

Concluding thoughts

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As I mentioned at the beginning of this book, I do not foresee a future where I pursue a library science degree, so the likelihood of me transitioning back to work in a library again is slim. Additionally, a substantial amount of my research interests now extend outside the realm of academic libraries. Consequently, the implementation of this frame by me in a future study on libraries in all probability will not materialize. While one does not have to work within libraries for this type of analysis to be successful, it holds significant practical applications that would benefit a librarian, manager, or administrator who had the ability to enact more immediate responses to any respective findings.

I also feel that some of the message here will be diminished by the fact that I am not a librarian. It admittedly is easy to write off these findings as the interpretations of a nonlibrarian outsider. If a message created and sent by formal and credentialed academic librarians would be more apt to find receptive individuals, then I would hope that other librarians would conduct this study in order to better analyze and appreciate their organization and the perceptions of the personnel.

Therefore, the majority of the forthcoming work will be produced by you, the readers, and researchers with a more permanent stake in the future of academic libraries. While I can and will proselytize the qualities of academic libraries and their librarians to fellow administrators external to the libraries, further modification must be enacted from within, and the application of this version of the blended professional model is a feasible and worthwhile advancement. With all that of said, here are several avenues of potential future research.

9.1 Future research

The first logical step would be to analyze other academic librarians, both at St. Jerome and other universities, with the blended professional model in mind. If the postulated assertion is that academic librarians are blended professionals, then does this trend extend to librarians working at universities that provide tenure to their librarians? Concerns were raised in the previous chapter about librarians' research preparation in graduate school, the level of the terminal degree, and the amount and quality of research productivity. Since the librarians did not all attend the same institution for their library science master's degrees, and education standards put forth by the American Library Association regulate curriculum in the accredited schools, it is reasonable to assume that librarians in other institutions have similar experiences. It would, therefore, not be surprising if librarians at those colleges and universities, even those with tenure for librarians, experience comparable obstacles to professional success and

occupy the same tenuous third space as the librarians at St. Jerome. However, the degree to which the differing statuses affect the blended role of the academic librarian at those institutions must be explored before a definitive proclamation may be made.

Geography might play a role in the development of professional identity. Constructions of social roles in different areas might restrict the blended professional role, even within supposedly advanced communities such as higher education. For example, would a female librarian in the Southeast be afforded the same flexibility as a female librarian in Northeast? What about differences in country? Perceptions of all faculty vary dependent upon nationality. For instance, the role of teacher (and subsequent connotations of faculty) might be more respected or held in higher esteem in, say, Finland, than in the United States. This study obviously considered the United States, but the projected professional identity of academic librarians might be higher if they were to be included in the function of "teacher" in those other countries. The hope is that geography would not have a tremendous impact on the identity, but research is required to determine the presence of challenges in this regard.

A study examining the nature of the institution and its impact on librarian identity would also warrant consideration. Just as there are categorized levels within the context of an individual university such as St. Jerome, there certainly are tiers of institutional rank within the entire university system. Consider implementing this frame on librarians at a lower-tier school or college. If a librarian working at that lower-tier institution had a low perception of their professional identity, then did that college's reputation have an effect on that viewpoint? However, if the librarian worked at a prestigious school like Princeton University or Harvard University, then perhaps that librarian would be more willing to accept their professional identity because there would not be much room for advancement in the library field within higher education. The relative placing of their institution within the total context of higher education might have a distinct effect on an academic librarian's professional identity, and it would be worth investigating.

Since this study also focused on female academic librarians, additionally expanding the demography will provide extra knowledge on the blended role. Is the perception of male librarian counterpart similar to that of the females at St. Jerome? The obvious next step would be to question the male liaison librarians at St. Jerome and gauge their opinions on their roles and the perceptions of their positions within this particular university. The opportunities for promotion are as limited for the males as the females at the university, as there are only so many positions available, regardless of gender. Given the males in the upper-level administration positions though, the few men that work in the liaison positions might not have as harsh of an opinion of the administration. It is not possible to make a conclusion on this subject though without additional research on the influence of gender.

It would also be interesting for someone to study both genders and analyze the obstacles through a comparison in order to determine whether or not the inhibitors persist for the men in academic libraries. As well, if male librarians have experienced significant obstacles to professional development, then what did they do in order to overcome these challenges? Were they gender specific? Could they translate to all individuals?

Whitchurch did include the student affairs professionals in her consideration of the blended professionals, but it was more in the mixed role of the faculty member. For example, in Whitchurch's assessment, the faculty person working as the program's graduate student adviser would be a blended professional due to the mixed roles of the individual. The next step would be to extend the model to the other professional faculty, not in an instructional role whatsoever, such as the career counselors in a career services department.

There are many avenues to expand the conversation on academic blended professionals, both internal and external to the libraries. The hope is that this initial model provides a template to expand on for future research in these separate areas. This research will provide a better understanding of the roles and professional identities of valuable members of the academic community and help identify (and ease) some of the obstacles to their professional development.

9.2 Conclusion

Librarians at St. Jerome are not on the same level as the tenure-track faculty, either in actual function or perception of their role. The librarians have far different emphases with respect to the core activities of research, instruction, and service. However, the librarians functionally operate as blended professionals. Unfortunately, these blended aspects of the librarians' role places structural limitations on their influence; the perceptual and manifest constructed limitations further increase these issues by confining the blended professional effectiveness and functioning third space, which produces both artificial and actual obstacles to professional development.

Geography, the hierarchical system of higher education itself, and socially constructed departmental structures limit the spaces that the librarians might interact within. While librarians gain a significant amount of pragmatic research experience through their profession, library school and disciplinary studies do not always provide sufficient knowledge needed to gain acceptance into research-oriented circles around the institution. Relationships are restrictive in their scope and breadth. Due to their standing within the hierarchy on campus, the librarians find common ground with service-minded staff external to the libraries and within their own immediate social and professional groups, but often the librarians fail to consider how to collaborate more efficiently with faculty, students, and other staff. Degrees and accomplishments often determine legitimacies in higher education, but the librarians do not market themselves in a manner that emphasizes their academic professionalism or credentialing. The librarians have the ability to interact with a wide range of individuals and departments in the academic community, but these restrictions place boundaries around their essential third space and mitigate the blended efficacy.

Some obstacles to professional development result from the librarians' perception of their role. A lack of time and money do not appear to have significant actual weight. Sensitivity to the role that gender plays in the role and the structure of the organization and its functioning ability though create tangible impacts on the perception of the job and the resulting performance therein. While these concerns have no quick means of

resolution, awareness of their presence in the minds and actions of the librarians at St. Jerome provides the initial stride toward constructive change.

The academic librarians at St. Jerome have a unique role and ability to contribute to the overall success of the mission of the university. The application of the blended professional model to their role is meant to aid in the understanding of that role and how the librarians themselves interpret their place within the system. In gaining this understanding, the hope is that the findings presented here will illuminate the difficulties facing these libraries and provide context and communication so that they might increase their abilities and successes in their role as blended professionals. Through the provision of these findings and the frame utilized, the added objective is that this method might be applied elsewhere and a greater understanding of librarians within the entire context of higher education might be sought and found.