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HEGEMONY'S HANDMAID? THE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION STUDIES CURRICULUM FROM A CLASS PERSPECTIVE

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The field of library and information studies (LIS) has traditionally avoided class analysis in favor of two other perspectives: pluralism and managerialism. Whereas pluralism focuses on the behavior of interacting individuals, and managerialism emphasizes organizations treated as systems, a relational class perspective argues that the LIS curriculum is just one of a constellation of middle-class practices aimed at maintaining hegemonic control by the dominant class. At least since the 1923 Williamson Report, four focal areas that relate to the theory and practice of cultural hegemony have preoccupied the LIS curricular field: links with the corporate world, professionalization, aspiration to scientific status, and stratification of literacy and of institutions. Hegemony, however, is never complete; historically some librarians and LIS educators have resisted ideological domination. For the newly emerging "information profession" to avoid political naiveté, the LIS curriculum should include social theory as a tool for rigorous, theoretical, and empowering analysis of current far-ranging societal changes.

Introduction

For decades, Americans have avoided use of the term "class," adhering instead to the comfortable rhetoric that most Americans are "middle class" and that class distinctions are suffered mainly by Old World nations that seem unable to shake off the shackles of an aristocratic past.

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But the American popular press has recently begun to adopt the language of class in an effort to analyze widening disparities of income and wealth in the United States. For example, John Cassidy asks in a 1995 *New Yorker* article, "Who Killed the Middle Class?" In response, he points to economic factors such as "an oversupply of unskilled workers and a shortage of skilled workers" [1, p. 123]. Cassidy also calls for increasing government programs to strengthen the dwindling middle class. Books and newspaper articles also point to a growing division between the information haves and have-nots (see, for example [2]). We are becoming a two-class society, they say (as though this phenomenon were something new).

Although class analysis is an accepted and major theoretical perspective in such related academic disciplines as education, history, and the social sciences, library and information studies (LIS) researchers—with a few notable exceptions—have almost entirely ignored the class perspective.² Is this simply an oversight, yet another example of the tendency of LIS to focus inward and overlook the theoretical preoccupations of scholars in other fields? Or is it more than oversight, perhaps even a willingness to comply with a dominant, but unstated, value that favors the maintenance of inequality. "Librarians are mainly liberals, in the classic sense of the term, and generally support open access and services to disadvantaged populations," comments Michael Winter. "But when we look more closely at this viewpoint, is it really an attempt to empower the excluded, or is it simply a desire to allow them equal access to the mainstream canon? Are the classification systems we favor politically neutral, or do they actually reinforce a certain powerful worldview that we simply do not care to challenge?" [4, p. 101].

The LIS debate has systematically neglected the class perspective in favor of two other standpoints: pluralism and managerialism. These two modes of discourse express middle-class perspectives that today have become so widely used as to appear entirely natural—librarians and other professionals use them unthinkingly. The language of pluralism has its roots in classical political and economic theory; the language of managerialism, in theories of bureaucracy and organizations, with links to science and technology. This article follows a framework described by Robert R. Alford and Roger Friedland in their 1985 monograph *Powers of Theory: Capitalism, the State and Democracy*, but other social scientists have also pointed to the role played by these perspectives, sometimes using different terminology [5]. Jane Robbins-Carter, for

2. The work of Michael H. Harris is a major exception. Since the 1970s, Harris has been the most vocal of a handful of scholars urging the adoption of a class perspective in LIS. See, in particular, [3].

example, distinguishes between power elitists and pluralists. "Simplistically," she writes, "power elitists claim to have identified interlocking groups of individuals who determine what the agenda items will be in the political arena, while pluralists claim that the variety of issue areas on the agenda have identified a widely spread and diverse number of actors" [6, p. 427]. These two groups correspond closely to Alford's and Friedland's managerial and pluralist perspectives. Michael Harris contrasts the pluralistic perspective with the class perspective, claiming that the whole field of library and information studies is permeated with the pluralistic perspective and that this orientation is largely unrecognized. Harris makes a crucial contribution by bringing a class perspective to bear on debates within LIS but weakens his theoretical framework by failing to distinguish a separate managerial perspective [7, p. 214]. Outlining pluralism and managerialism may seem digressive, but it is part of the class perspective to recognize that they dominate the field and that, in doing so, they help to maintain class hegemony. As Raymond Williams points out, the key concepts of each perspective are "the vocabulary of a crucial area of social and cultural discussion, which has been inherited within precise historical and social conditions . . . which has to be made at once conscious and critical . . . if the millions of people in whom it is active are to see it as active: not a *tradition* to be learned, not a *consensus* to be accepted, not a set of meanings which, because it is 'our language,' has a natural authority; but as a shaping and reshaping" [8, pp. 21–22]. Concepts are not eternal and unchanging—they are rooted in history and in the present. An understanding of the concepts that the LIS community "takes for granted," that are invisible and "natural," cannot occur without consideration of the historical weight of their meanings.

Class

Class as a construct has both definitional and contingent aspects. Class is an integral part of capitalism: its existence in a capitalist society is not a matter of contingency, to be determined by observation, but is part of the definition of capitalism. If we agree that we live in a capitalist society, we must agree that class is also a fact of our existence. However, this definition says little about what particular form class takes in late twentieth-century North America. The shape and description of class at any point in history is far from definitional but is a matter of observation. Class perspective is both broad and long. It takes society as a whole as its unit of analysis and claims that understanding of class as a broad social phenomenon can be acquired only within its long historical con-

text. Although class is a “macro” construct, the characteristics of class lie in the “micro” details: class practices as they are carried out on a daily basis. An example of those details is the curriculum of LIS education.

Sociologists use the term “class” in a number of ways. One major approach argues that classes are formations that, at least since the industrial revolution, have played a crucial role in historical events, issues, and changes. Two broad conceptions of these formations have dominated the field: the class theories of Karl Marx and Max Weber. For Marx, classes are economic. They arise from the capitalist mode of production. Under capitalism, pursuit of profit by the owners of the industrial means of production (the capitalist class) brings them into economic conflict with other participants in the economic system—owners of labor (the workers in a wage-labor system) and owners of land. Weber’s theory, on the other hand, emphasizes the market and the distribution and consumption of goods and services, as well as production, and introduces additional, noneconomic factors into the definition of class: status and political parties.³ Thus, following the Weberian tradition, many scholars and commentators emphasize “class” as explaining variations in people’s “life chances” by focusing on market-mediated differences in property, qualifications, and skills.

This article adopts a variation in the Marxian tradition that adopts the relational, experiential approach expressed, for example, by E. P. Thompson, in terms of activities rooted in social relations. According to this view, class is defined in terms of how people actively make sense of their experiences, values, and traditions and how groups of people struggle to create and maintain a sense of identity. “The notion of class entails the notion of historical relationship,” Thompson comments. “Like any other relationship, it is a fluency which evades analysis if we attempt to stop it dead at any given moment and anatomize its structure. . . . The class experience is largely determined by productive relations into which men are born—or enter involuntarily. Class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms” [10, p. 8]. The key development in influencing the shape of the “productive relations” on which the class experience depends was the nineteenth-century process of industrialization.

A foundation of industrialization’s ultimate success for the newly forming capitalist class lay in the transformation of coercive workplace control into an ideological control permeating all social and cultural

3. Anthony Giddens has written extensively on social class. For an introduction to the Marxian model and the Weberian alternative, see [9].

life, not merely the economic arena. The dominant class effected unobtrusive control (or what Charles Perrow calls “premise control”) at least in part, through control of the production of and access to printed materials [11, pp. 129–30]. Another means of asserting premise control was to create institutions. Modern social and economic institutions developed during the nineteenth century as part of the infrastructure of the capitalist industrial state. Twentieth-century libraries emerged out of this process of nineteenth-century industrialization and class formation, along with a number of other institutions now so taken for granted that they have become part of the landscape: banks, insurance companies and corporations, churches, and schools and universities.

This concept of class formation owes much to the Gramscian theory of hegemony as consensual rather than primarily coercive.⁴ According to Antonio Gramsci, a powerful group achieves hegemony when it gains control over a range of values and norms, to the extent that these are so embedded in society that they receive unquestioned acceptance: “One of [the state’s] most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level (or type) which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces of development, and hence to the interests of the ruling classes” [14, p. 258]. Gramsci includes the school among the state’s “positive” (that is, noncoercive) educative functions but goes on to point out that “a multitude of other so-called private initiatives tend to the same end—initiatives and activities which form the apparatus of the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling classes” [14, p. 258]. Together, the state and these “private initiatives” of “civil society” exercise ideological control.

In particular, intellectuals, the elite members of educational and cultural institutions, are “the dominant group’s ‘deputies’ exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government” [14, p. 12]. Educational institutions are of central importance in the transmission of an effective dominant culture. “This is now a major economic as well as cultural activity,” points out Raymond Williams. “The processes of education; the processes of a much wider social training within institutions like the family; the practical definitions and organization of work; the selective tradition at an intellectual and theoretical

4. Italian Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) is credited with extending traditional Marxian theory to emphasize the importance of culture and ideology for ruling-class domination and the struggle for hegemony. Gramsci, an elected member of the Italian parliament, was incarcerated by the fascists and spent the last ten years of his life in prison. Much of his published social theory is based on the notebooks that his wife managed to smuggle out of the clinic, where he died, six days after his sentence ended. For an introduction to Gramsci’s concept of “hegemony,” see Paul Ransome’s chapter 5 in [12] and T. J. Jackson Lears [13].

level: all these forces are involved in a continual making and remaking of an effective dominant culture, and on them, as experienced, as built into our living, its reality depends" [15, p. 414]. To experience twentieth-century educational institutions—schools, colleges, universities, and libraries—is to experience the class system unobtrusively at work.

However, it is important not to overemphasize the effectiveness of the dominant ideology and thus ignore the ways in which the dominated create space for themselves to exercise choice and control. Complete hegemony is rarely attained, and, as Michel de Certeau points out, researchers need not only "to make clearer how the violence of order is transmuted into a disciplinary technology" but also "to bring to light the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of 'discipline.'" These "creative" efforts, de Certeau goes on, are more than the sporadic efforts of isolated individuals. "Pushed to their ideal limits, these procedures and ruses of consumers compose the network of an antidiscipline" [16, p. xv].

Since the early 1970s, a number of social historians, especially the New Labor historians, have detailed the role of institutions in the development of the class system in the United States. For example, in his study of the relationship between class formation and institutionalization, Paul G. Faler discusses the founding in Lynn, Massachusetts, of middle-class institutions such as banks, insurance companies, lyceums, and libraries as an expression of developing class consciousness.⁵ As institutions grew, a class of people developed to manage and administer them. Some (for example, physicians, engineers, accountants, teachers, and librarians) formed professional subgroups. For the next century or more, this developing middle class adapted to new conditions while transforming institutions in major ways. Significant change took place, for example, in the Progressive era, when modern organizations developed the largely centralized, hierarchical, bureaucratic form, which for decades was assumed to best suit the needs of the industrial state.

The middle class derives assets from its relationship to institutions. These consist of not only physical assets but also skill, education, organization, and moral assets—the right to determine the moral agenda, to decide what counts as good character and ethical behavior.⁶ A major preoccupation of the middle class is to retain and accumulate these

5. Paul G. Faler also discusses the parallel development of working-class institutions, such as mutual benefit societies, newspapers, fire companies, cooperative stores, and reading rooms (see [17]). For an introduction to New Labor History, see [18].

6. See Erik Olin Wright's work on skill and organization assets [19]; Pierre Bourdieu on cultural capital [20]; and Mary Ryan on moral assets [21].

assets and to pass them on to new recruits—mostly their own children but also upwardly mobile people from lower echelons of society. In order to maintain its privileged access to this array of assets, the middle class engages in a number of activities that are normal, even routine, and that play an important part in defining its identity. Some consist of carrying out the day-to-day tasks of a professional person or a manager. Others consist of ordinary participation in the community—going to church, attending PTA meetings, raising money for the public library, belonging to voluntary organizations such as the Rotary or Lions Club, or running for school board.

However, the middle class is not a single unified entity: conflict over how to shape institutions and the values expressed through them occurs among different groups within the middle class. Some normal activities within the middle class express this struggle to set the middle-class agenda. For example, when professional people attend conferences and publish scholarly papers, they are taking part in this ongoing process of establishing and maintaining the boundaries of middle-class conduct and values. A class perspective on the LIS curriculum requires recognition of LIS education as just one of a constellation of middle-class practices. The annual meeting of the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) would be an example of an arena in which groups of participants attempt to influence aspects of the middle-class professional agenda.

Pluralism

In contrast to the societal focus of the class perspective, the pluralist perspective takes the individual as its unit of analysis. Key pluralist concepts are the individual, behavior, conflict of interests, participation, and consensus [5, pp. 6–8]. Interactions of individuals and individual behavior are explained with reference to cultural patterns of value and belief. The concept of individuals socialized into a culture is crucial. So is the notion of competition. Nineteenth-century classical theories of economic behavior are an important example of the pluralistic perspective, emphasizing another key concept—that of market. The concepts “‘modern,’ ‘social structure’ and ‘culture’ convey an image of society as an aggregate of interacting individuals socialized into cultural values and engaging in diverse communications and exchanges, especially in markets” [5, p. 17]. One functional version of the pluralist perspective, public choice theory, advocates that public institutions such as libraries adopt private sector methods in ensuring the most efficient distribution of resources in terms of individuals’ maximization

of utility [22, p. 196]. Much discussion couches Internet development in pluralist terms, emphasizing ease of communication, widespread individual access to information, and exchange of ideas.

A 1996 Internet announcement exemplifies pluralist discourse in the LIS curriculum. Dalhousie University has established a new Chair in Marketing Informatics through the collaboration of two units of the Faculty of Management: the School of Library and Information Studies and the School of Business. The announcement explains that, "Marketing Informatics . . . integrates traditional marketing information systems with new technologies and processes for discovering and presenting deeper relationships and insights . . . [and] attempts to clearly recognize and understand client needs and behaviours, particularly as they influence decisions and choices among competing products and services" [23]. Clues to perspective arise in the use of phrases such as "client needs and behaviours" and "decisions and choices among competing products and services." Former Baltimore County Public Library director Charlie Robinson's approach epitomizes this perspective in LIS practice. A "Charlie Robinson library," he explains, is "customer oriented. For example, we began merchandising our collections, using special fixtures to display face out as many books as possible. . . . I don't see any reason for keeping a book if it doesn't move. . . . What was the point of giving [patrons] what they didn't want?" [24, pp. 136–37].

Managerialism

The managerial perspective takes as its level of analysis the organization. Key concepts here are bureaucracy, elite, rationality, formal versus informal and simple versus complex. "Individual behavior can best be understood in terms of positions and resources within organizations," say Alford and Friedland [5, p. 19]. "Organizations are treated as systems determined by technology, tasks and environment. 'Input-output' models assume, for example, that organizational attributes lead to greater or lesser outputs and that these outputs can be measured" [5, p. 22]. Whereas the pluralistic perspective takes independent and dependent variables as the basis for its model of relations, the managerial perspective describes its model of relations in terms of inputs and outputs. In the managerial worldview, the power of the market, or competing groups, gives way to the power of dominant elites who control the decision-making process by deciding which problems are worthy of attention and which are not. This approach assumes that careful scientific study can construct accurate measures of "effectiveness,"

which library managers can use to meet library goals and objectives. Decision making is perhaps the key managerial activity. One role of research is to provide background information necessary to make rational decisions.

This perspective leans heavily on the language of science and engineering, with its stress on measurement, feedback, rationality, and systems. Those major areas of the LIS curriculum that focus on these concepts include management and administration courses, information systems, database design, research methods, and information storage and retrieval. Indeed, in a variety of publications, F. W. Lancaster uses managerial discourse to describe the entire LIS curriculum when he advocates basing it on "elements of the information cycle." These elements include uses and users, production and distribution, collection and storage, recording and representing, accessing and delivery, with interpretation, leadership and management, and research methods as peripheral to the central, circular, "system" (see, for example, [25]).

The LIS Curriculum

Discussion of the LIS curriculum from a class perspective raises two questions: What topics, from a class perspective, are relevant to the LIS curriculum? What, in fact, does the LIS curriculum focus on, and why? In answer to the first question, the pluralist and managerial perspectives certainly cover a large portion of courses commonly found in current LIS curricula. However, a failure to consider the big picture constitutes a major omission. By contrast, the class perspective asks questions about the distribution and use of power and asserts that major issues are determined by contests in which two broad classes struggle for control of the outcome. Questions invoking the big picture posed by the class perspective might include: What is the nature of the information infrastructure? Who decides what and how information should be produced and for whom? Who benefits? Who does not?

Consider this quotation from Herbert I. Schiller's 1995 book *Information Inequality*: "Two powerful forces [dominate] the social sphere at this time. They are a largely freewheeling corporate enterprise system, exerting its will locally and globally, in tandem with an unprecedentedly influential and privately-owned information apparatus, largely devoted to money-making and the avoidance of social criticism" [26, p. xii].⁷ What issues are implied in Schiller's analysis? As already noted,

7. In addition to the books authored or coauthored by Schiller himself, for a commentary on Schiller's work, also see [27, esp. chap. 5, "Information and Advanced Capitalism"].

the deepening division of society between information haves and have-nots is widely discussed in the general press. Does the LIS curriculum participate in this debate, or does it rather contribute to the information apparatus's aim of avoiding social criticism? Where are the courses on information politics? On the production and distribution of information? On the ownership of information? On the stratification of information?

Such courses do exist in some schools, but, for the most part, curricular consideration of these questions lurks in what are sometimes stigmatized as "airhead" or "philosophical" (that is, nontechnical) areas: courses in LIS foundations service to or aimed at low-status populations such as children or the elderly or taught from a feminist or multicultural perspective. From a class perspective, this failure of LIS education to confront societal questions is itself a sign of the power of the dominant class to exercise hegemony. Traditionally, LIS studies both the institution of libraries and the broad phenomenon of information largely through pluralist and managerial lenses as questions of service delivery, technical efficiency, and managerial effectiveness. One result is a politically naive profession.

This leads to the second question. If, from a class perspective, "gaps" exist in LIS education, what have actually been its main concerns, and why and how have they affected the LIS curriculum? Four focal areas have dominated discussion of the field at least since the 1923 Williamson Report and relate to the theory and practice of cultural hegemony: links with the corporate world, professionalization, aspiration to scientific status, and stratification of literacy and of institutions. LIS is not unique in these concerns; they are common to a number of occupations, some of which (such as law and medicine) have been more "successful" in attending to them. The class perspective not only highlights these concerns but shows how they fit into a broader pattern of middle-class strategic practices. It also shows how LIS has had only partial success in adopting these class-based strategies.

Links with the Corporate World

Although the influential Williamson Report of 1923 is usually cast as the production of a single, far-sighted individual—Charles C. Williamson—what is often forgotten, or glossed over, is the role of the Carnegie Corporation, a powerful corporate body that appointed and paid Williamson, determined the parameters of the investigation, and provided models for Williamson to follow [28]. Williamson joined the Carnegie Corporation during the First World War, as head of the

Department of Statistics and Information's Study of Methods for Americanization (perhaps a clue to the corporation's ideology of assimilation). The corporation had already financed studies into improving education methods for medicine and law and, in 1925, set aside \$5 million for a special program of library development. About half of this sum went to support the American Library Association. Of the rest, nearly \$1.5 million were earmarked to establish a new kind of library school—the Graduate Library School at the University of Chicago—and the remainder supported existing library schools [29, p. 167].

At this pivotal point, therefore, LIS education was heavily influenced by a major capitalist force, one that also played an important role in setting the direction of education in other professional fields. This nexus illustrates one way in which capital established a hegemonic form of domination in the first part of the twentieth century. Large corporations have perceived links with professional education as so vital that they have pursued them, with universities' eager acquiescence ever since. A recent example is the financing of library service and education in Michigan by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. This body's well-publicized programs have included a \$3 million grant to the Michigan community college system for the development of a telecommunications network using satellite, fiber optics, and microwave transmission and a retrospective conversion project at Wayne State University costing nearly \$1 million, as well as \$640,000 for "M-Link," a project to link seven public libraries electronically to the holdings of the University of Michigan [30, p. 16; 31, pp. 16–17]. More significant for LIS education, however, is the foundation's sponsorship of a new curriculum at the University of Michigan's restructured School of Information. Creditably, the school has publicized the progress of this development by posting its proposed changes on its Web page so that others can follow the thinking that has gone into this major enterprise.

In April 1997, the school's mission statement proclaimed, "The School of Information embraces a vision that harmonizes people, information systems, and organizations to improve the quality of life. Our mission is to discover the principles and concepts that will enable society to realize this vision, to design the technologies, systems, and practices that will substantiate the vision, and to educate new generations of professionals who will put that vision into practice" [32]. This statement, with its emphasis on "technologies," "systems," and "harmonizing," adopts a predominantly managerial approach to the study of information.

The mission statement also states, "The School of Information is dedicated to investigating the fundamental role of information in society. Its field of study is information: how it is created, identified, col-

lected, structured, managed, preserved, accessed, processed, and presented; how it is used in different environments, with different technologies" [32]. However, from a class perspective, "the fundamental role of information in society" is to underpin the society-wide distribution of power and material resources. One key aspect would be the study of how corporate links affect the definition of problems in the field of information. In contrast, the School of Information appears to continue a traditional focus on the technical problems of information retrieval, transfer and delivery, albeit within a utopian vision of the so-called information age.

A class perspective would also note that the Kellogg Foundation is funding a shift in emphasis from the old, visible, information institutions (libraries) to new, invisible, information networks. One advantage of this new intangibility to corporations is that it obscures yet further the very real and tangible controls exercised by corporate power over the production and distribution of information in the late twentieth century.

Professionalization

The next traditional LIS focus to be considered here is its concern with professionalization. Over the last century and a half, specialized sectors of economic activity have come under middle-class control through the agency of professional bodies. This shift has been so successful in law, medicine, architecture, and engineering that their professional organizations appear to be part of the natural landscape. However, those who have made a critical study of their history recognize the constructed nature of these major American professions (see, for example, [33–35]). An important feature of LIS education is the continuing effort to imitate this movement by helping to create a parallel profession of librarianship or, more recently, information science.

The middle-class professional project has used both pluralist and managerial perspectives in self-justification. Professions are depicted as collections of independent colleagues holding equal status, who arrive at decisions through consensus. Thus, they adopt the language of pluralism. At the same time, the professions occupy the top of a hierarchy. Below them are the noncertificated paraprofessionals, clerical or manual workers, condemned to positions of less control by their non-professional status. Certification and hierarchy are part of the discourse of managerialism. A major preoccupation of LIS education has been to create and maintain a distinction between "professional" librarians and paraprofessional or clerical library staff. One of the Williamson Report's recommendations was that library school graduates distance

themselves from shelving, filing, and typing and instead concentrate on higher intellectual or professional tasks such as cataloging and classification or library administration. Despite these early attempts to carve out a distinct area of professional practice, however, LIS still struggles with issues of demarcation. The employment of so-called paraprofessionals in cataloging and reference—two “core” areas of librarianship—continues, and LIS has failed to establish clear guidelines for what counts as professional practice and what does not. This fuzziness is mirrored in the curricula of library schools, as reflected by recurring Internet discussion among LIS faculty. Should entrants be required to take courses in so-called computer literacy or competency as part of the LIS curriculum, or should Internet and computer applications skills be a prerequisite of entry? Such basic familiarity with a personal computer will soon probably be assumed but perhaps replaced by a new layer of technical anxiety: familiarity with HTML (hypertext markup language) or VRML (virtual reality modeling language), perhaps, or knowledge of multimedia applications. The class perspective shows how LIS education is trapped in this dilemma by its adherence not only to the middle-class strategy of professional protectionism but also to two other middle-class strategies: a striving for scientific status and an attachment to universities.

Before leaving discussion of the professional strategy, however, we should note another facet of this tactic. If LIS has been unable to join the big players in the professional league as an equal, it has done its best to develop a symbiotic relationship with them by emphasizing delivery of information services to powerful professional groups. Specialized courses in law librarianship and medical informatics are now a familiar part of the curricular scene. The class perspective asks, Why, of all the groups in society, have schools of LIS focused particularly on those already so well endowed? The class perspective's answer, of course, is that it is precisely because of the power and status of law and medicine that LIS has responded in this way. The same can be said of the many links between LIS education and resources for business. The relative lack of specialized information courses for service to the underprivileged: labor groups, immigrants, local voluntary groups, and the low status of courses for those intending to work with children and young people is a detail and an indicator of a flourishing class system in operation in late twentieth-century America.

Scientific Status

The third focus of LIS education has been its attempt to acquire status as a scientific discipline. For over a hundred years, physical and biologi-

cal scientists have succeeded in representing themselves as generators of progress, wealth, and knowledge. Scientists have helped create colleges and universities as powerful, publicly funded institutions under whose umbrella other groups of intellectuals (such as humanities scholars) have also gained shelter. Because the scientific practices have accrued such prestige, an important strategy for less successful occupational groups has been to present themselves as scientific in nature. Earlier in this century, positivist theories representing science as non-political and value-free encouraged the coining of such terms as "social science," "domestic science," "library science," and, now, "information science." Imitation of so-called hard scientific methods (particularly the hypotheticodeductive method) is an important feature of these attempts to gain scientific status.

The LIS curriculum reflects these struggles. As Margaret Stieg pointed out in 1992, "Over the last ten years the largest single modification [to the curriculum] has been the addition of numerous new courses in technology and information science; Telecommunications, Database Management, Artificial Intelligence for Information Retrieval, Marketing of Information, and the National Information Policy are only a few examples" [36, p. 112]. Consider the list of "specializations" offered at the University of Michigan's School of Information: (1) next generation systems architecture; (2) human-computer interaction; (3) organizational information systems; (4) digital publishing; (5) library and information services (formerly known as librarianship); and (6) archives and records management.

The list speaks for itself. Librarianship is now a single specialization—one of six. Suffice it to say that middle-class support for libraries has persisted only as long as the middle class perceives its own need for them. To the extent that middle-class consumers see their information needs (and those of their children) provided at the privacy of their own computer desks, their support for public libraries, in particular, dwindles. In the current political climate, are public libraries destined to go the way of other publicly funded services for the disadvantaged—condemned as a sort of intellectual welfare?

Stratification of Literacy

The fourth strategy adopted by LIS in its pursuit of middle-class security is its contribution to the stratification of literacy and of educational institutions. Before the spread of universal education in industrializing countries, the mere possession of literacy was in itself a symbol of social status. Some groups (for example, slaves and women) were systematically excluded from becoming literate. Thus, the simple fact of literacy

maintained stratification. As industrialization proceeded, and the demands of new industrial processes required most of the workforce to read and write, simple literacy no longer indicated higher status. Instead, cultural authorities drew distinctions as to what constituted "good" reading, condemning popular fiction as "trashy" or "sensational." On the other hand, reading the "right" books and periodicals conveyed cultural capital. Librarians played an important part in transmitting the values of high culture, though perhaps, as Wayne Wiegand has argued, not in establishing those values [37]. Librarians also played an important role in transmitting the value of universal literacy and in linking this to the concept of what it was to be "American."

The parallels with so-called information literacy (often used to mean technical proficiency with microcomputers and familiarity with the Internet) are clear. Simple possession of computer skill still confers status. Just as mid-nineteenth-century clerks obtained better paying jobs because of their clear handwriting and arithmetical skills, so late twentieth-century clerks still enjoy a slight premium by virtue of their facility with word-processing, database, and spreadsheet manipulation. Since politicians now proclaim "computer literacy" essential for the future workforce, presumably they will eventually make resources available for most to acquire such basic skills. At the moment, resources are concentrated in schools for the relatively affluent. In an article entitled "The Internet and the Poor," Richard Cívile argues for the development of a "high-speed infrastructure for information with a civic purpose" [38]. According to Cívile, "routine production workers" and "in-person service providers" occupy powerless, low-status, and poorly paid positions in the economy, in contrast to "symbolic analysts" who are well paid and whose voices are heard in the political process. His solution is to increase the "network literacy" of the poor, to improve their social mobility.

However, the class perspective argues that this structure of employment also characterized the nineteenth-century industrializing economies and has been part and parcel of industrial capitalism ever since but that the suggested solution perpetuates rather than transforms the status quo. At a societal level, what keeps workers poor is not lack of skills but the existence of low-paying jobs. The solution, from a class perspective, is to restructure the economy so that jobs that keep people poor no longer exist. Improved network literacy would do nothing to change this situation, although it would certainly improve the economic prospects of some individuals.

The second point about stratification relates to educational institutions. Over the course of this century, four-year colleges and universities have emerged at the top of the tertiary education hierarchy. Community colleges, originally intended as an entryway into the college

system for the poor, instead have become providers of lower-status vocational education. Any suggestion that community colleges should provide the LIS curriculum is rightly interpreted by LIS faculty and practitioners as a threat to their occupational status. Four-year colleges and universities, on the other hand, successfully promoted the need for professional certification: the possession of a diploma symbolized professional competency and marked an "educated" person. The major professions surrendered the educational process to colleges and universities, though retaining control over curricula, often through the imposition of accreditation standards for institutions or boards of examination for individuals.

Universities undertook to provide LIS education, as they did medical, legal, and science education. The Williamson Report recommended university-based programs of graduate library education based on a standardized curriculum and specialized textbooks. Since establishing a master's degree as the standard for professional entry, schools of LIS have clung to their university status. The tenuous nature of that status was demonstrated in the late 1970s and 1980s, when about 20 percent of accredited LIS schools closed, and others were drastically reorganized. Status anxiety has characterized much discussion of LIS education ever since.

This anxiety is not confined to LIS. Other programs with a social rather than technological emphasis also find themselves under fire. Universities are changing to meet the demands of a capitalism more aggressive than at any time since before the Great Depression.⁸ To fit the values of the corporate environment, departments in many disciplines seek links to business as a protective shelter; others try to beat the numbers game by admitting more students, to be taught by fewer faculty. Distance education is another such strategy. These changes are not likely to be reversed in the short term. As long as LIS professional education is confined within the precincts of universities that have abandoned any pretense to independence, the curriculum will be influenced by the dominant corporate class. This influence is the payoff for university status.

Conclusion: The Need for Social Theory

The class perspective is not cheering. Short of revolution, it fails to present solutions to problems of exploitation and inequity. However,

8. So aggressive, indeed, that even prominent capitalist George Soros argues that capitalism now poses a threat to Karl Popper's "Open Society" comparable to the threat formerly posed by communism (see [39]).

it also does not encourage fatalism. It is not inevitable that the so-called information revolution will be subverted to corporate ends. Members of the LIS community are laying claim to a new title: the information profession. What sort of an occupational group will this be? We can choose to create a profession devoted to protection of its class privilege in return for support of corporate values, or we can risk the loss of class privilege in return for a struggle to spread the wealth of information more equally among the whole population. Whichever role we choose, we should do so knowingly rather than by default. Making an informed choice means that we have to go beyond our traditional pluralist and managerial language, beyond the discourse that reassures us that our main task is to tinker with the system or that "natural" forces of competition will permit the "right" solution to float to the surface.

Adopting a class perspective involves asking what, fundamentally, we are about. Do we stand by values of free and equitable access? Are we willing to tackle broader political questions relating to control of the production, distribution, and, indeed, definition of information? At crucial periods in history, the profession has reacted sometimes with principle and sometimes with self-interest. After the United States entered the First World War in 1917, for example, many public librarians bowed to popular and official pressure and removed from their library shelves pro-German and pacifist books and even some books by German authors. However, some resisted these efforts at censorship. In 1918, library director John Cotton Dana, for example, encouraged the Newark Public Library board of trustees to refuse to withdraw eight books that a local group called the "Vigilantes" described as "seditious" [40, pp. 95–112]. During the McCarthy era, some librarians, like Elizabeth Haas of Enoch Pratt Free Library, refused to sign loyalty oaths [41, p. 242]. Ruth Brown of Bartlesville, Oklahoma, lost her job, charged with collecting "subversive materials"—the *Nation* and the *New Republic*. As Louise S. Robbins has shown, however, Ruth Brown was an early civil rights activist who therefore offended powerful local interests on more than one count [42, p. 19–48].

Thus, some librarians have indeed practiced the "dispersed, tactical, and makeshift creativity" that Michel de Certeau identifies as forming the "network of an antidiscipline" [16]. Pockets of "creativity" have also existed in schools of LIS—places where LIS faculty have struggled, and continue to struggle, against the "nets of 'discipline'" by making a sustained effort to consider the broader consequences and implications of participation in the "information society." For example, in some schools, faculty and students are involved in the development of community-based information networks. Joan Durrance of the University of Michigan's School of Information has written extensively of the development of community information networks. Some schools have

developed courses in community information and referral services like that developed at the University of Western Ontario by Karen E. Pettigrew. Other LIS scholars, like Elfreda A. Chatman, Roma M. Harris, and Patricia Dewdney, have focused their research on the information needs of underserved groups (see, for example, [43–46]).

However, if schools of LIS are serious about producing information professionals who will “play an increasingly vital role in empowering individuals, communities, and organizations to capture the promise of the information age,” they need to do more than make space in the curriculum for the occasional elective course in community information [32]. As Bryan Pfaffenberger has forcefully pointed out, information is not a thing; like class, “it is a relation, specifically, a social relation.” Pfaffenberger explains, “The assertion that electronic databases contain information or knowledge is philosophically and linguistically incoherent unless the *user* of the information is capable of decoding the text that the databases contain.” However, he goes on, “Databases cannot be said to represent a valuable social resource in the absence of skilled decoders, and such persons are fewer in number with each passing year of educational deterioration in North America” [47, p. 55]. Here, the link between the social relationship that is class and the social relationship that is information is clearly mediated through access to educational assets.

For former schools of librarianship to lay claim to the title of “schools of information,” analyzing this social relation must be one of their central tasks. This, in turn, involves coming to grips with social theory. Like it or not, schools of LIS are the chief sites of theoretical development in the field. However, this task is not always embraced by LIS faculty in a willing or timely fashion. For example, failure by LIS faculty to follow (far less participate in) interdisciplinary debates ranging from phenomenology to postmodernism during the 1970s and 1980s resulted in the embarrassingly belated controversy over positivist and interpretivist research approaches aired at the ALISE annual conference in 1993.⁹

With additional preparation in social theory, LIS students and practitioners would be better equipped to investigate underexplored avenues of research. That we are witnessing an “explosion of information” has become a cliché; mountains of data and rapidly changing technologies are even held to produce a new psychological phenomenon among information workers: technostress. Paradoxically, in the face of this abundance, librarians, educators, and information specialists also

9. Budd presented a version of this article at ALISE. Discussion by a panel of commentators followed Budd's presentation. See [48].

frequently focus on the scarcity of resources, though often interpreting lack of funding for library services as a local, managerial problem, albeit one recognized by librarians globally.

Class analysis, with its wide-angle perspective, suggests explanations for the nature and effects of this apparent paradox. Topics for class-based research are numerous and might include (1) case studies of individual libraries' or library systems' funding over, say, the last two decades; (2) investigations into structural changes that have adversely affected particular segments of the publishing industry while boosting the fortunes of others; and (3) description and analysis of the distribution of newly qualified information professionals among various sectors of the LIS field. Class analysis can also illuminate the practices of information specialists and show how these contribute to the distribution of cultural capital.¹⁰ Libraries and librarians play a largely unexamined part in processes of cultural production. As Chris Atton points out, "Selection policies, cataloguing rules, classification systems and subject indexes . . . have tended to obstruct access to certain types of ideas," while "the provenance of materials has been severely limited . . . in the case of publications from alternative and radical publishers." Atton goes on to argue that "power [is] inscribed [within such systems], a power that perpetuates unequal relations of power" [50, p. 103].

In addition to scrutinizing the processes and effects of such power relationships, a class research perspective would analyze the restrictive practices that have sidelined "alternative" approaches to librarianship. Moreover, class analysis illuminates historical events and developments in LIS, by both opening new areas of investigation and revisiting "old" topics. While much criticism (some of it well aimed, some simplistically defensive) has been targeted at so-called revisionist library historians such as Michael H. Harris and Dee Garrison, few will deny that the ensuing debate has done much to shake up an area justly criticized for its primarily celebratory and descriptive nature.¹¹

To continue to make a significant contribution to the ways in which

10. As John Guillory has argued with respect to literacy, "An 'institutional' fact such as literacy has everything to do with the relation of 'exclusion' to social identity; but exclusion should be defined not as exclusion from representation but from access to the *means of cultural production*" (see [49, p. 18]).

11. Dee Garrison sets out to counter a "progressive interpretation" of library history which is "marred by inadequate awareness of the effects on institutional development of sex, class and generational conflict" [51, pp. xi–xii]. In a similar vein, Michael H. Harris challenges the humanitarian, democratic view of public library development [52]. For a rejoinder to Harris, see Phyllis Dain [53]. However, these examples notwithstanding, as Wayne A. Wiegand has argued, until recently, most mainstream library history research has been "reverential" rather than critical [54].

information goods and services are produced and distributed, schools of LIS do not need to transform themselves into schools of engineering (although the class imperative may point in this direction). Neither is the solution to take refuge in a nostalgic romanticism for bygone days when they were schools of librarianship, and students' most challenging intellectual activities consisted of coming to grips with Dewey classification or learning how to use a citation index. The tools for undertaking a rigorous, theoretical, and empowering analysis of current far-ranging societal changes are available to LIS faculty. It is their responsibility to seek out and pass these tools on to the next generation of information professionals, thus providing them with the intellectual capability to make an informed choice about how they will practice their profession on a daily basis—about whether or not to participate in networks of antidiscipline. Studies of intellectual freedom challenges have suggested that a key variable in affecting librarians' resistance to censorship is formal education (see, for example, [55–57]). If formal education makes a difference in resisting challenges to one well-defined professional value—freedom of information—it can also affect librarians' reaction to threats to other key values, including equity of access and support of the public sphere. It is true that radical curricular changes are not immediately available as an option to all schools; not every LIS faculty has the resources to introduce new courses and materials in social theory, or even courses in information services to the “have-nots.” However, something students and faculty alike can do is keep the debate going. The biggest problem comes when we no longer think there is a problem; then hegemonic “invisible” or premise control is complete.

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