Being Seen: Gender Identity and Performance as a Professional Resource in Library Work

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While much of the literature on gender in librarianship approaches this issue at an organizational level, this qualitative study investigates how individuals working in libraries perceive their gender identities as a resource for their professional goals and how this intersects with other social identities including race and sexuality. Using a constructivist grounded theory approach to analyze in-depth interviews with 29 librarians from a variety of backgrounds, we develop four overarching themes: *Visibility and Connection to Library Users*, *Credibility and Presumed Competence*, *Lack of Awareness and Hyperawareness*, and *Being Your Authentic Self and Concealing Yourself*.

Introduction and Literature Review

This project, like all great research projects of the 21st century, began with a tweet. In 2016, Allana Mayer tweeted a thread that expressed frustration at the lack of critical research on issues of gender performativity in the Library and Information Science (LIS) field. She asks us, as a profession, to look directly "in the eye" at the ways in which the performativity of gender identity works to reinforce oppression.[1] She then offered, very helpfully, an outline of interview questions that might begin to explore this complicated issue. That outline was the foundation of the interview questionnaire used in this study.

This article explores how gender performances serve as professional resources and obstacles in librarianship. We are interested in investigating the connections among librarians as embodied workers, the emotional and intellectual work produced by those bodies, and, of course, power. Some of the questions we set out to explore are: What benefits do folks get by performing their gender in expected or unexpected ways? What are the detriments to performing gender in expected and unexpected ways? In what ways does performing gender in the workplace inform a "good fit," notions of professionalism, and replications of inequitable access to power?

Research into gender performance, and how these performances impact organizational structures in workplaces (including libraries), is well established. Understanding how gender operates in workplaces has been a focus of study for decades. Building off Kanter's foundational work on gender tokenism,[2] researchers have developed a rich understanding of how gender is

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both reinforced by, and reinforces, labor practices.[3] As Martin explains, gender operates in the workplace through a "twin dynamic"[4] that includes personal/individual practices (practicing gender), and contextual/societal structures (gender practices). Of particular importance to this study is the research produced to understand how women cope with their minoritized status in men-dominated professions. A few notable concepts that are reinforced through our analysis include the "glass cliff"[5] and the "glass escalator,"[6] distancing,[7] and how gender identities become barriers to professional goals.[8]

Librarianship has given rise to literature and discussion about how gender practices operate in women-majority professions. Roma Harris wrote a groundbreaking book[9] that investigated and uncovered the ways in which librarianship is gendered, both in terms of the actual work and the perceptions of that work. Since then, research on the gendered nature of librarianship has developed several important paradigms relevant to this study. One of those is gendered labor. Gendered labor, essentially, is the way of organizing work tasks to reaffirm or uphold traditional gender roles. For instance, caretaking is considered feminine, whereas engineering is considered masculine: in a heteropatriarchal society, jobs that involve caretaking are feminized (suited for women) whereas intellectual tasks are masculinized (suited for men). Another key concept is emotional labor. Arlie Hochschild, the first to name the concept of emotional labor, defines it as the process of managing feelings and expressions, both of ourselves and of those with whom we are interacting, to fulfill the emotional requirements of a job.[10] Librarianship involves emotional labor, for example, when a librarian manages, and helps alleviate, the anxiety a student presents during a reference interaction, even if the research topic is one that is emotionally triggering for the librarian. Emotional labor is difficult work that can result in stress and burnout. Further, not only is feminized and emotional labor challenging, it is also undervalued. Many researchers have shown how the feminization of library work, and in particular the undervaluing of emotional labor required of public-facing roles like reference and instruction, is standardized in guiding professional documents[11] and job expectations[12] and ultimately serves as a way to continually devalue feminized work to uphold patriarchal norms.[13] As a women-majority (but not women-dominated[14]) profession, research into librarianship has also focused on career advancement and leadership through a gendered lens. Our research is particularly indebted to work that has uncovered gendered dynamics in library leadership. Overall, while the ethos of librarianship is feminized, masculine leadership qualities are still very much valued, forcing women in leadership to either "adopt practices that are 'contained within the paternalist state'"[15] or be left out of career advancement opportunities altogether.[16]

It would not be possible to frame research on how gender identities serve as professional resources without engaging in the scholarship of the "Librarian Stereotype." The stereotype of the librarian that has permeated popular culture in the United States and elsewhere is that of a cardigan-wearing, book-loving, whisper-demanding woman.[17] This stereotype is highly gendered as woman and highly racialized as white and, as such, has material professional consequences for librarians who are men,[18] who are not white,[19] who do not conform to a gender binary, who are disabled or neuroatypical, and so forth. As the results of this study suggest, some of these material consequences involve who is taken seriously and considered credible, how promotion opportunities are made available, and how librarians develop healthy and professional work relationships.

Experiences of women in men-dominated professions can be contrasted starkly with those of men in women-majority workplaces. Men can expect better career outcomes as tokens, as

opposed to token women, and often have different motivations for joining such professions than do women.[20] One such experience reinforced by this study is that of the "glass escalator"[21]—the phenomenon of advancing token men into leadership and management positions at a faster rate than women. Another body of work that informs our understanding of the experiences of men in women-majority professions is that of James Carmichael.[22] He explores stereotypes and perceptions of how gender operates in the profession by detailing the complicated and nuanced experiences men librarians have in a feminized profession.

Finally, though this research is primarily concerned with the ways in which gender identities operate in library work, the authors' commitment to intersectional feminist analysis implores us to examine how race, class, sexuality, abilities, and other sociopolitical identities interact with gender. Of particular importance is work that explores how professional identities of librarians are highly racialized, as well as gendered.[23]

As described above, much of the literature on gender and other intersecting identities approaches these issues at an organizational level. This study seeks to contribute new knowledge to this area by investigating how individuals working in libraries perceive their gender identities as a resource for their professional goals.

Methods
Rationale
We selected qualitative methods because our research objectives require a deep understanding of the professional utility of gender identity and performance. Our research uses a constructivist grounded theory approach.[24] Grounded theory is an inductive approach in which researchers attempt to bracket preexisting concepts and generate theoretical categories through analysis of the data.[25] The constructivist grounded theory perspective holds that there is not one objective or "correct" meaning to be derived from the data, but rather multiple potential interpretations, shaped by the situatedness of the researcher.[26] "Viewing the research as constructed rather than discovered fosters researchers' reflexivity about their actions and decisions";[27] thus, researchers should be intentional about examining how their particular values, perspectives, and socioeconomic context shape their data gathering and analysis process.

Recruitment
IRB approval was obtained independently from the University of Southern California and The Ohio State University, with the University of Oregon agreeing to cede review to the University of Southern California. We used a prescreening survey to recruit participants in the fall and winter of 2016. Prior to the prescreening survey's dissemination, the survey's terminology and goals were reviewed by the University of Oregon's LGBT Center. A link to the prescreening survey was sent through a call for participants on multiple professional association Library and Information Science email lists, librarianship-dedicated Facebook groups and pages, and on Twitter using dedicated LIS hashtags. People who were interested in being interviewed answered a set of prescreening questions in Google Forms, an online survey tool; the answers were used to select candidates for individual interviews (see appendix A).

Sampling Procedure
A total of 256 people responded to our call for participants survey. The survey was designed to identify people interested in participating in voluntary in-depth interviews exploring issues

of gender identity and performance in the library workplace. We asked that they self-identify racial identity, gender identity, sexual orientation, supervisory status, and workplace type. The screening survey collected demographic, educational background, and contact information, which allowed researchers to include participants based on the following criteria: a) they are located in the United States and b) they work in a library in a professional position. Surveys containing partial responses or coming from outside the United States were discarded. A non-probabilistic, purposive sampling framework was used to identify valid participants (meaning our sample was not random and research participants were sought to fit each of our racial and gender identity categories).[28] This data is not generalizable to an entire population or demographic. It was not designed to seek a statistically significant or representative sample. Like most qualitative research, this study instead intends to reveal the range of experiences within the topic.

To ensure a diverse sample, we aggregated the self-identified racial data according to the most recent United States Federal Census race categories. We then randomly selected participants within each category using an online random number generator, Random.org.

Interviews

Each author conducted a pilot test of the standardized interview guide with an individual recruited from one of our professional networks. The standardized interview guide was reviewed for terminology and goals by gender and sexuality studies research consultant Charlie McNabb and staff at the Queer Resource Center of the Claremont Colleges. For qualitative research that uses in-depth interviews, 12 interviews are determined to be sufficient to produce and reveal 92 percent of the total codes for a given homogenous population. For heterogeneous populations, the recommendation is that 20 to 40 interviews are sufficient.[29] We conducted 29 interviews to fulfill this recommendation. Selected participants received an email with possible interview times, a study release, and a list of definitions (see appendix B). If there was no response, another person from the category was selected randomly to participate until 29 were interviewed.

The phone interviews were conducted over the course of six weeks in February and March 2017. Each participant was interviewed by a research team member. The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and were based on a 30-question standardized interview guide. The standardized interview guide consisted of a common set of questions as well as two subsets for supervisors and IT professionals. It was not mandatory to answer all questions, and response length varied per question and per person. Participants did not receive incentives to take part in our research. The authors recorded the data using recorders; the audio recordings were then transcribed by a transcription service.

Coding and Analysis

The interview transcripts were independently coded using an open-coding approach, meaning codes were generated by reading and synthesizing the collected data to identify common and divergent perspectives.[30] We coded and analyzed responses in MS Excel, and then imported responses and codes into NVivo for further analysis. Codes were reconciled between coders until sufficient intercoder reliability was achieved. A master codebook was created and included code definitions, illustrative quotes, and examples. These coded responses were then categorized into themes using an inductive approach.[31] Themes are a way of creating struc-

ture out of unstructured data and often simplify the phenomena of lived experience. For the purposes of this paper, the authors analyzed 29 responses to five specific questions from our standardized interview guide (see appendix C for the five questions analyzed for this study).

Findings

Of the 29 participants, 14 identified as cis women, five as cis men, one as a trans woman, three as gender-nonconforming people, and six as other gender. Twenty of the participants were categorized (based on their self-identification and Census categories) as white, two as Black, one as Asian, one as Hispanic or Latinx, and five as more than one race or ethnicity. Twenty participants were nonsupervisors and nine were supervisors. Twelve participants identified as straight, three as gay or lesbian, three as bisexual, and 11 as queer. Three participants have been in the profession for less than one year, 11 for one to five years, eight for six to ten years, and seven for more than ten years. Nine participants worked at public libraries, 17 at academic libraries, one at a special library, one at an archive, and one is self-employed.

During the data-cleaning process, we replaced the participants' real names with pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. The pseudonyms are listed in table 1 and will be used throughout this article when attributing quotations to specific participants.

TABLE 1 **Participants**						
Pseudonym	**Gender Identity**	**Race**	**Sexual Orientation**	**Supervisor Status**	**Time in Profession**	**Type of Library**
Abby	Cis woman	White	Straight	Nonsupervisor	6–10 years	Archives
Alex	Other	White	Queer	Nonsupervisor	1–5 years	Self-employed
Anna	Cis woman	More Than One	Straight	Nonsupervisor	1–5 years	Academic
Bette	Other	White	Queer	Supervisor	6–10 years	Academic
Brody	Cis man	Black	Straight	Supervisor	1–5 years	Academic
C.M.P.	Gender nonconforming	White	Queer	Nonsupervisor	6–10 years	Academic
Cassandra	Cis woman	Hispanic/ Latinx	Straight	Nonsupervisor	6–10 years	Academic
Dan	Cis man	White	Gay/lesbian	Nonsupervisor	Less than 1 year	Public
Erika	Trans woman	White	Bisexual	Nonsupervisor	Less than 1 year	Public
Gemma	Gender nonconforming	More Than One	Queer	Nonsupervisor	1–5 years	Special
Harper	Cis man	White	Queer	Nonsupervisor	1–5 years	Public
Jane	Cis woman	White	Queer	Supervisor	More than 10 years	Academic

TABLE 1 Participants						
Pseudonym	**Gender Identity**	**Race**	**Sexual Orientation**	**Supervisor Status**	**Time in Profession**	**Type of Library**
Jim	Cis man	White	Straight	Nonsupervisor	More than 10 years	Academic
Lorelai	Other	White	Queer	Nonsupervisor	1–5 years	Public
Lou	Other	White	Queer	Nonsupervisor	6–10 years	Academic
Mari	Cis woman	More Than One	Straight	Supervisor	1–5 years	Public
Maria	Cis woman	White	Queer	Supervisor	More than 10 years	Academic
Martin	Other	White	Straight	Nonsupervisor	More than 10 years	Academic
Monica	Cis woman	Black	Straight	Nonsupervisor	More than 10 years	Public
Myra	Gender nonconforming	White	Bisexual	Nonsupervisor	1–5 years	Public
Nicole	Cis woman	White	Queer	Supervisor	6–10 years	Academic
Norah	Cis woman	White	Queer	Supervisor	6–10 years	Public
Red	Cis woman	White	Gay/lesbian	Nonsupervisor	More than 10 years	Public
Richard	Cis man	White	Gay/lesbian	Nonsupervisor	More than 10 years	Academic
Roxanne	Cis woman	White	Straight	Nonsupervisor	1–5 years	Academic
Serena	Other	White	Bisexual	Nonsupervisor	1–5 years	Academic
Victoria	Cis woman	More Than One	Straight	Supervisor	6–10 years	Academic
Vivica	Cis woman	Asian	Straight	Nonsupervisor	Less than 1 year	Academic
Walter	Cis man	More Than One	Straight	Supervisor	1–5 years	Academic

Themes

Based on our coding and data analysis, we developed four overarching themes: 1) *Visibility and Connection to Library Users,* 2) *Credibility and Presumed Competence,* 3) *Lack of Awareness and Hyperawareness* and 4) *Being Your Authentic Self and Concealing Yourself.* Distinct yet interrelated, these themes reflect the different ways that librarians perceive their gender identities as professional resources or hindrances.

Theme 1: Visibility and Connection to Library Users

When asked in what ways their gender identity helps them professionally, many participants spoke about *visibility* and *connection to library users*. For some, this was based in library users' gendered expectations about them as woman-presenting librarians; for others, being visible as members of a minoritized group helped establish greater connection with library users.

Several women participants noted that, because they are perceived as "maternal and approachable," students feel more comfortable "open[ing] up to" and "connect[ing] with" them. Some noted that being socialized as a woman can make you adept at performing the emotional skills that make for an effective reference/instruction librarian, such as listening, eliciting responses, and making others feel comfortable. Many of these participants expressed unease at the idea that they are able to do their job well because they are perceived as maternal, or socialized to perform a type of emotional labor. For example, Norah is queer but is often read as "a nice straight lady," and acknowledged that being a cisgender woman who presents in a heteronormative way can make some users more comfortable with her: "Yeah, I definitely think it advantages me that I come off as a cisgender female [sic], so it's just people are more comfortable with it and it makes my job easier. I don't necessarily think that that's fair, but it definitely makes it easier." Abby found it "unfortunate" but true that the "emotional labor involved in being a reference librarian" is similar to the emotional labor that women are taught to perform, and this can be "very helpful with the students." Cassandra told us she gives out maternal "vibes" without realizing she is doing it, and though this can help her connect better with students, it can lead students to become overreliant on her.

Other participants spoke about the value of being visible to students and other library users as a librarian from a minoritized group. This visibility helps to challenge stereotypes and expectations around who can hold positions of authority in libraries and higher education, which can have a positive impact on students.

> I've been told by several students over the past few years they were kind of inspired or kind of happy not only because of my gender but because of my ethnicity. I had an English professor come up to me and tell me that one of her [Black] students came up to her crying. That alerted me obviously, I said, "Why's she crying?" And she was crying because she didn't believe that a Black man could hold an administrative position in a library or be a librarian. (Brody)

> There are cases where I go into classrooms and I see students who are either trans or nonbinary or queer, or all of the above, and I think it is helpful for them to see people in a position such as mine. Not necessarily my position specifically, but like to see people who work for the college that are you know, queer, trans, nonbinary. (Lou)

Participants also discussed valuing their visibility as a librarian from a minoritized group because it helps library users see them as a safe person to approach for resources and help.

> Being out has been really beneficial for connecting with students. A lot of students who are just coming out feel really alone, and seeing someone who's an adult who's

out is really a big deal. I know that it would've been for me. Generally, what happened is once the word gets out, I get a lot of students visiting me and asking for resources about gender stuff and help talking to professors and so forth. (Alex)

I work in a public service environment, and being openly trans tends to attract the transgender patrons to the library I work at. It allows me to give them information on resources that nobody else really knows about because they're not involved with them. (Erika)

A common thread found in many of the participants' responses was the idea that having experienced marginalization oneself makes it easier, or more of a prerogative, to reach out to minoritized or marginalized members of the library community.

I came out as a lesbian in the '80s when it was still a little more scary to meet other people who were lesbian. I was in the [military] for a while and I really had to be careful there. There was a certain way that you would look at each other to kind of convey what you were without speaking anything. Sometimes at work I still kind of have that kind of connection with someone who comes in, and just by looking at them there's kind of a connection of, "It's okay to talk to me," about looking for some items, some books, that they might be less inclined to ask someone else who appears very straight. (Red)

I feel like as one of the core tenets of librarianship for me is that librarianship is for everyone and reaching out to marginalized and minority patrons is essential. And I feel that being more aware of those things, and having those kinds of experiences, makes it easier for me, but also makes it more of a priority for me. (Martin)

Theme 2: Credibility and Presumed Competence

When asked in what ways they thought their gender identity hinders them, many participants discussed struggling to be seen as *credible* and *competent* in their professional role because of their gender. This issue is bound up with the broader questions of who gets the benefit of the doubt when it comes to being seen as competent in their work and who has to "prove" it, how gendered characteristics like physical appearance and communication style impact whether one is seen as competent, and how these relate to preconceptions of who "seems" like a librarian.

Our interviews revealed that gender performance impacts both service to library users and interactions between workers within the library. For some women participants, being taken seriously by coworkers means having to dress in a feminine way or being very intentional about asserting themselves in meetings because they are not listened to otherwise.

I feel like on the random days that I'll put a dress or be a little bit more polished as far as like this, a suit skirt or whatever then I'm treated a little bit different especially from our administration team as being, I don't know, as being someone who's more worth listening to, I guess. (Anna)

I work in a very big place so I actually think there are instances when interacting specifically with male coworkers, I don't get taken as seriously, or I sort of have to assert myself more in those scenarios because of my gender performance. (Lorelai)

Some participants expressed doubt that they will ever be seen by some library patrons as fully credible or competent because of aspects of their identity.

Sometimes if you get a male patron and they're asking something that they think is traditionally a male topic, like about cars or things like that, they seem more hesitant like they don't expect you to know where to find the materials that they're looking for. (Monica)

While I don't invite conversations about my gender or my orientation at work, they're not secrets either and I think it's fairly well known that I'm some kind of queer. I think that helps me with some students but has made me automatically suspect to others and I suspect there are students who will never fully take my word as credible on anything because of that. (Nicole)

A number of participants discussed the different ways that they defy gendered expectations about librarians. When working with men colleagues both in the library and elsewhere in the university, Abby said she was conscious about asserting her authority:

In the past, I've had issues with male coworkers not respecting my authority. So, I know that when I do interact with male coworkers, I tend to be more assertive than I am with female coworkers…. I mean, some examples might be where faculty members in front of their class [will] contradict something that I've said when I was giving an orientation or instruction session to the students. Or they make it seem like they know more than I do. Because I am assertive, I have no problem correcting them in front of their students. (Abby)

Bette, who is nonbinary and works in library IT, noted:

I work with a lot of cisgender men. So I think in a lot of ways my not completely feminine presentation actually gives me credibility sometimes. But also I'm frequently called upon to be the [one] who has empathy. (Bette)

Victoria, a Black cisgender woman, observed that regardless of the way she dresses, library patrons make assumptions about her based on her gender and race:

You can see that I wear dresses. But, you know, it doesn't really matter… People make the assumption. I don't know what assumption they make. … For Black women, we're labeled or depicted a certain way so you really don't know what they think, you know? (Victoria)

One aspect of the *Credibility and Presumed Competence* theme we identified relates to the experiences of men in the women-majority profession of librarianship. Men participants discussed being cognizant of privilege afforded to them as men in women-majority workplaces, stating that they "stand out" and that their voices and opinions are often given more authority than their women colleagues. Dan, a children's librarian, discussed the reactions he elicits from patrons:

> The patrons that come into the library, they're very interested in me and probably because I'm new but also to them I'm still male. I think, in general, being a male in children's librarianship has helped me because that part of librarianship is female dominated on the administrative side. I think when I interview for jobs like this one it's like, "Oh, a guy that wants to work with kids."

Another participant, Harper, noted that his library director "definitely prefers men over women in terms of the candor with which he deals with them and the support he gives to various projects. I think he gives men a lot more autonomy than women." This has caused tension with his women coworkers:

> My women colleagues identify me with my men colleagues, the men in administration. They say I'm a golden boy. They will literally say things like, "Oh, well, you're a boy, so of course they like you." "You know, you're a man, so of course they like you." I didn't ask for that. I mean, that's what privilege is. I didn't ask for it, but it's nonetheless there.

Women and nonbinary participants discussed what they perceived as inequity in how men are valued and treated in their workplaces. Several noted that, though there are more women in the profession and often in specific workplaces, there are typically more men in leadership and decision-making roles. Some expressed frustration that their ideas are often disregarded while their men colleagues' ideas are acknowledged and that they are not set up to succeed in the same way men colleagues are.

> Yes, if I was actually a man, I feel like I would have more benefit to be able to accomplish things, I guess…. That I wouldn't have to, I guess, try as hard to be heard …In our meeting with my associate dean who is a man and myself, there have been few times where we're kind of suggesting the same idea but it will be the …The dean will credit the associate dean because he's chair of a committee. I don't know. Yes. So I don't know, if I was a man, if that would be different. I would think it would though, it seems that way. (Anna)

While men participants discussed situations in the workplace where they believed they were lent more credence or authority because of their gender, they also reported facing skepticism and doubt from both the public and colleagues. Dan has encountered patrons who are "suspicious" that he is a children's librarian, and he feels that he needs to do more to justify himself and his decision to work in children's librarianship when he interviews for new posi-

tions. Brody, a Black cis man, has encountered students who do not believe he is a librarian when he staffs the reference desk, because he does not look like what they think a librarian looks like.

> There are a few classes that I taught the first year where students were kinda surprised that I was a librarian. And sometimes it can be refreshing. Other times it has been a deterrent. To give you an example, I do, along with my teaching course, I also work reference hours and [with] students. There have been times where the staff have to point to me and say I am the librarian. Cause some of the students come up to me thinking I'm staff. They didn't believe it, or they just brushed it off, and somebody had to just point to me and say, "Yes, he is the librarian. He can help you." … They go by stereotypes. The classic blonde woman. There are still people that think that's what a librarian looks like. And we know that's just not the case. (Brody)

Theme 3: Lack of Awareness and Hyperawareness

The third theme is *Lack of Awareness* and its inverse, *Hyperawareness*, of the role that gender plays in the functioning of power and marginalization within an organization. Several participants who are gender conforming noted the difficulty of perceiving or reflecting on the impact their gender has on their professional lives. Some participants expressed doubt that their gender has influenced their careers but acknowledged they had not reflected on it much. Others noted that they do not feel the impact of gender at work on a day-to-day basis, but they know on an intellectual level that it plays a role. For example, when asked about whether she thinks her gender identity has hindered her, Jane replied:

> I don't feel like it has, feeling-wise. But intellectually, I know that it is the case that …They've done studies at my workplace, actually, and I can even see it where my male colleagues and male librarians get fewer administrative tasks or service, less service to committees, fewer tasks like that. I mean, I don't feel like it. I don't really mind doing that stuff, but I know that it is the case.

Some participants talked about feeling "unqualified" to speak about gender in librarianship because they have not had much occasion to reflect on it:

> I know that the reason that I don't think about this as much is because of my privilege. I speak to colleagues, especially outside the library, but even within the library, about that sort of thing, and I'm becoming even more aware of how much I should talk about and be aware of my privilege, and I feel like me being like, "I don't know." … When I was thinking about this interview and preparing for it, I was thinking like, "I have no idea. I don't know." Like, "I'm not the one, they shouldn't be asking me." (Roxanne)

On the other hand, a number of participants discussed feeling "hyperaware" of being someone with a minoritized identity in their interactions with colleagues and the public. Many

participants experienced this hyperawareness as a professional hindrance because it makes them feel self-conscious and second-guess their decisions, actions, and behavior.

Maria, who works in library IT, discussed being conscious of how she comes across when she is the only woman in a meeting, and how this can lead her to change her behavior.

> I work at a department head level and I work mainly in the digital libraries area, so I have a lot of IT responsibilities, so I often work with our central IT office, and they have far less gender representation than we do in the library, so I do find myself sitting in meetings with a bunch of men. I am sometimes the only woman in the room, and so I'm highly aware of how I am coming across in meetings where I am the only woman in the room, and I'm very conscious of it and I try to make sure that I'm not the one taking notes, for example, all the time.

Vivica expressed worries that her gender may hold her back professionally, even as she is just beginning her career.

> I've noticed that in the, at least in the organization that I work in, there is a gender gap in the leadership roles people take. And I wonder if that's gonna affect my future if I decide to move up the ladder. There aren't as many females or I should say non-males in leadership positions. I find that intriguing because it doesn't reflect the library staff at all. It's not directly proportional. I think if you look at the numbers of the overall demographics of the system that I work in, it doesn't reflect the numbers, the demographic information of the leadership. And I think that is a concern as an early career professional.

This hyperawareness was interpreted positively by some participants because the experience of marginalization can help build compassion and empathy for others:

> I feel that being nonbinary makes me better able to interact with more different kinds of people. I'm more comfortable interacting with women. I am more able to interact with men in a conscious way because of my experience with performing different personas, but I also feel that it makes me a better librarian to any person who is marginal almost. Being in a position where I have felt uncomfortable in mainstream society most of my life, I tend to be on the lookout for people who are also in that same position. (Martin)

Harper, who is a queer cis man, discussed being aware of his privilege at work. He mentioned trying to use his privilege to support others in the organization (for example, by amplifying good work that his women colleagues are doing when he talks to his library director):

> The director makes a lot of time for talking to me, which is nice, and I try and use that time not as just an opportunity to talk about myself but also as an opportunity to talk of what my colleagues are doing and what I think they're doing that's really great, my women colleagues especially because he pays less attention to them. … I'm not

a very high-powered person at the library, so it's not like I can actually bestow any kind of favoritism on anyone, but I do use the chances I have to support or amplify the voice of my women colleagues. I do try and do that. In terms of members of the public, if I see a guy treating one of my women colleagues in a disrespectful way and I think that my mere physical presence or even my words can affect a positive change, first priority is if it can help my coworker feel safe and supported, and then second, if they can [effect] some kind of change, then I try and do that.

Theme 4: Being Your Authentic Self and Concealing Yourself

The fourth theme is the dual dynamic of *Being Your Authentic Self and Concealing Yourself.* Participants were asked to discuss how they communicate or convey their gender identity at work (if at all) and whether their gender performance impacts the way they interact with coworkers. While the previous theme, *Lack of Awareness and Hyperawareness*, dealt with participants' internal awareness of difference (or lack thereof) vis-à-vis gender and related identity categories, this fourth theme reflects participants' experiences with how they disclose or conceal aspects of their identity with colleagues and users.

Some participants discussed being able to just be themselves, to interact with others in their workplace without having to conceal or be intentional about conveying their gender in any particular way.

> I haven't hid anything …But in terms in my gender …I don't do anything to hide it or …from birth I've been a cisgender male. I have facial hair, I don't shave. I trim it but I don't shave it. So I'm not trying to pass in one way or another. I'm just being myself. (Richard)

> Again, I don't know if it's something that I consciously convey. To look at me I think I present as a pretty feminine woman.… I think I sometimes just fall into that habit of assuming that I present as a woman and other people read me as such. (Cassandra)

> I would say these things are invisible, but the way I am is the way I interact, and I think I'm really honest, and maybe that's just the good fortune of being where I'm at, where I can be who I want to be and dress how I want to dress. (Jim)

All of the participants who reported "just being themselves" when it came to their gender identity are cisgender. A number of other participants, including trans and nonconforming participants as well as some cis participants, discussed the need to hide or conceal aspects of their gender at work; many noted that they conform to gender normative expectations about dress, behavior, or communication style at work, or choose not to discuss aspects of their gender identity with colleagues. For some, this is a way to feel safer in their workplace, or to make others more comfortable. Others said they choose not to disclose to colleagues who have more power in the organization.

> In day-to-day interactions, I'm pretty comfortable with being looked at as a masculine-of-center butch lesbian, even though I don't really identify that way. I

really do a matrix of thinking about when it's safe or when it's reasonable to talk more about the intersections of gender and sexuality for myself for certain particularities of my identity, as that makes sense without having to contextualize a lot. I let a lot of things go unsaid. (C.M.P.)

Well, I think in my personal life I'm a lot more, I guess, I can be a little more feminine than I attempt to have a really masculine front whenever I'm at work. In part because I feel like it is expected. People are more comfortable with those who conform but in my personal life I'm a lot more free, I guess. (Dan)

I don't feel like I can talk about [my gender identity] sometimes at work in the same way that other people do because I feel like it's unclear, you know what I mean. Like I feel like someone is just one way or the other, like if someone is masculine or feminine, it's easier to talk about it or be that way. I think depending on who I talk to I almost feel more safe gearing towards one particular gender instead of being more ambiguous about it, which is kind of how I am outside of work. (Gemma)

Some participants talked about being intentional about conveying their gender by wearing pronoun pins or putting their pronouns in their email signature; however, some have been met with negative professional consequences or expressions of outright bigotry from others in their organization.

I think that often people are pretty uncomfortable. I'm often the first trans person that they know of, and that can bring up some uncomfortable feelings for them I think. I think that they, after I disclose, people often [inaudible] period of time where they're really awkward with me. Sometimes they no longer want to work with me. (Alex)

Other participants discussed trying to use their positions of privilege as cis people to disrupt norms or expectations about gender. Roxanne, for example, talked about deciding to take on a more ambiguous gender presentation at her conservative institution:

In this campus environment, unlike other places I've worked at, I'm pretty sure everyone just assumes heterosexual and cis unless I were to make something of it. And because of that I feel like I sometimes somewhat intentionally make it a little bit more ambiguous. … Many of the students here haven't been exposed to anything but um, overtly heterosexual, overtly cisgender identity…. On different days, I dress very differently.

Analysis and Discussion

This research serves, in part, to confirm what librarians of color and those who are gender nonconforming have been saying for decades: there remains, in the LIS profession, material benefits to performing gender in socially predictable ways. From career advancement, to rela-

tionships with colleagues and faculty, to being seen as a competent professional, it pays to be white and cisgender. Pagowsky and Rigby's unpacking of Nisbett and Ross's representativeness heuristic helps us understand, in part, why this may be: because media representations of librarianship, and because of the demographic makeup of the profession itself, librarians, in many people's minds, are white and (usually) women. Because people subconsciously use these representations to relate "recognized traits to established categories"[32] having an identity that matches this heuristic undoubtedly affects how students, colleagues, and faculty view us and our work. Indeed, even our professional documents are centered on patriarchal, gender-normative expectations of library work.[33]

Unsurprisingly, a major focus of our findings is the role of relational, emotional work in the library profession. Relational work is a term meant to emphasize the fact that people invest energy into how they communicate to achieve specific outcomes. Within this framework, communication is not limited only to what is said, but also nonverbal communication, including dress and presentation.[34] Indeed, all four of the themes we uncovered are relational in nature: being seen as professional, the ability to be our authentic selves, connecting to our communities and users, and being aware of structures of privilege and oppression all require the labor of negotiating who we are and how we communicate that. Relational work is difficult and can be made more difficult by the uneven valuing of that work, depending on the gender and race of the person doing it. Our findings reflect the reality that, while our profession requires large amounts of relational, emotional work, that work is more likely to be valued or praised when done by men.[35] The de- and undervaluing of a core aspect of our work, when done by the majority of workers in the profession, leads to burnout, stress, and lowered job satisfaction. For a profession grappling with issues of equity and inclusivity, the role of relational work must be investigated at local and organizational levels.

Our interviews indicate that, although men are numerically the minority in librarianship, they benefit from privileges that accrue to men in other professions, such as having their voices heard and validated and having more opportunities for career advancement. These findings may help us better understand why some women choose to "distance" themselves from traditionally feminine presentations to accrue more professional cache.[36] Both Abby and Anna, for instance, mentioned the need to act more assertively, or to dress in more typically "professional" ways, to be taken seriously with men colleagues. Men may also benefit professionally from being in the numeric minority because they are seen as "special," and consequently given more opportunities and support by their organizations. These findings echo literature on the "glass escalator" phenomenon (discussed above), which holds that men in women-majority professions experience "structural advantages" to the benefit of their careers, such as being fast-tracked into higher-paying positions.[37] For example, Dan sees the main advantage to being a token man in librarianship is that men are overrepresented in administration: "I think, in general, being a male in children's librarianship has helped me because that part of librarianship is female dominated on the administrative side." At the same time, because men often diverge from the librarian stereotype, they may encounter doubt, disbelief, or even suspicion from the public or their coworkers, especially if they work in especially "feminized" areas of the profession such as children's librarianship, reference, or instruction, which is articulated by Dan when he notices the skepticism some patrons give him when he tells them he's a children's librarian. It's important to be attentive to the fact that the librarian stereotype is not just gendered but also raced, and this can have a compounding

effect of marginalizing men librarians of color. Brody, a Black cisgender man, for instance, describes this situation: "There have been times where the staff have to point to me and say I am the librarian. Cause some of the students come up to me thinking I'm staff. They didn't believe it, or they just brushed it off…" Thus, while the "glass escalator" phenomenon may hold true overall, any analysis must be attentive to the role that race plays in determining *which* men benefit from it and which do not.

Our findings also suggest that having staff who defy the librarian stereotype, like some members of the LGBTQ community[38] and people of color,[39] visible and supported by their workplace has positive impacts on similarly identifying library users (not to mention, of course, on the library staff themselves). Many of our participants of color and nonbinary participants noted that being a visible minority was an important, if not radical, aspect of their professional work. Martin, Red, Alex, and Erika all mentioned the benefit of being a person of color or gender-nonconforming person in professional positions as a source of connection to the students and patrons they serve. There has been a lot of important work done on the necessity of representation of people of color[40] and members of the LGBTQ community[41] to support student success. Paying more attention to the barriers to success that our marginalized colleagues experience can help to correct the near-stagnant growth of nonwhites in LIS and help alleviate the causes of burnout that keep people with marginalized identities out of the profession.

Limitations

This research was designed to be exploratory and the participants were purposely selected to encompass a range of ethnicities and experiences. Although we took efforts to ensure confidentiality, some participants may not have felt secure being fully honest in their responses for fear of deductive disclosure. We tried to address this limitation by asking open-ended and probing questions to solicit more information. Another limitation is our failure to ask participants explicit questions about marriage and parenthood and how they intersect with their gender identity and performances. This is a notable issue because being able to better understand how marriage and parenthood operate as professional obstacles or resources will contribute to a growing body of equity-focused research. We also did not ask participants to disclose their assigned sex or gender at birth. Nor did we consistently ask participants what type of position they held, though many offered their titles or duties extemporaneously.

Through our analysis we have identified several new areas for further research. Emerging questions centered on how parenthood and marriage explicitly intersect with gender in LIS work as well as how gender in LIS works operates outside the U.S. context. Closer examination of how gender practices differ between types of libraries (such as public vs. academic) and types of positions (such as IT vs. reference vs. admin) is warranted, and mixed methods research design might be key to exploring this area.

Conclusion

When we began this project, we set out to uncover the structural issues that impact our careers in LIS. Throughout our interviews, though, what we ended up with were reams of lived experiences. While many of our participants spoke about the topics we had imagined they would when discussing professional resources and obstacles—things like promotions, raises, opportunities for growth—many more spoke of the interpersonal interactions that

make up our workdays and workplaces. For folks with privileged identities, we often think that offering professional resources is a key way to promote racial and gender diversity. What our findings show is that it is the day-to-day interactions with students, patrons, colleagues, faculty, and administrators that provide the most challenges or opportunities. The toll of inequitable emotional labor, of having our competence or credibility questioned, of experiencing the duality of being your authentic self in some situations but needing to conform to racial and/or gendered expectations in others, is just as worthy a metric to measure our profession's progress toward equity and diversity as promotions or titles.

APPENDIX A. Participant Prescreening Survey

1. What type of information center do you work in? Mark only one.
   - □ Public library
   - □ Academic library
   - □ Special library
   - □ School library
   - □ Archive
   - □ Unemployed
   - □ Other:
2. How long have you been in a professional position? Mark only one.
   - □ Less than a year
   - □ 1–5 years
   - □ 6–10 years
   - □ More than 10 years
3. Do you work in a supervisory capacity? Mark only one.
   - □ Yes
   - □ No
4. Please enter the zip code for your place of employment.

5. How do you describe your gender identity? Mark only one.
   - □ Cis woman/cis female
   - □ Cis man/cis male
   - □ Trans man/Trans male
   - □ Trans woman/trans female
   - □ Genderqueer/Gender nonconforming
   - □ Other:
6. How do you describe your sexual orientation? Mark only one.
   - □ Heterosexual/straight
   - □ Homosexual/gay, lesbian
   - □ Bisexual
   - □ Queer/nonconforming
   - □ Other:
7. Please describe your racial and/or ethnic identity.

8. Are there other social identities you'd like to share with us? Some examples of social identities: socioeconomic class, ability, first language, national origin, age, and/or religion

9. If you are interested in participating in a confidential in-depth interview lasting 30–60 minutes on how gender performance impacts your work, please leave your contact information (email or phone number) below.

APPENDIX B. Definitions Provided to Participants

Gender: The culturally specific presentation of masculinity or femininity. Gender involves:
- Gender identity: a person's internal sense of masculinity and femininity, and the word they use to best describe that
- Gender assignment: the gender designation of someone at birth that is correlated with their sex assignment
- Gender roles: expectations imposed on someone based on their gender
- Gender expression: someone's external presentation of their gender
- Gender attribution: how others perceive someone's gender

Gender is different from sex assignment at birth, which is the assignment of "male," "female," or "intersex" based upon the genitalia that an individual possesses at birth, along with chromosomes and hormone levels.

Gender identity: a personal conception of oneself as male or female (or both or neither); a person whose gender identity matches the gender they were assigned at birth (based on sex organs) is called cisgender; a person whose gender identity is different from the gender they were assigned at birth (based on sex organs) is called transgender.

Gender performance/performativity: according to Judith Butler, who coined the term, the way in which one acts, walks, speaks, and dresses that consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman; also called gender expression.

Gender normative: adhering to or reinforcing culturally expected standards of masculinity or femininity.

*Nonbinary: Nonbinary genders are those that fall outside the traditional binary "man" and "woman" categories. Nonbinary is an umbrella term for all genders that are not exclusively male or female. Nonbinary people may identify as being a mix of two or more genders, as moving between two or more genders, as not having a gender, as being somewhere between male and female, or as having a gender that is completely separate from binary categorizations.

*Cisgender: An individual whose gender identity is aligned with their assigned gender at birth (based on external genital configuration). For example, a person born with a penis and assigned male at birth who identifies as a man is cisgender.

*Transgender: Transgender is an umbrella term for anybody whose gender identity does not correspond with the sex assigned to them at birth. Transgender people may be binary (female/woman or male/man) or nonbinary.

*Credit: Charlie McNabb, 2017.

APPENDIX C. Interview Questions for Questions Analyzed in This Study

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Pre-interview script (to send ahead of time)

Attached is the consent form. At the beginning of our interview, I'll be asking you for a pseudonym. If you don't give a pseudonym, we will come up with one for you—we will not use your real name.

Here are the definitions of the concepts we'll be discussing.

Script to recite at beginning of interview:

We are going to discuss your gender identity. [Define gender identity] and, in some cases, your sexual orientation. If at any point you would like me to define a term or provide an example, feel free to stop and ask me to. I want to remind you that you are free to end this interview at any time or refuse to answer any question. All answers will be anonymized and unidentifiable to you. Do you consent to participate in this study?

One-on-one interview questions for analysis:

Make Known Set

1. How do you make known [convey] your sexual orientation, if at all? [Example if they ask for one: If you are in same-sex relationships, do you openly discuss it with your coworkers?]
   a. Has the way you have made known [conveyed] your sexual orientation changed at all over the course of your career?
2. How do you make known [convey] your gender identity, if at all? [Example: do you share your pronouns in your email signature, when you're in a meeting, LibGuides, etc.]
   a. Has the way you have made known [conveyed] your gender identity changed over the course of your career?

Work Set

1. Does your gender performance impact the way you interact with your coworkers?
   a. Follow up: ask about how it impacts with people with their own gender identities (cis men with cis men), or other gender identities (transwomen with cis men)
   b. What are some of the strategies you use to fit in with your women colleagues? With your men colleagues?
      i. Do you ever downplay assertiveness and agency to fit in with your colleagues?
2. Does your gender identity ever help you?
3. How does your gender identity hinder you?

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