

**Opening the Book on Academic Librarians: an Agenda for Investigating  
Gender and Professional Status in a Feminized Occupation**

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**Abstract**

Librarians, as an occupational group, appear to have received surprisingly little attention from those who study work and gender. Like other feminized occupations, such as midwives and nurses, this group is of interest for how they have engaged in a project of professionalization in recent decades. Academic librarians have faced challenges to fully realizing a professional status because of their traditional organizational position as helpers or handmaidens to the professoriate. In order to more thoroughly outline a research agenda for examining this occupational group, this paper will present a review of the literature on the organization of librarians' work from a sociological and library science perspective, using Sociological Abstracts and Library Literature to identify resources. The co-authors on this paper contribute their individual expertise by examining the literature that emerges from their respective disciplines

and by entering into a cross-discipline discussion that will articulate the potential theoretical and practical outcomes of such a research agenda.

## **Introduction**

Female-dominated professions—sometimes referred to as semi-professions—have been the focus of many studies within the sociological literature. However, not all semi-professions have received equal attention. There are a plethora of studies on nurses and on groups such as midwives. In this paper, we wish to highlight one occupational group that has received less attention than might be expected: that is librarians, and in particular academic librarians. We define “academic librarians” as those librarians who are employed in universities, colleges, or other research settings. To give a sense of the degree of inattention to librarians as group, one might consider that a search for librarians in Sociological Abstracts lists 99 references in peer-reviewed journals, compared to searches for “midwives” or “nurses” which retrieve 163 and 962 references, respectively. This relative imbalance in research is notable particularly because librarians are so close at hand in academic life. We have chosen academic librarians as a focus for this research because they do work alongside academics, and because Abbott (1988, 219) names them as the professional elite within this occupation.

The relatively low level of sociological research on librarians is also notable because, over the past 30 years, academic librarians have been intensely engaged in debates about gaining faculty status. Sociologists who have studied other semi-professions have been particularly interested in the ways in which such groups have been engaged in strategies to improve their status and autonomy relative to male-dominated occupations (Witz, 1990; Coburn 1993, Benoit 1994; Sharpe 2001). Academic librarians also offer a potentially rich research site for such a discussion. However, as we shall see in a review of sociological studies of librarianship, this concern has received only a small amount of attention. It is this paper’s contention that the work and experience of librarians represent a rich research site in which to examine how gender, patriarchy and professional status intertwine to shape the experience of occupational groups.



## Opening the Book: Why this topic?

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- The Theoretical Preface
  - Witz (1990, 1992) and Acker (1990)
- Autobiographical footnotes
- Academic librarians defined

### **The literature on female dominated occupations and professional status**

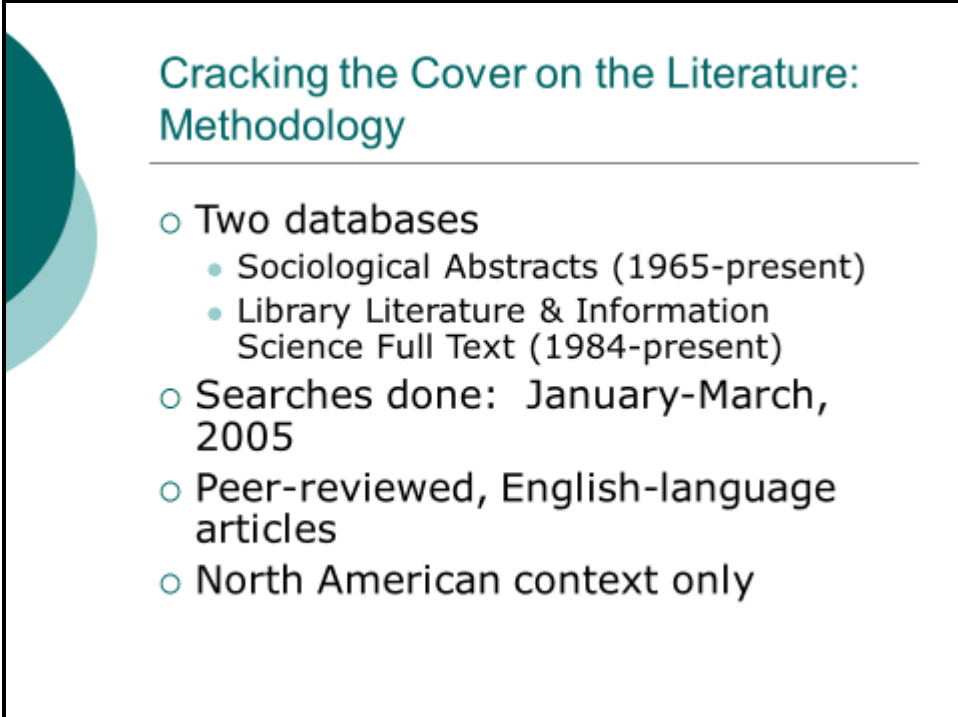
Adams (2003, 267) points out that women's professions are likely to have fewer of the characteristics that have been associated with traditionally male dominated professions, including "autonomy, pay, prestige, and a specialized body of knowledge." This being said, the problem for such groups then becomes how to distinguish themselves as professionals within institutional contexts where they are a part of a greater division of labour. Notable among the sociologists who have discussed this issue is Witz (1990) who has drawn attention to how female dominated occupations seek to realize their professional projects, often in relation to a male-dominated group, through the "gendered politics of occupational closure." Witz has discussed occupations such as midwifery and nursing in relation to a variety of exclusionary, inclusionary, demarcatory, and usurpationary strategies which have been used either by the occupation itself to gain autonomy and status or by a more dominant professional, such as medicine, to limit the power of these groups. Other writers have also focussed on the discussion of the politics of female-dominated professions in relation to midwifery and nursing (Coburn, 1993; Dahle 2003; Sharpe, 2001; Benoit, 1994), but as Adams (2003) suggests in her examination of dental

hygienists, many other female-dominated professions remain understudied.

The literature that does relate to the topic of occupational closure and women's professions raises a number of interesting points. Dahle (2003) extends Witz to study a situation where two female-dominated occupations—nurses and nursing assistants—are caught in a struggle for autonomy and control. Dahle's discussion addresses the question of how a profession comes to define its specialized knowledge and expertise, especially in situations where economic pressure may create a climate for restructuring in a division of labour. Abbott (1988) also examines competition between professionals, but the weakness of his study for female-dominated groups is that he largely overlooks the significance of gender and the possibility that women's historic roles in unpaid and paid work may influence the strategies they choose and the consequences of their actions. For example, female-dominated occupations may seek to replicate male models of professionalization (Witz, 1990) but they may also find themselves in double-binds arising from the way that masculinity is built into the substructure of institutions, including the assumption that workers can be free of family demands (Acker, 1990, 1998). Alternately, female professions may seek to re-value ways of knowing and doing which are associated with femaleness, as is the case for dental hygienists who have used ideas arising from feminist discourse to create a stronger sense of professional identity and legitimation for their work (Adams 2003). A strong sense of occupational identity may be crucial for effective lobbying of government to gain the legal claim to self-regulation of the profession (Benoit 1994; Coburn 1993).

Moving beyond occupations where women are in the majority, many authors have used the strategies highlighted by Witz to examine the dynamics of women's movement into male-dominated professions. It is worth noting a few of the trends in the literature in this regard to better understand how various strategies of occupational closure or inclusion may come into play. While women have moved into such professions, studies still note that demarcation persists whether through the persistence of vertical segregation, as for medical doctors (Crompton and Le Feuvre, 2003) or through the horizontal demarcation of certain speciality occupations being more suitable for women, as is the case in social welfare bureaucracies (Webb 2001). Others have pointed to how the "long hours culture" (Rutherford 2001) is a strategy of patriarchal closure, keeping women out of professional and managerial occupations such as

banking and state bureaucracy (Webb 2001), law (Seron and Ferris 1995), and ministry (Mellow 2002). To deal with this, women have had to develop a variety of strategies to balance professional work and family life (see for example, Lapeyre 2003; Mellow 2002; Webb (2001, 840) notes that while women have made in-roads into various professions and positions, it ultimately has meant “an equality of misery” where participants regardless of gender struggle with time greedy jobs.



**Cracking the Cover on the Literature:  
Methodology**


- Two databases
  - Sociological Abstracts (1965-present)
  - Library Literature & Information Science Full Text (1984-present)
- Searches done: January-March, 2005
- Peer-reviewed, English-language articles
- North American context only

### **Choosing literature for review**

Two separate search engines were used to retrieve abstracts or citations of journal articles published in English. These searches were done in the first 2 months of 2005. A search was done of the sociological literature using Sociological Abstracts and the keywords, “librarian” or “librarians.” Given that the listings in Sociological Abstracts extend back to the 1960s, this represents a relatively broad sample of research on this occupation. For the library literature—that written for and by librarians—a search of peer-reviewed articles was done using Library Literature & Information Science Full Text, an important search engine for this field. This

search engine covers from 1984 to the present, a somewhat shorter time frame than Sociological Abstracts.

After an initial scan of the literature, we also decided to limit our review to peer-reviewed articles written from a North American context. This is because we realized that the organization and culture of libraries in other regions was sufficiently different to make an adequate assessment difficult. The numbers of articles omitted for this reason are stated below; in each case, they form a relatively small group.




## Turning the Pages: Initial Results

- Sociological Abstracts
  - Keyword "librarian" or "librarians"
  - Total retrieved: 99 abstracts
  - Excluded: articles referencing librarians but not about their work
  - Final tally: 59 abstracts (35 specific to academic librarians)

The search of the sociological literature returned 99 abstracts, of which 35 focussed on academic librarians, 23 on librarians working in public libraries, and the remaining 41 did not clearly specify the work site of the librarians in the abstract. We did not limit the search to academic librarians, in this case, because of the relatively small amount of literature. Of the 99, we set aside 9 listings which did not provide enough information to assess the real topic of the paper and 8 which discussed librarians in non-North American contexts. In addition, it was discovered that another 23 had little to say about the subject of librarians as workers or as a

profession. For example, some of these mentioned librarians for other reasons, such as listing them as expert informants in a community study or as compilers or users of annotated bibliographies. These also are omitted from the discussion that follows. In sum, 59 sociological abstracts and articles were reviewed to get a broad sense of the research questions asked about this group.



## Turning the Pages: Initial Results


- Library Literature & Information Science
  - Keyword "faculty" → 7 key subject headings
  - Total retrieved: 1021 articles
  - Focus on: "college and university librarians-status" = 128 articles
  - Excluded: articles that "talked" around faculty status but not to faculty status for librarians
  - Final tally: 60 articles

In the library literature, the search was modified slightly. Firstly, this search concerned only academic librarians versus those in public institutions, as a way of limiting the literature retrieved. Secondly, the search had to be refined somewhat because using the keyword "librarians" or even "college and university librarians" alone would have done little to focus our search. Because we were particularly interested in Witz's approach to discussing female occupations, we first chose to search using various subject headings<sup>1</sup> that addressed the topic of "academic librarians' relationship to faculty." This search turned up 1021 unique articles. By

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<sup>1</sup> The subject headings searched included: "Librarians-careers" (118 articles); "Librarianship as a profession" (216 articles); "Librarianship as a profession-history" (6 articles); "College and University librarians" (71 articles); "College and University librarians – status" (128 articles); "college and university librarianship" (30 articles); and "college and university librarians – relations with faculty and curriculum" (476 articles).

far, the majority of the citations retrieved (476), spoke to the issue of librarian and faculty collaboration, mostly in terms of library instruction and collection development. While this may be an interesting area, we suspected that it was not the area in which issues of professionalization were likely to be problematic, since these are the more accepted components of librarianship. Thus, we decided to focus on the issue of faculty status, by searching for the subject, “college and university librarians—status.” This returned 128 articles. 67 of these articles either turned out to be opinion pieces and editorials on the topic, emanated from beyond the geographic boundary of North America, or spoke “around” the issue of faculty status but not too the issue (e.g., professional development, what constitutes scholarly work for librarians, pay equity case studies, etc.). In the end, 61 articles formed the foundation of this portion of the review.



## Chapter 1: The Sociology Literature

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Topics discussed:

- Historical development
- Attitudes to clientele
- Librarianship as a feminized profession
- Librarians as information “gate keepers”
- Relationship to other occupations
- Strategies for gaining professional status

### **The sociological literature on librarians**

This section outlines some of the major research themes covered by the articles found in Sociological Abstracts. Keep in mind that while our interest is primarily in academic librarians, the search discussed here includes articles on librarians in other settings. This was



done to see the fuller picture of how sociologists have looked at this occupation. As well, please note that in the discussion that follows, we do not cite every article retrieved although we do report total numbers retrieved which relate to specific topics. Rather we discuss those that are most illustrative of the concerns within the literature. This was also done for our discussion of the library literature.

Six abstracts looked at the historical development of the occupation although most of these were on public librarians. Garrison (1972) outlines how public librarianship came to be a female-dominated occupation and how this led to a lowering of workers' autonomy, a strengthening of strong internal systems of bureaucratic control, and a decline in the status of public libraries as institutions. Other writers document ways in which libraries and librarians have striven to increase the status of their occupation in the past. For example, public librarians in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain worked to downplay the image of the library as a leisure-oriented institution in favour of it being seen as an institution dedicated to educational and informational goals (Snape 1992) and championed the adoption of businesslike, bureaucratic procedures for library operations to give librarians greater control over library users (Black 2001).

Eight articles examine more current trends in the impact of feminization on incumbents in this occupation. In the seventies and eighties, sociologists identified continued feminization of the profession, discussing how young women chose librarianship as a gender appropriate occupation (Meyer and Maes, 1983; Oates and Williamson, 1978). Over the past 20 years, this line of investigation has shifted to an examination of the implications for men of working in such a feminized environment and its implications for masculine identity and working relationships (Simpson, 2003, Carmichael, 1995, 1992; Fairhurst and Snavely, 1982). This includes recognition of how men tend to benefit from their minority status, experiencing a glass escalator effect (Simpson 2003). Phenix (1987) reviews a variety of North American and English studies to underline the prevalence of vertical segregation within the occupation. While research on men in librarianship is indicative of sociologists' broader interest in issue of gender identity and men's experience in feminine occupations (see for example, Williams, 1989), it is surprising that no more recent studies have been done of vertical segregation within this occupation, particularly given the discussion of this topic in relation to female academics.

There is also a discussion of how librarians' role has changed with the introduction of

various computer technologies, with twelve abstracts addressing this theme, five of which look specifically at academic librarians. Early discussion of the impact of such emerging technologies either optimistically suggested that librarians would increasingly be known as “information scientists” (Smith 1978) or took a darker view posing “librarians against the machine” (Shera, 1967). The actual increased use of such technologies and greater ease of public access to information in the 1980's and 90's led researchers to discuss how this trend had the capacity to diminish the value of librarian's specialized role and the value of libraries as information repositories (Lofquist 1988, Nasatir and Nasatir 1982; Ward and Hansen 1991). However, the impact of technology has also been examined less negatively by those who have suggested that it has equally expanded the role of librarians in other ways. Libraries have been described as the “centre of the restructured university” with the evolution of information technology (Battin 1986). Rockwell (1994) examines the rapid expansion of consortia of Internet research services among universities and advocates for giving librarians' greater say in the development and management of these resources. Within in public schools and libraries, librarians are taking on new roles in regards to evaluating Internet sites and policing their usage (Hammet 1999; Dill and Anderson 2003). The issue, however, of whether the evolving role of librarians in relation to technology has been accompanied by changes in their status continues to be one that is worthy of examination by sociologists. It is relevant to Witz's discussion inasmuch as technology has changed the content of librarians work and their ability to act as experts in the retrieval of information.

In a similar vein, nine studies touch on librarian's control over information although many of these do not specify academic librarians. These include a discussion of professional standards related to censorship (Herring 1999; McDonald 1993); the politics of controlling, establishing and maintaining archives (Brown and Davis-Brown 1998); the power of librarians' elitism to snub certain literary works (Dessauer 1986). Professional standards in regards to choosing library materials by academic librarians are emphasized (Woolf 1993; Baky 1993) and for other unspecified librarians (McDonald, 1993). The rise of cultural studies, particularly of pop culture, is noted as point of tension in the relationship between librarians and academics in the early 1990's, with academic librarians being resistant to including popular cultural materials in university collections (Cooper, 1993; Cooper et al. 1993; Ellis 1993).


Seventeen abstracts discussed the relationship of librarians to the work of other occupations with all but one focussing on librarians in research institutions. Some articles underline other professions see librarians in terms of lesser status; for example, in the view of medical residents, librarians “consult the literature”, while researchers “evaluate it critically” (Timmermans and Angell, 2001). Others highlight more positive attitudes to librarians. Librarians may be viewed as an important resource for those engaged in research; this includes agricultural researchers (Palmer 1991), medical teams (Mesler 1989), and medical teams; and academics or government officials doing research to shape public policy (Bickner 1972). Finally, a number of writers emphasize the potential contributions that can be made by librarians to teaching in academia. Abowitz (1994), Thomas (1992), Leavy (1985), and Booth (1984) all argue that librarians should have a greater role in teaching sociology students how to process information and develop research strategies. Parrot and Ormondroyd (1992) and Booth (1984) give examples of this has been successfully carried out. However, there may be obstacles to such collaboration (Leavy, 1985) and sociologists may not acknowledge librarians’ contributions to instruction (Abowitz 1994). More generally libraries are noted as a “potentially...valuable support” for a sociology department’s instructional efforts (Sandler and Barling, 1984).

Finally, nine of the abstracts discussed strategies related to gaining professional status, benefits, and improving working conditions. This group of abstracts included discussions of things such as collective bargaining, salaries, working conditions. The issue of salary and working conditions surfaced in three of these articles. Milbrath and Doyno (1987) in a study of the quality of university life at an American university, note that librarians had especially low morale and quality of working life when compared to other members of the university community, including faculty members. Librarians were one of several female-dominated occupations identified by an Australian pay equity inquiry whose work was systematically undervalued (Hall 1999). Blum (1983) also identifies demands for increased pay among public librarians in California in the 1970s.

A debate over the appropriateness of librarians’ inclusion in collective bargaining units that also represent professoriate surface in the 1970s (see for example, McHugh 1971). The issue here is whether librarians along with counsellors, instructional resource personnel, and other administrators are logically part of the same “community of interest” as those who are full-time

faculty (McHugh 1971). A study done in the mid 1970s in the United States, revealed that librarians were included in seven out of ten awards given to bargaining units; this was slightly less often than professors, but more often than part-time academic staff or other support staff (Bognanno and Suntrup 1975). Bain (1975) examines the impact of unionization on the City University of New York; in this instance librarians were included in the same bargaining unit as professors, administrators and technicians, with a separate bargaining unit being struck for lecturers. A more recent examination of whether librarians should be included in faculty bargaining units is presented by Applegate (1993); she argues that although this inclusion is portrayed as a gain for librarians in regards to various benefits, in fact, many faculty themselves lack the idealized benefits as do librarians who may have faculty status.

While sociological studies may highlight the role librarians have in assisting others in the research community or their contributions to teaching, this does not necessarily translate into a hospitable climate for demands for greater benefits, autonomy or prestige by academic librarians. Witz's (1990) discusses the exclusionary strategies that often come into play when a female-dominated group vies for greater status. A consideration of how this may be experienced by librarians in universities or other research settings is a point worthy of investigation, but one which is largely overlooked by sociologists even though several related research themes have been addressed. At this point, we turn to a consideration of the library literature to see the degree to which the issue of increased status is a concern for librarians themselves, the strategies they have pursued to this aim, and the consequences of various models of professionalization for this occupation.



## Chapter 2: The Library Literature

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### Strategies of Inclusion

- In Canada, goal of **ACADEMIC status** (Leckie & Brett 1995)
  - 80% of CAUT member organizations provide full membership in faculty organizations
  
- In U.S., goal of **FACULTY status** (Lowry 1993)
  - 74% of higher education institutions
    - 67% offer faculty status to librarians
    - 7% offer academic status to librarians

### The Library Literature

Witz (1990) asserts that professional projects entail a consideration of the interplay of "gendered strategies" and "patriarchal structures." The literature produced by librarians themselves reveals how these interlocking aspects have shaped their experience even though they may not name them as such. Within academe, the legitimation rests on the granting of faculty status and ultimately tenure to those engaged in research, teaching and service. This form of legitimation, however, is an expression of the patriarchal structure of academia: it assumes a single-minded focus on research, including the "long hours culture" identified by Rutherford (2001) and the ability to set aside concerns of family and personal life to focus on work. The gendered organization of academic life (Acker 1990) makes it difficult for women to enter the ranks of the professorate and serves as a mechanism of occupational closure.

Faculty status also rests on the privileging of certain kinds of practice over others--in reality, scientific research counts more than the instruction of students. The privileging of the production of theoretical knowledge, as much as the institution in which they work, differentiates academics from teachers. It signals the masculine origins of this occupation and contrasts with

the way teaching evolved as a feminized occupation that focused on the personal development of students. This prioritizing of knowledge production over work with people is also an expression of how a patriarchal structure informs academic life. It is similar to the way that medicine's theoretical knowledge of the human body undergirds its diagnostic authority, and is privileged over the practical care-giving offered by nurses (Dahle 2003). Larson (1977) argues that professional projects are often linked to strategic fights about what constitutes valuable knowledge and who has the expertise to apply it.

It is against this background that the strategies of academic librarians to define their identity and their position in the academic division of labor must be understood. Central to this has been a struggle by the occupation to attain either academic or faculty status, as well as a debate over what this means in practical terms for librarians, given that their practice has differed historically from that of academics. Within their experiences one can identify various components of Witz's framework of occupational closure, both in the debates in which librarians are engaged and the attitudes of other occupations towards them.

The meaning as well as the application of "faculty status" is not straightforward when it comes to academic librarians. In their opening paragraphs, Spang and Kane (1997, 446) lay the issue out clearly:

"Status as faculty, centered on a 'three-tiered structure requiring performance in teaching (professional practice), scholarship, and service,' was formally adopted by the ALA in 1971 as the definitive answer to the century-long debate over what constitutes the professional identity of academic librarians. But the ensuing twenty-five years, faculty status, with its emphasis on research, publication, and participatory management, has proved to be a less than uniformly applied model for librarians."

They go on to report that by 1992 it was apparent that the access to such status was "more likely to be influenced more by attitudes and perspectives of local ... administrators and faculty than by demands of librarians or any standards set by national library organizations." This last observation points to how, despite the move to consolidate and focus the goals of academic librarianship as a profession, the occupation nevertheless may remain vulnerable to exclusionary tactics by the professorate or administration.

In Canada, in 1977, the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) and the Canadian Association of College and University Libraries (CACUL) jointly agreed on guidelines governing the terms and conditions of employment for academic librarians working within the Canadian university environment. However, unlike the United States, the status afforded Canadian academic librarians was “academic status” (Leckie and Brett, 1995). Werrell and Sullivan (1987) clarify the difference between the two terms by quoting the definition of “faculty status” from The ALA Glossary of Library and Information Science: “an official recognition by an institution of higher education that librarians are part of the instructional and research staff by conferment of ranks and titles identical to those of faculty, and commensurate benefits, rights, and responsibilities.” They go on to say that “faculty status differs from ‘academic status,’ which implies neither identical titles and ranks nor all the rights and responsibilities of faculty” (95).

If that is the distinction and it follows geographic boundaries, librarians in Canada might be viewed as having been more successful in attaining “academic status” than librarians in the United States have been attaining “faculty status”. In 1993, CAUT reported that librarians in 45 of the 50 institutions covered by their librarian salary survey, were either members of or were eligible for membership in their location faculty organization and at 40 of these institutions, academic librarians were full members of their faculty organizations and were recognized as having academic status (Leckie and Brett, 1995). In comparison, it is estimated that 74% of higher education institutions in the United States grant either faculty status (67%) or academic status (7%) to their librarians (Lowry, 1993). However, for our purposes, we will ignore such distinctions since regardless of what it is called, status by any definition is a matter of professional identity.

## The Library Literature

### Internal Challenges for the Project

- Role ambiguity--serving patrons versus conducting research
- No acculturation to the research process
- Workload balancing & allocation of time
  - Professional activities (librarianship) versus research and service
- Professional life vs. personal/family life

### *Librarians' attitudes towards faculty status*

While some form of faculty or academic status exists for most librarians and in most universities in North America, the topic remains contentious among academic librarians. The desire for faculty status is not unanimous by any means; the number varies depending on the source but regardless only approximately two thirds of academic librarians would choose faculty status (Benedict, 1991; Dimmick as quote in Sprang and Kane, 1997)). This professional ambivalence is further demonstrated in the literature on the topic. In the introduction to her paper on alternative appointments for academic librarians, Diane Ruess (2004) reported on a quick comparison of the library literature that she had conducted which resulted in 234 hits for the subject “college and university librarians—status”, 6 hits for “public librarians—status”, 32 hits for “school librarians—status” and 2 hits for “special librarians—status”. As she commented, “assumptions from such a quick and dirty search are tenuous at best, but it is safe to say that academic librarians have a long-standing interest in this issue” (p.76).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Doing the same search for this paper using “college and university librarians—status” yielded 253 hits. However only 128 of these citations were from peer-reviewed journals including 8 editorial or opinion pieces. Thus only 120 of the citations were based on some actual study of the topic. The point here is to illustrate that most of the debate



One is hard pressed to find a librarian that disagrees with the concept of faculty status for librarians as this concept pertains to professional identity. Benedict (1991) found 88% of librarians surveyed in 1982 and 80% of those surveyed in 1989 agreed that faculty status was “fitting” for academic librarians. Hoggan (2003), in her review of the literature, observed that “the majority of published opinions support the idea that faculty status improves the stature and image of academic librarians.” (p.433). It is, however, the definition of faculty status as manifested in the criteria of teaching, research and service juxtaposed against the reality of what privileges they have actually gained that creates conflict for librarians.

#### *Differing benefits from faculty status*

Werrell and Sullivan (1987) reviewed the literature from 1974 to 1985. While, acknowledging that most academic librarians at the time had some form of faculty status, they note that there are “some glaring deficiencies in the privileges academic librarians enjoy” (p. 96) and this has caused “rumblings from within the ranks whether faculty status is the most appropriate vehicle for attaining these conditions.” (p.96). They note “other arguments against faculty status maintain that the problem lies not in working conditions, but in the fact that our profession lacks a sound identity of its own.”

Faculty status may be implemented in different ways at different institutions with in the same general category (e.g., member libraries of the Association of Research Libraries) (Lowry, 1993; Leckie and Brett, 1995), in different ways between institutional categories of libraries (e.g. two-year colleges, 4-year colleges, undergraduate universities, research universities) (Benedict, 1991; Hoggan, 2003), in different ways within the same library depending on the responsibilities of the librarians (Peele, 1984) and whether librarians are employed full or part-time (Brustman and Via, 1988). These variations directly relate to the support provided to academic librarians in terms of leaves, clerical support, etc. (Kenney and McMillan, 1989)

The conflict librarians feel with their requirement to participate in teaching, research, and service is not only with respect to how these requirements are accommodated by conditions of employment. There is some conflict within the profession about what constitutes teaching and

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around faculty status for librarians is opinionated and emotional, as one might expect when the topic is one of identity and self-determination.

whether the librarians' contributions in this regard actually fit the mould (Werrell and Sullivan, 1987; Peele 1984). There is some conflict around the whole issue of service as it pertains to governance and collegiality since libraries traditionally tend to be more hierarchical in organizational structure (Werrell and Sullivan, 1987; Holley, 1988; Leckie and Brett, 1995) and such service commitments may detract from the core work of librarianship (Gamble, 1989; Hoggan, 2003). However, the most conflict, if the literature is any indication, is with issue of scholarship and research (Mitchell and Swiezkowski, 1985; Montanelli and Stenstrom, 1986; Werrell and Sullivan, 1987; Boice, Scepaniski, and Wilson, 1987; Mitchell and Morton, 1992; Henry, Caudle, and Sullenger, 1994; Leckie and Brett, 1995; Mitchell and Reichel, 1999; Hoggan, 2003; Henry and Neville, 2004). Intertwined with this is a discussion of what work needs to be done to ensure fair evaluation of librarians (Wallace, 1986; Hill, 1994; Hill, 2005). In general, librarians are most satisfied with the traditional aspects of librarianship (e.g., relationship with users and colleagues) and less satisfied with the components of faculty status, namely promotion and tenure, publishing and political involvement (Horenstein, 1993; Leckie and Brett, 1997).

Supplementary to the debate around scholarship and research is the adjunct issues of whether librarians should pursue advanced degrees, either in the form of a second subject-specific masters or a doctorate in library science (Crowley, 1996; Jones, 1998; Mayer and Terrill, 2005). Librarians do not necessarily set out to become academic librarians. For many, the actual type of librarianship practiced is decided by the job market after graduation. The Masters degree sought by librarians is a professional degree and the program of study is most often course-based with content generally appropriate to work in any kind of library environment. As a result, there is minimal opportunity for academic librarians to study in-depth in research methodologies or to be socialized to the academic culture of research and publication during the completion of their Masters degree. These views are supported by Holley's (1988) description of the differences between librarians and teaching faculty, by Church's (2002) review of the literature on how librarians have been viewed over time, and by Bushing's (1995) survey of faculty status librarians. Bushing's study also suggests that individuals attracted to librarianship are more likely have passive rather than aggressive personalities, and thus may be more attracted to an occupation of service rather than to the competitive "publish or perish" world view that is typical

of academic research.

Layered over it all are the lifestyle issues that throw professional lives into conflict with personal ones (Hoggan, 2003), an important consideration especially given that librarianship continues to be a female-dominated profession. Academic librarianship splits out at approximately 67% females and 33% males (Lowry, 1993, p. 166). The conflicts imposed by expectations for research and service in addition to the regular work of running the library creates an inflation of work demands. This is a particular concern for women who may have families. Given the perpetuation of gendered social roles, women continue to do the lion's share of domestic work, so an increase in expectations related to their professional work is likely to also affect the personal lives of their families, especially their children.



## The Library Literature

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### External Challenges for Project

"Faculty status for librarians is likely to be influenced more by the attitudes and perspectives of local ... administrators and faculty than by demands of librarians or any standards set by national library organizations."

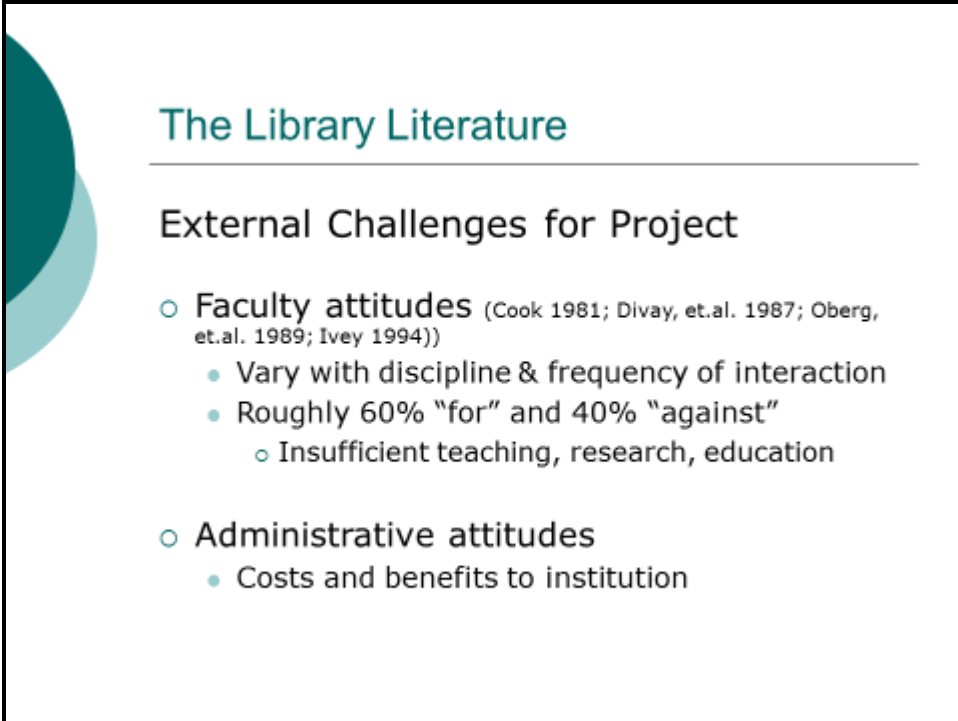
Association of Research Libraries (1992)  
(as quoted in Spang and Kane 1997)

### *Attitudes of Faculty and Administrators*

The issue of librarians' status is also contentious for other faculty and administrators. Studies done by Cook (1981), Divay, Ducas, and Michaud-Oustryck (1987), Oberg, Schleiter and Van Houten (1989) and Ivey (1994) combine to identify factors that influence faculty

perceptions of librarians (or, at least of the library!)<sup>3</sup>:

1. Frequency of use—the more frequently faculty visit the library, the more they appreciate the library;
2. Length of tenure—the longer faculty are on staff with a university, the better their perceptions of the library and librarians;
3. Discipline of the faculty—those faculty involved in the more humanistic side of academe, the better their relationship with the librarians while those involved in the sciences and more technical disciplines such as engineering and technology, have relatively negative perceptions of their libraries, hence, librarians; and
4. Focus of the faculty—those faculty more focused on teaching had more positive impressions of the library and librarians than the more research focused faculty.



**The Library Literature**

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**External Challenges for Project**

- **Faculty attitudes** (Cook 1981; Divay, et.al. 1987; Oberg, et.al. 1989; Ivey 1994)
  - Vary with discipline & frequency of interaction
  - Roughly 60% “for” and 40% “against”
    - Insufficient teaching, research, education
- **Administrative attitudes**
  - Costs and benefits to institution

<sup>3</sup> The articles by Cook (1981) and Ivey (1994) were not retrieved as part of the literature search conducted for this paper. Cook’s article pre-dates the coverage of Library Literature online and Ivey’s article was classified differently in the database. However, both articles were included *ad hoc* because of the topic they addressed and because they shared the methodology used by Divay, et.al and Oberg, et.al.. Cook’s article, in fact, was one of the very first to attempt to understand the challenge of faculty status from the faculty’s perspective.

Cook (1981) and Oberg, et.al. (1989) queried faculty on whether librarians should have faculty or academic status. The split was very roughly 60% “for” and 40% “against”, the main argument against librarians sharing their status being a perception of insufficient teaching and research while a secondary argument was an insufficient level of education. (The one thing that faculty could not find fault with was librarians’ service (i.e., professional responsibilities) which they saw as the top priority for librarians (Cook (1981); Divay, et.al. (1987); Ivey (1994)).) As noted above, neither is there unanimity among librarians when it comes to the notion of faculty status. In fact, librarians are deeply conflicted over the issue.

The views of administrators also factor prominently in the debate in terms of articulating the costs of faculty status for librarians in the face of other library costs (Kingma and McCombs, 1995), the challenges of managing librarians with faculty status (Simon, 1987; Hersberger, 1989; Koenig, Morrison, and Roberts, 1996), the contribution faculty-status librarians can make to the institution in terms of enhanced student achievement (Meyer, 1999; Hoggan, 2003), and the impact that faculty status may have on the market for academic librarians (Hoggan, 2003).



## The Library Literature

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### Countervailing Strategies

- Mentoring programs for new librarians
- Clarification of expectations
- Flexibility of appointment
  - research and non-research appointments
- Different models of appointment
  - clinical model; academic professional

### *Alternate Models for Professionalization*

The final category of library literature focuses on proposals to either facilitate the existing model of faculty status or to propose alternative models to reconcile the differences in perspective. Working with the existing model, Sapon-White, King and Christie (2004) suggest establishing a system of local peer-review scholarly work in order to support a culture of scholarship with local libraries. In a similar vein, recognizing that librarians are likely to have not been exposed to research methodologies and related activities, there are suggestions of creating models of internal-to-the-library support for academic librarians (Miller and Benefiel, 1998; Black and Leysen, 1994). Clarifying expectations with respect to the review process is also proposed (Lener, Pencek and Ariew, 2004; Leysen and Black, 1998). Others propose more radical alternatives. For example, Ruess (2004), concerned about recruitment and retention, proposes expanding the options for appointment to allow academic librarians to select a preferred appointment according to personal and professional goals while Bechtel (1985) advocates for an “academic professional” appointment. McGowan and Dow (1995) argue that a clinical faculty model, similar to faculty in medicine, might be more appropriate for librarians, a view endorsed by Hill and Hauptman (1986). Applegate (1993) proposes that librarians step back from the notion of faculty status and re-evaluate the initial objectives using models informed by organizational theory and feminist theory.

Within the literature there are also a number of authors who provide “reality checks” regarding the implications of pursuing the notion of faculty status. Observations made by Hoggan (2003) suggests some interesting connections regarding time demands and the constellation of work expectations that are connected to faculty status. Librarians, because of their professional activities and the scheduled nature of that work—such as doing shifts on the reference desk--feel conflicted over the competition for their time. Participation in governance uses up time as does scholarship but at the expense of what other activities? If librarians are to continue to be librarians, then service commitments and, more likely, scholarship has to be undertaken over and above the time allocated for their regularly scheduled duties as librarian and most likely at the expense of their personal lives.

If service and scholarship are to be done as part of the regularly scheduled activities, then it means that librarians are not necessarily going to be available to be active in all areas of

librarianship that they perhaps once were so how does the library maintain its services when the librarians are off fulfilling their service and scholarship activities? The expectation is that para-professionals or library technicians would be hired to assume those duties most easily delegated to this level of employee if not also those duties (e.g. reference) also done librarians. Recall that faculty perceptions of librarians are informed by their interactions when they visit the library and making the observation that for most people, any one who works in a library is a librarian, faculty are most likely to interact with non-librarian staff and walk away having formed an impression, good or bad depending on the interaction, about librarians. Are librarians with faculty status actually any further ahead on the challenge of acceptance? In fact, Major (1993) found that performing the role of librarian and exploiting campus governance activities contributed significantly more to collegial acceptance than a common interest in research.

Witz and others who have written about the professions (Freidson 1986, Abbott 1988) suggest that achieving professional goals requires a high degree of consensus among an occupation in order to organize politically to legitimate their status and authority. Lobbying of Canadian governments by midwives is a case in point (Benoit 1994; Bourgeault and Fynes, 1997). Librarians are not lobbying for self-regulation with governmental authorities, but they are engaged in articulating their professional goals to university administration. Among librarians however, it is clear that there is much debate on how these goals should be achieved or even what they are, even if most agree that the idea of faculty status is important. The conflict over the issue of research, as well as debates over how that and service are to be incorporated with the work of running the library may hold them back from consolidating their strategies to achieve greater benefits and prestige.

Appropriating the masculine model of faculty status by focussing primarily on research as a means of legitimation has a number of unintended consequences as we have seen. Chief among these is falling prey to the “long hours culture” that marks so many male occupational bastions, and which plays out as a strategy of exclusion that bars women from more prestigious roles. This may be as important as the attitudes or actions of individual faculty or administrators in terms of invoking exclusionary tactics. As we have seen, faculty attitudes vary towards librarians and administrators also have varied in terms of awarding faculty status to the librarians in individual institutions.

Those authors within this literature who raise the possibility that there may be other models to achieve prestige and legitimation are attempting to suggest alternate ways in which a professional project may be realized. They are engaging in a debate over what constitutes valued practice: only knowledge production or different forms of administration, teaching, and service? Examining academic librarians suggest that professional projects may include struggles over legitimate practice, rather than valuable knowledge as Larsson (1997) suggests.

### Missing Pages: A Comparison of the Two Literatures

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- The “project” of faculty status is overlooked by sociologists
- Disconnect in content of the work
  - Knowledge Custodians vs. Producers
- Little discussion of the impact of professionalization on the organization of work: professional and/or personal

#### **Comparing the literatures**

In our discussion of the sociological literature, we already have identified some research questions which may be worthy of further pursuit and will not repeat them here. However, a comparison of the literatures generated by sociologists and by librarians reveals some interesting mismatches between the two, particularly pertaining to librarians’ project of professionalization, highlights some additional avenues for research.

First and foremost, discussions of librarians’ struggle for faculty status is almost off the radar for sociologists, with only a few articles appearing on this in the 70's and only one more in 1993



by Applegate. In contrast, the librarian literature reveals an immense preoccupation with this topic, which we have outlined above. The lack of sociological discussion of this phenomenon represents a real gap in this literature, especially given the focus by sociologists on strategies of professionalization and occupational control in other occupations such as nursing and midwifery.

While librarians have not necessarily engaged in a process of lobbying government to achieve greater professional autonomy in the way that midwives have, nor have they been as successful in consolidating their organizational identity, they nevertheless present an occupational venue where one can trace the growth and emergence of a professional project, including the interplay of various strategies of inclusion and exclusion such as those laid out by Witz.

Second, sociologists make note of librarians' roles as providers of resources for others' research and professionals who may contribute to teaching, but they entirely overlook the issue of librarians as potential researchers in their own right (or as sources of research study). In contrast, the academic librarian literature discusses teaching and of assistance to others' research endeavours as taken for granted components of the occupation and place these under the rubric of faculty collaboration. While the literature on this is extensive, the discussion is focussed on how to do it, rather seeing it as something of note as sociologists seem to do. In contrast, librarians have engaged in an extensive debate about the possibility of including research in their occupational role. While librarians do not seek to become members of the professoriate, per se, within their own literature they do discuss the possibilities of becoming the producers of knowledge in addition to being custodians of it. The production of knowledge is seen as one way to legitimate a claim to greater rewards and prestige within the university system that has been structured by a historically masculine professoriate. Using Witz's conceptual framework this appears to be an inclusionary strategy, albeit one that seeks to legitimate access to rewards such as pay and tenure, rather than to an actual profession. It would be worthwhile for sociologists to examine the extent to which librarians have actually been successful in achieving these gains, as well as examining the countervailing exclusionary strategies are put in place by the professoriate. This would make a clear contribution to the literature on gender and professionalization.

Third, the preceding discussion of the librarian literature has drawn attention to how the incorporation of research into librarians' work practices has created a serious dilemma in regards

to time demands. This highlights a serious gap in the sociological discussions of librarianship. The route to achieving faculty status, and thus a greater professional prestige and benefits, seems to be largely conceptualized in terms of adopting a male-model of work. As Biggs points out, “[l]acking a clear-cut notion of what “librarian status” might be—indeed, fearing the phrase may be a contradiction in terms—librarians reach out for the read-made status of an obviously respected profession” (as quoted in Church 2002, 17). However, this creates nearly unrealizable expectations because other work functions are not reduced to accommodate this. Ultimately, extreme time demands arising from this re-organization of work keeps librarians from achieving greater status in the same way that female lawyers, bankers, or managers have difficulty competing with their male peers. It is an exclusionary strategy that operates independent of the attitudes of individual faculty and emerges from what Acker (1990) has identified as the gendered substructure of the organization. Because the majority of librarians are women, and many are likely to have greater family responsibilities than their male counterparts, the lack of sociological consideration of how work-family balance in relation to librarians represents a gap in the research that needs to be incorporated into a broader discussion of how professional projects are gendered. This topic, however, is also a relatively understudied issue by librarians themselves. This gap in the librarian literature may also be an expression of a gendered catch-22 for librarians. To discuss this issue is to draw attention to their femaleness, and to downplay their professional image; but to avoid discussing it, while making them appear more “like one of the boys”, also means they relinquish the chance as an occupation to come to terms with this problem or to fully engage in a discussion of alternate means to increase their prestige within the academic division of labour.



## Chapters to be Written

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- How do librarians compare to other feminized professions?
- How do librarians legitimate their value within academe?
- Is the traditional faculty model the right model for academic librarians?

### **Conclusion**

Our review of the sociological literature reveals several avenues of research related to librarians, a number of which echo research questions that have been asked of other female occupations but have not been pursued in any extensive way in regards to librarians. Just as importantly a review of the library literature related to faculty status sets out a range of concerns that could be helpfully framed by sociological analysis. Librarians' exploration of workable route to professional status and greater prestige is one which sociologists should explore in a more systematic way. Authors within the library literature who suggest that a more viable strategy for librarians would be to reclaim service and teaching as central to their role but develop a better articulation of the value of these aspects for the institution of academia are trying to chart a different model of access to rewards, prestige, and tenure. Werrell and Sullivan (1987) state that "librarians should be respected on the strength of our unique contributions to the academic world, and not according to criteria set for a profession that differs from our own." (p.97) This would constitute a radical challenge to the current academic regime of rewards and status, and with attendant risks as well as potential gains for librarians. Nevertheless, any experiments in this regard should be of interest to sociologists who wish to ask about how patriarchal structures are being challenged by female professionals.

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