

The Library-Community Convergence Framework for Community Action: Libraries as Catalysts of Social Change

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This paper presents a library-community convergence framework (LCCF) to extend the role of all libraries to participate more fully in community action and enhance their function as proactive catalysts of social change, as compared to a sometimes perceived role of bystanders. Although the paper highlights deliberations about the involvement of public libraries in their local communities, and shares experiences of community interactions between library and information professionals and minority and underserved groups in American academic library settings, yet the proposed framework of convergence between the library-community and the methods/approaches of community action are applicable across a variety of library contexts. The paper discusses select application of the LCCF for community action in two qualitative research studies, with local immigrant communities and sexual minorities, that use methods pioneered in ethnographic outreach and participatory action research (PAR) respectively.

The results of these studies show that the LCCF is applicable in the development of various forms of services in different library environments. Ethnographic methods in the first study provide understanding of cross-cultural issues and uncover how local immigrant classifications can be induced from an ethnographic perspective to generate library classifications and information services that are locally relevant and participant-empowering. PAR ideologies in the second study underlie implementation of library and information interventions and community action while partnering with local sexual minorities and their allies, to address specific and contextualized community facets in ways that may promote community-wide social changes. Points of intersection from the two studies help identify key elements in the LCCF framework that can extend the role of all kinds of libraries as leaders and cultural planners of progressive community-based action.

Introduction

The current state of decay in contemporary social and political life in the United States reflects a 'crisis of democracy' owing to lack of unbiased and accurate information flows to lay citizens about political concerns and processes taking place in the country (Wolfe 2006; Kellner 2005). The predicament in American democracy is also connected to a significantly low level of participation in public dialogue and political decision-making

by the people, of the people, and for the people (Barber 2000). Both these factors are interrelated and attributed to commoditization and the market forces of media production, political ransacking, and an immersion of the various channels of communication and information dissemination in the spirit of the 'selling game,' to increase sales and boost rankings at the cost of accuracy, integrity, content and quality (McChesney 2000). Over the past decades, sweeping trends in the hegemonic corporatization of communication and

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information as politicized products for mass consumption, have contributed to the development of a systematic process of manipulation, distortion, and presentation of a partisan picture of social and political realities under the garb of fact-based truth and evidence (Gilboa 2002; Bennett & Entman 2000). This is now resulting in damaging effects on American democracy, leading to people's disillusionment and inertia to resist these encompassing forces of psychological control and social dominance (Leighninger 2006). The only solution against this "domination of highly developed capitalism" for freedom and democracy to flourish in the United States, and in the world at large (Weber 1946, 71), is for a revitalization of democratic communication systems and computer and information technologies (Kellner 1990). Rejuvenated and truly democratized information and communication technologies, free from corporate and/or political agendas, will be able to effectively develop future opportunities of equitable access, equality in use, and reflective critical information literacy skills in all people, irrespective of their race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, income, geography, religion, marital status, and other variables that have traditionally created political, social, cultural, economic, and technological gaps between the haves and have-nots (Bozinis 2007; Birdsall 2005). Recent discourse in American public policy, organizational behavior praxis in industry and commerce, and educational research in centers of higher learning, amongst other areas, recognize the relationship between social and economic inequities and the significant role of knowledge and information, and its access and effective use (Gurstein 2003), as tools to gain social power, economic success, political and cultural well-being, and community and individual empowerment (Castells 2003). Consequently it is necessary to devise alternative (and creative) mechanisms that provide both the knowledge and information literacy skills, on the one hand, and the benefits of information management and organization, on the other, to all disenfranchised and minority populations in the United States. Information literacy and the knowledge of information management can help engage people on society's margin to become aware of, and resist, the corporate-politics-media nexus, empower themselves via active involvement in the democratic process, and

take action to improve their marginalizing social and economic conditions (Kreps, Mandell & Mandell 2005). Such a need places tremendous pressure on groups working for human and civil rights, and raises the expectations on American public services and institutions such as libraries of all kinds (e.g., public, academic, special, others) to initiate community-wide changes (Halverson & Plotas 2006) that connect the three domains – underserved and disempowered minority populations; democratic agendas to empower people via promoting their participation in programs to develop an equitable distribution of resources; and the effective use of communication and information technologies to achieve meaningful outcomes for the concerned participants (Chang *et al.* 2004).

Although the paper highlights deliberations about the involvement of public libraries in their local communities, and shares experiences of community interactions between library and information professionals and minority and underserved groups in American academic library settings, yet the proposed framework of convergence between the library-community and the methods/approaches of community action are applicable across a variety of library contexts. The word "library" is used in the paper in a general sense to refer to the larger applicability of the discussion to a range of library environments even though the specific reference may be to public and/or academic libraries. It is beyond the scope of the paper to discuss the various definitions and nuances associated with the word "community" although its use in the paper represents a similar strategy to relate to a broader clientele or service population that various libraries cater to in the performance of their everyday roles and day-to-day functioning.

The metaphor of the librarian as a "midwife to the birth of knowledge" (Herold 2001) accurately reflects historical perceptions in American society that consider both the traditional and modern library as institutions (physical or virtual) dedicated to the organization, representation, and communication of global knowledge (Taylor 2003; Shera & Cleveland 1977). Public libraries have also been charged with the responsibility of disseminating information and providing access to relevant information services based on the needs of local community constituencies (Rayward 1994; Abbott 1988). This includes the expectation of the

public library to act as a referral agent to local community information that makes them directly relevant and situated in the everyday contexts of American communities across urban, semi-urban, and rural settings (Rodger, Jorgensen & D'Elia 2005; Middleton & Katz 1988).

The responsibility justifies the support public libraries receive from local funding agencies (Usherwood 1996) and provides the public library a status that is unique and at a distinct advantage over competing commercial, governmental, and other information service providers (Comedia 1993). The community referral-focused conceptualization of public libraries has been liberating for the profession at large since it has insured the continuity of the library's role in public recognition as a storehouse of knowledge and information provider, irrespective of changing socio-cultural, socioeconomic, socio-political, and socio-technological advances over time (McCook & Jones 2002; Van Fleet & Raber 1990).

However, the rigidity of the public library in only a "referral service" mode at times has compromised the vision of practitioners and researchers to conceive of all libraries as active leaders in the provision of proactive services that directly engage multicultural and marginalized community publics (Muddiman 1999). We point to the following arguments:

- The public library image as a referral agent at times has prevented hands-on involvement of different libraries in the everyday happenings of local communities that might have enhanced their empowering role to help people help themselves (Maack 1997; Mehra, Albright & Rioux 2006);
- Public libraries have been subsequently associated with public institutions of power and agents of social control (Ring 1993; Harris 1973), that cater to the changing attitudes of a homogenized middle class (Venturella 1998), at the cost of ignoring the needs of people on the margins of society, including ethnic minority communities (Roach & Morrison 1998). Moreover, various libraries dedicated to serve those on the margins are often not fully equipped, financially and methodologically, to understand the realities their constituent communities face in their own worlds and terms (Chu 1999).
- Beyond roundtable discussions in professional groupings such as the American Library Association and others, the general public has not always viewed libraries of all kinds as beacons of social change, or significant players in community building and community development efforts since libraries are still viewed as "distinctly biased toward property, wealth, bigness, main-

stream "culture," and established authority" (Berman 2001, xi);

- Library representatives across settings have been largely left out of decision-making and legal and political policy development that impacts intellectual freedom, surveillance, and other critical issues faced within American society (Cieszynski 2002).

We argue that because of the presumed community-focused referral role of the public library, it has at times been marginalized in terms of being identified as a leading force in the public sphere with respect to significant community issues of diversity and intellectual freedom (Sumerford 2004). Additionally, though public libraries have been moderately proactive in promoting social change, they have done so "only within the limits permitted by a collective of community values" (Wiegand e-mail communication dated July 4, 2006), perhaps owing to their dependency on public funding and public opinion that exert significant influence on the development of public library services and programs around the country (Ditzion 1947; Anders 1958). One historical consequence of the embedded public library monies in the community's tax base is a lack of public library conceptualization, and its systematic and aggressive marketing, in terms of a proactive involvement in community engagement (McCook 2000) that remains dispersed and specifically targeted in isolated areas of impact (Osborne 2004; Wiegand 2000). This paper attempts to build upon (and extend) past library involvement in service and outreach-oriented efforts by presenting the Library Community Convergence Framework (LCCF) for proactive community action that consolidates and markets the image of all libraries as social catalysts, rather than the sometimes perceived role of mere bystanders passively observing the community dynamics unfold and enact.

We believe that since libraries of different kinds are passively involved in empowerment initiatives (or actively participating in isolated attempts), they have at times only been seen as *passive supporters* of social change that only indirectly contribute towards changing the disempowered status, experiences, and realities of people on the margins (Chatman & Pendleton 1995; Dervin, Harpring & Foreman-Wernet 1999; Bishop, Mehra, Bazzell & Smith 2003). This issue is accentuated with the introduction of new digital library technologies that are created in environments fun-

damentally removed from the population of users which they aim to serve (Seyfarth 2003; Srinivasan 2007), leading to a lack of significant focus on the cultural priorities of marginalized communities (Shapiro 2003). Instead of actively probing into the behaviors, classifications, and priorities of their multicultural publics, these information systems have been advertised to focus on user-interface, receiver-type issues (Komlodi *et al.* n.d.; Marchionini & Fox 1999) that have dwelled into systems design and resource development, without as direct a concentration on the impact or change brought about in the user or community's experiences. Therefore, while different library information collections, resources, and programs have recognized the information seeking behaviors and needs of various user populations (Durrani 2001; Chatman 1985; Metoyer-Duran 1993), their involvement with disenfranchised groups has often been limited (and represented as such). Only in the last few years, various public and academic libraries have now been forced to recognize and represent the need for greater *proactive involvement* in social change via community building efforts that consider culturally diverse constituencies (Long 2000). This has occurred owing to unexpected consequences of:

- Contemporary changes in local community demographics that have expanded in terms of ethnic diversity (Gonzalez 1999), making the issue of empowering marginalized publics more visible (Hernandez 1997);
- Political, economic, social, cultural, and technological effects of globalization on American society (McLuhan 1964; Bender 1996; Appadurai 1996), highlighting the need for representation of cultural plurality in order to effectively compete in a global networked supply chain for services and manufacturing (Friedman 2005).

However efforts such as community librarianship (Black & Muddiman 2005), civic librarianship (McCabe 2001), and service learning initiatives in library education (Mehra 2004) that connect the library as an institution (in intellectual discourse and physical representation) to the multicultural publics in a heterogeneous community via bridging social inequities, remain unevenly represented (McCook 2000). This paper addresses the missing gap of a lack of cohesiveness in conceptualization of different libraries as proactive places involved in ongoing and continuous advocacy by presenting a consolidated and holistic framework that

exemplifies the library role as an agent for social change, going beyond constructions that presented the general library as solely a container of world knowledge and an information provider. This community action framework (presented as the LCCF for community action) recognizes that public and academic libraries are social and information hubs in American society and in American educational settings respectively, and acknowledges that these and other libraries have been involved as community agents, participating in social change, yet that their role can further expand. The framework assumes that the communities various libraries serve are dynamic, diverse, heterogeneous, and ever-changing (Orange 2004), particularly in an age of rapid technological and cultural migration (Appadurai 1996). Our approach calls for an understanding of the complexity of local community constituencies, and for a greater awareness of the cultural factors that mediate the development within, and information flows across community members. This paper therefore urges all libraries to venture into non-traditional domains of community understanding to develop and extend community outreach strategies and forge new partnerships and collaborations in order to become "rocks" that may provide footholds to people on the margins (McCook 2002). Such efforts will not only result in progressive social change, but also re-create public awareness and understanding about the general library's role as a leader that can significantly impact information and cultural policy-making (Hillenbrand 2005).

We argue that this paradigm of different libraries as proactive community agents (represented in the LCCF for community action) must recognize relevant findings within methods pioneered in ethnographic outreach and participatory action research (PAR). These methods, discussed in the following sections of the paper in the context of our fieldwork experiences while working with local community members representing two disenfranchised populations and their allies in academic library environments, are applicable and capable of implementation in the development of various forms of services in different library environments. Qualitative research involving local immigrant communities and sexual minorities are shared to respectively highlight two key goals in the LCCF for community action, namely, of accommodating local priorities and ontologies, and,

developing PAR initiatives to partner with various representatives of underserved populations. In the first study, an ethnographic approach has been useful towards understanding cross-cultural issues and uncovering how local immigrant classifications can be induced from an ethnographic perspective to generate library classifications and information services that are locally relevant and participant-empowering (Srinivasan 2006a; 2006b; 2007). In the second study, PAR ideologies underlie implementation of library and information interventions and community action while partnering with local sexual minorities and their allies, to address specific and contextualized community facets in ways that may promote community-wide social changes (Mehra & Braquet n.d.; Braquet & Mehra 2006). Points of intersection from the two studies help identify key elements in the LCCF framework that extend the role of all kinds of libraries as leaders and cultural planners of progressive community-based action (Boaden *et al.* 2005). We believe that understanding the cultural perspectives, values, and priorities of a multicultural public via ethnography can be transformed into a participatory action agenda that shall enable different libraries to serve as active agents in meeting the goals of otherwise marginalized populations.

An ethnographic perspective to understand immigrant ontologies

Ethnography, a field-based method of expressing and acknowledging the beliefs of a community or cultural group from the perspective of its own actors (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983), provides a possibility to explicitly allow library and information professionals in various work environments to directly engage with their multicultural publics and understand the subtleties of complex belief systems, priorities, and classifications they may hold. The history of ethnography has emerged from positivist methods of describing culture (Keat & Urry 1975; Giddens 1976), which attempt to emulate the priorities of scientific measurability, to naturalistic understandings of culture (Blumer 1969; Lofland 1967; Matza 1969; Denzin 1971) that attempt to describe a culture or community as untouched and within a "natural", primeval state. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983, 14-15) reasonably argue that these approaches must be put

aside to more realistically and productively recognize that cultural realizations emerging from ethnography are reflexively co-produced (Gouldner 1970) via the praxis (Freire 1968) of the researcher and community: "The first and most important step towards a resolution of the problems raised by positivism and naturalism is to recognize the reflexive character of social research: that is, we are part of the social world we study. This not a matter of methodological commitment, it is an existential fact. There is no way in which we can escape the social world in order to study it; nor fortunately, is that necessary."

Can this methodological breakthrough enable various library and information professionals to acknowledge and engage the multicultural and dynamic publics which they serve? We assert that as the librarian in any setting moves toward a reflexive approach of practicing ethnography s/he begins to place community members as equals in a dialogue and participatory process that can then impact her/his library on multiple levels, including but not limited to programming, collection development, outreach services, acquisitions, educational activities, technology usage, and potential classifications and standards utilized.

Extending the ethnographic perspective towards building community technologies around collective ontologies, or cultural-specific representations of priorities and topics, Srinivasan has led research in the design of information systems that are based around the articulated priorities of an ethnic community (Srinivasan 2004; Srinivasan & Huang 2005). The community's articulation of relevant topics and their interrelations has served as the ontology of the information system, or the structure of themes and topics around which submitted information has been represented and retrieved. The Village Voice and Tribal Peace projects were both community-designed information systems created with a set of Somali refugees in the Boston Area and 19 dispersed Native American reservations in Southern California respectively (Srinivasan 2007). In these research projects, community members submitted video, image, and sound information across several public meetings and viewed these to create an ontology representing their collective contributions. Community members who submitted information to the system could identify their content as correspondent to any of the themes within the ontology

and could change these annotations at any time they wished. Moreover, members could navigate and retrieve information associated with any of the ontology topics simply by selecting them. The ontology was considered a fluid structure of community priorities, and via a consensus at a community meeting, could be continually re-shaped.

Srinivasan and Huang (2005) have observed that immigrant-authored and designed information systems can allow ethnic groups to re-connect around shared visions. They observed a significant shift in how the Tribal Peace system had impacted local reservation schools and economic institutions, for example, by allowing community leaders to directly access the voices of their peoples who were dispersed across the reservations (Srinivasan 2006a). Similarly, in the Village Voice project, Srinivasan (2004) observed the possibility of the system to allow community members to present themselves cohesively to outside governmental and educational institutions. This approach toward the use of "fluid ontologies" (Srinivasan & Huang 2005) presented a method of community engagement that allowed members to build their own local and cultural-specific structure for an information system, thereby incorporating an evolving participatory process in the representation of the information they authored (Crabtree 1998; Gregory 2003; Srinivasan & Shilton 2006; Schuler 1994). This work builds on past research that has tried to engage marginalized publics to participate in the process, and influence the design of systems and technologies which otherwise would have been largely impositional (Puri & Sahay 2003; Harrison & Zappen 2003; Kanungo 2004). Such an approach towards supporting communicative action (Habermas 1984) in the design of information services, as articulated by Hirschheim and Klein (1994), values open communication between community members and researchers. It is based around the following four major paraphrased principles:

- Equal opportunity to all participants to raise issues, points, and counterpoints to other views in discussion;
- All participants are on an equal footing with respect to power positions;
- All participants can question the clarity, veracity, sincerity and social responsibility of the actions proposed;
- All participants can have an equal opportunity to articulate feelings, doubts, or concerns.

We assert that libraries in a variety of contexts can follow the lead of the methodologies the above examples embody. We also believe different libraries can actively become agents that serve their multicultural and non-homogenous communities by:

- Assessing community needs (as articulated by communities themselves);
- Reflexively engaging in ethnographic processes that attempt to uncover community goals, visions, and priorities;
- Following participatory and praxis-based methods that empower community members to actively articulate their own ontologies, classifications, and value systems.

Participatory Action Research to represent sexual minorities in community facets of power

PAR involves seeking relevant outcomes for disenfranchised members in society (Whyte 1991; Park 2000; Bishop, Bazzell, Mehra & Smith 2001) by actively involving them not as "research subjects" identified in traditional research, but as co-investigators and co-researchers who are intrinsically involved as equal partners in the research process (Reardon 1998). PAR facilitates opportunities for disempowered populations to understand their own experiences and viewpoints (Bishop, Mehra, Bazzell & Smith 2003) during every phase of research development (Hall, Gillette & Tandon 1982), from analyzing their needs to creating relevant design outcomes (Mehra, Bishop, Bazzell & Smith 2002) that are meaningful to them in their everyday lives (Mehra, Merkel & Bishop 2004). Having roots in Freire's social justice philosophies (1968) that advocate strategies of liberation of oppressed peoples via action and engagement with them to resist forces of dominating powers (Mehra 2004), PAR framework gives an opportunity to "actualize and operationalize the notion of equality in our practical work and personal lives by empowering all people who interact within settings that adopt the underlying PAR philosophy" (Mehra 2005, 34).

Often practiced under different names – action research, collaborative research, community-based research, amongst others – PAR manifestations with their specific nuanced variations of ap-

plication, share the following common over-arching threads (Stoecker & Bonacich 1992):

- Democratization of knowledge processes where society's "marginalized" analyze their own experiences to develop new understanding and new knowledge;
- Social action becomes a focus of research whose aim is to balance inequities in distribution of power, information, services, and/or resources.

Essential characteristics of action research include decentralization of inquiry into understanding local contexts to solve real problems, de-regulation of reliability-based research measures towards outcome-based evaluation measured in terms of changed situations in people's experiences (Greenwood & Levin 1998), and cooperativeness in execution via equitable partnering initiatives between the "researcher" and the "researched" (Stringer 1999). Use of PAR-related strategies fulfills social equity agendas and help gain participation of disadvantaged individuals (Mehra 2006) in organization of local resources and community development (Chavis, Speer, Resnick & Zippay 1993). They provide opportunities to the historically identified "marginalized" to "validate and reframe information provided by their own life experiences to enable them to take control of the surroundings and better determine their future" (Plaut, Landis & Trevor 1992, 57). The potential of PAR in community development is highly relevant to those researchers and library and information professionals working in different settings who are interested to further such a service mission in their activities towards community building since it allows for the possibility of building equity in relationships and challenging traditional imbalances in power discourse between the multicultural publics and the stakeholders who are provided with a mandate to represent and serve them (Mehra, Albright & Rioux 2006).

How can we as library and information professionals apply these PAR principles into praxis in our various work activities to develop partnering efforts with disadvantaged constituencies and their local allies and agencies involved in social justice work? How can we use PAR to initiate community action that may promote and proactively contribute in the process of bringing a progressive social change on the behalf of the "marginalized" multicultural publics? We share some experiences

from an ongoing study conducted by Mehra and Braquet (2006; 2007) that is applying PAR strategies to address specific and contextualized community facets via implementing library and information interventions for sexual minorities living in the City of Knoxville and adjoining areas located in East Tennessee. These community facets include (Mehra & Braquet n.d.): institutional policy development, political lobbying, creation of culturally sensitive training workshops, promotion of safe-space programs, advertising and promotion for positive visibility, development and access (print and electronic) to appropriate information and resource collections (local and non-local), and development in use of community-based social and digital communication technologies. These community facets are significant because each one of them reflects a specific power discourse historically embedded in its conceptualization and construction that is relevant to address community-wide social changes for sexual minorities in the local geographic area under study. As participant-researchers and library and information professionals, we are applying some PAR strategies in these community facet domains to introduce progressive social change interventions for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals that may lead towards equating some existing power imbalances currently detrimental to the lives of LGBT individuals in the community.

Institutional policy developments are an important community facet and definitely a huge source of power imbalance in terms of identifying those who are legally protected within the sanctioned boundaries in given contexts and those who are "left out" within these jurisdictions (Israel, Schulz, Parker & Becker 2001). As a response to an initial lack of the University of Tennessee's (UT) institutional commitment for legal protection of sexual minorities in its non-discrimination policy reflected in the UT's Equal Employment Opportunity (Affirmative Action) Statement and Tagline (see URL: <http://oed.admin.utk.edu/docs/tagline.doc>), Mehra and Braquet (Life Sciences Librarian at UT Libraries) initiated PAR efforts to communicate, collaborate, and network with members of local LGBT community-based groups and social justice agencies to promote advocacy for representation, inclusion, and policy change that would insure a safer campus and community-wide legal

support for sexual minorities in the region. Efforts have led to the recent authorization and creation of the Commission for LGBT People by UT Chancellor Loren Crabtree (e-mail notification received on 27 April, 2006) and the authorization by UT President John Petersen for inclusion of sexual orientation in the UT non-discrimination policy (news received via e-mail from UT Chancellor on December 8, 2005).

Similarly, Mehra and Braquet have applied PAR in building collaborations and networking to achieve specific outcomes with local LGBT activists for political lobbying at the city/county levels, an important community facet that embodies a significant power discourse ethics since political support/sanction for sexual minorities is important for the enactment of local community dynamics to work in the favor of LGBT individuals in this conservative East Tennessee region, located in the heartland of the "bible belt." For example, Mehra played a PAR-inspired partnering role with LGBT allies to prepare pro-LGBT resolution statements and refine vocabulary constructs to represent sexual minorities in a city ordinance non-discrimination clause, presented and discussed during fall 2005 with local Councilmen Bob Becker and Chris Woodhull. Another community facet example applying PAR is ongoing work in the creation of culturally sensitive training workshops to rectify historical power imbalances and/or existing injustices melted out against local LGBT individuals. Under the auspices of the Diversity Experience Workshop (DEW) Advisory Group created by UT's Office of Equity and Diversity (OED), Mehra, Braquet, and several faculty/staff/students across campus have been identifying appropriate and accurate LGBT content for reflecting and representing LGBT needs. Such LGBT materials are being incorporated into OED's diversity experience and training workshops that now, owing to suggested changes by local LGBT participants, focus on LGBT as "special populations" as well as represent LGBT issues in general workshops on diversity. Components from these workshops are being delivered during various events on campus, new student and faculty orientations, discussion forums in fraternities and sororities, departmental diversity evaluation sessions, amongst other avenues. Incorporating case-scenarios or discrimination stories experienced by local LGBT individuals form a significant element in these workshops

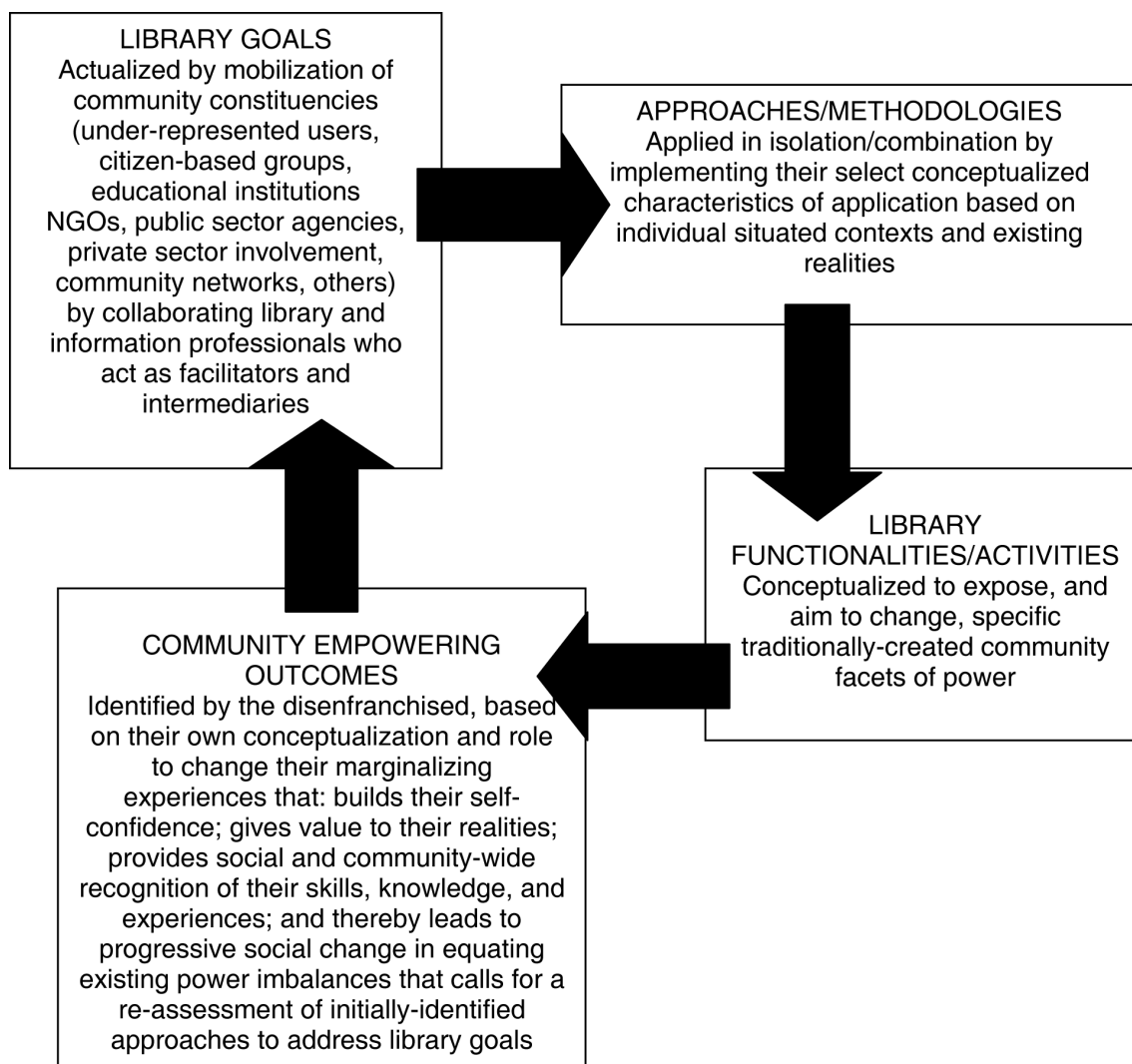
that give acknowledgement to local marginalized experiences as well as provide ways to improve existing services and resources in order that such negative experiences do not occur in the future.

PAR has played a significant role in our experiences as library and information participant-researchers engaged in ongoing efforts for sexual minorities to address imbalanced power dynamics embedded in specific contexts, representing the above and other community facets. Building equitable relations and recognizing value of all participants' contributions, knowledge, and experiences in development of concrete outcome-based activities are key PAR criteria that are helping us promote social change, and will hold us in good stead towards future progress in support of sexual minorities in our local community.

The Library-Community Convergence Framework

The above two case descriptions, when considered jointly, present a compelling framework for potential library-community convergences that all libraries can adopt in their efforts to extend their role as proactive agents of community-wide changes. The studies reflect two significant goals in the LCCF for community action that libraries of all kinds can follow to re-engage with a changed notion of community, in terms of library meanings and the reality of library practice in local contexts: First, it is important to develop an ideological and positional shift in the library's conceptualization and to acknowledge value and understanding of community-conceptualized classifications and distinctions, and assimilate those in terms of the development and structuring of the library's own information services and thinking. This involves exploration into how a culture classifies its own knowledge (Srinivasan & Huang 2005) and looks at its own oral (and written) histories (Ong 1982) reflectively (Srinivasan 2006b), to understand its perspective and viewpoint of itself, so as to guide how the library can become an active mirror of these social forces, and subsequently, of the community as the community evolves. Second, we believe it critical to answer the "how to" question of providing direction for real outcome-based actions and activities that the library may undertake to achieve the following agendas (Mehra, Albright & Rioux 2006):

Figure 1: Conceptual Relationships in the Library-Community Convergence Framework for Community Action.



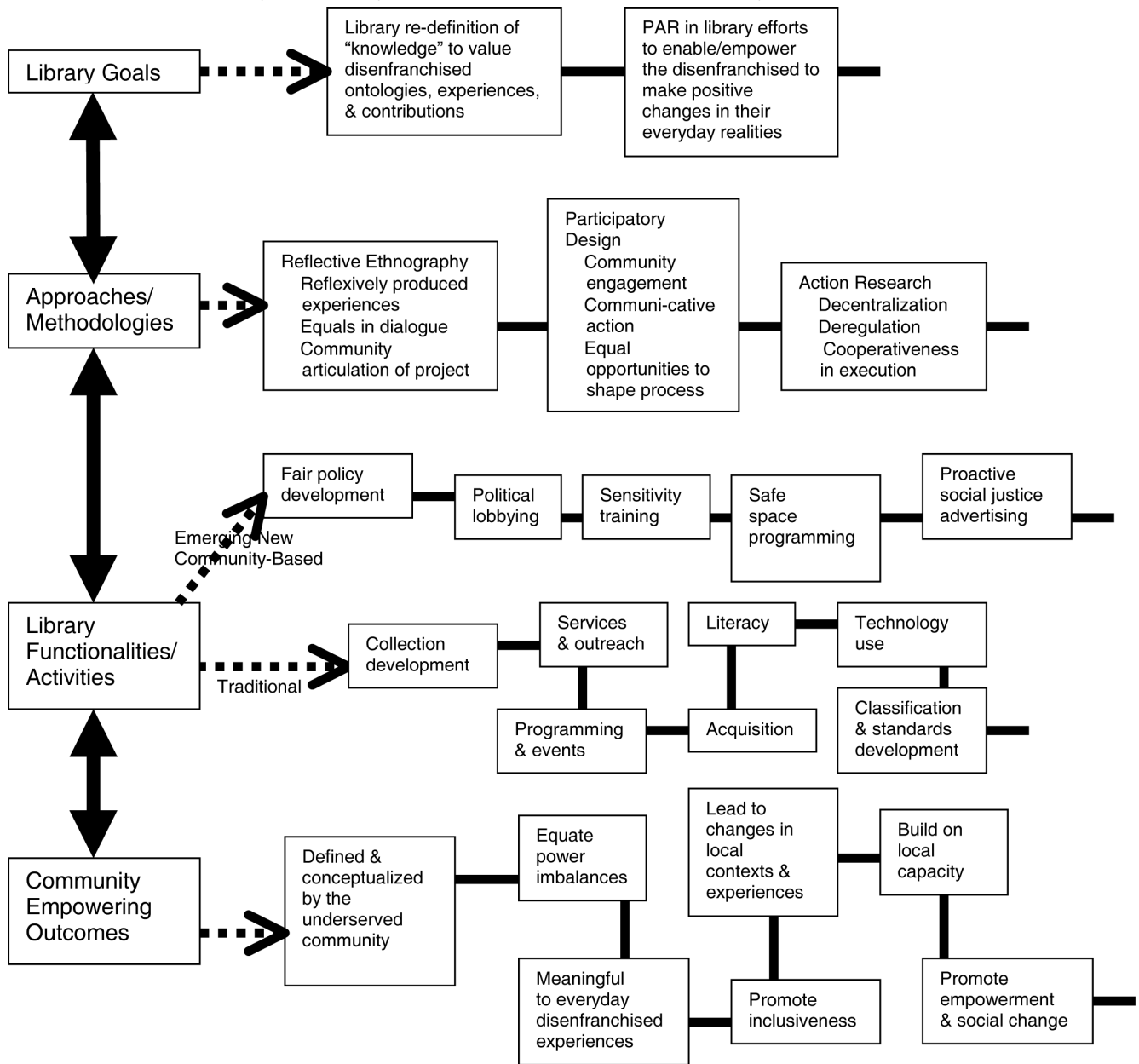
- Bring the multicultural, complex, and dynamic dimensions of community into its folds;
- Equate the historical imbalances that have at times existed between the library and marginalized elements in society.

This calls for different libraries to apply PAR efforts in community building activities, for example, in implementing neighborhood asset mapping, that will help to: 1) understand needs and realities of local communities, piece-by-piece (i.e., neighborhood by neighborhood); and, 2) identify strengths and potentials of individuals, social networks, organizations, agencies, institutions, and others, in order to proactively involve them in building equitable partnerships and collaborations with the common goal of community de-

velopment, i.e., to bring into focus, issues of how might such efforts lead to empowerment and improve the real-life social, political, and economic experiences of marginalized individuals (Mehra 2005). These types of activities shift the discourse from attempting to bring community members "into the library", or attempting to loan information out. Instead, it sees different libraries as agents that weave information and knowledge in praxis with local community discourses and participants. The information initiative is shifted to that of emergence – one wherein the library and community mutually gain and produce realities that are greater than the sum of their individual parts.

Our search for concrete approaches/methodologies to implement the two goals of incorporating local priorities/ontologies and building equitable

Figure 2: Details of the Library-Community Convergence Framework for Community Action.



partnering relationships in proactive community action lead us to elements from three intellectual constructions as explained – reflexive ethnography, participatory design, and action research. Elements from these three methodologies have been applied in various degrees of application and overlap during different times in the ongoing work from the two case examples described above. They have also been applied in previous community informatics projects (Kretzmann & McKnight 1993; Pinkett 2003; Shaw 1995; Beaulieu 2002). Suffice to say, what is missing across the

range of past community informatics projects is a holistic methodology that explicitly focuses on the role and activities of various libraries in the context of the problematic of engaging multicultural publics. The proposed LCCF for community action fills these missing gaps.

We present two illustrations of the LCCF for community action. Figure 1 outlines a schematic representation of the proposed framework for different libraries to engage in proactive community action as leaders to promote community-wide social changes. There are four broad and inter-

twining components in this framework, namely: library goals, approaches/methodologies, library functionalities/activities, and relevant community empowerment outcomes. Conceptually, library goals are actualized via application of appropriately identified approaches/methodologies that are implemented in enactment of specific library functionalities/activities to bring about relevant community empowering outcomes.

Figure 2 explores the proposed library framework for proactive social change in greater detail. The two goals of library action (as discussed in the earlier sections) are identified in terms of: library re-conceptualization of what it considers "knowledge" in order to acknowledge, provide equal value, and represent the classifications and ontologies, language constructs, and knowledge experiences of disenfranchised populations; and, expanded PAR initiatives that equitably partner library and information professionals in different settings with local "marginalized" constituencies to enable and empower them to make positive changes in their everyday lives. The proposed LCCF for community action therefore attempts to equalize localized community facets of power to achieve community-desired relevant outcomes. Library functionalities include efforts to "explicate and implement activities related to information creation, organization, and dissemination processes" (Mehra & Bishop 2007) and encompass library collections, services, programming, outreach, acquisitions, educational and literacy workshops, library training, technology use, classification and standards development, amongst others. They also include new and emerging community-based efforts that libraries must seek to incorporate in their traditional activities as well as explore newly (and creatively) identified directions or community applications. These library functionalities/activities are directly conceptualized to expose, and aim to change, various specific traditionally created community facets of power discourse so as to equate power imbalances that may exist in local communities. Desired community outcomes are those that lead to empowerment of disenfranchised individuals and populations based on their own conceptualization and role to change their marginalizing experiences. Our LCCF for community action accommodates a vision for future growth in recognizing potential additions of new criteria and conceptualizations

for the elements of library goals, approaches/methodologies, library functionalities/activities, and community empowering outcomes, as indicated in Figure 2 by the open-endedness of the horizontal solid black line.

Conclusion

Our LCCF for community action discussed in this paper presents a holistic approach for libraries to extend their existing functionalities and programs as well develop new initiatives for becoming catalysts for community-wide progressive social changes in favor of people on the margins. Our goal here was to present qualitative data gathered from two field-based studies to show how select elements from the LCCF for community action are being implemented in our ongoing work as library and information professionals with specific disenfranchised members in our communities, followed by a visual and descriptive explanation of the LCCF for community action. We hope to continue applying elements from the LCCF for community action in the two projects described in the paper and will report progress in future publications. For example, it is our endeavor to merge select aspects in new and emerging community-based library functionalities/activities with traditional library functionalities/activities (two streams from level 3 in Figure 2, top to bottom) towards balancing existing power dynamics in our ongoing community action work for sexual minorities in the Knoxville area and immigrant populations in the Los Angeles region. The following are some project examples of library initiatives that reflect such efforts:

- UT library and information professionals are partnering with local LGBT individuals and groups such as the Lambda Student Union (URL: <http://web.utk.edu/~lambda/>) to promote safe-space programs for LGBT individuals in local public places. Efforts to initiate marketing and advertising of LGBT library collections, library programming, and events in outreach have involved going out into the community where people are, as compared to waiting for people to come to the library. During the New Student Bash hosted by Lambda at a local club during fall 2006, a contingent from UT libraries presented LGBT promotional display materials, networked with local LGBT activists, and discussed future participation and collaboration between library and information professionals and community leaders to promote social change in support of sexual minorities.

- Local LGBT people are helping staff at the UT library coordinate awareness of LGBT efforts across the community via proactive advertising of local LGBT-related events and activities to generate positive visibility and awareness of LGBT issues. For example, the Diversity News Channel (URL: <http://www.lib.utk.edu/news/diversity/archives/glbtt/>), hosted on the UT library server, presents current LGBT happenings and programs related to LGBT themes.
- Mehra and Braquet (2006) conducted qualitative interviews with 21 self-identified LGBT individuals in the community to elicit their suggestions and participation to implement appropriate library interventions in areas like development and access (print and electronic) to appropriate LGBT information and resource collections (local and non-local). The need for accurate, honest, and fair LGBT information resources has led to a recent focus on LGBT issues in the UT library's Cultural Corner (see URL: <http://www.lib.utk.edu/diversity/culturecorner/springlist-06.html>), a library effort to demarcate a visible physical and virtual space on issues of contemporary relevance. Another related effort has been as a result of an analysis of the information needs of local LGBT individuals (Mehra & Braquet 2007) that has contributed in the development of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Resource Guide (see URL: <http://www.lib.utk.edu/refs/glbtt.html>) that provides online access to local LGBT resources and services via the UT library's website.
- In order to use social and digital community-based information and communication technologies for support of LGBT issues, Mehra and Braquet created a listserv "LGBTANet" in October 2005 as a means for information sharing, communication exchange, and building institutional memory for LGBT individuals and allies (URL: <http://listserv.utk.edu/archives/lgbtanet.html>).
- Srinivasan and fellow researchers have begun developing a digital library system, described as the South Asian Web, within the South Asian community of Los Angeles. The goal of this effort is to follow the LCCF to uncover ontologies, priorities, and culturally relevant information to help unite a largely dispersed immigrant community (Srinivasan & Shilton, 2006).
- With the sponsorship of the National Science Foundation, Srinivasan and Bravo have begun an ethnographic digital museum project with the Zuni Native American tribal communities of New Mexico, wherein the Zuni will adopt and generate their own ontologies around digitally repatriated objects provided from Cambridge University's Museum of Anthropology (Boast, Bravo & Srinivasan n.d.).

These are but a few of the activities from the proposed LCCF for community action that we are currently trying to orchestrate with the goal of promoting proactive community-based interventions via extending traditional library function-

alities and introducing new kinds of activities that our local public and academic libraries may not have participated in during the past. Based on our experiences in the two projects, some challenges for different libraries to proactively serve minorities and underserved populations include: 1) Long-term efforts in trust building and promoting participation of individuals and groups representing the multicultural publics; 2) Lack of awareness and use of the library by underserved populations; 3) The library's inertia towards outreach, and its lack of awareness about various local underserved populations; 4) Society's lack of recognition of various libraries as significant players in catalyzing social change; 5) Local politics and identification of key stakeholders and potential partners.

There is need for future research to further examine the validity of various elements in the LCCF for community action in other kinds of social justice projects involving different kinds of underserved populations in order to identify variations and details of categorizations and applications within the larger framework. There is a need to also check ongoing validity of the LCCF for community action in existing projects via gaining and documenting feedback from various segments in the community (including the partnering disenfranchised populations). This will allow researchers and professionals to authenticate different library-community convergences to various outcomes, as expressed by a combination of quantitative and qualitative data.

An examination of the historical development of American libraries provides a clear and simplified (yet miscast) understanding of the idea of community as a homogenous construct, equated with the formless "public" (Wiegand 1999). This paper asks scholars and library leaders in various work environments to re-consider the topic of community, and instead re-conceptualize it as a multicultural, ever-changing, and highly complex entity. It asks all librarians to actively engage with these constructions of community and recognize local community dynamics, reflect upon them as they may interact with the goal of praxis, and establish a self-reflective dialogue that dissipates the power dynamic of teacher-student (Freire 1968), in lieu of a philosophy that asks the librarians to learn from, and respond to, issues and realities articulated by their diverse publics. Without this approach, the

danger exists of reifying historical patterns, whereby librarians may negligently continue to homogenize the construct of community, and only serve governmental or commercial interests in lieu of multicultural community partners. Without this philosophical shift, different libraries at worst may also run the danger of eroding the possible learning and cultural exchange held within this multicultural scenario, and more mildly, may simply become less relevant to these communities. The LCCF for community action is an approach that provides the possibility and the methods of extending the role of different libraries and their relationships with marginalized communities and dynamic multicultural publics to a deeper and stronger level of engagement and involvement. It potentially allows for promoting proactive social changes towards building vibrant, engaged, and locally sustainable communities where various libraries are no longer viewed as minor players in bringing socio-cultural, socio-political, and socioeconomic changes in people's marginalized lives and disenfranchising experiences. In order to make the library a more significant player in promoting progressive social changes in different environments, there is a need to accept, adopt, and practice the LCCF for community action and its variations at a library-by-library level, in addition to its acknowledgement at the larger regional and national levels. In this way, the LCCF for community action may provide a new mode of practice deepening interactions between different libraries, marginalized community stakeholders, and the changing multicultural publics. Such efforts will be democratic and equitable, participatory and sustainable, and contributions of all involved will be supported in ways that lead to the empowerment of people on the margins and build on their abilities to make major and minor changes in their everyday lives in terms of what is meaningful to them.

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