WORKING LIBRARIANS' PERCEPTIONS

OF THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

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Tax-supported public institutions with often-insufficient resources, public libraries in America can only provide a limited array of programs, services and materials. Recent surveys of the public show libraries are important, but there is a lack of understanding and awareness about what the library does and the source of library funding. Librarians have long known that they do a bad job of telling others about the library. An unclear mission would make communicating difficult, as it is hard to communicate what the library does if there is no clear role or purpose for the library. Examining current professional literatures shows little true discussion of the public library's purpose or role. Why had no one surveyed professional librarians about the library? Moving beyond these investigations of public sentiment about the library, this research asks not just whether the library is important or valuable, but also what librarians feel the role of the library should be.

What emerged from the focus groups, interviews and surveys was a picture of the ideal public library, librarian and library role as perceived by librarians working in the field: the most important or critical role for the public library today is to present a variety of ideas and

opinions. Libraries should provide both traditional and newer services and still see information as imperative. They value equal access and being community centered. They believe librarians need to be able to adapt and change, have fresh ideas, be committed to those they serve, know the best way to find information and have a high tolerance for the peculiarities of people. These findings are similar to those of the surveys of the public about the library. So why a disconnect? Librarians value what the community wants and the larger values, ideals and roles of the library and the profession. What happens when the two conflict? As a profession, librarians need library school and continuing education courses and opportunities that focus on public service, community organizing, surveying and assessing community needs.

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CHAPTER 1

THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

1.1 Introduction

The goal of this paper is to examine the role of the public library in the 21st century through the unique perspective of the professional librarian. Professional librarians have a uncommon understanding of the public library, its mission and the obstacles standing in the way of fulfilling that mission. It is possible that librarians agree on the mission of the library but do not do a very good job of communicating that mission to the public. Alternatively, perhaps the mission has changed or is changing to fit current situations and circumstances. If so, librarians should be the first to note such a change.

Although its history has been relatively short (opening its doors for the first time only 154 years ago), the public library in the United States has proven to be a resilient institution. During the Great Depression, public libraries managed to provide needed service to the community, despite less money and reduced hours (Martin 1998, 76). During both World War I and World War II, public libraries supported troops and those on the home front with books and government information, and even a Victory Book Campaign (Williams 1988, 33-34, 51-52). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, many librarians realized that, like society, the public library needed to change and to help bring about change. "The library was to seek out those groups in American society that were powerless, oppressed victims of poverty and discrimination, and work to bring them into the mainstream where they might enjoy the benefits of power and affluence"(Williams 1988, 101). American library history repeatedly shows that the public library responded to the circumstances and situations that affected the country as a whole.

Over the past few years, budgeting constraints forced libraries to reduce hours, staffing, services and programming. Some have even closed their doors completely (Barack 2005, 21; Blumenstein and Oder 2006, 16-17; Blumenstein and Oder 2007; Eberhart 2004, 17; Oder 2006,

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19-20; Stone 2005, 14-15). Yet, library circulation has increased and citizen surveys show support for the public library. In some cases where funding was tight, citizens banded together to raise money and awareness to save their library (Molyneux 2006, 29; Public Agenda 2006, 1).

The American public library survives. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that many public libraries are forced to try to do more with less money. The American public library has a bureaucratic structure, built on rules, policies, procedures, hierarchies and roles. The librarian, as a professional, has had to work within this structure to maintain a professional level of service. At the same time that budgets are being cut, ideas from new public management and the reinventing government movement are working their way down to government and administration at the local level. These ideas are critical of the problems of bureaucracy and bureaucratic structure and bring about a focus on the organization as mission driven. Proponents of these have brought about a change where organizations set missions and then select objectives and goals to fit under that mission. The Public Library Association has, over time, revised library planning documents and processes, including in the planning process the steps of determining library mission and library roles. In addition, many administrative bodies that oversee public libraries have set overall missions, goals and objectives. The public library's mission, goals and objectives must fit under the overall mission of the administrative body and report on progress towards the same. In many cases, budgets and budget requests must support the mission of the library and the larger administrative body for approval.

As tax-supported public institutions with often-insufficient resources, public libraries in America can only provide a limited array of programs, services and materials. Someone must make choices about the public library's mission and what programs, services, and materials support that mission. According to the authors of *A Planning Process for Libraries*, a library-planning document published in 1980, librarians should lead planning for the library in tandem with the community (Palmour, Bellassai and VanHouse). The first step in the planning process is deciding the mission of the library. Librarians should be guiding the community in the planning process, and librarians and other research groups periodically survey the public about the library

and the services and programs the library should offer. Moreover, these surveys can be informative: libraries are important, but there is a lack of understanding and awareness about what the library does and the source of library funding (Public Agenda 2006; OCLC 2005).

Looking at the history of the library in America, there have been different missions depending on circumstances and situations of the time. Library practitioners and researchers Watts and Samuels wondered how librarians, who cannot seem to agree on the mission of the library, could expect a community to do so. If librarians do not have a clear vision for the basic concept of library, the community will most likely not give them a better or stronger one. The planning process often leads to broad, vague, general or superficial statements about the library's mission that allow for the inclusion of almost any library program or service. "Transferring an obscure, cloudy, fragmented or restricted concept from the profession-wide level to the local level does not solve the problem, it merely relocates it" (Watts and Samuels 1984, 131).

1.2 The Research Problem

A few years ago, there were several investigations of the public and their perceptions of the public library. In 2005, the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) with the input of staff and librarians surveyed an international group of information consumers. The findings of this survey were that information consumers see libraries as places to borrow books but are unaware of other content libraries offer. Though information consumers made limited use of library resources, they trusted libraries as reliable sources of information (Online Computer Library Center 2005). A 2006 report on an investigation of public opinion on public libraries by Public Agenda, "Long Overdue: A Fresh Look at Public Attitudes about the Library in the 21st Century", found that Americans insisted on and valued library service even in the information and internet age. However, these same people were not aware that public libraries must often compete with other services for resources (Public Agenda 2006).

Faced with the information from these reports, public librarians concluded that they do a bad job of telling others about the public library. An unclear mission would make communicating difficult, as it is hard to communicate what the library does if there is no clear role or purpose for

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the library. Examining the literature shows that this has been a concern throughout the history of the public library and that bureaucracy, and that professionalism and new public management only add to these concerns. Examining current professional literatures shows little true discussion of the public library's purpose or role. Why had no one surveyed professional librarians about the library? Moving beyond these investigations of public sentiment about the library, this research asks not just whether the library is important or valuable, but also what librarians feel the role of the library should be.

The importance of the public library as a public institution forms the basis for this research. Public libraries are longstanding public tax-supported institutions, bureaucratic in structure, run by professionally trained librarians that are being asked to determine mission, purpose, roles, goals, and objectives, and then measure and report on progress. This research is an investigation of the perceptions of public librarians in the United States in the early 21st century. The goal of this research is to start a discussion about library role and purpose by asking these working professionals to state their preference for one role or purpose for the library over another. Moving beyond the question of library usage and value, this investigation asks what librarians perceive as the most important or critical role for the public library. It asks how librarians perceive their ability to bring about change in the library's goal or purpose, and what factors are helping or hindering change. The decided purpose of the library would matter little to librarians if they could not bring about change to further that purpose.

1.3 Introduction to the Study

This investigation seeks to discover what public librarians across the country perceive as the most important or critical role for the public library. It is also an analysis of why they believe as they do. This is an investigation of public librarians and public libraries and does not address the views of specific groups of library users, nonusers, or other interested parties.

1.3.1 Definitions

In this study, "role" refers to the mission, goal, aim or effect of the public library, that is, its reason for existing. "Library" refers to a collection of materials that organized for access by users.

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A public library is an administrative entity, the agency legally established under local or state law to provide public library service to the population of a local jurisdiction. The administrative entity may have a single public library service outlet, or it may have more than one outlet (Chute et al. 2006). A "librarian" is one who has the care of a library and its contents, selecting, acquiring and organizing the books, documents and non-book materials that comprise its collection, and providing information and loan services to meet the needs of its users.

1.3.2 Structure of the Study

Different sources of data were used to try to discover the most important or critical role for the public library. Using the library history and current professional literature as a basis for discussion, a small number of public librarians attended focus groups and individual interviews to help inform the survey instrument. Public librarians across the nation then had the opportunity to complete the survey online. For the most part, data was nominal or categorical, as the goal was to ascertain and describe librarians' perceptions, experiences and opinions. Analyzing responses allowed for placing respondents in like groups. The survey instrument asked for personal demographic information, details about the library for which they work, and their perceptions about the public library's services, functions, role and their ability to effect change therein.

1.3.3 Sample

To hold the focus groups and interviews quickly and inexpensively, a volunteer convenience sample used local Dallas-Fort Worth area librarians. No one who participated in the focus groups had supervisory relationship with any other participants. Several supervisors from the same library systems also agreed to one-on-one interviews separate from the focus groups. The researcher moderated both focus groups with the help of an assistant.

Subjects for this survey were members of the population of public librarians currently employed in professional positions in public libraries in the United States. In order to reach a national population of public librarians quickly and inexpensively, e-mail listserv groups comprised of librarians or focused on topics or subjects of interest to librarians received survey invitations. This type of sample is nonrandom as it depends on volunteers. All listserv members who were

public librarians could choose to participate. The researcher will compare the sample with the total population of public librarians where possible to show the demographic representativeness this sample.

1.3.4 Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

Concepts and constructs came from the literature and from discussions with current public librarians. However, as a quick look through the current professional literature revealed, the profession does not often discuss these topics in a substantive way so there is the possibility of misunderstood questions or the answer choices. For that matter, the researcher may have the wrong concepts altogether. Bias may have crept in the focus groups and interviews since the participants knew the researcher and one another. Part way through one focus group, a librarian made remarks that indicated she had more to say but was worried that someone else might find her answer troubling.

The assumption was that participants would answer questions openly and honestly, but there may have been a tendency for some respondents, as a group with a shared educational background and an understood professional philosophy, to give socially or professionally acceptable answers. The informed consent assured focus group, interview and survey respondents of the privacy of their responses, but perhaps the pull of the profession was too much for them. Those in the library profession who differ in their ideas and opinions from the majority of the profession may have stopped speaking out. Another possibility is that respondents are so connected to and involved with the library profession that their top of mind responses are repeating what they read in the literature and learn in library school and workshops and hear from other librarians: a sort of superficial knee jerk response, rather than a serious reconsideration of the issues and the questions.

A survey may not be the best format for trying to get respondents to dig deeper. Even though the survey items, questions, and responses were formed using the relevant literature and input from the focus groups and individual interviews, a survey of this type could not list all possible responses. There could be countless and unknown events and experiences that

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influence the respondent's opinions and perceptions. Even the addition of the choice of other, where respondents could write in their responses, does not help much, as some respondents are more likely to chose other and specify another option. Other respondents, when they do not see a choice that matches their answer, either skip the question or choose one of responses closest to their choice.

In order to draw conclusions about the entire population of public librarians in the United States it would have been better if the sample were deliberate or perhaps stratified or quota sample. As there is no unified list of all current public librarians in the United States, the sample was comprised of a volunteer convenient sample. In addition, the researcher needed to be able to administer the survey in a way that was quick, inexpensive and not burdensome to the respondents. This type of sample is nonrandom as it depends on volunteers. All listserv members who were public librarians could participate in the survey. Nonrandom sampling is a method of selection that favors some cases over others however inadvertently. This can lead to bias, a systematic error or constant difference between the sample and the population that reduces the overall representativeness of the sample. It is possible that those who volunteered for the survey were more interested in the research topic or providing their opinion than the population as a whole. Public librarians that monitor and read professional listservs may differ from the entire population of public librarians. The researcher will compare the sample with the total population of public librarians where possible to show the demographic representativeness of the sample.

The following assumptions were made about the population of public librarians: that because participants selected for this survey work in public libraries, and virtually every public library is connected to the Internet, that for the most part the population as a whole had access to e-mail and to the site for the online survey (Bertot et al. 2006). Other assumptions included that participants were capable of using e-mail and answering online surveys.

1.4.1 The American Public Library and a Sense of Purpose

The public library as an institution is a relatively recent development in America. The American public library evolved and grew over time from the libraries that the colonists brought with them from England: college libraries and personal book collections (Predeek 1947, 84-85; Eaton 1961, 13). Benjamin Franklin started a subscription library; the first of its type in America, in 1731, with the goal of providing ways for people to become educated (Isaacson 2003, 103-104). Franklin provided a foundation for democratizing education, and his library served as a model for other groups and organizations to found their own such libraries (Predeek 1947, 87; Martin 1998, 2). Towns all across the colonies soon had subscription libraries, and sometimes these subscription libraries opened their collections to non-members during certain hours (Johnson 1960, 117-118). During the colonial period, bookstores, printers and publishers also engaged in circulating or renting books for a small fee (Johnson 1960, 122; Martin 1998, 3). After the revolutionary war, more libraries that are private came into being to meet specific needs of users. Literary and scientific society libraries helped change libraries, making them more effective for students and researchers by providing access to a wide range of materials and meeting users' direct needs (Johnson 1960, 130-131). Society libraries engaged in learned activities, purchasing what their members considered well-written and researched expensive books (Predeek 1947, 90-91).

Subscription libraries also increased in number, and some began to take on characteristics that are familiar in contemporary libraries: catalogs, public housing for collections, organization schemes, and a volunteer or paid librarian (Johnson 1960, 132). Apprentice and mercantile libraries provided popular reading materials as well as materials related to trades or professions to the working class. In many cases, these libraries served to provide education for young people who could not attend school (Predeek 1947, 91; Johnson 1960, 133; Martin 1998; 2-3). Established in the early to middle 1800s, the first school district libraries supported the public education system (Predeek 1947, 91; Martin 1998; 2). All of these various forms and types

of libraries had similar goals and purposes: to provide for or support the education of their users, Commercial circulating libraries also added a focus on recreation and the newly developed style, the romance novel. All advocated for providing access to materials for the average person. These two missions or themes, reading for education and for recreation, along with the value of access, would continue to reappear in American public libraries through time, and still cause tension and debate among librarians today.

Article 1, section 8 of the Constitution gives Congress power to promote science and "the useful arts" but makes no mention of education or public libraries (Predeek 1947, 90). The constitution left cultural matters up to the state, and the state then delegated them to the local level. It was not until well into the first half of the nineteenth century that cities, under state law, established public libraries. It was a matter of timing. Libraries, like other publicly supported institutions, had to wait for the American people to realize that voluntarism was not adequate to meet their needs and institute some kind of government support (Harris 1995, 241-242).

During the early to mid 1800s, many fundamental ideas put into practice led to the establishment of the public library as a social and cultural institution. Benjamin Franklin thought that access to books would improve "the general conversation of Americans" and make "the common tradesmen and farmers as intelligent as most gentlemen from other countries" (Isaacson 2003, 104). The presence of libraries in schools demonstrated that books have cultural value and should be a part of education. Social libraries showed that libraries have a common usefulness as many people joined them. Education legislation paved a way for communities to secure the means to pay for cultural institutions, not just schools, but libraries as well. In the 1820s, the workingman's movement identified education as important to democracy, political power and economic prosperity. In 1848, Massachusetts passed legislation that would later allow the city of Boston to establish what would become the first public library in the country supported with municipal funds. Over time, the prevailing attitude about establishing and supporting public services changed (Harris 1995).

In 1852, George Ticknor and Edward Everett wrote a report for the trustees of the Boston Public Library that specified the ideal concept of public library service and made an argument for starting public library service in Boston. According to library historian Michael Harris, the upper class saw reading as a necessity for everyone to understand and function within the bounds of social order (1972, 57). With more immigrants in large cities and a general feeling that stabilizing and socializing forces like religion and family were deteriorating, leaders looked to the public library as a way to channel this potentially troublesome part of society. Elites and those in authority were concerned that immigrants might bring with them ideas about government contrary to democracy, which combined with the urbanization and fragmentation of the life of the working class in the city, could lead to disruption in the industrial machine (Harris 1995). Ticknor and his colleagues derived their ideas for a public library from these assumptions: man can be perfected and books are the way to intellectual perfection, but the average man cannot afford them. In 1854, the Free Boston Public Library opened (Predeek 1947, 93). This role for the library, of providing access for the average person to information and knowledge, remains one of the possible missions for the library today (Harris 1972, 4-5). Professor of library history Patrick Williams also supports this view, the founding of the public library as educational institution (1988, 4). The value of free public libraries complemented public education, and there was both cultural and social value in providing good quality reading to people of different class and status (Harris 1972).

Related to the mission of the library as provider of educational support, but often rejected in favor of other missions, is that of the library as supporting the democratic principles of American society (Hafner and Sterling-Folker 1993). Veteran librarian, consultant and prominent figure in American library history Lowell Martin sees the founding of the American public library resting on both democracy and capitalism. According to Martin, democracy needs the education, the facts and information that the library can provide to citizens, providing opportunities for individuals to fulfill their potential (Martin 1998, vii). Capitalism provided the wealth and prosperity that led to library buildings and provided for library collections. But the two are often contradictory

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as the democracy at its best "frees people, protects liberty, gives all an opportunity" while capitalism at its best "provides power to some and denies it to others" (Martin 1998, vvii-viii). Democratic theory argues a stable government and good society require individuals with access to knowledge and ideas in order to reach their potential and make good decisions (Harris 1972, 41-42; Hafner and Sterling-Folker 1993, 34). "[L]ibraries embody an essential element of democracy: a place where the ideal of unfettered communication and investigation exists in rudimentary form, allowing for critical and rational discussion of the issues of the day" (Buschman 2005, 9-10). This was in some ways similar to the elitist and authoritarian purposes of the first American public libraries with a few differences: this library did not exclude any ideas and the individual should see all ideas and make decisions for him/herself (Harris 1972). If the role of the library was to build democracy, the job of the librarian was to focus on acquisition and organization of information presenting all sides of economic, political and social concerns (Harris 1972, 42). According to Harris, however, this allows librarians to be passive guardians, to place the onus on the library user to come and get the information they need, insisting that the librarian remain neutral, and allowing the librarian and library to remain elitist, as libraries were still book centered, limiting the user base (Harris 1972, 42-43). Education was necessary for democracy, and education must continue beyond the public school system. Hafner and Sterling-Folker argue that an institution is the product of its times, and that reexamining the founding of the American public library shows libraries to be social institutions whose purpose was to provide access to knowledge for all citizens (1993, 34).

Usage and user statistics do not seem to support this role for the library, so librarians often have turned to popular or recreational services and programs to try to increase usage. This subverts the protective role the library is supposed to serve, that of providing access and therefore freedom to all ideas, popular or not. The success of bond elections demonstrates that the public does support the library even if all community members do not use the library themselves (Hafner and Sterling-Folker 1993, 34-35).

Because they provide for "rational organization of human cultural production," libraries help make possible Habermas' ideal of the democratic public sphere, an idea that is lost in the recent developments in the public sector and public libraries. The movement towards a new public philosophy based on economic and business models is pushing the library to conform to the needs of the new technology/information based economy (Buschman 2005, 7-9)

George Ticknor wanted a popular library because no library can provide help unless people will come. Ticknor hoped that the public who came for popular materials would then be led to read something of better quality and importance, and that might change the reader. This concept, known as taste elevation, was an elitist view dictating what people should read and would continue as the justification for providing popular materials in public libraries for many years (Harris 1972, 6, 15; Williams 1988, 5; Martin 1998, 13). Taste elevation was supposed to function this way: once the user has the habit of reading engrained, then librarians could work on elevating the reader's taste to better, more important works (Harris 1972, 23-24; Martin 1998, 17). There was no proof that taste elevation had any effect on the public's reading choices.

Directly related to this idea of providing popular materials is the mission of the library as giving the public what it wants. Public libraries first had light popular reading and later collections of music, movies and best sellers (Harris 1972, 25; Williams 1988, 15-16; Martin 1998). In Baltimore in the 1970s, the public library system created collections to give the public what they wanted by purchasing huge numbers of bestsellers and removing books that did not circulate. With this model, Baltimore became very successful and had the highest per capita circulation in the country (Williams 1988, 118-119). Some librarians believed that popular collections took away from the educational goals of the library, while others argued that as a tax-supported institution the library should provide what taxpayers want (Williams 1988, 15-16; Martin 1998, 17). In addition, the idea that recreation had stabilizing power and value of in society, as well as an acknowledgment that getting rid of fiction might insure that the people the library wanted to help the most stayed away led to the idea that the library needs to carry popular materials (Harris 1972, 25; Williams 1988, 16-17, 20).

Another possible mission for the library was as part of the solution of the social problems, conflicts and conditions in the United States. Under this mission, the public library becomes a social agency. While education provided a part of the solution, this purpose was far more than just education: the library as tool of creative evolution and national salvation, and librarians as missionaries spreading the library spirit, with a higher calling for a better reason (Williams 1988, 27). Harris again has a more ethnocentric view of authoritarian librarians working to stabilize society by "Americanizing" the new wave of immigrants (Harris 1972, 31-32). Although Harris was writing of late 19th and early 20th Century immigrants, in the 1960s and 1970s, many librarians again felt that the library should play an important role by seeking out groups in society that were "powerless, oppressed victims of poverty and discrimination, and work to bring them into the mainstream" (Williams 1988, 101). Many specialized library services grew out of the library spirit of socialization: children's and youth services, reference and information services, reader's advisory services, outreach services, and information about and referral to other agencies and service providers (Williams 1988, 29-30, 101-102, 105). Another aspect of this mission was providing for more and better access to libraries and books for more people. Traveling collections, house libraries, collections in schools, fire and police stations and more provided access to books (Williams 1988, 29).

At various times its history, librarians, administrators, and others have decried the fact that relatively few people use the library, no matter what special collections or services the library decides to provide (Harris 1972, 35, 44; Williams 1988, 66-67; Martin 1998, 106). A multi-year study followed by several in-depth reports of results, *The Public Library Inquiry* surveyed library users and nonusers, community organizations and groups about the library in the late 1940s and early 1950s. What the *Inquiry* found was most adults do not use the library, a few use it occasionally, and even less use it a great deal (Martin 1998, 106). This study concluded that the library's mission should be providing a specific collection of materials for a specific limited group of users: mostly educated, mostly middle class community and society leaders who were seeking enlightenment and enrichment (Harris 1972, 44; Williams 1988, 69; Martin 1998, 106-107). The

library should provide authoritative and reliable materials with balanced views of unpopular or new ideas, materials of enduring quality, a complete record in various formats on particular subjects and other types of information that mass media cannot or will not provide (Williams 1988, 69).

Most librarians rejected this mission of serving a limited user base. They believed that the public library should serve all members of the community (Martin 1998, 108). Throughout the years, public and governmental support for the library remained, and even nonusers felt the library was necessary (Williams 1988, 67; Martin 1998, 110). This mission of library, to become the community center, is connected to the idea that public library should provide all kinds of information to all kinds of people. Not just the people's university, the public library should be the people's library. In the 1960s and 1970s, public libraries began offering materials, programs and services to attract more people to the library. From showing football games and films, to providing lectures and demonstrations on many subjects, to putting on craft shows and art exhibits, to lending art, cameras, tools and more (Williams 1988, 118; Martin 1998, 153). Marketing and public relations were also a focus, in hopes that informing people about the library and its services would increase usage (Williams 1988, 91; Martin 1998, 139). In Queens in the 1950s, the library system created a real people's library: a storefront location staffed by local residents, which carried not subject collections, but materials about local issues, and tons of free pamphlets on employment, education, politics and health. A recreational reading collection and daily homework help for children rounded things out (Martin 1998, 153).

Whenever the prevailing mission of the public library falls out of favor, libraries and librarians turn back to a mission that is not a mission at all: the functions of the library as mission. Librarians focus on superficial statistics, outputs, planning, processes and evaluation. The mission becomes about what and how the library runs rather than why. From nearly the beginning, librarians looked for efficiency and modern management, with men like Melvil Dewey trying to find the best way to take care of library work (Harris 1972, 28). *The American Library Association published Output Measures for Libraries in 1982*. Librarians liked it because it gave

them a clear way to determine and count outputs, and they have been even more crazy about statistics ever since. The problem was that librarians were measuring and fixating on outputs with no idea of what mission they were trying to achieve. Measuring this and that is not a purpose in and of itself, and creating statistics that do not indicate anything is the result.

Librarians may also be obsessed with statistics for their own sakes, as increasing programs and circulation looks good in terms of advancing their careers, increasing their salaries and insuring libraries (and their jobs) survive, very much like Downs's self-maximizing bureaucrat (1967). The main goal of public relations and marketing of the library was to increase library use, again to build statistics (Harris 1972, 38; Williams 1988, 127-128). In recent times, library administration and even some librarians have again become obsessed with efficiency and management as it turns away from its public service orientation and towards the new public philosophy, focusing on running the library more like a business, with an eye on profit and a bias towards technology (Buschman 2005).

From its beginning, the public library has had many possible missions depending specific needs at specific times. Martin argues that the government and the public continue to support the library because they view the library's mission as an acceptable public obligation (1998, 17). At various times throughout its short history, different missions have come to the forefront of the American public library, depending on situations and circumstances. These missions sometimes were in competition with or contradicted other possible missions for the public library.

1.4.2 Library 2.0: A Model for Service or a Sense of Purpose for the Public Library?

Library 2.0 is the hot topic of discussion in libraries, and anyone researching and writing about libraries in 2008 must mention Library 2.0. Library 2.0 is a term attributed to Michael Casey, Division Director of Technology Services for Gwinnett County Public Library, first used in his blog, *Library Crunch*, in October of 2005. Later he co-authored an article with Laura Savastinuk that further defined the term (2006). Library 2.0 is "a model for library service that encourages constant and purposeful change, inviting user participation in the creation of both the physical and the virtual services they want, supported by consistently evaluating services" (Casey 2006). Talk

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and discussion of Web 2.0 technologies in the information technology field helped form the basis for Library 2.0. However, Casey and Savastinuk emphasize, Library 2.0 is more than just technology. It requires librarians to think differently about how they serve their users. The idea is to customize library services to individual customer wants and needs (2006). Casey counters that this could take the form of some new Web 2.0 technology, or it could be a new physical service or operation. The idea is to solicit feedback from users so to evaluate library services, and make frequent changes and updates as a response to that feedback and evaluation (Casey and Savastinuk 2006).

What does this have to do with the purpose of the library? What Casey calls "a model for service" is making assumptions about what the library should and should not be doing. It would be simple to say this is a version of the Baltimore model, giving people what they want. However, Casey says that libraries should not continue to cater only to regular users by providing "popular materials that their existing customers request" but libraries should be targeting "shy users and non users" through things like the long tail, collaboration, tagging, blogging, social networking and other customer driven and customer created change and content (2006). Library 2.0 is not full-fledged purpose, but a set of potential tools for fulfilling several different purposes. As a profession, librarians must be careful not to fall back into that historical role where we considered the functions of the library our purpose. Janet Balas echoes cries that are periodically raised in the professional literature, "…it is important to be aware of the competition, we cannot hope to be successful if we are doing nothing more than reacting to the capricious and oftentimes contradictory trends in society...Administrators need to have a clear vision of the library's mission in order to make consistent decisions on new programs and services" (2008).

1.4.3 Library Planning and Evaluation: From Standards to Mission

For almost 45 years, from the early 1930s to the late 1970s, a set of standards that included measures like the library's per capita spending or number of volumes were used to evaluate public libraries. Standards assumed that a library was a library, no matter the community it served. In 1979, the American Library Association published the *Public Library Mission*

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Statement, which dealt with goals and objectives (Martin 1998, 183). The goal was to develop objectives and programs for the library to meet the needs of the local community. This statement lists some of the ways libraries might meet community needs (Watts and Samuels 1984, 131). Like many bureaucrats, library administrators conducted planning within a narrow box, assuming that what the library had been doing is what the library should be doing. Some leaders in the library field felt that this attitude would keep the library from reaching its full potential, and could have ramifications when circumstances and attitudes towards the library changed. This was the impetus for the writing of *A Planning Process for Libraries.* One of the seven steps in the process is to determine the role of the public library in the community. "In developing its planning process for libraries, the Public Library Association attempted to give guidance (not, it should be emphasized, instruction) through specific suggestions on how to proceed to public libraries in planning" (Watts and Samuels 1984, 131).

Many in the library field felt that *A Planning Process* required too much data gathering, community analysis, evaluating and surveying. Staff was neither skilled in these functions nor unbiased about the possibility of losing their jobs. Library trustees and community members also found the process daunting. Therefore, the Public Library Association created new documents, *Planning and Role Setting for Public Libraries* and *Output Measures for Public Libraries*. The new planning document was a do it yourself guide, listing the process step by step, simplifying data gathering while focusing on local circumstances (Martin 1998, 186). It also introduced the concept of role setting. There were eight suggested roles. Libraries should select not just their current roles, but also look ahead to future roles. Problems arose if a library accepted all or most all of the roles (Martin 1998, 186-187). Another change was the addition of *Output Measures*, with evaluation based on outputs instead of inputs. Rather than financial support or the size of the collection, libraries should look at results the inputs create. In 1997, changes in technology in the library world led to updated planning. *Planning for Results: A Public Library Transformation Process* identified 13 service responses that a library could offer to meet community needs (Nelson and Garcia 2006). Since those responses were developed, surveys of library users show

that opinions about the library have changed. In response, the Public Library Association (PLA) worked with its members, both face to face and virtually, to update and adapt the planning documents for public libraries. Incorporating the missions from the library's past with understandings of today's library users, librarians identified 17 service responses (Nelson and Garcia 2006).

In January of 2007, Public Library Association's blog posted a full draft of the service responses that included descriptions, target audiences, typical services and programs, policy implications, critical resources and possible measures for each service response. Published in January of 2008, *Strategic Planning for Results* compiled and expanded on this draft. This title is so new that reviews or discussion have yet to appear in the usual professional library journals[1], nor have any public libraries put together their own list of service responses based on its recommendations. Some may see the increase in the number of service responses as troubling, as many administrators and community leaders see these lists as what the public library should be doing.

Lowell Martin questions the efficacy of planning documents, wondering if anyone is really using them to create change in their libraries (1998, 187). The planning process emphasizes getting community feedback to help determine the library mission, but where library administrators have enough power and sway, they are able to select the mission and convince others that it was the correct one. Some libraries have even hired consultants to tell them what their mission should be (Martin 1998, 185).

The planning documents suggest a large role for librarians, although library practitioners and researchers have questioned what kind of leadership can be given if librarians cannot agree on the mission of the library or even in what the library should be or do (Watts and Samuels 1984, 131). Lowell Martin also addressed this topic: "The library must stop trying to do all the things it had been doing, it must select among the roles it had played and tried to play" (Martin 1983). Watts and Samuels analyzed the professional library literature and concluded that there were

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[1] Searched for review on March 15, 2008 in Library Literature and Information Science Full Text available online from Wilson Web. Available from http://hwwilsonweb.com.

very few articles written about purposes and roles of public libraries and librarianship, and those that were often superficial. "This [lack of discussion of mission and purpose] may actively contribute to a strong sense of ambiguity on the subject…An alternative explanation is that the role of the public library is felt to be so well entrenched, so pervasive, and automatically known that there is no need to discuss it…we all "know" what a public library is" (Watts and Samuels 1984, 133). It would seem that having a shared understanding of library and library mission would be imperative before beginning any of these involved planning processes. Libraries cannot get around this basic question by saying that they are going to do fulfill all the role possibilities that they have available (Martin 1998, 187). Even constructing a mission statement is not enough. The profession should be discussing the purpose of the public library as an institution. Failure to address this basic and necessary question could lead to problems with community support of the library and library planning and result in libraries that are unable to deal with situations or meet patrons' needs (Watts and Samuels 1984, 131)

1.4.4 The Librarian as Professional

Through all these iterations and variations on library purpose, the librarian has played a key role. Librarianship had its beginnings in a conference of librarians held in 1853, and the founding of the American Library Association and Library Journal in 1876 further established the profession (Johnson 1960, 146-148; Williams 1988, 9). Held in different locations from year to year, the annual conferences of the American Library Association stimulated discussion about and raised the profile of libraries. Just as with the Boston Public Library, the founders of the American Library Association were male, and concerned with informing and uplifting the community. Women gained entry into the workforce as public librarians and in turn helped grow the number of libraries. Women librarians have been responsible for shifting the focus of library service to the community with open stacks and services for children and immigrants. (McCook 2004, 49-50) Public libraries began to spread across the United States, as more literate educated people with more leisure time lived in or near industrialized cities that could afford to build and support libraries (Johnson 1960). The expansion of public libraries along with the changes in

services, focus and purpose required knowledgeable and capable staff. With only a few library schools in existence, most worked their way up through the ranks, reacting to challenges and changes and establishing the library profession along the way (Martin 1998, 65). During World War I, librarians gained credibility as a profession as they made connections with the community and other agencies working for the war effort at the local and national level (McCook 2004, 51).

Librarians still struggle with legitimacy as a profession. Since their beginning and even today, librarians handle a lot of visible routine clerical tasks suggesting to the public that the profession does not also require knowledge and skills necessary for acquiring, organizing, and disseminating information. In the 1920s, the Williamson report recommended the establishment of formal professional library education as graduate programs affiliated with universities. However, it was some time before public libraries as a whole reacted to create professional positions (Martin 1998, 66-67).

Frederick Mosher thought that the most significant characteristic of public service was professionalism. The role of the professional is to make the intellectual actual, to convert expertise into action. A clearly defined career field, higher education or special degrees, associations, organizations and licensing procedures, distinguish a profession. While they may be diverse in knowledge and skills, professions have commonalities, including elevating and strengthening their public image as a profession, concentrating on the "work substance" of their field, avoiding anything that might be considered political and deciding personnel policy as related to employment of their profession (Mosher 1982, 100-126). Mosher concludes that much of the government is now run by professionals, "[t]he choice of these professionals, the determination of their skills, and the content of their work are now principally determined, not by general government agencies, but by their own professional elites, professional organizations, and the institutions and faculties of higher education" (Mosher 1982, 132). Mosher's descriptions of professions and the professional state fit public libraries and librarians: a specialized knowledge base and philosophy, a defined career field tied to a specialized higher degree from specialized professional schools and professional associations run by professional elites.

Accreditation programs and master's degrees would come later, but the philosophy of library education and of librarianship remains much the same now as it was then (Martin 1998, 66-67). Library schools expose students to professional ideals and values. According to Michael Gorman, library dean, professor, and past president of the American Library Association, although libraries change, the foundations of the profession do not. Gorman lists eight central values of librarianship: stewardship, service, intellectual freedom, rationalism, literacy and learning, equity of access to recorded knowledge and information, privacy, and democracy. Stewardship is preserving records for future generations, making library education healthy and robust to train future librarians, and earning respect from the community for using library resources wisely. Service is having a service focus in all that the library does. Intellectual freedom is the right of all to read and view, defending that right, defending the minority's right to freedom of expression, and making facilities and programs accessible to all. Rationalism is organizing and managing services in a logical way, applying the values of science to the library. Literacy and learning is encouraging literacy, the love of reading, and supporting lifelong reading. Equity of access makes all resources and programs available for all, and helps to overcome barriers to access. Privacy refers to the confidentiality of library records and use. Democracy is the role the library plays in maintaining democratic values and being a part of the educational process to ensure the necessary educated citizens for democracy (Gorman 2000, 26-27). Memberships in professional library associations at the state, regional, and national levels, and having more experienced librarians mentor those new to the field further reinforces those professional values. Loyalty to the profession and its values can lead to conflicts, forcing librarians to deal with bureaucracy and bureaucratic structure. Also, like the field of public administration before them, librarians try to hold to the false politics-administration dichotomy leading not to a non-politicized library, but to librarians that have not examined their bias or prejudice and how it effects the library, collections, and services.

1.4.5 Libraries and Bureaucracy

Public libraries exhibit many of the characteristics of the ideal bureaucracy identified by Max Weber: hierarchy, rules and division of labor (Lynch 1978, 259). However, many librarians dislike the bureaucracy, and as professionals may begrudge the authority of the bureaucratic structure, hierarchy and rules over expertise. Where bureaucracy and professionalism meet, rules and procedures counter an orientation towards service, and conflict arises (Bundy and Wasserman 1968, 14; Lynch 1978, 263). Bureaucratic in structure and nature, public libraries and librarians also share some of the dysfunctions of bureaucracies and bureaucrats. Librarians tend toward fundamental ambivalence at times and question what a certain action or service attains. Trained incapacity and unfit fitness shows when librarians are unable to apply their knowledge and training in new situations. Occupational psychosis reveals itself when librarians have bias towards adding or censoring certain types of material or planning and promoting certain programs. Adhering to the rules and policies of the library becomes an end in itself and affects service. All of these factors tend to limit innovation and prevent the librarian from using professional expertise to change and improve library services and management (Merton 1940).

As with other bureaucracies and bureaucratic agencies, the public library as a profession and institution is concerned with the representativeness of library personnel. This has been an especially difficult task when it comes to librarians because the underrepresentation of minorities in postgraduate study in general and library programs specifically means the library profession is also not truly representative. Representative bureaucracy refers to a set of ideas about whether unelected civil servants in a bureaucracy are representative of society. Bureaucrats implement and develop policy, make rules that are comparable to law, decide disputes in hearings, and many other functions that effect government and policy. For this reason, researchers wonder if bureaucrats can represent the public (Dolan and Rosenbloom 2003, 3).

In examining the British bureaucratic administration, Kingsley concludes that civil service can have its own values and culture that may not reflect or represent those of the public at large. "[A]dministrators are drawn overwhelmingly from the upper and middle classes of the population

and they have been educated according to the traditional pattern of the ruling class" (Kingsley 1944, 151). Bureaucracies will only be democratic when they are representative of the public they are supposed to serve (Kingsley 1944, 305). Personnel can address the representativeness of bureaucracy: equal opportunity, recruitment, selection, promotion and retention are all relevant to achieving a representative bureaucracy. The American Library Association and other professional associations and library schools have focused on this idea of diversity for over a decade, with special recruiting efforts and scholarships for students representing diverse groups. Nonetheless, as of 2006, 87 percent of librarians were white and 84 percent were female (Library Workers Facts and Figures 2007).

Frederick Mosher agrees with Kingsley that bureaucracy should strive to be as democratic as possible. However, he wants evidence that just because a bureaucrat has a certain social background or "passive (or sociological) representation" that that individual will then advocate for those he is representing, "active (or responsible) representativeness" (Mosher 1982, 11-12). This distinction formed the basis for much research and analysis, with growing evidence that the two are related. The assumption is that groups with distinctive status or identities have experiences and values different from other groups. Bureaucrats in one of these groups confronted with issues that are important to that group tend to become active in their representativeness (Dolan and Rosenbloom 2003, 5).

Samuel Krislov adds to the theoretical basis for representative bureaucracy. First, he argues that passive representation directly relates to administrative legitimacy and the ability for the government to gain support for policies (Krislov 1974, 4-5). Secondly, he points out that representative bureaucracy works even when its execution is not perfect (Krislov 1974, 63). Third, Krislov argues against Weber, saying that bureaucrats should be more than cogs in a machine, "the human potentialities brought by bureaucrats to their jobs are inevitable and advantageous" (1974, 81). For active representation to have an impact, some characteristics of the ideal type bureaucracy, such as hierarchy and impersonality, should be reduced or removed in favor of participation and empowerment (Dolan and Rosenbloom, 2003, 6). Krislov sees in representative

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bureaucracy a normative value, in that it makes government more representative, can make up for other government institutions that are less representative, and can promote equal opportunity and equality (1974, 131). All of these ideas apply to the public library as well.

Librarians are also share characteristics of street-level bureaucrats: they have regular interactions with and therefore immediate and close relationships with the public and in this role can function as agents of social control and policy change. Library policy is ultimately implemented and handled by librarians, and only through them, can policies be changed or reformed (Lipsky 1980). Instead of compromising professional service to patrons, professionals should participate in making decisions about library standards and goals even though the hierarchy stresses deference (Bundy and Wasserman 1968, 15).

1.4.6 The Public Library, Reinventing Government, and the New Public Management

If Graham Allison was right and public and private management are at least as different as they are similar, the point has become moot in a time when the public sector has swung back to appropriating and utilizing private sector techniques, structures and values as part of the reinventing government and new public management models. More recently, George Boyne has conducted a meta-analysis of empirical studies on the differences between public and private institutions. He concludes that support exists for the flowing theories of the differences between public institutions and private institutions: public institutions are more bureaucratic, have less materialistic managers and have managers with weaker organizational commitment then private institutions do. None of these is reasons, Boyne says, for the public sector to reject private sector techniques out of hand (Boyne 2002, 116, 118). As a part of the public sector, these same ideas have impact in the public library as well. More than just a call for government to be run like a business, the one idea that connects this group of theories is that the relationships between public institutions and their clients should be like that between a business and its customer, focusing on being competitive, innovative, productive, and looking for alternative service delivery methods or even privatization and contracting out (Hood 1991, 3-5; Kaboolian 1998, 189-190). Advocates for new public management and reinventing government movements see the public

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sector as failing to be economically efficient and believe that their calls for action provide for both equity and efficiency (Hood 1991, 4). Professor and library director John Buschman worries that by casting the role of libraries in economic and not democratic terms and following entrepreneurial and business models rather than public service ones, the public library is in danger of losing its publicness, and will be forced to rely on finding its own economic support (Buschman 2004). Writing on libraries and democracy, library dean Arthur Hafner and political scientist Jennifer Sterling-Folker agree, reporting on a correlation between people's understanding of the public library's purpose as supportive of democracy and people's voting for public library bond issues (Hafner and Sterling-Folker 1993). The prevailing attitude in many public libraries is that in order to survive, much less thrive, there is a need to compete for customers. Even outspoken library journalist John Berry agrees that one of the missions that the public library needs to have is giving people what they want, like a free bookstore (Berry 2006, 10). While public libraries often carry much more than just books, and offer a variety of diverse services and programs, they see bookstores as their natural competition. This is evident in public libraries' stocking bestsellers, audio books, comics and graphic novels. More and more libraries are adding coffee shops, cafes and beverage bars. Articles and books have been written and workshops given about how libraries can make marketing work for them, and how merchandising like a bookstore can increase customers and circulation (Baker and Wallace 2002, 364; Wise 2005, 11-12). Librarians are blogging, creating pod casts, and maintaining pages on social networking sites, all in the name of competing for customers (Evans 2006, 8-10, 12; Lee 2006, 206-208; Library Blogs 2006, 11-12)

One of the largest forays by a public library into outsourcing was the much-ballyhooed outsourcing by the State Library of Hawaii all collection development tasks including materials selection, typically handled by a professional librarian at the local level. Outcry from the profession combined with contractual issues between the library and the vendor led to the demise of this project (Oder 1997, 15; Strickland 1999, 63-72). More recently, the city council of Bedford,

Texas, voted to put out for requests for proposals to outsource the entire library system and its services (DeLeon 2006, Fox 2007).

Before explaining the study and its results and findings, the next chapter examines the discussion of the public library's role or purpose in recent professional literature. Examining two years of articles from widely available professional periodicals and journals shows what current discussion there is about library role and purpose.

CHAPTER 2

PUBLIC LIBRARY PURPOSE AND MISSION: A LOOK AT TWO YEARS OF THE
PROFESSIONAL LITERATURE

2.1 Studies of Library and Information Studies Research

Recent research, writing and discussion in the field should give some indication as to which topics, issues, and concerns are at the forefront for the library profession. The professional literature should reflect an ongoing discussion or concern about the public library's purpose or role, if one exists. One method of analysis of the body of library and information research is content analysis. There have been a few such reviews of the library and information literature.

Atkins reviewed the library and information literature from 1975 to 1985 and found a strong focus during that decade on topics related to library automation (1988). Buttlar's examination of major library journals in the late 1980s finds this topic still being widely addressed (1991). Looking at articles from a single year, 1985, Jarvelin and Vakkari found that the most frequently addressed subjects were practical topics that involved the daily operations of libraries (1990). Several other studies looked at authorship of the research and determined that academic librarians and library school faculty published the most research (Yerkey 1993; Weller, Hurd and Wiberley 1999).

A more recent study by Blessinger and Frasier examined literature published between 1994 and 2004, looking for patterns in topics and subjects covered in the research. This study grouped all the subjects covered in different articles under five broad categories or headings. Of the articles examined, 33 percent fell under the category of library operations, while 18 percent dealt with the library profession. It is possible that some of these might have covered topics dealing with the professional's view the library or the profession, but this is not something that they specifically examined. From the 2,220 articles published in the ten journals they choose to investigate, they came up with the top 25 subjects appearing in the articles. Public libraries

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ranked 20th appearing 85 times. This low number might have to do with the journals they examined. Many were more scholarly in nature, and according to the authors, academic librarians were the largest percentage of authors. They also did not describe what aspects of public libraries the articles covered, although they did discover that most articles dealt with at least three subjects, so most likely few or none focused only on public libraries (Blessinger and Frasier 2007).

Watts and Samuels (1984) specifically researched the literature dealing with the mission, goal or purpose of public libraries. The authors raised the concern that complexity of the public library as a public institution and its need to meet the needs of a widely varied and diverse group of clients has led to "perceptual conflicts and ambiguities" among librarians and administrators. The library needs to identify itself and its position in both the local community and society. "The problem is magnified if there is a lack of agreement on such a fundamental as the basic purpose of public librarianship. Good planning is impossible without a reasonably clear and well-defined sense of direction or "mission" which expresses the basic relationship between the library and the community" (Watts and Samuels 1984, 131). Without such understanding, there can be problems between the library and the community they serve, if the people working in the library cannot agree, they cannot present a united and coherent purpose to the community and garner support.

Following the work of Pauline Wilson, Watts and Samuels examined the literature to try and "determine whether or not a unified, explicitly stated description of the purpose and role of the public library was recorded" (1984, 132). They used content analysis to look at articles published in four major library journals from 1981-1983. The four journals they chose were less academic in nature than those chosen by Blessinger and Fraiser, and public libraries might own them. The authors determined whether and how articles related to themes of mission and purpose of the public library based on a set of criteria, and 139 articles fit those parameters. From this larger group of articles that clearly addressed mission or purpose, a smaller sample of 30 was taken. "[M]ost of the articles in the periodicals under study have no substantial significance for, or are irrelevant to perceptions concerning role concept" (Watts and Samuels 1984, 132). The

majority of the articles that dealt with role perceptions did so in vague or limited ways or focus on specific goals or objectives over a broader discussion of mission or purpose. Very few articles addressed the multiple role concepts for public libraries. Watts and Samuels concluded, "It is reasonable to tentatively suggest that public librarians are exposed to very few substantive discussions of role concept" (1984, 133). The existing literature presents conflicting ideas of what the role of the public library should be. The focus of literature on role concepts is on a single or best role for the public library. "Often there is a direct confrontation between groups supporting one or the other role concept" (Watts and Samuels 1984, 133). Many other articles mention role concept only in passing and in vague or unclear terms, further adding to the disjointedness and conflict. Even more articles presented goals and objectives without first showing why they were needed, "presenting programs and services (the "practical side of librarianship") as roles and purposes" (Watts and Samuels 1984, 133).

2.2 Current Views of Public Library Purpose and Mission: A Review of Two Years of Professional Literature

This researcher examined two years of library and information science literature to see if there was any current discussion of the purpose or mission of the public library. Not content analysis per say but a snapshot of the recent literature showing what discussion was there. The Library Literature and Information Science database from WilsonWeb indexes articles and book reviews appearing in over 234 library and information science journals, providing full text from over 100 publications. Searching the online database Library Literature and Information Science using as search terms "goal," "mission," "purpose," "role," "objective" and "future" in combination with "public library(ies) or librarian(s)" returned quite a few results. Keyword searches helped find articles that dealt with the topic even if indirectly or tangentially. Consequently, there were quite a few false hits as well, including articles about public libraries in other countries, examinations of public libraries in specific times in history, and even articles dealing with academic libraries. The following review includes fifteen articles that dealt, at least tangentially, with the role or purpose of

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the public library. Just like the Watts and Samuels study, this review included articles published in major journals and magazines most likely held by public libraries in the United States.

Several themes emerged in the review of the articles. As with Watts and Samuels, not many recent articles directly addressed the library's role or purpose, but several substituted (or implied) that goals and objectives were the purpose. Several articles were concerned with library role or purpose only insomuch as to insure that the library was what the public wanted and therefore insure its continued survival. This mission becomes the rallying cry for continued support of the library. A few articles addressed values the public library should strive to uphold. Emphasizing library services, some authors looked at the actual and potential services offered in public libraries. Another group of articles focused on serving the customer, making sure the customer gets what they want. Finally, two article clearly discussed a role or purpose for the public library: insuring the continuance of democracy.

2.2.1 Securing the Funding and Future of the Library as Purpose

There are several articles that looked at how having an appropriate mission is important to secure funding for and insure that the library continues in the future. This need to secure funding and insure the continuance of the library relates to the bureaucratic structures and tendencies of the library raised in the last chapter. There is some research supporting the idea that bureaucrats are self maximizing and work to forward their own interests—job security and the further existence and growth of their institution or agency (Downs 1967).

In an editorial from 2006, John Berry argues that instead of a single broad mission, the public library should focus on several main goals. Berry admitted that in the past he has argued against the idea of library as bookstore, "giv'em what they want" and lamented that the public library does not do more "to inform democracy, to convince citizens to use its resources to become more knowledgeable in order to decide public issues" (2006). He concludes that there are many other roles that public libraries could and should explore, and that "many missions are better" for securing public support (2006). Perhaps Berry would say that the purpose or mission of the public library should be to be all things to all people, or at least, some things to most people.

He is probably talking about more than just securing funding, but it is clear that is one of his main points here.

Ways that Pat Max suggested libraries can remain relevant in the future relate to finding a purpose or role the community can support. First, "[t]hink about what it is that we do best and how we might best make a contribution to our various constituencies/communities" (2006). Max agreed with Berry, looking back to the founding of the Boston Public Library to argue for the library's role in education and democracy. "Our mission…is to help create democratic citizens who make our communities better and freer places in which to live and work." (Max 2006) Max suggested that could best happen by writing appropriate mission statements that drive everything the library does, relating more to the publicness of library and how it is less like a business and more like democratic institution. Max advocates for the library's role in education and democracy, and acknowledges that a mission statement and an understanding of what the library does is important in trying to move forward and remain relevant.

Fridenwald-Fishman and Dellinger described an effort in Portland, Oregon to revitalize the Multnomah County Library System through building public will. The library "initiated an integrated effort to learn what customers valued, to connect to those values, and to communicate the value the library delivers with frequency and consistency" (Fridenwald-Fishman and Dellinger 2006). The idea of building public will is more than just better promotion or communication, but getting people to see the library as a vital resource and then to act on that idea, to "turn belief into action."

Building public will means using both grass roots and mass media tools that connect people to issues through their own values, rather than trying to change those values. Changes in attitudes eventually lead to changes in actions. Public will is achieved through focus on an issue that leads to the formation of new or different expectations on the part of the community (Fridenwald-Fishman and Dellinger 2006). Libraries are usually worried about short-term day-to-day operational issues, and therefore try to change the public opinion in the short term as well. "In contrast, public will--based strategies focus on long-term change built over time by engaging

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broad-based grass-roots support to influence individual, institutional, and social change."
(Fridenwald-Fishman and Dellinger 2006) According to the authors, there are five steps to
building public will: framing the problem; building awareness; sharing information; creating
personal conviction; and evaluate and reinforce. For each step, they give concrete examples of
how a public library system in the United States accomplished that step successfully. The authors
concluded by saying that building public will leads to long term and sustainable change, creating
expectations that libraries are necessary for flourishing communities. (Fridenwald-Fishman and
Dellinger 2006) There is a vague unstated or assumed purpose in this process: to connect what
the library does to that to what the community values so the community sees that the library is
important.

Francine Fialkoff wrote an editorial about two small town libraries located in communities
where she vacations. "Because the towns they're in are small, these libraries have a much more
visible impact on their people and communities" (Fialkoff 2006). The boards governing these
libraries had decided that the libraries should be community centers, and the library directors in
turn had made that the library's mission. This short article does not define community center, nor
does it address how libraries in larger towns or cities impact their communities. The implications
are this mission is responsible for increasing library usage. The role or purpose of library as
community center could really fit under other roles such as support for democracy or education.

Marylaine Block has spent two years researching well-funded libraries for a book. She
determined that libraries that are most loved (well funded) by the community are the ones that
"continually demonstrate oneness with their townspeople" (Block 2007). One thing that these
libraries and librarians understand is how to respond in times of crisis by providing information
that the community wants and needs. She listed specific examples, such as the crisis information
and links to reports on bridge inspections and engineering provided by Minnesota libraries when
the I-35 Bridge collapsed; and Houston and Harris County libraries response to Hurricane Katrina
refugees by taking computers and library programs into the shelters (Block 2007).

Block does not explicitly state a purpose or mission for the library, but that well-funded and well-liked libraries are a part of the community in which they are located, not only by providing resources and by services for residents, but by responding in times of need, keeping records of community events and participating in community celebrations. Again, as in other articles, a library that has a community focus insures its survival but there is no explicit connection drawn as to the purpose of role the library play in the community.

2.2.2 Values as Library Purpose

Loriene Roy, then president of the American Library Association, reminded librarians of the role that libraries and librarians play in defending access to library resources and services for all patrons, regardless of age, background or origin. She specifically mentioned resources and services provided for immigrant populations, as libraries are "responding to their changing demographics by building and providing multilingual collections and offering a range of customized services for this sometimes new clientele" (Roy 2007). Libraries provide support in learning English, which allows immigrants access to library programs and services as well as support for future education and employment goals. "Community-language literacy provides the opportunity to participate globally, to forge and reinforce connections and to support self-esteem" (Roy 2007). Even though she spoke of the role that libraries and librarians play in granting access, this is not a purpose, but a value that would support a purpose. Access for all applies to many roles or purposes that libraries might choose, as the purpose would determine what they were able to access.

In the first of their series of articles about the transparent library, Casey and Stephens they discussed the idea of the transparent library. The transparent library practices open communication, both listening and talking, providing multiple opportunities for communication in a variety of ways. The transparent library scans its environment, looking for the next trend because responding to trends can lead to innovation and improvement (Casey and Stephens 2007). Again, not a stated purpose or mission, but rather a goal or objective that the authors think every library must strive for in today's technologically focused world. As in some of the articles below,

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this article focuses on technology, without explaining or exploring assumptions or directing technology could towards a specific library purpose or mission.

2.2.3 Library Services as Library Purpose

After looking at the small number of studies dealing with public library services for adults over the past two decades, Stephens examined the move from roles to services responses in the planning literature, and looked at ways that libraries in Alabama use different planning methods to decide what services to offer to adult patrons. A nationwide survey of public libraries in 1986, Adult Services in the Eighties, identified 73 different services that public libraries were providing to adults. This survey was valuable because it was the first of its kind since the 1950s (Stephens 2006). Subsequently, the Public Library Association released its series of documents and updates and revisions to those documents to help public libraries with the planning process, including trying to figure out which services they should offer. *Planning and Role Setting for Public Libraries*, published in 1987, included eight roles from which libraries could choose and the descriptions of the roles included a listing of possible library activities or services, benefits of that role, critical resources needed to accomplish that role, and output measures to tell if the library was successful at that role (Stephens 2006).

In the 1980s and 1990s, many libraries published reports following this planning process. The Public Library Association updated the planning documents were in 1998 and 2001 as *Planning for Results* and *The New Planning for Results.* Instead of roles, these manuals include thirteen service responses that are supposed to represent the distinctive and unique ways the public library serves the public to meet community needs (Stephens 2006). In 2000, the National Center for Education Statistics surveyed libraries about their provision of literacy and life-long learning for adults. In 2004, the author examined the planning documents available online through library web pages. "Except for three somewhat unique responses, these plans contain service responses in original, slightly reworded or combined form from those in the manuals." (Stephens 2006) Rural Illinois libraries were part of a study reported on in 2001 about which services were more in demand and which had declined over the past two years. The author had

surveyed Alabama libraries in 1986 about what services they provided, and repeated a similar survey in 2000. Various reports and studies showed a correlation between libraries using the Public Library Association planning documents, the roles or service responses they choose, and the services they provide.

The author's most recent study in Alabama revealed that librarians used a variety of methods to decide what services to provide. What and how planning methods are used need further study according to the author. "Knowing which services public libraries provide for adults… and how these services are selected, is vital to determining and publicizing the valuable contributions public libraries make to their communities… Such a knowledge base should prove beneficial for local and state library budget requests and for local, state-level and national library planning" (Stephens 2006). Again, this argument insures the continued support of the library.

Nelson and Garcia (2006) discussed the need for the Public Library Association to revise the public library planning documents in light of how libraries have changed since the last revisions of the documents. Revising and updating the service responses in these documents is necessary to make sure the public library is still relevant and meeting the public's expectations (Nelson and Garcia 2006). The revision process started at the American Library Association's annual conference with multiple meetings to discuss whether and which service responses were still valid, needed updating, combining or even deletion. The association planned another open meeting for the Midwinter Conference, and provided for online feedback. The Public Library Association as always begun these planning documents with having the library and whatever group is doing the planning to write a mission statement, but in this process of revising, the focus was on service responses and not on purpose or mission.

Having written a new textbook on reference in the public library, Cassell and Hiremath examined what they see as the future of reference and librarians, trying to figure out what things will change and which will stay the same. The future lies in providing new materials in new formats and providing new services. New materials in new formats present challenges to improving user access to those materials and formats. "In fact, the user often turns to Google or

Yahoo! assuming equal quality rather than to the library's databases because the search engines are more user-friendly" (Cassell and Hiremath 2007). Traditional library services such as face-to-face reference and ready reference have been in decline. "Users only consult the reference librarian after trying unsuccessfully on their own to find the information on the Internet" (Cassell and Hiremath 2007). Librarians must then seek out new users in new ways, expand the library services and ways they provide them. "The future of reference is best summed up as high tech and high touch. Libraries will continue to upgrade technology to serve their users better. They will also continue to develop personalized services for each and every user, whether that user asks for service face-to-face at the reference desk, by telephone, by e-mail, or by chat" (Cassell and Hiremath 2007). Again, perhaps not a purpose, but goals and objectives that libraries should aim for, in this case, in the name of utilizing technology to provide different and better services for users, implying that as long as that is happening, the library is here to stay.

2.2.4 Serving the Customer as Library Purpose

King and Porter wrote a column in response to their experiences when speaking to librarians at conferences and workshops. Some librarians had asked them how they stay on top of all the new technology that is emerging. In this article, the authors listed five things that they think every public library and librarian ought to be doing. These five things do not equal a stated purpose or mission, but are certainly goals and objectives. They related these five things to the idea of why librarians should be tech-savvy. The first is, whatever anyone asks, the librarian should be able to answer. "At a library, we're all about the customer. We wouldn't exist if there weren't customers! We love to help customers find information on a wide variety of topics" (King and Porter 2007). These suggestions are not that different from traditional library services, except now people ask about more than reference questions or finding books. Secondly, librarians need to know how to use the tools their library offers. "If your library is spending time and money creating these new tools, they must be important for your library's customers" (King and Porter 2007). Next, librarians must keep current, and not just about books. "In today's emerging technology world, we still provide those same services. We just need to become familiar with

today's (and tomorrow's) emerging tools" (King and Porter 2007). Next, as librarians it is important to remember if the books were down, people would still come in. "My guess is that Internet access is one of the, if not the, most important service in your library…Staff can't accomplish some tasks when computers are down. The same goes for public PCs and customers" (King and Porter 2007). Finally, librarians need to learn about technology in order to remain viable in the library job market. "Traditional library jobs are changing, too" (King and Porter 2007). Again, these goals and objectives are not in and of themselves purpose or mission, but based on assumptions about what the library should be doing in terms of providing services and attracting users as well as again emphasizing technology.

Genco and Kuzyk did not directly address the mission or vision of the public library either. Instead, they discussed collection development in times of rapid change. This article lists many principles directed towards empowering patrons, giving patrons what they want when they want it, encouraging patrons to create content and add value to library resources, services and suggestions that the library could learn from businesses such as Netflix, Amazon and Google (Genco and Kuzyk 2007). This article is emphasizing the need for the library to make use of technology that is available in a Web/Library 2.0 way, as well as giving the private sector business models as blueprints for ways the library can improve and reach users. Not a stated purpose or mission, but certainly implying that there is a better way for the library to accomplish its purpose.

At the King County Library System in Washington State, a pilot project was conducted to see if patrons were leaving the library frustrated without having their needs met. The library staff decided to ask patrons about their experiences (Pitney and Slote 2007). Librarians and other staff came out from behind the counter and approached people at their point of need, often proactively taking care of situations and incidents before they even really had a chance to start (Pitney and Slote 2007). Tied to the traditional library service of reference and patron assistance, this idea brings this service into the 21st century by focusing on the customer and emphasizing again how

technology can help the librarian with their tasks. Again, more goals and objectives, to provide better customer service, to utilize staff and technology to the fullest.

2.2.5 Supporting Democracy as Library Purpose

According to Baldwin, the American public library has always had an important role to play in sustaining American democracy. Librarians must "stimulate public interest in sociopolitical issues and responsible citizenship. Democracy…has been in decline for some years, and that decline has recently accelerated toward authoritarianism…Public librarians must accept their inherent professional responsibility to nurture democracy rather than watch from the sidelines as American democracy degenerates." (Baldwin 2006). Baldwin sees a clear vision or purpose for the library beyond the goals and objectives that have been the focus for so long. He thinks that librarians need to be assertive, work to change their image with the public, go and make connections between people and information, train people for information in a democracy and promote the library as a center for democracy. Here there is a clear focus to all the services, goals, objectives, and technology mentioned in other professional literature.

Using survey and interview data, Bertot, Jaeger and Langa researched the impact that the public library's provision of Internet access has on their community. While there were many responses, "…a key theme that emerged from the study and additional interviews was that by meeting user information needs through public access computing and Internet services, public libraries were also able to serve a larger community need for access to e–government services and resources — both as a matter of course and in times of catastrophe" (Bertot, Jaeger and Langa 2006). Librarians reported that for many in their communities, the library was the only point of access for the internet. Others who have access elsewhere often turned to the library for assistance and one on one support and training in using the computer and accessing the Internet. Still others find that the library's Internet is faster and more efficient then their home or work connections. In addition, more and more government agencies at all levels are moving to serve clients through web-based resources, with some services being now primarily available only online. "Government agencies are now referring their service recipients to public libraries as

places in which to receive both access to online services and assistance" (Bertot, Jaeger and Langa 2006). A number of libraries located in communities housing refugees from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita were turned into clearing houses for information and assistance from finding family and loved ones, completing FEMA and insurance claims online and searching for information about their homes and communities that were hit by the storms. The authors concluded by saying if public Internet access in public libraries is crucial in these ways, it is important that funding is available to insure continued access, that librarians receive more education and training in both government and e-government and that federal policies dealing with public internet access and information facilitate public access.

This research shows how the public library supports democracy by providing a direct connection to government and government processes. However, libraries go beyond that by educating people on how to work with and interact with the government, its processes and agencies.

2.3 Conclusions

Like Watts and Samuels, not much appeared in the literature that directly related to library purpose. Instead, there many articles suggesting goals and objectives and services without examining specific roles or purposes or underlying assumptions raised by privileging one set of values, services or objectives over another. A very superficial discussion of purpose and role occurred in the name of insuring continued support for the library. Other articles focused on customer service and technology, areas that may have come out of the reinventing/new public management movement and treating patrons like customers or from the Baltimore model of giving them what they want. Several articles address the values libraries should support and uphold without explicitly connecting those values to a stated role or purpose. Perhaps there is so little in-depth discussion of this topic in the literature because the library profession as a whole thinks that they agree or at least know what the answers are, as Watts and Samuels suggested.

The goal of this research and investigation of the perceptions of public librarians about 21st century libraries is to have that discussion about library role and purpose by asking these

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working professionals to explicitly state their preference for one role or purpose for the library over another. The next chapter is a report on focus groups and interviews with public librarians that were held to better understand their perceptions and these questions and how best to ask librarians about the role or purpose of the library.

CHAPTER 3

BEGINNING THE DISCUSSION: TALKING WITH WORKING PUBLIC LIBRARIANS

<u>3.1 Introduction</u>

Close examination of the current professional literature failed to demonstrate a consensus among librarians on the role or purpose of the public library in 21st century. To add to the literature, this research seeks to find out what librarians believe to be the mission of the public library. Asking them directly shows their true perceptions. To survey a large national sample of public librarians an appropriate survey instrument was necessary, but no existing instrument addressed the research question exactly. The library history literature was helpful, but not enough. Focus groups and interviews with public librarians allowed for discussion of the library, and its role. This further development of the research question then became the foundation for the survey instrument. The moderator led the participants through a series of questions and prompts eliciting discussion on the ideal public library; its programs and services; the ideal public librarian; the role of the public library and assets needed to accomplish that role.[2]

<u>3.2 Focus Groups and Interviews with Working Public Librarians</u>

As preliminary exploratory work into the research question, I convened two focus groups and conducted three individual interviews with working public librarians. To hold the focus groups and interviews quickly and inexpensively, a convenience sample used local Dallas-Fort Worth area librarians with whom the researcher had worked. All librarians from two local library systems received invitations to participate in the focus groups. Five librarians from each system agreed to participate in each group. No one who participated in the focus groups had supervisory relationship with any other participants. Several supervisors from the same systems also agreed to one-on-one interviews separate from the focus groups. I scheduled the focus groups in th

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[2] For copies of the questioning route and other documents related to the focus groups and interviews, please see Appendix A.

evening and included a meal so to be convenient for the participants. The researcher moderated both groups with the help of an assistant who took notes and monitored the recording equipment. The supervisors agreed to interviews in their respective offices. All participants and interviewees gave permission to be audio taped.

3.2.1 Characteristics of Participants

Of the 13 participants, nine were female and four were male. The majority of participants were white, although two were African American. Their ages ranged from 20s to 70s. Of the participants, one was in her 20s, one in his 30s, four in their 40s, three in their 50s, three in their 60s, and one in her (or his) 70s. The participants held different types of positions at different levels in the public library. The majority provided frontline customer service with five working as children's librarians, and six in reference and adult services. One was a manager of two neighborhood branches and one a library director. Of the total, six had supervisory responsibilities as part of their positions. One of the library supervisors had been working in public libraries the longest, 32 years. Four people had about 20 years experience in public libraries and six about 10 years. Only three had five or fewer years of experience, and the newest librarian had two years of experience. Almost all had chosen to become librarians because someone suggested it would suit them or they had previous library experience, or, in some cases, both. One tried out different types of libraries before settling on public. One chose librarianship over another career because she thought it would be more interesting. One was sure he wanted to be an academic librarian, but he could not quite forget the professor who had pegged him (correctly, it turned out) as a born public library administrator. Another liked categorizing and cataloging but when she was applying for library jobs, only public service positions were available. One became a librarian because she wanted to run something. She had owned her own business as an information broker and placement service for library staff. She turned to public libraries when she felt a calling to public service after 9/11.

3.3 The Ideal 21st Century Library

Participants described their ideal 21st century library. They discussed the library's goals and mission; its programming, materials and resources; its physical structure and its clientele. They also discussed what it would take to create this ideal library and what the role of the librarian would be in such a library. Find the summary of their responses in Table 3.1 below.

Almost everyone mentioned that the ideal library should provide staff, most specifically mentioned librarians. The library should also provide information, although there was disagreement as to which form that information should take. Explaining the importance of staff and librarians, one participant said, "We (librarians) know how to find things people think they can find on their own but can't." Another added that "staff are gatekeepers and that we need to show people the way to go and we need to do it in person." More than just justifying their chosen careers, participants explained what they saw as an important role of the librarian: to connect people with information. In the technologically advanced internet world, this connection might be even more important, because librarians help people connect over the digital divide or they help connect people with in depth information specific to their need.

Speaking of technology and information, one participant's ideal library would be a hybrid library that has a few core physical copies of books but thousands of other books and materials available virtually. He said, "The library should still feel cozy and traditional but should be able to keep up with current demands." Several others felt that the library would always have books because they are an important part of what the library has to offer and the public expects the library to have them. One older librarian very strongly felt that the library is neglecting core materials and information in favor of jumping on the latest technology trend. Somewhat surprisingly, one the younger librarians agreed with him, and asked rhetorically, "what if the computers go down?" Therefore, as a group, they argued for a continued mix of both old fashioned collections of books and electronic just in time materials that could be accessed anywhere. There was a strong sense that the needs both tradition and change in order to carry out its role.

Several participants mentioned that the library removes or lessens the sense of isolation that people have from one another, contributing to a sense of community. One librarian put it this way: "The library provides a sense of place in an electronic world, giving people someone to talk to, a place for people to come together to share books, and get an introduction to the community." The basic need for the human touch and contact is not going away. More than just facilitating individual human connections, the library should be a community center and gathering place and select its goals and objectives based on its community.

Contrary to the prevailing model for the community library as active and noisy, one participant noted that some library patrons want to come to the library and accomplish their objectives in peace. Some people may not come to the library because of the environment and atmosphere. Another participant added, "We (the librarians) are trying too hard to make the library a popular place. Sometimes I read journal articles and wonder when did that become the role of the library? There needs to be respect for the area and for materials." Another participant pointed out that she felt many of the problems with noise and chaos in the library was due to design flaws. "Maybe in the future we will see different architectural designs (for libraries)." One participant told about a recent visit to a newly built library that separated its different functions on different floors with different designs and feel to each one of them. The first floor, designed like a bookstore, held the popular and non-print materials. The other floors were more traditional and suited for research or studying. With this design, people could come and do what they wanted without disturbing others. "The library as place needs to balance between warehouse, playhouse and courthouse." Again, these librarians are emphasizing a need for a mix of old and new, tradition and change in the public library. The library needs different types of spaces for different types of activities, acknowledging that not everyone comes to the library for the same reasons.

Further elaborating on mix of materials, services and activities that is the public library, one participant responded only somewhat jokingly that the ideal library should be "a cross between Barnes and Noble and the United Way." The public library should provide popular materials and programs such as DVDs and bestsellers and coffee along with materials and

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programs that help patrons by providing information and education targeted to their needs and situations. The library should also be an exceptional place for kids and teens, a safe place to keep them out of trouble and perhaps provide education or enrichment. Several people touched on the need for the ideal public library to provide materials, resources and services for the disadvantaged, "There will never be a time when everyone has a computer of their own and therefore it is important that the library provide that computer (and internet) access to even things out." Beyond just providing computers and internet access, technology allowed the library itself to be virtual, having no walls, "The (physical) library could not afford to hold and store what it can do online. The library brings the world to the doorsteps." As a group, they seemed to be advocating that the library have something for everybody, both in terms of what people want and what they need.

Table 3.1 summarizes this discussion of the ideal library, showing the sometimes seemingly contrary characteristics that were nonetheless important to these participants. The ideal public library has a staff of librarians. The library should provide information in different formats, and assure access to that information for the disadvantaged. The ideal library should be both traditional, with quiet places to learn and study, and a community center with a real sense of place. There should be different types of physical spaces in the ideal library designed for different purposes, and virtual spaces that move the library beyond its walls while removing many barriers to access. This library will give people what they want in the form of popular materials such as bestsellers, DVDs and downloadable audio books while not forgetting that people need education, training and answers to life issues.

Table 3.1: The Ideal 21st Century Library Discussion

The Ideal Library should provide:
Staff, especially librarians
Information in different formats
Access to information for the disadvantaged

Table 3.1 - continued

| Traditional quiet place to learn and study |
| Sense of community, sense of place |
| Physical space with lots of different types of spaces for lots of different purposes |
| Virtual space that removes the walls and many barriers to the library |
| What people want: bestsellers, DVDs, downloadable audio books |
| What people need: education, training, answers to life issues |

3.3.1 Important Library Materials and Services

Participants were asked what they thought were the most important programs and materials the public library could offer. Find the summary of these responses in Table 3-2 below. Participants frequently mentioned information, with discussion about the form or nature of that information. One participant thought that the public library should have information that is useful to the average user, that it should give them a place to start when learning or exploring something new. In addition, providing computer access is important because "it is necessary to function in today's world." For some library users, the library is the only place to access computers and the internet. One participant observed, "People don't have it at home and need it for jobs or whatever because they need access." Several others mentioned the idea that the library as a physical place was important. The library provides "free places for people to be." The library serves as "a meeting place, a place for people to get together and share experiences. For example, some book clubs meet in libraries."

Assuming that books, collection and physical space were a given, others had different ideas: what becomes important is connecting people with the materials and information. For this to happen the public library should be free and librarians should not censor what they provide to the public. Free programs, especially those educational or literary in nature, were listed as important by some. Some mentioned traditional library services, including reader's advisory, a service to connect people to books that they might like to read, and reference assistance,

connecting people with the information they need. These were services that participants felt the public expects to find at the public library. After listening to everyone else, one older library supervisor thought about what the others had said and decided what mattered was all of it. "We should have what people are asking for when they come to the library. I guess most people are coming to the desk for information. Take reference and combine it with reader's advisory sneak in programming as well, it's the way we market the library and our services and resources. Lean heavily towards those (programs and resources) that are educational in nature and more literary based. When they leave, they are leaving with ideas or a perspective that they didn't come in with. Almost like added value." It is interesting to note the overlap between what the public library should be in terms of functions and physical space and what the public library should offer in terms of programs, services and materials. Librarians struggle with separating what they do from why they do it. The literature mentioned in the previous chapters showed this to be true as well, with functions, services and models for providing service as purposes.

Repeatedly participants mentioned that access to all these resources and services required librarians. All the materials and resources in the world were useless to most people without someone to help connect them with the right materials and resources at the right time. One older librarian put it this way: "A room full of books is not a library. A library without books but with a librarian is a library. The librarian can get people to things just in time." The library needs not just librarians who can find information, but librarians with the right attitude and frame of mind for serving the public. "Librarians need compassion, to love people and the community you work for. You have to care and make sure they are getting what they need. People don't always know what to ask for, what they need. We help."

Table 3.2 summarizes the discussion of the most important library services and programs. The most important library services and resources include not just information or books or computer access, but a librarian helping people to connect to information, whether through reference assistance or reader's advisory or some other means. What may not be as

clear in the table is the idea that librarians do more than just provide information to people: they are helping people, meeting needs, and serving the community.

Table 3.2: Most Important Library Services and Resources Discussion

Service/Resource
Information
Librarians
Connecting people to information
Computer access
Books/collection of materials
Physical place
Reference assistance
Reader's advisory

3.4 The Ideal 21st Century Librarian

Asked to describe the 21st century public librarian, participants identified many traits and skills as useful and necessary for librarians in the 21st century. See the summary of these responses below in Table 3-3. Mentioned quickly and engendering quite a bit of discussion was the need for the librarian to learn, grow, change and adapt. One of the older librarians pointed out how much libraries have changed, that, for example, when he had started working in the public library, there had been no computers. "They showed up and I had to learn to use the computer and they didn't have that in library school when I went. Even today I am struggling to deal with a lot of computer issues I don't know about." Librarians have to be willing and able to deal with change, to learn and incorporate it into their jobs. More than just accepting change, but understanding that change is a part of the library and that librarians should be excited about the next thing, change and possibilities. One older librarian suggested that the ideal librarian would have "a willingness to embrace change…to take risks and…to try something new, knowing it might fail." The group as a whole seemed to accept that change was a part of their careers as

librarians, and they had to change in order to survive. Not everyone was as eager to embrace and accept change however.

One of the younger librarians reminded the group that the reverse can also be true, there can be too much emphasis placed on change, on the latest and greatest technology at the expense of other ways of finding information and helping people. She came in to the library and knew about computers, but not stuff like Valueline and Criss Cross (traditional reference books still heavily used today.) She said, "You can't just approach being a librarian from a technological perspective. You have to deal with technological and traditional library services, both sides…just because it (resources, services) is new; don't have to throw out the old." This statement is the reappearance of the theme of mixing the old and the new, of mixing tradition and change. It is interesting that it was the youngest librarian who brought it up in the discussion.

There were several other characteristics or traits the group named as important for librarians. Librarians need perseverance: "(The librarian must) be able to tackle a problem and stick with it until they solve it, should not say 'I don't know.'" The public librarian needs flexibility in dealing with the public and their questions, "different types of people who want to use the library." Not every question or situation is an in-depth meaningful search for information. The public comes in with different types of questions and needs different kinds of assistance, "even with the Internet, they need help." It is good for the librarian to be somewhat even-tempered and affable, "You have to work with people of all kinds, easy and difficult." It is good for a librarian to be "someone who…gets along with a lot of different kinds of people" and who is "approachable." The ideal librarian had "a high tolerance for the peculiarities of people" and should want to work with people or not work in the public library at all. Here the group acknowledged the public in public library, that the public is varied and diverse, and may have different reasons for coming to the library. Also the idea of wanting to help, of providing service is again repeated here.

Connected to this idea of helping or serving was a focus on providing excellent customer service. One librarian noted that when patrons ask a question, there are all kinds of variations in how the librarian responds to the patron. More to than just liking people, librarians should embody

customer service. "[The best librarians should be] not the kind of people who when asked a question respond by pointing in the vague direction of the answer, but who show them (patrons) exactly where it is. Some people (librarians) when a patron comes to the desk it is almost a distraction to them." Several other participants agreed, noting that they needed to be fully present when working with the public, and allowed time away from the public to complete other job tasks and assignments.

Some mentioned curiosity as an important trait for librarians to possess. Satisfying curiosity and increasing knowledge lead to better customer service, as these librarians know more about a variety of subjects. On the same hand, librarians should read widely, on lots of topics and not just books, "They need to develop a knowledge base and core skills and abilities." Several others agreed, "They need to keep up with current events." More than that, they need to have areas of interest or expertise. One participant added, "This is helps with selecting materials, answering reference questions and assisting the public." To a certain extent, a librarian does not know the answer but knows where to look for the answer. However, knowing more than that leads to better customer service and a value added experience for the library patron.

One of the younger librarians countered that it is not only about what specifically the librarian knows, but rather that "the librarian needs to be somebody with ideas, fresh ideas and can see things differently. Coming from a different background can give perspective." Several in the group thought that maybe the ideal public librarian would have had a different job before becoming a librarian. This is something that the library profession as a whole believes to be important. That is why there are no accredited bachelor's degree programs for becoming librarians. A person with an undergraduate degree in liberal arts or social science or biology will automatically be a better librarian because of exposure to other subject areas.

These are two different ideas or understandings of the librarian. On the one hand, generalists are librarians exposed to many topics and subjects but rather than focusing on one, focus on homing skills and abilities to the right information at the right time. On the other, specialists are librarians have studied materials and services for one specific group or subject

area, but sometimes have a hard time transferring their knowledge and skills to other situations. Four respondents agreed that the idea of pegging librarians as specialists is useful "so that if a patron has a specific question go to employee Z." There is so much to know that specialists and their knowledge are valuable. This can have negative effects for the librarian however when "they [administration] expect everyone to know everything and it's insane." Specializing does allow the librarian to focus on delivering targeted quality services and programs rather than trying to do many different tasks and doing none of them well. On the other hand, three librarians agreed that "generalists are better because they can survive (they have a broad knowledge and experience base that allows them to adapt.)" One added, "That specialist thing is going out the window" and librarians have to be a "jack of all trades." The group had to agree to disagree, but begrudgingly acknowledged that both generalists and specialists were helpful in running the public library.

Librarians should have energy, excitement and enthusiasm and not just for their job but also for the community they serve. One participant put it this way, "The librarian needs to be committed and connected to the community where you work; the librarian needs to want to make the community better." The ideal librarian thinks "outside of themselves." Several participants felt that especially valuable would be more librarians who can "think strategically," who see beyond day-to-day services to accomplishing a larger goal or mission and can "maintain objectivity and move beyond personal likes or dislikes." The librarian should have vision, should communicate that vision and should not be afraid to try new things to help accomplish that vision. It is not about the individual librarian in his or her position, but about that individual understanding their role in the larger picture and working to bring about the role or purpose of the library.

The ideal public librarian embraces change while remembering traditional library methods. The ideal librarian is not only customer service focused, but also genuinely wants to work with all kinds of people. He or she is curious, with interests outside of the library, books and reading, and has fresh and new ideas for the library and library services as well as a sense of excitement about the library and its community and what the library can do. This librarian perseveres, whether in finding answers to difficult questions, or trying to bring about lasting

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change in the library, and has the ability to think strategically about the library and its services. Table 3.3 is a summary of the ideal librarian discussion. Many of these traits are not learned, but are a part of character, personality and temperament.

Table 3.3: The Ideal 21st Century Librarian Discussion

Ideal Librarian Traits and Characteristics
Not only changes and adapts, but embraces change
Does not forget other traditional ways of providing service and assistance
Wants to work with all kinds of people
Is customer service focused
Has fresh ideas and new ways of seeing the library and library services
Is curious, has areas of interest outside of library, books, reading
Perseveres in serving public, finding answers, and bringing about change
Has enthusiasm and excitement for library and its community
Thinks strategically, has a vision for library service

3.5 The Role of the Public Library

Respondents were asked what they see as the most important or critical role for the library today. Several commented that the role of the library is different depending on the community that it serves, look at the community's demographics to figure out what role the library should have. Neither an affluent educated community nor a city wants or needs the same services as a less affluent or smaller town or community. One older librarian noted that he would "rather see the library focus on the main things we do well instead of doing everything for everybody" which is how he understands that most library administrations interpret "serving the community." One of the younger librarians felt this is not always the case: the library can have role of community center but some libraries focus more on social interaction, some more on information and some on social services.

Others did not necessarily disagree, but felt as if the library could serve both its community and fulfill a larger role. One stated it thusly, "Be this way to the community but reach out to everybody." In a larger social sense, the role of the library is to "be a neutral space or have the quality of neutrality and provide information and not leave anyone out." Libraries are a place for ideas that provide anything to anyone regardless of age or ability to pay. One participant repeated an oft-quoted public library maxim, "We have something here that will upset everyone. It is part of doing our job. We are at the forefront, or should be, of insuring that people have access to accurate credible information and the right to dissent, supporting the First Amendment as 'a university of the people.'" One possible role of the library then is educating people for democracy. Another noted that the role of education is part of it because we are "not just giving people access to information, but giving them resources to understand. The library provides training, introduces people to technology, issues, culture. No other institution currently serves this purpose. Exposing people to ideas makes people more aware and better members of society." This works both ways and is good for both society and for individuals as "this exposure to and awareness of information and ideas can lead to opportunities (for the individual)." Beyond the role of just presenting ideas, the library then moves to educator. The library is part of the education information infrastructure in a community, which means it is also "an important part of economic development in insuring a literate workforce and community." Again, the group emphasized that just putting books on the shelf or having computers available is not enough. People need to know how to use and understand the information provided in the library. In addition, it is the role of the library to help.

Participants also discussed the library's role in storing knowledge. Libraries are "storehouses of knowledge." One participant said, "When authors want to write a book, they come to the library to get information." More than just a place to hold information for research, another librarian said, "The library is the collector of human record. We acquire, organize and store knowledge of the past for the future." In addition to relating to the role of education, the idea of storing the past for the future also connects with the role of promoting democracy in preserving

important documents and recording events in history of times when the United States did not have the freedoms it enjoys now.

Table 3.4 summarizes the discussion of possible roles for the library. The library should serve as a storehouse of knowledge, be an educator of the people, present of a variety of ideas and opinions, prepare people for democracy, provide neutral access for all and serve as a community center. None of the roles mentioned are necessarily mutually exclusive, but focusing on one would most likely mean less attention and resources for the others.

Table 3.4: Possible Library Roles Discussion

Library Role
Storehouse of knowledge
Educator of the people
Presenter of variety of ideas and opinions
Preparing people for democracy
Neutral provider of access for all
Community center

3.5.1 It's Not Just About Money: What It Takes To Accomplish That Role

Having discussed the role of the public library, the discussion turned to what librarians needed to fulfill that role. Grouping similar answers showed there were two distinct types of assets: tangible physical objects like money or buildings and intangible skills, attributes and attitudes like political perception or good communication.

Eight out of thirteen people mentioned money or items that the library could get or have if it had more money: staff, materials and collections, buildings. One participant was sure that well-paid staff would stay at the library and those who stayed would know more and be better able to serve their patrons. Another thought that employers should pay for employees' membership into national professional associations so that there would be opportunities to connect with other

librarians, participate in the larger library community and learn about what others are doing because librarians need to "share information…private knowledge is useless."

Some wanted more recognition of staff and mentioned bonuses, prizes and rewards. Four people mentioned needing more time: time to get things done, time to learn new things, and time just to be able to think. In some ways, time equals money, as hiring more staff might give more time for other things, but there could also be a problem with management style or philosophy in terms of staff expectations. One older librarian put it this way, "we need less stupid, busy work." One of the older supervisors disagreed about money being the answer. In her opinion, those who say the library needs more money are taking the easy way out. "You can work around not having money." Too often, money or the lack of it becomes an excuse or a crutch for not acting or not trying new programs or services.

The necessary intangible skills, attributes and attitudes are harder to acquire. Librarians need political support. Librarians should try to "get support outside the library. Be active in the community, encourage people to bring things up. Get involved in grass roots efforts, write letters, talk to city council." One of the older librarians jumped in and said that actually what you need is "the belief that you have political support (whether you actually do or not.)" Librarians also need "support from administration that allows you to implement ideas." This is especially difficult because as observed by one participant, "[a]s an organization we get entrenched in a certain direction. We sink resources into an area and when we want to change we can't because we don't have the resources." The younger librarians wanted to know how to "find a way to get the ear of administration," because you pretty much "need to know someone who is in power." The older librarians turned it back on them, saying that they find a way to make themselves heard. Knowing someone helps, but "little guys can be heard if they speak up." The librarian needs to have a role in planning and be prepared to work hard, "You have to do your due diligence, do your homework. It may require some effort on each of your part. Do some background research and get your facts straight. You must present things in a way to get your point across, but you have to go in with the knowledge and the facts," it takes time; "you have to build credibility."

Sometimes administration needs a nudge, "bringing up things over and over." Also, make an effort "to understand how management works. This is hard for younger people to understand." One of the older librarians cited an example where she had an idea to improve library services that she kept bringing up in meetings until someone really listened and agreed to look into the idea.

Librarians do not do a good job of talking about or marketing the library or themselves: "the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing," one participant added. First, "We need to establish what we really do—people are shocked we can answer real questions." Then as a group, librarians need to market the library and themselves. "As a profession [we are] not the best at telling people what we do." Librarians should "not be afraid to ask questions. We miss the fact that many in the community don't see the value of the library…ask the community what they want. We think we know what people need…can't be afraid of the answers. We need to stop defending our position and figure out what our position should be." "We have to change public perception or change what we do—that is necessary to make us better." "The city manager, council members are focused on different things, hard for them to grasp what the library is. They see things as real estate brokers or lawyers, or what was cost effective in another city." Because they do not grasp what the library is and is trying to do, this leads to a focus on statistics and the bottom line. Instead, respondents argued, we "need to measure what the library does for the quality of the community, the quality of life."

Library staff could be both part of the problem and part of the solution. It is important to "get the right people 'on the bus' and get the wrong people 'off the bus.'" The "right people" are those who "share the same vision and passion for the library and the community." A problem is the "lack of interest (on the part of staff) in the people part of it [working in the public library], not wanting to deal with people." One supervisor added that a librarian needs a whole combination of skills and attitudes to fulfill the role, "Fortitude to get it done… political skills to get the message out there to the powerbrokers and stakeholders. You have to get them to buy into your vision and your ideas and what you are trying to do—make them understand."

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Table 3.5 summarizes the discussion of what respondents believe would help libraries and librarians accomplish the chosen role for the public library. There is never enough money or time, and more of both would mean more and better services, staff and resources. Staff themselves can be both a positive and a negative. Making an effort to recruit staff that fit with the library's role is important. Clear and open communication combined with a clear vision or mission for the library can lead to making oneself heard and changing perceptions. Political and administrative support can be crucial in opening up the communication process and assuring that everyone is working towards the same goal.

Table 3.5: Assets Needed to Accomplish Role

Assets
Money
Time
Communication
Political support/skills
Administrative support
Clear mission and vision
Change perceptions
Ability to be heard
Staff
Information

These responses from the focus group participants and the individuals interviews helped inform the questions for the survey instrument. The next chapter will describe the survey portion of the research, including the survey instrument, the structure and method for the survey, and the characteristics of the sample. The survey moves the discussion of the library and its role from a small specific local group of individuals to the national population of public librarians.

CHAPTER 4

BROADENING THE DISCUSSION: TALKING WITH PUBLIC LIBRARIANS ACROSS THE
UNITED STATES

4.1 The Survey Instrument

Responses from the focus groups and individual interviews informed the survey instrument. Several public librarians and other researchers refined the survey questions and answers further by carefully considering each question and its answer choices. They again examined the survey online through the online survey tool, Survey Monkey.[3] They were looking for clarity of questions and response choices, as well as ease of online layout and flow. The items fell into three main groups: items describing the respondent's personal and demographic characteristics and the characteristics and features of his or her library, items identifying both what the library is and what ideal library would be, and items identifying what the librarian is and what the ideal librarian would be. The survey took most respondents between ten and twenty minutes to complete.[4]

4.1.1 Demographics and Personal Characteristics of the Sample

These questions helped to describe the sample, and allowed for comparison to the population of public librarians as a whole. Respondents identified their age, gender, race and whether they were recent immigrants to the United States. Respondents who come from a society or culture that has different values for libraries and information may respond differently when asked to choose the best purpose for the public library. Respondents answered questions about their level of education and field of study. Because many choose the library as a second career, respondents also identified if they were career changers and their former career fields. Respondents placed themselves on a scale indicating political ideology. With some thought that

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[3] www.surveymonkey.com, accessed May 14, 2008.
[4] For copies of the survey instrument and other documents related to the survey, please see Appendix B.

those in administrative positions or working behind the scenes have a different perspective, respondents identified their role in the library. Any of these characteristics might be helpful in differentiating the question of library role as being a member of one of these distinct groups could factor into the role they chose for the library.

4.1.2 Library Characteristics

In order to further describe the sample and compare it to the total population, respondents answered questions about the libraries that employed them. Respondents were asked to identify the state where their library is located, their library administrative type (city, county, other), how urban or rural their location was, and how many service outlets their library had. These items demonstrated how representative the sample was.

4.1.3 Qualities of the Library

The survey included questions asking the respondents to identify both qualities of the present-day public library and qualities they would like to see in their ideal public library. While not meant to access roles for the public library, they may help predict the preferred library roles as certain qualities and characteristics may be associated with a certain role for the library. One question asked about the physical design characteristics of the ideal library. If form follows function, then it might help predict the role of the library. Respondents also identified the library's main purpose or function. Identifying the most important library services forced respondents to choose from all the things the library could do, the few things it should do. One item asked respondents to choose the most important ideal for the public library to uphold. Respondents listed obstacles to changing the library, some of which related to specific library qualities. A similar question asked about the actions to take if no one were coming to the public library.

4.1.4 Qualities of the Librarian

The survey included questions asking the respondents to about their experiences as working librarians and the qualities they would like to see in ideal public librarians. Several questions attempted to measure the respondents' strength of association with and exposure to the library profession through library association membership, library listserv subscriptions and

library conference or workshop attendance. In asking why respondents became librarians, uncover whether certain reasons led to a certain library role. Identifying the most necessary qualities that librarians today should have might also provide a clue as to the role of the library. Librarians established whether changing the library's role was possible and if they themselves had ever changed it. If so, then they answered how they brought about change.

4.2 The Sample

Subjects for this survey were members of the population of public librarians currently employed in professional positions in public libraries in the United States. In order to reach a national population of public librarians quickly and inexpensively, e-mail listserv groups made up of mostly librarians or centered on topics or subjects of interest to librarians received survey invitations. This type of sample is nonrandom as it depends on volunteers. All listserv members who were public librarians could choose to participate. Nonrandom sampling is a method of selection that favors some cases over others however inadvertently. This can lead to bias, a systematic error or constant difference between the sample and the population that reduces the overall representativeness of the sample. It is possible that those who volunteered for the survey were more interested in the research topic or more prone to liking to give their opinions than the population as a whole. The researcher will compare the sample with the total population of public librarians where possible to show the demographic representativeness this sample.

The text of the posting to the listservs explained the research project and provided the researcher's contact information. Specifically, the post told potential respondents:

Hi,

My name is Susan Smith. In addition to working as a public librarian for the last ten years, I am a doctoral student at the School of Urban and Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Arlington.

As part of my doctoral dissertation research, I am surveying public librarians in the United States about their ideas of the public library and the library profession in the 21st century. This information will in turn provide information on and insight into the functioning of the public library. The purpose of this survey is to determine how working librarians perceive the institution of the public library in the 21st century and how the library profession shapes the institution of the public library with the goal of improving knowledge about and functioning of the institution of the public library. In addition to forming the basis for my

dissertation, I hope to be able to share the results in some of the professional library journals.

Participation in this research is voluntary and anonymous. The survey is available online and should take about 20 to 30 minutes to complete and requires some thought. If you are interested in completing the survey, please click the link below. Otherwise, thank you for your time.

The researcher compiled a list of 12 listservs with national membership, some of which focused on specific types or aspects of librarianship, others targeted librarians of specific ethnic groups or heritage. Some of the listservs were associated with and hosted by the American Library Association and its divisions while some were independent, hosted by libraries, universities and listserv hosting sites. Before posting anything, however, the researcher contacted the listserv moderators for permission to post the survey to their specific lists. Most moderators gave their approval immediately, while a few asked to see the survey before granting approval. In the end, 11 out of 12 moderators allowed the posting of the survey to their lists. The listservs shown in Table 4.1 posted the survey (The number of subscribers at the time of posting are listed where known). As a part of the survey, respondents recommended another public librarian who might be interested in completing the survey. After the survey had been live for about a month, the researcher sent individual invitations to those e-mail addresses. Of the 50 addresses supplied, only one was undeliverable.

Table 4.1: Library Listservs Where Survey Was Posted

Name	Subscribers	Purpose	Website
The Asian/Pacific Librarians Association			http://www.apla.org
The Association for Library Services to Children	1362		http://www.ala.org/alsc
The Chinese American Librarians Association			http://www.cala-web.org/

Table 4.1 - continued

Fiction_L		Addresses aspects of readers advisory	http://www.webrary.org/rs/FLmenu.html
LIBREF-L	2095	Addresses reference services in libraries	http://listserv.kent.edu/archives/libref-l.html
LITA	1899	Library and Information Technology Association	http://www.ala.org/ala/lita/litahome.cfm
PUBLIB		Addresses all aspects of public libraries	http://lists.webjunction.org/publib/
PUBYAC		Public Libraries Serving Youth and Children	http://www.pubyac.org
REFORMA		The National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking	http://www.reforma.org/
RUSA	1131	Reference and User Services Association	http://www.ala.org/ala/rusa/rusa.cfm
YALSA	1234	Young Adult Library Association	http://www.ala.org/yalsa

The link to the survey was live for two months. Although 639 individuals started the survey, only 475 completed the survey. The first screen of the survey was the informed consent document, providing respondents with information about the research project, benefits and risks of their participation, and contact information for getting in touch with the researcher or her institution. After reading the screen, seven people elected not to continue with the survey. Because the survey was targeted to the population of public librarians working in professional

positions in the United States, the next questions were qualifying questions to eliminate those not in the target population. Of the respondents who started the survey, 516 identified themselves as public librarians holding professional positions while 123 did not meet the qualifications to continue. In addition to those who eliminated by the qualifying questions, 41 respondents answered at least part of the survey but did not finish. Some may have lost interest, or as one respondent wrote in an open-ended response, "If you expect us to answer this question, you should have shortened the responses." The survey was long, but the questions left were meaningful to the research. Despite the few who left, 92 percent of qualified respondents completed the survey.

<p style="text-align:center">4.3 Characteristics of the Sample</p>

4.3.1 Demographics and Personal Characteristics

As seen in Table 4.2, at least one respondent represented each 5-year age range. Both ends of the ranges had the least representatives. The third smallest group was those between 60 and 64 (5%). The rest of the respondents ranged across the other age groups. Statistics on librarian's ages as a group are unavailable. However, for many years now there has been talk in the profession about how many librarians will be reaching retirement age over the next few years, so this group may skew a little toward the younger end (Curran 2003). Younger respondents are not a surprise, considering online administration of the survey and e-mail used to recruit respondents. They are in the age groups that have had more exposure to computers and utilize if not embrace them.

<p style="text-align:center">Table 4.2: Age of Respondents (N=459)</p>

Age Range	N	Percentage
Ages 20-24	2	>1%
Ages 25-29	73	16%
Ages 30-34	72	16%
Ages 35-39	51	11%

Table 4.2 - continued

Ages 40-44	48	10%
Ages 45-49	59	13%
Ages 50-54	65	14%
Ages 55-59	58	13%
Ages 60-64	24	5%
Ages 65 and above	7	2%

Of the 456 respondents who recorded their gender, an overwhelming majority (90%) identified themselves as female. This means the sample was slightly more female than the population of librarians as a whole. Data extracted from the ACS and reported on the American Library Association Diversity Counts website shows that 82 percent of librarians are female (2007). This data includes all librarians (except law and special librarians), so the actual numbers may be somewhere in between. Anecdotally, it seems that female librarians are disproportionately more likely than male librarians to work in public libraries.

The majority of the respondents (93%) recorded their race as White. Small groups of respondents represented mixed Race, Asian, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native and Hawaiian Native or Pacific Islander backgrounds. According to data from the American Community Survey (ACS) from 2001-2004 as reported on the American Library Association Diversity Counts web site (2007), mixed race was over represented, with the ACS showing just less than 1 percent and Asian slightly under represented, the ACS finding 3 percent of the total population of librarians to be Asian. There were even fewer African Americans, with only 1 percent responding to this survey versus almost 4 percent found by the ACS (2007). Part of this difference could be due to the distribution of the survey through listservs. The Black Caucus of the American Library Association does not have a public listserv, and hence their membership did not receive the survey directly. On the other hand, the Chinese American Librarians Association and the Asian/Pacific American Librarians have a public listserv, and both

groups posted the survey link. It should be noted that the American Community Survey lumps all librarians who do not work in education, medicine, or law together, so it is difficult to know then how truly reflective it is of a smaller subset of that population.

The number of respondents who consider themselves Hispanic or Latino (approximately 3%) is almost that found by the ACS, (2.8) but again, that includes all librarians who are not in education, medical, or legal libraries. In addition, Reforma, which it the national group that promotes Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish speaking population in the United States, posted the survey link directly on their listserv.

Because of the library profession's support of the values of freedom of information, intellectual freedom, equal access and the like, there often exists this idea that all librarians are extremely liberal. It is possible that the possible roles for the public library had more or at least different appeal depending on the respondent's political ideology. Looking at Table 4.3, the overwhelming majority of respondents identified themselves as liberal, although 15 percent identified with being conservative and 24 percent as only moderately liberal.

Table 4.3: Political Ideology of Respondents (N=455)

Political Ideology	N	Percentage
Very Liberal	118	26%
Somewhat Liberal	106	23%
Moderately Liberal	107	24%
Moderately Conservative	37	8%
Somewhat Conservative	18	4%
Very Conservative	12	3%
Don't Think of Myself in Those Terms	57	13%

Respondents who come from a society or culture that has different values for libraries and information may respond differently when asked to choose the best purpose for the public

library. Of 454 respondents who responded to an item about how recently they or their families had immigrated to the United States, a very small number where themselves born outside the United States (4%). A slightly larger number (about 9%) had at least one parent who was born outside the United States, while an even larger group (25%) had at least one grandparent who was born outside the United States. Immigrants or second-generation respondents identified the countries of their heritage. The researcher recoded the original responses listing the countries immigrated from by the continent where those countries are located. The majority of respondents (69%) listed countries that are located in Europe. The next biggest groups (11% and 9% respectively) listed countries that are located in Asia and North America (not including the United States). Almost 10 percent of respondents had originated or had family from more than one continent (Europe and Asia or Europe and North America.) Only a few listed countries in South America and Africa. Again, trying to find whether there is any correlation having immigrated or having a family that recently immigrated from outside the United States and the perception of library purpose.

Most librarians have Masters Degrees in Library and Information Studies, and as Table 4-4 shows, the vast majority of respondents (93%) did as well. The degree is required or strongly preferred for most professional library positions. A small group (12%) has a Masters degree in another field, while a handful have either an Associates, Bachelors, some graduate training or an advanced degree. Very few colleges or universities offer undergraduate degrees in library and information studies. Librarians must get an undergraduate degree in another field before moving on to the master's degree. Respondents who had chosen to study different areas for their undergraduate or other degrees may have different preferences for library role. Respondents areas of educational study, originally recorded as open-ended responses, were recoded into degree area or field categories. Table 4.4 shows that by far the largest number of respondents (68%) has a background in liberal arts. The rest of the respondents spread out over many areas of study, with the next most popular field of study being education (chosen by 9%.)

Table 4.4: Educational Background of Respondents (N=456)

Level of Education	N	Percentage
Associate's degree	3	>1%
Bachelor's degree	11	2%
Some graduate training	9	2%
Masters in Library and/or Information	416	93%
Other Masters	62	12%
Advanced degree (PhD, M.D., etc.)	6	1%
Area of Study		
Liberal Arts	289	68%
Education	39	9%
Fine Arts	25	6%
Science, Math, Engineering, Technology	21	5%
Business	19	4%
Communication or Journalism	17	4%
Library Science (not Masters)	11	3%
Public Administration and Policy	7	2%

For 244 or 53 percent of the respondents, the public library was a second career. Those who had changed careers to become a public librarian identified their former career. The researcher recoded these open-ended responses into types of careers. A small percentage of respondents listed their former careers so that the researcher was unable to determine how to code their responses. Table 4.5 shows that respondents had worked in a variety of career fields. The career that the largest group of respondents (26%) had held was education. The second largest group (12%) was in business and finance. The third most chosen career was retail, hospitality and food service (9%). Another small group (7%) had been involved in journalism, writing and publishing. The rest of the respondents had a wide variety of former careers, from homemaker to secretaries to healthcare, law and bookselling.

Table 4.5: Former Career (N=239)

Career Field	N	Percentage
Education	64	27%
Business and Finance	30	12%
Retail, service, or hospitality	22	9%
Writing, publishing, journalism	18	7%
Science, math, engineering, technology	14	6%
Fine Arts	12	5%
Other types of libraries	11	5%
Clerical/secretarial	10	5%
Healthcare/medicine	9	4%
Military/government	7	3%
Social work/services	7	3%
Homemaker/stay at home mom	6	3%
Law	5	2%
Bookstore/bookselling	5	2%
Manufacturing/trades	5	2%

The respondents (N=513) represented 44 states and the District of Columbia. In general, the respondents seemed representative of the United States as a whole. The largest group was from Illinois (N=68, 13%). According to the Public Library Survey, Illinois had 5 percent of the national population of professional librarians in 2006 (Chute and Kroe 2007). Many respondents lived in larger states: Texas (N=39, 8%), California (N=39, 8 percent), Indiana (N=38, 7%) and New York (N=34, 7%). According to the Public Library Survey, Texas had 5 percent of the national population of librarians, California had 10 percent, Indiana had only 3 percent and New York had 11 percent. Compared to the national population, the sample overrepresented Illinois, Indiana and Texas and underrepresented New York and California. The remaining states were less than 5 percent each of the total sample population. In general, the sample underrepresented the more populous states when compared to the national population of librarians in the Public

Library Survey (Chute and Kroe 2007). States with no responses were Delaware, Hawaii, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Dakota and Vermont. In order to aid in running different statistics, the researcher collapsed these responses into the four regions of the United States as defined by the United States Census Bureau.[5] The Midwest had the most respondents (N=179, 35%) followed by the South (N=145, 28%), the Northeast (N=102, 20%) and the West (N=84, 17%).

4.3.2 Characteristics of the Libraries in Which Respondents Work

There were 508 respondents who described the type of library in which they work. Half of the respondents (N=259, 51%) work in a city or municipal library, which is close to the national percentage of city or municipal public libraries (Chute and Kroe 2007). A little under a quarter (N=111, 22%) of respondents work in a county or parish library which is more than twice the national percentage. Respondents who work in city/county combined libraries (N=66, 13%) are 13 times the national percentage. Respondents from library district libraries (N=18, 4%) and nonprofit or association libraries (N=15, 3%) are underrepresented in the sample, more than four time less than the national percentage. A few respondents (N=18, 2%) work in multijurisdictional libraries which is about half of the national percentage of multijurisdictional libraries. Even fewer respondents (N=4, less than 1%) work in state libraries which are open to and provide substantial services for the public.

Of the 505 respondents who identified their library location, 37 percent said their library was located in the suburbs or outskirts of a big city. Another 36 percent work in a small city or town library. Public libraries that are located in a big city were the workplace of 22 percent of respondents. Only 2 percent of respondents work in a country village, and another 2 percent chose in the country when asked about library location. Of the 4 percent of respondents who

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[5] The Northeast region is Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. The Midwest region is Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas. The South region is Delaware, Maryland, District of Columbia, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas. The West region is Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, Washington, Oregon, California, Alaska and Hawaii

selected other, 1 percent identified the location of their libraries as a medium sized city. There is no comparison here as the Public Library Survey only looks at public libraries at the state level.

There were 502 respondents who listed the total number of service outlets in their library system. "Single-outlet libraries are a central library, bookmobile, or books-by-mail-only outlet. Multiple-outlet libraries have two or more direct service outlets, including some combination of one central library, branch(es), bookmobile(s), and/or books-by-mail-only outlets" (Chute and Kroe 2007). Of those who responded to this item, 38 percent worked in a library with only a single location, while 23 percent worked in a system with two to five locations. About 14 percent worked in library systems with 6 to 10 locations and another 6 percent worked for systems with 11 to 15 locations. Another 6 percent of respondents worked in systems with 16 to 20 locations. About 7 percent of respondents were in library systems with 21 to 29 locations and 6 percent at library systems with 33 to 90 locations. One respondent listed the total number of locations from which his or her library system offers services as 123. According to the 2007 Public Library Survey, of the 9,198 public libraries in the United States and the District of Columbia, 7,433 are single-outlet libraries and 1,765 are multiple-outlet libraries (Chute and Kroe 2007). Recoding the responses to this question shows that here the survey sample is somewhat reversed, with 62 percent of the respondents working in multiple-outlet libraries and 38 percent working in single-outlet libraries compared to 81 percent single-outlet and 19 percent multiple-outlet libraries nationally.

The majority of the 504 respondents who answered this question, 68 percent, worked in a central or main library location. Of the remaining respondents, 21 percent worked in a branch, neighborhood, or satellite library, 6 percent in a regional library 2 percent in the headquarters or administrative offices for their library system, and 1 percent work in more than one location. Some respondents said they worked at both a branch and the central location, some worked at more than one branch, and one worked out of the central library and the bookmobile. Three respondents commented that they worked in systems where there are no distinctions between central and branch libraries, and all library locations are equal in stature. One respondent works at the library's virtual branch from an office in the main library, and one works at an off-site

technical services building. The Public Library survey only counts main or central libraries and branch locations. Of the 16, 543 stationary outlets, 55 percent are central libraries and 45 percent are branches, so in this survey central libraries are over-represented (Chute and Kroe 2007).

Comparing characteristics of the survey respondents with national population of public librarians and libraries shows that the sample is similar but not entirely representative of the population at large. Therefore, the findings revealed in the next two chapters are not generalizable to the entire population of public librarians. Chapter 5 will examine the qualities of the ideal library and how these characteristics relate to library's role, while chapter six will consider the librarian in the same manner.

CHAPTER 5

THE IDEAL LIBRARY AND LIBRARY ROLE

5.1 Introduction

The historical and contemporary library literature gives clues to help understand the role of the public library in the 21st century. The historical literature gave examples of roles the library had held in the past. The current literature shows that this is not a topic about which there is substantive discussion. A few librarians engaged in discussion of the library and its role in focus groups and interviews. From there, the survey questions developed to try to gauge librarians' perceptions about the library and its role on the national level. These next two chapters will look at what that survey discovered. In this chapter, the focus will be on the most important or critical role for the public library as well as the qualities and characteristics of the public library that librarians perceive to be important and essential in delivering library service today.

5.2 The Most Important or Critical Role for the Public Library

This research is an investigation of public librarians and their perceptions of the public library as an institution. The question that is central to this investigation: What is the role of the public library in the United States in the 21st century? On the online survey, librarians were asked which statement best reflects what they believe to be the most important or critical role for the public library. The survey provided three statements that reflect broad roles for the public library derived from the literature and the individual interviews and focus groups.

The first option or choice described the role of the library in a democracy. According to this statement, the public library is the last stand for democracy. It educates people for democracy by giving them resources to understand society and insuring they have access to accurate, credible information. In this role, the public library helps bridge the digital divide, demonstrates the power of information, and serves as the collector of human record and history.

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The second option describes the role of the library in presenting a variety of ideas and viewpoints. From this perspective, the public library is a place of ideas. With materials representing different views and opinions, the public library encourages the free exchange of ideas and information, and makes room for the voice of dissent. In this role, the public library exposes people to issues, culture, diversity, education and possibilities. The public library should remain objective and neutral as it provides information on all sides of a topic or issue. The third choice listed as a possible role for the library is as providing educational opportunities. In this role, the library is a university of the people. An educational center that provides educational materials, training and learning, the public library helps people can get better jobs and be more productive members of society. The public library is part of the educational infrastructure of the community that helps provide for a literate workforce. In this educational role, the public library also has an effect on the economic development of a community.

Table 5.1 clearly shows that respondents identified the most important or critical role for the public library as presenting a variety of ideas and viewpoints (n=296, 62%). This is similar to one of the roles presented in the library history literature: a library that is objective and neutral and presents all sides. In the context of that literature, this role supports the promotion of democracy. Looking back to the interviews and focus groups though, this role is even bigger than that, related to improving and enriching patrons' lives.

Table 5.1: Respondents' View of the Most Important or Critical Role for the Public Library
(N=479)

Most Important or Critical Role	N	Percentage
Variety of Ideas and Viewpoints	296	62%
Last Stand for Democracy	89	19%
University of the People	66	14%
Community Center	9	2%

The library history literature suggests the role of the library is a reflection of a particular time and set of circumstances. Determining the circumstances of this particular time, that lead a majority of public librarians to choose presenting a variety of ideas and viewpoints as the most important role for the library might help understand their responses. More than just the traditional idea of library as a collection of books or information presenting all sides of economic, political, and social concerns, this role emphasizes the active part the library and librarian play in connecting people to issues, culture, diversity, education and possibilities. For example, as the United States becomes increasingly diverse both racially and ethnically, many public libraries are using their role of presenting a variety of viewpoints and ideas to highlight the diversity within their communities. In 2007, the Irving Public Library system in Irving, Texas, held a series of programs highlighting the countries, cultures and customs of its citizens. These programs included displays of books and resources, film festivals, food and art from the various cultures in Irving (Dallas Morning News 2007).

The second choice for most important or critical role for the public library was promoting democracy (n=89, 19%). The library and librarian not only provide access to information, bridge the digital divide and educate the public to be better citizens, they also uphold and preserve democratic values and freedoms such as the right to dissent, the right to privacy, and freedom of speech. The public library has been involved in taking a stand for democracy since the events of September 11 led to the Patriot Act. The Patriot Act includes provisions that allow the federal government or its agents access to patron's internet usage and library records (Egelko 2002). This provision of the Patriot Act is an invasion of patrons' privacy, and the American Library Association has spoken out strongly against it.

The third most popular choice for most important or critical role for the public library was educating the masses (n=66, 14%). Here again, libraries and librarians are moving beyond just offering books and information on their shelves to providing classes and training that give patrons knowledge and skills to have more opportunities, get better jobs, and improve their circumstances. This benefits the community by providing literate citizens who contribute to the

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economy. One branch library in Arlington, Texas has had a homework help center for several years now. The center can only serve a small number of students, and there is always a waiting list. This is partially because this center targets lower elementary, a group that is underserved by other similar services. The main goal of the homework center is to insure that students have the necessary skills to pass the third grade and move on to succeed in school. In Texas, not passing a reading comprehension test in the third grade holds a student back, and research shows that this is a critical age for acquiring reading and other skills.

When presented in the online survey, respondents were also given the option of writing in their own ideas of the most important or critical role for the public library. A small percentage (about 4 percent) wanted to choose more than one option, balking at the idea of choosing between them. Disregarding these respondents, a common fourth option listed by respondents was the most important or critical role for the public library as community center (n=9, 2%). One respondent wrote, "The public library is the only "3rd place" remaining in our country. The only place you can go to access information, attend programs, and gather together." These respondents believed that first the library is a place where people can gather for different purposes, to meet and discuss ideas. Two library supervisors mentioned this role in the interviews. The advent of new technologies and the rapid changes that technology has brought about in everyone's lives and the life of the community has led to discussion in the professional literature of the library as a place for building social connection and community. Past president of the American Library Association, Carol Brey-Casiano, chose as her president's program in 2005, "Coming Full Circle: The Library as Place." As president, the media had often asked her about the future of libraries. "If we have the Internet, why do we need libraries?" She replied, "library spaces are truly changing, but the library still retains a very special place in the community…we've come full circle, because if you think about the fact that in 1885 or earlier, we had library spaces that served as community centers and cultural centers for our communities, now here we are again: the library is still serving as a community center and a cultural center" (Brey-Casiano 2005). The library is a community destination and should reflect what the community wants. One respondent

wrote about the public library and community this way: "Therefore, there is not one role for the public library, but rather different roles for different public libraries, as different as the different communities they serve.

It is easy to understand some respondents' adamant assertion that all of these choices are important and critical roles for the public library. As one respondent wrote, "Sorry, the question makes us have to choose, and I am not comfortable balling up our goals and having to pick one. Libraries have evolved to offer a place where different views, opinions and resources are available. We are also in the knowledge and education business, with on-line resources and materials (think job/career section) that assists any one at different stages of their life. And yea, we are a place to support democracy (pure) rather than elected officials democracy. We are in the business of keeping history and its records. We provide voting information and history books." On some level, there is connection and overlap between the roles. To promote and educate for democracy, the library needs to present a variety of ideas and viewpoints and to educate the masses so they can learn and gain understanding about issues and current events. For any of these to be successful, the library needs to be a place for community that connects people to one another and to these various ideas. One respondent added, "Again, each statement above is part of an integral whole. Each statement is equally important." This research is not trying to uncover or identify the one role for the public library, but rather the roles for the public library as seen by these librarians.

Nevertheless, these respondents may be in denial, ignoring the fact that with limited resources, they make choices every day that privilege one role over another. A meeting room currently in use for GED classes cannot hold a cultural program. Money spent on bestsellers and DVDs available for learning materials in other languages. Look at what groups and organizations use the meeting room, what programs and services the library offers, and a pattern will emerge. In the next section, those qualities and characteristics of the public library selected by respondents that might relate to or demonstrate the chosen role are considered.

5.2.1 Demographics and Personal Characteristics of the Sample and Library Role

The last chapter reported details about the ages of the respondents. Respondents ranged across age groups. All respondents, regardless of age, chose presents a variety of ideas as the most important role for the library. Among respondents ages 30-39, the library as university for the people was the second most popular choice for library role while everyone else selected the role of last stand for democracy second. (tau=.016, p=.338).

The majority of the respondents recorded their race as White (n=418, 93%). Small groups of respondents represented mixed Race, Asian, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Hawaiian Native or Pacific Islander. It is interesting to note that only White and Mixed Race wrote in the role of community center as most important, and then only a few of those. In addition, while there were only a few of them, no African American respondent chose the educator role either. It would be interesting to know their reasoning behind these choices and if all African American public librarians would choose the same. Perhaps African Americans feel like some other institution besides the library is the center of the community or responsible for education. Or maybe they are strongly connected to the profession and its values and believe that these are the best roles for communicating and upholding those values. There was no strong relation between race and the respondent's choice of most important library role (tau=.013, p=.123). Only a few respondents (n=13, 3%) identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino, and there was no relation between identifying as Hispanic or Latino and choice of library role.

Most respondents (n=331, 73%) identified themselves as liberal to some degree, although about 15 percent identified themselves as conservative to some degree (n=67), while almost the same number (n=57) "don't think of themselves in those terms." For the most part, those who were younger (under 45) identified themselves as more liberal that those who were older. There was no relation between race of respondents and their political ideology. Regardless of their political ideology, the respondents' most popular choice for important library role was presents a variety of ideas (n=286, 63%). On this item, however, there was slightly less difference

between the second and third most popular choices for roles: last stand for democracy (n=79, 17%) and university of the people (n=64, 14%). For those respondents who identified with the more moderate or conservative side of the political scale, and those who do not think of themselves in these terms, these two role choices were practically evenly distributed as their second most popular choice for library role (tau=.019, p=.225).

Respondents who come from a different society or culture or who have families that do (n=152) might have been socialized to have different values and understanding of libraries and information. There was no relation between a respondent or his or her family being born outside the United States and the choice for most important library role (tau=.007, p=.375). This same group of respondents (n=135) was asked from where their families had immigrated. The majority had come to the United States from European countries (n=103, 76%) although a good few were from Asia (n=16, 12%) and North America outside the United States (n=13, 10%) and handful had families that came from multiple continents (n=9, 7%). Even fewer identified their families as being from South America (n=5, 4%) and Africa (n=2, 1%). This data again shows the lack of diversity in the library profession. Regardless of continent of family origin, the most popular choice for critical library role was presents a variety of ideas. Here again, the choices for second and third most popular role were much closer together than in the sample as a whole. In many cases, respondents were evenly split between a library that promotes democracy and one that is the university of the people (tau=.013, p=.327). It is interesting to note that respondents had immigrated did not affect their choice of library role as much as from where they had immigrated. The second is slightly more specific, and therefore probably allows for better predictions.

As it is at least a strong preference if not a requirement for most professional library positions, the vast majority of respondents (n=413, 91%) have earned as their highest level of education a Masters degree in Library and Information Studies. A small group had a second Masters (n=53, 12%), while a handful had an Associates (n=2, .4%), a Bachelors (n=11, 2%), some graduate training (n=8, 2%) or an advanced degree (n=6, 1%). There was no relation between level of education and choice of most important library role. Since almost all librarians

have at least an undergraduate degree in another field, the respondents identified their previous area of study to see if it related to their choice of library role. The majority of respondents had a background in liberal arts (n=288, 68%). The rest were spread out between many areas of study, with the next most popular being education (n=39, 9%). There was no relation between area of study and choice of most important library role (tau=.015, p=.331).

For about half the respondents (n=244, 53%), the library profession was a second career. There was no relation between whether a respondent was a career changer and the choice of most important library role (tau=.022, p=.211). Those who had previous careers identified the occupations or fields in which they had previously worked. The most respondents (n=64, 27%) had worked in was education. The second largest group (n=30, 13%) had been involved in business and finance. The third largest group of respondents (n=22, 9%) had been in retail, hospitality and food service and a slightly smaller group (n=18, 8%) in journalism, writing and publishing. The rest of the respondents had a variety of former careers. Not surprisingly, none of the respondents was in the youngest age range (20 to 24). A little more surprising was the fact that the rest of the respondents spread evenly among the remaining age ranges (25 to 64) with the exception of 65 or older, which had the least. For the most part, former career did not lead to differences among choices for most important role for the public library. Interestingly enough, those who had worked in education did not, for the most part, select the role of library as educator as most important, perhaps because they saw that as the role of other institutions. Regardless of former career, presenting a variety of ideas was most popular, followed by last stand for democracy and then education, with community center far behind.(tau=.031, p=.255).

The type of position and level he or she occupies within the library organization could affect the ability of the librarian to change the role of the library. Those on the frontline in customer service might effect change in a different way and on a different scale than those in mostly managerial or administrative positions. Table 5.2 lists the range of types of positions found in most public libraries. About half the respondents (n=244, 53%) said that their positions are mostly frontline/customer service. Just less than one third (n=146, 32%) had

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administrative/managerial positions. Support/technical/bibliographic services (n=18, 4%) and both frontline/customer service and administrative/managerial n=19, 4%) were chosen by only a few respondents. The rest were between both frontline/customer service and support/technical/bibliographic services, some of aspect of all areas, outreach and programming. It is interesting to note that contrary to assumptions, 61 percent of those 44 or younger were in administrative or managerial positions, while 60 percent of those 45 and older were in frontline customer service positions. The majority of respondents on this item were White and held either administrative/managerial or customer service position. Of those who were non-white, the majority of them were working on the frontline providing customer service. Here again is the issue of diversity and representativeness in bureaucracy (and the public library). For true representativeness, it is important to hire a diverse staff, but also to have diversity in leadership, management and administration.

There is some anecdotal evidence that librarians on the front line think that those in administration are out of touch with what is really happening in the library. If this is the case -- that those in different roles or levels in the organization see the library differently -- one would expect that these groups would have different perceptions of the library's purpose. Interestingly enough, across all these types, more than 50 percent of respondents chose presents a variety of ideas as the most important or critical role for the public library, with the rest being split between last stand for democracy and education. There was then, no relation found between level of position and choice for most important library role (tau=.011, p=.449). A possible reason for this could be that the profession, its values, ethics, and education, cuts across all levels and positions in the organization's hierarchy so that in fundamental ways, the library director is like the librarian working the reference desk.

Table 5.2: Type of Position Held within the Library (N=459)

Type of Position	N	Percentage
Frontline/Customer Service	244	53%

Table 5.2 - continued

Administrative/Managerial	146	32%
Support/Technical/Bibliographic Service	18	4%
Both Frontline/Customer Service and Administrative/Managerial	19	4%

<u>5.3 Qualities and Characteristics of the Library and Library Role</u>

The next section examines respondents' selections of those qualities and characteristics of the public library that might relate to or demonstrate the chosen role. The discussion will move from physical design and concrete library services to more theoretical functions and ideals. These characteristics and qualities are connected and sometimes they overlap. A library that has chosen a specific role will demonstrate them in a certain way.

5.3.1 Physical Characteristics and Design of the Library

By indicating which physical and design characteristics respondents prefer for the ideal public library, librarians are indirectly indicating what they believe the function of the public library should be. In Table 5.3, respondents show they differed in their preferences for the design of the library. The most popular answer (n=205, 42%) was a public library that has open areas and meeting spaces that encourage socializing, talking, interacting, the sharing of experiences and information, and is a community center. This first design focuses on the community center/social gathering/meeting place aspect of the public library. For example, in addition to auditoriums and meeting rooms of various sizes, the new downtown Seattle Public Library has a giant "living room" to encourage people to stop, sit and interact with one another. This design is a direct representation of the role of the library as community center, and the large number of respondents who selected this design indicates that if community center had been a role choice, more might have chosen it then the few that wrote in the role. The library as quiet place, interesting in light of today's community and family oriented public libraries, was the second most popular choice (n=61, 12%). This second design focuses on the research center/quiet aspect of the public library and connects back to the literature that showed one role of the library public library as storehouse and collector of knowledge. This public library has quiet places, study

rooms that feel calm and allow people to come and accomplish what they need to do in peace. But it does seem to be ignoring users who want to come to the library for other, noisier reasons. An example of this would be the traditional library reading room with rows of tables and study carrels among shelves of books and reference materials. The public library that looks like a traditional or historical public library, with classical details such as columns and pediments, grand entry ways, open floor plans and lots of natural light was the choice of only 10 percent of respondents (n=48). This third design focuses on the grandeur of a Carnegie-like neoclassical library that held stores of knowledge for access by the common person. Again, it seems this design is indicating a certain role and certain type of user. Unfortunately, as demonstrated in the library usage surveys throughout time, the common person was not the one using these libraries. Carnegie library buildings are still in use today, but when designed were of course very book focused. Think of the lions guarding the columned entrance of the New York Public Library on 5th Avenue for an example of this style. The least popular choice (n=43, 9%) featured design focused on making the library popular by giving people what they want, like the Baltimore model, by borrowing a model from the private sector. This public library might look like a bookstore, with comfortable chairs, and a café or coffee shop. There have been library conference presentations and workshops on what the public library can learn from the bookstore, as well as a book by Jeanette Woodward entitled Creating the Customer-driven Library: Building on the Bookstore Model. It would be interesting to know if respondents did not believe it was important for the library to be popular, or that the library was different from a bookstore and should not try to compete with one. Quite a few respondents selected "other" (n=138, 28%), and those who specified an answer wanted to have some combination of all of the above choices. Most libraries have some elements from these different ideas about library design, but the point in framing the question this way was to compel respondents to indentify which they considered the best or ideal design. However, knowing what librarians view as the critical physical and design features of a public library do not help explain what they believe to be the library's more important role.

Table 5.3: Physical Design of Library (N=493)

Physical Design	N	Percentage
Community Center	205	42%
Quiet Place for Study	61	12%
Traditional Library	48	10%
Bookstore	43	9%
Other	136	28%

5.3.2 Services Offered

Respondents selected the three most important services that an ideal public library might offer. As Table 5.4 shows, the most important library services chosen were providing a collection of books and materials (n=333, 67%) and offering computers and internet access (n=303, 61%). Interesting to note that the first one is a traditional library service and the other is a newer service. These were followed closely by customer service from library staff (n=251, 51%) and providing services and resources for different ages (n=235, 47%). Traditional reference assistance and readers' advisory (matching readers with books) were seen as less important (n=161, 33%, n=102, 21%, respectively). And even with an emphasis on multiculturalism in recent times in library services, collections and resources; services and resources for different cultures (n=56) was rarely chosen as an important service, coming in just above referrals to social agencies (n=18, 4%), another more traditional library service.

Table 5.4: Three Most Important Library Services (N=489)

Service	N	Percentage
Collection of Materials	333	68%
Computers and Internet access	305	62%
Customer service	251	51%
Services and resources for different ages	235	48%
Reference assistance	161	33%

Table 5.4 - continued

Reader's advisory	102	21%
Services and resources for different cultures	56	11%
Referrals to social service agencies	18	4%

This next section looks at qualities and characteristics of the library that are less easily observable: functions and ideals. One way to think about this is that the previous mentioned services and physical design of the library are indicators or manifestations of certain functions or ideals. Providing reference services can be a part of the function of information because it entails giving specific information to patrons. Where it gets tricky is that many of the services could fit more than one function. Providing a collection of books and materials could be part of the functions of access, books and reading, information, education or entertainment but with the choice of each function, the collection of materials would differ.

5.3.3 Library Function

Respondents identified what they saw as the most important library purpose or function. These functions are more general in nature than the aforementioned services and physical characteristics, but a library choosing one of these functions might also choose some of those services and physical characteristics. As Table 5.5 clearly shows, information was the overwhelming choice (n=339, 69%) as the most important function for the public library, followed by education (n=50, 10%). Entertainment (n=20) and programming (n=18) trailed behind, chosen by only 4 percent of respondents. The remainder of the choices, all functions or purposes of most present-day public libraries: meeting community needs (n=10), providing access (n=7) and books and reading (n=4), were not chosen by many as most important (1-3% of respondents.) There was a group who marked other (n=42, 9%) and when asked to be specific, wrote in that they thought the library should do some combination of all of the above choices, and most of those said that the library should do most or all of the choices. It is interesting to note that the number one most popular choice for this question was by far the most popular, and that this function

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could be present under all the role possibilities. No matter how the library has changed and continues to change; the surveyed librarians still felt information dissemination is the most important function of the library. Neither age nor race was factors in the choice of library function. There was also no relation between choice of library function and the respondent's political ideology. Regardless of which function respondents chose as important, they overwhelming selected presents a variety of ideas as the most important or critical role for the public library (tau=.037, p=>.001).

Table 5.5: 21st Century Library Functions (N=493)

Function	N	Percentage
Information	339	69%
Education	50	10%
Entertainment	20	4%
Programming	18	4%
Other	42	9%

5.3.4 Library Ideal

An ideal is a principle or value actively pursued as a goal. In this sense then, there would be different sets of services and functions that would indicate the ideal of the library, the sum of these are greater than the parts. The chosen ideal becomes an attitude and a way of thinking about everything else that the library does. As seen in Table 5.6, respondents chose two ideals more often than all the rest: equal access (n=311, 43%) and community centered (n=154, 32%). After that was compassionate, helping, serving (n=53, 11%). A few respondents (n=27, 6%) chose objectivity or not taking sides. Diversity (n=16), justness and fairness (n=10) and equity (n=9) were chosen the least often (2 to 3% each). It is interesting to note that the ideals of access and community-centered appear as popular responses for many other questions, including most

important function and important or critical role for the public library, and were also noted in the library literature as part of the role of the library at various points in time.

Here are some examples of how services and functions work together towards an ideal. Providing information in different languages, hiring staff that is multilingual, and offering opportunities for education is part of promoting equal access. On the same hand, providing reference assistance is a service, and is a part of the information function of the library. However, calling shelters for a family in distress ten minutes after the library closed is more than reference or referring to social agencies or even just good customer service: the serving ideal is driving the interaction with the patron. In the same way, providing information on different sides of an issue and allowing for the expression of the minority viewpoint are part of more than just information, but also objectivity and not taking sides. Therefore, it is not just that a library provides a certain service or fulfills a specific function, but the how and why that give some indication as to the ideal that it has chosen, and its role or purpose as well. No matter which ideal respondents chose as important, they overwhelming selected presents a variety of ideas as the most important or critical role for the public library (tau=.030, p=>.001).

Table 5.6: Most Important Library Ideal (N=487)

Ideal	N	Percentage
Equal Access	211	43%
Community-centered	154	32%
Compassionate, helping, serving	53	11%
Objectivity	27	6%

All of these characteristics and traits together form a picture of what respondents believe the ideal public library should be. From a design perspective, it should be a place with open areas and meeting spaces that encourage socializing, talking, interacting, sharing experiences and information. It should be a community center. The three most important services this library

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should offer are a collection of books and materials, computers and internet access, and customer service from library staff. The most important function or principal purpose that it should provide is information, and the ideals or values it should uphold are equal access and community centeredness. No matter how respondents answered these items, they all believed that the primary role of the library is to present a variety of ideas and opinions. Knowing what the library should be, respondents identified what was keeping them from achieving that ideal.

<u>5.4 Biggest Obstacle to Achieving the Ideal Library</u>

This next section examines what respondents see as the biggest obstacle in the way of achieving the ideal public library. An open-ended question allowed for a variety of responses that the researcher recoded into groups. Some respondents listed tangible assets like money or staff, and others listed intangibles, like fear and perceptions.

As Table 5.7 shows, the obstacle listed more often was money and budgetary constraints (n=248, 54%). Many respondents just wrote money, budget or funding. A few even wrote "$$$." Some were more specific, saying that the money pay for staffing or buy more resources for the library. A few indicated that money was a physical form or indication of support from the government/administrative body and community. "Financial support is directly linked to community support of the library. If the community has an awareness of the services and potential that the public library has, the community will be much more willing to provide support." The next most popular choice was tradition and fear of or resistance to change (n=49, 11%). In many cases, the respondents specifically mentioned library staffs that were inflexible, resistant, unwilling and even afraid to change. One respondent felt that librarians were afraid of becoming obsolete, and "We're more interested in making ourselves necessary than useful." It is necessary in many librarians' minds, that the library keep providing many of the same resources and services it always has provided, but in many cases, this may no longer be serving a purpose. A few mentioned an unchanging administration or governing body. As one librarian put it, "I think that in order for a library to achieve the ideal, you must have forward thinking library directors,

willing to plead with their boards of trustees to create and implement a vision. I think this rarely happens."

Perception of the library was mentioned quite few times (n=30, 7%). This was not just perception of the library patrons of the library, but perceptions of the public, of the library staff and library administration and the larger administrative body that oversees the library. Speaking of the public, one respondent said, "Many people don't want to understand why a library is important to others, especially if they are not regular library users themselves." Staff (n=16, 4%), as in "the right staff," "passionate staff," or providing support and training for staff were mentioned a few times as well. Not having a single strong vision or mission was the choice of a handful of respondents (n=11, 2%). As one respondent put it, "The difficulty in deciding what the "ideal public library" means to everyone involved in the planning." About half of the respondents coded as "other" named more than one obstacle, many of those listed above. Some other obstacles mentioned included time, public apathy, library leadership and administration. Examining the tau statistic shows that the biggest obstacle to achieving the ideal library does not improve the prediction of the dependent variable, the most important or critical role for the public library (tau=.009, p=.461).

Table 5.7: Biggest Obstacle (N=436)

Obstacle	N	Percentage
Money	248	54%
Tradition/Fear/Resist Change	49	11%
Perception of library	30	7%
Staff	16	4%
Other	108	23%

In this chapter the research question has been further analyzed in discussing the most important or critical role for the public library. Respondents considered other facets of the public library including services, functions, ideals and obstacles. The findings illuminate librarians' views:

the most important role for the public library is to present a variety of ideas and opinions. The ideal public library would have open places with meeting spaces and areas to encourage interacting and socializing. The three most important services that the public library could provide are books and materials, computers and internet access, and customer service from library staff. The most important function handled by the public library is information, and the central ideal upheld by the public library is equal access. The biggest obstacle librarians identified as keeping the library from fulfilling the selected role was money, or lack thereof. The next chapter will look at the public librarian, both in ideal terms as to which traits and skills the 21st century librarian should possess, and in real terms as which traits, skills, preferences and personal characteristics the respondents to this survey possessed.

CHAPTER 6

THE LIBRARIAN AND THE LIBRARY ROLE

6.1 Introduction

Having discussed the ideal public library, this chapter will consider the public librarian. Understanding the librarian is an important part of understanding the public library as a whole. Public librarians at all levels run most public libraries. These librarians are professionals, with a clearly defined career field, higher education or special degrees, and associations as enumerated by Frederick Mosher (1982, 100-126). They are also bureaucrats who share some of the characteristics of street level bureaucrats as described by Michael Lipsky (1980). The Public Library Association's library planning documents include the librarian in the planning process. Therefore, the public librarian could have a lot of influence on the public library and its role or purpose.

6.2 The Ideal Public Librarian

Presumably, those who currently work in the public library would know best which skills and traits are essential for the ideal public librarian. For this item, respondents identified the three traits they felt were the most important for a 21st century public librarian to possess. These traits and skills connect to the services, functions, ideals and roles mentioned when attempting to describe the ideal library. It will be interesting to see if the traits and skills match the chosen services, functions, ideals and roles. If these sets of characteristics are the most important, are librarians aware of what staff needs to carry them out?

Some of the skills and traits relate to working with and serving people, connecting to the customer service function and the helping/serving ideal. Some relate to the librarian who is able to or even embraces change, which was mentioned a possible obstacle to bringing about the ideal library. Some relate to finding information, answers, being an expert, and having outside

interests that connect to the service of reference assistance and the function of information. As pointed out in the focus groups, librarians also need certain traits in order to be successful in bringing about change and getting their ideas heard. Table 6.1 shows that the most frequent choice was that a librarian should be flexible and able to adapt quickly and easily to change (n=275, 58%). Nearly as many chose that librarians should be committed and connected to those they serve, passionate about providing library services the community wants and needs, think outside themselves and be selfless (n=253, 53%). The next most popular choice was that the ideal librarian presents fresh ideas for libraries and library services, and is willing to take risks and fail while being forward looking (n=227, 48%). The traditional idea of the librarian who knows the most efficient way to find information, using both traditional methods and sources and technology and never says "I don't know" was next most popular choice (n=221, 46%). When given as answer choices for most important library service and ideal, diversity was not a frequent choice. However, it is important that a public librarian relates to and has a tolerance for all kinds of people, regardless of gender, race, age, culture, ethnicity, or sexual preference (n=199, 42%). The idea of the librarian as compassionate, empathetic and serving others, wanting to work with and help people was chosen by quite a few (n=140, 30%). Seen as less important, chosen by fewer respondents, was that a librarian has interests and expertise outside of the library, books, and reading (n=59, 12%).

Examining the tau statistic shows that what personal traits librarians believe are essential for 21st century librarians does not help with understanding their views on the most important or critical role for the public library. In other words, librarians did not seem to link their views about the ideal library with their views about the ideal librarian. It is interesting to note that with the exception of "finding information," these are personality or character traits and not taught in school, although perhaps experience helps improve them. For this reason, modifying or changing the hiring and interview process may be necessary to ensure that those being hired fit the library and its framework and role. It will be interesting to compare these ideal traits with the respondents' reasons for joining the library profession detailed below.

As shown in Figure 6.1 below, according to respondents, the ideal librarian is one who is flexible and adapts well to change. This person connects to those he or she serves, and brings fresh ideas for libraries and library services. He or she should like books and research. A librarian should be willing to try new things, and work actively to change perceptions about the library. They should assess their community and work on building awareness of the library and its services through marketing. This librarian hears and listens, and is involved in bringing about change and determining the role of the library.
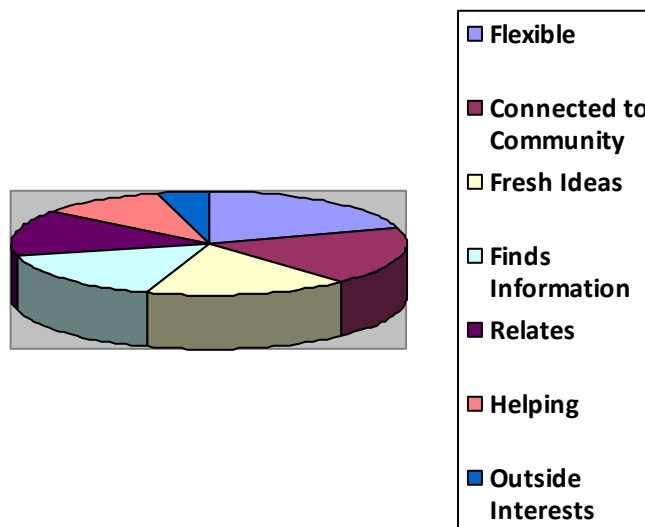
Figure 6.1 Essential Traits or Skills for Public Librarians

Table 6.1: Essential Traits or Skills for Public Librarians (N=479)

Trait	N	Percentage
Is flexible, adapts to change	275	58%
Is connected to those they serve	253	53%
Has fresh ideas for libraries	227	48%
Is efficient at finding information	221	46%
Relates to all people	199	42%
Likes helping people, empathetic	140	30%
Has interests outside the library	59	12%

<u>6.3 Working Public Librarians and the Role of the Library</u>

6.3.1 Reason for Choosing Profession

Respondents thought back to why they decided to become public librarians. This variable is measuring whether why someone became a public librarian makes a difference to how they perceive the public library. It is possible that someone who chose to become a librarian for reasons related to traditional library roles and services would choose a different role for the library than someone who chose the library for its newer roles or for practical reasons.

This question allowed respondents to select multiple answers. The percentages listed below in Table 6.2 are the percentage of the total respondents who selected each answer. There was also a choice of "other," which respondents were then asked to describe. Some of these choices reflect reasons related to the traditional role of the library, while others reflect new roles the library has taken on more recently, and some relate to practicality of the degree or career than to the purpose or mission of the public library.

The most popular reason for choosing the profession (n=336, 74%) was that they liked books and reading. Respondents also selected this traditional library service as one of the most important aspects of the 21st century library. That they liked doing research was chosen the second most frequently (n=277, 60%). This choice relates to another service earlier identified as important: reference assistance. Closely following was the choice of wanting to help and serve others (n=275, 59%). This connects with the respondents' choices of the service of providing customer service and to the ideal of helping and serving.

Many respondents had worked in public libraries before (n=221, 48%) or had experience in other libraries and decided they liked the public library the best (n=155, 34%). A large group liked technology (n=146, 32%) and earlier many respondents had chosen computers and internet access as the most important service the library could provide. Quite a few respondents became librarians because someone else suggested to them (136, 29%). This might indicate a lack of awareness of and about the library profession. About one third became librarians because they

liked organizing information (n=123, 27%). Just like several of the other choices, this links back to the library function of information.

Many felt that librarianship was more interesting than other careers (n=83, 20%), and some had volunteered for the public library (n=71, 15%). A few became librarians because they wanted to run something and be in charge (n=39, 8%). Another small group found the public library had job opportunities and openings when and where they needed them (n=21, 5%). A handful had been lifelong library users (n=11, 2%) or wanted to work with children (n=11, 2%).

Table 6.2: Reasons why Respondents Choose a Public Library Career (N=460)

Reason	N	Percentage
Like books	336	74%
Like research	277	60%
Serve others	275	59%
Worked in public library before	221	48%
Like public libraries the best	155	34%
Like technology	146	32%
Someone suggested it	136	29%
Like organizing information	123	27%
More interesting than other careers	83	20%
Volunteered for public library	71	15%
Wanted to run something	39	8%
Public library had an opening	21	5%

Examining the tau statistic shows that there is a very slight relationship between why a respondent became a librarian and his or her choice for the most important purpose for the public library. Those respondents who became librarians because they had a librarian family member or mentor (n=15, 3%) were almost equally dispersed between their choice for the most important or critical role for the library (tau=.012, p=>.001). Five respondents selected each the library as the

last stand for democracy and the library as an educator, while four respondents who chose the library because of family ties selected the library as a place that presents a variety of ideas. The library as a community center was the choice of one respondent from this group. Among these respondents, there were a few respondents in each age range from 25 to 65 or older, and all were White and liberal to some degree.

The three respondents (n=3, .1%), who became librarians to be involved in education, not surprisingly, selected "educator of the people" for the public library's most important or critical role (tau=.014, p=>.001). They ranged in age from 25 to 34 and 50 to 54, and were White. There was no relation between becoming a librarian to be involved in education and political ideology. Their educational background, somewhat surprisingly, was in liberal arts and business. Both these reasons for joining the profession appear significant, but apply only to a very small percentage of respondents.

6.3.2 Involvement and Identification with the Library Profession

Because public librarians are a part of the library profession and the library field, it is possible that their choice for most important library role relates to those characteristics of a profession noted by Frederick Mosher: clearly defined career field, higher education or special degrees, and associations (1982, 100-126). Respondents answered a series of questions to determine how connected and involved with the library profession they were and whether there was any relation between their connection to the profession and their choice for library role.

Professional or library focused listservs were the main way in which the survey was distributed and of the 459 respondents who answered this question, only a small minority (2 percent) did not subscribe to library listservs. That only 11 respondents were not on listservs could mean that the attempt to snowball sample was not as successful as the researcher would have hoped. However, it could also indicate how widespread listservs are in the library profession. Examining the tau statistic shows that there was no relation between subscription to library listservs and the choice of most important or critical role for the public library. This is could be because almost everyone chose the same response so there was little variability.

Many local workshops, training and seminars of interest to librarians are free of charge, and librarians are encouraged and allowed to attend on work time. Some library systems also pay for attendance at state, regional, and national conferences, which are also count as work time. These are ways for librarians to learn about new trends, programs, and services in the library field, meet and network with other professionals, and hone their skills. Most of the 460 respondents reported that they had attended a library conference, workshop, training or seminar in the last 12 months. Only small number (n=23, 5%) said that they had not. There was no relation between attendance at library conferences, workshops, seminars and training and the choice for most important or critical role for the public library. This is probably the case because again almost everyone chose the same response, so it does not help to differentiate his or her choice of the dependent variable.

There are many reasons for belonging to a professional association. One person who belongs to an association may believe it is an important part of being a part of the profession. Others see it as necessary for networking and getting their next job. Still others may use membership in an association for keeping up with what is going on in the library field. Most library associations support certain values and viewpoints about libraries and the library profession. Newsletters, magazines, web sites and conferences help communicate values and tenets of the profession. Not everyone who belongs to an association necessarily agrees with the values of the association, but many of them no doubt do. There is a good chance, as one respondent pointed out, that those librarians who choose not to belong to an association are still getting the information through other channels, whether at work or online or from other librarians who are members. Of the 460 respondents who answered this question, the vast majority of them (n=409, 89%) belong to professional associations for libraries or librarians. Examining the tau statistic shows that adding membership in professional associations does not improve the prediction of the dependent variable, the most important or critical role for the public library. These last few questions described above may be depicting a bias in the sample as it may be possible that those librarians that were more connected and invested in the public library and the library profession

were more likely to respond to and complete this survey since the numbers are overwhelmingly on their side. In other words, is the population of public librarians as a whole this connected to the profession or are the librarians in this sample more so because they are more interested in the subject matter and took time to answer the survey.

Respondents who did not belong to a professional association answered why they did not belong. Of the 51 respondents who answered this question, the majority (n=30, 59%) thought that it costs too much. They ranged in ages from 25 to 54 and all were White. There was no relation between not joining because of cost and political ideology. Of this group, about half chose "presents a variety of ideas" as the most important role for the public library, while the rest chose almost equally last stand for democracy and education. The next largest group (n=15, 29%) do not see the benefits of belonging, and the majority of those chose presents a variety of ideas as the most important role as well. A handful (n=3, 6%) of respondents do not share the beliefs of the association. Another small group (n=3, 6%) had not gotten around to joining or had not gotten around to renewing their membership. Several individual respondents listed other various reasons for not joining the associations. For the most part, these groups of respondents selected presenting a variety of ideas as the most important role for the library and only differed from the respondents who were members of professional organizations in that they were more evenly split between the democracy and education as the second role choice (tau=.072, p=.003).

<u>6.4 Creating Change in the Library</u>

An overwhelming number of respondents (n=455, 97%) believed that it is possible for a librarian to change the vision or role of the public library. While not quite as overwhelming, a clear majority of respondents (n=307, 68%) believed that they have changed the library's vision or role. Examining the tau statistic shows there is no relation between these variables and the choice of the most important or critical role for the public library.

Those respondents who indicated that yes, they had changed the library's vision or role, were then asked to specify how they had brought about change. The researcher coded the original opened-ended answers into like groups. For this question, respondents could list as many

ways of bringing about change, as they liked. As Table 6.3 shows, there was no one way that librarians had created change.

Many librarians listed "creating a library that serves the community's needs" (n=131, 45%) and "changing and trying new resources, services, policies, and programs" (n=125, 43%). As one respondent put it, "We used to say "no" to new opportunities. Now we say "yes" as often as possible." Another said that he or she had created change "by making sure that our library became a real center of the community, meeting patrons' requests in collection development and services - we're a very patron-based library." Next was working to change perceptions of the library and librarians (n=85, 30%) followed by outreach or taking services outside the building (n=32, 11%). One librarian, only out of school a few years, said, "On a daily basis I make my patrons say, 'wow I never knew you/the library had/could do this/helped with this etc.' This is changing the vision and role of the library on a micro scale." Another added, "As an outreach librarian, I bring the library outside of the walls to the people where they are." Moreover, not just traditional outreach groups such as the homebound or seniors, but anyone who for whatever reason cannot or will not come to the physical library. A handful of respondents had brought about change by being actively involved in the community (n= 23, 8%), while another small group facilitated change by being actively involved in their job and profession (n=20, 7%). Change comes about "by doing," one respondent said. "Getting involved in the community, establishing non-typical partnerships with neighborhood organizations, businesses, etc. and proving that these partnerships are beneficial." Alternatively, as another stated, "By actively participating and taking on leadership roles in professional organizations such as REFORMA and ALSC as well as in my own job." A small group became part of the planning process for their libraries (n=19, 7%). The rest of the choices were specified by a handful (3% to 6%) of respondents: became more customer friendly or customer oriented (n=18), spoke up to make sure that their thoughts and ideas were heard (n=18), worked with other agencies to provide better service to the community (n=15), provided staff training and support (n=13), created and communicated mission/vision, (n=9).

It is interesting to note the relation between the responses to the biggest obstacle to achieving the ideal public library and how the respondents brought about change in their own libraries. In many cases, how respondents brought about change was a direct response to one of the identified obstacles. An obstacle was the perception of the library and librarians by patrons, the community, and library staff. Deliberately working to change those perceptions was one method for change. Examining the tau statistic shows that the ways in which librarians have changed the vision or role of the public library does not improve the prediction of the dependent variable, the most important or critical role for the public library.

Table 6.3: How Did You Change the Library (N=288)

Action	N	Percentage
Changed and tried new things	131	45%
Worked to make library community centered	125	43%
Changed perceptions about library	85	30%
Outreach	32	11%
Got involved in community	23	8%
Actively participated in job and profession	20	7%
Planning	19	7%
Focused on customer and service	18	6%
Spoke up, made sure they were heard and listened to	18	6%
Worked with other community agencies to better serve community	15	5%
Provided support and training to staff	13	5%
Created and or communicated library vision	9	3%

6.5 If No One Comes to the Library

This item asked respondents to consider what they would do if they felt had taken all the proper actions and yet no one was coming to or using the library. The researcher later coded the open-ended responses to this item. Table 6.4 summarizes their responses. Assessing your

community (n=160, 25%) and marketing (n=146, 23%) were the most often mentioned measures respondents would take. As some respondents wrote, "ask the public what they want," and then, "try a new technique or marketing campaign to encourage library use." People were not coming to the library because the library does not have what the community wants or needs, or it was available, but no one was aware that it was. Related to these was a broader response: to keep trying and reexamine your beliefs (n=96, 15%). Either librarians are not doing everything right, or there are some other factors involved. "Re-evaluate what I have done. There is no "right" way that will work in all instances. There are, instead, a spectrum of possible solutions that must be explored when solving problems." Outreach or taking library services outside the building (n=74, 12%) is also a form of publicity as well as a way to remove barriers to access. One respondent strongly declared, "Go to them. Find where they are and serve them there." Another answer mentioned often (n=53, 8%) was that the library had not kept up with the times and because it does not meet people's expectations, they seek to have their needs met elsewhere. Several people mentioned looking at best practices of other libraries (n=27, 4%) and even businesses (n=4, 1%) to see if there was anything to be learned from them. Collaborating with community groups and agencies was mentioned by a few (n=25, 4%). A very few (n=14, 3%) were confident that would never happen, while another few (n=14, 3%) were pessimistic, saying that they would close the library and look for another job. Examining the tau statistic for the actions respondents would take if no one comes to the library does not improve the prediction of the dependent variable, most important role or purpose of the public library.

Table 6.4 If No One Comes to the Library (N=413)

Action	N	Percentage
Community Assessment	160	25%
Marketing	146	23%
Reexamination/Keep Trying	96	15%
Outreach	74	12%

Table 6.4 - continued

Library Improvements to Meet Customer Expectations	53	8%
Collaboration with Community Groups	27	4%
Successful Libraries	25	4%
That Would Never Happen	14	2%
Quit/Close the Library	14	2%

6.6 Recurring Themes Across Survey Items

Looking at the survey as a whole, it becomes obvious that there were themes or motifs that flowed throughout the items. These responses reappeared in different forms for different questions. In some cases, the respondents themselves wrote them in.

A multiple layer crosstab considers the influence of a "third variable." That is, the statistics program creates a separate "subtable" for each category of a third variable. Separate subtables showing the relationship between the "main variables" for each category of the control variable controls for the third variable. Here being more specific or having more information should reduce errors in predicting the dependent variable of library role. Therefore, a respondent who only had one of the responses in the group would not be a strongly connected to the same idea as someone who had three or four.

In the survey there were four items or responses that related in some way to change. An essential librarian trait was to be flexible and adapt to change. An essential librarian trait was to have new ideas for the library. One way to change the library vision or role was by changing and trying new things. Changing and trying new things was a response if no one comes to the library. Here, again, examining the tau statistic shows there is a relationship to public library purpose. Respondents who answered only one of the change items, flexible and adapts easily to change (n=48) overwhelming chose "presents a variety of ideas" as most important or critical library role (tau=.047, p=.074). More than half of the respondents (n=39) who answered two of the change items (changed the vision of the library by trying new things and flexible and adapts easily to

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change) also chose presents a variety of ideas as most important or critical library role (tau=.079, p=.281). Respondents (n=15) who answered three change items (keep trying and change when no one comes to the library, presents fresh ideas for the library and answered is flexible and easily adapts to change) were a little more spread out in their choices for library role: less half (n=7, 47%) chose presents a variety of ideas, while a third (n=5, 33%) chose last stand for democracy and one chose center of the community (tau=.064, p=.222). More than half of respondents that chose all four change variables (n=8, 67%) chose presents a variety of ideas as most important or critical role for the public library. A few each chose last stand for democracy (n=2, 17%) and educator of the people (n=2, 17%. There was no relation age, race, or political ideology and this series of four change responses. Examining the tau statistic shows there is a relationship between all four change variables and the choice for most important role for the library (tau=.124, p=.060).

There were four items or responses that related in some way to compassion, helping and serving: became a librarian to help and serve others; one of the most important library services is customer service; an essential librarian trait is helping others, and a library ideal is to help and serve. Here, examining the tau statistic does show there is some relation between these compassion characteristics and choice for public library purpose. Looking at only respondents who selected the ideal of compassion and those who answered why they became a librarian (N=11), about half chose presents a variety of ideas as most important or critical role for the public library. The rest split between last stand for democracy and educator of the people. These respondents ranged in age from 25 to 54 and were White except for two who were Asian. More than half consider themselves to be somewhat liberal (tau=.47, p=.301).

Seven respondents chose all four of the compassion related characteristics. Of these, a little more than half (n=4) chose "presents a variety of ideas" as most important or critical role for the library. The others divided between last stand for democracy and educator of the people. These seven librarians ranged in age from 25 to 54 and all were White except one who was Mixed Race. Four were liberal to some degree and three were conservative to some degree

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(tau=.035, p=.060). It is interesting that these respondents did not all chose one of the roles that has explicit the library as serving the public, either through education or insuring democracy or even as community center.

In the last two chapters, librarians described many aspects of public libraries and librarians. Hopefully what is emerging is a clearer picture of the public library, the librarians who work there and the role for the library. The next chapter will consider all of these aspects and draw conclusions from them, as well as consider future studies.

CHAPTER 7

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED AND WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

7.1 Introduction and Summary

The survey examined the public library, the librarian and the role of the library from several angles. A look through the literature revealed a historical picture of the American public library. The founders of the Boston Public Library, the first true public library in the United States that opened in 1854, hoped to socialize Americans on the ways of democracy and to provide education for the general public. Not too much later, the public accepted the idea of the library providing popular or recreational materials as well. The public library played different roles in different places and times depending on the greater situation and circumstances of the country at large. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, public libraries served an increasing immigrant population facilitating of English-language acquisition and American citizenship. During both World War I and World War II, libraries provided books for troops and the homefront while serving to disseminate government information. During the Depression of the 1930s, public libraries managed to keep their doors open, and communities across the country founded new public libraries. In the 1970s, public librarians felt called to help bring about social change, and in the 1990s, public libraries began working to bridge the digital divide.

The role of librarian followed the purpose of the library. The expansion and spread of public libraries across the United States required more staff to run them. The library profession grew out of a conference of library staff held in 1853, and formation of the American Library Association followed in 1876. There was no formal library education at first, many librarians started as library clerks and worked their way up to the position of librarian and in doing so, established the foundations of the profession. Then and now, librarians struggle for legitimacy, as they handle many visible routine clerical tasks suggesting to the public that the profession does

not also require special knowledge and skills. Alternately, the public believes that librarians sit around and read books all day or that everyone who works in the library is a librarian, regardless of their job responsibilities or education. In the 1920s, some universities established formal professional library education as graduate programs.

According to current library literature, the why is less important than the what and the how of library services. Instead of role or mission, the literature emphasized and discussed objectives, goals, services and values. A few articles mentioned purpose, but only as a rallying point for ensuring continued support of the library. Only two articles clearly discussed the role of the library as promoting and taking a stand for democracy. Since there was no real sustained discussion of the most important or critical role for the public library, the point of this research was to help at least to start to fill in the gap. As a group, public librarians take many actions because patrons or the community expect it of the library or that is what they have always done and not necessarily because it is what is best for the patrons or the community. Librarians write missions based on mission statements from other libraries and the long lists of possible programs, services and materials they could offer.

Librarians give surveys and take surveys all the time, but no survey addressed this particular topic of the public library and its role. Feedback from focus groups and interviews with working librarians helped form the survey instrument which was then distributed to a national sample of public librarians; the previous chapters enumerate these survey results.

The public librarians who completed this survey were in general agreement on what the ideal purpose or role of the public library. The majority of the surveyed librarians believed that the role of the public library is to present a variety of ideas and opinions. Other librarians believed instead that the public library should be the last stand for democracy. A handful – fewer than expected – saw the public library primarily serving as an educator for the people. The public library as a center of the community was a distant fourth, although respondents wrote this role in themselves. Yet, this survey is interesting and exciting because librarians discussed the library and their profession. The professional literature included no such discussion. Several survey

respondents emailed the researcher to let her know they appreciated participating and they felt as though the topic of the purpose of the public library was an important one not currently addressed elsewhere. One respondent planned to use the survey questions as a basis for discussion with his or her library school students, while others sent the survey link to their librarian colleagues. Patterns and pictures have emerged of how public librarians perceive the public library and the library profession.

The role of the public library as presenting a variety of ideas and viewpoints might resonate more than others because it is connected with the professional values and ideals that librarians strive to uphold. They see this statement as a variation on intellectual freedom and it is the responsibility of the profession. Part of intellectual freedom is to represent all viewpoints. Part of intellectual freedom entails serving all members of the community equally, or providing equal access. Equal access was the ideal chosen as most important. Interestingly enough, the second most important ideal, being community centered, can often be at odds with intellectual freedom and equal access. Some communities, or at least, some members of some communities, may not want certain viewpoints or opinions represented in their library collections. Librarians have started working to alleviate these tensions by creating change and removing obstacles: proactively collaborating with and serving their communities while working to change perceptions about the library and their profession. To the extent they are successful, these librarians know their community and better able to provide materials and resources that match. At the same time having opened a channel for dialogue about what the library provides and why it is important that dissenting and minority opinions and ideas be represented.

7.2 Moving Forward While Holding on to Tradition

For the most part, respondents selected as most important library services, functions and ideals that are traditional services, functions and ideals for the library while recognizing the importance of technology, internet access and computers to carrying out the library's purpose in today's world. Selected as most important was information, a collection of books and other materials, computers and internet access and equal access for all. Again, this echoes the role

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selected, as all of these choices add up to the ability for the library to present a variety of ideas, opinions and viewpoints, to uphold the public's intellectual freedom and right to know. Beyond preserving their jobs, librarians took this role one step further, noting that customer service from trained library staff was crucial for insuring the public was connected to what they needed when they needed it.

While quite a few respondents felt that the library could fix some of its problems by learning from the private sector and businesses, especially those like bookstores that have some of the same services or attract some of the same patrons, for the most part, the library was seen as uniquely public. Even though it has been a hot topic in the professional literature over the past few years, a library that is like a bookstore was chosen less frequently then a library that is a community center or quiet place or even a traditional and neoclassical library. Therefore, the respondents to this survey, at least, have not fully accepted this model for providing library services. In a sense, operating a library like a bookstore would be like serving a very limited group of users, and as librarians did after the Public Library Inquiry in the 1950s, librarians today reject that idea for one of serving the whole public. A bookstore does not teach GED classes, provide computer training, assist with job searches, register people to vote, help students with their homework, showcase ethnic groups in the community or offer free tax help because these types of activities do not sell books. People who come to the public library for these activities and more may never check out a book or drink coffee in the library café, but the library has definitely served them. Is this always the most efficient use of resources? From a dollars and cents perspective, maybe not, but from the perspective of the individual receiving the service, maybe it is.

The essential traits or characteristics for the ideal 21st century librarian also mix tradition with innovation. The ideal librarian must be flexible and able to adapt quickly and easily to change, commit and connect to those he or she serves, and present fresh ideas for library service while being willing to fail and find answers and information effectively and efficiently. Technology is the focus of a great deal of this adapting and changing. As technology has changed, so have

libraries and library services. There is a running joke among librarians that three major changes in technology are about all one librarian can take and then it is time to retire. The other big change to which librarians must adapt is to those whom they serve. As was pointed out in several of the interviews, the community that the library serves is changing, becoming more diverse and harder to categorize. As soon as the library can measure or ascertain what the community wants in a library, it changes. Another idea raised in both the interviews and the focus groups was that librarians needed to adjust or at least be aware of those groups in their communities that are not served or underserved. It becomes easy to pay attention to those who are in the library, who provide feedback, who complain. It is harder to hear those who are not there.

7.3 Listening to Librarians

Obstacles to achieving the ideal library, how librarians had changed the role of the library and what librarians would do if no one were coming to the library asked for open-ended responses. Respondents listed the biggest obstacle as budget, or lack of budget, although one interviewee stated that those who give this as their answer are lacking in creative thinking as to how to provide library services in other ways. A distant second was clinging to tradition or fear of change also mentioned by one of the interviewees. Staff was third and received mentioned in both focus groups and by several interviewees. There was a great deal of overlap in the ways in which librarians had changed the library's role and the ways they would respond if no one were coming to the library. In both cases, librarians have changed or would change and try new things, assess the community and make the library what the community wants or needs, outreach into the community to take the library outside its physical walls, be actively involved in the community and collaborate with community groups. As first discussed in the focus groups and later raised in the survey, the public library is becoming both a physical place for people to be as well as a virtual place reaching far beyond four walls. Perhaps this "third place" for people to come together is not a place at all, or it is a movable place at least. Librarians may need to be ready to work on changing perceptions again, to be able to explain why they are better used at town hall meetings and school open houses and community festivals then sitting behind a desk. Librarians need to

use this collaboration and community activity as support for trying new programs and services, and administration and others will also need to understand that there are many ways to achieve the library purpose or goal, but understanding what the public really wants and then working with the public to provide it makes the library truly not just public, but a member of the community.

<u>7.4 How do Librarians Compare to the General Public?</u>

How well do the perceptions of librarians match the perceptions of the public? A series of surveys of the public about public libraries that were conducted in 2005 and 2006, "Perceptions of Library and Information Resources" (OCLC 2005) and "Long Overdue: A Fresh Look at Public and Leadership Attitudes about Libraries in the 21st Century" (Public Agenda 2006) prompted the exploration of this topic in the first place. The public has given their opinion, but nothing from the working librarian who studied, worked, and became a part of the library profession and their opinions. The OCLC survey included an international sample of information users ranging from 14 to 65 or older (N=1854). The results were broken down to isolate the responses of those living in the United States. The Public Agenda survey was a little bit different, combining a national public opinion survey of adults aged 18 and older (N=1203) that also sought opinions of "civic influentials," those in the community who were civically engaged (n=458) with series of seven focus groups in several United States cities of library users, nonusers, and the general public. Leaders in those same cities gave their thoughts about the library. Many editors, librarians and library administration focused on the summary of results and the findings from these two surveys and reports, but this comparison is a deeper one.

Librarian respondents identified the most important role for the library in today's world as providing for access to a variety of viewpoints and opinions. The OCLC survey asked the general public respondents what they saw as the purpose or mission of the library. While some gave one or two word answers, such as books or information, quite a few provided more complex or multidimensional answers. According to the OCLC report, the main purposes that the United States public identified for the library were information (52%), books (32%) and research (16%). This removes the detail and nuance from the written responses, as many respondents mentioned

what information, books and research to provide, how to provide it and for whom. Many mentioned that the library provided free access for all and creates opportunities, including "books and information for free," "to give the public free easy access to a lot of information," "to provide the public with an opportunity" (OCLC 2005). Education, enjoyment and community also appeared frequently in responses. The purpose of the library is to provide "mind-material, either for entertainment or education," and "to be there to supply the community with information that they need, or for entertaining books, cd's, video's" (OCLC 2005). Librarians seem to reflect the public's sentiment.

In the Public Agenda survey, 92 percent of those surveyed agreed strongly or agreed somewhat that, the library was essential to maintaining a productive community. These respondents did not explicitly identify the purpose for the library, although the survey asked which services and materials a library should provide which might point to a purpose. Some of the services and materials they identified as important dealt with the library's role as educator (providing homework help for children, providing literacy classes for adults), promoter of democracy (providing government information and forms, having meeting rooms for community and public meetings) and community center . It did not seem like presenting a variety of ideas and opinions was even implicit in the choices, the closest one being "having enough books, CDs, videos, and magazines so that you have a good selection for pleasure reading, reference, or learning about a hobby" (Public Agenda 2006). The survey asked those same respondents who would be hurt the most if the library was to close. One focus group member had this to say, "It's almost like you might as well just be burning all the books. Because essentially, for people who can't afford Amazon, essentially that's what it is. It's like literally cutting off access. If you're cutting that off, where's the hope for anything better?...It seems like libraries were the next resource for the average person" (Public Agenda 2006). Therefore, librarians are not far off the mark it would see from the rest of the public in their perceptions of the library and its role. They are all at least using the same ideas and words to describe what they perceive. Librarians have deeper more thought out answers, expected as it relates to their chosen profession and day-to-day job.

Comparing other facets of the two surveys shows more congruence with the librarians' perceptions. The respondents to the OCLC survey compared libraries and bookstores to see which they preferred for various activities and services. They favored "libraries over bookstores for free Internet access, free materials and special programs. They favored bookstores because of the coffee shops, current materials and meeting their friends" (2005). The public sees the library's "brand" as books, and librarians agree, naming books the most important service the ideal library should offer (OCLC 2005). Many public libraries have added coffee shops and relaxed rules against drinking and eating in the library. Of course, this leads to the conclusion of the OCLC report that information users are unaware of many of the other resources that libraries have to offer (databases, online reference materials, online books and audio books, ask a librarian services, and more) (OCLC 2005). The survey from Public Agenda revealed that the general public respondents felt that the public library providing computers and internet access was an essential service for the community. Librarians agreed, as it was their second choice for most important library service. Respondents to the Public Agenda survey also mentioned services and resources for different age groups, from children to teens to adults to seniors. This was the librarians' third choice for most important library service. Those from the OCLC survey were no different, "When prompted, respondents agree (*completely agree* or *agree*) that libraries serve many community roles, including a place to learn, a place to read and support literacy, a place for free computer/Internet access and a place to promote childhood learning and development" (OCLC 2005).

The OCLC survey asked respondents about positive and negative associations with the library. The two items with the most positive associations were books and information; again, the librarians identified these as important as well (OCLC 2005). The strongest negative associations with dealing with customer and user service, again mentioned many times by librarians as important, especially when talking about changing the library or overcoming obstacles to get people to use the library.

Both surveys raised concerns about the public's perception of the library and its services. The OCLC survey pointed out that information users are not familiar with newer services and resources that the library provides, and are much more comfortable and likely to use the internet to find the information they need (2005). The Public Agenda survey also was worried about the public's understanding of the library and how its programs and services are funded (2006). Librarians agree, mentioning working to change perceptions about the library and librarians, marketing, outreach into the community, becoming active in the community, and working with local businesses and community groups to improve services to the community. These activities serve multiple purposes: to raise awareness of library services to attract more users, and to advocate on the library's behalf so funding for the library remains a priority.

7.5 A Few Comments from the Researcher

First, it is interesting to note that these respondents break some stereotypes that others have of the library profession and even the library profession has of itself. Not every librarian identifies his or herself as very liberal, even if as a professional and part of the profession they uphold liberal values and ideals. This perhaps goes back to the fact that librarianship is a profession, with a philosophy, set of values, and so on. Just as in other professions, there is some room for differences in personal and professional principles.

Talk to many librarians and they will tell you that those in administration or leading the library associations are out of touch with the public and with the rest of the profession. The researcher received a comment by e-mail on November 16, 2007 from a public librarian and adjunct library school instructor who had just answered the survey, "[P]ersonally, I think the PLA is out-of-touch with front-line librarians. I think their adoption of business language (i.e. referring to patrons as "customers") and the fact that many of their surveys are answered predominantly by administrators and managers is indicative of this. My colleagues, my students, and I are all worried about the future of the public library as administrators and many in the upper levels of the PLA, ALA, and state library associations continue to embrace the library as "edutainment" center." However, respondents to this survey, anyway, do not bear this out. There was no

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difference in responses from those on the frontline providing customer service than those in administrative or managerial positions. It might be interesting to give the same survey to those in leadership positions within the library associations to see what their responses are.

One interviewee and a few survey respondents saw the need for a single strong vision or mission to guide what services, functions and ideals librarians selected their libraries to pursue but they were in the minority. There was a real feeling from many of the interviewees and survey respondents that the public library has to do it all, especially all that the community wants them to do. When asked to pick one service, function or role, many respondents chose "other" and wrote in multiple choices, often indicating that they could or would not choose one that the library could and should do all or some variation of all. A few were even somewhat indignant that they had to limit their answers to one choice. The role or purpose of library as community center could really fit under other roles such as support for democracy or education. The library cannot do everything. Public libraries have limited resources and staffing and have to spend quite a bit of both on maintaining resources and services they already have. The public library often sets for itself the impossible mission of doing too many things for too many groups in the community and finds that it does none of them well, or fails in its purpose.

Part of the problem here lies with the profession itself. Surveys of the general public show that the public may value the library but not understand it and are unaware that the library often must compete with other services for money (OCLC 2005, Public Agenda 2006). Moreover, the library responds by trying to do everything, to provide something for absolutely everyone and in the end sometimes losing focus on that vision or role. Every time the public library planning documents are re-written, they list more possible or potential library services. In the past, individual library plans written using these planning for results methods often included all suggested service areas, with usually more than one goal or objective under each. There may be statements in these documents to the effect of not every service is needed in every library, but the reality is that many middle and larger libraries do not see it that way.

Looking back to the focus groups, a part of the discussion also touched on this, the idea that some participants had that the library could be both what the community wants and also strive to be something more, for a bigger or higher purpose. This deliberate choice adds a layer of subtlety to those respondents who want the library to be and do everything. Instead, there is tension between what the community wants and larger values, ideals and roles of the library and the profession. An example is the difficulty of upholding free speech while following perceived community standards.

7.6 Program Changes

There is a lack of variability among and between respondents' selections for the items on this survey. Perhaps part of the homogeneity comes from the library profession. It is a profession as defined by Frederick Mosher with: a common philosophy, common education through accredited masters' degree programs, common philosophy and connection with the profession and other librarians through listservs, continuing education and professional library associations. It is hard to say if all of these things add up to the respondent's choice of most important role for the library, or if there is some other characteristic or variable that leads them to the library profession that accounts for it. Most respondents joined the library profession because they enjoyed the nature of the work (books, computers) or felt as though through this profession they could make a difference (serve others, education, sharing books and reading).

However, the population of librarians as shown earlier is homogenous as well. The profession is aware of this and has been trying to remedy the situation by actively recruiting minority students to attend library schools. The American Library Association has developed a scholarship program to target these groups as well (American Library Association, Office of Diversity, 2007). This idea ties back to the literature on the representativeness of the bureaucracy examining how well the unelected librarian reflects and serves the public. Since race of the respondent explained a little of the choice of library role, it would seem that more variation in race might explain more. If the sample were more diverse racially, there might have more variation in responses about how the library should be, who should work there and what the library's role is. It

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matters because the population of the United States is changing and becoming more diverse. The public library needs to be more than a reflection of the population at large, the library needs librarians that represent these people, their wants, and needs and understand how to communicate with them, how to get them to come in and use the library.

Unfortunately, as a profession, the attempt to recruit a more diverse population does not go far enough to address the issue of diversity and representativeness. The sample for this survey was mostly white, mostly female, mostly young, and mostly liberal and pretty much in agreement about the library and its role or purpose. If these are the librarians in the profession now, what can the profession do to make sure they are serving their communities in the best way possible? That they are in touch with the community, and that they share a vision for library service. Although it would be welcome, it is nonetheless not practical for every library that serves a foreign or immigrant population to hire a librarian from that population,.

Since the demographic characteristics of the profession are not going to change quickly, it is imperative that all librarians receive the proper education and support to succeed in serving all communities. The library and information studies master's degree is a short course of study, usually ranging between 36 semester hours to 72 quarter hours (American Library Association, Office of Accreditation 2007). Students have set required and recommended courses that make up as many as half of these hours. These courses cover such subjects as foundations of library and information science, classifying and organizing materials, reference services, library administration, collection development and so forth. The other half are usually electives, but relate to whichever type of library or area of library service the student believes they want to pursue, such as academic libraries or children's services. A quick look at the websites of the top five rated library schools show no prescribed course for public library service, and only a few courses directly related to serving the public library. Most have some courses on assessing or surveying the community or marketing the library, but not all make it a requirement for the degree (U.S. News 2006, University of Illinois, University of North Carolina, Syracuse University, University of Michigan, University of Washington). Many states have some form of public library

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worker certification, often times mandated by state law or administrative code. "They may be for all levels of staff (Ky.), only for librarians, or only for directors (Mass.). Some staff have to get the certification in order for the library to receive state funding (Mich.)…The purpose for the certifications may be as a legal requirement, skills enhancement (Okla.), or as requirement to practice (Va.)…Re–certification or renewals may be scheduled anytime from biennially (Ga.) to never (Ind.); and usually are granted with documented completion of continuing education activities" (Grady 2005). The Public Library Association along with the Allied Professional Association began a National Public Librarian Administrator certification program a few years ago. This program is for public librarians with 3 years of experience, and other than a class on serving diverse populations (which is an elective, but still a start), focuses on the management/administration aspect of the public library (Certified Public Library Administrator Program).

As a profession, librarians need library school and continuing education courses and opportunities that focus on public service, community organizing, surveying and assessing community needs. This is more than just marketing or surveying patrons that already use the library. There should be both formal and informal mechanisms in place for staying in touch with the whole community, library users or not. This is a different way of thinking about and approaching public library service. Librarians need exposure to these ideas as a part of the librarian's education and then later recalled and built upon in continuing education, workshops and seminars. In combination with courses like these, public librarians also need courses on serving diverse populations. Such courses need to be more than just dealing with diversity or insuring that the library's collection represents the cultures in the community, but a deeper understanding not only of other cultures and ethnicities, but also how to work with those same. As a group, public librarians may be surprised how far these ideas and techniques can take them in terms of raising the awareness of the public library, making the library the center of the community and gaining and keeping support for the library, its values and services.

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7.7 Further Discussion and Future Research

This small survey is just the beginning and further research will help refine and clarify the results. Several thoughts as to directions this might take. The first is to take the current survey instrument and further refine it, adding and editing questions and responses to fit those provided by the respondents. Then, instead of a huge sample, many smaller targeted samples compared with and against each sample. Of course, there is value in conducting that same refined survey with a large random sample to see if the results match those of this volunteer sample of convenience. If, as some of the library history literature indicates, library role or purpose were related to an external set of issues and circumstances, a way to capture and quantify that would be useful. Perhaps a historical study of the role or purpose of the library as related to certain events could be undertaken. This would be moving beyond just a recitation of events, and delve into the professional literature and meetings proceedings and library education to try to pinpoint when the role changed and what the context of that change was. Alternately, the development of an instrument that asked a few short questions about the library's current role or purpose could form the foundation for a longitudinal study of libraries and purpose. Overlaying these responses on a timeline of events might give some indication of how library purpose changes in response to circumstances. Finally, knowing that a survey of this type could never list all possible responses or capture the subtle nuances and differences among and between public librarians, more focus groups and interviews would be helpful, not just to make a better survey instrument, but in their own right, as telling the story of the library, the librarian and the role that all play in the 21st century.

7.8 Conclusions

This research, the findings and results from the focus groups, interviews and surveys, both extends and is an original addition to the library field. The literature review demonstrated that there was not much discussion of the public library, librarian and the role of the library. There was a little discussion, but it was not current. What emerged from the focus groups, interviews and surveys was a picture of the ideal public library, librarian and library role as perceived by

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librarians working in the field. For these librarians, the most important or critical role for the public library today is to present a variety of ideas and opinions. Moreover, librarians believe libraries should provide both traditional and newer services and still see information as imperative. They value equal access and being community centered. They believe librarians need to be able to adapt and change, have fresh ideas for library service, be committed to those they serve, know the best way to find information and have a high tolerance for the peculiarities of people regardless of gender, race, age, culture, ethnicity, or sexual preference.

Furthermore, these librarians explicated how they had changed the library themselves through their planning, actions and hard work. They enumerated what they see as obstacles to achieving the ideal library, and named solutions or ways to get around those same obstacles. So maybe Watts and Samuels were right when they speculated that librarians assume that we all know what the role or purpose of the library is. Still, it is as much the interactions and discussions with these librarians as the results of these interactions that is important. These obstacles and barriers are not going to disappear, and as a profession, librarians will be better able to handle them if they discuss the library's direction and destination and what they are going to do to make sure it arrives there.

APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW DOCUMENTS

Focus Group Recruitment Script

Date
Name of person
Time called
Better time to call

This is Susan Smith, doctoral student at the School of Urban and Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Arlington. As a public librarian, I thought you might be interested in what I am doing.

As part of my doctoral dissertation research, I am getting together a small group of your librarian peers to share their ideas about the public library and the librarian profession in the 21st century. This information will help me prepare a survey instrument that will be distributed to public librarians nationwide, which will in turn provide information and insight into the functioning of the public library.

It will be a small group, 7 to 10 people. The group will be:

Date, day
Time (2 hours)
Place

I'll have snacks to thank you for your time and ideas.

Will you be able to attend?

Interview Recruitment Script

Date
Name of person
Time called
Better time to call

This is Susan Smith, doctoral student at the School of Urban and Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Arlington. As a public librarian, I thought you might be interested in what I am doing.

As part of my doctoral dissertation research, I am interviewing a small group of your librarian peers to find out their ideas about the public library and the librarian profession in the 21st century. This information will help me prepare a survey instrument that will be distributed to public librarians nationwide, which will in turn provide information and insight into the functioning of the public library.

It will be a short interview, 45 minutes. I would be happy to come to your office.

Are you willing to be interviewed?
No. Okay, thank you for your time.
Yes. Great, what date and time are best for you?

Date, day
Time
Place

I'd like to send you an e-mail to confirm everything. (Confirm name and e-mail address.)

Public Librarians Focus Group and Individual Interview Questions

1. Take about a minute and tell us your name, how long you've worked in public libraries, and what was it that caused you to choose to become a librarian?

2. Describe the ideal 21st century public library. (goals, mission, programs, materials, resources, space, who uses it? What is needed to create it? Role of the librarian? What does it accomplish?)

3. Describe the ideal 21st century public librarian.

4. What is the role of the public library (in the community, in society, in a democracy)?

5. Of all the different programs and materials that could be offered at a public library, what do you consider to be the most important?

6. What do you need to fulfill that role? What keeps you from fulfilling that role?

7. What input could librarians provide in setting the role for the public library?

8. What do librarians need to do this?

9. Given libraries as they are today, what could be done to help it better fill that role?

10. What would you do if you felt you had done everything right and yet no one was using the library?

11. Thinking back on our discussion today (**Purpose: To determine how do working librarians perceive the institution of the public library in the 21st century and how the library profession shapes the institution of the public library**.) is there anything you would like to add? Anything that you didn't get a chance to say? Is there anything we didn't ask that you wish we had? If there were one question you think I should ask on my survey, what would it be?

APPENDIX B

SURVEY DOCUMENTS

Public Librarians Survey Recruitment E-mail

Hi,

My name is Susan Smith. In addition to working as a public librarian for the last ten years, I am a doctoral student at the School of Urban and Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Arlington.

As part of my doctoral dissertation research, I am surveying public librarians in the United States about their ideas of the public library and the library profession in the 21st century. This information will in turn provide information on and insight into the functioning of the public library. The purpose of this survey is to determine how working librarians perceive the institution of the public library in the 21st century and how the library profession shapes the institution of the public library with the goal of improving knowledge about and functioning of the institution of the public library. In addition to forming the basis for my dissertation, I hope to be able to share the results in some of the professional library journals.

Participation in this research is voluntary and anonymous. The survey is available online and should take about 15 to 30 minutes to complete and requires some thought. If you are interested in completing the survey, please click the link below. Otherwise, thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Susan Smith

Librarian and Doctoral Student

smithsusanl@gmail.com

Survey Instrument

1. Informed Consent

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Susan Smith

TITLE OF PROJECT: Working Librarians' Perceptions of the Role of the Public Library in the 21st Century

This Informed Consent will explain about being a research subject in an experiment. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer.

PURPOSE:
The purposes of this research study are as follows:
To determine how working librarians perceive the institution of the public library in the 21st century and how the library profession shapes the institution of the public library.
To improve knowledge about and functioning of the institution of the public library.

DURATION
20 to 30 minutes

PROCEDURES
The procedure, which will involve you as a research subject, include: the completion of an online survey.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

The possible risks and/or discomforts of your involvement include:
No identified risks.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS
The possible benefits of your participation are:

There are no direct benefits of your participation. Indirect benefits include improving knowledge about and functioning of the institution of the public library.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. Neither IP or e-mail addresses will be collected or saved with the responses. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet in room 530 of University Hall on the University of Texas at Arlington campus for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the UTA IRB, the FDA (if applicable), and personnel particular to this research (individual or department) have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

FINANCIAL COSTS
The possible financial costs to you as a participant in this research study are:
There are no financial costs associated with participating in this research.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS
If you have any questions or problems at any time, you may call or e-mail Susan Smith at 239/595-3553, smithsusanl@gmail.com or Dr. Edith Barrett at 817/272-3285, ebarrett@uta.edu
You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at 817/272-1235 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
Participation in this research experiment is voluntary. You may refuse to participate.

By choosing yes below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you. Please print these pages for your records. You have been and will continue to be given the chance to ask questions and to discuss your participation with the investigator.

You freely and voluntarily choose to be in this research project.

No, you do not wish to volunteer to be in this research project.
Yes, you freely and voluntarily choose to be in this research project.

2. Are you currently employed as a library professional in a public library setting in the United States?
No
Yes

3. In which state is the library where you work located?

4. How would you classify the library where you work?
City or Municipal library
County or Parish library
City/County combined library
School District library but open to the public
School District/City combined library
School District/County combined library
Native American Tribal library
Independent library
Nonprofit library
Don't Know
Other (please specify)

5. Would you describe the place where the library you work is located as
A big city
The suburbs or outskirts of a big city
A small city or town
A country village
In the country
Don't know
Other (please describe)

6. From how many total physical locations does your library offer service?

7. Now, thinking about the specific library location where you work, would you say it is a
Branch, neighborhood or satellite library
Central or main library

Regional library
Other (please describe)

8. Which of the following sentences BEST describes the physical and design characteristics of YOUR ideal 21st century public library?
A public library that looks like a traditional or historical public library, with classical details such as columns and pediments, grand entry ways, open floor plans and lots of natural light.
A public library that has quiet places, study rooms, that feels calm and allows people to come and accomplish what they need to do in peace.
A public library that looks like a bookstore, with comfortable chairs, and a café or coffee shop.
A public library that has open areas and meeting spaces that encourages socializing, talking, interacting, the sharing of experiences and information, a community center.
Other (please describe)

9. What is the MOST important function or principle purpose that the ideal 21st century public library should provide?
Education
Entertainment
Information
Programming
Other (please describe)

10. Select the THREE (3) MOST important services that the ideal 21st century public library should offer.
Collection of books and other materials
Customer service from librarians and other staff
Services and resources for different age groups
Services and resources for different cultures or ethnicities
Computers and internet access
Referrals to social services and other agencies
Reference assistance
Reader's advisory (helping people find something good to read)
Other (please describe)

11. What is the MOST important ideal that the ideal 21st century public library should uphold?
Equal access
Compassionate, helping, serving
Equity
Diversity
Community-centered
Justness and fairness
Objectivity, not taking sides
Other (please describe).

12. Which of the following statements BEST reflects the most important or critical role for the public library?
The library is a place of ideas, with materials representing different views and opinions, encouraging the free exchange of ideas and information, and making room for the voice of dissent to be heard. Exposes people to issues, culture, diversity, education, and possibilities.
Objective and neutral, attempts to provide information on all sides of a topic or issue.

The library is a university of the people, an educational center that provides educational materials, training and learning so people can get better jobs and be more productive members of society. People are given opportunities through education, and the library is part of the educational infrastructure of the community and helps provide for a literate workforce. This in turn has an effect on the economic development of a community.

The public library is the last stand for democracy and educates people for democracy by giving them resources to understand society, insuring people have access to accurate, credible information, working to bridge the digital divide, demonstrating the power of information, and serving as the collector of the human record and history.

Other (please describe)

13. Which of the following sets of traits or characteristics are the most essential for a public librarian to possess in the 21st century? Please choose the three (3) most important.

Committed and connected to those whom they serve. Passionate about providing library services the community wants and needs. Think outside of themselves, selfless.

Presents fresh ideas for libraries and library services. Willing to take risks and to fail. Forward looking.

Is flexible and able to adapt quickly and easily to change.

Wants to work with and help people, compassionate and empathetic.

Has interests and expertise outside of the library, books and reading

Knows the most efficient way to find information, whether using traditional methods and sources, or technology. Never says I don't know.

Relates to and has a tolerance for all kinds of people, regardless of gender, race, age, culture, ethnicity, or sexual preference.

Other (please describe)

14. What is the one biggest obstacle to achieving the ideal public library?

15. Can librarians effect change in the vision or role of the public library?
No
Yes

16. Have you ever effected change in the vision or role of the public library?
No
Yes

17. How did you effect change in the vision or role of the public library?

18. What actions would you take if you believe that you have done everything right and yet no one is using the public library?

19. What led you to become a public librarian? (Please mark all statements that apply.)

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I had volunteered for a library and liked it.
I had worked in a library and liked it.
Someone suggested it would be a good career for me.
I liked books and reading.
I liked computers and technology.
I liked doing research and discovering obscure facts.
I liked organizing, categorizing and cataloging books and materials.
Of all the different types of libraries (government, academic, special), I liked public libraries the most.
The public library was more interesting than other careers I was considering.
I wanted to help and serve other people.
I wanted to run something; to be in charge.
Other (please describe)

20. Was becoming a public librarian a career change for you?
No
Yes

21. What career or profession were you in before working in the public library?

22. Do you belong to any professional associations for librarians or libraries?
No
Yes

23. Why not?
It costs too much.
I don't share the beliefs of the association.
I don't see the benefits of belonging.
Other (please describe)

24. Have you attended any library conferences, workshops, training or seminars in the last 12 months?
No
Yes

25. Do you subscribe to any library related e-mail listservs such as those sponsored by the American Library Association, your state or regional library association, or others interested in or serving libraries?
No
Yes

26. Currently, are you employed
Part-time
Full-time

27. Is your position in the public library--
Mostly support/technical/bibliographic services
Mostly administrative/managerial
Mostly frontline/customer service
Other (please describe)

28. Gender

Male
Female

29. Which of the following ranges includes your age?
20-24
25-29
30-34
35-39
40-44
45-49
50-54
55-59
60-64
65 or older

30. Which category best describes your race?
American Indian or Alaska Native
Black or African American
Asian
White
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
Mixed

31. Do you consider yourself
Hispanic or Latino
Not Hispanic or Latino

32. In politics today do you consider yourself liberal, moderate, or conservative?
Very liberal
Somewhat liberal
Moderately liberal
Moderately conservative
Somewhat conservative
Very conservative
Don't think of myself in those terms

33. Were you, either of your parents, or any of your grandparents born in a country other than the United States?
Yes, I was
Yes, at least one of my parents was
Yes, at least one of my grandparents was
No
Don't know

34. In which country?

35. What is the highest level of school you have completed?
GED or High school graduate
Some college or trade school, no degree
Associates or 2-year degree
Bachelor's or 4-year degree
Some graduate training

Masters in Library and/or Information Studies/Science
Masters degree not in Library or Information Studies/Science
PhD/JD/MD
Don't know

36. In what area, field, or concentration is your degree(s)?

37. Thank you for participating in this research project and taking the time to take this survey. If you have any questions about this research project or your participation in it, please contact the principal researcher Susan Smith at smithsusanl@gmail.com or 239-595-3553.

Can you think of another public librarian who might be interested in taking this survey? If so, please enter his or her e-mail address below.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

After earning her Bachelors in English and Masters in Library and Information Studies, Susan Smith spent almost ten years working in various positions and departments in public library systems around the Dallas, Texas area. She has been a children's librarian, a young adult librarian, a technology librarian and a fiction librarian, to name a few. Her front line library experience combined with her interest in understanding the larger framework in which public libraries exist and her desire further her education motivated her to pursue her Ph.D. in Public Administration at the University of Texas at Arlington. Susan has recently transitioned to the academic world, accepting a position as the Distance Education Librarian at Hodges University in Naples, Florida, where she hopes to teach in their Masters of Public Administration program.