

*Information Access*

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**Abstract:**

Information access is an important research concern of information ethics, within library and information science (LIS), but it is underdeveloped conceptually, methodologically, and theoretically. This paper reviews the current state of the literature. The two predominant conceptualizations of information access are examined and synthesized. The place of information access in LIS—both as an *a priori* research focus and as a foundation of other research areas—is demonstrated. Reviewing the state of the methodology in this area reveals that information access has not been studied with a great deal of empirical rigor; normative and advocative writings dominate the literature. Theoretically, information access is frequently linked to jurisprudential theories of freedom of speech. This paper illuminates this linkage, as well as explaining how the three predominant jurisprudential theories of free speech: the marketplace of ideas/ search for truth, democracy, and individual empowerment relate to information access. In addition, the theory of normative behavior, originating from LIS, is applied to information access. Finally, this review concludes with a critical assessment of the conceptual, methodological, and theoretical state of affairs and suggests some future directions for additional research.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This paper analyzes the research area of information access within library and information science (LIS). Webster (1999) contends that the development of an information infrastructure, since the industrial revolution, has entailed access to and provision of information. From this perspective, then, improved information access is both a goal and a result of information and communication technologies. Information access is an important area for research within LIS, but presently it is conceptually, methodologically, and theoretically underdeveloped, as this review of the current state of the literature will demonstrate. This paper thus represents a first step toward rectifying the gap in the current literature.

Information access falls within the broader research domain of information ethics (Carbo & Smith, 2008; Froehlich, 1992; Hauptman, 1988; Himma & Tavani, 2008; Mathiesen, 2004; Vaagan, 2005).<sup>1</sup> Although several scholars have proposed unifying or comprehensive definitions of information ethics, none have been widely adopted. Carbo and Smith (2008), in an introduction to a recent special issue of the *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, define information ethics as “concern with the moral dilemmas and ethical conflicts that arise in interactions between human beings and information (creation, organization, dissemination, and use), information and communications technologies (ICTs), and

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<sup>1</sup> Mathiesen (2004) argues that information ethics attempts to answer questions of “whether or not it is morally required, prohibited, laudable, or permissible to deny or provide some person(s), or their agents, access to some piece(s) of information” (para. 15). This review, however, seeks to avoid such moral evaluations, instead examining access as a neutral concept. Future work will investigate specific instances in which information access was denied or provided (in Mathiesen’s words), and will likely evaluate the moral laudability or denigration of such action. At this point, however, such evaluation is premature.

information systems” (p. 1111).<sup>2</sup> As this essay will demonstrate, information access is an important part of answering questions concerning the creation, organization, dissemination, and use of information.

Indeed, Mathiesen (2004) suggests that information ethics is “fundamentally about who ought to have access to information and under what conditions” (para. 2). According to Frohman (2008), information ethics theories that posit a moral agent (such as Froehlich, 1992; Hauptman, 2002; and Mathiesen, 2004) tend to see information access as a central concern. Thus, for at least some information ethicists, information access is an important part of this research domain. The American Library Association’s (ALA) Code of Ethics (2009) also demonstrates the significant relationship between information access and information ethics; the preamble states that library and information science professionals are “explicitly committed to intellectual freedom and the freedom of access to information. [They] have a special obligation to ensure the free flow of information and ideas to present and future” (para. 3). The first principle in this Code of Ethics includes “equitable access” (para. 5).

Information access is often not explicitly defined in the literature.<sup>3</sup> Even the terminology itself is highly variable. “Access to information” is more commonly used in LIS research (see, e.g., Blakemore & Craglia, 2006; Burden, 2000; Caidi & Ross, 2005; Cooke, 2007; Doctor, 1991, 1992; Jorgensen, 2006; Lor & Britz, 2007; McCreadie & Rice, 1999a, 1999b; McDermott,

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<sup>2</sup> Although a broad review of information ethics is beyond the scope of this paper, one would do well to start with Carbo & Smith’s (2008) introduction, which includes a 400-item bibliography of information ethics (see pp. 1116-1123).

<sup>3</sup> Neither, of course, is information. Mathiesen (2004) explains, “there seems to be no consensus on what ‘information’ is, or even what its essential features are. Indeed, it has been suggested that there is no single thing that is meant by ‘information’ in the sense that it is used by empirical scientists, mathematicians, computer scientists, library scientists, legal scholars, economists, and philosophers” (para. 6). In addition, Borgman (2000) notes, “Definitions of information range widely between disciplines and contexts...[which] indicates how difficult it is to think of ‘information’ in any single sense. Philosophers have spent centuries explicating ‘information’ and related concepts such as ‘knowledge’ and ‘meaning;’ I do not propose to resolve those debates here (p. 58). This paper follows Borgman in abdicating a single comprehensive definition of information.

2007). However, “information access” is used by Burnett & Jaeger (2008), Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson (2008), Jaeger (2007), Jaeger and Burnett (2005), Lievrouw and Farb (2002), and Smith (1995). The two phrases—access to information and information access—should be seen as functionally equivalent, as demonstrated by several scholars who use both interchangeably (e.g., Burnett, Jaeger & Thompson, 2008; Jaeger & Burnett, 2005; Lievrouw & Farb, 2002; and Smith, 1995).

Because this paper draws heavily upon the conceptual and theoretical refinements suggested by Jaeger, Burnett, and their colleagues (see particularly Section 2.1 and Section 4.5), it will utilize “information access.” As will be justified in Chapter 2, this paper adopts Jaeger and Burnett’s (2005) definition of access as “the presence of a robust system through which information is made available to citizens and others” (p. 465). Such a system has physical, intellectual, and social components. Thus, information access is a combination of intellectual, physical, and social elements that affect the availability of information to individuals.

Other similar formulations include “free dissemination of information” (Farber, 1991, p. 560), “access to information and knowledge resources” (Doctor, 1991, p. 218), “freedom of information” (Lor & Britz, 2007, p. 388), “freedom of access to information” (Hamilton & Pors, 2003, p. 409), and the “right to have access to all expressions of knowledge, creativity, and intellectual activity” (IFLA, Libraries and intellectual freedom, 2007, para. 1). This variance suggests either a lack of conceptual clarity or multiple, co-existing approaches, as well as conflation with freedom of speech/ expression (see Section 4.1 for an explication of this relationship).

One of the goals, therefore, of this paper is to offer conceptual clarity by examining extant definitions and uses of information access in the literature. Chapter Two defines the

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research area of information access and demonstrates its relevance to library and information science. As Jaeger (2007) contends, “access stands at the center of information behaviors” (p. 843), and this chapter analyzes the centrality of information access to LIS research in general.

Chapter Three reviews the methodological approaches evident in the information access literature. This chapter demonstrates that much of the relevant literature has a normative or advocative tone, rather than employing empirical research methods to investigate information access. Typically, research that is done in this area takes the form of case studies, an appropriate method for a nascent research area.

Chapter Four examines relevant theoretical approaches to information access, including three predominant theories of freedom of speech, drawn from both the jurisprudential and LIS literature. In addition, this chapter reviews the theory of normative behavior developed by Chatman (2000). Although each of these theoretical approaches has potential for illuminating information access research in LIS, that potential has yet to be realized.

Finally, Chapter Five concludes this review of the research area. It critically analyzes each of these areas—concept, methodology, and theory—as they have been developed and applied to information access. Particular areas of weakness are noted. In addition, this chapter summarizes the potential strengths of information access as a research area and reiterates its relevance and utility for LIS. The chapter concludes by briefly discussing some possibilities for future work.

## **Chapter 2: Conceptual Approaches in Information Access**

According to some scholars, “the right of access to information has become the dominant right in the information and knowledge era” (Lor & Britz, 2007, p. 392; see also Brown, 2004; Byrne, 2003; Corredoira, 2007; Cramer, 2009; Doctor, 1991, 1992; Jaeger, 2007; Lievrouw, 2000; Lievrouw & Farb, 2002; Smith, 1995). Nearly 20 years ago, Buckland (1991) recognized that “access emerges as a recurrent theme” across information science research (p. 77). Yet information access remains, for the most part, underconceptualized and infrequently studied in library and information science (LIS) and in other academic disciplines.

This chapter attempts to elucidate a research area that is sometimes vague, ill-defined, or left implicit in the library and information science literature. In this chapter, the research area of information access is reviewed by drawing upon relevant literature to define and demarcate common conceptions. Distinctions between information access and related research areas are clarified. Finally, this chapter reviews the relevance of information access to LIS.

### *2.1 Defining information access*

Buckland (1991) provides an early example of the difficulties in articulating access. He lists six aspects of access—identification, availability, price (to the user), cost (to the provider), understanding, and acceptability—but understands most of these primarily in terms of technological capabilities and requirements (pp. 78-79). For example, identification, as Buckland describes it, is concerned with how retrieval systems recognize suitable sources. However, as Doctor (1991) argues, technology will not, by itself, enable people to succeed; rather, they need

access to information.<sup>4</sup> Access can be mediated by technology, but it is not determined solely by technology.

Though unable to find a single encompassing conception of information access in a single domain, McCreadie and Rice (1999a, 1999b) generate a broader understanding of access by reviewing literature across six different disciplines. Their review, covering library studies, information science, information society,<sup>5</sup> mass media, organizational communication, and economics of information, found six different conceptualizations of access. These are summarized below, in Table 1, taken directly from their article (1999a, p. 50). As discipline-spanning conceptualizations, these are not defined in detail, but sketched with examples and generalities.

The first, “access to knowledge and its representations,” is the most common across disciplines; this includes messages sent and received, printed and audiovisual materials, digital data, analysis and advice, and education. In LIS, this conception of access typically includes books, documents, periodicals, citations, and databases. The emphasis, according to McCreadie and Rice, tends to be on the representations or artifacts of knowledge; there is an underlying assumption that if people have access to an artifact, then they have access to the knowledge contained therein. In individuals’ personal and work lives, “access to knowledge” can affect their quality of life and decision-making abilities (McCreadie & Rice, 1999a, pp. 49-51).

The second common conceptualization is “access to technology,” which primarily focuses on connections or interactions with particular technological systems or types of media.

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<sup>4</sup> This argument parallels recent digital divide literature; distributing (more) technology to diverse areas does not necessarily improve the lives and opportunities of people (see, e.g., Dewan & Riggins, 2005; Gunkel, 2003; Kvasny & Keil, 2006; and Warschauer, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> McCreadie and Rice differentiate between library studies, information science, and information society, all of which can be seen as components of LIS (library and information science) as commonly understood. When describing their work, LIS is used to refer to these three research domains, though sometimes they are discussed separately.

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McCreadie and Rice (1999a) found this perspective less commonly in the LIS literature they reviewed. This conceptualization, McCreadie and Rice note, frequently assumes that access to

Table 1. Conceptualizations of access to information.  
From McCreadie and Rice, 1999a, p. 50.

| Category              | Examples  | Implications  |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Knowledge             | Message sent, information flow;<br>Observations, visual sources, evidence;<br>Documents, books, periodicals, numerical or digital data, databases, citations;<br>Analysis, advice, interpretation, debate, answers, education   | Can lead to decision-making, control over information flow;<br>To quality of life, quality of work life;<br>To power, influence;<br>To socioeconomic opportunities: equity, funds, legal advantage, participation in democratic society and citizenship activities  |
| Technology            | Range of technologies and media: computer, telephone, movies, books, newspapers, magazines, music, tv, etc.;<br>Information delivery systems, systems that generate, store, create information;<br>Interface or command language, software, programming;<br>Use of system;<br>Linking technologies: interactive, communication, networking technologies | Assumes that access to technologies leads to access to information; assumes an infrastructure of support;<br>Assumes knowledge of how to use;<br>Can lead to access to multiple data sources, automatic methods of surveillance, increased control, creativity;<br>Compounding effect: access to one technology can increase future access, experience, advantage |
| Communication         | Making sense of things: content, comprehension, retention, explanation;<br>Making use of information: accuracy, relevance, format, level, decision making;<br>Connectivity;<br>Communication competence   | Assumes communication competence;<br>Requires broader meaning of relevance;<br>Can lead to social, political participation with implications for democracy, equity, power relations;<br>Compounding effect: access likely to lead to greater competence, access   |
| Control               | Over who has access to what to whose advantage;<br>Over the agenda, terms of debate, content, organization, design, program;<br>Over processes and flows of information;<br>Over production of culture  | Assumes that power and control are associated with information and knowledge;<br>Compounding effect: those who control access are more likely to decide, design in favor of others most like them   |
| Goods/<br>Commodities | Information as social, economic good with value, costs, benefits;<br>Distribution of control capacities, availability of resources;<br>New markets for information industry   | Assumes potential for public good, social value;<br>Value not known until used;<br>Compounding effect: potential for economic barriers and paths to be reinforced by social dynamics  |
| Participation         | Services: governmental, communication, information;<br>Advocacy;<br>Privacy   | Can influence right to participate as citizen;<br>Compounding effect: those most in need often least likely to obtain services  |

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technology, or use of some system, is equivalent to access to information. However, a host of factors can intervene or complicate the relationship between access, information, and use. In addition, technology mediates individuals' access to information, either intensifying or compensating for individuals' abilities. Finally, McCreddie and Rice explain that "access to technology" can have a compounding effect: the more access one has, the easier and more effectively one can gain further access (pp. 51-53).

A third conception, "access as communication," was found in information science and information society literatures, as well as in library studies. According to this perspective, access involves making sense of and using information. This includes comprehension, retention, and decision making. Again, a compounding effect is evident: "communication competence is gained through access to and participation in communication practices," so those who gain access to information are likely to benefit more and gain further access (McCreddie & Rice, 1999a, pp. 53-54). In other words, an initial level of access to information begets competence in accessing and utilizing further information.

The remaining three conceptions of information were found less frequently in the LIS-related literature McCreddie and Rice surveyed. First, access can be understood as control, meaning "control of participation and of content... [or] control over who gains access to what information to whose advantage" (1999a, p. 54). Second, information access can also be conceptualized as "access to economic commodities or goods," implying that there are costs and benefits of access. This perspective is particularly common in the economics of information literature, and evaluates the risks, resources, and markets for access to information (pp. 55-56). Finally, McCreddie and Rice found that several disciplines consider access as a means to participation, particularly in the political process; here, information access includes rights, social

power, and even the ability to benefit from accessing information (pp. 56-57). According to their research, four of the six conceptualizations are present in LIS disciplines: access as knowledge, technology, communication, and participation, though participation is rarely discussed (McCreadie & Rice, 1999b, p. 78).

The pair of articles by McCreadie and Rice (1999a, 1999b) is seminal because of the authors' detailed analysis of information access and their nuanced portrait of how access was conceptualized across six disciplines. They concluded with a challenging, though mostly unheeded, call for further research: "with access underlying many different areas of everyday life and implicit in much research, we need to understand its dimensions in order to consider seriously its implications and to guide us in designing policies and systems" (1999b, p. 45).

In the nine years since their articles, however, the distinctions between different conceptualizations of access have grown less clear (Lievrouw, 2000; Lievrouw & Farb, 2002; Lor & Britz, 2007; Powell, 2007; Reddick, 2004). For example, discussions about controlling access inevitably involve concerns about citizens' abilities to participate socially, economically, and politically (Balkin, 2004; Lievrouw & Farb, 2002; Lor & Britz, 2007; Powell, 2007). Reddick (2004) notes that access inequalities "reflect the longstanding inequality of access to power and resources, as well as to social participation" (p. 13). Lor and Britz (2007) directly link control to participation:

The denial of access to information is therefore no longer merely a denial of access to the ideas held by others or suppression of freedom of expression. It also marginalizes people's participation in the various economic, political and socio-cultural activities. It touches the very heart of the modern information era (p. 392).

In fact, "access as a means to participation" in politics and in the global information economy is mentioned in nearly all access-related research; participation has shifted from a minor focus to a

more prominent position across the access literature (Balkin, 2004; Brown, 2004; Burnett & Jaeger, 2008; Byrne, 2003; Cooke, 2007; Corredoira, 2007; Cramer, 2009; Hamilton & Pors, 2003; Jaeger, 2007; Jaeger & Burnett, 2005; Kranich, 2001; Lievrouw & Farb, 2002; Lor & Britz, 2007; Mathiesen & Fallis, 2008; Reddick, 2004; Schement, 2001; Sturges, 2006). For example, Schement contends that “access to information and communication technology is the primary policy tool for enabling all citizens to participate in these economic, political, and social activities fundamental to a democratic society” (p. 17).

Another distinction McCreadie and Rice suggested (1999a, 1999b), between “access as knowledge” and “access as communication” seems somewhat artificial. LIS research, in particular, has shifted away from considering knowledge in isolation and has a stronger emphasis on knowledge that is usable, workable, and beneficial to individual users in specific social and organizational contexts (Gorman, 2000; Heckart, 1991; Jones, 1999; O’Neil, 2002; Rubin, 2004; Schement, 2001; Thompson, 2008; Webster, 1999). Burden (2000) summarizes the connection between “access as knowledge” and “access as communication” by arguing that “information has value only if it is accessible, if it can be read and understood, or if the user can gain new knowledge from it” (p. 46). Recall that McCreadie and Rice’s conception of “access as knowledge” focused on extracting knowledge from artifacts such as books or documents, and “access as communication” included making sense of and using information. Burden’s argument combines these two into a single understanding of access.

As this discussion illustrates, the six-part conceptualization McCreadie and Rice (1999a, 1999b) formulated is not an accurate representation of the current thinking about information access. Borgman (2000), without formally citing McCreadie and Rice, similarly acknowledges that “‘access’ is a word with a variety of denotations and connotations” (p.53). She defines

access to information as “connectivity to a computer network and to available content, such that the technology is usable, the user has the requisite skills and knowledge, and the content itself is in a usable and useful form” (p. 79). Here, we can see several aspects of McCreadie and Rice’s six-part formulation combined. Borgman’s definition is rooted in technology, but also incorporates knowledge, utility, and communicative aspects. In some ways, this definition is an improvement over McCreadie and Rice, in that multiple perspectives on access to information are incorporated into a single sentence; however, Borgman’s stance is problematic because access is defined in terms of technology (in the form of a computer network). A fully comprehensive definition should include non-technological access as well.

More recently, Jaeger and Burnett (2005) propose that information access should be defined as “the presence of a robust system through which information is made available to citizens and others” (p. 465). The potential breadth of this definition is somewhat unclear, because the authors leave their conception of “system” vague. However, from the context of the article and subsequent publications (Burnett & Jaeger, 2008; Burnett, Jaeger & Thompson, 2008; Jaeger, 2007; Jaeger & Bowman, 2005), it is clear that “system” is meant to encompass more than a technological system; rather, system entails socially and politically contextualized complex means by which individuals obtain information. Hence, this definition reaches beyond technological tools and is useful for studying various forms of information access.

Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson (2008) suggest that access has three components: physical, intellectual, and social. Physical access includes “the physical structures that contain information, the electronic structures that contain information, and the paths that are traveled to get to information” (p. 57). Geography, technology, and economics can all affect physical access. Intellectual access refers to understanding information in a document, including “how the

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information is categorized, organized, displayed, and represented” (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005, p. 67). Individual traits such as physical or cognitive abilities and disabilities, language competence, and technological literacy can affect intellectual access; whereas physical access is enhanced, constrained, or manipulated in the external environment, intellectual access is affected by the individual’s internal characteristics. Finally, the concept of social access suggests that elements of one’s social world, including social norms and worldviews, influence the information one accesses, and how and why particular information is sought (Burnett & Jaeger, 2008; Jaeger & Thompson, 2004; see Section 4.5 for an explication of these concepts). Normative social behaviors, according to Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson (2008), “define the appropriate mechanisms and activities involved in information access” (p. 59).

Thus, neither physical nor intellectual access can be understood in isolation; both are mediated by the social milieu of individuals. Lor and Britz (2007) make a similar argument: “a well-developed and well maintained information infrastructure...alone is not enough. The information that is accessible should also be affordable, available, timely, relevant, readily assimilated, and in languages and contexts users can relate to and understand” (p. 390). The relationships between these different components of information access are explicitly problematized when Blakemore and Craglia (2006) wonder “whether physical access to information is being prioritized above that of social access” (p. 19). Thus, other scholars have recognized, more or less explicitly, the physical, social, and intellectual components of information access explicated by Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson.

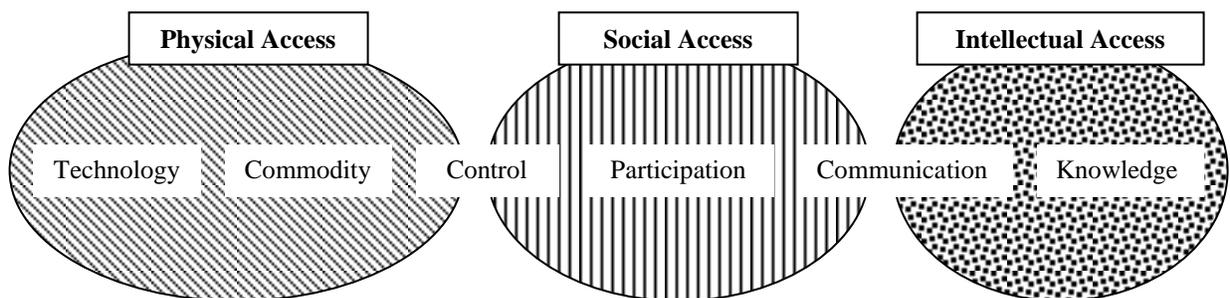
The scheme offered by Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson (2008) does not conform precisely to the six conceptualizations suggested by McCreddie & Rice (1999a), but it does cover many of the same elements (see Figure 1). For example, “access as technology” (from McCreddie & Rice,

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1999a) is clearly analogous to physical access (as described by Burnett, Jaeger, & Thompson). Both perspectives study the physical tools individuals may use (or may not be able to use) to gain access. Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson's physical access also covers some of the same territory as McCreadie and Rice's "access as commodity" and "as control." The conceptualization of "access as commodity" includes how access is distributed, subsidized, bought and sold (McCreadie & Rice, 1999a, p. 55). Although not as clearly congruent with physical access as "access as technology," nonetheless "access as commodity" can be seen in "the questions of whether people can get into the location that houses the documents" (Burnett, Jaeger, & Thompson, p. 57), which conceptualizes access as a physical, spatial *thing*.

"Access as control," according to McCreadie and Rice (1999a) includes both control over technology, physical equipment, and resources, and control over "who gains access to what information to whose advantage" (p. 54). Thus, there are both physical and social aspects to "access as control." Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson (2008) note that "social norms may actively impact or limit information access" (p. 58). These limitations are a form of, or perhaps the result of, "access as control."

Figure 1. Synthesis of Two Conceptualizations of Information Access.



In addition to "access as control," McCreadie and Rice's (1999a) "access as participation" is also implicated in Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson's (2008) social access, in

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which “different understandings of social attitudes, expectations, and norms directly influenced how—and whether—certain types of information were made available or were perceived as valuable” (p. 64). It is these attitudes, expectations, and norms that can constrain or promote “access as participation.” In addition, “access as communication” is partially included in social access. McCreddie and Rice explain that “communication competence is required for participation in the social, economic, and political spheres of society” (p. 54).

“Access as communication” also comes under Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson’s (2008) intellectual access. McCreddie and Rice (1999a) note that “access as communication” includes “access to content, to comprehension, or to retention...this broader understanding of relevance includes factors that make it possible for the individual to make use of information” (p. 53). It is this individualized aspect of intellectual capacity that is part of intellectual access as depicted by Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson. Finally, intellectual access to information also incorporates McCreddie and Rice’s “access as knowledge,” the sending, receiving, and interpreting of messages and individual understanding of information.

As the preceding discussion makes clear, the six conceptualizations of access suggested by McCreddie and Rice (1999a, 1999b) do not map neatly onto the three components of information access articulated by Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson (2008). Yet there are overlaps and similarities, allowing these two approaches to be synthesized. The most significant ideas from McCreddie and Rice *can* be incorporated into Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson’s approach. This is beneficial because McCreddie & Rice are the founders of information access research, and their broad, multi-disciplinary survey remains important, but physical, intellectual, and social access are more conceptually distinct (in literature by Burnett, Jaeger, and colleagues) than McCreddie and Rice’s six conceptualizations (as illustrated in the above discussion). Although

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McCreadie and Rice provide valuable groundwork, Burnett and Jaeger provide a more robust foundation for subsequent research.

The conceptualizations of information access reviewed here are complex, with multiple understandings of information access. This is not surprising, as other researchers have similarly noted diverse perspectives of information access. For example, Dole, Hurych, and Koehler (2000) report that librarians throughout the world considered “access” to be a core value of librarianship, but found no standard, shared definition of that value.

Lievrouw (2000) details the complexity of information access by describing several stages of access in her discussion of universal service. Lievrouw notes that information must be generally available before an individual can become personally aware of that availability. Yet mere availability is not sufficient for access; as Dervin (1994) notes, the false assumption that “availability equals accessibility” needs to be contested (p. 369). In Lievrouw’s model, this personal (awareness of) availability is then converted into accessibility through individual capacity such as literacy and social intelligence. Finally, access occurs through individual action. She further notes, “access can be ensured only if members of a community have also developed sufficient individual capacity to convert availability to accessibility, and subsequently to obtain access” (p. 157). This model illuminates the micro-stages of information access and illustrates the physical, intellectual, and social elements necessary for people to access information

Technical reports—published by various agencies of the federal government—illustrate the complexity of information access. For over 50 years, many federal agencies have been researching and preparing technical reports covering a wide variety of topics. Unlike other federal publications, these have not been collected in a central location, published by a central authority, or controlled with standard bibliographic information (McClure, 1988; Nickum, 2006;

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Shill, 1996). Though the National Technical Information Service (NTIS) was “created to act as a clearinghouse” for research and development information, it has not received funding since 1987, severely hindering its ability to collect, organize, and disseminate technical literature (Nickum, 2006, pp. 35-36; see also McClure, 1988). In the early 1990s, it was estimated that NTIS had collected no more than one-third of all federally funded reports (Shill, 1996, p. 289). Furthermore, NTIS was expected to be self-supporting, charging information seekers fees for producing the needed reports, which was not a successful business model (McClure, 1988; Shill, 1996). Agencies were expected to voluntarily submit reports to NTIS, which led to irregular submissions and “less than complete collections in many libraries and research centers nationwide” (Nickum, p. 35).

Technical reports *existed*—they were produced, voluminously, by many federal agencies. These reports were also, in principle, *available*. One could contact the NTIS and hope that the desired report was available there, or, if one knew which agency was responsible for the desired report, one could contact the agency and hope they would be willing to disseminate the information. These are both legitimate concerns: Nickum (2006) and McClure (1988) note that identifying the relevant agency is difficult for all information seekers, especially novices; furthermore, because information dissemination is not part of the fundamental mission of most agencies, sharing technical reports was not always done. Despite their existence and availability, therefore, technical reports were not *accessible* to other scientists, information professionals, and researchers, let alone average citizens (Nickum).

Technical reports suffered, therefore, from a lack of physical, intellectual, and social access. Physical access, according to Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson (2008) includes structures, technologies, and paths used to obtain information; none of these, however, were present for

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technical reports—for example, there was no effective central collection and organization of the reports. Individual intellectual traits could facilitate or impede access to technical reports, depending upon whether one knew of their existence, likely location, and the best avenue to them. Social access is affected by one's worldview and social norms: obtaining technical reports would be easier if one's colleagues and peers knew how to do so. Conversely, if the social norms of one's world disapproved of questioning the government, one would be less likely to aggressively search out technical reports.

With the advent of internet publishing, technical reports have become more accessible, as Nickum (2006) details. An improvement in physical access led to increased social and intellectual access. For example, the Office of Science and Technical Information (OSTI) in the Department of Energy, has collaborated with federal depository libraries and research communities to create several websites providing access to either bibliographic information about reports or the full reports themselves. By collaborating with outside individuals and institutions, the OSTI has increased social access, as capability spread outward, like ripples in a pond. The Energy Citations Database, perhaps the pinnacle of access to technical reports, contains bibliographic information for over 2.3 million documents from 1943 through the present, as well as over 175,000 electronic documents (Nickum, 2006; U.S. Department of Energy, 2009). With features like search engines, standard metadata, and bibliographic control, this database makes technical reports and other documents truly accessible to the general public. These features decrease the intellectual work necessary to access the technical reports.

Technical reports illustrate how all three aspects of information access—physical, intellectual, and social—are key ingredients to actually achieving access. This example clarifies

and illuminates the preceding conceptual discussion, by demonstrating how to utilizing the three-part conception articulated by Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson (2008).

## *2.2 Access as an a priori consideration*

This section briefly clarifies the distinction between information access and some closely related research domains. Information access can be conceptualized as an *a priori* component of other LIS domains of research. For example, information needs, seeking, and use (INSU) research considers “how people need, seek, give, and use information in different contexts, including the workplace and everyday living” (Pettigrew, Fidel, & Bruce, 2001, p. 44). Yet before one can seek out or make sense of particular information, it must be accessible;<sup>6</sup> in fact, “access stands at the center of information behaviors” (Jaeger, 2007, p. 843). If access to information is restricted, or the information is censored, then no amount of seeking will bring it forth.

The user-centered cognitive approach in INSU emphasizes that information is constructed by individuals to make sense out of their lives (Dervin & Nilan, 1986). One could ask, from what is this information constructed? Before sense can be made out of information, it must be physically accessible, intellectually accessible, and socially accessible (following from Burnett, Jaeger, & Thompson, 2008). Jaeger and Burnett (2005) note, “in a social context, the mere availability of information does not account for the full spectrum of information behavior” (p. 466). Thus, information access is conceptually distinct from INSU literature; research such as

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<sup>6</sup> The following discussion applies most directly to the “use” component of INSU. Technically, a *need* for information may precede its accessibility (even its existence). An individual may need or desire information that is not accessible, but once that need is acted upon (for example, by searching for the information), access to that information becomes central. *Seeking* information that is not accessible is also, technically, possible. However, it can be difficult to search for information one does not know about, making access to information an important factor in the seeking process. Furthermore, the accessibility of sought-after information is crucial to the success of the seeking.

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Case (2002), Dervin (1992), Dervin and Nilan (1986), Kuhlthau (1991), Pettigrew, Fidel, and Bruce (2001), Savolainen (1995), Vakkari, Savolainen, and Dervin (1997), Wilson (1997, 2000), and Wilson and Allen (1999) is therefore not addressed in this paper. A simple example can be drawn from the preceding discussion of federal technical reports. A report about leakage from a toxic waste site could be used by individuals to make sense of environmental damage and serious illness in their community; however, if that report is inaccessible, it cannot aid in making sense of the situation. Access to information must precede use of that information to understand one's everyday life. This review of information access examines only access itself, not the need for the information or the use of the information.

A second domain of LIS research that may be confused with information access is information retrieval. Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson (2008), in fact, include "the storage and retrieval of information" (p. 2) as part of physical access. In LIS, information retrieval is typically seen as a highly technical research area, as evidenced by the Special Interest Group-Information Retrieval (SIGIR) of the Association for Computing Machinery, which held a workshop on evaluating information access by studying information retrieval issues in non-English speaking countries (Sanderson, Sakai, & Kando, 2007; for information retrieval perspectives on information access, see Perugini & Ramakrishnan, 2007; White, Jose, & Ruthven, 2005; Yu, Venkatraman, & Singh, 2003). This conception of information retrieval is not addressed here. Instead, the focus is on the broader conceptualization of information access as articulated by Burnett and Jaeger, who draw particular attention to the intellectual and social components of information access.

Finally, access issues are frequently addressed in research related to people with disabilities. Research studying accessibility issues for underserved populations may well address

physical, intellectual, and social access (Burnett, Jaeger, & Thompson, 2008) and thus be part of the overall information access domain. For example, Horwath (2002) conducted an exploratory study to determine the accessibility of proprietary databases for visually impaired library patrons. Her survey examined physical and intellectual access issues, but did not address social access issues. Studies of accessibility for people with disabilities can be considered a subset of information access research. This review of information access does not pay particular attention to this subset (and, thus, research such as Brophy & Craven, 2007; Cunningham & Coombs, 1996; Dobransky & Hargittai, 2006; Fink, Kobsa, & Nill, 1997; Goggin & Newell, 2000; Jaeger, 2006; Mates, 2004; Roberts, 2006; and Stienstra, 2006; is not addressed here). Instead, the emphasis is on delineating the broader research area of information access.

### *2.3 Information access: Relevance to LIS*

With this clarification, we can now turn to demonstrating the relevance of information access to LIS research. Information access is a fundamental concern of librarianship, particularly public libraries. Mathiesen and Fallis (2008) argue that information access can be traced back to Ranganathan's five principles of the library (1931/2007). Gorman (2000), a past president of the American Library Association (ALA), suggests that equality of access is one of the eight primary values of librarianship. Publicly supported libraries strive to provide equity of information access regardless of patron characteristics, such as education or socioeconomic status (American Library Association, 1986; ALA Libraries: An American Value, 2008; ALA Library Bill of Rights, 2008; ALA Policy Manual, 2008; ALA Diversity in collection development, 2009; ALA Universal right to free expression, 2009; Berry, 2004; Blitz, 2006; Burden, 2000; Buschman, 2005; Byrne, 2003; Kranich, 2001; Krug, 2002; Gorman, 1995, 2000; Heckart, 1991; Mathiesen

& Fallis, 2008; Rubin, 2004; Stielow, 2001; Schement, 2001; Thompson, 2008). Jaeger and Burnett (2005) argue that “libraries can be seen as models of equitable access” because they act as open repositories of information and because their spaces are open and accessible to the public (p. 468).

Similarly, Smolla (1993) notes that librarians should “provide information and make it accessible” to the general public (p. 72). Thompson (2008) suggests that public libraries should “focus on information service and access rather than on the physical collection the walls contain therein” (p. 97). Others have likewise argued that libraries and librarians have a central role in information access. Mathiesen and Fallis (2008) acknowledge the complexity of accessing information in the modern world by proposing that librarians act as “an intermediary between the person who wishes to access some information and the information” itself (p. 230).

Information access is tied to librarianship not only in America, but globally as well. In 2003, Koehler surveyed librarians worldwide and found that equal access and intellectual freedom were consistently ranked among the most important values (see also Dole, Hurych, & Koehler, 2000). Sturges (2006) summarized the centrality of information access by noting “the commitment of the profession to freedom of expression, [and]... the global role of libraries in contributing to providing access to the widest possible range of information and ideas for communities” (p. 181).

The strongest evidence that information access is a suitable research concern for LIS scholars is found through the connections with intellectual freedom (IF), a long-standing research area and normative concern of LIS (library science in particular). Intellectual freedom,<sup>7</sup> as defined by the ALA, is

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<sup>7</sup> Williams and Pearce (1973) are skeptical about the phrase “intellectual freedom,” claiming that “it uses faulty terminology, lacks systematic expression, incorporates factual error, is founded on untenable principles, flies in the

the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. It provides for *free access to all expressions of ideas* through which any and all sides of a question, cause or movement may be explored (ALA, 2008, Intellectual Freedom & Censorship Q&A, para. 1, emphasis added).

Clearly, information access is central to IF, and to librarianship in general. The foundational policy and position documents of the ALA all emphasize the importance of equal and free access to information (ALA Libraries: An American Value, 2008; ALA Library Bill of Rights, 2008; ALA Policy Manual, 2008; ALA Universal right to free expression, 2009; Berry, 2004; Burden, 2000; Krug, 2002). IF is an orientation toward serving patrons by making as much information available as possible, and removing as many barriers or restrictions toward access as possible. The close connection between IF and information access has been recognized by numerous scholars (Asheim, 1953, 1983; Burden, 2000; Burnett, Jaeger, & Thompson, 2008; Jaeger & Burnett, 2005; Jones, 1999; Kranich, 2001; Krug, 2002; Mathiesen, 2008; Mathiesen & Fallis, 2008; Rubin, 2004; Thompson, 2008). For example, Burden explains that IF “includes the concept of universal access to information” (p. 46).

One of the fundamental concerns of IF is censorship, or restriction of access to particular materials or points of view. Censorship is most often thought of in reference to libraries, especially school and public libraries. Perhaps because of this focus, libraries have created specific definitions of censorship; for example, the Office for Intellectual Freedom of the American Library Association says “Censors pressure public institutions, like libraries, to suppress and remove from public *access* information they judge inappropriate or dangerous, so that no one else has the chance to read or view the material” (ALA Intellectual Freedom &

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face of social and legal reality, and is impossible to implement” (p. 2399). Such cynicism, however, is relatively rare in LIS literature, and this paper adopts an unproblematic attitude toward IF.

Censorship Q&A, 2008, emphasis added).<sup>8</sup> Doyle (2001) defines censorship as “any deliberate impediment on the expression of or *access to* any ideas or images” (p. 45, emphasis added). Similarly, Oppenheim and Smith (2004) define censorship as an act when “something is withheld from *access* by another” (p. 160, emphasis added), and Mathiesen (2008) notes that “censorship limits *access* to an expression, either by deterring the speaker from speaking or the hearer from receiving such speech” (p. 574, emphasis added). As these definitions show, lack of access is an elemental component of censorship.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, these definitions reflect both the regulative and the constitutive components of censorship. Following Jansen (1991), regulative censorship includes laws, conventions, and rules that prohibit or govern the material that can be published, owned, shared, sold, or displayed—in other words, regulative censorship restricts access to information (pp. 7-8). This regulative element is the predominant understanding of censorship and examples are relatively easy to find. For example, the scores of challenges noted in the ALA’s *Intellectual Freedom Newsletter* are all regulatory battles over which materials should be part of a library’s collection. In contrast, constitutive censorship is the subtle process by which “the powerful invoke censorship to create, secure, and maintain their control” (Jansen, 1991, pp. 7-8). Constitutive censorship operates at a hidden, implicit level, motivating the various rules about who can have access to which materials. McCreadie and Rice (1999a) argue that “there are two social groups with regard to access: those with privileged access and the power to signify terms of the debate

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<sup>8</sup> As this definition indicates, there is often an evaluative stance taken in IF: censorship, or restriction of information access, is portrayed as an unqualified wrong. However, this review, seeks to avoid moralistic evaluations (as part of intellectual freedom, information ethics, or both), instead examining access as a neutral concept. Future work will investigate specific instances in which information access was denied or provided, and will likely evaluate the moral laudability or denigration of such action. At this point, however, such evaluation is premature.

<sup>9</sup> The motivations behind censorship—examples and theories of restricted access—lie beyond the scope of this paper. Within the literature pertaining to restricted access, several explanations can be found: national security (Strickland, 2005), moral/ religious convictions, and information quality/accuracy. Detailed explication of one or more of these approaches may be best undertaken in conjunction with empirical research.

and those who must struggle to gain access” (p. 68). As this diverse, widespread literature demonstrates, IF and information access are closely entwined; because IF is a fundamental concern of librarianship and LIS more generally, information access thus is situated squarely within LIS research.

The relevance and centrality of information access *vis-à-vis* LIS goes beyond IF, however. As Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson (2008) state, “access [is] a concept interwoven with many major research problems in LIS” (p. 56). Whether addressed explicitly or implicitly, information access is a common element in several different LIS research domains. Table 2 illustrates how the three components of information access can be seen across several LIS research areas.

For example, the literature on the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) includes key questions about physical access such as whether certain records exist and how to determine this (Halstuk, 2000; Gordon-Murnane, 1999; Tankersley, 1998). Intellectual access factors include the amount and readability of information provided, as well as potential connections between documents. Knowing how to request records and how to pursue adjudication are also components of intellectual access (Grunewald, 1998; Tankersley, 1998). Social access issues play a role, as well. Some researchers, for instance, may think it is inappropriate to request records related to homeland security, while others may advocate just such requests (Feinberg, 2004; Mart, 2006; Smith, 2007). The social component of information access can also include an agency’s philosophy and practice about FOIA requests (Davis, 2003; Halstuk, 2000; Oltmann, Hara, & Rosenbaum, 2006).

A similar elucidation can be made for the research pertaining to open access. Questions of physical access revolve around the technological factors affecting open access, such as

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gaining permissions, finding websites, and locating specific resources within an open access

Table 2. Information Access as a Component of Selected LIS Research Areas.

|                                   | Physical Access   | Intellectual Access   | Social Access   | Related Research  |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do the records exist?</li> <li>• How can records be obtained?</li> <li>• What format are the records in?</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can the records be understood?</li> <li>• Will information be redacted?</li> <li>• How do these records fit with other documents?</li> </ul>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should one ask for these records?</li> <li>• What sort of response is expected from the agency?</li> <li>• What should be done with these records?</li> </ul>          | Davis, 2003; Feinberg, 2004; Grunewald, 1998; Halstuk, 2000; Mart, 2006; Oltmann, Hara, & Rosenbaum, 2006; Perritt, 1998; Relyea, 1994; Smith, 2007; Tankersley, 1998   |
| Open Access                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where/how can one get access?</li> <li>• What is available through this?</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the information high-quality?</li> <li>• How can one compare this with other research?</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who supports or discourages this?</li> <li>• Is this an acceptable way to get published?</li> </ul>  | Drott, 2006; Joseph, 2008; Norris, Oppenheim, 2008; Oppenheim, & Rowland, 2008; Novak & Pardo, 2007; NTIA, 1999; Scholze, 2007; Suber, 2008; Subirats, et al., 2008   |
| Digital Divide                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many computers are available?</li> <li>• What equipment can reduce the divide?</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What can one learn from X?</li> <li>• How is this used?</li> <li>• What individual traits perpetuate the divide?</li> </ul>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are peers getting online, using this technology?</li> <li>• How will this information be useful in one's life?</li> </ul>  | Adams, 2001; Alvarez, 2003; Barzilai-Nahon, 2006; Bertot & McClure, 2000; Bucy, 2000; Clement & Shade, 2000; Dewan & Riggins, 2005; Gunkel, 2003; Hargittai, 2002; Kvasny & Keil, 2006; Loader & Keeble, 2004; Warschauer, 2003; van Dijk, 2005, 2006 |
| Web Content Management            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is information posted on the website?</li> <li>• Where is it posted?</li> <li>• How do features like search capabilities and site maps affect access?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which information is/ is not posted?</li> <li>• Are there patterns in what is posted?</li> <li>• What information is sensitive or confidential?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who has to approve posting information?</li> <li>• How are those decisions made?</li> <li>• How are discussions about posting sensitive information framed?</li> </ul> | Eschenfelder, 2004a, 2004b; Feinberg, 2004; Mahler & Regan, 2007  |

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repository or journal (Suber, 2008; Subirats, Onyancha, Salokhe, Kaloyanova, Anibaldi, & Keizer, 2008). The intellectual access components of open access include evaluating the quality of available resources; for example, are articles published in open access journals as reputable as articles published in traditional, paper-based journals? Intellectual aspects also include, therefore, determining *how* to evaluate articles and rank sources (Norris, Oppenheim, & Rowland, 2008; Scholze, 2007). Finally, social values and norms are also part of the open access research domain (Joseph, 2008; Novak & Pardo, 2007). For example, recruiting, tenure, and promotion procedures, traditionally based on publication in traditional journals, may be questioned and even disparaged in the open access literature (Drott, 2006; Oppenheim, 2008). These are social practices, governed by social norms; if one's norms indicate that traditional journals are more prestigious, one may denigrate open access journals.

Concerns about information access are central to the digital divide literature, though the concept lacks clarity in that domain. For example, physical access research includes questions about availability of various technologies such as computers and the internet (Bertot & McClure, 2000; Gunkel, 2003). Intellectual access involves not only individual skill and knowledge, but also individual traits (such as socioeconomic status, race, and education) that are implicated in digital divide research (Alvarez, 2003; Bucy, 2000; Hargittai, 2002). Social access issues include questions about peer groups and the impacts of various technologies and resources (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2006; Brynin & Kraut, 2006; Donnermeyer & Hollifield, 2003). Clement and Shade (2006) address the physical, intellectual, and social aspects of information access in their "access rainbow," a visualization of seven different components of access (carriage, devices, software tools, content/ services, service/ access provision, literacy/ social facilitation, and governance) that they feel are essential to addressing the digital divide. Some digital divide literature goes

beyond focusing on one aspect of access to the exclusion of the other components; these scholars argue for a more comprehensive conceptualization of access (e.g., Adams, 2001; Barzilai-Nahon, 2006; Bertot, 2003; Dewan & Riggins, 2005; Kvasny & Keil, 2006; Loader & Keeble, 2004; Warschauer, 2003; van Dijk, 2005, 2006). Because the digital divide literature examines more than access to information, it should not be considered a subset of information access; rather, this exploration is meant to demonstrate how central and foundational information access is in relation to other, more recognized research areas. Investigation and analysis into the digital divide and into information access ought to be complementary.

Finally, several LIS scholars have recently investigated the processes by which web content is managed for the websites of state and federal government agencies (Eschenfelder, 2004a, 2004b; Feinberg, 2004; Mahler & Regan, 2007). They studied how decisions about website content were made, affecting citizens' access to government information. Eschenfelder (2004b) found that decisions about posting information and making it available necessitated agency approval, which involved "extensive review of content to determine factual correctness, compliance with agency standards, the degree to which it supported division or agency priorities, and likelihood of attracting negative public attention (therefore requiring even higher level review)" (p. 474). Blakemore and Craglia (2006) similarly studied access to public-sector information in Europe.

In these research domains, particularly in the studies cited here, information access was a central (though sometimes unstated) concern for the researchers. Physical, intellectual, and social access are key components of multiple LIS research streams.

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This chapter has introduced, defined, and clarified the research area of information access, using Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson's (2008) three components of information access—physical, intellectual, and social. As this chapter demonstrated, it is a legitimate research concern of LIS, one that is integrally bound up with several other research domains. The following chapter reviews common methodological approaches to information access.

## Chapter 3: Methodological Approaches in Information Access

This chapter turns to a review of the common methodological approaches in information access research, as summarized in Table 3. The vast majority of literature concerned with information access is not quantitative. One exception is the work by Hamilton and Pors (2003), which uses data from two surveys to analyze global differences in library perspectives on freedom of access, internet access, and patron privacy. One survey was conducted by the

Table 3. Common methodological approaches in information access research.

| Type of research           | Focus or outlook   | Types of questions asked   | Representative works  |
|----------------------------|--|--|---|
| Normative/<br>Prescriptive | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What ought to be done</li> <li>• Best practices, professional guidelines</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What should libraries (librarians) do?</li> <li>• What are the best professional practices?</li> </ul>  | ALA position and policy statements; Brown, 2004; Burden, 2000; Buschman, 2005; Byrne, 2003; Gorman, 1995, 2000; Heckart, 1991; Jones, 1999; Krug, 2002; Mathiesen & Fallis, 2008; Rubin, 2004; Schement, 2001 |
| Advocacy                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passionate, rhetorical stances</li> <li>• Social justice</li> <li>• Preserving and extending freedoms and rights</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can the status quo be protected or bettered?</li> <li>• What should we be wary of in the future?</li> </ul>                                       | Some ALA position and policy statements; Berry, 2004; Corredoira, 2007; Doctor, 1991, 1992; Jorgensen, 2006; Kranich, 2001; Lor & Britz, 2007; Smolla, 1993; Stielow, 2001                                    |
| Review                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current/ recent policies, laws, regulations</li> <li>• Some documentary analysis</li> </ul>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the recent changes?</li> <li>• What might the implications and effects of these policies be?</li> <li>• What lessons can we draw?</li> </ul> | Blakemore & Craglia, 2006; Cooke, 2007; Jaeger, 2007; Jaeger & Burnett, 2005; Lievrouw & Farb, 2002; Mart, 2003; McDermott, 2007; McCreadie & Rice, 1999, 1999b; Nickum, 2006; Smith, 1995; Sturges, 2006     |
| Case study                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploratory</li> <li>• Use of interviews and/ or documentary analysis</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the implications and effects of these policies?</li> <li>• What causes X?</li> </ul>   | Burnett, Jaeger, & Thompson, 2008; Eschenfelder, 2004a, 2004b; Mahler & Regan, 2007; Powell, 2007; Thompson, 2008   |

National Authorities of Public Libraries and the other was conducted by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). Such broad quantitative surveys are, however, rare in the information access literature.

In general, most information access literature is not empirical; normative and advocacy works predominate.<sup>10</sup> Although neither normative nor advocative approaches are methodologies, they both are common in the information access domain. A parallel can be drawn with the community informatics literature, where O'Neil's analysis of community networks includes works "with a lesser degree of scientific rigor" because "they provide a solid basis for further development of more rigorous community informatics tools" (p. 78). In the same vein, many authors, particularly those writing in or about public libraries, use the written word in an attempt to guide action or influence beliefs, rather than to present empirical research.

### *3.1 Normative/ prescriptive*

Normative information access literature typically describes how libraries and librarians ought to act, how they ought to interpret and apply information access concepts, and how they ought to challenge resistance to implementing these norms (ALA Core Values, 2008; ALA Diversity in collection development; ALA Libraries: An American Value, 2008; ALA Library Bill of Rights, 2008; ALA Policy Manual, 2008; ALA Universal right to free expression, 2009). For example, the American Library Association's "Library Bill of Rights" contains a list of six values and practices that libraries "should" endorse, such as "Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should

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<sup>10</sup> For comparison, see Robbin, Courtright, and Davis (2004), who note that much of the literature related to democracy and information/communication technology is "normative, prescriptive, aspirational, stereotypical, and hyperbole" (p. 461). Unfortunately, much of the information access literature suffers from a similar problem.

not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval” (part II). There appears to be no way to compromise or be uncertain about these principles (other than raising concerns at the annual association meeting). Similarly, the ALA statement “Libraries: An American Value” asserts that “Free access to the books, ideas, resources, and information in America’s libraries is *imperative*” (para. 1; emphasis added), again brooking no dissent.

These statements by the ALA are meant to serve as quasi-official guidelines for how librarians and libraries ought to act, emphasizing professional guidelines and ethics. Other normative works in this vein include Brown (2004), Buschman (2005), Burden (2000), Byrne (2003), Gorman (1995, 2000), Heckart (1991), Jones (1999), Krug (2002), Mathiesen and Fallis (2008), Rubin (2004), and Schement (2001).

### 3.2 *Advocacy*

Related to this normative strand, many works advocate strongly for increased access and/or decreased censorship. These advocative works adopt rhetorical language, a persuasive tone, and are more strongly worded than the normative literature mentioned above.<sup>11</sup> For example, Doctor (1991) argues

Access will be of little benefit to large portions of the population, unless it is accompanied by equipment and training that allow effective use of that access. What we need then is a “right to access” in the broader sense of a “right to *benefit* from access” (p. 217, emphasis in original).

This is an impassioned argument for increasing and protecting the rights of marginalized segments of the population. Lor and Britz (2007) advocate for a right to access in a similar way, because they believe that information access is “a precondition for participation in the various

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<sup>11</sup> Blakemore and Craglia (2006) similarly note the impassioned advocacy present in some access writing, which can be “characterized by emotional, even religious tones [of] the promoters of ‘free’ access” (p. 17).

socio-economic and political activities of a modern knowledge society” (p. 388). This approach often has a social justice component to it: information access is seen as a way to correct wrongs done earlier to various groups in society. Thus, First and Hart (2002) argue that “equal access to information and services on the internet has become an important new area of concern for social justice” (p. 385).

Advocacy in the information access domain often warns of potential dangers in the future, such as a reduction in citizens’ rights to access information. Thus, Smolla (1993), for example, advocates for librarians to combat censorship in all its forms, in all its permutations. Many other writers take a similar stance, but Smolla’s article has a strong exhortative stance absent in other writings. Other advocative works include Berry (2004), Corredoira (2007), Doctor (1992), Jorgensen (2006), Kranich (2001), and Stielow (2001).

### *3.3 Review*

A somewhat more formal, evidence-based method used in information access research is a review of both current and recently-enacted laws, regulations, and policies. For example, Jaeger and Burnett (2005) review the effects on information exchange among scholars of several provisions of the USA PATRIOT Act, the Homeland Security Act, various related Executive Orders, the Children’s Internet Protection Act, and the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System. Jaeger (2007) analyzes implications of some George W. Bush administration policies regarding information access.

Most of the review literature is concerned with implications of policies and laws, hence the emphasis on recent changes. Mart (2003), for example, reviews court rulings pertaining to the right to access information to demonstrate how this right has gradually developed through

adjudication and interpretation (see Chapter 4, especially Section 4.1, for further discussion). Nickum (2006) explains the implications of the internet and recent collaborative efforts to improve access to federal technical reports.

Other scholars review the current state of the literature, explaining various foci of information access research. Smith (1995) provides a broad overview of the relationship between democracy and free access to information in America. McCreddie and Rice (1999a, 1999b) perform an extensive review of six domains that study information access. Lievrouw and Farb (2002) assess literature dealing with access, equity, and the digital divide.

Some of these studies make use of at least a perfunctory document analysis, reviewing and citing relevant changes in laws or policies. Cooke (2007), for example, bases her examination of European Union (EU) approaches to restricting internet content on “documentary analysis of both hard copy and electronic primary and secondary sources,” conducting a “retrospective analysis [to provide] longitudinal insight into shifts in policy emphases over this period” (p. 361). Similarly, Blakemore and Craglia (2006) review the debates and policies encoded in EU documentation and reports to analyze official perspectives on access to public sector information.

### *3.4 Case study*

Finally, the information access literature that *is* empirically based utilizes case studies heavily. Eschenfelder (2004b) reviews the web content management policies and practices of four state-level government agencies, using an “exploratory multiple case study design with predominantly qualitative data” drawn from semi-structured interviews and document review (p. 466). Mahler and Regan (2007) similarly look at how seven federal agencies update and create

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new web content. They stated that they used three kinds of evidence in their case studies: visual evidence from websites, documentation, and semi-structured interviews (p. 511).

After elaborating their three-part conception of information access, Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson (2008) apply it to three case studies drawn from the literature: the re-design of the San Francisco Public Library, book banning efforts in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, in 1951, which led to the firing of the public librarian, and recent Bush administration information policies (p. 59). They provided new analysis of these cases but did not conduct original research.

The case studies all acknowledge the exploratory nature of their findings. Rather than generating untested assumptions about the implications of particular policies, this case study research examines how information access is actually affected. For example, Eschenfelder (2004b) finds that some state agencies enforced multiple levels of control and approval before any substantive changes could be made to agency websites, which slowed the public's ability to access information.

The overall paucity of empirical research, and the reliance on case study methods, may be somewhat surprising. However, information access (and related research areas, such as censorship, intellectual freedom, and freedom of expression) can arouse strong emotion (as seen in the advocacy works), which is not always conducive toward empirical study. Most of the case studies have been conducted fairly recently, perhaps indicating a turn in this field toward empirical work. With little empirical work done to date, case studies are an appropriate methodology to begin making preliminary assessments.

## **Chapter 4: Theoretical Approaches in Information Access**

This chapter reviews common theoretical and philosophical approaches to the concept of information access. Reviewing theoretical approaches to information access is somewhat problematic for two reasons. First, as discussed above, much of the relevant research is normative or prescriptive, with little or no theoretical basis. Secondly, the nature of theory in LIS research is contested (Bates, 2005; McKechnie & Pettigrew, 2002; McGrath, 2002). Some scholars suggest that LIS rarely uses theory and uses it *well* even less often (Bates, 2005; Jarvelin & Vakkari, 1990; Pettigrew & McKechnie, 2001; McKechnie & Pettigrew, 2002; Kim & Jeong, 2006). Pettigrew and McKechnie (2001) investigate how information science (IS) scholars use theory. As they began analyzing articles from IS, they were compelled to accept, at face value, authors' uses of the word "theory," because the "initial coding quickly indicated that there was no singular definition that would encompass all the varied uses of the term in the articles" they examined (p. 65). In fact, McGrath (2002) notes that, in LIS

there is little formal theory to agree or disagree on... Any of the following have been used as the meaning of theory: a law, hypothesis, group of hypotheses, proposition, supposition, explanation, model, assumption, conjecture, construct, edifice, structure, opinion, speculation, belief, principle, rule, point of view, generalization, scheme, or idea (p. 309).

Perhaps as a result of this, some have argued for a broader understanding of theory and its uses in LIS. For example, Buckland (1991) explores the denotations and connotations of theory in LIS, and in information systems research in particular. He notes that "to develop a theory of something is to develop a view, a description, or a way of looking at it" (p. 17). He then defines theory "in the broad sense of a description or explanation of the nature of things, not in the more restricted sense, used in some sciences, of denoting fundamental laws formally stated

and falsifiable” (p. 18). This definition seems more applicable to social sciences such as LIS (and, hence, information access). Kim and Jeong (2006) suggest that theories can be utilized in five ways: spot citing (simply including the name of a theory, typically without citations); background review (up to a few paragraphs of description with a few citations); theory discussion (an in-depth explanation); theory application (directly applying a theory to the conceptual framework used in the research); and analytic evaluation (applying, evaluating, and extending a theory) (p. 554). This hierarchy of theory use suggests, rightfully, that some LIS studies and fields of research are more theoretically rigorous than others. Some theories may be more or less developed or articulated, in addition to being differentially applied.

Due to the nascent nature of information access, this paper adopts Buckland’s (1991) approach to theory; not all of the perspectives here fit into a traditional scientific understanding of “theory.” For example, much legal and jurisprudence theory is based upon an examination of court decisions and writings, rather than on explicitly stating hypotheses, variables, and findings, yet they remain important examples of investigations into freedom of speech and information access. As the *Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Law and Legal Theory* states, legal theory is “an enterprise that has tended to concentrate on rationalizing and legitimating whole departments of legal doctrine” (Edmundson, 2005, p. 1; see also Blasi, 1977; Barzun, 2007; Hemmer, 2007; Shiffrin, 1990). Legal theories include different ways to understand, interpret, and apply the concept of “freedom of speech.”

Often, information access research is theoretically informed by jurisprudential theories of freedom of speech. Thus, Section 4.1 explains the relevance of freedom of speech theories to information access, based on an extensive jurisprudential history. The next three sections review

common legal approaches to defending freedom of speech,<sup>12</sup> and the final section describes an explicitly LIS theory pertaining to information access.

#### *4.1 Jurisprudence and the right to information access*

Information access has been explicitly and implicitly linked to the broader rights of freedom of speech/ expression.<sup>13</sup> Essentially, the argument is that freedom of speech is impossible or valueless without the right or ability to access that speech (Bollinger, 1986; Braddon-Mitchell & West, 2004; Burden, 2000; Hamilton & Pors, 2003; Jones, 1999; Mart, 2003; Smolla, 1993). Extensive support for this connection can be found in American jurisprudence<sup>14</sup> concerning the First Amendment and citizens' freedom of speech.

The First Amendment prohibits Congress from “abridging the freedom of speech” of citizens. Over time, this has been interpreted to include the ability or right to receive speech—in other words, to information access. Mart (2003) traces this development through various First Amendment cases before the Supreme Court (*Martin v. City of Struthers*, 1943; *Thomas v.*

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<sup>12</sup> What follows is not an all-encompassing review of freedom of speech theory, which has been the subject of numerous dissertations, treatises, books, and indeed, lifelong academic careers. Bollinger (1986) wryly remarked that “the First Amendment landscape has both grown dramatically in size and been subdivided into many plots” (p. 3), which has only continued in the twenty years since his comment. This paper, therefore, is limited to presenting an overview of the three predominant theories of freedom of speech, as they pertain to information access.

<sup>13</sup> The distinction between freedom of speech and freedom of expression—and the scholarly debate about whether there *is* any distinction, and which is the foundation of the other—is beyond the scope of this paper. Generally, “freedom of expression” is taken to explicitly include non-speech acts, such as artwork or clothing, and “freedom of speech” has come to implicitly include these (though strict interpretationalists would likely disagree). In this paper, these phrases are treated as roughly equivalent (following, e.g., Braddon-Mitchell & West, 2004; DeCew, 2004; Emerson, 1970; Hemmer, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> The connection between information access and freedom of speech is also found in international jurisprudence. In the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 19 states, “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, retrieve and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” This Article explicitly incorporates the concept of information access into a basic human right that should be available to all people (Corredoira, 2007; Cramer, 2009; Jorgensen, 2006; Krug, 2002; Sturges, 2006). The UDHR has influenced subsequent agreements, including the U.N. International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights (1966), the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights (1950), the American Convention on Human Rights (1969), and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981).

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*Collins*, 1945; *Griswold v. Connecticut*, 1965; *Lamont v. Postmaster General*, 1965; *Stanley v. Georgia*, 1969; *Red Lion Broadcasting v. FCC*, 1969; *Kleindienst v. Mandel*, 1972; *Board of Education v. Pico*, 1982).<sup>15</sup>

*Martin v. Struthers* (1943) established a protection for the right to receive information, and two years later, in *Thomas v. Collins* (1945), the Court explained that such a right was “necessarily correlative” to freedom of speech (p. 530). In *Lamont v. Postmaster General* (1965), which was about post offices retaining foreign communist mailings, Justice Brennan articulated the relationship:

It is true that the First Amendment contains no specific guarantee of access to publications. However, the protection of the Bill of Rights goes beyond the specific guarantees to protect from congressional abridgment those equally fundamental personal rights necessary to make the express guarantees fully meaningful... The dissemination of ideas can accomplish nothing if otherwise willing addressees are not free to receive and consider them. It would be a barren marketplace of ideas that had only sellers and no buyers (p. 308).

Brennan thus explained that freedom of speech has little power if others cannot receive, or access, that speech. A marketplace without buyers, he speculates, would soon become a marketplace without sellers, thus eliminating the purpose of and need for a market (see Section 4.2 below for a further explication of this argument). The ability to buy—to access information—is necessary to constitute a market (see also *Griswold v. Connecticut*, 1965, for the same argument).

Two cases in 1969 further cemented the connection between the right to freedom of speech and the right to access information. Justice White argued that “the right of the public to

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<sup>15</sup> Mart’s review ends with *Pico* in 1982. Additional, subsequent Supreme Court First Amendment cases that pertain to the right to receive information include: *Republican Party of Minnesota v. White*, 2002; *Watchtower Bible & Tract Society v. Village of Stratton*, 2002; *Bartnicki v. Vopper*, 2001; *Lorillard Tobacco Company v. Reilly*, 2001; *Reno v. American Civil Liberties Union*, 1997; *Eu v. San Francisco City Democratic Central Committee*, 1989; *Press-Enterprise Company v. Superior Court*, 1984; and *Bolger v. Youngs Drug Products Corporation*, 1983. These were identified after reviewing nearly 200 First Amendment cases between 1983-2008.

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receive suitable access to social, political, esthetic, moral, and other ideas and experiences is [the] crucial” component of the ruling upholding the Federal Communications Commission’s fairness doctrine (*Red Lion Broadcasting v. FCC*, 1969, p. 390). *Stanley v. Georgia* (1969) established the right to receive even obscene material. Mart (2003) notes that “by 1969, the right to receive information had become a fundamental right” (pp. 178-179). The Supreme Court agreed, summarizing the importance of accessing information in *Board of Education v. Pico* (1982): “This right [to access information] is an inherent corollary of the rights of free speech and press that are explicitly guaranteed by the Constitution” (p. 867). Blitz (2006) concludes that “it is now well established that the First Amendment protects not only the rights of people to engage in speech but also the right of audiences to receive it” (p. 800).

The lower courts have followed the Supreme Court’s lead. In *Kreimer v. Bureau of Police for Morristown* (1992), for example, the Second District Federal Court said, “the First Amendment does not merely prohibit the government from enacting laws that censor information, but additionally encompasses the positive right of public access to information and ideas” (p. 1255). In fact, the *Kreimer* decision suggested that a public library is “the quintessential locus of the receipt of information” (p. 1256). A 2002 case in Colorado found that citizens have a right to receive ideas and information. The court further held:

It is well established that [the First Amendment] safeguards a wide spectrum of activities, including the right to distribute and sell expressive materials, the right to associate with others, and, most importantly to this case, the right to receive information and ideas. These various rights, though not explicitly articulated in either the Federal or Colorado Constitution, are necessary to the successful and uninhibited exercise of the specifically enumerated right to “freedom of speech.” Without the right to receive information and ideas, the protection of speech under the United States and Colorado Constitutions would be meaningless (*Tattered Cover v. City of Thornton*, 2002, pp. 1052-1053).

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The U.S. courts have found the right of access to be a corollary of the First Amendment for two reasons. First, the right to receive ideas and information follows naturally from the speaker's right to disseminate them; without someone to receive the ideas, the right of free speech is incomparably diminished (*Lamont v. Postmaster General*, 1965). Secondly, the right to receive information is "a necessary predicate to the recipient's meaningful exercise of his own rights of speech, press, and political freedom" (*Board of Education v. Pico*, 1982, p. 867). In order to produce speech, one must have access to other's speech, which can then inform or shape one's own ideas; the Court suggests that ideas and speech do not form in a vacuum, but are necessarily built upon the speech of others. Thus, access to this speech is necessary to be able to exercise one's own right to speech (Balkin, 2004). In this perspective, receiving/ accessing information and expressing information "are properly viewed as two halves of the same whole" (Cohen, 1996, p. 1006). Similarly, Ross (1999) argues that "the right to speech includes an integral right to receive information so that speakers can evaluate and choose among the ideas which they prefer to voice" (pp. 224-225; see also Coase, 1974; Napoli, 1999; Smolla, 1992; Sweeney, 1984).

Access has clearly been bound with freedom of speech within American jurisprudential history, as demonstrated through the above-mentioned court cases.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, it is worthwhile to explore arguments used to support freedom of speech because, by extension, these same arguments are applicable to information access. These legal theories provide some of the strongest analysis and explication of freedom of speech (and, by extension, information access) and have been foundational for how LIS scholars conceptualize freedom of speech/ information

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<sup>16</sup> Several court cases have articulated the right to receive information, but Ross (1999) notes that this "remains a relatively unexplored aspect of freedom of speech, [which] may be attributable in part to the fact that it is frequently taken for granted and subsumed within the speaker's right to express his or her views" (pp. 230-231) and Blitz (2006) notes it has "garnered very little scholarly attention" (p. 800). This essay attempts to bridge that gap in the literature.

access. The following three sections address the most prevalent theories related to the First Amendment: the marketplace of ideas, free speech's relation to democracy, and individual utility/ empowerment (see Table 4 for a summary).<sup>17</sup>

Table 4. Predominant jurisprudential approaches to freedom of speech.

| Approach  | Key arguments  | Representative works   |
|---|--|--|
| The argument from the marketplace of ideas and the search for truth | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ideas should compete with one another in a marketplace, in which the best (most truthful) ideas will eventually be adopted</li> <li>• Speakers are analogous to sellers and listeners to buyers/ consumers</li> <li>• Full or partial truth can be found in most ideas, so all should be heard</li> <li>• Even falsehoods can aid the search for truth by strengthening true arguments</li> </ul> | ALA policy statements, 2008; Asheim, 1953, 1983; Blasi, 1997, 2004; Burden, 2000; Chevigny, 1988; Doctor, 1992; Gordon, 1997; Heckart, 1991; Holmes, 1919; Hopkins, 1996; Lievrouw & Farb, 2002; Mill, 1869; Napoli, 1999; Riley, 2005; Rubin, 2004; Schauer, 1986; Smolla, 1993                                   |
| The argument from democracy   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free speech is essential to promoting and ensuring democracy</li> <li>• Free speech is implicated in both civic participation and public deliberation</li> <li>• It ensures that citizens know their rights and can exercise them</li> <li>• Free speech keeps government accountable and responsive</li> <li>• It facilitates good collective decision-making</li> </ul>                         | ALA policy statements, 2008; Balkin, 2004; Barzun, 2004; Blakemore & Craglia, 2006; Bork, 1971; Chafee, 1941; Chambers, 2003; Dervin, 1994; Doctor, 1992; Emerson, 1970; Hafner, 1993; Jaeger & Burnett, 2005; Kranich, 2001; Meiklejohn, 1961; Murdock & Golding, 1989; Schauer, 1982; Smith, 1995; Smolla, 1992; |
| The argument from individual utility/ empowerment                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom of speech (thought) is essential to self-fulfillment and development</li> <li>• It can empower individuals</li> <li>• Free speech is an end in itself</li> </ul>  | ALA policy statements, 2008; Blakemore & Craglia, 2006; Brison, 1998; Chevigny, 1988; Cohen, 1993; Emerson, 1970; Lievrouw, 2000; Lor & Britz, 2007; Nagel, 1995; Redish, 1984; Richards, 1989; Rubin, 2004; Scanlon, 1972; Smolla, 1993   |

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<sup>17</sup> Scholars arguing that these are the three predominant perspectives include Blasi (1977), Bollinger (1986), DeCew (2004), Heckart (1991), Ross (1999) and Smolla (1992). Theorists suggesting four approaches include Emerson (1970; self-fulfillment, democracy, the marketplace of ideas, and the balance between stability and change), Chevigny (1998; self-fulfillment, democracy, the search for truth, and individual autonomy), and Raikka (2003; autonomy, diversity, democracy, and truth). Note that the three prevalent theories—marketplace of ideas/ search for truth, democracy, and individual utility/ empowerment—all appear in each of these longer lists. Other theories garnering less attention, and less support in the literature, include checking abuses of power (Blasi, 1977), public choice theory (Farber, 1991), and promotion of a democratic culture (Balkin, 2004). In developing these minor theories, the authors provide useful commentary on the predominant theories, or partially support them in some way, so they will be used occasionally in this review.

#### *4.2 The argument from the “marketplace of ideas” and the “search for truth”*

The “marketplace of ideas” is the predominant theory concerning the right to freedom of speech (Blasi, 2004; Braddon-Mitchell & West, 2004; Coase, 1974; Gordon, 1997; Hopkins, 1996; Napoli, 1999). Though they are sometimes discussed separately (e.g., Raikka, 2003), the marketplace of ideas and the search for truth are so interlaced that they are usually discussed together and treated as a single approach to freedom of speech (Barzun, 2007; Blasi, 1997, 2004; Braddon-Mitchell & West, 2004; Chevigny, 1998; Emerson, 1970; Gordon, 1997; Hopkins, 1996; Riley, 2005; Schauer, 1986). As a metaphor, the marketplace of ideas is more fruitful and useful when combined with a search for the truth. As will be explained below, the “search for truth” modifies the “marketplace,” so that the market should not be viewed as a strictly economic realm.

John Stuart Mill is most frequently cited as the originator of this approach. In *On Liberty* (1869), he argues that allowing free speech is the best way to ensure the advancement of truth. The marketplace of ideas is a place in which truth emerges from an engaging, interactive competition. In this view, the open and free exchange of ideas will lead to the eventual adoption of the best ideas, which will prevail over falsehoods. Mill (1869) describes in detail how truth can be discovered through competing ideas. An opinion may be true, in which case we would all benefit from allowing it to be voiced. It may not be completely true, but may “contain a portion of [the] truth,” in which case we can still learn, and increase our overall grasp of truth, from it (p. 30). Even if a statement contains no truth, it can still serve to contest the truth; through these challenges, Mill believes, we become better able to articulate and defend the truth (pp. 30-31). Mill acknowledges that “the dictum that truth always triumphs over persecution is one of those

pleasant falsehoods,” but given enough time, the truth will eventually emerge again and be recognized as such (p. 16). Freedom of speech is part of Mill’s broader conception of liberty, in which individuals should be free to act however they choose, as long as they do not harm others (see Riley, 2005, for a detailed analysis of how speech fits into Mill’s broader view of liberty). Mill provides an important philosophical basis for how legal theorists think about freedom of speech.

Mill’s ideas are echoed in Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes’ famous dissent in *Abrams v. United States* (1919). This dissent, arguing that the government did not have the right to silence opposition, is universally acknowledged as the foundation of U.S. jurisprudence about freedom of speech. Holmes argues:

...when men have realized that time has upset many fighting faiths, they may come to believe even more than they believe the very foundations of their own conduct that the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas—that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market, and that truth is the only ground upon which their wishes safely can be carried out. That at any rate is the theory of our Constitution. It is an experiment, as all life is an experiment. Every year if not every day we have to wager our salvation upon some prophecy based upon imperfect knowledge. While that experiment is part of our system I think that we should be eternally vigilant against attempts to check the expression of opinions that we loathe... (p. 630).

The origin of Holmes’ (1919) line of thought is uncertain, though he did re-read Mill just before hearing the *Abrams* case and writing this dissent (Blasi, 2004). However, he provides no citations for his argument about the “competition of the market,” leaving jurists and academicians to decipher his intended meaning. In this metaphor, “speakers are analogous to producers and sellers, [and] listeners and viewers are analogous to buyers and consumers” (Riley, 2005, p. 164). Speakers put out opinions, ideas, and information; listeners evaluate the multiple ideas available and choose what they want. In Mill’s and Holmes’ view, they should

choose the best, the most truthful opinions, ideas, and information: “just as Adam Smith’s ‘invisible hand’ will ensure that the best products emerge from free competition, so too will an invisible hand ensure that the best ideas emerge when all opinions are permitted freely to compete” (Schauer, 1986, p. 16). As described in the previous section (4.1), both *Lamont v. Postmaster General* (1965) and *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965), utilized the marketplace of ideas to explain why individuals’ freedom of speech needed to be protected. As Napoli (1999) notes, “by the mid-1960s, the marketplace metaphor had fully crystallized into a concise expression of a key dimension of the First Amendment” (p. 155).

Yet, as Gordon (1997) shows, if a marketplace of ideas functions in the same manner as an economic market, it may not lead to the most truthful ideas being accepted (see also Braddon-Mitchell & West, 2004; Chevigny, 1988; Coase, 1974; Goldman & Cox, 1996; Schauer, 1986; Smolla, 1992). Gordon argues that markets respond primarily to “forces of power whether it be in terms of wealth, influence, or sheer numbers, and truth is not necessarily generated from any of these sources” (p. 241). In other words, market competition will not necessarily, and in fact is unlikely, to lead to the emergence of truth. Similarly, Goldman and Cox (1996) state that the best products are not necessarily produced in the greatest quantities, according to economic theory; rather, “the levels of outputs for each type of good will reach efficient levels, relative to the production possibilities facing producers and the preferences of consumers” (p. 17). Schauer (1986) points to our increasing knowledge about how ideas are transmitted and received; in his view, it is difficult to accept that “the distinction between truth and falsity has much explanatory power in telling us which ideas are likely to be accepted by the public and which are likely to be rejected” (p. 777).

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Blasi (1997) acknowledges the problems of using the market as a metaphor, but doubts that Holmes (1919) had “a willingness [to] commodify truth and to ignore the various sources of market failure that operate in the flesh-and-blood society” (p. 1344). Blasi notes that the social values of ideas and information are not well captured in most economic descriptions of markets; in fact, “one cannot persuasively develop a philosophy of free speech by drawing upon the insights of classical and neoclassical economics” (Blasi, 2004, p. 12). Instead, through a careful reading of Holmes’ dissent and his other writings,<sup>18</sup> Blasi demonstrates that Holmes had a more nuanced conception of market in mind:

Ideas should be evaluated the way consumer goods and services are: not by any kind of political or intellectual authority but rather by an open-ended process that measures and integrates the ongoing valuations of all the individuals who comprise the relevant community (p. 4).

Thus, some authoritative body should not determine the best ideas or the best knowledge for a society; rather, individuals, through their consideration, rejection, and selection of ideas, demonstrate which ideas have the most currency, power, and importance. In this manner, ideas are subjected to “a vibrant, brutal weeding-out process analogous to the functions markets for goods and services perform” (Blasi, 2004, p. 24). Blasi interprets the marketplace, then, as a description of how ideas can be challenged and contested, resulting in their acceptance or rejection.

As he cautions, the market should not be understood economically, but as a metaphor. Thus, Gordon’s (1997) concern that truth does not survive under market conditions misses the point: Holmes is not suggesting we submit ideas to an economic market, but rather to similar

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<sup>18</sup> Blasi (1997, 2004) examines Holmes’ other Court opinions, law articles, and numerous letters to colleagues and fellow scholars. In particular, his 2004 article details many of these resources through which Blasi determines Holmes’ intent in his 1919 *Abrams* dissent.

processes, uncontrolled by authority and open to collective evaluation. Furthermore, there is no deadline for truth; it may emerge gradually (Blasi, 2004; Mill, 1869). Schauer (1986) similarly contends, “it is not today’s determination of truth, but the determination of truth in the long run, that is the focal point of the marketplace of ideas” (p. 775).

Blasi (2004) concludes by observing that “the cultural/ intellectual/ political combat facilitated by free speech is, in Holmes’ vision, messy, unpredictable, often nasty, and impossible to domesticate” (p. 40). Hopkins (1996) provides some empirical evidence that this perspective of free speech has been taken up by the Supreme Court. After surveying how the Supreme Court has employed the phrase “marketplace of ideas,” Hopkins notes that “members of the Court have referred to a multitude of marketplaces and have indicated that these marketplaces are controlled by differing technology, geography, content, or other factors” (p. 45). In other words, the marketplace(s) is (are) indeed messy and unpredictable.

At the same time, the marketplace of ideas has proved quite enduring since being introduced into American jurisprudence by Holmes. The metaphor has been used in at least 125 opinions in 97 cases between 1919 and 1995, including seventy majority or plurality opinions involving free speech issues (Hopkins, 1996). In addition, the marketplace of ideas has gained acceptance beyond legal theorists.

It underlies the ALA’s stance toward freedom of speech and information access (e.g., *Libraries: An American value*, 2008; *Library bill of rights*, 2008; *Universal right to free expression*, 2009) and can be found in other LIS literature about access (Asheim, 1953, 1983; Burden, 2000; Doctor, 1992; Lievrouw & Farb, 2002; Rubin, 2004; Smolla, 1993). In one “interpretation” of the Library Bill of Rights, the ALA states that “there are many complex facets to any issue, and many contexts in which issues may be expressed, discussed, or interpreted.

Librarians have an obligation to select and support access to materials and resources on all subjects” in order to have as many ideas as possible circulating in the community (Diversity in collection development, 2009, para. 1). In *Foundations of Library and Information Science*, Rubin suggests that “people and society as a whole are changed, and in the long run, improved by ideas, no matter what format of these ideas” (p. 313), employing the marketplace of ideas theory to argue for broad information access in libraries. Burden makes the argument even more explicit, explaining that “the best way to show the uselessness and fallibility of incorrect beliefs or ideas is not to keep them out of sight, but rather to hold them up to the light of day [and] scrutinize them” (p. 49). Whenever the LIS literature counters censorship by arguing for a wide circulation of diverse ideas, the marketplace of ideas is implicated.

Heckart (1991) argues that librarians have “embraced the essential content” of the marketplace of ideas metaphor (p. 491), in both essential professional documents and in their daily practices. According to his perspective, librarians adopt two conflicting roles with regard to the marketplace of ideas: on one hand, librarians strive to be “neutral facilitators” of the search for truth, refraining from passing judgment on patrons’ requests and reading. On the other hand, librarians occasionally intervene in that market “when market forces would otherwise exclude new, unorthodox, and controversial ideas” (p. 497). They intercede, says Heckart, to increase the circulation of information and improve the marketplace of ideas.

### *4.3 The argument from democracy*

In both the LIS and legal literature, sometimes the marketplace of ideas is justified by referring to the argument from democracy, the second predominant theory concerning freedom of speech. According to this line of thinking, freedom of speech is crucial because it enables the

circulation of ideas and accountability necessary to involved citizens and a functioning democracy. Emerson (1970) explains that “the governed must, in order to exercise their right of consent, have full freedom of expression both in forming individual judgments and in forming the common judgment” (p. 7). Citizens of a democracy need as much information as possible in order to make good decisions—that is, good political decisions, such as which representatives to elect, which policies to support, and so forth (Balkin, 2004; Bork, 1971; Barzun, 2007; Chafee, 1941; Chambers, 2003; Emerson, 1970; Meiklejohn, 1961; Schauer, 1982; Smolla, 1992).

Though Meiklejohn (1961) is generally recognized as the father of this legal theory, both Thomas Jefferson and James Madison articulated the basic concepts. Jefferson (1787/ 1944) contended that the only way to reduce errors in the government “is to give [citizens] full information of their affairs through the channel of the public papers... The basis of our government being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right” (pp. 411-412). Madison (1822/ 1973) added:

A popular government without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance; and a people who mean to be their own Governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives (p. 437).

Most formulations of the democracy theory of free speech are concerned primarily or exclusively with political speech, any “citizen’s speech, press, peaceable assembly, or petition, whenever those activities are utilized for the governing of the nation” (Meiklejohn, 1961, p. 256). The speech that is most directly connected to democracy is the most strongly protected, under this theory. Critics have charged that this theory applies only to political speech, overlooking or discounting many other types of speech and forms of expression, particularly

popular culture (Balkin, 2004; Schauer, 1982, 1986; Sunstein, 1995). Meiklejohn, however, extends political speech to include education, philosophy and science, general public discussions, and literature and the arts; he argues that these topics contribute to the formation of a rational, thoughtful citizen and are thus indispensable components of political speech (p. 245). However, it is unclear how far such an extension can stretch without weakening the emphasis on democracy (Schauer, 1986; Sunstein, 1995).<sup>19</sup>

Regardless of the specific types of speech that may be covered by this theory, “public deliberation [is seen] as a cornerstone of participatory democracy and representative government” (Delli Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004, p. 316). Other scholars have tried to further untangle the relationship between free speech and democracy. For example, Smolla (1992) explains that there are five ways that self-governance and free speech are connected. First, freedom of speech is “a means of participation, the vehicle through which individuals debate the issues of the day, cast their votes, and actively join in the processes of decision-making” inherent in a democracy (p. 12). Secondly, in an argument derivative of the marketplace of ideas, freedom of speech aids in the pursuit of political truth. Thirdly, free speech can aid majority rule by “ensuring that collective policy-making represents, to the greatest degree possible, the collective will” (p. 12). Smolla’s fourth point is that free speech can be a restraint on state tyranny and corruption. Finally, free speech provides stability in a democracy by ensuring that minority views have a right to be presented and heard.

Robbin, Courtright, and Davis (2004) note that, among diverse conceptualizations of democracy, one commonality is “involvement in political life by the citizenry” (p. 418). This involvement, in the discourse, is seen in two themes: civic participation/ engagement and public

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<sup>19</sup> Sunstein (1995) notes that it is “extremely difficult to distinguish between political and nonpolitical speech. Indeed, any such distinction is likely itself to reflect politics” (p. 5). Defining “political speech” is outside the scope of this current paper.

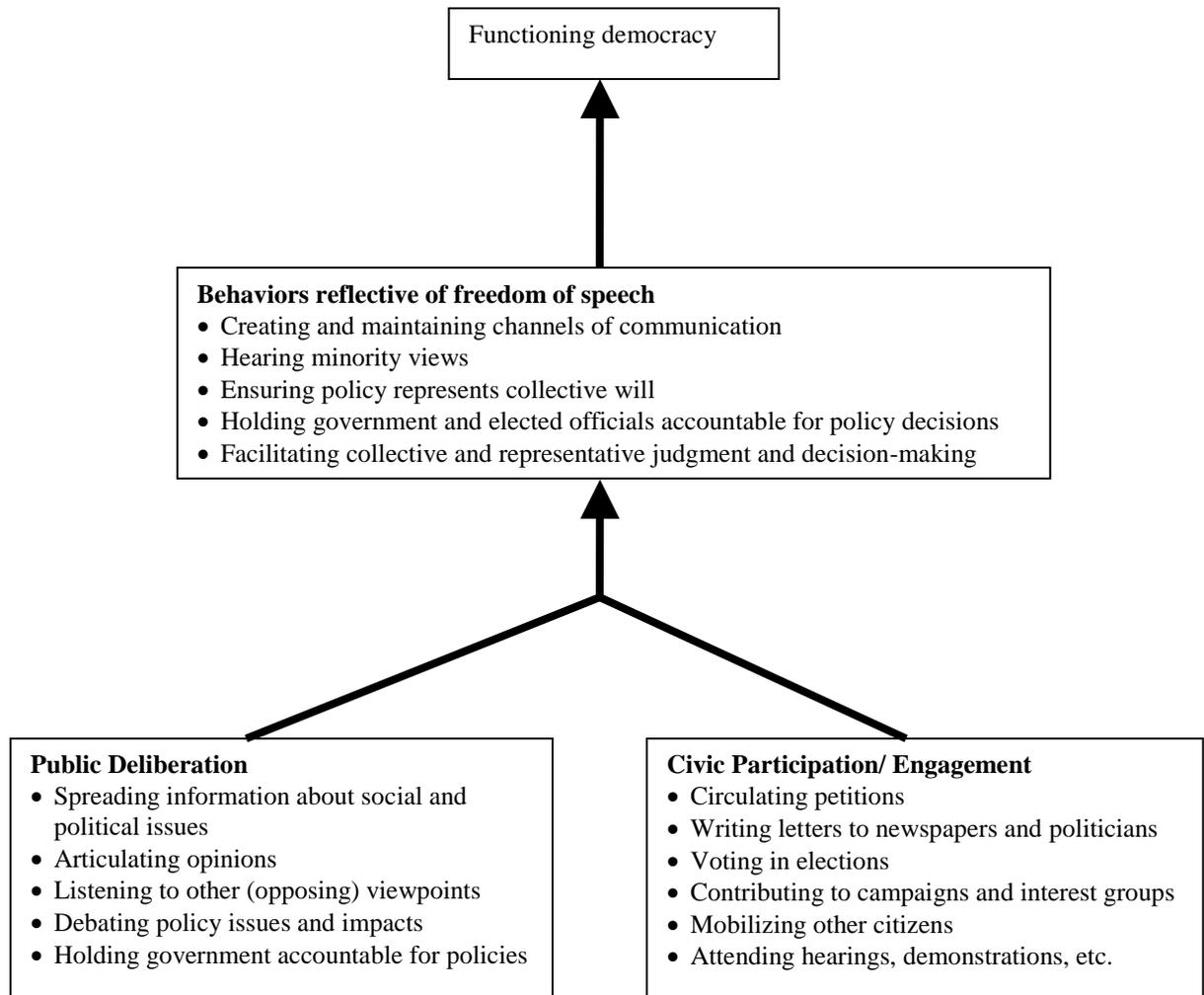
deliberation (p. 420). Though civic engagement remains ambiguous in the literature, it is composed of many “political behaviors;” in Robbin, Courtright, and Davis’ list of “political behaviors,” many involve some form of speech or seeking access to information (pp. 420-421). The authors define public deliberation as “a continuing dialogue that leads to good judgment through active participation among free and equal citizens [who] participate in reflective, reasoned, and informed debate” (p. 421). Similarly, Chambers (2003) explains that “deliberative democracy focuses on communicative processes of opinion and will formation” (p. 308).

The various descriptions of the relationship between freedom of speech and democracy are summarized in Figure 2. At the base of this figure lie civic participation/ engagement and public deliberation as described by Robbin, Courtright, and Davis (2004), though only the components most directly related to freedom of speech are portrayed in this figure. Public deliberation consists of free speech behaviors such as sharing information about social and political issues, articulating opinions, listening to other views, debating issues and policy decisions, and holding government accountable for policies. Civic participation includes actions such as circulating petitions, writing letters, voting, contributing time and/ or money to campaigns, interest groups, and movements, mobilizing other citizens, and attending hearings, demonstrations, and so on (see Robbin, Courtright, & Davis, 2004, pp. 420-421 for a longer list of civic participatory behaviors). Note that many of these behaviors directly implicate information access, such as citizens gaining knowledge of candidates through debates.

Together, public deliberation and civic participation/ engagement lead to more behaviors that are dependent on, or reflective of, freedom of speech; these behaviors directly contribute to the functioning of democracy, as depicted in the intermediate level of Figure 2. These behaviors include creating and perpetuating channels of communication between citizens and officials

## Information Access

Figure 2. The argument from democracy: Free speech as a foundation for democratic government.



elected, as well as between citizens themselves, ensuring that minority opinions can be heard, checking that policy decisions represent the collective will, holding elected officials accountable, and facilitating collective and representational decision making. Each of these, according to the literature, directly contributes to a functioning democracy (Balkin, 2004; Bork, 1971; Barzun, 2007; Blakemore & Craglia, 2006; Chafee, 1941; Chambers, 2003; Emerson, 1970; Meiklejohn, 1961; McCreadie & Rice, 1999a; Schauer, 1982; Smolla, 1992).

## *Information Access*

Some scholars who concentrate on access to information have argued that access is a particularly important component for public deliberation and civic engagement; according to this stance, without access to relevant, accurate information, citizens have little chance to meaningfully deliberate or participate in democratic structures. Jaeger and Burnett (2005) contend that “the dialogue and deliberations that are essential to a democratic society rely on freedom of access to information and on the exchange of information between different social groups” (p. 464). Jaeger (2007) further explains that

the connections between information access and democratic participation can be seen as comprising three primary relationships—access to substantive information about rights and how to use them in the public sphere, access to substantive information about social and political issues for forming opinions, and channels of communication to articulate and exchange these opinions (p. 843; see also Murdock & Golding, 1989).

Furthermore, increased information access can better enable citizens in their efforts to hold government officials accountable for unfair or unsuccessful policies (Blakemore & Craglia, 2006; McCreadie & Rice, 1999a). These arguments again demonstrate the close relationship between freedom of speech and access to information. They suggest that information access is foundational for public deliberation and civic participation, which in turn are key ingredients of democracy.

However, the low levels of political participation and the modern complexity of the state counter simplistic, deterministic relationships between information and democracy. After a comprehensive review of the deliberative democracy literature, Della Carpini, Cooke, & Jacobs (2004) conclude,

countering the optimism of proponents of deliberative democracy is a strong and persistent suspicion that public deliberation is so infrequent, unrepresentative, subject to conscious manipulation and unconscious bias, and disconnected from

actual decision making as to make it at best an impractical mechanism for determining the public will, and at worst misleading or dangerous (p. 321).

With political knowledge among individuals steadily decreasing, Somin (2004) suggests that the democratic ideal of engaged citizens is no longer realistic.

In addition, “empirical research on deliberative democracy has lagged significantly behind theory” (Della Carpini, Cooke, & Jacobs, 2004, p. 316). Examining the antecedents, actual acts, and consequences of deliberative democracy remain challenging activities and this domain tends to be under-studied. Thus, the relationship between democracy and freedom of speech may be theoretically significant, but some authors question its practical, real-world relevance (see, e.g., Robbin, Courtright, & Davis, 2004).

Notwithstanding these concerns, this theoretical perspective has been widely adopted in LIS literature. Both Ditzion (1947) and Shera (1971), in tracing the development of American public libraries, noted the close connection with democracy (McCook, 2001; Stielow, 2001). Many ALA position and policy statements explicitly name the protection and furtherance of democracy as one of the essential, foundational reasons for the existence and continuation of libraries (ALA Core values of librarianship, 2008; ALA Diversity in collection development, 2009; ALA Libraries: An American Value, 2008; ALA Library Bill of Rights, 2008); during 2000-2001, the ALA President, Nancy Kranich, chose “Libraries: The cornerstone of democracy” as the presidential theme. The ALA emphasizes that libraries “celebrate and preserve our democratic society by making available the widest possible range of viewpoints, opinions and ideas” (Libraries: An American value, 2008, section 7). In linking intellectual freedom, information access, and democracy, the ALA (2008) argues that, “Intellectual freedom is the basis for our democratic system. We expect our people to be self-governors. But to do so

responsibly, our citizenry must be well-informed. Libraries provide the ideas and information...to allow people to inform themselves” (ALA Intellectual freedom & censorship Q&A, para. 2). Similarly, IFLA (2001) states that public libraries “have an important role in the development and maintenance of a democratic society by giving the individual access to a wide and varied range of knowledge, ideas, and opinions” (Section 1.3). As Byrne notes, there is a basic syllogism at the heart of nearly all discussions of democracy and libraries. This argument first states that “good libraries provide uninhibited access to information for all members of the community.” Secondly, a “healthy democracy depends on an informed and participative community” (p. 122). Thus, libraries with their inclusive provision of information access facilitate democracy. Buschman (2005) notes that “libraries 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” (pp. 9-10).

This facilitation occurs through different mechanisms. For example, libraries create opportunities so that “those who are interested [can] access different perspectives on social, political, and economical issues” (Byrne, 2003, p. 121). Kranich (2001) similarly argues that libraries “provide the information and opportunities for dialogue that the public needs to make decisions about common concerns” (p. 84). Furthermore, because a library is “an exemplar of democratic values in its construction and operation, it could be a vehicle for their reproduction throughout the community” (Byrne, p. 120). More generally, libraries are “vectors for spreading notions of freedom and democracy” (Byrne, p. 122).

Despite Byrne’s (2003) exposition, he accepts the usual articulation of the relationship between libraries and democracy with little critical reflection. Many writers accept this

relationship between freedom of speech and democracy uncritically and unreflectively (e.g., Berry, 2004; Bertot, 2003; Brown, 2004; Byrne, 2003; Doctor, 1992; Blakemore & Craglia, 2006; McCook, 2001; Smith, 1995; Stielow, 2001; Thompson, 2008; Webster, 1999). For example, Brown simply notes that libraries are “integral to democratic governments” (p. 169) and Berry asserts that libraries were “created to inform our democracy” (p. 8). Such claims are typically not explored, contested, or defended in any depth. Indeed, as Buschman (2007) contends, “the vast portion of this literature merely rehearses and repeats the basic ideas of Jefferson and Madison from 200 years ago” (p. 1483; for additional critiques of this simplistic perspective, see Dervin, 1994; Robbin, Courtright, & Davis, 2002). He notes that very little of the LIS literature that mentions democracy is peer reviewed, and even the scholarship that is peer reviewed and theoretically sophisticated tends to “instrumentalize democracy via information and its associated technology, and equate exposure to information and communication technologies with more effective democratic participation” (p. 1485). Simply put, Buschman claims that democratic theory is “an unfinished, truncated idea” in most of the LIS literature. Yet there is potential for a richer analysis:

democratic theory seeks to identify the conditions for and obstacles to the exercise of democratic power by informed and engaged citizens in the interest of the commonweal...[there is] a rich vein of concepts relevant to but largely untouched in the LIS literature—the democratic exercise of power and its meaning, obstacles to the democratic exercise of power, the mechanics of democracy versus its meaning, the common good, the determination of the common good, citizenship, effective citizenship, the state and its relationship to power, political deliberation, [and] democratic deliberation (p. 1486).

After critiquing the current state of democratic theory in LIS, Buschman concludes by reviewing three alternative means for LIS scholars to deepen their dialogue on democracy, by utilizing ideas from Habermas, Wolin, or educational democracy.<sup>20</sup>

#### *4.4 The argument from individual autonomy/ empowerment*

The third predominant jurisprudential theory about freedom of speech has emerged more recently than either the marketplace of ideas or the democracy theories; the focus on individual empowerment<sup>21</sup> did not develop until after World War II (Barzun, 2007; Redish, 1984). This perspective argues that

Freedom of expression is essential as a means of assuring individual self-fulfillment. The proper end of man is the realization of his character and potentialities as a human being. For the achievement of this self-realization the mind must be free. Hence suppression of belief, opinion, or other expression is an affront to the dignity of man, a negation of man's essential nature (Emerson, 1970, p. 6).

In this theory, free speech is seen as an essential component of self-development and individual empowerment: an individual can be most happy, and most realized, only if he or she is able to fully exercise freedom of speech fully (Chevigny, 1988; Redish, 1984). This theory posits that freedom of speech “is a right defiantly, robustly, and irreverently to speak one’s mind *just because it is one’s mind*,” which “provides the speaker with an inner satisfaction and realization of self-identity essential to individual fulfillment” (Smolla, 1993, p. 9, emphasis in original).

The argument from autonomy may be, as Cohen (1993) implies, a particularly Western view,

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<sup>20</sup> Detailed analysis of these schools of thought lies outside the scope of this paper because these are suggestions to advance the current LIS scholarship (rather than already-integral components).

<sup>21</sup> I use “individual autonomy/ empowerment” as an encompassing phrase to include perspectives that focus on individual autonomy or fulfillment (following, e.g., Brison, 1998; see her description of the various meanings on p. 323). Though various labels are used in conjunction with this approach (i.e., self-realization, dignity, empowerment, self-realization, and autonomy), they are all essentially describing the same theoretical focus.

because this sort of “commitment to freedom of expression turns on embracing the supreme value of autonomy” (p. 222). It is an approach that other cultures, with less of an orientation toward individualism, may find more difficult to utilize.

Brison (1998) articulates several distinct but related variations of the autonomy argument, some of which are described here.<sup>22</sup> First, autonomy can be seen from the perspective of Mill (1869), as “freedom of governmental interference in some specified domain” (Brison, 1998, p. 324). A second version of autonomy argues that “autonomous persons could not allow the state to protect them against the harm of coming to have false beliefs” without losing their autonomy (Brison, p. 327; see also Scanlon, 1972). Nagel (1995) similarly argues that “mental autonomy is restricted by shutting down both inputs [access to information] and outputs [expressions of speech]” (p. 96). A third perspective on autonomy perceives it as an “ability to be rationally self-legislating,” (p. 330). This in turn connects to “the capacities, developed or undeveloped of persons... which take as their self-critical object one’s life and the way it is lived” (Richards, 1989, p. 205).

Blitz (2006), in his focus on accessing (receiving) information, has a similar emphasis. He contends that accessing information is “not merely a complement to expression, [but] is also an alternative way for individuals to exercise liberty of conscience and self-development” (p. 802). He argues that a right to receive information has unique characteristics—including strong protection of privacy and liberty for those with an as-yet unformed opinion—which are lacking from the typical conceptualizations of freedom of speech. In particular, a right to access

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<sup>22</sup> Brison (1998) draws unnecessary distinctions between some versions of autonomy, creating more conceptualizations than are actually, arguably, present in the literature. In addition, her interpretation of other, pro-autonomy authors may not be entirely accurate. However, much of Brison’s analysis is novel and insightful, moving this field forward. A detailed examination and point-by-point refutation or endorsement of Brison is beyond the scope of this current paper; only her most salient points are employed here.

information in a public library can allow people to think, imagine, create, and fully realize themselves.

Along these lines, Doctor (1992) claims that a right to access is about empowering individuals, and Lievrouw (2000) contends “both access to channels and access to content are considered essential prerequisites for social and political participation in advanced societies” (p. 155; see also Blakemore & Craglia, 2006; Lor & Britz, 2007). This is one of the foundations for the ALA’s stance on intellectual freedom (ALA Core values, 2008; ALA Intellectual freedom & censorship Q&A, 2008; ALA Library bill of rights, 2008; Rubin, 2004, p. 313). The ALA (2008) contends that “We recognize the power of information and ideas to inspire justice, to restore freedom and dignity to the oppressed, and to change the hearts and minds of the oppressors” (ALA Universal right to free expression, para. 11). The Library Bill of Rights (2008) states “books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves,” thus explicitly recognizing the value of individual empowerment (Section 1).

Though the argument from individual autonomy has gained some acceptance, it has also been challenged. For example, most autonomy arguments do not really explain *why* freedom of speech is necessary to secure individual autonomy; individual fulfillment could potentially be protected through other means or enhanced with other liberties (Schauer, 1982). Perhaps most damaging to arguments from individual autonomy is Brison’s (1998) critique. She notes that advocates of autonomy arguments rarely, if ever, “show how to get from the premise that we have the capacity to be rationally self-legislating to the conclusion that governmental interference is unjustified” (p. 331). In her analysis, without a forcefully drawn connection between these two premises, the autonomy arguments falter. This legal theory is the least

developed of the three. Having reviewed the three predominant legal theories, we turn now to a theory that arises from within LIS.

#### *4.5 The theory of normative behavior and information access*

The final theory considered here was developed by Chatman to better analyze the everyday worlds and information behaviors of marginalized people (Chatman, 2000; Pendleton & Chatman, 1998; for related work that led to the development of this theory, see Chatman, 1992, 1996). Her theory of normative behavior (TNB) provides conceptual constructs—social norms, worldview, social types, and information behavior—that aid in analyzing how individuals' everyday worlds may shape their information actions. Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson (2008) suggest that these concepts, comprising TNB, can usefully be applied to information access research. Because TNB is a rare example of a theory developed in LIS research and directly applied to information access, it is worth investigating in some detail.<sup>23</sup> This review will begin by defining the four basic concepts, then reviewing Chatman's premises, suggested as the basis for further research.

Chatman's first conceptual construct, *social norms*, consists of the "standards with which members of a social world comply in order to exhibit desirable expressions of public behavior" (Chatman, 2000, p. 13). These are guidelines, often implicit, which structure and standardize behavior. Members of a group regulate one another's behavior to ensure compliance with social norms, which effectively "dictate 'rightness' and 'wrongness' in social appearances" (Chatman, 2000, p. 11; see also Burnett, Besant, & Chatman, 2001; Burnett & Bonnici, 2003; Jaeger &

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<sup>23</sup> Chatman did not fully develop the theory of normative behavior due to her untimely death. Subsequent researchers have attempted to further develop and expand the theory. Thus, this examination draws from Chatman's research as well as subsequent investigations by other scholars. For a critique of the theory of normative behavior (including this somewhat unformed character), see Section 5.3 below.

Thompson, 2004; Pendleton & Chatman, 1998). Burnett and Bonnici explain that norms “emerge directly from the activities, motives, and goals of the group itself” (p. 334); and Jaeger and Thompson (2004) suggest that “social norms are social behaviors reinforced by the small world” (p. 100; see below for an explication of small world), though the particular mechanisms by which this occurs are left unspecified.

The second concept Chatman identified is *worldview*, which is “a comprehensive philosophy that shapes a body of beliefs about human life. It is a system of shared experiences that provides an outlook or point of view” (Pendleton & Chatman, 1998, para. 14). Simply put, a worldview creates “the parameters of ‘who we are’” (Burnett & Bonnici, 2003, p. 340). Chatman (2000) explains that worldview includes language, values, meaning, symbols—all those things that members of a group jointly hold to be of importance. In turn, this results in the production of common customs and understandings of similar experiences. One’s worldview “can remain [the same] throughout one’s lifetime, reinforced by the small world one inhabits, or [it] may change as the small world is expanded, contracted, or otherwise altered” (Jaeger & Thompson, 2004, p. 101).

One such common understanding pertains to *social types*, a system of generalizations about people, their roles, and the typical behavior associated with those roles (Chatman, 2000; Burnett, Besant, & Chatman, 2001; Pendleton & Chatman, 1998). Through the creation of social types, members of a group gain “sensible clues to the ways in which to behave, converse, and share information” (Chatman, 2000, p. 12). Chatman (2000) suggests that social typification may be a recursive process; these generalized, classified behaviors may “give that person a certain signature, which defines what role that person plays in his social world” (p. 12).

The final concept of TNB, according to Chatman, is *information behavior*, which can include information use or non-use and information seeking or avoidance.<sup>24</sup> This concept “connotes a broader view of information in the lives of people” (Pendleton & Chatman, 1998, para. 61). As Burnett, Jaeger, & Thompson (2008) note, “within specific contexts, information behaviors—like other day-to-day activities—must be seen as normative” (p. 58).

Together, these four concepts form the theory of normative behavior concerning information. Normative behavior is, simply, the “behavior which is viewed by inhabitants of a social world as most appropriate for that particular context” (Chatman, 2000, p. 13); within the context of LIS research, then, TNB attempts to address how social expectations and behavior affect information practices. The four concepts “provide a framework for analyzing the complex relationship between information and the social world within which individuals find their places” (Burnett, Besant, & Chatman, 2001, p. 545).

Finally, most scholars extend Chatman’s work by applying TNB to study “small worlds,” or “people who share a similar social and cultural space” (Pendleton & Chatman, 1998, para. 3). A small world “has a specific context that serves a particular population to permit members to conduct their business in a routine, expected manner” (Burnett, Besant, & Chatman, 2001, p. 536; see also Burnett & Jaeger, 2008; Chatman, 1992, 2000). As Burnett and Jaeger (2008) note, Chatman and subsequent scholars have “paid little attention to the interactions between one small world and another[,] or to the social forces of the larger world surrounding the small worlds” (para. 3). Though the concept of small worlds is not explicitly mentioned in Chatman’s

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<sup>24</sup> In fact, Chatman (2001) states “It is impossible to understand the seeking process without first acknowledging one’s behavior with respect to information...One needs to step back from an examination of the information seeking process” (pp. 12-13). This argument provides additional (if implicit) support for studying information access as a research area distinct from information seeking, needs, and use (see Section 2.2 above).

articulation of TNB, it is often used by Chatman and subsequent researchers to depict the idiosyncratic, unique elements of a small group of individuals under study.

Chatman (2000) suggests five “propositions” that emerge from TNB (pp. 13-14): these are general statements that describe the relationships among the four primary concepts (social norms, worldview, social types, and information behavior). These prepositions can aid subsequent researchers in describing the small worlds of their subjects. The five statements are:

- Social norms are standards with which members of a social world comply in order to exhibit desirable expressions of public behavior.
- Members choose compliance because it allows for a way by which to affirm what is normative for this context at this time.
- World-view is shaped by the normative values that influence how members think about the ways of the world. It is a collective, taken-for-granted attitude that sensitizes members to be responsive to certain events and to ignore others.
- Everyday reality contains a belief that members of a social world do retain attention or interest sufficient enough to influence behavior. The process of placing persons in ideal categories of lesser or greater quality can be thought of as social typification.
- Human information behavior is a construct in which to approach everyday reality and its effect on actions to gain or avoid the possession of information. The choice to decide the appropriate course of action is driven by what members’ beliefs are necessary to support a normative way of life (pp. 13-14).<sup>25</sup>

Recently, Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson (2008) demonstrate that TNB can be fruitfully applied to information access. The authors note that “although Chatman’s work does not address information access directly, its focus on the localized context in which information is used offers a robust tool for analyzing the ways in which information is understood and valued in particular communities” (p. 57). Their article has three foci: defining information access (as described above in Section 2.1 above), reviewing TNB, and describing three case studies where the concepts embedded in TNB allowed for a more thorough investigation of information access. For

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<sup>25</sup> These are presented in Chatman’s own words, though some of these statements are clearly under-developed. Subsequent research could expand or clarify these propositional statements. For example, the second statement probably does not adequately capture all of the reasons that individuals comply with social norms.

example, the authors described the redesign of the San Francisco Public Library in 1996, particularly controversies regarding “weeding books from the collection, devoting space in the new building to computers, and removing card catalogs” (p. 59). Using the concepts of TNB, Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson demonstrate that individuals within the public library administration had very different understandings of information access than individual users and authors (see pp. 59-61). One critic of the library staff’s aggressive weeding argued that removing books from the library was equivalent to denying access, but the staff members saw weeding as a process “to maintain and enhance access, to remove some information from access in order to make other information more effectively accessible” (p. 61). Debates involving traditional card catalogs versus then-novel electronic catalogs involved competing social norms, worldviews, social typing, and information behaviors, according to Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson. The authors conclude by suggesting that TNB, applied to information access,

is robust enough to be applied both on a micro level (where, for instance, colliding social norms and worldviews can impact the practices of a single public library) and on a macro level (where decisions about a nation’s information policy, based in the values of a specific—if powerful—small world, can determine an entire population’s ability to gain access to information (p. 65).

Both Chatman’s theory of normative behavior and its application to information access are nascent, so further work must be done to determine their compatibility. Nonetheless, TNB may be a uniquely LIS theoretical contribution to the research area of information access.

This chapter has reviewed several theoretical approaches to information access. The fundamental connections between information access and freedom of speech were demonstrated, particularly through U.S. jurisprudential precedents. Three legal theories of freedom of speech—marketplace of ideas, democracy, and individual empowerment—have implications for

information access. Finally, this chapter also reviewed the theory of normative behavior (TNB), as depicted by Chatman, as an additional approach to investigating information access. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the use of “theory” within LIS is problematic (Buckland, 1991; Kim & Jeong, 2006; McKechnie & Pettigrew, 2002; Pettigrew & McKechnie, 2001). Because of this, the chapter has utilized a broader understanding of theory that includes jurisprudential theory. Buckland’s definition of theory as “a description or explanation of the nature of things” seems particularly *apropos* to LIS and to nascent research areas such as information access. Some LIS studies and areas of research are more theoretically rigorous than others. Some theories may be more or less developed or articulated, in addition to being differentially applied. In an under-studied research area such as information access, it is not surprising that theory is also under-developed, a critique which is expanded in Section 5.3 below.

## **Chapter 5: Critical Assessment of Information Access**

This chapter reviews the previous three sections—conceptual, methodological, and theoretical approaches to information access—and critically assesses the state of the art in each area. Previous chapters have indicated some weaknesses; this chapter delves into these limitations in more detail. The chapter concludes with a summary of the importance of continuing analysis of information access and a brief look forward into possible avenues for future research.

### *5.1 Critical assessment of conceptual approaches in information access*

Conceptually, the research domain of information access is under-developed. McCreadie and Rice (1999a, 1999b) review literature across six disciplines and categorize conceptualizations of information into six groups: access to knowledge, access to technology, access as communication, access as control, access to goods/ commodities, and access as participation (1999a, p. 50). Each of the six disciplines they study “overlooks or privileges certain issues associated with access” (McCreadie & Rice, 1999b, p. 79). The first three conceptualizations dominated LIS research domains, according to McCreadie and Rice. Several years later, Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson (2008) revisit the concept of information access and argue for a three-part conception, including physical, intellectual, and social access. Overall, they define information access as “the presence of a robust system through which information is made available to citizens and others” (Jaeger & Burnett, 2005, p. 465; see also Jaeger & Thompson, 2004).

## *Information Access*

The models of information access offered by both sets of researchers utilize multiple conceptions of information access. This echoes work by Borgman (2000), Fidel and Green (2004), and Kole, Hurych, and Koehler (2000), all of whom found imprecise or varied understandings of information access across different contexts. In sum, they found information access is poorly conceptualized in both abstract, theoretical evaluations and in practical, working contexts.

This lack of conceptual clarity has, contributed, in part, to the confusion between information access and other, similar domains (see Section 2.2). Thus, information needs, seeking, and use (INSU), information retrieval, and access for disabled users have all, at times, been conflated with information access. This current essay, particularly the second chapter, thus serves an important function of distinguishing among these fields, and demonstrating that information access should be seen as an *a priori* research domain. As Jaeger (2007) argues, “without access to information, there can be no exchange, use, collection, or management of information” (p. 843). Unfortunately, Jaeger’s emphasis on information access is not currently shared by most other LIS researchers.

In addition, information access has been overlooked as a legitimate, central research domain in LIS. In general, the research area of information access is poorly studied. For example, UK researchers found “no government-related or other recent research on the specific information access needs” pertaining to health information (Baxter, Glendinning, & Clarke, 2008, p. 197). Relatively little research focuses explicitly upon information access, so conceptual confusion may not be surprising. Further analysis of this concept could help researchers to better articulate the “potential economic, social, political, and personal impacts of access to information or [of] barriers to access” (McCreadie & Rice, 1999a, p. 46). The relevance of information

access to LIS could also be better specified through further research. As demonstrated in Section 2.3, it is a frequent—if implicit—concern of LIS research. For example, Eschenfelder (2004b) rarely even uses the word “access,” yet citizen access to government information is the underlying motivation of her study. By examining web content management techniques, she sheds light on the processes that regulate access to government information.

The field of information access, therefore, suffers from some conceptual weaknesses. First, the concept is not well articulated. Second, the articulations that do exist are not widely used, hampering the development of a strong core of information access research. Third, analysis of information access nearly always concludes that there are several important, diverse components, further complicating the development of a core understanding. Fourth, information access is sometimes incorrectly conflated with other fields of study. Fifth, information access is often an implicit, rather than explicit, focus of research.

Recent work by Jaeger, Burnett, and colleagues (Burnett, Besant, & Chatman, 2001; Burnett & Bonnici, 2003; Burnett & Jaeger, 2008; Burnett, Jaeger, & Thompson, 2008; Jaeger, 2006, 2007; Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Jaeger & Burnett, 2005; Jaeger & Thompson, 2004) suggests that these conceptual weaknesses of information access are beginning to be remedied; however, because the majority of these originate with just two scholars, Gary Burnett and Paul Jaeger, the breadth of recognition paid to information access remains debatable. This essay follows Burnett and Jaeger in further clarifying the concept and calling for additional research.

## *5.2 Critical assessment of methodological approaches in information access*

In addition to conceptual problems, the research area of information access is also weak methodologically. As Chapter 3 noted, information access is not often studied in a rigorous

manner. Four basic approaches were identified from the literature: normative, advocacy, review, and case studies. The majority of information access literature, particularly in library science, remains prescriptive and aspirational. The sparse empirical research that has been done relies primarily on case studies. This is appropriate for a field that is young and growing, but as information access matures, other types of research need to be conducted.

Neither a normative nor an advocacy approach to information access can be considered a formal method per se, yet these perspectives have been so prevalent across the information access literature that they necessitate inclusion. Both approaches have set lofty goals and ideals for practitioners, officials, and citizens, but do not contain research to further their claims, instead relying on rhetorical flourishes and emotional appeals.

The information access literature from a “review” perspective has been somewhat more robust methodologically, often employing cursory documentary analysis. At the very least, this subset of the literature has compared and contrasted various laws, interpretations, or documents to draw tentative conclusions. In addition, this review-oriented literature has typically acknowledged its methodological weaknesses; for example, Cooke (2007) explained that “a greater insight into the processes and debates behind decision-making... would have resulted from using a broader array of methods such as interviews and observation, [but] the scope of this study precluded the use of such methods” (p. 361). Thus, although not perhaps meeting social scientists’ expectations of formal methodology, the literature with a review orientation is somewhat more rigorous than the normative or advocacy oriented literature.

Finally, several studies have investigated information access through case studies. Researchers in this vein typically recognize the exploratory nature of their work. Eschenfelder (2004b) notes that “the goal of the study was to develop a grounded framework, based on

concepts” derived from the existing literature (p. 464). Many case studies, including Eschenfelder’s, provide at least perfunctory justification for their selection of cases; because she was studying web content management practices of state agencies interacting with the public, Eschenfelder bases sampling “on the size of the agency, the public orientation of the agency, and the size of the web sites” (p. 466). Thus, the agencies she studies were the most likely to provide evidence of web content management techniques, which could then be developed into a framework to be applied in subsequent study. Mahler and Regan (2007) employ a different approach, purposefully choosing federal departments that had high-ranked, mid-ranked, and low-ranked websites for their analysis (pp. 510-511).

Other case studies, however, did not explain the reasoning behind case selection (e.g., Burnett, Besant, & Chatman, 2001; Burnett, Jaeger, & Thompson, 2008). Thus, one weakness of information access research is the lack of attention paid to case selection; this is somewhat surprising, considering the careful, comprehensive scholarship on case selection, both within and beyond LIS (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; George & Bennet, 2004; Merriam, 1988; Ragin & Becker, 1992; Ragin, 1987; Yin, 1994;). Comparative case study researchers typically focus on examining and explaining theoretically interesting or challenging cases (Ragin, 1987). Case selection, then, tends to be purposeful. While several approaches have been suggested in the literature, three seem potentially applicable to future information access research.

In the “most-similar” approach to case selection, cases that have many similar characteristics—but differ on the outcome—are selected for comparison. The shared characteristics are in effect controlled: they are unlikely to be responsible for the outcome in question, the phenomenon of interest, because these characteristics are present in both positive and negative cases (Ebbinghaus, 2005; George & Bennett, 2004; Ragin, 1987). When the

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selected cases share many characteristics, it is possible to “exclude certain types of explanations or certain confounding variables categorically” (Ragin, 1987, p. 47). A second approach to case selection is the “most-different” method, in which cases share few characteristics but are both positive on the outcome. In this scenario, the researcher attempts to identify characteristics, held in common by the different cases, which could be causally significant. Because the cases have the same outcome, the researcher seeks the same causal mechanism across the cases (Ebbinghaus, 2005; Ragin, 1987). Finally, there is the “crucial case” approach. Gerring (2007) explains that “a case is crucial if the facts of that case are central to the confirmation or disconfirmation of a theory” (p. 231). In the strictest sense, a case is crucial when it can be specifically explained by a theory and no other theories elucidate the case; this is, however, rarely possible in the social world. Thus, Gerring and George and Bennett (2004) suggest researchers look for “tough” cases, cases that critically test theories. A tough case can be either confirmatory, in which demonstrating that the theory fits the case strongly improves the argument for the theory, or disconfirmatory, in which demonstrating that the theory does not fit the case strongly calls the theory into question.

An additional weakness of the methodological approaches seen in the information access literature is the reliance on qualitative methods. A full analysis of the perennial qualitative vs. quantitative debate is beyond the scope of this paper; however, several researchers argue that both approaches have merit (Babbie, 2004; Hernon, 2001). For example, in a detailed analysis of ten differences between qualitative and quantitative methods, Mahoney and Goertz (2006) argued that the two orientations are valuable, legitimate, and complementary to one another:

ideally, an explanation of an outcome in one or a small number of cases leads one to wonder if the same factors are at work when a broader understanding of scope

is adopted, stimulating a larger-*N* analysis in which the goal is less to explain particular cases and more to estimate average effects. Likewise, when statistical results about the effects of causes are reported, it seems natural to ask if these results make sense in terms of the history of individual cases; one wishes to try to locate the effects in specific cases (p. 231).

Following this train of thought, a fully developed research area ought to include both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Babbie (2004) notes that quantitative research can allow one to “aggregate, compare, and summarize data...[and] opens up the possibility of statistical analysis” (p. 26). In addition, quantitative research allows generalizations to be made across populations and for average effects to be estimated (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006). The research area of information access is currently lacking these very attributes. This is not to argue that qualitative research should no longer be done, or that it is less important than quantitative research. Nonetheless, quantitative research would strengthen this research area.

In summary, much of the extant information access research suffers from three primary methodological weaknesses. First, the majority of the literature (both the prescriptive and the advocacy) does not have a formal methodology. Second, the empirical research that has been undertaken—primarily case studies—is not always explicit in its reasoning (particularly concerning case selection). Third, information access could benefit from quantitative analysis.

Nonetheless, there seems to be a slow shift occurring, with more rigorous investigations of information access occurring in the past several years. As more case studies are conducted, perhaps additional research methods will be utilized.

### *5.3 Critical assessment of theoretical approaches in information access*

The research area of information access needs additional depth not only in methodology, but also in use of theory. Theoretical approaches to information access were addressed in

Chapter 4. After tracing the relationship between freedom of speech and information access jurisprudentially, that chapter reviewed three legal justifications or legal theories for freedom of speech: the argument from the marketplace of ideas and the search for truth, the argument from democracy, and the argument from individual autonomy. Finally, Chatman's theory of normative behavior, derived from LIS research, was also introduced.

The three legal theories are the predominant legal explanations concerning the importance of freedom of speech (and, by extension, information access). This is not to say, however, that they enjoy widespread acceptance by legal scholars. Schauer (1986), for example, argued that these free speech theories have "dubious empirical and epistemological presuppositions" (p. 777). For example, the argument from democracy is readily criticized on two fronts: first, most speech is not about government, politics, or even pressing social issues; and second, few individuals seem engaged in the sort of rigorous public debate envisioned in this argument (see Section 4.3 for a fuller explication of these criticisms).

In his book-length treatment of free speech, Schauer (1982) expands from that criticism: he is doubtful that any one argument is sufficient to fully support freedom of speech, but each one has particular strengths that seem to protect certain areas or aspects of speech. He contends:

it is not imperative that all of the arguments for freedom of speech relate closely to each other, or that they be distillable into one principle or argument...the arguments for freedom of speech are to some extent distinct. They may apply in different circumstances, and in conflicting ways. I do not consider this a failure. Too much synthesis may result in a principle so abstract as to be useless or trivial, or a principle so qualified as to be hardly a principle at all (pp. 85-86).

In other words, none of the three legal theories considered here should be adopted without reservation, but neither should they all be disregarded and rejected (see also Greenawalt, 1989; Lichtenberg, 1987; Ross, 1999). For example, the marketplace of ideas, with its clear depiction

of sellers/ speakers and buyers/ listeners, provides a concise but fruitful analogy describing the communication and circulation of ideas through society. Lichtenberg, in accordance with Schauer (1982), argues that “any ‘monistic’ theory of free speech, emphasizing only one of these values, will fail to do justice to the variety and richness of our interests in free speech” (p. 332).

Social scientists may question whether these arguments rise to the level of theory, as commonly understood in science (see, e.g., Bates, 2005). In fact, though legal scholars use the word “theory,” they often refer to these arguments as philosophical underpinnings or justifications—conceptions of theory unlikely to be readily assimilated into social science. Thus, LIS must take these legal arguments as starting points, as invitations for analysis and evaluation. It could be interesting, for example, to see which descriptions of a “marketplace” best fit actual, empirical situations; in turn, this might tell us something more about the value of speech and how to protect or enhance it. Perhaps, as Hopkins (1996) suggests, there are multiple marketplaces, each functioning somewhat differently, with different constraints and licenses of information. An examination of these different marketplaces could resolve ambiguity about the role of public libraries in protecting and encouraging free speech.

The other legal theory most evident in library literature, the argument from democracy, is rarely addressed in a critical, rigorous manner. In his criticism of the LIS discipline’s use of the argument from democracy, Buschman suggests that LIS “simply must engage democratic theory at a level deeper than the aposiopetic situation currently in place” (p. 1484). He further notes that most discussions of democracy in LIS (particularly library science) do not extend much beyond Madisonian and Jeffersonian ideals of over 200 years ago.

Regardless of the paths chosen, however, it is clear that more work is needed to strengthen the connections between these legal theories and LIS. In particular, these legal

theories tend to be most frequently utilized in discussion of public libraries or other library science topics. The arguments from the marketplace of ideas, from democracy, and from individual empowerment are less frequently studied or used in information science research, a gap that ought to be remedied. As Schauer (1982) argues, “to ignore what the law has done with respect to freedom of speech [through the past two centuries] would be a mistake, because the law furnishes both doctrine and illuminating examples” (p. x). Therefore, what is needed is an expansion and a rigorous evaluation of these theories.

A similar argument could be made for Chatman’s theory of normative behavior (TNB). The application of TNB has been sparse to date (likely due at least partially to Chatman’s untimely death). As Burnett and Jaeger (2008) explain, “Chatman’s theoretical work is underused...most references to her research in academic discourse simply acknowledge her ideas without employing, engaging, re-evaluating, or building upon them” (para. 4). Three important steps must be taken for TNB to be more widely utilized with LIS: first, the relationships or interdependencies between social norms, worldview, social types, and information behavior must be specified more clearly (see Burnett & Jaeger, 2008, for initial attempts to do so). For example, does one’s worldview determine the social types one sees? Second, TNB must be applied to broader situations beyond those of information poverty, where Chatman focused. Burnett, Jaeger, and their colleagues have begun these processes (Burnett, Besant, & Chatman, 2001; Burnett & Bonnici, 2003; Burnett & Jaeger, 2008; Burnett, Jaeger, & Thompson, 2008; Jaeger & Burnett, 2005; Jaeger & Thompson, 2004). The propositions suggested by Chatman (2000; see Section 4.5), to guide and extend use of TNB, have so far not been taken up by subsequent researchers, yet they could fruitfully be applied to numerous settings. Third, connections between TNB and other theoretical perspectives need to be considered and analyzed. Burnett and

Jaeger (2008) recently synthesized Chatman's micro-level consideration of small worlds with Habermas' macro-level perspective of lifeworlds, in an attempt to bridge the gaps between these theories. This also calls to mind Buschman's (2007) recommendation to use Habermasian theory as a way to strengthen democratic theory within LIS.

In summary, this review uncovered three weaknesses in the current theoretical approaches to information access. First, the predominant legal theories justifying freedom of speech (and, by implication, information access) may not be accepted as such by the broader social science community. Second, the legal theories need to be rigorously evaluated, tested, and analyzed. Third, the theory of normative behavior, the only explicitly LIS theory that has been applied to information access, remains under-developed and under-evaluated. This essay has considered only those theoretical approaches currently utilized to study information access. It is clear, however, that other theoretical perspectives could be fruitfully applied to this research area.

#### *5.4 Directions for future research*

Though the preceding sections of this chapter were highly critical of the research area of information access, it is nonetheless an important part of LIS, even if it is currently under-recognized. For example, information access is evident in library science research, particularly in connection with censorship and intellectual freedom. Most definitions of censorship describe a restriction of access or of seeking and receiving information. Information access underlies many other LIS research areas, including open access, the freedom of information act, and the digital divide (see Table 1 in Section 2.3). It is an implicit focus of research such as Eschenfelder's (2004) study of web content management practices. Her investigation showed that social and

political factors affected decisions about which information was posted to websites of state departments such as Transportation; depending on the decision made, state citizens might be unable to access certain information. Thus, information access is implicated in many information science studies, even if it is not expressed as an explicit research concern. In fact, information access can be seen as an *a priori* research concern in many ways; if information cannot be accessed, many of the concerns of the INSU literature become irrelevant.

As this chapter has made clear, information access as a research area currently has a number of conceptual, methodological, and theoretical weaknesses. Rather than casting doubt on the legitimacy of access as a research area, these weaknesses should be seen as gaps typical in an emergent field and as invitations for future work to remedy these problems.

Conceptually, information access could be better analyzed and defined. Information access is a foundational concern of much LIS research, yet it often remains implicit. Part of establishing information access as a research domain, then, will involve making these connections explicit and more widely recognized. Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson (2008) call for more nuanced research into information access: “if the study of information access is to provide realistic and inclusive perspectives, it must account for the array of social issues that significantly influence access,” not just physical or intellectual issues (p. 56). Thus, future conceptualizations should incorporate all three aspects of information access (Burnett & Jaeger, 2008; Jaeger & Thompson, 2004). Methodologically, information access research has tended to rely on reviews and case studies. This is typical for a developing field. Yet, as knowledge about information access is accumulated, other types of research should be conducted. Both qualitative and quantitative research have strengths that could contribute to the development of information access. Theoretically, the field can be strengthened by further evaluation of legal theories

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pertaining to freedom of speech and further application of Chatman's theory of normative behavior. In addition, other theories—such as institutional theory or symbolic interactionism—could beneficially be applied to information access.

Jaeger (2007) presents a novel approach that has the potential to be extremely fruitful. He sketches the intersection of information access and information arguing for “the overall importance of more research and analysis linking information policy and information access” (p. 842). For example, he discussed information policies of the Bush administration prior to 9/11 that included removing content from federal websites, denying Freedom of Information requests, and refusing information requests from the Government Accountability Office and other federal agencies. After the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration made additional changes to federal information policies that further restricted information access, according to Jaeger. Some changes were formal, enacted through legislation such as the USA PATRIOT Act and the Homeland Security Act. Memos and executive orders, according to Jaeger, were “particularly revealing about [the administration's] attitudes toward information access. An October 2001 order from the Department of Justice instructed federal agencies to release as little information as possible” (p. 848). This sort of restriction of information access, accomplished through information policies, can potentially “reshape discourse in the public sphere on issues to match administration perspectives” (p. 851). Burnett and Jaeger (2008) suggest that

as the public policy climate has become much more restrictive of the access and exchange of information at many different levels, conceptual representation of information behavior in large and small contexts become increasingly important for understanding the roles of information in society and how policy is affecting these roles (para. 49).

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This argument acknowledges that conceptual development of information access is likely to be bound up with both theoretical and methodological development—each of these three strands ought to be strengthened in conjunction with one another.

As a physical, intellectual, and social construct, information access is not determined merely by an individual's (intellectual) capability or by the (physical) location of technology; the (social) policies that guide and regulate relationships between individuals and organizations also affect access. Thus, Jaeger's call for additional research connecting information policy and information access offers a fruitful avenue for future work.

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