Purpose of the study and research questions

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At this point, the conversation turns to the topic of the roles of librarians versus tenure-track faculty. As you will see in this chapter and throughout the rest of the work, I believe that the basis of the productivity of the tenure-track faculty and academic librarians are similar. However, the substance of the tenure-track faculty is on a different, more advanced level. Of course, this is not a universal absolute, but it certainly is the prevailing trend.

This assertion is not to denigrate librarians or their place in academe at all. I do not believe that the role and perception of the academic librarian should be relegated to "servitude," which it has in many cases throughout the academic community. Instead, it is an accurate affirmation that provides a more positive understanding of the librarian's roles in higher education. As such, this study aims to help define the role of the academic librarian and provide a more realistic and defined role and space for the academic librarians.

2.1   Purpose of the study

When speaking of "faculty," the general implication is of the tenure-track variety, that is, a professor who splits their time teaching classes and performing research for their next book or article, all the while attending conferences for their particular discipline. Even at that connotative and simplified level though, the actual role of faculty in the established tenure-track line is at times itself murky. For example, a 2007 COACHE study found that while the tenure expectations regarding scholarship and instruction remained clear, the role of faculty in community and service was vague. Still, the priorities of the role retained consistency: research, instruction, and service (COACHE, 2007).

Yet there are wrinkles in the actual roles of faculty themselves as "economic, political, and cultural forces have contributed to the ways in which the nature of faculty work has changed over time" (Robbins, 2013, p. 191). These pressures are pervasive, regardless of the institution, as revised role requirements created new positions and expectations of duty (Robbins, 2013). In addition, across the academy, assumptions about the activities and role of the faculty vary by level and classification, as there are other members of the university community who have faculty status but perform nontraditional and/or nontenured roles. Department chairs, for example, are full-time faculty but occupy a position that involves more administrative duties than average tenure-track faculty (Riley & Russell, 2013). Student affairs professionals are one example of personnel who often hold faculty titles but have different expected

competencies and may not even teach or research at all (Ahren, 2008; Dickerson et al., 2011). There are many complex hybrids of faculty across campuses that do not fit the traditional tenure-track notion and as a result, struggle to gain recognition as either defined or accepted faculty.

The segment of that underrecognized population examined in this discussion of course is the academic librarian. The historical image of a librarian sitting at a desk dispensing information is prevalent, but it has evolved into a position that includes instruction (both in person and virtual), service and society memberships, academic scholarship, collection development, and other substantial tasks. Also, similar to student affairs professionals and other factions of the faculty, academic librarians exist in a malleable spot at the university due to these mixed roles as scholar, educator, and administrator (Coker, van Duinkerken, & Bales, 2010). They are a balance between the academic faculty and other departments on campus, such as student services. Their work enhances the in-class learning provided by the faculty by extending that formal learning with supplemental literature and resources.

However, the literature regarding academic librarians does not look favorably upon the premise that academic librarians are, in fact, faculty. Higher education literature and the discussion on faculty habitually overlook the role of the academic librarian, since the role is considered an intrinsically different form and level of academic faculty (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2013). At the same time, literature by librarians concerning their role rarely considers higher education theory in an attempt to bolster their argument that they are, in fact, equivalents to their professorial counterparts (Hardesty, 1991). In short, higher education theorists and proponents of the tradition faculty role view librarians as nonfaculty, whereas academic librarians argue the opposite.

This discussion asserts through a case study analysis of academic librarians at St. Jerome University (St. Jerome)[1] that academic librarians do not, in fact, deserve faculty status. The activities of the academic librarians do involve traditional faculty mores of research, instruction, and service. However, these activities occur on a different plane of involvement than do those of the tenure-track faculty.

The consideration of academic librarians as true tenure-track-style faculty, at least among higher education theorists, is peripheral at best; academic librarians argue that their roles are consistent with faculty. As I mentioned, due to my academic and professional background, I bridge the gap between the higher education theorists and the libraries. I understand both sides of the argument. Part of the bias from the higher education perspective emerges from the mentality that the library and its workers are in the service role. Faculty depict the librarians as persons who will help students or faculty find materials and habitually little more. The academic librarian is often in a subordinate role, one that I do not agree with, for the record. Partnerships may be unequal, but they do not have to be inferior or superior in perceived or actual rank. Librarians, on the other hand, still struggle to overcome this subservient image and validate the collaborative roles that they might play within the academy. Due to

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[1] St. Jerome University (St. Jerome) is the pseudonym for the real university at which the case study occurred. Citations related to St. Jerome will not be listed with the references due to the potential for human subject identification.

realities in the identities of the librarians though, which will be discussed later, I suspect that this fight will continue for some time.

If academic librarians are not on the level of tenure-track faculty, then what is their classification? The aim of this study, therefore, is to determine what the actual role of female academic librarians by investigating their positions with higher education theory. By establishing through empirical evidence and qualitative research that their active roles significantly differ from the traditional model of tenure-track faculty, the research therefore seeks to determine the exact features of this position. Once the study concludes *what* they are, the discussion may turn to *who* they are. By solidifying the professional roles, the study then may consider the perceived identities of the librarians. How do they view themselves within the academic community? The higher education framework by which the question of identity of these individuals may be studied is called *blended professionalism*.

As institutions have evolved to meet the demands of their age, the exact specifications of the roles of the roles of various forms of academicians subsequently changed as well (Gordon & Whitchurch, 2007). The combination of these new, actual roles and perceived identity create what Whitchurch (2009) defines as the *blended professional*. Blended professionals are individuals who "are characterized by an ability to build common ground with a range of colleagues, internal and external to the university, and to develop new forms of professional space, knowledge, relationships and legitimacies associated with broadly based institutional projects such as student life, business development and community partnership" (Whitchurch, 2009, p. 417). Basically, blended professionals bridge gaps in both institutional and external silos in order to perform their professional and academic duties; the roles and the environment in which they are performed create professional identities.

Blended professionalism is influenced by and enhances prior identity models. Regarding individual self-identity, Giddens's (1992) model has a noteworthy impact. Giddens (1992, p. 5) regards identity as a "reflexively organized endeavor…which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives [and] takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems." External influences and spaces such as jobs and professional roles therefore impact individual identity (Whitchurch, 2009). Whitchurch also cites Rhoades's (2005) development of professional identities of management in academe. Rhoades (2005, p. 39) asserted that shifting roles for nonfaculty administrative managers influenced their faculty identity as *managed professionals* and affected shared governance. The modification of management ultimately was found to have impacted faculty socialization and roles (Deem, Hillyard, & Reed, 2007; Rhoades, 2007). Faculty identity has also been tied to the activities of research and instruction (Deem, 2006), yet like Giddens's (1992) general model is fluid and in constant flux because it is internally perceived (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). The key addition of Whitchurch's model is that though the prior models acknowledged shifts in roles, they did not overly develop considerations of the blurring of specific professional responsibilities and the resultant outcome on identity. As such, the relative activities of these blended individuals merge and develop a new professional identity not readily codified in previously existing identity theories.

Whitchurch considers and surveys several members of what she considers blended professionals, such as those individuals whose "areas of work variously described as learning or business partnership, student life, diversity, outreach, institutional research, program management and community development" (Whitchurch, 2009, p. 408). A major area of thought left out of Whitchurch's analysis, though, is the role of the academic librarian in the institution. It is clear from a study of Whitchurch's (2013) subsequent work that academic librarians do not even come under consideration with respect to the blended professional concept.

So what is the value of this higher education-based model called blended professional for the analysis of academic librarians? Consider the description of the blended professional again. Blended professionals "are characterized by an ability to build common ground with a range of colleagues, internal and external to the university, and to develop new forms of professional space, knowledge, relationships and legitimacies associated with broadly based institutional projects such as student life, business development and community partnership" (Whitchurch, 2009, p. 417). When I initially read this description, I immediately thought of my librarian colleagues because their work spanned across several spheres of influence within the academy. That portrayal above essentially applies to every facet of the academic librarian's role.

In fact, academic librarians perform a variety of functions in the academy that comprise aspects of research, instruction, and service, and require networking and influence in a variety of physical and virtual spaces (Crawford, 2012). Academic librarians, with their numerous and sometimes ambiguous roles, also may be considered blended professionals. The exact specifics depends upon the academic librarians' personal interpretation of their roles and the associated perceptional identity of their positions. By applying this frame to librarians, administrators and researchers might be better able to understand the professional role and identity of the academic librarians.

Therefore the first guiding question of this study is:

What is the blended professional identity of female faculty librarians?

I argue that the traditional mold of tenure-track faculty does not fit the roles of academic librarians. However, by utilizing Whitchurch's blended professional model, the study better establishes the specifics of the position in the context of their professional duties. Whitchurch's four-tiered frame considering space, knowledge, relationships, and legitimacies is an apt model for analysis, as librarians operate in a blended professional manner on a daily basis. The explicit use of female academic librarians also provides additional insight into the blended professional, specifically due to the additional concept known as *third space*.

Whitchurch (2009, p. 408) asserts that blended professionals are individuals "who not only cross internal and external institutional boundaries, but also contribute to the development of new forms of third space between professional and academic domains." Third space is a theoretical sphere built through an individual's ability to interact and intertwine with many different communities, thereby developing commonalities between diverse populations (Whitchurch, 2013, 2008). With this in mind, the second guiding question of the study becomes:

What is the third space that female academic librarians occupy?

In addition to the library, interactions for and by academic librarians occur in a variety of physical and virtual settings across institutions and with a diverse assortment of

the populace to include other library staff, faculty, and students. The role and identity of academic librarians is often an afterthought for higher education theorists. In contrast, literature from the standpoint of the library expounds on the positive additions that academic librarians provide at the academy. The specifics of the position beyond the relative boundaries of the library and its personnel are mitigated due to prevailing perceptions, creating a confusing and complicated professional and academic environment for the librarian.

Part of the difficulty arises from the theoretical conception of the environment. Third space encompasses both the actual role and space of the librarians as well as their perception of that situational setting. This may be a positive opinion if the individual feels supported. However, internal and external forces can create real or artificial boundaries for mobility, thereby potentially limiting growth and development. This environment, in turn, develops the professional identity. The supposition here is that due to their status as female faculty and their professional positions, the academic librarians operate on a difficult plane of third space due to preexisting biases. This space of operation has a significant chance of influencing the academic librarians' professional development.

This reality provides the third guiding question of this work:

How does the blended professional identity shape the female academic librarians' professional growth?

Numerous studies document the historical discrimination and gender inequality that almost always favors men (Blau, Gielen, & Zimmermann, 2012; Lorber, 2010; Vianello & Siemienska, 1990). The prior section of this work mentioned the biased gender trends in academic libraries, where despite the greater number of female librarians, women earn less compensation in directorships. This is perpetuated throughout higher education. For example, in the academic year 2005–06, only 31% of tenure-track positions were filled by women (West & Curtis, 2006), despite the fact that the majority of master's (62.3%) and doctorates (53.3%) in the United States were conferred to women (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Another example in higher education is leadership positions, as in 2006, only 23% of university president positions were filled by women (American Council on Education, 2007). The historical model of the tenure-track faculty is based upon an image of a profession that developed from a male-only role. Women gradually gained positions in the professesoriate, but there always have been consistent gender-based inequities concerning course loads, student and faculty expectations, and domestic responsibilities (Trower, 2012). Compound this with the prevailing perception that librarians on not on equal footing with tenure-track faculty counterparts (Coker et al., 2010).

The combination of all of these factors creates a presumably difficult third space in which female academic librarians might thrive. The purpose of this investigation is to determine how the confluence of these dynamics affects the academic librarians' ability to thrive as blended professionals in the collegiate environment. This is a significant conceptual addition, as Whitchurch (2009) primarily considered the fractured divisions in the workers' professional positions. The linking and codification of these academic librarians in a distinctive third space creates a unique prism through which members of the faculty might be examined.

2.2 Significance of the study

At the base level, this study extends multiple conversations regarding academic librarians and their place in the professoriate. Misunderstanding of the role has led to an underappreciation of the contributions of the librarians on campus, and this study in part attempts to clarify the involvement of these individuals within the collective whole. This study gains significance by analyzing this issue; the work recasts academic librarians as blended professionals, and as such, provides the opportunity to reevaluate their worth and significance to the goals of the university system.

Additionally, through the employment of this higher education-based frame and theory, the work provides a wholly new prism through which librarians might investigate their roles in the context of higher education theory. Librarians have complex and sometimes ambiguous roles and duties within the university, the understanding of which might facilitate a more complete understanding of the perception of the position. This study offers insight into the roles and development of female academic librarians and provides a model that might be replicated in other geographic and demographic settings to the benefit of staff and management alike. Simply put, this study ascertains a new, reimagined understanding of the professional identity of academic librarian. The blended professional identity approach enhances the appreciation of what librarians do at the academy and who they are (or more accurately, who they think they are).

On an individual perspective, this study and its replication offer professional individuals an opportunity for self-reflection and analysis, which may have a positive individual outcome (Cooper, 1999). The primary argument put forward here is that the role of the librarian remains so inherently different from a tenure-track route that classifying them as faculty becomes problematic and incorrect. However, librarians gain alternative analytical perspective on their roles and consequently may better understand and articulate their identity when evaluated through the higher education scope.

From a managerial perspective, the study potentially provides the opportunity to discover obstacles preventing staff members' successes in regard to performance and professional development. While this study focuses on one segment of the faculty in the form of academic librarians at one specific university, it is applicable in other units and departments. This is to include positions interior to the library, such as a cataloging librarian, and exterior departments in student affairs that also nominally qualify as faculty but share blended roles, such as career services. The process also may be replicated in other positional demographics, geographies, and manners of collegiate institutions. This study's significance derives from the contextualization and codification of the attendant contributing factors to librarian role and identity construction while employing higher education framework of blended professionalism.

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, the framework of the questions of the study was defined in hopes of explaining the purpose and impact that the work might have on the definition of academic librarian role and identity. The following chapter will discuss literature

regarding the evolution of the faculty role and the development of the position of the academic librarian in the context of historical narrative. In addition, through preliminary role comparisons, the chapter will establish that the academic librarians in this study do not share the same functionality as tenured-track faculty. A further historical discussion on the inequities regarding the experience of women in higher education will follow. The chapter will conclude with a critique of the literature and underscore the means by which the application of the theory of blended professionalism will address gaps in the arguments.

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