative example of the way in which descriptive standards are shaped by the biases and worldviews of specific socio-historical contexts. However, the issue of bias in descriptions of holdings is not limited merely to libraries or to the topic of gender. Archivists (who often borrow subject headings from LCSH) are also guilty of using descriptive terminology that perpetuates social conventions of language which discriminate against certain sexual, ethnic, and social groups. As

Larade and Pelletier suggest, archivists must be able to identify and analyze the inequities of language and propose alternative, more representative constructs to the work of archival description. There will, of course, be those who view any effort to incorporate new descriptive language as “interference rather than as responsible mediation – as pushing archival objectivity and impartiality out the window” (Larade & Pelletier, 107). Yet, one could only hold such a view if one assumed language to be impartial in the first place.

Like other modes of classifying and organizing knowledge, cataloging and descriptive standards have been the historic product of a predominantly Western, white, Christian, heterosexual, male worldview; the applicability of which has recently been called into question by postmodernism. Accordingly, it is necessary for archivists to revisit the descriptions and assigned access points of their holdings to ensure their adequacy and representativeness.

By reformulating archival principles in ways that incorporate these new understandings of arrangement and description, archivists will be better able to construct more accurate representations of their holdings and enhance users’ understanding of records. Archivists must begin to articulate principles of arrangement and description that recognize the limits of the record group and original order, and expand the conception of provenance, thereby allowing archival work to highlight the fluid, polysemic, and multi-relational characteristics of the records. These principles must also demonstrate an awareness of the influential roles of archivists and the social contexts in which they conduct their work. An archival theory based on such principles would be better able to deal with arrangement and description as metanarrative, mediation, and social construct. The final sections highlight some practical applications for such a theory.

Archivist as Author, Finding Aid as Narrative

As we have seen, the process of archival arrangement and description does not simply reveal the meaning and significance of records, it actively participates in their construction. Thus, in the postmodernist view, the archivist is not the mere keeper of the record, but its co-creator. As Nesmith explains:

A record is a meaningful communication, which means it is a physical object, plus an understanding or representation of that object. Some of what makes a record meaningful is inscribed in it by those who literally made it, but most of what makes a record intelligible lies outside its physical borders in its context

of interpretation. Archivists, who do much to shape this context, therefore share in authoring the record (32).

The Jenkinsonian tradition of consigning the archivist to an invisible role did not limit the archivist's influence over the documentary record; it merely concealed it. Recognizing the influence of archivists means recognizing archivists as authors. Dealing with authorship entails accepting responsibility for the potential biases that may affect archival work. Thus, Duff and Harris conclude:

Just as archivists document the historical background, internal organizational or personal cultures, and various biases or emphases of record creators, they need also to highlight their own preconceptions that influence and shape the descriptions and consequently the meanings of the records they re-present to researchers (278).

If archivists are authors, then the descriptions they create are narratives; stories told about the record and its meaning. Postmodernists assert that records contain many potential stories. The power of the archivist, then, stems precisely from his/her position to decide which stories will be told. According to Duff and Harris, "descriptions inevitably privilege some views and diminish others. When archivists describe records, they can only represent a slice, or a slice of a slice ... of a record's reality" (278).

Michelle Light and Tom Hyry highlight these two factors – the lack of archival accountability and of multiplicity of perspective – as major flaws of conventional finding aids. In order to acknowledge both the inherent subjectivity of archival work and its mediating role in the production of meaning, the authors suggest two additions to the finding aid: colophons and annotations. Colophons are statements that provide contextual information pertaining to the creation of a text. Finding aid colophons create a space in archival description where archivists can acknowledge and explain their authorial role in the creation of the record. Providing users with information about the social background, personal history, and worldview of the processing archivist denaturalizes archival description and acknowledges its inherent subjectivity. Thus, finding aid colophons directly reflect an expanded conception of provenance, which addresses the role of the archivist in shaping the records' context.

The second descriptive modification proposed by Light and Hyry is the incorporation of finding aid annotations. Finding aid annotations allow for the airing of diverse perspectives about a collection. Rather than privileging a single narrative about a group of records (i.e., that of the processing

archivist), Light and Hyry suggest allowing reference archivists and users to annotate finding aids, thereby permitting the accumulation and capture of equally valid re-readings of the records. According to the authors, as reference archivists and researchers use a processed collection, they come to know more about the records and devise new interpretations of their meaning. Yet finding aids only reflect the first reading of the records, freezing their meaning in time and foreclosing the possibility of alternative interpretations (Light & Hyry, 228). By incorporating annotations into the finding aid, new readings can be gathered over time and a multiplicity of perspectives can be expressed. Annotations, therefore, reflect a postmodern understanding of description as dynamic, rather than static; as open, rather than closed.⁵

*Talk About Nailing Jelly to the Wall:
Creating Standards in the Collapse of Metanarrative*

If the subjective role of archivists is concealed by principles that articulate a misleadingly narrow view of provenance, it is further masked by descriptive standards that lend to description an “aura of objectivity” (Light and Hyry, 221). Much discussion in recent archival literature has focused on the need for greater standardization. While necessary for facilitating information exchange, promoting consistency of practice, and enhancing intellectual control of holdings, descriptive standards also reflect the particular biases, worldviews, and ideological traces of the social and cultural environment in which they were produced. As Rogers’ study of library subject headings demonstrated, the choices librarians and archivists make in selecting descriptive terms are laden with value judgments that reflect particular views of reality.

Descriptive standards also create a metanarrative of archives as they seek to establish rules to homogenize practices and make them uniform across institutions. In order for descriptive standards to function they must elevate one point of view over all others. This has a profound effect on access as well as description. Each concept, capable of being expressed in a variety of different ways, can only be assigned one authorized descriptor. These become the “metanames,” which all users are forced to use in order to access particular holdings, thereby shaping their understanding of them. In terms of description, archivists are pressed to correlate materials with appropriate descriptors no matter how ill-fitting the match. As Duff and Harris point out, “the greater the level of standardization the greater the violence done to the local, the individual, the eccentric, the small, the weak, the other, and the case which does not fit its conceptual boxes” (281).

However, as Duff and Harris suggest, the dangers associated with standardization do not mean archivists should avoid standards. For one

thing, the need for standardized terminology is inescapable and necessary in order to permit some level of descriptive consistency, inter-institutional cooperation, and efficient retrieval of records. Secondly, descriptive standards are one of the few direct means available for questioning and challenging traditional descriptive practices that, more often than not, replicate and sustain existing power relationships (Duff & Harris, 283). But how do archivists, living in the collapse of metanarrative and with new understandings of its socially constructed nature, create useable and responsible standards of description?

Resolving this seeming paradox lies in creating standards that are liberatory rather than oppressive. Accordingly, Duff and Harris suggest the following guidelines for developing responsible descriptive standards:

1. The standard must refrain from presenting itself as “natural.” The traces of its construction and the biases of its creators must be made explicit.
2. It must emerge from a process that is inclusive and transparent thereby ensuring accountability.
3. It must affirm a process of open-ended making and remaking of the record.
4. It must consider the needs of diverse user groups by allowing different ways of searching, interrogating, organizing, and interpreting records.
5. It must require engagement with the marginalized and the silenced and create spaces for sub-narratives and counter-narratives.
6. It must seek ways of troubling its own status as a metanarrative by embracing ‘a politics of ambiguity and multiplicity’ and opening spaces for other tellings and re-tellings of competing stories (285).

A descriptive standard that follows these principles would demonstrate an awareness of all three postmodern understandings of arrangement and description – as metanarrative, as mediation, and as social construct.

Conclusion: On Becoming Responsible Mediators

This essay has sought to offer a review of postmodern theories of arrangement and description and demonstrate how they can be used to enhance social responsibility within the archival profession. In particular, we have looked at how the reformulation of traditional principles, modification of the finding aid, and the development of liberatory descriptive standards can be applied in order to enrich users' understanding of our holdings and increase professional responsibility. Above all, this

essay has sought to encourage archivists to recognize and embrace the mediating role they play in shaping the historical record. Embracing mediation does not mean accepting relativism, dismissing ethics, or repudiating professional standards. It means coming to terms with our subjectivity, tolerating ambiguity, decentralizing power over the record, and accepting accountability for our decisions.

Archivists must realize that there are serious limitations to the way we have traditionally carried out our work – limits to the truth-value of records; to the conceptions of record group, provenance, and original order; to archival neutrality and objectivity; and to our ability to create representative portrayals of the past. However, we need not be disheartened for the realization of these limitations brings with it new possibilities – new ways of understanding arrangement and description; new formulations of old principles; new voices, stories, and contextual relationships waiting to be documented; and new ways of engaging our users and presenting our work to the public. There are no doubt some who would say that accepting mediation entails the creation of an alien and potentially dangerous role for the archivist. However I would argue that by refusing to accept mediation, we irresponsibly refuse to acknowledge a role that already exists.

NOTES

1. The influence of postmodern theories in this area of practice is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in experimentation with techniques such as macroappraisal and documentation strategies.
2. In his renowned book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), Kuhn argued that radical changes occur in any scientific theory when the answers normally proffered to explain occurrences no longer sufficiently explain current phenomena. In order to adapt themselves to new and changing realities, such theories must inevitably undergo a paradigm shift. See: Khun, Thomas. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.
3. Sanford Berman's *Prejudices and Antipathies* (1971) was among the first published works that agitated against racial, gender, and ethnic biases in library subject headings. See: Berman, Sanford. *Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subject Heads Concerning People*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1971.
4. It should be noted that a cursory analysis of Library of Congress subject headings in 2005 demonstrates that many of these gendered distinctions are still very much in use in library cataloging.
5. While some archivists may be horrified by the idea of allowing non-professionals a hand in archival description, the fact of the matter is that they have been doing for years. In many repositories processing is often done by non-professionals, untrained employees, and student assistants. Allowing experienced researchers who not only have actual hands-on experience with the collection materials but subject expertise as well, would just as likely improve the quality of description as diminish it.

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PLG EXCHANGE

“Is that a poll in your inbox or are you just glad to see me?”

(Editor’s note: This e-mail thread responds to the methodology, timing, and subjects of the new “AL Direct” online “polls.” The thread has been edited for grammar and syntax and extraneous content concerning other issues or aspects have been edited out. Compiled and edited by John Buschman)

— 1 —

Subject: On AL Direct and “polling”
Date: Sat, 04 Feb 2006
From: Mark Rosenzweig, ALA Councilor at large
To: alacoun@ala.org
CC: srrtac-l@ala.org, PLGNET-L@listproc.sjsu.edu

I don’t know who has empowered Leonard Kniffel and American Libraries, through “AL Direct” or any other instrumentality, to intervene in the business of the Association and influence its direction rather than just reporting on it. I am talking here of the fake, faulty, framed-up “polling” that took place in the first issue of “AL Direct” on the question of whether ALA should change its policy re Cuba, which was a direct and unethical intervention into the politics of the Association.

It is no secret that Kniffel disagrees with ALA Council’s position on Cuba, but to use his editorial position to pursue his opposition to that policy by staging a pseudo-poll of the most transparently fraudulent variety and promising to continue this manipulative practice as a regular “feature” is unacceptable. Fake polling frames questions in a manner meant to influence policy in already-decided direction and it challenges the governance of the Association and it is an endorsement of pseudo-scientific polling techniques which undermine our democratic practices.

I would ask for clarification on what the proper role of American Libraries and “AL Direct” is in relation to policy. If Council wished to poll the members and voted for that, it would be one thing. For one person, not elected or directly responsible to the membership, to do so is quite another.

— 2 —

Date: Mon, 06 Feb 2006
From: John Buschman
To: PLGNet-L@listproc.sjsu.edu
CC: alacoun@ala.org, srrtac-l@ala.org

Mark & Colleagues,

This is especially galling in light of how officious American Libraries gets when others push them to act on and/or cover those acting on Association policy or intramural debate. The answer frequently comes back that “this would make AL too political” and “we don’t make policy, we only report on the work and actions of the Association.” The current classic in this genre was the give-and-take over Laura Bush’s award/citation. AL’s coverage was insulting, patronizing, and a blatant attempt to put the final stamp on the issue as “settled” with the grown ups smiling benevolently upon those raising questions and patting us on the head while they did the “responsible” thing. Now we have slanted fake “polls.” I am, frankly, tired of having to keep an eye out for these kinds of shenanigans. Perhaps it is time for a change.

— 3 —

Date: Thurs, 09 Feb 2006
From: Mark C Rosenzweig, Councilor at large
To: alacoun@ala.org, srrtac-l@ala.org
CC: PLGNet-L@listproc.sjsu.edu

Having received the new “AL Direct” and seen yet another poll, I have to ask whether it is still brazenly being done without any attempt whatsoever at the very least to make sure a) only members can vote and b) nobody can vote multiple times. I suspect nothing whatever was done to address this concern which would hardly mitigate the more fundamental problems with this kind of polling having to do with self-selection of participants.

The blatant anti-intellectualism of this kind of tabloid practice makes me wonder if the Mr. Kniffel has been listening to this discussion. I suppose it would be beneath him to even respond with some editorial justification for this. Here’s the latest bit of arrant infotainment (below) which seems to be one of the few distinctive features of this “service.”

Attached text:

“What do YOU think?

Should public libraries auction naming rights to their library on Ebay?

Click here to <> VOTE!

This is an unscientific poll that reflects the opinions of only those AL Direct readers who have chosen to participate.”

— 4 —

Date: Thurs, 09 Feb 2006
From: Veronica Calderhead, Rutgers -Newark
To: PLGNet-L@listproc.sjsu.edu

Mark has nailed it. There are several serious problems with this kind of poll, but the main problem (and most serious) is the lack of context. No single issue is simple. Typically an issue is layered and requires the individual to read different perspectives. To simply place a stark question alongside a yes/no ‘submit’ button is to invite meaningless results. Why do it? Why encourage results that are useless both in short and long term? The data (I even hate to call it data) collected won’t enable policy makers because of the methodology (i.e. the lack thereof). Researchers who’d like to include the data for related studies are bound to reject them on the same basis. It can’t even be used by American Libraries, ALA, or library directors who might simply looking to see which way the wind is blowing. The results of these polls would be absolutely null, so why is anybody even considering them?

Mark states that the poll is unscientific and that it will only reflect the opinions of “AL Direct” readers. I’m not even sure these polls can reflect an opinion; certainly not an informed opinion.

— 5 —

Date: Thurs, 09 Feb 2006
From: John Buschman
To: PLGNet-L@listproc.sjsu.edu
CC: michaelg@CSUFRESNO.EDU,kfiels@ala.org,
mghikas@ala.org, aldirect@ala.org, lkiffel@ala.org, srrtac-l@ala.org
Veronica, Mark, et. al.:

While I couldn't agree more, I think you're going about this the wrong way. You're both trying to reason with a free-floating practice widely adopted by the forms of media "AL Direct" seeks to imitate. Perhaps we should suggest that, rather than take on a "professional" issue unprofessionally, why can't "AL Direct" simply ask the kinds of questions such methods/methodologies deserve:

Would Dale Earnhardt have won the Daytona 500 again if he hadn't killed himself with that reckless driving move? Do you remember who shot JR? Should Britney Spears try and break into the country-and-western market? Does W really look like a monkey?

What do YOU think? - then structure the answers and discuss it like the pabulum it really is.

Now, wasn't that simple? Now this will get some attention! (Really, this is where Kniffel & Co. are headed.)

— 6 —

Subject: Fake news flash!
Date: Thurs, 16 Feb 2006
From: John Buschman
To: plgnet-l@listproc.sjsu.edu

Results of the February 8 poll:
Should public libraries auction naming rights to their library on Ebay?

YES.....45%
NO.....55%
(250 responses)

So in other words, 112 people who self chose to respond agreed that library names should be sold on Ebay, and 138 said no. Thus Kniffel's moronic poll translates 112 people into 45% of the profession saying we should sell libraries like any other commodity.

— 7 —

Date: Fri, 3 Mar 2006
From: Isabel Espinal, Amherst MA
To: plgnet-l@listproc.sjsu.edu

I'm glad that librarians are speaking out. It was pretty clear from the first one I saw on Cuba that someone was trying to prove something big with this little, unscientific poll. The last one about whether libraries should give a platform for an "opposing" viewpoint when it does a "controversial" program also bothered me. I have done programs in libraries over the years and something that is non-controversial to me -- say a poetry reading in Spanish -- might seem controversial to some racist person or faction in the community. Those people do exist because I've had to deal with their opposition! I shudder to think that a library would have a policy that would mandate a platform for racism -- but that's what could happen with this idea of an "opposing" viewpoint.

These polls not only oversimplify but also distort situations - a practice very much used by the racist right wing of this country. For example, the issue of bilingual education was framed here in Massachusetts in the election of 2002 by the right wing - giving a false impression to voters who seemed to think that they were voting about whether non-English speaking children should be taught English (or not). They even called their campaign "English for the Children." Who's against children learning English? What they were really doing was knocking down bilingual education, effectively outlawing the use of other languages in the classroom. Our current governor was campaigning and used this issue in his ads saying he wanted all children to learn English, which sounded very generous. Of course the word bilingual means two languages English and another language. Duh. But, this informed view did not get the airtime that his distortion did, and bilingual education was eventually outlawed in an official election by a huge majority. Gay marriage is an issue that also has been oversimplified in polls and such: "do you believe the sanctity of marriage should be preserved legally? yes or no." Well, this could be used to limit and

exclude gay people from marriage, just as the language of the “AL Direct” polls could lead to a reduction in social justice and freedom for our real communities, as opposed to an expansion of rights.

— 8 —

Date: Fri, 03 Mar 2006
From: Kathleen de la Peña McCook
To: Isabel Espinal, plgnet-l@listproc.sjsu.edu

We are so late to this game (online polls) and we are so pitiful. I wouldn't mind if they were insipid---do you like cats or dogs, for instance....but out of the box the poll gave ammunition to the right wing on Cuba, and I see them citing it everywhere. Also as you point out so well the need to balance everything turns it all into trash. The intelligent design discussion is an example. I am sure for every sane balanced idea there is a small group that might--under the poll's results--call to be heard. The worst case/best example of this was when the head of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, N.Y. refused to allow a celebration of social security because it was political.

DOCUMENTS

RESOLUTION CONDEMNING THE ACTIONS OF PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH & CALLING FOR IMPEACHMENT PROCEEDINGS

WHEREAS, democracy is a core value that defines, informs, and guides our professional practice;

WHEREAS, the American Library Association affirms the responsibility of the political leaders of the United States to protect and preserve the freedoms that are the foundation of our democracy (ALA Resolution on the USA Patriot Act and Related Measures that Infringe on the Rights of Public Library Users); and

WHEREAS, the actions of the current President, George W. Bush, have violated that responsibility in unprecedented ways and threaten the very foundations of a democratic government; those actions, arguably involving the commission of “high crimes and misdemeanors,” are as follows:

Entering into an illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq, based upon fabricated and erroneous information;

Crafting of policies adopted since September 11, 2001, including provisions in the USA PATRIOT Act (Public Law 107-56) and PATRIOT ACT II and related executive orders, regulations and actions, which threaten fundamental rights and liberties by:

- a) expanding the authority of federal agents to conduct so-called “sneak and peek” or “black bag” searches, in which the subject of the search warrant is unaware that his property has been searched, thereby increasing the likelihood that the activities of library users, including their use of computers to browse the Web or access e-mail, may be under government surveillance without their knowledge or consent;
- b) granting law enforcement and intelligence agencies broad access to personal medical, financial, library and education records with little if any judicial oversight;
- c) permitting the FBI to conduct surveillance of religious services, internet chat rooms, political demonstrations, and other public

- meetings of any kind without having any evidence that a crime has been or may be committed;
- d) diminishing personal privacy by removing important checks on government surveillance authority;
 - e) reducing the accountability of government to the public by increasing government secrecy;
 - f) granting expansive new immigration powers to the Attorney General which are subject to abuse, particularly with regard to immigrants from Arab, Muslim and South Asian countries; and
 - g) expanding the definition of “terrorism” in a manner that threatens the constitutionally protected rights of Americans.

Approval of the use of torture (including practices such as hooding, shackling, drugging, sleep deprivation, etc.) in the interrogation of suspected terrorists or their suspected accomplices in his “war on terror.”

Illegal detainment of so called “enemy combatants” and others who are jailed on the merest suspicion, refusing them legal counsel and either holding them indefinitely or secretly deporting them.

Authorization of warrantless electronic surveillance of people within the United States, including U.S. citizens, by the National Security Agency (NSA).

Promoting policies that erode the division of Church and State.

Openly asserting executive power in attempts to override the U.S. Constitution, U.S. Congress, and the U.S. Judicial system, thus ignoring the system of checks and balances fundamental to democratic government.

WHEREAS, librarians are among the preeminent defenders of intellectual freedom and government openness in the US; and

WHEREAS, intellectual freedom, our primary value as librarians, is seriously violated by the current political climate which allows for suppression, attack and even criminalization of dissent; and

WHEREAS, the Library Bill of Rights states that libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas; and

WHEREAS, the broad social responsibilities of the American Library

Association are, in part, defined in terms of the contribution that librarianship can make in ameliorating or solving the critical problems of society, and the willingness of the ALA to take a position on current critical issues with the relationship to libraries and library service set forth in the position statement (ALA Policy Manual, 1.1); therefore it is

RESOLVED, that the Progressive Librarians Guild join with others demanding that President George W. Bush, as the head of the administration that is leading the U.S. in its current political direction, be presented with articles of impeachment as stipulated by the Constitution with a view to removing him from office; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that PLG calls on its members and all others in the library community to urge their elected representatives to support HR635 of the 109th Congress calling for an investigation into possible impeachment proceedings; and be it finally

RESOLVED, that this resolution be forwarded to the President of the United States, to the Attorney General of the United States, to Members of both Houses of Congress, to the library community, and to others as appropriate.

Approved by the Coordinating Committee of the Progressive Librarians Guild on March 15, 2006, and based on a resolution written by Seattle Public Library AFSCME members.

Resolution Against Anti-Immigrant Legislation 2006

WHEREAS, the Progressive Librarians Guild supports immigrants' rights,

WHEREAS, anti-immigrant measures deleteriously affect the immigrant community, regardless of legal status or citizenship status,

WHEREAS, the Sensenbrenner Bill - H.R. 4437 is totally punitive in trying to make felons out of undocumented immigrants, denying them any human, civil, working, or due process rights; seeking to make criminals out of people who aid undocumented immigrants, including clergy, health care workers, teachers, and possibly librarians; gives no recognition of the significant contributions immigrants make to our local and national economies and to our communities; and was passed by the United States House of Representatives on December 16, 2005 by a vote of 239-182 <http://www.nclr.org/content/policy/detail/35618/> and has been sent to the Senate,

WHEREAS, Senate Judiciary Committee Chair Specter (R. Pennsylvania) has drawn upon existing bills and the Sensenbrenner bill into a draft bill, the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006, which is currently being debated in the Senate; therefore be it

RESOLVED that, the Progressive Librarians Guild does not support Senator Specter's bill, the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006; be it further

RESOLVED that, the Progressive Librarians Guild will take immediate action to alert the Senate about their position on this legislation; be it further

RESOLVED that the Progressive Librarians Guild will alert and encourage its members to contact the Senate in opposition of this and any future similar anti-immigrant legislation; be it further

RESOLVED that the Progressive Librarians Guild will alert its members to take an active part in the education of members' communities about immigration and social justice for Latino and other immigrant communities; be it further

RESOLVED that the Progressive Librarians Guild will promote libraries as sites and library workers as providers of citizen education about immigration issues and encourage library workers to act as advocates for the education of undocumented immigrants about their human rights.

*Approved by the PLG Coordinating Committee on March 15, 2006,
and based on Isabel Espinal's original draft.*

Letter Supporting Library Union in Indianapolis

Progressive Librarians Guild
Rider University Library
2083 Lawrenceville Rd.
Lawrenceville, NJ 08648

August 9, 2006

Library Board
Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library
P.O. Box 211
Indianapolis, IN 46206-0211

Dear Indianapolis-Marion County Library Board Members Gregory Jordan, Louis Mahern, Gary Meyer, Peter Pizarro, Mary Lou Rothe and Sarah Taylor:

The Progressive Librarians Guild, a national organization of public, academic, and special librarians, urges the Indianapolis-Marion County Library Board recognize the request for union representation made by its library workers. It is our understanding that a majority of these workers have expressed support for a union, and the next proper step is to verify the majority support and begin negotiations with the workers' union.

Collective bargaining is not only a right, it is a reasonable and fair practice. Libraries work better when staff has a voice in library policies that directly affect them as employees. Library workers are marginalized enough as it is; very often union representation is the only mechanism they have to assure equitable treatment and respect on the job. Please don't deny these workers that opportunity.

Thank you.

Progressive Librarians Guild

How you can help link:
<http://indylibraryunion.org/how.html>

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Joseph Deodato is currently a graduate student at the University of Maryland, College Park where he is pursuing Masters degrees in history and library science. He is also a Graduate Assistant at the University of Maryland Engineering and Physical Sciences Library.

Shiraz Durrani graduated from the University of East Africa in 1968 and got his library qualifications from the University of Wales. He worked at the University of Nairobi Library from 1968 to 1984. Following the publication of his articles on Pio Gama Pinto in the *Standard* in September 1984, Shiraz had to move to Britain. Here, he worked at Hackney and Merton public libraries before taking up the post of Senior Lecturer in Information Management at the London Metropolitan University. His new book, *Never be silent: publishing and imperialism in Kenya, 1884-1963* (Vita Books) was launched in Nairobi in July, 2006.

Joacim Hansson has a PhD in Library and Information Science and is Associate Professor at the Swedish School of Library and Information Science, Borås, Sweden. He has written several articles and books on critical and political perspectives concerning public librarianship and knowledge organization.

Gary T. Marx is professor emeritus M.I.T. His web page <http://www.garymarx.net> gives additional information and contains many articles on surveillance, technology, privacy, social movements and mass behavior and inter-group relations.

Stacy Hinshaw Simpson was born in Chicago and raised in Minnesota. She has a BS in Communications Disorders from the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, and an MLIS from Dominican University, River Forest, IL. She currently works assisting people in a research-oriented environment.

Elizabeth Smallwood graduated from Manchester Metropolitan and Lancaster universities with a BEd (Hons) and MA respectively. She began working for Merton Library and Heritage Service in 1998 and completed her library qualifications in 2002. She has worked in a number of positions and has been involved in a number of changes to the service, including introducing a new staffing structure and supplier selection for bookstock. She was the author, in early 2002, of *Communities Developing Communities*, a consideration of how a needs-based library service can ensure that libraries in the future can continue to be relevant to local communities. Currently, she manages the newly built Raynes Park Library.

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-Sandy Berman

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