We're Not Libraries; We're People: Identity and Emotional Labor in Providing Face-to-Face Services in Libraries

Carolina Hernandez and Mary K. Oberlies

Introduction

Within libraries, individuals in public services are the face of the institution. Library employees working in public spaces are expected to be impartial providers of equitable access to information.[1] In our previous positions, we were co-supervisors of our department's reference desk student assistants. During this time, there were several incidents involving patrons trying to access information that made the students feel uncomfortable, running the gamut from pornography to white supremacist websites. In these situations, the students struggled with how to respond appropriately. Professional ethics outline that library staff create an environment in libraries that is neutral, free of censorship, and protective of intellectual freedom. We provided these guidelines to them, but found ourselves questioning whether this was the right approach. Our students were not wrong to feel uncomfortable in these situations, and we did not want to invalidate their experience, yet we were essentially asking them to set aside who they were

---

1   "Library Bill of Rights," American Library Association, June 30, 2006,
     http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill.

in order to provide service in situations that ran counter to their identities and convictions. Student staff are not alone in these experiences; rather library workers on all levels encounter this dissonance, including ourselves. This realization started us on a path of questioning the unequivocal nature of our profession's principles of service.

As a set of policies, the Library Bill of Rights (LBR) contains self-proclaimed "unambiguous statements" that issue guidelines for providing impartial service within libraries and supporting intellectual freedom.[2] In an effort to add clarity and further guidance, the members of ALA Council have adopted policies that are designated as interpretations of the statements in the LBR.[3] However, neither the LBR nor its interpretations discuss the people who do the work to support these principles. Instead, the language used in the LBR and its interpretations obscures the human element of libraries—their staff—positioning the libraries themselves as the ones offering service. By anthropomorphising libraries, turning them into entities with agency, the language of the LBR glosses over the work of individuals, which makes it easy to neglect the potential emotional labor that library workers engage in while attempting to meet professional service expectations and patron demands.

Individuals from marginalized racial and ethnic minority groups are often disproportionately negatively affected by emotional labor. This labor is a "stark contradiction between their racialized experiences in [white] institutions, on the one hand, and the dominant discourse that minimizes and delegitimizes their experiences on the other hand."[4] Because the LBR advocates for providing access to information and space regardless of beliefs, affiliations, or views, library workers may be put into situations where they must continue to assist patrons even when they feel threatened by the information being accessed. For example, this might occur when a Black librarian assists a patron looking for information on white supremacy and racial superiority. Such an act would put the librarian's personal identity and safety at odds with professional expectations.

In this chapter, we explore how professional service expectations outlined in the LBR can come into conflict with the personal identities of public services library workers, focusing on how gender and race affect the

---

2 "Library Bill of Rights," American Library Assocation.

3 "Interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights," American Library Association, July 30, 2007, http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations.

4 Louwanda Evans and Wendy Leo Moore, "Impossible Burdens: White Institutions, Emotional Labor, and Micro-Resistance," *Social Problems* 62, no. 3 (August 1, 2015): 441.

amount of emotional labor needed to meet these expectations. We conducted a national survey of library workers who provide public services in a variety of library settings and in different positions. Through quantitative analysis of the survey data, we examined the distribution of emotional labor across race, ethnicity, and gender identity. Survey comments then highlight specific experiences and feelings about providing public services. All together, the data demonstrate a disparity in the amount of emotional labor performed, with women of color (WOC) bearing the bulk of this burden.

Literature Review

Professional Ethics

Much of what has been written on the LBR is in relation to its support of intellectual freedom principles as part of our professional ethics.[5] This codification of supporting intellectual freedom is largely seen as positive and necessary in positioning the library profession against censorship. There has been some critique in the past of the LBR, although it has been primarily concerned with the legal and ethical underpinnings of the policy.[6] Recent criticism of the LBR has focused on the amendment to the Meeting Rooms interpretation, which supported providing space for white supremacist groups to hold meetings. The criticism centered on how, with the approval of this amendment, the ALA Council prioritized the rights of hate groups to use a space over the well-being of individuals from marginalized groups who would be deterred or harmed by this decision.[7] These discus-

---

5   Emily J. M. Knox, "Supporting Intellectual Freedom: Symbolic Capital and Practical Philosophy in Librarianship," *The Library Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (January 2014); Shannon M. Oltmann, "'For All the People': Public Library Directors Interpret Intellectual Freedom," *The Library Quarterly* 86, no. 3 (July 2016); Shannon Oltmann, "Creating Space at the Table: Intellectual Freedom Can Bolster Diverse Voices," *The Library Quarterly* 87, no. 4 (October 2017).

6   Gordon B. Baldwin, "The Library Bill of Rights-A Critique," *Library Trends* 45, no. 1 (1996); Martin Frické, Kay Mathiesen, and Don Fallis, "The Ethical Presuppositions behind the Library Bill of Rights," *The Library Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (October 2000); Tony Doyle, "A Critical Discussion of 'The Ethical Presuppositions behind the Library Bill of Rights,'" *The Library Quarterly* 72, no. 3 (July 2002).

7   April Hathcock, "My Bought Sense, or ALA Has Done It Again," At *The Intersection* (blog), July 11, 2018, https://aprilhathcock.wordpress.com/2018/07/11/my-bought-sense-or-ala-has-done-it-again/; Kaetrena Davis Kendrick, "Hateration, Holleration…," *The Ink on the Page* (blog), July 16, 2018, https://theinkonthepageblog.wordpress.com/2018/07/16/hateration-holleration/.

sions point to a need for closely examining how the language of the LBR and its interpretations can put librarians from marginalized and underrepresented communities at odds with professional expectations.

Originally adopted in 1939, the LBR acts as a guiding document of library values intended to protect the rights of patrons and fight against censorship.[8] Broadly, the policies within the LBR outline principles advocating for value-neutrality as part of our professional values. Policies 3–5 speak specifically to this idea:

III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.

IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.

V. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.[9]

These value-neutral ethics manifest when working directly with patrons, but can negatively affect the library worker by forcing their personal identity to vanish during the transaction.[10]

While the tenet of value-neutrality aligns with the mission of libraries to provide equitable, unbiased access to information, it does create problems as a professional ethic of librarianship. Robert Hauptman, Juznic et al, and Robert C. Dowd all explored the issue of librarian value-neutrality and the public good, responding to each other's findings from 1978 to 2001.[11] In each study, the authors visited reference librarians and asked for

---

8   "Library Bill of Rights," American Library Association.

9   "Library Bill of Rights," American Library Association.

10   D.J. Foskett, *The Creed of a Librarian: No Politics, No Religion, No Morals*, (London: Library Association, 1962), 10.

11   Robert Hauptman, "Current Issues: Professional Responsibilities Reconsidered," *RQ* 35, no. 3 (1996): 327–29; Primoz Juznic, et al, "Excuse Me, How Do I Commit Suicide? Access to Ethically Disputed Items of Information in Public Libraries," *Library Management*; *Bradford* 22, no. 1/2 (2001): 75–79. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/01435120110358961; Robert C. Dowd, "I Want to Find Out How to Freebase Cocaine or Yet Another Unobtrusive Test of Reference Performance," *The Reference Librarian* 11, no. 25–26 (1989): 483–93; Robert Hauptman, "Professionalism or Culpability? An Experiment in Ethics," *Wilson Library Bulletin* 50, no. 8 (April 1976): 626–27.

assistance locating information on necrophilia and suicide, the creation of bombs, and how to freebase cocaine. In each case, the librarians provided the information without pause. Hauptman reported at least one librarian stated, "the nature of the request is irrelevant; the librarian does not have the right to discriminate against a patron."[12] For Hauptman, this caused concern because our professional ethics could harm the public good. Dowd, and Juznic et al. found librarians only went so far as to provide assistance on these topics or had negative body reactions. They saw this as a failing to adhere to the professional ethics of non-judgemental assistance.[13] At the core of this discussion about personal ethics versus professional ethics is a concern about the risk of public trust and libraries. If librarians err on the side of personal ethics, it could hinder intellectual freedom and people's trust in libraries as a place they can go to get value-neutral assistance.[14] Ultimately, these studies fail to consider the perspective of library workers and the impact the professional expectations outlined in the LBR have on the individual librarian.

Focusing on the personal versus professional identity of public library workers handling access to pornography, Harkovitch et al. found librarians in their study agreed with intellectual freedom, but 31% of them experienced tension when dealing with the issue. Many librarians felt they could not let their personal disagreements with policies show for fear of losing their jobs. The study revealed that librarians do make a distinction between their personal and professional values. Though the exploratory nature of the study limited the authors from identifying solutions to help librarians, the findings do indicate that libraries need to pay attention to the dilemmas experienced by public service staff and work to acknowledge and address these issues.[15]

---

12   Hauptman, "Professionalism or Culpability?" 627.

13   Juznic, et al, "Excuse Me, How Do I Commit Suicide?"; Dowd, "I Want to Find Out How to Freebase Cocaine."

14   David Sherman, "Value-Neutrality, Professional Ethics, and the Dissemination of Information," *Information for Social Change* (blog), March 13, 2013, http://libr.org/isc/value-neutrality-professional-ethics-and-the-dissemination-of-information-by-david-sherman/; John C. Swan, "Ethics at the Reference Desk: Comfortable Theories and Tricky Practices," *The Reference Librarian* 1, no. 4 (1982).

15   Michael Harkovitch, Amanda Hirst, and Jenifer Loomis, "Intellectual Freedom in Belief and in Practice," *Public Libraries* 42, no. 6 (December 2003).

Institutional Racism

The traditional mission and values of librarianship are situated in what Diane Lynn Gusa calls, "White Institutional Presence" (WIP), meaning the system is built on inherently white values, practices, and cultures.[16] The historical exclusion of people of color (POC) from US institutions "constructed a white-centered logic that organized institutional norms and values" which is now linked to enlightened ideals of equality, neutrality and equity.[17] Joe R. Feagin describes this as a white racial frame, or the "racialized ideas, emotions, and inclinations" that become routine within institutions.[18] This white racial frame becomes embedded in organizations as a norm of the institution generating WIP. For libraries, WIP manifests through our policies and practices of neutrality, including the LBR. These ideals in practice often create color-blind racism.[19] George Lipsitz describes color-blind racism as an ideology that "does not do away with color, but rather reinforces whiteness as the unmarked norm against which difference is measured."[20] When our professional service expectations are founded in WIP, it fosters a system where POC can experience isolation, tokenism, hostility, invisible labor, and undervaluation, ultimately establishing a racist environment. This is particularly a problem because, as Freeda Brook, Dave Ellenwood, and Althea Eannace Lazarro point out, "endemic racism in the profession is a crucial barrier to recruitment, retention and job satisfaction."[21]

Without institutional change to address the white racial frame, even as POC join the organization, there is no change to the underlying norms as POC are expected to embrace the ideals of the institution. If POC push

---

16   Diane Lynn Gusa, "White Institutional Presence: The Impact of Whiteness on Campus Climate," *Harvard Educational Review* 80, no. 4 (December 2010).

17   Evans and Moore, "Impossible Burdens," 442.

18   Joe R. Feagin, *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 23.

19   Evans and Moore, "Impossible Burdens."

20   George Lipsitz, "The Sounds of Silence: How Race Neutrality Preserves White Supremacy," in *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness across the Disciplines*, ed. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Luke Charles Harris, Daniel Martinez HoSang, and George Lipsitz (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019), 24.

21   Freeda Brook, Dave Ellenwood, and Althea Eannace Lazzaro, "In Pursuit of Antiracist Social Justice: Denaturalizing Whiteness in the Academic Library," *Library Trends* 64, no. 2 (2015): 264.

against WIP, studies have found they are often labelled as overly emotional or angry, forcing these individuals to hide their feelings and engage in emotional labor.[22] Evans and Moore found many POC deal with WIP through cognitive and emotional distancing in the workplace to protect themselves from harm. They cite the example of two law students who sat through a class discussion where students engaged in racist tropes about African Americans. Recognizing any engagement in the discussion "would only result in their feeling more angry and hurt" as their classmates would dismiss their comments, both students elected not to engage in any class discussions going forward.[23] In librarianship, this lack of engagement is certainly harmful on an individual level, as it means librarians of color are not necessarily allowed to be their whole selves and are forced to engage in additional labor by repressing their feelings. It can also mean that these perspectives are left out at institutional and professional levels, further reinforcing WIP.

Emotional Labor & Intersectionality

The emotional labor involved in service professions has been studied for some time. For the purposes of our research, we use Arlie Hochschild's definition of emotional labor: "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display."[24] In librarianship, examination of this type of labor is more recent, but there has been growing acknowledgement of how it plays into our interactions with the public.[25] In particular, research on the relationship between various aspects of identity and the amount of emotional labor one is required to engage in has been gaining ground. Celia Emmelhainz, Erin Pappas, and Maura Seale examined the emotional labor for women involved in reference desk work through a feminist lens, finding that RUSA's "Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers" sets gendered expectations

---

22   Evans and Moore, "Impossible Burdens"; Adia Harvey Wingfield, "Are Some Emotions Marked 'Whites Only'? Racialized Feeling Rules in Professional Workplaces," *Social Problems* 57, no. 2 (2010).

23   Evans and Moore, "Impossible Burdens," 448.

24   Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 29.

25   Miriam L. Matteson and Shelly S. Miller, "A Study of Emotional Labor in Librarianship," *Library & Information Science Research* 35, no. 1 (January 2013); Miriam L. Matteson, Sharon Chittock, and David Mease, "In Their Own Words: Stories of Emotional Labor from the Library Workforce," *The Library Quarterly* 85, no. 1 (January 2015).

for emotional labor.[26] Rose L. Chou and Annie Pho also approached labor at the reference desk from a feminist perspective, using interviews with WOC in LIS to describe the additional labor they must engage in because of discrimination of their intersecting identities.[27]

This approach of looking at intersecting aspects of marginalized identity and privilege is not new. Kimberlé Crenshaw refers to this concept as intersectionality and uses this as a way to get beyond the "single-axis framework" that inevitably prioritizes privileged positions and erases marginalized ones.[28] The application of this intersectional framework has only taken hold in the last couple years in library literature, particularly after Fobazi Ettarh's call for a more "intersectional librarianship."[29] For example, Kawanna Bright's research notes that both race/ethnicity and gender components of identity "play a role in the experiences of RIS [reference and information service] for women librarians of color and should be considered in future studies of reference librarians."[30] Jennifer Brown and Sofia Leung have also taken this intersectional approach and examined how their own individual identities as WOC have impacted their experiences in LIS.[31] Our hope is to add to these discussions and demonstrate how the LBR plays a role in creating a culture that encourages the disregard of one's personal identity in order to meet professional service expectations.

---

26 Celia Emmelhainz, Erin Pappas, and Maura Seale, "Behavioral Expectations for the Mommy Librarian: The Successful Reference Transaction as Emotional Labor," in *Feminist Reference Desk: Concepts, Critiques, and Conversations*, ed. Maria T. Accardi (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2017).

27 Rose L Chou and Annie Pho, "Intersectionality at the Reference Desk: Lived Experiences of Women of Color Librarians," in *Feminist Reference Desk: Concepts, Critiques, and Conversations*, ed. Maria T. Accardi (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2017).

28 Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum 1989 (1989): 139.

29 Fobazi Ettarh, "Making a New Table: Intersectional Librarianship," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (blog), July 2, 2014, /2014/making-a-new-table-intersectional-librarianship-3/.

30 Kawanna Bright, "A Woman of Color's Work Is Never Done: Intersectionality in Reference and Information Work," in *Pushing the Margins: Women of Color and Intersectionality in LIS*, ed. Rose L. Chou and Annie Pho (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2018), 191.

31 Jennifer Brown and Sofia Leung, "Authenticity vs. Professionalism: Being True to Ourselves at Work," in *Pushing the Margins: Women of Color and Intersectionality in LIS*, ed. Rose L. Chou and Annie Pho (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2018).

Methodology

We conducted a national survey of public services library workers in December 2018 to determine the extent to which they perform emotional labor. We hypothesized that library workers from marginalized groups are more likely to feel compelled to perform emotional labor to meet professional service expectations as outlined in the LBR and that the profession as a whole overlooks the emotional labor that is often required of its employees.

In an effort to gain a more diverse distribution of data, we shared the survey with various listservs and groups, with a focus on those identifying as networks for library workers of color and LGBTQ+ library workers. In total, we collected 348 responses, 183 of which met our qualifications for analysis (respondent currently employed in public services position and completed survey in totality). In our first round of analysis, we looked at the data as a whole to see the experiences of public services library workers taken as a collective. We conducted three additional rounds of analysis, focusing on responses based on gender, race, and ethnicity to check for selective incivility. Selective incivility is considered a modern form of workplace discrimination affecting women and minority groups. Dana Kabat-Farr and Lilia M. Cortina describe it as a "veiled expression of bias that ostracizes women and people of color."[32] While workplace discrimination against specific groups is legally prohibited, "incivility sometimes represents *covert* manifestations of gender and racial bias in the workplace."[33] In some cases of selective incivility, the instigator can often point to non-gendered and non-racial explanations for their behavior, and in others, the incivility can be blatant, but still not appear overtly discriminatory. These behaviors could manifest as excluding specific individuals from discussions or activities, cutting them off in conversations, treating someone rudely or refusing to speak to them, or creating additional obstacles to complete tasks.[34] Taking this into consideration, in our second analysis, we only looked at responses from POC to see how their experiences varied from white library

---

32   Dana Kabat-Farr and Lilia A. Cortina, "Selective Incivility: Gender, Race, and the Discriminatory Workplace," in *Gender and the Dysfunctional Workplace*, ed. Suzy Fox and Terri R. Lituchy (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2012), 107.

33   Lilia M. Cortina, "Unseen Injustice: Incivility as Modern Discrimination in Organizations," *The Academy of Management Review* 33, no. 1 (2008): 57, https://doi.org/10.2307/20159376.

34   Cortina.

employees. We define POC as including racial minorities and Latinx individuals of any race. Finally, in the last two rounds of analysis, we took an intersectional approach and looked at responses from WOC compared to those from white women, as well as compared to responses from men of color (MOC).

Respondents were also asked to provide open-ended responses to five questions in the survey to provide additional information about their experiences. We examined the responses to these questions focusing on a) how tension between personal and professional identity impacted views of the profession; b) what policies/structures exist to support library workers experiencing these tensions; c) examples of patron interactions that create these tensions; and d) how respondents engaged in self-care as individuals and with library support.

Findings

The following tables provide the gender, race, and ethnicity breakdown of the 183 respondents with comparison data from the 2017 ALA Demographic Study.[35] Although the demographics of our respondents are in line with that of the profession as outlined in ALA's study, we acknowledge that the number of those from racial and ethnic minority groups is still low despite our efforts to reach marginalized groups.

Survey Respondents by Gender	
Woman	84.7%
Man	13.7%
Non-binary	0.55%
Transgender Man	1.1%

Gender 2017 ALA Demographic Study[1]	
Woman	81%
Man	19%

---

35   Kathy Rosa and Kelsey Henke, 2017 ALA Demographic Study (Chicago, IL: ALA Office of Research and Statistics, 2017).

Survey Respondents by Race		Race 2017 ALA Demographic Study[2]	
Asian	0.55%	Asian	3.6%
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.1%	American Indian/Alaska Native	1.2%
Black/African American	2.2%	Black/African American	4.4%
White	88%	White	86.7%
Multiracial	7.1%	Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.2%
Middle Eastern	0.55%	Other	4.0%

Survey Respondents by Ethnicity		Ethnicity 2017 ALA Demographic Study[3]	
Latinx/Hispanic	6.0%	Latinx/Hispanic	4.7%

The survey results demonstrate a broader trend in library employees having experienced tension between their personal identity and professional service expectations, with 58% of overall respondents saying they had felt this during a patron interaction at some point. In the survey, we specify that professional service expectations are those that are outlined within the LBR. While the word tension was not defined within the survey, it was meant to suggest a conflict or point of divergence between these expectations and their identities. An overwhelming majority of those who had felt this tension also felt the need to engage in emotional labor as part of providing face-to-face services to the public, and a little over one-third of respondents found it negatively impacted their view of the profession.

Professional Ethics and Identity

Our initial questions addressed the LBR, its role in professional identity, and the tension between professional expectations and personal identity. While a majority of the qualifying respondents considered the LBR to play a part in their professional identity, this was more true for white

library workers (66%) than those from communities of color (57%). WOC were about equally as likely as MOC to have the LBR play a role in their professional identity, but less likely than white women (67%), suggesting that race and ethnicity play a stronger role than gender in how the LBR is viewed. It is worth mentioning that not all respondents were familiar with the LBR, which could indicate not everyone is trained to recognize these tenets of librarianship. In fact, POC library workers were slightly less likely to be familiar with the LBR (21%) than their white counterparts (15%), further supporting the idea of a racial component to how the LBR is received.

When looking at whether they experienced any tension between their professional and personal identities, roughly 38% of all respondents said they had felt tension at some point. Those that reported having tension between their role as a library worker and their personal identity were asked a follow-up question about how this has impacted their view of the profession. This question documents the greatest divergence in responses, specifically between WOC and white women, with a majority of WOC reporting that the tension negatively impacted their view of the profession (71%), whereas far fewer white women felt the same (32%). Interestingly, 10% of white women said the tension they experienced positively impacted their view of the profession. A majority of WOC also reported a patron interaction creating tension (63%), while 56% of white women reported similar interactions.

This particular portion of the data echoes what we saw in the literature regarding how ideological frameworks can be set up as neutral, but in practice, create cultures that disproportionately negatively impact POC.[36] One respondent was even explicit in how they felt about the LBR and the idea of professional expectations, stating that "views of what it means to be 'professional' are outdated and based almost entirely on beliefs held by whites." While several white respondents were also critical of these professional expectations, none pointed to the institutional racism to which policies like the LBR contribute.

Institutional Racism and White Institutions

White individuals, as part of the dominant culture, do not experience the selective incivility POC do within librarianship. Thus, to them, the

---

36   Evans and Moore, "Impossible Burdens."

"profession appears neutral and objective, yet is in fact coded White."[37] That there is broader awareness of the LBR among white women in LIS as opposed to WOC supports this idea. Respondents pointed to this separation in the form of discrimination and classism.

> "There's a woman who has been visiting the library for over a year seeking information about finding housing. She's had a number of interactions with the local housing authority and she accuses them of discrimination. Some of my colleagues dismiss her as being 'crazy,' but I believe a lot of her story. I see my colleagues being discriminatory toward her, so it's easy for me to believe that others are doing the same."

> "Most of my tense interaction have been with older, male faculty who feel entitled to too much."

Professional ethics and behavioral expectations of organizations create "feeling rules" that provide employees with guidance on acceptable emotional exchanges within their jobs.[38] These feeling rules match the norms and structure of the organization and govern the emotional work and management of employees. Since institutional culture is structured around WIP, these feeling rules usually focus on amiability and congeniality, unless the authority of a position allows for more aggressive feelings.[39] In the case of libraries, foundational documents, like the LBR, guide libraries in the establishment of feeling rules for library workers and call for behaviors like friendliness and value-neutrality. Studies looking at race and gender in relation to feeling rules and emotional labor highlight that generally white men are the only group allowed to express anger, irritation, etc. White women are expected to have more "mothering" behaviors, and POC to suppress any emotions beyond the accepted emotions of amiability and openness.[40] The feeling of being forced to portray an inauthentic self for acceptance in libraries and concern about library neutrality opening the space to hate speech without consequence were shared by respondents.

---

37 Brook, Ellenwood, and Lazzaro, "In Pursuit of Antiracist Social Justice," 265.

38 Wingfield, "Are Some Emotions Marked 'Whites Only'?"

39 Wingfield.

40 Evans and Moore, "Impossible Burdens"; Wingfield, "Are Some Emotions Marked 'Whites Only'?"

"I have to cultivate a watered down, and apparently less intimidating, version of myself so that white colleagues do not feel uncomfortable."

"I am expected to uphold the institution to my own personal detriment. Speaking up for myself would leave me to be viewed as a non 'team player,' 'overly sensitive,' or 'insubordinate.'"

"The F word is taken more seriously than the N word at this point in time."

Wingfield notes that the tokenism African Americans experience in the workforce makes them particularly visible in organizations and requires them to engage in more emotional labor compared to others. In interviews with African American professionals and their experiences with feeling rules and emotional labor, Wingfield found that interviewees were okay with being amiable, but found it difficult to maintain this in the face of racial stereotypes and beliefs. One interviewee explained it as having to "humble yourself, kind of like modern-day sharecropping."[41] Within libraries, April M. Hathcock and Stephanie Sendaula discuss experiences of librarians of color (LOC) at the reference desk that mirror Wingfield's findings. LOC are often othered by patrons assuming they are not credentialed librarians but support staff, and, in face of these assumptions, must maintain professional expectations of approachability and niceness or face repercussions.[42] When asked about how tension between their personal identity and service expectations impacted their view of the profession negatively, some respondents highlighted the lack of diversity and inclusivity in the librarianship.

"[Librarianship is] a career-oriented towards certain groups of people and not others."

"We talk a great deal about diversifying and strengthening what we have on our shelves, but it feels we're more perfor-

---

41   Wingfield, 260.

42   April M. Hathcock and Stephanie Sendaula, "Mapping Whiteness at the Reference Desk," in *Topographies of Whiteness: Mapping Whiteness in Library and Information Science*, ed. Gina Schlesselman-Tarango (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2017).

mative than substantive when it comes to diversifying and welcoming staff."

Others explicitly pointed to microaggressions and racism they have experienced in the library and must overlook to maintain professional expectations.

> "For example, I said: 'I'd like to see the Emancipation Proclamation exhibit' and a user responded 'Haven't you heard? You're free." I was supposed to laugh. I finished the interaction by gritting my teeth and biting my tongue. Later, my supervisor told me to lighten up. I can't do that. I refused to work with this person during a future visit, but it put a burden on other staff members. I was told I was unprofessional. I was labeled an angry black woman when I asked a coworker (via email) to stop putting her hands in my hair. By the time this label started to lose some of this gleam, I managed to renew it by asking someone not to use the word mulatto."

> "Once a patron misidentified me as my colleague who helped solve their information problem previously. We are both the same gender and racial group and look nothing alike. When I graciously acknowledged that I had not in fact helped, I was interrupted and told that we look just alike."

While some expressions of irritation and frustration are allowed in specific cases, POC often do not get to engage in this behavior without facing potential repercussions. The white racial frame of institutions establishes rules about behaviors and emotions, but any expressions of frustration must be suppressed by POC, especially in relation to racial discrimination. "Tokenism operates such that black professionals are scrutinized not only for what they *do*, but how they *feel*. This establishes an emotional culture that is built on racial inequality."[43] This makes feeling rules harder for POC to follow. It limits the emotions they can express in their professional lives and forces them to perform more emotional labor.

---

43   Wingfield, "Are Some Emotions Marked 'Whites Only'?," 265.

Emotional Labor, Self-Care, and Support Structures

When analyzing the responses about emotional labor and tension by race and ethnicity, we found that, as a whole, POC library workers reported slightly higher levels of emotional labor (81%) than their non-Latinx, white counterparts (79%). Recognizing that women experience emotional labor more often than male colleagues, particularly WOC, we also wanted to examine their experiences separately. Crenshaw points out that WOC experience three types of discrimination: their experience as a POC, additional discrimination as a woman, and that which is unique to their specific status (e.g. Black women).[44] Thus, we parsed out the responses to our survey from WOC. Almost all WOC respondents (83%) felt compelled to perform emotional labor in situations where their personal identities and professional expectations were in tension with one another. This is in contrast to 75% of MOC and 79% of white women. This is in line with previous research in the field that shows that WOC providing public services in libraries are disproportionately affected by emotional labor.[45] This was echoed in some of the comments that we received from WOC, in which they mentioned having to suppress their emotions for the sake of the job:

> "Feeling the need to be passive when certain comments are made that are subtle, however, may be offensive in their undertones."

> "The most instruction I have been given at work is to maintain composure and try to support the patron's needs as neutrally as possible but seek help if it becomes to uncomfortable and challenging."

These situations often involve dealing with macro- and microaggressions, which leads to emotional labor in an attempt to maintain professional service expectations. This can cause adverse physiological reactions including weakened immune systems, mental health concerns, and high blood pressure, which can also undermine job performance and satisfaction.[46]

---

44   Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex."

45   Bright, "A Woman of Color's Work Is Never Done"; Chou and Pho, "Intersectionality at the Reference Desk"; Gusa, "White Institutional Presence."

46   Chou and Pho, "Intersectionality at the Reference Desk"; Kabat-Farr and Cortina, "Selective Incivility."

With the amount of emotional labor engaged in and the negative effects it brings, self-care and support structures are essential for library workers performing emotional labor. However, our survey results show that there are very few formal support structures in place to help with the burdens of emotional labor. Instead, the onus is on the individual to fend for themself. As with other problems stemming from the white values of the LIS profession, this has a disproportionate negative effect on WOC. We asked participants whether they engaged in self-care after incidents and what policies and support structures existed within their libraries to help employees cope with situations that create tension. The overwhelming response we received was "No" for both areas. For support after incidents, many pointed to relying on informal help instead:

> "There are no formal policies or structures, but employees with similar experiences do tend to find each other, and we meet to discuss the issues we notice. It helps relieve the pressure for sure."

While it is heartening that some are able to find support amongst each other, the lack of formal assistance likely means there those who are left without the tools to help them handle these situations and the aftermath.

Conclusion

As a core set of policies in librarianship, the LBR plays an important part in outlining our profession's service expectations and defining how we approach our work. However, because the LBR is enmeshed in White Institutional Presence, it is ultimately creating a set of expectations that is detrimental to people of color in our profession. If, as a profession, we are to create a space that is actually welcoming and safe, we need to examine the professional expectations that we have accepted as norms at all levels. This includes re-evaluating our professional ethics and how they are framed.

The LBR is not alone in creating this problem. Other policies and guidelines that make up our profession's system of professional values and expectations, such as the ALA Code of Ethics and the RUSA Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers, also contribute to WIP in librarianship. Though we only focused on the LBR, we believe it is worth re-evaluating the language in all of these documents. They need to better reflect the work that goes into providing services for the public, as well as make room for marginalized individuals to feel comfortable and supported in pulling themselves out of situations

that go against their personal identity. Altogether, this is a bare minimum effort that allows for the acknowledgement of the emotional labor that can go into service work, which has been shown to disproportionately affect WOC.

Our hope is that creating space for acknowledgement of emotional labor can then lead to practical discussions of what can be done to minimize it and identify what support can be provided in more formal capacities by our institutions. As our research shows, there is a dearth of resources and support available for library employees forced to engage in emotional labor in situations where their work is put at odds with their identity. If we are serious about diversifying our profession and retaining those individuals from marginalized communities, institutions need to start formalizing support structures for these situations and creating an environment where individuals can feel safe bringing their whole self into their work.

Bibliography

American Library Association. "Interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights."
July 30, 2007. http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/
interpretations.

———. "Library Bill of Rights." June 30, 2006. http://www.ala.org/advocacy/
intfreedom/librarybill.

———. "Library Bill of Rights and Freedom to Read Statement Pamphlet." November 16, 2016. http://www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/oif/LBOR-FTR-statement-pamphlet.

Baldwin, Gordon B. "The Library Bill of Rights-A Critique." *Library Trends* 45, no. 1 (1996): 7–27.

Bright, Kawanna. "A Woman of Color's Work Is Never Done: Intersectionality in Reference and Information Work." In *Pushing the Margins: Women of Color and Intersectionality in LIS*, edited by Rose L. Chou and Annie Pho, 163–96. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2018.

Brook, Freeda, Dave Ellenwood, and Althea Eannace Lazzaro. "In Pursuit of Antiracist Social Justice: Denaturalizing Whiteness in the Academic Library." *Library Trends* 64, no. 2 (2015): 246–84. https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2015.0048.

Brown, Jennifer, and Sofia Leung. "Authenticity vs. Professionalism: Being True to Ourselves at Work." In *Pushing the Margins: Women of Color and Intersectionality in LIS*, edited by Rose L. Chou and Annie Pho, 329–47. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2018.

Chou, Rose L, and Annie Pho. "Intersectionality at the Reference Desk: Lived Experiences of Women of Color Librarians." In *Feminist Reference Desk: Concepts, Critiques, and Conversations*, edited by Maria T. Accardi, 225–52. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2017.

Cortina, Lilia M. "Unseen Injustice: Incivility as Modern Discrimination in Organizations." *The Academy of Management Review* 33, no. 1 (2008): 57. https://doi.org/10.2307/20159376.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989 (1989): 139–68.

Dowd, Robert C. "I Want to Find Out How to Freebase Cocaine or Yet Another Unobtrusive Test of Reference Performance." *The Reference Librarian* 11, no. 25–26 (1989): 483–93.

Doyle, Tony. "A Critical Discussion of 'The Ethical Presuppositions behind the Library Bill of Rights.'" *The Library Quarterly* 72, no. 3 (July 2002): 275–93. https://doi.org/10.1086/lq.72.3.40039760.

Emmelhainz, Celia, Erin Pappas, and Maura Seale. "Behavioral Expectations for the Mommy Librarian: The Successful Reference Transaction as Emotional Labor." In *Feminist Reference Desk: Concepts, Critiques, and Conversations*, edited by Maria T. Accardi, 27–45. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2017.

Ettarh, Fobazi. "Making a New Table: Intersectional Librarianship." *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (blog), July 2, 2014. http://www.inthelibrarywiththe-leadpipe.org/2014/making-a-new-table-intersectional-librarianship-3/.

Evans, Louwanda, and Wendy Leo Moore. "Impossible Burdens: White Institutions, Emotional Labor, and Micro-Resistance." *Social Problems* 62, no. 3 (August 1, 2015): 439–54. https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spv009.

Feagin, Joe R. *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Foskett, D.J. *The Creed of a Librarian: No Politics, No Religion, No Morals*. London: Library Association, 1962.

Frické, Martin, Kay Mathiesen, and Don Fallis. "The Ethical Presuppositions behind the Library Bill of Rights." *The Library Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (October 2000): 468–91. https://doi.org/10.1086/603218.

Gusa, Diane Lynn. "White Institutional Presence: The Impact of Whiteness on Campus Climate." *Harvard Educational Review* 80, no. 4 (December 2010): 464–90. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.80.4.p5j483825u110002.

Hathcock, April M., and Stephanie Sendaula. "Mapping Whiteness at the Reference Desk." In *Topographies of Whiteness: Mapping Whiteness in Library and Information Science*, edited by Gina Schlesselman-Tarango, 251–60. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2017.

Hathcock, April. "My Bought Sense, or ALA Has Done It Again." *At The Intersection* (blog), July 11, 2018. https://aprilhathcock.wordpress.com/2018/07/11/my-bought-sense-or-ala-has-done-it-again/.

Harkovitch, Michael, Amanda Hirst, and Jenifer Loomis. "Intellectual Freedom in Belief and in Practice." *Public Libraries* 42, no. 6 (December 2003): 367–74.

Hauptman, Robert. "Professionalism or Culpability? An Experiment in Ethics." *Wilson Library Bulletin* 50, no. 8 (April 1976): 626–27.

———. "Current Issues: Professional Responsibilities Reconsidered." *RQ* 35, no. 3 (1996): 327–29.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

Juznic, Primoz, Jose Urbanija, Edvard Grabrijan, Stasoa Miklavc, Damijana Oslaj, and Sonja Svoljsak. "Excuse Me, How Do I Commit Suicide? Access to Ethically Disputed Items of Information in Public Libraries." *Library Management; Bradford* 22, no. 1/2 (2001): 75–79. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/01435120110358961.

Kabat-Farr, Dana, and Lilia A. Cortina. "Selective Incivility: Gender, Race, and the Discriminatory Workplace." In *Gender and the Dysfunctional Workplace*, edited by Suzy Fox and Terri R. Lituchy, 107–19. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2012.

Kendrick, Kaetrena Davis. "Hateration, Holleration…" *The Ink on the Page* (blog), July 16, 2018. https://theinkonthepageblog.wordpress.com/2018/07/16/hateration-holleration/.

Knox, Emily J. M. "Supporting Intellectual Freedom: Symbolic Capital and Practical Philosophy in Librarianship." *The Library Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (January 2014): 8–21. https://doi.org/10.1086/674033.

Lipsitz, George. "The Sounds of Silence: How Race Neutrality Preserves White Supremacy." In *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness across the Disciplines,* edited by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Luke Charles Harris, Daniel Martinez HoSang, and George Lipsitz, 23–51. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019.

Matteson, Miriam L., Sharon Chittock, and David Mease. "In Their Own Words: Stories of Emotional Labor from the Library Workforce." *The Library Quarterly* 85, no. 1 (January 2015): 85–105. https://doi.org/10.1086/679027.

Matteson, Miriam L., and Shelly S. Miller. "A Study of Emotional Labor in Librarianship." *Library & Information Science Research* 35, no. 1 (January 2013): 54–62. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2012.07.005.

Oltmann, Shannon. "Creating Space at the Table: Intellectual Freedom Can Bolster Diverse Voices." *The Library Quarterly* 87, no. 4 (October 2017): 410–18. https://doi.org/10.1086/693494.

———. "'For All the People': Public Library Directors Interpret Intellectual Freedom." *The Library Quarterly* 86, no. 3 (July 2016): 290–312. https://doi.org/10.1086/686675.

Rosa, Kathy, and Kelsey Henke. 2017 ALA Demographic Study. Chicago, IL: ALA Office of Research and Statistics, 2017.

Sherman, David. "Value-Neutrality, Professional Ethics, and the Dissemination of Information." *Information for Social Change* (blog), March 13, 2013. http://libr.org/isc/value-neutrality-professional-ethics-and-the-dissemination-of-information-by-david-sherman/.

Swan, John C. "Ethics at the Reference Desk: Comfortable Theories and Tricky Practices." *The Reference Librarian* 1, no. 4 (1982): 99–116.

Wingfield, Adia Harvey. "Are Some Emotions Marked 'Whites Only'? Racialized Feeling Rules in Professional Workplaces." *Social Problems* 57, no. 2 (2010): 251–68.

Appendix: Survey Questions

Qualifier

Do you currently work in a library providing face-to-face public services?

· Yes
· No

Library Role

In your current position providing public services in a library, what is the classification of that position? [Check all that apply]

• Librarian
• Staff
• Administration
• Manager
• Student

In your current position providing public services in a library, what type of library do you work at? [Check all that apply]

• Public
• Academic
• School
• Special
• Archives

What has been your primary public service interaction location?

• Reference/Research Desk
• Circulation/Check-out Desk
• Technology/Computer Help
• Other, please describe: _____

Professional Identity

In two or three sentences, how would you describe your professional identity in your current position?

Does the Library Bill of Rights play a part in your professional identity?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know
- I'm not familiar with the Library Bill of Rights

Have you experienced any tension between your role as a librarian and your personal identity outside of that role?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

    If yes, has it impacted how you view the profession?

    - Yes, positively
    - Yes, negatively
    - No
    - I don't know

    [If 'yes'] If comfortable, please share how it impacted your view of the profession.

What policies or structures, if any, have been established at your institution to support library employees in situations where your personal identity competes with providing professional service expectations as outlined in the Library Bill of Rights?

Emotional Labor

Have you ever had a patron interaction that created tensions between your personal identity and professional service expectations?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

> *[If 'yes'] If willing, please describe an example of this type of interaction.*

> *[If 'yes'] In this interaction, did you feel compelled to perform emotional labor by ignoring your personal identity to fulfill your professional expectations?*

  - Yes
  - No
  - I don't know

> *[If 'yes'] Because of this interaction, did you seek out resources (services, assistance, etc.) to engage in self-care?*

> *[If 'yes] Does your library have any support systems in place to help employees cope with situations like this?*

Student Worker

As a student (undergraduate, graduate, etc.), were you ever employed to work in public services at a library?

- Yes
- No
- Current position is as student employee

As a student employee, were you aware of the Library Bill of Rights and the professional service expectations associated with it?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

As a student employee, did you ever have a patron interaction that created tensions between your personal identity and professional service expectations?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

[If 'yes'] In this interaction, did you feel compelled to perform emotional labor by ignoring your personal identity to fulfill your professional expectations?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

What policies or structures, if any, were in place at the time to provide support for student employees in situations like this?

Demographic/Personal Identity

Please identify your gender:

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary/Non-conforming
- Prefer to self-describe: _____
- Prefer not to answer

Please identify your ethnicity:

- Latinx/Hispanic
- Non-Latinx/Hispanic
- Prefer not to answer

Please identify your race (select all that apply):

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black/African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Multiracial
- Prefer to self-describe: _____
- Prefer not to answer