

During the conceptual phase of this project, several replicable methodological avenues were considered. The central construction of the research—the blended professional identity of female academic librarians—is perceived by the individual experiencing the role. Since these identities are individualized, it was believed that qualitative interviews would produce the most profound, direct feedback on the blended professional identities of the academic librarians and illuminate the working third spaces as well as the obstacles to professional development. Therefore, a qualitative case study was chosen.

Since this project is the study of a single case at an institution in the United States, some readers will question the study's universality. Given the complexity of higher education institutions (private, public, not-for-profit, for-profit, etc.) and the libraries therein, it would be difficult to provide an applicable study that would cover all institutions even within the United States, much less on the international level. For instance, if this book covered a review of librarians at the surveyed university's institutionally defined "peer" schools (that are all schools in the United States) in order to provide a larger sample, then there still would be an opportunity for a librarian from, say, Australia to mention that it is not a collective survey. Therefore, providing access to the method and the appropriate recommendations for the implementation of the study seems like the most suitable route.

As well, the hope is to offer a higher education-oriented model that would gain purchase with nonlibrarian faculty better than a simple comparison of duties. Most library-based analyses, including those mentioned in the previous chapter, create an argument from the standpoint of the libraries. In the higher education sector, this is less effective due to the relative role and placement of libraries and librarians in the hierarchy of the institution. While application of this study might not reveal a pleasant standing for the librarian's role and identity, it will provide the opportunity to address inhibitors to professional success in the respective institutions.

In practice, methodology sections tend to be somewhat sterile and drab. It is a necessity here though. The base goal of this book is to provide a replicable model that librarians and library administrators might reproduce in their own libraries and institutions. This could be done on the department level or the institution level. It is up to the reader to determine that greatest value. The following chapter will outline the methodology utilized in this study along with the procedures implemented.

## 4.1 Into the weeds

For these research questions, qualitative research presents a viable methodology. [Mauch and Park \(2003, p. 125\)](#) define "qualitative research as describing a situation as it exists,

without involving formal hypothesis, but focusing on explaining social processes in great detail.” The research concerning the identity of the librarians is subjective and based upon experiences of individual librarians within an academic community. A qualitatively collected sample would offer direct connection with the experiences of the academic librarians, as responses would be tied to experience and emotion.

This is of consequence, since “securing accurate information about feelings, sensitive behaviors, and other personal experiences is critical in many areas of research” (Mauch & Park, 2003, p. 18). The interviewee’s personal experiences will educe relevant information that may be applied to the theoretical and actual role and identity of the academic librarian. It is possible to write a generic report regarding the roles of academic librarians without formal interviews; however, the direct experiences—to include the successes, the challenges, the frustrations, the emotions, and so on—produce personal recollections and anecdotes that create a fuller understanding of the person and the environment of study.

By interviewing the librarians, the hope is to gain a better understanding of the effect that the role has on the blended professional identity and development of the academic librarian. In addition, one of the prime benefits for faculty members to participate in a study such as this is that it allows the practitioner to self-reflect on their roles, challenges, and opportunities that exist in the navigation of their instructional responsibilities. This type of analysis has been demonstrated to have positive pedagogical effects on the participating members because of its ability to positively identify obstacles (Dausien, Hanses, Inowlocki, & Riemann, 2008; Zha, Adams, & Mathews-Ailsworth, 2013).

#### **4.1.1 Method**

The context of this study is developed with a historical role in mind, but the results are based upon contemporary experiences. Therefore, a case study method of analysis becomes the best option. “The case study relies on many of the same techniques as a history, but it adds two sources of evidence not usually included in the historian’s repertoire: direct observation of the events being studied and interviews of the persons involved in the events” (Yin, 2009, p. 11). Historical works often analyze people, events, and environments where the seminal contributors to any theory are no longer available, rendering the evidence finite to a degree. This contrasts case studies examining contemporary situations where opinions are documented and witnessed by the researcher. As well, the case study “method is heuristic- a term for self-guided learning that employs analysis to help draw conclusions about a situation” (Ellet, 2007, p. 19). Unlike purely historical studies, where the availability of the studied individuals may not be accessible due to the distance of historical time, a case study offers the ability to study and interact with the individuals in a contemporary context.

Case studies become viable methods when the researcher has no influence on the individuals studied. “The case study is preferred in examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated” (Yin, 2009, p. 11). The experiences of the academic librarians are developed through their relative experiences. This is relevant in this instance, as I, as the researcher, had no control over the events that lead to their beliefs, as I had no influence on the librarians’ role requirements

involving research, instruction, and service. I also was not in the position of librarian supervision and had no ability to develop policy or procedure that might sway the librarians' behavior.

#### 4.1.2 Identification and recruitment of participants

Yin (2009, p. 93) affirms that "convenience, access, and geographic proximity can be the main criteria for selecting a pilot case or cases." In this particular case, the participants were identified due to my proximity to the sample organization, and geographically, it allowed for minimal travel for the qualitative process. As well, since I was not a librarian, I was not a member of any regional, national, or international professional library organizations. My professional affiliations were and are in the higher education sector, and there is not a great deal of organizational overlap with library associations. As a result, the vast majority of library contacts and associates for me were located at the sample institution, St. Jerome University (St. Jerome).

St. Jerome, the pseudonym of a real institution, is a mid-Atlantic state university with approximately 34,000 students spread across 200 degree programs located on three main campuses: St. Gabriel, St. Michael, and St. Raphael. St. Gabriel Campus is in an urban setting, St. Michael Campus is in the suburbs, and St. Raphael Campus is rural. About 6100 students live on campus, primarily at the St. Michael Campus. There are about 6400 faculty and staff working at St. Jerome. Of a total of about 130 full-time employees that include classified staff, between 40 and 45 jobs in the libraries at St. Jerome are academic librarian positions, though duties vary.

Just as with the faculty itself, librarians are stratified by their role and responsibilities. St. Jerome has several types of librarians on staff in departments such as technical services, cataloging, and circulation services. However, these librarians perform more administrative tasks and rarely engage in instruction of students and faculty. Also, there are classified staff that perform many of the same duties as librarians such as instruction, but do not have master's degrees in library science. As a result, the librarians surveyed in this sample were *liaison librarians* employed at St. Jerome.

As opposed to the traditional model of librarians that field either random or subject-specific inquiries at a physical desk in the library, liaison librarians are attached to a specific academic department or sector of the community, such as undergraduates in entry-level required English courses (Crawford, 2012). Crawford (2012, p. 3) defines liaison librarians as the "old subject librarian PLUS" who operates "beyond the traditional realms...to explore new possibilities." Therefore, the role of the liaison librarian fits the concept of blended professional in definition and function; as individuals who operate internally and externally through a variety of academic and professional realms, they work within the library and liaise with their academic department and its constituents in various communities around the campus. In addition, at St. Jerome, these librarians have renewable contracts and perform versions of the faculty role through instruction, research, and service.

At St. Jerome, the status of the librarians is based upon "professional competence, scholarship, service, and experience [as academic librarians]" (St. Jerome University Librarians' Handbook, 2012, p. 20). Four levels of librarian exist: I, II, III, and IV.

**Table 4.1 The libraries and their corresponding campus**

Library	Campus
Alexander VI Library	St. Michael Campus
Stephen VI Library	St. Michael Campus
Urban II Library	St. Gabriel Campus
Clement V Library	St. Raphael Campus

The length of appointment is determined by the rank; Librarian I is for 2 years, Librarian II is for 3 years, Librarian III is for 4 years, and Librarian IV is for 4 years. Similar to an academic department, there are a higher number of the lower-ranked positions available.

The librarians surveyed came from two sectors of the library: Research Services and Gateway Services. The main difference between these two departments is that the latter specifically markets to the undergraduate population, whereas the former interacts with all levels of patronage. Both departments report to the same Associate University Librarian. St. Jerome also has four distinct libraries spread across three different campuses. [Table 4.1](#) indicates the library name and the campus location.

Each of these libraries has the position of “head” or “director.” Gateway Services is located in the main undergraduate library at St. Jerome, Stephen VI Library, although the head of that department reports directly to the Associate University Librarian as opposed to the head of the Stephen VI Library.

This sample made a practical case study due to the demographics of the potential interviewees. Comparing the relative professional identities between male and female librarians in this case study makes little sense, as all but three of the librarians and the department heads were female. Therefore, the survey specifically examined the professional identity of the female librarians. In addition, the consideration of race did not appear a feasible topic of inquiry, as only one of the female librarians was of minority status.

At the time of research, there were 21 female academic librarians in these libraries; 17 of these librarians agreed to participate in this study. The librarians were recruited via an email, which was sent out July 7, 2014. A copy of this email is attached as Appendix B. Accordingly for the 17 librarians who responded to the mail, interview times and dates were arranged according to the librarians’ schedules. I interviewed each librarian alone. The 17 interviews took place between July 7, 2014 and August 12, 2014.

The questions were designed around the juxtaposition of role and identity. As well, they used the framework of the concept of the blended professional put forth by Whitchurch, as such a model provides a researcher “ways of identifying and understanding important aspects of a situation and what they mean in relation to the overall situation” ([Ellet, 2007](#), p. 19). The questions fielded by the librarians are found in Appendix C.

The interviews with librarians based on the St. Michael Campus, as well as one librarian working on the St. Raphael Campus, occurred in the Alexander VI Library conference rooms. The interviews with the librarians at the St. Gabriel Campus

occurred in the Urban II Library conference room. The interview with the librarians at the St. Raphael Campus occurred in that librarian's office. All interviews were recorded with an Olympus VN-702PC Digital Voice Recorder. The 17 interviews totaled 788 min.

Following the interviews, I transferred the digital recordings to a 4 GB thumb drive. I then transcribed the interviews and double-checked them for veracity between July 8, 2014 and August 19, 2014. Following the completion of the transcriptions, the interviews were printed out and stored in a legal document folder in a locked desk in my office.

The Institutional Review Board approved consent forms were signed by the librarians prior to the start of each interview. These consent forms were stored in a separate folder within the same legal document binder. In order to mask the identity of the individuals who participated, the interviewed librarians were given pseudonyms during the transcription process. The names that appear in the text of this book are not the real names of the interviewed academic librarians.

In order to enhance the validity of the results, the responses from the qualitative interviews were triangulated. "Triangulation may be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behavior. Triangular techniques in the social sciences attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 141). Similar to the construction of the questions, the triangulation techniques were designed with role and identity in mind.

To inspect blended professional roles concerning spaces and relationships, schedules were examined. These documents and observations gave me information on where the primary working spaces of the librarians were and with whom and how the total working time of librarians was being spent. I chose to examine the schedules of the interviewed librarians from Sunday, September 21, 2014 through Saturday, September 27, 2014. Depending on the discipline, librarians have varying responsibilities at different points in the semester. As a result, this week in September was chosen at random without catering to one discipline or another. In order to obtain the schedules, I contacted the respective librarians and mapped out their schedules on a standard calendar ledger. I then added the total time spent in various activities and tabulated the results.

Similarly, I studied librarian-developed Infoguides and Research Portals in order to establish activities regarding knowledges. The 17 interviewed librarians collectively created and continuously update 193 Infoguides and 21 Research Portals. While Infoguides and Research Portals are effectively the same thing—information on the resources available to library patrons—Infoguides are geared toward more generic undergraduate learning, whereas Research Portals are oriented toward graduate students with discipline- or program-specific problems and provide more in-depth tools for the viewing researcher. These documents are publically available via the internet on the St. Jerome University library website and required no contact with the librarians. The online materials detailed the librarians' subject knowledge expertise. Additionally, I arranged to observe instruction of eight librarians between July 9, 2014 and September 19, 2014. These classes took between 60 and 150 min in length.

For legitimacies, I examined physical artifacts such as business cards and office spaces to note presence of established credentials and experience. Items of interest included diplomas, award certificates, training certificates, mementos from academic conferences, and other miscellaneous objects that denoted professional experience and achievement. The inspection of the 17 librarians' offices and working spaces took place immediately following the interviews and generally lasted 15 minutes or less.

Field notes were compiled in a 5"×9" spiral bound notepad. Upon return to my office, the notes were transferred to a confidential master spreadsheet stored on the same USB thumb drive as the transcriptions. A chart outlining the methods of inquiry is found in Appendix A.

### 4.1.3 Data analysis

One of the difficulties in constructing a qualitative research project is that there is "no precise or agreed-on terms describe varieties and processes of qualitative analysis" (Patton, 2002, p. 452). Many recommendations in literature vary in steps and terminology. As well, the process is subjective. "Qualitative research is 'interpretive' research in which you make a personal assessment as to a description that fits the situation or themes...the interpretation that you make of a transcript differs from the interpretation that someone else makes" (Creswell, 2005, p. 232). My understanding of the collected data may differ from the next researcher who either reads this report or conducts their own field work using a similar model.

In general though, this study followed Creswell's (2005, p. 231) "bottom-up" approach:

1. Collect data
2. Prepare data (transcription, etc.)
3. Read through data
4. Code data
5. Code text for themes
6. Interpret data

The interviews, transcriptions, and verification of the accuracy of the transcriptions, steps 1 and 2, were completed by August 19, 2014. The actual qualitative data analysis was developed with inductive analysis. "Inductive analysis involves discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one's data. Findings emerge out of the data, through the analyst's interactions with the data" (Patton, 2002, p. 453). Specifically, this study employed inductive content analysis to code the data and develop categories and themes. The intent of this method was to cultivate core concepts that emanated through the existing data (Glaser, 1992).

So that I might accomplish this task, I read the entirety of the interviews upon completion of the transcription process (step 3). I then did not look at the transcripts for 7 days and occupied myself with exercise, hobbies, and vacation in order to garner a fresh look during subsequent readings. Following the week respite, I began step 4 and numbered the survey questions and then noted in each text where that particular question was asked, which was the beginning of the open coding scheme (step 4).

“Open coding is the commencement of...working the raw data, through constant comparison, initial conceptual identification, and categorization” (Price, 2010, p. 157). Open coding, while a rigorous and exhaustive process, allowed me to identify relevant patterns and themes related to the framework of blended professionalism. I then underlined key sentences and phrases under each numbered question in the transcript text, thereby segmenting information (Creswell, 2005).

This process follows Patton’s (2002, p. 454) recommendation suggesting that “a good place to begin inductive analysis is to inventory and define key phrases, terms, and practices that are special to the people in the setting studied.” Following the completion of the underlining and note-taking process, I copied all underlined and noted phrases into a file with their corresponding numbered survey question. This process was replicated for all 14 of the formal survey questions asked of the interviewees. The reason for utilizing this method was to create a means of comparing the results with the existing literature on blended professionalism and the academic librarians’ role in a more structured manner. By configuring the analysis in this way, I was better able to analyze and conceptualize simultaneously both individual segments and the totality of the emerging information within the data.

From there, the underlined sentences and phrases were distilled in order to create short, collective bullets. Finally, I bolded the significant words into “a manageable...coding scheme” within the bullets (Patton, 2002, p. 454). After developing the codes, I considered themes that emerged from this process. Themes were created (step 5) with the use of handwritten mind maps comprised of the codes (Creswell, 2005). A mind map is a model illustration used to visually consolidate and shape substantial information (Munim & Mahmud, 2011). Mind maps have been shown to enhance understanding of data by allowing a researcher to view problems on a multidimensional plane, which allows for more complete understanding of the information (Munim & Mahmud, 2011). The emergent themes from the mind maps became the core and structure of the interpretation of the findings (step 6) found in this chapter.

#### **4.1.4 The researcher’s role and limitations**

Ideally, a researcher will approach the process from a purely objective position in order to develop rational and valid results (Greenbank, 2003). Rarely, though, is this perfect model obtainable, and in some ways it was not achieved in this model. Biases and suppositions, resulting in potential limitations in this study, exist due to my familiarity with the survey sample. Reflection and disclosure of these established perspectives, though, support the development of the validity regarding the total study (Greenbank, 2003). As such, in this case study, my role is that of an insider given that I had worked at the same institution as the interviewed librarians; yet due to my nonlibrarian job, I was an outsider, as I shared a different social and professional standing.

As a result of my employment at St. Jerome, I had also experienced similar challenges and opportunities that academic librarians might face as blended professionals, albeit at a nonfaculty level of classification. I had worked with the majority of the librarians in an assortment of professional capacities. In addition, I had developed

assumptions about the roles and activities of the academic librarians through years of interaction in a variety of campus settings.

Consequently, it was difficult for me to divorce myself from some of the data, especially concerning productivity and academic professionalism. The administration celebrates the achievements of the academic librarians much more vociferously than the accomplishments of the classified staff. This is an annoyance and slight to the ego and difficult to overcome with an objective analytical perspective.

Upon reflection, though, it became apparent to me that the obstacles that limited the productivity and professional development of the librarians inherently were different due to the individuality of those who perceive them. My professional and personal roles varied significantly from the interviewees and projecting my own expectations on that community acted as a severe disservice and would mitigate the librarians' respective voices in the data.

In qualitative models, the researcher has the ability to become a member of the collective. Conversely, the researcher might find that the aim of objectivity creates a greater divide between the individual and the interviewed group (Punch, 1998). In my experience, I did improve communication with several interviewed librarians. In some cases the interview was the first formal in-person contact that I had with that particular librarian. Following the research, though, there was little impetus for the librarians to remain in contact with me, and these relationships and my capacity to engage in that particular academic realm became stagnant.

In truth, I did not have the realistic ability to become a member of the librarian community. It is true that I belonged to the same university, and in some cases, the same department as some of the interviewed librarians. However, within the academic hierarchy, I remained classified staff. No amount of personal or professional connections developed through research would ever have elevated me to the respective level and standing of the interviewed librarians. This research in some ways further defined the boundaries that prevent the mixing of the roles by codifying the role of the academic librarian at St. Jerome. Simply put, I was not a librarian and therefore could not join that exclusive community.

Further, my professional activities were usually as a separated function to the undertakings of the librarians. My instruction has been detached from that of the librarians; whereas librarians often teach library instruction, I focused on more discipline-oriented, lecture-based topics given in graduate student settings. At the time of research, I was not a member of any of the professional library service organizations, such as the American Library Association. I also had performed only one nonwork related collaborative research project with one of the liaison librarians. The rest of my projects were individual or conducted with nonlibrary staff. The professional roles of me and the academic librarians essentially diverged when considering research, instruction, and service.

Also, the premise of this study is to establish how academic librarians develop within the blended professional role. This may be done regardless of established professional relationships because the factors influencing the librarians' opinions were not controlled by me. No aspect of my professional or academic position then swayed any of the policies and procedures that governed the work environment of those



librarians. Furthermore, as classified staff, I habitually occupied a lower hierarchical and theoretical organizational position than the librarians. Due to position rank, I did not participate at all in the librarian administrating committees that had the potential to modify the roles of the librarians. In short, though I worked in the same organizational unit, the spaces and spheres of influence were inherently separate.

The study also considers one segment of the population of the nontenure-track faculty at one mid-Atlantic university in the United States. Professional role experiences and opinions on identity will differ by department even at the studied institution, so the results cannot be considered comprehensive for the entirety of nontenure-track faculty and academic librarianship. The hope though is that through the demonstration of the viability of this model, other researchers might explore the concept of blended professionalism in varying departments and demographics.

## 4.2 Conclusion

This chapter established the framework of the qualitative research methodology that I utilized in this case study. Blended professional identities are perceptual, and therefore, these identities are personalized. These identities will fluctuate by institution and even by department within larger organizations. The model frame, though, provides the means to assess these perceptions at your respective institutions.

It was believed that qualitative interviews would generate the most reflective, direct opinions on the blended professional identities of the female academic librarians and provide insight into the third spaces as well as the obstacles to professional development. Following the completion of the interviews, coding, and analysis, this qualitative process seemed successful as it produced animated responses and viewpoints in spite of the aforementioned limitations. The next chapter will begin to discuss the findings of this case study.

### 4.2.1 Questions for researchers to consider

Since this was a case study analysis, your sample invariably will be different than mine. Prior to undertaking your work, reflect upon how your group might influence the results. As well, I have attached the questions that I asked of the librarians in my study in the appendices. The structure of the questions that I provide is sound because they are designed to deliver understanding of librarian role and identity with the blended professional frame in mind. You are free to replicate them for your work.

However, you may choose to modify slightly or add some additional questions based upon what you would like to learn from the research. Still, keep the focus on blended professionalism. The following are some straightforward considerations that will help you mold the specifics of your blended professional questionnaire.

*How does your organization classify librarians?* Institutions vary on how they categorize librarians within the hierarchy of the university. Some librarians are categorized as faculty, and some are viewed as staff. The professional expectations accordingly

would correspond. In order to define the role of the academic librarian at your institution, catalog their responsibilities and develop conforming questions.

*What is the nature of your institution?* St. Jerome University is a large, public institution in the United States. Just as with the classification of the librarians, the type of institution might predicate professional expectations for the librarians in your study. Again, determine how the institution itself would have an effect on the academic librarians and create appropriate modifications to the questions.

*What is the size of the sample that you want to study?* The model is applicable for all sizes of study. However, the size will have an effect on the perception of components of the model, such as spaces and relationships.

*Do you have a homogenous or mixed demographic?* My research featured all females. Your study might have a more even mix of genders or even the inverse. Additionally, I did not examine race. This would be an option for the additional framing of questions when considering professional identity.

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