

ASK A LIBRARIAN: THE PROFESSION, PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES, AND
CONSTITUTIVE RHETORIC OF LIBRARIANS

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Communication
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011

Urbana, Illinois

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ABSTRACT

Institutions can be powerful influences on our personal and work lives and can constrain and enable our behaviors. It is through communication that institutions are created and sustained. Professions, institutionalized occupations, are one example of institutions that play an important role in organizations. Terms like *profession* and *professional* evoke certain expectations about types of work and workers. Organizational communication scholars, however, often treat professionals as non-distinct from other organizational members or uncritically employ the terms *profession* and *professional*. This study explored the meanings of profession and professional identity for librarians. Specifically, this research analyzed librarians' rhetoric about their work. Interviews with public and academic librarians were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using modified grounded theory approaches combined with rhetorical analysis. Librarians' rhetoric revealed insecurity about the stereotypes and misconceptions held by the public. Librarians actively defended their professional status by delineating certain activities as truly *librarian* and aligning their activities and professional identities with the profession of librarianship's values and standards. By aligning their activities and professional identity with the broader practices, values, and standards of the field, professionals add meaning to their work, defend their professional status, make sense of their roles, and (re)constitute the profession. This work suggests that professional identity can be usefully seen as tied to activities as much as to social membership. The research also guides our understanding of communication's role in creating and sustaining institutions and providing coherence and meaning to work.

For my great-grandma and my brother

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank the Department of Communication and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for many wonderful years of challenging and inspiring opportunities. I also want to thank the kind librarians willing to spend time with me.

I have been fortunate to have several talented and generous faculty mentors here. Scott Poole challenged me to think harder and helped me see myself as a real scholar. Trina Wright's enthusiasm has always been contagious and much appreciated. Grace Giorgio reminded me to take care of myself as a person. I learned to be a better writer, thinker, and scholar from Cara Finnegan. Her ambition, her generous advice, and her kindness have been so influential in my development.

I am exceedingly grateful for the mentorship and friendship of John Lammers, my adviser. His guidance and encouragement are invaluable. He pushed me to think in ways I hadn't before. He challenged me to be ambitious, allowed me to be afraid, and taught me to trust myself. Countless times he inspired and supported me. I am thankful to have had the opportunity to work with him and look forward to many more years of collaboration.

I have met several amazing people while in graduate school. They are more than my colleagues; they are my friends. Vincent Pham, Troy Cooper, Jillian Klean Zwillling, and Anne Stone have been supportive and thoughtful colleagues and friends. Our writing group was extremely important to my success. Our friendship has been important for my spirit. Troy has been an especially important friend and confidant during these final months and I appreciate all of his calm energy. I would be remiss if I did not also thank Greg Goodale, Ryan Blum, Michelle Hals, and Dan Larson for being my mentors so early on and helping me find my way through the program.

I am also thankful that Jenny reminded me to have fun and stop thinking. Mark taught me to chill and consider the easier path. Beth's encouragement and our long friendship were always a great comfort. Kevin's support and love held me up when I didn't think I could go on. I cannot begin to describe the incredible support Jason has provided. He read countless drafts, listened to countless hours of rambling, and washed countless dishes. Most importantly, he brought humor, joy, and faith into my life.

Lastly, I am forever indebted to my family. My grandma taught me to laugh it off, get a little goofy, and believe. My Uncle Johnny reminded me to find balance and stay in touch. My dad's unconditional love and encouragement helped me get here. He taught me to have goals and work hard. My mom has been an endless source of love, kindness, enthusiasm, humor, and faith. She has made me a better woman. My sister's faith in me has kept me strong. My nephew and nieces have brought me the greatest joy. My family and friends have sustained me and for that I am so unbelievably thankful.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“I guess when I look at the other people that I work with, I see them as professional. It’s a profession; it’s something that I intend to do for a long time. It’s not just a job, so I guess I just see the difference between a profession and a job. Whereas there are some people that work here that have this as a job (pause) you know it’s just a transition for them to something else, but I think for everybody that works in my department this is a profession.” Jillian

“I kinda think people don’t understand, really, what librarians are. I mean, they would tend to explain the sort of bookworm, still, slightly geeky, I think. More often, people say ‘Oh, I don’t know. What does a librarian do?’” Beth

“As a librarian, my mission is to allow patrons access to information. That is what I am there to do. Any information they want, any means that I have necessary.” Lewis

For individuals holding advanced degrees or training in a discipline, the *job* becomes something more, something other. It becomes a *profession*. The labels *profession* and *professional* “make claims about the work being done” (Cheney, Lair, Ritz, & Kendall, 2010, p. 131) and about who is doing the work. These terms evoke assumptions about specific types of work and workers and “[put] into play a set of unacknowledged cultural assumptions” (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007, p. 147). Organizational communication scholars, however, often ignore profession by either treating professionals as non-distinct from other organizational members or by uncritically employing the terms *profession* and *professional*. As Lammers and Garcia (2009)

noted, the “meaning of profession in an organizational context raises as yet unanswered empirical questions about how it is manifested, experienced, negotiated, or managed” (p. 358). In this study, I explore the meaning of profession and how profession is constructed in professionals’ communication. In particular, I consider what the rhetoric of librarians tells us about their professional identity and their relationship to their profession.

Professionals are a unique group of organizational members, bringing potentially competing loyalties and expectations to an organization (Ashcraft, 2007; Kuhn, 2006; Real & Putnam, 2005). As professions gain legitimacy over time, individual professionals are held to higher standards. These standards, enforced formally and informally by the profession and the lay public, influence an individual’s communication, work identity, and work life. Professionals, as Scott (2008) argued, are also the primary agents of institutions. Professionals help create, define, and change institutions. Institutions are constellations of established and enduring practices, beliefs, roles, and meanings, which shape and are shaped by individual actions, interpretations, and understandings, and transcend particular organizations and situations (Lammers & Barbour, 2006; Meyerson, 1994). As individuals communicate and act, they “seek guidance” from other people and “by reference to standards of obligation” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p. 10). Institutions are often those standards of obligation. Heaton and Taylor (2002) argued that institutional constraints frame our understandings of work. Institutions operate as an extra-organizational force influencing organizations and individuals. Though it is possible to see institutions as disabling agency, I argue in this study that individuals help construct and define the very institutions that come to constrain or enable their actions and communication. Specifically, I argue that professionals’ communication creates, sustains, and endorses the profession.

I define professionals as individuals with advanced training and education operating within a particular profession. Though I use this definition, I do not exclude individuals without advanced training who may also claim to be a member of or identify with a profession. Such individuals are likely to have much in common with their colleagues due to their perceived attachment to the profession. I define professions as institutionalized occupations, with formalized practices, beliefs, and values that transcend the organization and influence and are influenced by communication. Professions, in other words, are one manifestation of institutions today. As Wilensky (1964) noted, most occupational groups desire the legitimacy, autonomy, and social prestige that come with professional status and, though professionalization is a difficult process, many occupations struggle to earn that status. Wilensky argued that professionalization includes establishing a set of norms, expectations, rules, and values for all individuals operating within the field to follow.

Communication research allows us to examine the creation, maintenance, and influence of professions as one form of institution. It is through communication that institutions are (re)produced over time and space and influence organizations and individuals. Examination of individuals' communication is necessary in order to explore the meaning of profession and professional identity for professionals. My research considers the ways that individuals construct what it means to be a professional through their rhetoric. In particular, I borrow from White's (1985) conception of constitutive rhetoric which argues that culture and community are created and sustained through rhetoric. White argued that when a person speaks as a lawyer, for example, he establishes a relationship to his audience and a "character—an ethical identity" for himself (p. 34). I extend this to suggest that when any professional speaks as a professional (e.g., a doctor speaks as a doctor or a librarian speaks as a librarian), she enacts her profession, reveals choices

about her professional identity, and establishes a relationship between herself and her audience. She chooses to endorse or dismiss certain values, rules, or meanings. Her communication is a reflection of the ways profession is experienced and negotiated.

A communication approach to institutions, in this case a profession, allows us to explore our understandings of work and organizing. Specifically, this research highlights how professionals add meaning and coherence to their work and differentiate between types of work and workers. I explore professionals' rhetoric in interviews to consider how professionals experience and negotiate their professional identity and profession. As a result of this research, I propose that professional identity is more usefully seen as tied to activity, rather than primarily membership in a social category, and that professionals' rhetoric about their professional identity and profession (re)constitutes the profession.

Background and Preview of This Study

In this study, I interviewed and observed 32 librarians at public and academic libraries in the Midwest. Using qualitative methods and White's (1985) conception of constitutive rhetoric, I explored the ways librarians define their profession and their own professional identities. I chose librarians as a professional group for a variety of reasons, but primarily because librarianship is a profession trying to define itself for the public and its members and librarians are often an unrecognized group of professionals. I will begin this section with a brief discussion of librarians' identity challenges in order to reveal the value in studying librarians as professionals. A more in-depth discussion will follow in Chapter 3. I will conclude this section with a preview of the major sections of this dissertation.

The library is an important place in many communities. Individuals gather there seeking entertainment, information, and conversation. The library is an institution important for

sustaining an informed and engaged citizenry. Librarians have often been the voice for free speech, democracy, access for all to information, and the right to privacy. During difficult economic times, library use increases as individuals seek assistance for applying for jobs, writing resumes, filing taxes, or providing inexpensive entertainment to their families. For example, an article in *The New York Times* entitled “Times are tough, libraries are thriving” reported that one public library saw an increase of 59% between 2008 and 2009 (Berger, 2009). People turn to the library to save money on books, movies, and Internet use. Unfortunately, the term *thriving* in the article has more to do with visits than budgets. Library budgets are regularly cut, forcing libraries to serve more people with less money and fewer staff.

Budget cuts and increased patronage are not the only struggles found in libraries. Librarianship is a profession struggling to be recognized as a profession. Librarians, especially, feel misunderstood and under-appreciated as professionals. Librarians attempt to counter popular stereotypes of the quiet, shushing librarian while also trying to prove their relevance as professionals. The professional status of librarianship, as we will see in Chapter 3, has been called into question for decades. One librarian refers to the problem as a “professional identity crisis” (Davis, 2008, p. 73). This phrase is particularly useful as it refers to the profession’s crisis in establishing a respectable identity and also the challenges faced by individuals’ professional identity.

In recent years, librarians have had more face time in the media. For example, in 2007, an article in *The New York Times* referred to librarians as a “hipper crowd of shushers”, praising the younger generation of librarians for being tech-savvy and cool. In 2010, a lively debate broke out after Fox Chicago News questioned the City of Chicago’s library budget and the very existence of the public libraries. The Chicago Public Library Commissioner, Mary Dempsey (2010),

replied with a letter to the editor. She claimed that the Chicago Public Library gets over 12 million visitors per year and continues to operate on a tight budget. A few days later, National Public Radio (NPR) called libraries “the next big pop-culture wave after cupcakes” (Holmes, 2010). The NPR article pointed to libraries’ fight for free information and librarians’ extensive knowledge. The author even acknowledged the bad rap librarians usually get, but speculated that new respect for knowledgeable people might help the image of libraries. YouTube videos of librarians also brought attention to libraries and librarians. In 2010, Old Spice began an ad campaign featuring an attractive, bare-chested model named, Isaiah Mustafa (“Hello Ladies,” 2010). The popularity of the ad model led to Old Spice creating personalized YouTube videos with the model answering questions. The model provided a video encouraging people to visit libraries. Also, the students and faculty from the University of Washington’s Information School (2010) filmed a video called “Librarians do Gaga.” Despite the pop-culture wave of appearances of libraries and librarians in the media, librarians are still not well understood or respected. Furthermore, libraries are not safe from budget cuts or even outsourcing. In September 2010, for example, *The New York Times* reported a private company’s takeover of several libraries (Streitfeld, 2010). The article reported that library employees and patrons were angered by the takeovers. Libraries continue to struggle to prove their worth and relevance, while librarians still struggle to be seen as respectable, expert professionals.

A study of librarians is an opportunity to observe the active negotiation of professional identity, both in the constructing and defining of the profession and individual librarian’s struggle to define their own professional identity. Librarians have a stake in how people view the profession and their communication about the profession is important to how the public views and treats librarians. Talking with librarians provides an exciting opportunity to explore how

professionals create the profession through their communication and how they articulate and manage their professional identity. Librarians today face a variety of external discourses that challenge their professional status and force them to consider what it means to be a professional. Davis (2008) claimed that librarians are “seeking reassurance and justification for why and how librarians do what they do” (p. 58). Librarians’ communication reveals this process and provides insights into the ways people experience and manage profession and professional identity.

The next chapter reviews the relevant literature on institutions and professions, as well as the communication literature on both, and establishes constitutive rhetoric as a useful framework for analysis in this study. Chapter 3 covers a brief history of libraries, and the professionalization of librarianship, defines public and academic libraries, as well as the tasks and roles of librarians within them, and closes with a discussion about the perception struggles facing the profession. Chapter 4 summarizes the methods used in this study. The chapter opens with an argument for viewing interviews as rhetorical situations. The chapter details the data collection procedures as well as the analysis methods with special attention to my use of qualitative data analysis software. Chapter 5 presents the findings of this study, with particular emphasis on professional identity and constitutive rhetoric. Chapter 6 concludes this dissertation with a summary of the major findings, theoretical and practical implications, limitations of the study, and opportunities for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

While institutional approaches dominate the academic landscape of most organization studies (Greenwood, Sahlin, & Suddaby, 2008, p. 2) communication scholars have only recently entered the conversation. I would argue, though, that communication scholars have crucial expertise for understanding the creation, maintenance, and influence of institutions. I argue that communication is the primary means through which institutions are (re)produced over time and space, and in turn influence organizations and individuals. Specifically, I argue that professions are institutionalized occupations, with formalized practices, beliefs, and values that transcend the organization and influence and are influenced by communication. Professions come to exist and persist through the formal and informal communication of professionals.

In this chapter, I provide a definition of institutions, summarize institutional theory concepts, and review relevant literature on communication and institutions. Given that a profession is the focus of my study, I define professions by highlighting the features commonly used to characterize profession. I then discuss communication research on professions, focusing specifically on organizational identification and possible barriers to identification, especially professional identity. Finally, I argue for a communicative perspective on institutions and offer constitutive rhetoric as a framework for analyzing professions, professional identity, and communication.

Institutions

Defining Institution

Lammers and Barbour (2006) noted that while the term *institution* has been used to mean a variety of things, it usually indicates “that certain persons, organizations, beliefs, ways of thinking, behavior, or rules have an enduring and fixed nature” (p. 358). They defined

institutions as “constellations of established practices guided by enduring, formalized, rational beliefs that transcend particular organizations and situations” (Lammers & Barbour, 2006, p. 357). Other scholars have provided different but complementary definitions. Scott (2001) argued that “institutions are composed of cultural-cognitive, normative, and regulative elements that together with associated activities and resources provide stability and meaning to social life” (p. 48). Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin, & Suddaby (2008) used the term to mean “more-or-less taken-for-granted repetitive social behaviour that is underpinned by normative systems and cognitive understandings that give meaning to social exchange and thus enable self-reproducing social order” (p. 5). Meyerson (1994) defined institutions as “cognitive and symbolic systems that produce and legitimize patterns of culture, including symbols, beliefs, roles, and meanings within organizations, which in turn shape and are shaped by individual actions, interpretations, and understandings” (p. 630). These definitions share several elements, including the taken-for-granted, symbolic, and enduring nature of institutions. Institutions, in the form of rules, myths, norms, and practices, guide and constrain individuals and organizations, influencing decisions, behaviors, and communication. Borrowing from the aforementioned definitions, I summarize institutions as constellations of established and enduring practices, beliefs, roles, and meanings, which shape and are shaped by individual actions, interpretations and understandings, and transcend particular organizations and situations.

The sociological approach to institutions holds that “individuals face choices all the time, but in doing so they seek guidance from the experiences of others in comparable situations and by reference to standards of obligation” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p. 10). Individuals do not always consciously select norms. Instead, these norms or expectations are taken for granted. DiMaggio and Powell provide useful examples: “One cannot decide to get a divorce in a new

manner, or play chess by different rules, or opt out of paying taxes” (p. 10). Institutions not only “constrain options,” they also “establish the very criteria by which people discover their preferences” (p. 11). At the same time, institutions are also the product of “human actions” (p. 28). Lammers and Barbour (2006) argued, in fact, that “it is day-to-day practices enacted, endorsed, routinized, and recorded that sustain institutions” (p. 364). Institutions are influenced by and influence individuals and organizations.

Institutional Theory

Scholars using institutional theory attempt to understand the structures and activities of organizations, recognizing that all organizations are situated in particular organizational fields and sociopolitical contexts. Primarily, institutional theory explores the dynamics between organizations and the larger environments in which they exist. Some institutional research has also considered the ways institutions influence and are influenced by human action (e.g., Green, Babb, Alpaslan, 2008; Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004; Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004). Communication scholars have much to offer institutional research.

Early studies of institutions, now referred to as “old institutionalism,” focused on issues of group conflict, politics, the role of local communities, and informal structures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). In 1977, Meyer and Rowan published *Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony* and new institutionalism was born. New institutionalism focuses on the organizational field or the larger society as opposed to local communities. Scholars’ examination of the formal structures of the environment, external to the organization, is seen as “creating the lenses through which actors view the world and the very categories of structure, action, and thought” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p. 13). Structures and rules become institutionalized and remain stable over time and across organizations. The new theory “stresses

the unreflective, routine, taken-for-granted nature of most human behavior” (p. 14).

Meyer and Rowan (1977) defined institutionalization as the process by which “social processes, obligations, or actualities come to take on a rule-like status in social thought and action” (p. 342). In an attempt to understand how the wider societal context influenced organizations, Meyer and Rowan argued that “organizations are driven to incorporate the practices and procedures defined by prevailing rationalized concepts of organizational work and institutionalized in society” (p. 340). When new organizations use established and tested procedures, norms, and rules that other successful organizations use, they gain legitimacy and status (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Meyer and Rowan (1977) suggested that the formal structural elements of organizations are actually manifestations of institutional rules that “function as myths” (p. 344). These myths prescribe the rational ways to achieve particular purposes. Because the rules exist external to any particular organization, they are considered institutionalized. Meyer and Rowan noted that myths might be something like the belief that occupations hold expertise, or the reliance on a licensing system. As more organizations use these myths, and because the myths are assumed to be rational (that is, linking means and ends), the myths gain legitimacy and confer legitimacy onto the organizations that use them. By relying on institutionalized rules, organizations not only achieve a higher societal status, but they are buffered, to a certain extent, from failure.

Meyer and Rowan (1977) also argued that while organizations might change to fit into the context, “they often play active roles in shaping those contexts” (p. 348). It is possible for organizations to only ceremonially conform to external expectations. If the pressures of the institutional context hurt efficiency or productivity, an organization might follow in principle but not in practice. Meyer and Rowan claimed that “elements of structure are decoupled from

activities and from each other” (p. 357). The organizations’ activities vary situationally while the formal structure remains intact. To achieve this, organizations minimize inspection, allow employees to work relatively autonomously, and trust that individuals are acting appropriately. This is particularly true in institutionalized occupations where professionals expect to work autonomously.

DiMaggio & Powell (1983), borrowing from Meyer and Rowan (1977) and Hawley (1968), advanced the concept of isomorphism to explain the homogenization of organizations within an organizational field. They wanted to explain why many organizations respond the same way to environmental pressures. They stated that “isomorphism is a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions” (p. 149). In other words, organizations adapt their characteristics to resemble and be compatible with the environment. DiMaggio & Powell (1983) proposed three mechanisms for institutional isomorphism: coercive, mimetic, and normative. Coercive isomorphism includes legal and political pressures that force an organization to change. Mimetic isomorphism is a response to uncertainty; organizations will model other organizations to escape uncertainty. Of particular interest to the present project, normative isomorphism “stems primarily from professionalization” (p. 152). Professionalization is “the collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of their work,” typically via education and professional associations (p. 152). Professionalization provides members a set of expectations, norms, and behaviors to carry with them from organization to organization. When an occupation aims to professionalize, it attempts to become institutionalized.

Scott (2008) suggested that institutions rest on three pillars: regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive. Scott defined the regulative pillar as the “rule-setting, monitoring and

sanctioning [of] activities, both formal and informal” (p. 223). The normative pillar “introduces a prescriptive, evaluative, and obligatory dimension” (p. 223). The cultural-cognitive pillar emphasizes symbolic systems that guide behavior. The pillar framework is a useful way to understand the multiple foundations of institutions. For my purposes, Scott’s definition is particularly important because it extends to our understandings of professions. In fact, Scott’s work emphasized using this framework to understand professions. Later in this chapter, I elaborate on the importance of professions as institutionalized occupations.

Institution and Communication

It is in the study of the symbolic nature of institutions that communication scholars are most needed. It is through communication that certain rules, norms, and practices take on meaning and are shared until they come to be taken for granted, enduring, and established; in other words, they are institutionalized. This communication can be formal, as in the case of written rules and regulations (e.g., codes of conduct, legal statutes), and informal as in everyday conversation. In this section, I will first review literature in institutional studies that recognizes the role of communication in institutions. I will then review recent communication studies that explore institutions.

Institutional studies literature. Friedland and Alford (1991) argued that institutions are “simultaneously material and symbolic” (p. 241) and “provide individuals with vocabularies of motives and with a sense of self” (p. 251). Phillips, Lawrence, and Hardy (2004) echoed this notion saying that discourses “provide the socially constituted, self-regulating mechanisms that enact institutions and shape individual behavior” (p. 636). They suggested that the rules, norms, and acceptable behaviors that people choose to follow are not always explicitly witnessed in the behaviors of others but rather are passed on through communication. For example, they

suggested that texts, such as verbal reports, pictures, and talk, carry information, which then influences action. They argued that actors, action, and text all work together to create the social reality. Institutions are socially constructed through the discourses that “[make] certain ways of thinking and acting possible, and others impossible or costly” (p. 638). I believe a communication approach to institutions is necessary to better understand how institutions are created and maintained and how they influence and are influenced by human action and communication.

Some institutional scholars have recognized communication as an essential part of institutions. For example, Green, Babb, and Alpaslan (2008) argued that rhetoric can shape institutional logics. Institutional logics are organizing concepts that “constrain and enable the potential agency of actors” (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005, p. 37). Values and beliefs are embedded in logics, which then enable and constrain action (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Friedland and Alford (1991) asserted that individuals use institutions as “symbolic systems, ways of ordering reality, and thereby rendering experience of time and space meaningful” (p. 243). These systems each have a “central logic- a set of material practices and symbolic constructions – which constitutes its organizing principles and which is available to organizations and individuals to elaborate” (p. 248). Through interviews and analysis of corporate articles, Green, Babb, and Alpaslan (2008) identified corporate control rhetoric that shaped broader logics of control. Their work suggested that individuals use language purposefully as a means to shape logics. Individuals, though constrained by the institutional context surrounding them, can assert agency through their communication.

Powell and Colyvas (2008) also suggested that language and vocabulary play a role in institutions. They noted that “institutions are reproduced through the everyday activities of

individuals” (p. 277). Powell and Colyvas claimed that institutional logics can be “instantiated in and carried by individuals through their actions, tools, and technologies” (p. 277). They argued scholars can better understand institutions by studying blogs, email, archives, metaphors, and stories. Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) also called for an examination of the role of language in institutions. Specifically, they argued that “persuasive language, or rhetorical strategy, is a significant tool by which shifts in a dominant logic can be achieved” (p. 41). They used transcripts from commission hearings and other supporting documents to look for recurrent phrases, words, and referential texts. They saw clusters of words as institutional vocabularies through which institutional logics get articulated. They relied on classical categories in rhetoric such as logos, ethos, and pathos. Maguire and Hardy (2009) considered the deinstitutionalization of a practice: the use of the pesticide DDT. Maguire and Hardy examined, for example, texts that included claims or arguments problematizing current DDT practices. They explored “how the actions of individuals in producing, distributing, and consuming texts” (p. 148) led to change in an institutional field, and, in fact, the end of an institutionalized practice. While meanings are shared and taken for granted, thus forming institutions, they can also be changed through negotiation of meanings. This negotiation occurs through communication and the production and consumption of texts.

Communication literature on institutions. Several communication scholars have employed the term *institution* (e.g., Clair, 1993; Finet, 2001; Heaton & Taylor, 2002; Keranen, 2007; Lammers & Barbour, 2006). Few studies define the term or borrow from institutional theory concepts. However, those studies including institutions illustrate the contributions communication scholars can make to understandings of institutions. Furthermore, organizational communication scholars can benefit from increased consideration of the influence of institution

on action and communication in organizations. In the following paragraphs, I review communication studies of institutions.

Perhaps the most common examples of institution in communication studies relate to institutional rhetoric. For example, Cheney (1991) analyzed Catholic bishop's pastoral letters regarding nuclear arms. The Church was seen as an institution rhetorically managing multiple identities while attempting to speak to internal and external audiences. Jablonski (1989) also examined the rhetoric of the Catholic Church. Specifically, she tracked changes in institutional rhetoric in the doctrinal rhetoric of the church, tracing themes in Vatican II's rhetoric. It could be said that the doctrines of the church represent the esoteric knowledge of the institution. Lynch (2005) explored the rhetorical strategies of the Catholic Church's letter on homosexuality, seeing the Church and the larger sociopolitical context as institutions. These authors do not explicitly define the term institution, though it is reasonable to view the Catholic Church as an example of an institution given the definition I use.

Other scholars have referred to the United States presidency and judicial system as institutions. For example, Stuckey (2006) examined Theodore Roosevelt's presidency as an institution. Francesconi (1982) studied North Carolina Governor Hunt's defense of the North Carolina judicial system after a white-owned store in Wilmington was firebombed by several black men and a white woman. Francesconi claimed that the governor attempted to "legitimize the institutions of state as the facilitator of social harmony and progress," making a public issue a legal one (p. 56). For Francesconi, institution means regulatory agencies such as the courts. These approaches map onto Scott's regulatory pillar, though they do not extend beyond it and thus do not present a complete picture of institutions. Though Francesconi, and others, do not explicitly engage institutional studies, they do implicate the basic tenets of institutional theory.

Several communication scholars have more explicitly used the term *institution*. For example, communication scholars often use the term institution to discuss issues related to medicine and health. For example, Smith (1988) proposed that talk about health can be seen as a reflection of the institution of health and the values, beliefs, and actions associated with it. Though Smith does not define institution explicitly, his recognition that talk about health reflects a larger institution provides an example of the role communication scholars might play in institutional studies. Talk about health, for example, reflects the larger institution, and also reproduces that institution. Furthermore, the institution of health also influences individuals' talk about health. Barbour's (2010) call for examining the everyday conversations in health care organizations echoes this idea. Barbour suggested that professionals "draw their legitimacy in organizing...from their attachments to institutions" (p. 450). Those institutions, he argued, "have the capacity to control and constrain talk" while, at the same time, "actors appropriate institutions to their own ends" (p. 450). Barbour included examples of the routine conversations health professionals may have, such as conversations about switching to electronic medical records or patient handoffs. He argued that these conversations should be studied in order to explore which communication strategies are effective. He also proposed that seeing these conversations in the institutional context in which they happen may help develop "strategies for working well with institutional constraints and strategies for challenging those constraints" (p. 453).

Barbour and Lammers (2007) used institutional theory to understand physician response to managed care. They claimed that physicians rely on particular beliefs of their institutions to understand "who they are and what they do" (p. 224). They advocated an appreciation of the communicative construction of institutions and the influence of institutions on communicative

behaviors of professionals. They viewed “communication as the process by which institutional beliefs and managed care arrangements interact to influence physicians’ satisfaction” (p. 203). According to Barbour and Lammers, the institutional beliefs are those “propositions that participants hold as true related to established norms that cut across organizations” (p. 202). Physicians enact those beliefs in the communicative behaviors and use them to make sense of their professional identities.

Lammers and Garcia’s (2009) exploration of veterinarians also revealed the above to be true. Veterinarians relied on the established standards, values, and norms of veterinary medicine to make sense of their work, defend work choices that contradicted organizational values, and define their professional selves. In these examples, we see that institution, in particular the profession, influences organizational members. At the same time, institutions are constituted by those decisions and communicative choices organizational members make. Heaton and Taylor (2002) recognized that institutional constraints frame work for organizational members. Their research examined the technical and professional issues in knowledge management fields. They found that individuals develop a collective identity in professional associations. The shared practices of the larger profession influenced knowledge creation and dissemination.

Keranen’s (2007) examination of code status worksheets in hospitals provides another example of the potential for studying institutions from a communicative perspective. She argued that code status worksheets (e.g., DNR forms) were “an evolving genre of institutional discourse” (p. 180). Though she does not necessarily examine an institution nor define the term, she traces the institutionalization of CPR, demonstrating how an innovation comes to be taken-for-granted or fails to reach such status. She noted, for example, that CPR was still a contested practice within hospitals. In Keranen’s analysis, institutional rhetoric in the form of code worksheets is

part of a larger system of expectations, rules, and order. The worksheet serves as an example of the rhetoric of managed health care and broader systems of medicine.

Institutions are an important influence on communication, especially in the workplace. For example, institutions provide rules and norms for individuals to follow. Institutions may also influence ways of thinking or solving problems, communicating decisions, or sharing information. Institutions also provide vocabularies and even scripts for individuals to use at work. In the case of professions, for example, the institution provides a portable identity and attendant values, beliefs, attitudes, practices, and norms.

In particular, I advocate for communication studies on the everyday talk of professionals. Finet (2001) argued that individuals' talk reflects the sociopolitical context, allowing individuals to "interpret and make sense" of that context (p. 277). Finet gave the example of the institutional rhetoric of sexual harassment, which "establishes what behaviors and communicative practices constitute harassment" (p. 281). Studying individuals' talk reveals what behaviors and practices are believed to constitute harassment and reinforces those beliefs. In this way, the institution influences and is influenced by individual communication. My research considers profession as an institutionalized occupation. Professions operate like an institution, providing a set of expectation, norms, and behaviors for individuals. Profession can be seen as an extra-organizational influence on individual and organizational identity. Scott (2008) argued that professionals are the primary agents of institutions. Studying professionals, therefore, provides an exciting avenue for researching communication and institutions. Also, as Lammers and Garcia (2009) argued, "studying profession as an institution thus offers the opportunity to observe how institutions penetrate organizations" (p. 363). In the next section of this chapter, I review the features commonly used to characterize professions and consider current explorations of

professions and professionals in the communication literature.

Characterizing Professions

Wilensky (1964) argued that not every occupation can achieve the status of a profession, though many occupations “engage in a heroic struggle” to do so (p. 137). Occupational groups desire the legitimacy and autonomy that comes with professional status. Abbott (1988) defined professions as “exclusive occupational groups” (p. 8). When an occupation achieves professional status, it has “[convinced] the public that its services are unique and trustworthy” and “[asserted] an exclusive jurisdiction” over a body of knowledge and the practice of that knowledge (Wilensky, 1964, p. 138). However, as Wilensky argued, this is no easy task. Gaining jurisdiction over a discipline requires a “technical base” that is not easily standardized and used by any untrained person (p. 149). For members of an occupation to achieve professional status there must be a “combination of intellectual and practical knowing, some of which is explicit (classifications and generalizations learned from books, lectures, and demonstrations), some implicit (‘understanding’ acquired from supervised practice and observation)” (p. 149-150). Furthermore, Wilensky claimed, the profession must be able to “persuade the public of the mystery of the craft” (p. 150).

I define professions as institutionalized occupations, with formalized practices, beliefs, and values that transcend the organization and influence and are influenced by communication. Much of the literature on professions focuses on clusters of attributes that characterize professions as opposed to other organizational categories (Leicht & Fennel, 2001; Ritzer, 1973). In particular, scholars have attempted to distinguish between occupations as professional or nonprofessional. Leicht and Fennell (2001) noted that occupations are often “evaluated based on their conformity or deviance from [the professional] traits” (p. 27). Typically, it is argued that

occupations can earn professional status by fitting traditional traits of professions. Lammers and Garcia (2009) organized the literature on professions into several categories summarizing the features used to define profession: emotional neutrality, command over a body of knowledge, formal standards of conduct, service orientation, social status, training and education, self-control, social control, formal associations, and professional identity (pp. 359-362). Scholars also organize these features in different ways, treating these as descriptive concepts defining profession or as prescriptive, sharing features necessary to professionalize (e.g., Carr-Saunders, 1966; Vollmer & Mills, 1966).

Some scholars have criticized the use of traits to define professions, arguing that traits are arbitrary and rigid (Moore, 1970; Leicht & Fennell, 2001). Despite this argument, public vernacular about what a profession is or what it means to be a professional continues to use trait features. Freidson (1986) suggested it might be appropriate to consider “how people in society determine who is a professional and who is not” (p. 36). Cheney, Lair, Ritz, and Kendall (2010) argued that while there may not be real agreement on what it means to be professional, expectations of professionals are different from those of nonprofessionals. Because professions and professionals gain status and legitimacy from public perception and are treated differently as a result, it is important to view professions and professionals from the point of view of that public. The following discussion focuses on the most common features associated with professions. In the following chapter, I review librarianship and highlight some of the features included below in order to argue that librarianship is in fact a profession.

Features of Profession

Command over a body of knowledge. One defining feature of professions is that a command of a body of specialized knowledge is necessary for an occupation to be called a

profession (Abbott, 1988; Barber, 1965; Goode, 1966). As Moore (1970) argued, a professional is supposed to be “an authority on his subject as a body of knowledge and an expert on its application to the solution of particular problems presented by clients” (p. 106). Professionals have special knowledge regarding complicated problems important to individuals, communities, and society. The knowledge is often applied using systematic theory (Greenwood, 1966). Furthermore, the knowledge is “specialized knowledge that is developed and sustained in institutions of higher education, organized into disciplines, and subject to a process of rationalization” (Freidson, 1986, p. 225).

Individuals operating within a profession are extensively trained in the body of knowledge and its application. Professionals then have “a jurisdiction that expresses a profession’s claim to moral competence, in addition to technical competence, and, in a certain sense, superiority over non-members” (Cheney, Lair, Ritz, and Kendall, 2010, p. 126). As a result, professionals have a monopoly over the creation of and access to a particular body of knowledge (Abbott, 1988; Barber, 1965; Goode, 1966). Freidson (1973) argued that professions organize knowledge activities. When an occupation controls the creation and production of and access to exclusive knowledge and practices, it gains professional status. Because one occupational group learns, uses, controls, and produces the knowledge, the resulting profession and its members--and society at large-- expect that the right to practice the use of that particular body of knowledge is exclusive. The specialization of the profession allows it to determine who can and cannot be a part of it (Cheney, Lair, Ritz, and Kendall, 2010).

It is in the definition of knowledge as systematic and specialized that the difference between occupation and profession is most clear. In fact, most scholars agree that an occupational group can achieve professional status only if the knowledge and skills it lays claim

to are unique, specialized, and important.

Both professions and occupations lay claim to unique skills or information. Thus, members of occupations and professions alike are seen as experts in their fields. In the case of the profession, however, knowledge “is based on some branch of higher learning and... is thought to be of special benefit to society” (Freidson, 1986, p. 25). Wilensky (1964) also differentiated professionals from other types of workers. He argued that an occupational group “wishing to exercise professional authority must find a technical basis for it, assert an exclusive jurisdiction, link both skill and jurisdiction standards of training, and convince the public that its services are unique and trustworthy” (p. 138). If the technical skills or knowledge of the occupation are easily standardized so that any person can use them, Wilensky argued, the occupation will struggle to professionalize. Furthermore, the abstract knowledge of a profession must be “storable, controllable, indeterminable, and deployable” so that it is clear the profession has a special expertise (Covaleski, Dirsmith, & Rittenberg, 2003, p. 325). If the knowledge a profession lays claim to is standardized enough to be outsourced, the profession must seek out “jurisdiction” in other ways, such as controlling the language of the discipline (p. 325). For example, Covaleski, Dirsmith, & Rittenberg (2003) examined the rhetoric of accounting firms, accountants, auditors, and the Securities Exchange Commission to observe how these different groups competed to maintain their jurisdiction. In this example, we also see a connection to the symbolic nature of institutions. Individuals contending for jurisdiction or influence over the institutional logics attempt to assert control through rhetoric.

Training, education, entry. In order to gain command over knowledge, of course, individuals must be trained and educated. Professionals complete formal higher education requirements as set forth by professional associations and regulatory agencies and participate in

specialized training to use knowledge in practice (Carr-Saunders, 1966; Freidson, 1986; Moore, 1970). Often, completion of this education and training is a prerequisite for employment in any organization associated with the profession (Freidson, 1986). Training and socialization educates individuals on the rules, norms, and procedures of the profession. The status of professions, and the monopoly over the activities and information associated with a particular field, depends on professions upholding standards and controlling who can and cannot enter the field. Professions often “create rigid entry standards, coupling extensive education with several levels of examination prior to formal entry into the profession” (Abbott, 1988, p. 84). These standards create a public image for professions, telling people the knowledge one must know and use in the work is challenging, important, and exclusive. In fact, Abbott (1988) argued that “expert action without any formalization is perceived by clients as craft knowledge” (p. 103). Professions gain what Abbott calls a “special legitimacy” by formalizing abstract knowledge, developing values associated with using that knowledge, and controlling who uses the knowledge (p.103). Access to the profession is controlled through education and certification.

Associations, formal standards, and monopoly. Occupational members seek to gain or sustain professional status by developing and maintaining formal associations to determine requirements for entry, create codes of ethics and agree on values, and protect jurisdiction in the legal arena (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 1986). Ethical codes of conduct and formal standards for practice are important features of professions (Carr-Saunders, 1966; Freidson, 1986; Goode, 1966; Greenwood, 1966; Moore, 1970). Professional associations encourage a collegial enforcement of standards. Daniels (1973) argued, though, that professional codes of conduct “do not simply fulfill the functions suggested by the professional ideology. Rather, they are part of the ideology, designed for public relations and justification for the status and prestige which

professions assume vis-à-vis more lowly occupations” (p. 49). The formalization of education, training, and entry, and the prestige associated with professions, results in a monopoly over activities, work settings, even technical vocabulary (Abbott, 1988). This monopoly or jurisdiction is protected in the legal system. The association “[mobilizes] its members, can better direct media support of its position, and above all, can better support effective academic work that generates cultural legitimacy for jurisdiction” (Abbott, 1988, p. 82). Creating an association earns professionals legitimacy and the functioning association protects that legitimacy in the long term.

Autonomy and accountability. Moore (1970) argued that autonomy is important to professionals. The professional is responsible only to her peers and her clients (MacIver, 1966; Moore, 1970). Many scholars have noted that, unlike in typical bureaucratic organizations or occupations, only other members of a profession can judge the competence and performance of the profession and its members (Moore, 1970; Starbuck, 1992; Wallace, 1995). An exception to this can be found in Scott’s (1965) differentiation between autonomous and heteronomous professional organizations. In an autonomous professional organization, the professional employees are integral to the administration of the organization (p. 66). In these organizations, professionals are responsible for “setting performance standards” (p. 66). On the other hand, in a heteronomous professional organization, “professional employees are clearly subordinate to an administrative framework” and their tasks are often controlled by the administration (p. 67). In this project, for example, librarians are subordinate to an administrative group made up of individuals who may or may not have the professional degree. The administrative group controls schedules, performance standards, and evaluation.

Generally however, as Freidson (1986) suggested, professionals expect, at minimum, “technical autonomy, the freedom to employ discretion in performing work in the light of personal, presumably schooled judgment not available to those without the same qualifications” (p. 141). Furthermore, professionals are expected to control their behavior and maintain emotional neutrality, using only rational and informed decision-making (Barber, 1965; Greenwood, 1966). Cheney, Lair, Ritz, and Kendall (2010) asserted that society lets a professional group determine what makes quality work, respects those standards, and expects professionals to perform their “social responsibilities” (p. 127). Professions and professionals are accountable primarily to colleagues within the discipline, but are also expected to uphold their end of the “explicit social contract” (p. 126).

Service orientation. As I just mentioned, professionals are held accountable to their peers and also their clients. Individuals often enter their chosen field because they want to provide a service to people. Many individuals are committed to their clients’ interests (Barber, 1965; Russo, 1998; Starbuck, 1992). Goode (1966) argued that there is a social contract between professions and society. Society expects that professions will maintain high performance and ethical standards and continue to serve the public good above all else. For many professionals, this willingness to serve a public is rooted in a commitment to a calling (Moore, 1970).

Social status. Status as a feature is implicated in every other feature of profession; each aforementioned feature creates or protects the social standing of professions and allows for the differentiation between occupations and professions. The prestige is earned through a mastery of knowledge, a control over entry into the field, a shared understanding of the social contract, and the maintenance of standards. This status reflects and often leads to monopoly, higher pay, and more prestige (Barber, 1965; Goode, 1965). Abbott (1988) contended that public opinion

provides professions with power. When a profession “[meets] clients on its own, rather than their own, grounds, the profession increases its social status” (p. 47). From the use of exclusive and complicated knowledge to the autonomous practice of professional work, professions and their members benefit from social status. Granted, this social status is expected to bring public scrutiny and accountability, though this may not always be the case. Social status also brings better pay, autonomy, and respect.

It is difficult to disentangle the features or characteristics of professions. Each feature implicates another, as discovered by Lammers and Garcia (2009) in their exploration of veterinary professionals. To gain prestige and status, occupations formalize the education and training and establish professional associations. Having professional associations also maintains that status and the professional associations continue to formalize the education. The association maintains legitimacy when members uphold standards and ethical practice, and professional members are afforded a certain amount of autonomy in their work as a result. Controlling entry and knowledge creation and dissemination allows professions control over a body of knowledge and results in even greater prestige.

Scott (2008) proposed that scholars use the pillar framework to understand professions. His framework is useful for summarizing the aforementioned traits. Scott argued that institutions, and professions, stand on three pillars. The regulative pillar includes the formal and informal rules often set forth by an association. For example, state agencies and the professional association may control or influence entry and practice in the field. The normative pillar includes professional norms. For example, a professional association may have an ethical code all professionals are expected to follow. Finally, the cultural-cognitive pillar includes the use of common ideas and symbols to guide behavior. These may include particular ways of solving

problems or ways of talking about information in the field. Each of these pillars implicates the communicative, pointing to the formal and informal ways professions are created, sustained, and shared. I argue, therefore, for a communication approach to profession and professionals.

Professions in Communication Research

Cheney and Ashcraft (2007) stated that “communication’s insights regarding the power of the symbolic can challenge sociological approaches to consider...how mere labels, metaphors, and narratives evolve and function persuasively and consequentially in everyday practice and scholarship” (p. 168). The label ‘profession’ has important implications for occupations, just as the label ‘professional’ has important implications for those individuals claiming the term. Lammers and Garcia (2009) suggested that the “meaning of profession in an organizational context raises as yet unanswered empirical questions about how it is manifested, experienced, negotiated, or managed (p. 358).

Scholars in communication consider a variety of occupations and professions. Real and Putnam (2005) and Ashcraft (2005; 2007) studied pilots and their defense of their profession. Tracy and Scott (2006) explored the communication strategies used by firefighters and correctional officers to manage impressions of their work. Kuhn (2006) discussed the discursive resources employed by attorneys and government employees to justify work time commitments. Russo (1998) examined professional and organizational identification of journalists. Other studied occupations include osteopathic doctors (Miller, 1998); fundraisers (Meisenbach, 2008) banking, auto-repair, and management consulting (Trethewey, 1999); engineers (Jorgenson, 2002); and veterinarians (Lammers & Garcia, 2009).

Studies of professions and professionals also appear in the organizational literature outside of communication: Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann (2006) examined medical residents;

Dukerich, Golden, and Shortell (2002) studied physicians in three different health care systems; Hall, Schneider, and Nygren (1970) worked with members of the U.S. Forest Service; Pratt and Rafaeli (1997) observed nurses in a rehabilitation hospital; van Dick (2005) looked at school teachers; and Johnson (2006) explored the identification of veterinarians in various organizational settings, to name a few. Organizational scholars across fields recognize the significance of professionals as a unique group of organizational members and professions as important influences in and on organizations. In particular, organizational scholars have explored the relationship between organizational identification and professional identity. Identity is an important influence on individuals' experience of and performance at work. Also, organizational identification has been shown to have positive outcomes for organizations and employees alike. Scholars, however, have questioned whether professionals are as likely to identify with their organization, given the potentially stronger professional identification. In the following section, I review literature on organizational identification and professional identity. I consider the potential identification barriers professionals may experience. This project offers important theoretical contributions to our understandings of professional identity, as well as potential practical implications for organizational identification.

Organizational identification. Organizational identification, an extension of social identification, is “the degree to which a member [of the organization] defines him-or-herself by the same attributes he or she believes define the organization” (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994). A person's self-concept and how he or she defines him or herself is thus tied to the organization (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Pratt, 1998). Pratt (1998) argued that organizational identification occurs when “an individual's beliefs about his or her organization become self-referential or self-defining” (p. 172). Cheney and Tompkins (1987) also suggested

that identification is evident when an individual makes decisions in the best interest of the organization (p. 2). Identification, for Cheney and Tompkins is the “appropriation of identity” through symbols and language (p. 5). These definitions also apply to professional identification.

High organizational identification might be beneficial for both the organization and the individual. Dukerich, Golden, and Shortell (2002), for example, found that physicians were more likely to exhibit cooperative behaviors if they identified with their health care systems. Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) argued that stronger identification would lead to greater cooperation with in-group members and greater competition with out-group members. They also suggested that organizational identification would result in greater effort on tasks that help other members of the organization (citizenship behaviors). van Dick, Wagner, Stellmacher, and Christ (2005) reminded us that the more one defines oneself as a member of a group, the more likely one is to behave according to the norms and expectations of that group. One’s behavior, essentially, is partially governed by one’s membership to particular groups. Professionals, however, typically have additional memberships and perhaps greater loyalty to their professional identity. Furthermore, professionals are attached to the profession regardless of where they work.

Cheney (1983) noted that organizational identification has been linked to decision-making behaviors and job performance and satisfaction, among other things. He also argued that studying organizational identification allows scholars to examine the impact of “organizational policies and activities” like socialization, training, and internal and external communication. van Dick, Wagner, Stellmacher, Christ and Tissington’s (2005) review of studies on outcomes of organizational identification revealed a variety of positive outcomes: greater performance on tasks, less absenteeism and turnover, intent to stay, work involvement, more extra-role behavior, greater job satisfaction, more motivation, overtime, commitment, and even positive physical and

emotional well-being. Organizations often engage in a variety of campaigns to foster identification at work in order to benefit from the positive results of identification. Those who do not identify might feel distanced from co-workers, thus affecting organizational performance and, in some cases, job satisfaction.

Identification barriers. Certainly not all identification outcomes are positive. For example, too much identification may result in lack of flexibility, distrust, unethical behaviors, and maybe even burnout (Pratt, 2000). Gossett (2002) argued that because fostering identification in the workplace takes time and resources, organizations might want to reconsider spending so much energy on the endeavor. Identification, she suggested, is particularly difficult in contemporary workforces when organizations are downsizing and long-term employment is rare.

Additionally, many scholars have argued that organizational identification may be less likely for professionals (Brown, Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten, 2006; Dukerich, Golden, & Shortell, 2002; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Roberts, 2005; Starbuck, 1992). Gouldner's (1957; 1958) work suggested that experts are less likely to identify with organizations because they are validated by their peers outside the organization and are more committed to their professional tasks. Wallace (1995) claimed that professionals in bureaucratic organizations, especially, feel conflicting goals and competing loyalties. In fact, many professionals working in non-professional places attempt to buffer their work group by structuring it to resemble the professional organization.

Ashforth and Mael (1989) considered possible ways a member might attempt to ease the tensions between identifications. For example, one might define oneself by the most socially salient or by personal attributes, defer to the most valued or important, defer to one with greater impact, or even attempt to separate. Ashforth and Mael (1989) warned that "a lack of congruence

between the goals or expectations of the nested groups may impede joint identification” (p. 29). Members may then disidentify or become ambivalent regarding the organization or other target (Pratt, 2000). Gossett (2002) argued that an individual’s professional goals might conflict with the organization’s goals, thus causing an individual who identifies with both to choose “which identity is most important in a given situation” (p. 387). She argued that individuals want to identify with their organizations because they spend so much time in these environments (p. 387). In situations where an individual feels conflicted, identification may be less likely or, at the very least, tenuous.

Scott, Corman, and Cheney (1998) “[emphasized] that increased identification with a target need not be accompanied by a corresponding decrease in identification with some alternate target” (p. 314). For example, if an individual identifies strongly with her profession and the organization’s goals, rules, and values are congruent with the profession, that individual might find it natural to identify with both equally, and pull from both identities easily. Scott, Corman, and Cheney also asserted that “the expression of identification that shapes and is shaped by our identities varies situationally” (p. 324). Depending on organizational events (e.g., mergers, management shifts, crisis), a person’s identification with the organization might be strengthened or weakened. It is common for individuals to “understand themselves through overlapping identifications with multiple organizations and professions” (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005, p. 172).

Russo’s (1998) work on journalists explored these overlapping, and potentially conflicting, identities and identifications. Because professionals’ identity as professionals and identification with the profession exist before their entry into an organization, and because that identity is portable, professionals often identify more strongly or more frequently with the profession. Russo found that journalists identified more with their profession than the employing

newspaper. Typically, the two identities are strongly linked as journalists see their mission as presenting news to readers and the organization is the vehicle through which to achieve that goal. For the journalists in Russo's study, the profession was "a source of collective inspiration, energy, and strength" (p. 101). The journalists, however, called upon professional values to deal with daily work tasks and the frustrations related to management changes. Russo proposed permeability between "the constructs of professional and organizational identification" and emphasized the role of socialization and work group demographics in influencing identification.

Professional identity. As indicated above, scholars have questioned whether someone with a professional identity can truly identify with the organization and thus make decisions that benefit the organization. This debate is partly rooted in the fact that professionals may be more likely to identify with their profession, and might choose to follow professional rules or norms over the organization. Much of the work on professionals focuses on issues of identity construction and management. As Kuhn and Nelson (2002) suggested, there are several identity structures available to organizational members and certain activities will trigger certain identities more than others. Profession is often treated as one of the possible identities available for organizational members. An individual perceives a membership in a social category (e.g., an organization, a profession, a work group) and uses that category both as a means for articulating one's own identity and defining or defending behaviors or attitudes.

Communication scholars exploring identity among professionals most commonly employ social identity theory, explicitly or implicitly. Social identity theory was developed in the 1970s by Henri Tajfel and has since become the most common way to study identification in groups (Hogg, 2006). Social identification is the "perception of oneness or belongingness to some human aggregate" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Individuals derive their

self-concept from membership in those groups. One's behavior is then influenced by which categories or memberships are most salient.

Scott, Corman, and Cheney (1998) suggested four distinct identity targets: individual, work group, organizational, and occupational or professional. They emphasized that identity is “an ‘anchor’ of the individual or collective self” (p. 303). They also argued that identities for organizational members might overlap. For example “an engineer...may feel that his or her work is personally rewarding, central to the project group's goals, consistent with the organization's mission, and very much aligned with what the engineering profession is all about” (p. 315). The authors assert, “each identity is analytically distinct and practically important” (p. 313).

Meisenbach (2008) proposed that occupational identity is the “shifting material and discursive framing of image and practices associated with a particular type of work” (p. 263). My argument echoes this idea, and I assert that professional identity is an even more powerful, salient, and enduring identity. As Ashcraft (2007) claimed, “occupational identity is especially potent as it easily spans sites (e.g., workplaces, labor associations, regulatory agencies, trade agencies, family socialization, and popular culture) and levels (e.g., macro-societal, meso-institutional, and micro-interactional) of organizing” (p. 13).

Occupational and professional identities are particularly interesting to communication scholars because identities are “accomplished by a variety of discourses generated by occupational insiders and outsiders” (Tracy & Scott, 2006, p. 7). An identity “includes core beliefs or assumptions, values, attitudes, preferences, decisional premises, gestures, habits, rules, and so on” (Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998, p. 303). Often these beliefs or assumptions are grounded in or influenced by larger discourses surrounding the individual and one's identity is negotiated through communication. Cheney and Ashcraft (2007) “reframe professionalization as

a fundamentally rhetorical process because the identity and status of any job is not given or determined but is rather a precarious, contested formation constantly negotiated through discursive activity” (p. 165). As we will see in Chapter 3, librarianship is one example of a profession struggling to negotiate and protect its professional identity.

An occupation achieves professional status by communicating its unique and special knowledge and asserting its jurisdiction by persuading the public to recognize its importance. Individuals also negotiate their work identities, occupational or professional, through communication. For example, Meisenbach’s (2008) study of fundraisers found that individuals employed specific framing strategies to make sense of their work and what they felt it meant to be a professional. Meisenbach argued that the desire for happiness at work and personal agency encourages people to “project appropriately disciplined professional selves and to derive a positive sense of self from such constructions” (p. 259). People have an expectation for what it means to be professional and when one meets those expectations, one gains a certain status or prestige and takes on a set of standards and beliefs. Professionals attempt to portray a professional self in order to earn and maintain social status.

In his work on government workers and attorneys, Kuhn (2006) found that each group of professionals employed different discursive resources to justify work time commitments. Attorneys integrated their professional selves by suggesting that pro bono work was more satisfying. Government workers saw their work as being noble and felt they were accountable to a larger public. Both groups “engaged in identity work that secured social and organizational status by portraying themselves as dedicated professionals” (Kuhn, 2006, p. 1347). Individuals tapped into broader discourses about professionals to make sense of their work commitments and even justify or defend choices. We also see implicated here features of profession earlier

described: status and service.

Other scholars have focused on issues of gender and identity and professionals.

Trethewey (2001) examined the intersection between age, gender, and identity in self-described professional women. She found that women believed the professional body was appropriately dressed and used appropriate body language and avoided appearing too sexual. While the women she studied believed men too had to portray the right 'professional body', women had more limiting parameters. Her earlier study of self-described professionals considered the ways in which professional is "literally written upon members' bodies in ways that often constrain and sometimes enable women's professional identities" (Trethewey, 1999, p. 423). This focus on the body echoes Cheney and Ashcraft's (2007) call to include the material and physical when examining professionals.

Jorgenson (2002) explored the narrative construction of professional identities of engineers. Women engineers simultaneously manage their professional identities and their family statuses. To do so, they situate their gender differently depending on which identity is most salient. Individuals managed multiple identities by negotiating between different identities depending on the situation and culling from various discursive resources to aid in that negotiation. Ashcraft (2005) conducted a study of pilots. To maintain their autonomy and protect the profession's prestige from threat or decline, pilots engage in "narratives of masculinity" revealing dialectic of resistance and control (p. 69). In a later study, Ashcraft (2007) examined how pilots used historical depictions of fatherly professionals to defend their work. She argued that pilots used occupational identity to understand their actual jobs and the performance of those jobs. Ashcraft (2005) argued that the construction of meaning regarding bodies, work, and identity is a "discursive struggle for the right to occupational control, professional class status,

and the economic and social standing of a job” (p. 85). Individuals who see themselves as members of a profession seek to maintain the status and autonomy that accompanies claiming that identity. Real and Putnam (2005) examined pilots as professionals. The pilots defended the profession overall, aiming to maintain the image of the profession as “unique and irreplaceable” (p. 103). The pilots used various tactics including “appeals to professional image through the use of metaphors and discursive strategies” (p. 113). For the pilots, communication was a powerful means for defining and protecting their professional status.

These examples illustrate the importance and role of communication for professionals. In order to create, sustain, and manage their professional identities, professionals engage in a variety of communicative activities. Professionals use communication, especially rhetorical framing strategies, to defend their work choices, protect their professional status, and make sense of their work life. Communication scholars stress that the development and negotiation of identity is a process that plays out in our daily activities and communication (Cheney, 1983; Cheney and Tompkins, 1987; Miller, 1998). We use identity to define ourselves and make decisions about how we should behave and communicate. Professional identity exists in addition to organizational identity, and provides alternative resources, rules, and expectations.

A Constitutive Rhetoric Approach to Professions

Though communication scholars are particularly well suited to consider the symbolic nature of institutions, professions, and professional identity, there are few studies that “systematically explore the consequential symbolic functions of the professional” (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007, p. 147). As mentioned earlier, occupations continue to strive for professional status and individuals want to be seen as professionals. Profession as an institution provides a unique set of expectations, norms, and behaviors that have important consequences in the

organization and for individuals. Furthermore, as Cheney and Ashcraft (2007) claimed, the term professional “[evokes] tangible evidence of status and identity, powerful images of actors with attendant evaluations of bodies and behaviors and exclusive networks of relationship” (p. 153). They also noted “issues of autonomy, power or control, and knowledge are all implicated by how we treat (i.e., create, elevate, or constrain) professions and professionals” (p. 150). My research is guided by an understanding that the terms *profession* and *professional* implicate a set of rules, values, meanings, behaviors, and evaluations. The findings of this project also implicate Cheney and Ashcraft’s (2007) claim regarding the evocation of identity, status, bodies, and behaviors.

Lammers and Barbour (2006) offered five propositions to “[sensitize] researchers to the institutional features of organizational communication” (p. 367). First, “communication sustains institutions” (p. 364). Second, “communication aligns organizing with institutions” (p. 365). Third, “institutions operate in organizing through formal communication” (p. 365). Fourth, “the success of boundary-spanning communication depends on the presence of institutions” (p. 366). Fifth, “institutional hierarchy is manifested in organizing” (p. 367). Each of these propositions provides a warrant for taking a communication perspective on institutions and by implication, professions. The first proposition sensitized me to the constitutive nature of communication and the importance of communication in creating, sustaining, and influencing institutions. I am interested in the ways individuals’ talk reflects and reinforces the profession. Individuals’ talk reveals what behaviors, values, and practices they feel are important for defining the profession. Also, it is through interpretation, meaning making, and communication that professions come to exist and persist.

In order to explore the role of communication in constructing, (re)producing, and revealing profession, I draw upon James Boyd White’s definition of constitutive rhetoric. White

(1985) used the phrase “constitutive rhetoric” to refer to the “central art by which culture and community are established, maintained, and transformed” (p. 28). White is not, of course, the only scholar to have explored constitutive rhetoric. For example, Charland (1987), through an analysis of Quebec’s independence movement, emphasized that the rhetor literally constitutes the audience through his language choices. The rhetor calls the audience into being and establishes the identity of the audience through his rhetoric. As Jasinski (2001) noted, studies of constitutive rhetoric are increasing and continue to “explore the constitutive or *constructive* possibilities of discursive practice” (p. 106). I have chosen White’s (1985) conceptualization of constitutive rhetoric because it so closely aligns with the institutional perspective I have taken. In particular, White’s emphasis on the construction of culture and community complements understandings of profession when we see profession as including norms, rules, beliefs, and attitudes and providing a collective identity for professionals. Furthermore, White’s use of law (which I would call a profession) as an example demonstrates the effectiveness of using this framework in exploring a profession.

White argued that law is a “rhetorical and literary activity” (p. x). Though White argued that law is something other than, or more than, a “set of rules or institutions or structures,” I am extending his work and advocating for a view that recognizes a profession as an institution and establishes the importance of rhetorical activities in sustaining and creating that institution. As Lammers and Barbour (2006) suggested, it is the “day to day practices enacted, endorsed, routinized, and recorded” that constitute and maintain institutions (p. 364). I argue that these practices include daily activities and rhetoric.

White suggested that law could be seen as a “set of resources made available by a culture for speech and argument” (p. 33). This definition resembles the definition of institution provided

here. He includes rules and statutes as well as technical resources as part of this set. A lawyer, therefore, could make use of any of these resources to complete his persuasive aims. Lawyers speak a particular language and may alter that language when necessary. White noted the constitutive nature of the law, which I would call a profession:

Every time one speaks as a lawyer, one establishes for the moment a character—an ethical identity, or what the Greeks call an *ethos*—for oneself, for one’s audience, and for those one talks about, and proposes a relationship among them (p. 34).

The language used creates a community of lawyers, clients, and the general public. White claimed that scholars can analyze several aspects of a lawyer’s rhetoric: the discourse available for the lawyer to use, his use or “reconstitution” of that discourse, and his “constitution of a rhetorical community” (p. 35). When engaged in law, for example, one is acting in a social context, using the materials found in that context, and constituting the very community that allows law to work. Constitutive rhetoric is the process of “meaning-making and community building” (p. 40). Lawyers, for example, decide what kind of culture and community they want and use their language to create it. Law is a “social activity—a way of acting with others—and a cultural activity, a way of acting within a certain set of materials found in the culture” (p. 35).

I wish to highlight another aspect of White’s conceptualization of constitutive rhetoric. He speculated that a reconceptualization of law as rhetorical activity would also mean a change in the teaching of law. In particular, he felt that his view of law would require lawyers to recognize “the uncertainty of life and the fact that we, and our resources, are constantly remade by our own collective activities” (p. 42). In terms of institutional theory, our “day to day practices enacted, endorsed, routinized, and recorded” could be considered our collective activities (Lammers and Barbour, 2006, p. 364). We remake ourselves, our identities, and our institutions through our

activities, communicative or otherwise. White argued that training lawyers would include teaching them specific tasks lawyers do (e.g., drafting contracts) and teaching them ways to differentiate between ordinary language and legal language. Education for lawyers would help individuals “understand [the] materials, their resources and limits, and to learn to put them to work in the activities of narrative and analysis and argument that make up their professional lives” (p. 43).

I advance that one can replace the term *law* with nearly any other profession. For example, when a doctor speaks as a doctor she enacts an identity and establishes a character for herself, her audience, and the profession of medicine. I would argue, further, that she implicates a set of rules, values, and beliefs associated with that profession and those same rules, values, and beliefs, influence the character she can create for herself and her audience. Most professions, due to the expectation of specialization and expertise, have a specific language or set of concepts. For example, as we will see in the next chapter, librarians use terms like *reference collection* and have their own titles differentiating professional roles. A professional enacts her profession in her communication and activities and in doing so makes certain choices about her professional identity and what the profession means. She chooses to leave out or endorse certain rules, values, or meanings. Furthermore, the profession might usefully be seen as a rhetorical activity through which professionals create culture, identity, and community. Rhetorical analysis “invites us to talk about our conceptions of ourselves as individuals and communities” (White, 1985, p. 44). By using constitutive rhetoric as a framework, my research considers the ways individuals construct what it means to be a professional and in doing so create and sustain the social category, hence (re)constituting the profession.

This study examines the rhetoric of librarians' to explore their sense of profession and professional identity. The following chapter provides context and background on libraries and librarianship by offering a history of libraries and the professionalization of librarianship and exploring the enduring struggle librarians' face in creating and maintaining professional status. Against the backdrop of libraries and librarianship, the following chapter also provides the research questions that guide this project.

CHAPTER THREE: LIBRARIES, LIBRARIANS, AND LIBRARIANSHIP

The American Library Association (2010), or ALA, estimates there are currently 122,000 libraries in the United States, including public, academic, school, and special libraries (“Number of Libraries in the United States”). Specifically, according to the ALA, there are 9,221 public libraries, 3,827 academic libraries, 99,180 school libraries, 8,476 special libraries (e.g., corporate or medical), and 1,397 armed forces and government libraries (“Number of Libraries in the United States”). The library is a place to gather for information, entertainment, and interaction. Many of us remember our first school librarian, our first library card, or even our first late fee. The Online Computer Library Center (OCLC, 2005) conducted a survey of people’s perceptions of libraries. The survey confirmed that many people use public libraries, with 96% of respondents having visited a public library (Part 1, p. 1). The survey also found that people typically have positive associations with the library and its resources (Part 6, p. 6). As noted in Chapter 1, during difficult economic times, such as we face now, library use increases and patrons use the library for Internet access, job search and resume assistance, and inexpensive entertainment options. In 2009, the Chicago Public Library had 12 million visitors and provided 3.8 million free, one-hour Internet sessions, with 60% of those patrons using the computer completing job search activities (Chicago Public Library Foundation, 2009, p. 16). Busy librarians are tasked with the challenge of serving increased numbers of users and providing positive experiences for users. Unfortunately, many librarians feel misunderstood and slighted by the very public they serve (Bell, 2009; Hesse, 2007; Kniffel, 2004).

In this chapter, I provide a brief history and description of public and academic libraries. I then consider the professionalization of librarianship with a focus on the current image problems librarians face. I am interested in this image problem because it indicates that librarians

must actively defend, define, and negotiate their profession and, thus, their own professional identities. By considering the context within which librarians work, we also see the broader discourses influencing librarians. Further, this background reveals the role of the public and community in constituting the profession and influencing librarians' constitution of the profession. I conclude this chapter with my guiding research questions.

History of Libraries

Public Library History

Sessa (2010) provided a useful history of the public library in the United States and Europe. This section will summarize key historical events from his description. He argued that while the history of the public library in the United States begins in the 19th century, the roots of the public library idea trace back “two millennia” (p. 2119). He suggested that even Julius Caesar had thought to open a public library, though he was unable to complete this task before his death. The first public library in Rome was built in 39 B.C., though Sessa noted that this library did not necessarily resemble the modern public library. The collection was smaller, more specialized, and non-circulating. In the 15th century, wealthy individuals donated libraries, especially collections, in England, Scotland, France, and Germany. Sessa, however, suggested that many of these did not last. Larger cities attempted to create a “social library” which was often subscription based (p. 2120). In England, the Museum Act of 1845 helped establish libraries and museums. Early arguments for creating public libraries focused on the importance of reading for a morally and socially strong citizenry.

These arguments generally held in the United States as well. Most libraries prior to the 19th century were private collections held in homes. In the 1650s, Robert Keayne, a merchant, left money to the city of Boston to create a house that would have one room for a public library.

A fire destroyed this building in 1747, but while it was open it held town records and a small collection of books. In the early 18th century, Reverend Thomas Bray helped establish several parish libraries throughout the colonies. These libraries were not necessarily open to the public, and typically focused on educating the ministry. Several social libraries were opened as well and supported by a group of people who subscribed in order to use the library. Benjamin Franklin, after a failed attempt to bring his friends' private collections into a social library, established the Library Company of Philadelphia in 1731. During this time, several other versions of public libraries were attempted. In 1762, a circulating library opened that was a for-profit business and failed shortly after it opened. Other forms of libraries included "mercantile libraries, mechanic' libraries, young men's libraries, and apprentices' libraries" (p. 2125). Each of these was aimed at educating a particular group of workers.

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) also opened several libraries meant for the moral and social education of young men. These libraries were often open to the public. Early founders of the public library saw these libraries as an important foundation for democracy and education. Libraries were so strongly associated with democracy that, in 1802, President Jefferson approved the establishment of a position called the Librarian of Congress. Congress had access to this special library in order to stay informed and keep records. During the War of 1812, the British had burned the first Library of Congress. Billington (1998) noted that Thomas Jefferson sold his personal collection to Congress because he believed "in the power of knowledge and the direct link between knowledge and democracy" (p. 41).

It is not surprising then that throughout the early 1800s, several attempts at creating public libraries were made. It was often difficult, however, to keep financial support for the library. School libraries even struggled to secure funding from states. The first "modern public

library”, according to Sessa (2010), was a library built in Peterborough, New Hampshire in 1833 (p. 2122). This library was meant to provide free access to the town’s citizens and to be supported by state funds. Prior to this library opening, George Tickner, a Harvard professor, suggested that the Boston Athenaeum (a subscription library) join with all the smaller libraries in Boston to create a circulating collection open to the public. In 1847, the Boston city council created a committee to discuss the option of creating such a library. In 1848, the city decided to create a public library. The Boston Public Library was open to anyone in Boston. Certain citizens, such as teachers and city officials, could use the library and take the materials out without charge. Other citizens had to put down a deposit to take out a book. According to Glynn (2006), the early mission of the library was to influence reading habits and inspire moral reform, especially in the working classes. Glynn noted that public libraries were also supporting children’s education at a time when many children left school at a very young age.

In 1895, the New York Public Library was created and in 1901 became the New York Free Circulating Library. This shift in name represented the library’s commitment to lending books for free, even in some of the poorest areas of the city. According to Wiegand (1986), at the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago, the ALA and the Bureau of Education displayed a model library of 5,000 volumes classified with the Dewey Decimal Classification system for one half and the Cutter’s Expansive Classification for the other. This exhibit was meant to encourage recognition of libraries as important and necessary places for America’s future. White (1976) argued that by 1876, traditional school-district libraries were less popular and people were beginning to accept the idea of “tax-supported free libraries” (p. 1). More books were being published, collections were growing, and the number of public libraries was increasing. In 1902, Herbert Putnam began

the movement for free interlibrary loans and the Library of Congress' card catalogs were made available to libraries throughout the country, according to Billington (1998).

Andrew Carnegie is also an important individual in the history of public libraries in Europe and the United States. Sessa (2010) noted that Carnegie donated money for libraries throughout Scotland and England. In 1905, he provided the city of Baltimore enough money to create several branch libraries. His money was typically allocated for the building development, rather than book purchases. Carnegie donated enough money between 1886 and 1919 to build over 1400 libraries in the United States. In 1925, the Carnegie Corporation gave \$5 million to library development, library schools and the ALA (White, 1976). McCook and Phenix (2010) attributed much of the growth of public libraries to women's clubs, state agencies, tax support, national legislation, and the philanthropy of individuals like Carnegie.

The ALA continued to push for improved library service, especially after World War II. In 1956, the United States passed the Library Service Act and in 1964 the Library Services and Construction Act to provide federal funds to build and support more public libraries throughout the country. 1956 is also the year when the Highway Act was passed. Bobinski (2007) argued that this act moved more people to the suburbs, thus creating the need for more public libraries outside of the major cities. Bobinski noted that the Library Services Act brought public library service to over forty million Americans. The support for public libraries remained steady and today we have libraries in many communities, urban and rural, throughout the United States. In fact, despite early struggles to create libraries, they seem rather ubiquitous today, as if they were always there.

Academic Library History

The growth of academic libraries in the United States was and continues to be directly related to the growth of the educational system. Curzon and Quiñónez-Skinner (2010) claimed that “the rotary printing press, public funding for colleges and universities, and the emergence of the profession of librarianship” changed the face of libraries in the United States (p. 1). Moran and Leonard (2010) also pointed to the Morrill Act of 1862, which created land grant universities, as important to the growth of academic libraries. More academic libraries were necessary to support the increase in student population. Early academic libraries, according to Coffey (1990), held limited hours and the librarians were primarily professors with other teaching duties. After World War II, the federal government increased funding for the natural and social sciences, thus leading to new areas of research. Academic libraries had to expand their collections and increase specialization. As the Baby Boomer generation began to enter college, the need for academic libraries increased, as did the need for trained librarians.

From 1945 to the early 1970s, according to Bobinski (2007), higher education enrollment was increasing and academic libraries and librarians became a central part of the academic community. The Academic Facilities Act of 1963 helped fund the construction of new library buildings on many campuses, and the Higher Education Act of 1965 provided funds to increase collection development. Technology led to more web-based materials, students doing more specialized research, and faculty and students requiring assistance to use the new resources. Curzon and Quiñónez-Skinner (2010) also pointed to the Machine-Readable Catalog (MARC) standards, Library of Congress Subject Headings, the OCLC, and the automation of library records as important factors in the history of the academic library. Academic libraries have had to be on the cutting edge of library technology and service. The fate of academic libraries is

closely tied to the fate of education in the country. As education suffers from budget crises and staff shortages, so too do academic libraries.

Types of Libraries

Public Library

The Institute of Museum and Library Services defined a public library as:

An entity that is established under state enabling laws or regulations to serve a community, district, or region, and that provides at least the following: (1) an organized collection of printed or other library materials, or a combination thereof; (2) paid staff; (3) an established schedule in which services of the staff are available to the public; (4) the facilities necessary to support such a collection, staff, and schedule; and (5) that is supported in whole or in part with public funds (Henderson et al., 2010, p. ii).

A public library is typically created and regulated by state law and each community can have only one public library. A community may also establish a public library system to connect several town libraries. The ALA (2010) estimated there were approximately 9,221 public libraries in the United States in 2008 (“Number of Libraries in the United States”). The ALA also estimated approximately 1.5 billion public library visits during that same year. The public library is meant to provide resources to “meet the needs of individuals and groups for both formal and informal education, as well as for information and personal development which includes recreation and leisure” (Clubb, 2010, p. 4347). Bobinski (2007) claimed that from 1941-1956 public libraries used adult services for “strengthening democracy, promoting an enlightened citizenship, and assisting in the realization of democratic ideals” (p. 30). He argued that this focus started to shift in the 1950s to include meeting community education needs.

Public libraries today are supported by states or cities through tax dollars and are governed by boards of elected community members, in addition to the libraries' administrations. Public libraries provide several services including: loans of books and media, reference services, internet and technology access, readers' advisory, community information and records, educational and entertainment programming, and information services for children, teens, and adults. A public library's collection is developed based on the demographic information of the community, the budget of the library, and the community demand. Public libraries are staffed by librarians (individuals with a Master's in library science), library assistants, and, sometimes, volunteers.

Academic Library

The National Center for Education Statistics defined an academic library as a library "associated with a degree-granting institution of higher education" and providing all of the following: 1) an organized collection of printed or other materials or a combination thereof; 2) A staff trained to provide and interpret such materials as required to meet the informational, cultural, recreational, or educational needs of clientele; 3) An established schedule in which services of the staff are available to clientele; and 4) The physical facilities necessary to support such a collection, staff, and schedule (Phan, Hardesty, Sheckells, & George, 2009, p. 1).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2008 there were 3,827 academic libraries (Phan et al., 2009, p. 3). The academic library and its employees must follow the same rules and policies of the academic institution in which it resides.

According to Curzon and Quiñónez-Skinner (2010), academic libraries are divided into Public Services and Technical Services. The Public Services unit is responsible for connecting

the university population with the library's resources. Services include circulation, interlibrary loans, course reserves, government documents, special collections and archives, and reference help. Also included in Public Services is library instruction for students and faculty. The Technical Services unit is responsible for the acquiring, cataloging, and processing of the library's materials, print and digital. Technical Services usually develops the collection and manages technology for the library as well.

To this point, I've summarized the history of libraries and defined two major types of libraries, highlighting the structure and purpose of each type. The history and structure of libraries serves as a backdrop for the work librarians do today. As we will see in the next sections, librarians' work is complex, though not well understood.

Librarians: What They Do

In this section, I will first describe the major components of a librarian's role. These activities apply to public and academic alike and will be used throughout this dissertation. Furthermore, these activities are essential to the functioning of any library. In this section, I also list the job titles commonly held by employees of public and academic libraries.

First, most librarians conduct *reference transactions*. The Reference and User Services Association (2008), a division of the ALA, defines these transactions as "information consultations in which library staff recommend, interpret, evaluate, and/or use information resources to help others to meet particular information needs" ("Definitions of Reference," para. 1). The reference interview is the conversation a librarian and patron have regarding the patron's needs. The librarian asks probative questions to help clarify the patron's information problem and decide where to direct them. The Reference and User Services Association provides continuing education courses on the reference interview.

Second, *collection development* refers to the reviewing, selecting, and purchasing of materials. Librarians are expected to carefully review available materials (print and digital) and decide based on their community what materials will best suit the needs of patrons. Third, *readers' advisory* refers to a librarian assisting patrons in choosing materials to read. Often, this refers to helping recommend fiction or nonfiction materials to patrons. The librarian will stay informed in several genres of literature and be prepared to guide readers based on their interests. Sometimes a librarian will also lead a book club of readers. Fourth, *programming* refers to librarians and library workers organizing events for the public. For example, children's programming may include story time for preschool age children. For adults, this might be a photography workshop with a local artist. Programming is meant to bring the public into the library and appeal to a wide variety of interests and needs. Fifth, *circulation* refers to the cycle of materials in and out of the library. Circulation activities include checking out and checking in materials (often using a software system), checking the quality of materials (e.g., making sure they are not damaged), and re-shelving materials. In smaller libraries, each library worker assists in this process. In larger libraries this process may be primarily automated.

Finally, *cataloging* is the creation and maintenance of a bibliographic system for tracking and organizing materials. Early library cataloging required the use of a card catalog with each card detailing the bibliographic information of the source. Today, most catalogs are digitized and technically more advanced. There are specific cataloging rules for organizing materials and librarians, especially in academic libraries, specialize in this area of the discipline. Due to its complex nature, cataloging is typically assigned to a single unit (technical services) or librarian with advanced training in cataloging. Smaller public libraries that are part of a library system are likely to use the library system for cataloging services.

Librarians are expected to complete a variety of tasks in addition to those listed above. Librarians are also expected to “be knowledgeable about building and maintaining facilities, computers, printers, photocopiers, scanners, digital environments, and social software while simultaneously developing and applying skills that some might seem more appropriately assigned to a psychologist or social worker” (Clubb, 2010, p. 4355). For example, in today’s public library a librarian will have to fix the printer, help someone create an email or social networking account, and demonstrate the use of an mp3 player. A librarian may also have to ask someone to put his shoes back on, rearrange chairs, or assist a mentally challenged individual whose needs may be unclear. The work of a librarian includes the mundane and the complex. In the next sections I will specify the job titles and tasks for public and academic libraries.

Public Library Titles and Tasks

More specific job titles typically include the following, according to the ALA (2011): pages, library assistants or technicians, librarians, library managers, and library directors (“Types of Library Jobs”). Pages are responsible for returning materials to the shelves and retrieving materials. Library assistants or technicians often work the checkout or circulation desk, answer phone questions, issue library cards, collect fines, process new library materials, or serve as a resource for directing patrons to the right area of the library. Librarians assist all patrons from children to adults. They are responsible for answering reference questions, helping patrons track down resources, retrieving materials, handling interlibrary loans, searching for information in the library’s collection (physical or digital), developing the collection by selecting and purchasing materials, and leading programs for patrons (e.g., reading children’s stories or demonstrating the use of a new software). Library managers are typically assigned to supervise one department (e.g., Children’s, Adult, Circulation). They are responsible for work schedules, personnel issues,

patron complaints, and overseeing the operations of that unit. Library directors are primary administrators that maintain the operations and budget of the library and report to the community board. Often library directors are responsible for budgets, building maintenance, public relations, personnel, and legal issues. In smaller public libraries, this person may work as both a librarian and library director.

Academic Library Titles and Tasks

The head of an academic library often holds the title University Librarian, Dean, or Director. Academic libraries are staffed by librarians (individuals with a master's degree in library science), library assistants, clerical staff, student workers, and administrators. Librarians in academic libraries are given faculty status and required to follow the tenure process like any other academic faculty member. In public universities, the academic library will often have a group of employees called civil service staff. These individuals often have a bachelor's degree in a different discipline, although not always, and work as library assistants. Moran and Leonard (2010) noted that, today, most employees in an academic library will be paraprofessionals. These individuals are considered support staff and are usually highly trained individuals, though they do not possess a library degree. Academic librarians often have student workers in addition to the civil service staff and librarians. Many of the basic services and functions of librarians are similar across types of libraries (e.g., reference and collection development). Academic librarians, however, conduct more research and must provide service to the campus. In academic libraries, librarians also perform library instruction, which is like the academic library's version of a public library's programming.

Librarianship as a Profession

Professionalization

The professionalization of librarianship was tied closely to the increase in public libraries in the United States. In addition to the need for more librarians to manage the libraries, the complexity of keeping up with larger collections and more patrons required better-trained librarians. Wilson (1984) pointed to the decision of librarians to organize as a profession, and not as a “trade, or a craft, or a union” as a way of “exerting some control over how their work would be done and how it would develop” (p. 563). Choosing professionalism, Wilson claimed, allowed librarianship to claim a “special relationship” with the public and earn autonomy and financial reward in exchange for excellent service (p. 564). By choosing this particular label and way of organizing, librarians sought to develop a particular type of collective identity. This section reviews several important events that supported the professionalization of librarianship.

Coffey (1990) pointed to the founding of the American Library Association as an important step in professionalizing librarianship. She credited Melvil Dewey with pushing for a professional association. In 1876, 103 librarians attended the first meeting of the American Library Association in Philadelphia (Wiegand, 1986, p. 3). The association was seen as a way for librarians to meet and work together on behalf of the discipline. At the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893, the ALA held a conference to focus on practical issues such as classification, binding, and shelving in libraries. State associations started cropping up in the 1890s in New York, Iowa, and New Jersey. Wiegand (1986) noted that in 1901 the ALA president Henry Carr gave an address entitled “Being a Librarian” and “emphasized to his audience they were members of a profession of professions because they were custodians of literature for all professions” (p. 75). The creation

of the American Library Association served as the formal marker of the occupation professionalizing.

Glynn (2006) also pointed to the founding of the New York Library Club in 1885 as an important event in professionalizing librarianship. The club was a place, Glynn noted, for librarians to debate methods and ideas and begin establishing a sense of mission. The club viewed libraries as an important factor in moral education. Furthermore, the club was used as a way to create a “social identity” for librarians (p. 446). Libraries at this time were struggling to garner financial support from taxpayers and keep up with larger collections. It became imperative for librarians to advocate for libraries and prove their professional worth. Glynn argued that the New York Library Club’s discussions “helped to meet a pressing need of any emerging profession—the creation of a specialized, esoteric body of knowledge that was unique to and helped define a body of practitioners as professionals” (p. 449). This comment reflects much of what we saw in the previous chapter regarding professions and professionalization. The ALA and the New York Library Club helped the discipline coalesce around a set of skills, knowledge, and values.

Early concerns of the ALA included technology, automation, and a set of rules or standards for librarians to follow in order to formally professionalize the field. Dewey also emphasized the need for formalized training of librarians and in 1887 established the first library school: Columbia College’s School of Library Economy. This school was meant to serve as an alternative for the primarily apprenticeship system used at the time to train librarians. Dewey sought to raise the status of librarianship. Not every librarian was in favor of formalizing the education, however. William F. Poole, the director of the Chicago Public Library, Wiegand

(1986) reported, opposed Dewey's motion to the ALA to support a library school. Poole claimed that the best education for a librarian was experience.

Most early library leaders, however, did agree on professionalizing the field. What the profession should look like exactly created some debate, though. Wiegand (1986) shared that Herbert Putnam, an important leader in the ALA in the late 1800s, wanted the profession to have standards for the field but also advocated for diversity in ideals. Putnam claimed that librarians needed to "furnish impartially the ammunition for both sides of every issue" (as cited in Wiegand, 1986, p. 232). Librarians were encouraged to be neutral and provide information regardless of political or moral views.

The ALA helped librarianship "forge a consensus into a professional identity, and to give meaning and status to their work" (Wiegand, 1986, p. 230). The ALA was pivotal in securing federal funding for libraries, advertising libraries, formalizing training and education of librarians, and allowing librarians to organize. The ALA developed a code of ethics in 1938. In 1951, the ALA made the Master's degree in Library Information Science (MLS) the entry requirement for professional positions. In 1957, the ALA created National Library Week, using the slogan "Wake up and read." The ALA also helped publicize the importance of libraries with the READ posters. In 2002, the ALA Allied Professional Association (ALA-APA) was created to help promote the professional interests of librarians. For example, in 2005, the ALA-APA established the Certified Public Library Administrator program that allowed MLS-holding public librarians with three years supervisory experience to expand their education and career opportunities. Today, the ALA is still the primary professional association for librarians. The formation of an association serves as one way for an occupational group to standardize beliefs, rules, and norms and communicate them to more individuals.

Professionalizing librarianship was not an easy task, and some have argued that librarianship has not completed that task. Coffey (1990) remarked that in the 1960s critics argued that librarianship was not a true profession. For example, Flexner (1968) called librarianship a vocation and claimed it lacked the intellectual properties required to define a profession. Edgar (1976) pointed out that librarianship is missing licensing requirements and self-regulation with actual sanctions to punish unethical conduct. Furthermore, he noted the lack of social prestige offered other professions. He blamed this on the limited educational requirements for entry into the field. Earlier, I mentioned Henry Carr's view of librarianship as a profession of all professions. This broad knowledge base has threatened librarianships' status because it appears to some that the field does not have a body of knowledge of its own.

However, Winter (1983) analyzed librarianship and concluded that, on most counts, librarianship is actually a profession. He used many of the features included in Chapter 2: professional association, service orientation, status, command over a body of knowledge, autonomy, formal education, and ethical standards. Regarding the body of knowledge, for example, Winter claimed that because librarianship continues to develop theory, especially in the areas of classification and other technical services, they meet the requirements for the label *profession*. Furthermore, Winter asserted, librarianship's knowledge base is, in fact, rooted in theoretical issues and cultural values (e.g., intellectual freedom). Though he called for more active participation in creating knowledge and better collaboration across the field, he felt strongly that librarianship had a "distinctive intellectual core [that] is made up of the interplay between the science of controlling and retrieving recorded information and the sociocultural values which attempt to assure its free movement" (p. 25).

The reader may recall Wilensky's (1964) claim regarding the unique and specialized technical base required of a profession. Wilensky submitted that an occupation would struggle to be seen as a profession without a specialized knowledge and skill base. According to Winter (1986), librarianship meets this requirement. On the other hand, librarianship is low on the social status expected of professions. Winter contended that as the public's appreciation of information increased, the profession would gain respect. He noted that the recognition of the discipline's theoretical base was also dependent on the continued formalization of education. The debate regarding whether librarianship is a profession has not, however, ended. In April 2010, Deschamps, author of a blog called "The Other Librarian," posted his ten reasons librarians are not professionals. Included in this list was a lack of a monopoly over activities and consequences for ethical violations, a generalized body of knowledge, and poor educational preparation. This blog entry led to a great deal of debate and, in May 2010, Deschamps wrote a reply on LibraryJournal.com. In the reply, he gave ten reasons librarians are, in fact, professionals. He argued that librarians work together to share knowledge and skills to improve information access, but that each librarian should be able to respond to attacks on the discipline's professional status.

Winter's (1983) discussion suggests librarianship is a profession. Librarianship has a code of ethics, a professional association, a body of knowledge and set of unique skills, a service orientation, and formal education requirements. Additionally, librarians are expected to maintain emotional neutrality, even in the face of frustrating patrons. Because academic librarians operate in a more theoretical arena, producing and publishing knowledge, they are likely less threatened by comments regarding their professional status. Furthermore, academic librarians are required to contribute to knowledge creation through publications and research, thus developing the knowledge base of their discipline.

Curran's (2001) definition of library information science helps situate librarianship as a profession. He argued that "library and information science (LIS) is what people hired to create, sort, manage, and transfer information do" (p. 56). This emphasis on the science of what people do helps root the field in a knowledge base. Curran claimed that library information science is focused on the origin, dissemination, acquisition, properties, classification, storage, retrieval, interpretation, and use of information. Librarians, he said, understand the "life cycle of information" and engage with "reliable classification theory" every day (p. 58). Thus, librarians have unique skills that cannot easily be standardized and are grounded in theory. Librarians do see themselves as professionals, and scholars refer to librarianship as a profession. On the other hand, librarians also feel that the public does not respect them as professionals. Librarians are faced with an image problem that results in low social status (and low pay) and many library journals feature conversations speculating about the lack of professional respect for the field. The next section of this chapter reviews some of the major arguments and problems associated with librarians' image.

Perception Problems

Librarians do not feel respected or understood by the public and, as noted earlier, suffer from a lack of social prestige normally afforded a profession. Many librarians focus on the negative stereotypes of what a librarian looks like visually. Grimes (1994) argued that the image of the librarian is of a "picky, hardworking, standoffish, bookish, and by most accounts, pitiable" woman like the character Marian Paroo in *The Music Man* (p. 3). Grimes speculated that the prevalence of this stereotype is rooted in the shift from a profession dominated by males to one dominated by females, most of whom were single women pursuing jobs instead of married life.

Bayless (1977) lamented that librarianship has a “total lack of power and self-respect as a profession” (p. 1715).

More than a decade later, the perception problem was still in tact. Schuman (1990) noted that the ALA created a task force to consider how to enhance the image of librarians. Even the ALA attempted to advocate for recognition of librarians as professionals. In 1990, for example, the National Library Week slogan was “Ask a professional—Ask a librarian.” Schuman suggested that librarianship is “particularly caught up with the question of its image” despite the fact that nearly every profession suffers from stereotypes (p. 86). For example, she pointed to the stereotypes of boring accountants or greedy lawyers. Schuman speculated that the concern regarding image is closely tied to status and pay. Schuman criticized librarians’ focus on the spinster stereotype and advocated for more concern about whether the public finds librarians to be relevant and useful to their personal needs. David and Scherdin (1994) asserted that librarians should “take responsibility for promoting [the profession] to others” (p. 121).

Today, librarians still launch the same complaints regarding the image of their discipline. From library journals to library conferences, the topic of the librarian’s image is prevalent. Preer (2006) noted that this problem of perception dates back even to the 1920s. Preer claimed that from 1926 to 1956 librarians were forced to defend the existence of libraries and the need for new libraries. Today, librarians still feel “invisible, overlooked, and underestimated” (p. 489). Hutchins (2000) asserted that “we all know librarians have a public perception problem” caused by the profession failing to promote librarians (p. 57). Davis (2008) claimed that librarians have a “preoccupation with challenging traditional stereotypes and images, while at the same time seeking reassurance and justification for why and how librarians do what they do” (p. 58). Davis affirmed that librarians are concerned about their low status, lack of respect, and low pay. In

2009, Bell argued that the profession must prove to the public that librarians offer a unique and relevant service.

Librarians proffer several possible reasons for the perception problem. One argument is that the profession tends to promote libraries and not librarians. For example, the ALA currently has a website, www.atyourlibrary.org, which emphasizes the importance of libraries in your community, though not necessarily your librarians. Schuman (1990) claimed, “It’s one thing to tell people to come to a place. It’s quite another to tell them to consult an expert, well-educated, and highly trained librarian” (p. 88). This argument suggests that the profession should focus on its people, not its places. The very term librarian, however, is associated with the physical library: someone who works in a library. Schuman recognized, though not explicitly, that the way librarians talk about the profession influences how people view the profession. Bell (2009) echoed this by arguing that library workers can provide more meaningful experiences for library users.

Carpenter (1998) claimed that librarians focus on “technique” and have limited their service to “providers of books” instead of “purveyors of information” (p. 79). Carpenter felt librarians are mainly trained on issues of best practices and technique, as opposed to rigorous theory and knowledge creation. Furthermore, if people see the practices of librarians as standardizable, they have not proven the mystery of their craft, as Wilensky (1964) might say. Kniffel (2004) suggested that because the more technical tasks a librarian performs are visible to the public, people conflate those activities with the entire role of librarians, thus missing a great deal of a librarian’s activities. For example, if one’s only exposure to a librarian is with the individual who checks out one’s book, one may think that librarians merely check out books. Carpenter (1998) noted that the early activities of the occupation did include recording books

taken out, thus making the occupation less respected since those tasks seemed easy. These lower level tasks do not help elevate librarians' status. Though today librarians are expected to do a great deal more, as discussed earlier, many patrons only witness the more clerical component of a librarian's day.

Many librarians lament that “few people outside the library profession understand exactly who librarians are—or what librarians do” (Schuman, 1990, p. 86). Bayless (1977) felt the profession had not educated the public about librarians or librarianship. She pointed out, for example, that the public views every library employee as a librarian, though they would not assume every doctor's office employee was a doctor. Davis (2008) echoed this sentiment arguing that people are not only unaware of the actual work of librarians but they also cannot tell the difference between a degreed librarian and a support worker. Davis criticized the profession's inability to agree on issues such as what the field is called (e.g., librarian v. information scientist) and what community members using the library are called (e.g., patron v. user v. borrower). Bayless (1977) also proposed that the perception problem was rooted in librarianship's debates defining the profession. The field has also struggled to agree on educational requirements for entry into the field. As noted earlier, the MLS is considered the primary educational requirement for the field. However, many smaller libraries cannot afford to hire individuals holding the degree and, thus, some have questioned whether the degree is necessary.

Davis (2008) referred to these debates as part of librarianship's “professional identity crisis” (p. 73). According to Davis, the field needs to respond to “rapid and far-reaching social and technological changes” and advertise the abilities of librarians including “flexibility, vision, the ability to think critically, yet synthetically, to form partnerships, to collaborate, to continue learning, and to teach others” (p. 77). In 1976, Edgar warned librarians that if they wanted “to

change before 2076, [they] should take to heart the words of Porky, a friend of Pogo, who once remarked ‘We have met the enemy, and he is us’” (p. 318). Though it is only 2011 and librarians have time to change the image, most librarians want results sooner. Librarians have been facing an image problem since at least the 1970s, though some would argue since the profession’s inception, and yet, even today, the problem is not resolved.

Studying Librarians

Librarianship is struggling to be seen as a profession and librarians are struggling to be seen as professionals, making librarians an excellent group with which to study professional identity. Studying librarians provides us an opportunity to observe the active negotiation of professional identity and the constructing of the ideal profession(al) image. Librarians have a stake in how people view the profession, and their communication about the profession is crucial in influencing how the public views and treats librarians. Furthermore, the perception problems of librarianship demonstrate that institutions are negotiated over time and, as Cheney and Ashcraft (2007) noted, through “discursive activity” (p. 165). Librarians’ communication occurs within the context I’ve described in this chapter and is, in part, a response to the broader discourses surrounding their work.

Prior to reading the literature about libraries and librarians, I had heard a librarian friend of mine complain that the public did not understand what librarians do, did not appreciate the role librarians play in the information age, and did not have any respect for librarians as professionals. My friend reported that he held many conversations with librarians at conferences in which they vented about this problem and sought ways to improve the situation. Just as the literature suggests, librarians are still concerned about their image and its impact on their status and pay. Their concerns are not unwarranted; the average pay for a librarian in 2009, according

to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, was \$55,670. Compare this to the average pay of other professionals such as veterinarians at \$90,110, doctors at \$173,860, or lawyers at \$129,020 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009, “Occupational employment and wages”).

Using the definition I provided in Chapter 2, in conjunction with the discussion in this chapter, I consider librarianship a profession, albeit a struggling one. Librarianship typically includes advanced training or education, adherence to a code of conduct, service orientation, emotional neutrality, and command over a specialized body of knowledge and skills. Despite public misperceptions regarding who librarians are or what they do, I believe librarians are professionals and the field has an opportunity to overcome the misperceptions.

In this project, I use the term librarian to refer to an individual holding a Master’s degree from a Library and Information Science program. The Institute of Museum and Library Services defines the term librarian as individuals who “do paid work that usually requires professional training and skill in theoretical or scientific aspects of library work, or both, as distinct from its mechanical or clerical aspect” (Henderson et al., 2010, p. 55). When the Institute of Museum and Library Services surveys libraries, they count total librarians and MLS librarians. For example, in 2008, 67.9% of librarians held Master’s degrees from an ALA-accredited LIS program. Though some libraries will give individuals without the MLS the title *librarian*, I will refer only to MLS-holding individuals as librarians. I will use the term *library staff* to indicate an employee of the library who does not hold the degree.

This project explores librarians and their communication about their work, their profession, and their professional identity. As noted in Chapter 2, a communication approach to professions as institutionalized occupations allows us to consider the influence of institutions and the (re)constitution of profession. This chapter suggests that the constitution of profession is

influenced by the history of and the broader discourses surrounding the profession. By talking with librarians in this study, we can explore how they, as professionals, enact or create the profession and how they construct their professional identity. As noted in the introduction, today's workforce is increasingly professionalized and our understandings of work, organizing, and our own identities, are influenced by the larger institutions around us and the conversations surrounding what it means to be a professional. This research offers an opportunity to explore how individuals use rhetoric to add meaning to work, label and differentiate work, and develop a sense of work self. This study holds significance for our understandings of institution and profession, communication, and professional identity. Additionally, this research has important implications for advising librarians desiring improved professional image and, perhaps more importantly, respect and appreciation. I seek to answer the following questions:

RQ 1: How is librarianship negotiated, enacted, or constructed through communication?

RQ 2: What does profession mean for individuals working as librarians?

RQ 3: What does the rhetoric of librarians tell us about the profession and professional identity?

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODS

This chapter discusses the qualitative data collection and analysis procedures used in this project. My primary data is participant interviews with and observations of librarians. In this chapter, I first discuss the assumptions guiding qualitative research and two common forms of qualitative data collection: observations and interviews. I then advocate a view of interviews as rhetorical situations. After framing interviews in this way, I review the methods used in the current study. I describe the data collection and procedures for the study. I then discuss the data analysis process and my use of qualitative data analysis software.

Qualitative Research

Assumptions

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) argued that “qualitative researchers seek to preserve and analyze the situated form, content, and experience of social action, rather than subject it to mathematical or other formal transformations” (p. 18). Qualitative data is the actual conversations, interactions, and actions we observe in the field. We use our experiences and observations to describe and explain what we have witnessed. Lindlof and Taylor pointed out that, while there are several approaches to qualitative research, the primary goal is always to examine the “diverse forms and details of social life” (p. 19). I situate myself as a qualitative organizational communication scholar interested in these details of social life. In particular, I am interested in how individuals use profession as a social category and give meaning to, organize, and label work.

As qualitative researchers we can only understand portions of knowledge and knowledge creation and should “preserve the subjective experience and motivations of social actors” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 11). As such, qualitative work focuses on the experiences of

individuals. Methodologically, qualitative scholars use interviews, observations, participation, personal experience, and, sometimes, texts. Interpretive qualitative work “[aims] to explicate, and in some cases, to critique the subjective and consensual meanings that constitute social reality” (Putnam, 1983, p. 32). An interpretive view assumes that multiple realities operate simultaneously and “knowledge of social realities emerges from the interdependence of researcher and researched” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 11). Primarily, this means that researchers influence the data they collect; there is no such thing as objective data collection. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argued that our observations are “socially situated in the worlds of-and-between-the observer and the observed” (p. 19). Our interactions shape the conversation or observation. The researcher and participant bring a set of assumptions, beliefs, and experiences into the setting. Furthermore, the situated nature of observations influences a researcher’s interpretations and analysis of the data. Qualitative researchers also indicate when they perceive a personal bias, experience, or belief is influencing their ability to interpret the data. A researcher is expected to “systematically [reflect] on who he or she is in the inquiry” (Creswell, 2003, p. 182). I agree that the researcher influences the participant. Throughout the data collection and writing of this project, I carefully considered my own biases and views.

An important factor in qualitative research is context. Corbin and Strauss (2008) argued that “experience must be located within and can’t be divorced from the larger events in a social, political, cultural, racial, gender-related, informational, and technological framework” (p. 8). Corbin and Strauss claimed that “context doesn’t determine experience or set the course of action, but it does identify the set of conditions in which problems and/or situations arise and to which persons respond through some form of action/interaction” (p. 88). The context is seen as the conditions requiring or leading to a response and influencing that response. Corbin and

Strauss claimed that our memberships in “social worlds and subworlds” influence our perceptions, whether we are aware of these memberships (and their effects) or not (p. 7). As an organizational communication scholar, I recognize that these contextual conditions include the organizations and institutions surrounding us.

Qualitative Methods

Observation is one of the principle methods of qualitative research. Researchers observe events in social settings in order to describe and analyze the settings or some phenomenon within those settings. For communication scholars, a primary factor in these experiences is conversation. Conversation observed by communication scholars is “embedded in the accomplishment of episodes other than interviews” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 135). Episodes might be interactions, conversations, or behaviors observed in the field.

Researchers can enter and operate within the field site in a variety of ways. Sometimes, they operate in a marginal sense, observing as unobtrusively as possible. Even the most discrete observation, however, influences the observed and the situation. In fact, it could be argued that the researcher always has a role in the scene. It is also possible for a researcher to get involved, to different degrees, in the daily operations of the setting.

The “complete participant” becomes a “fully functioning member” but does not reveal her role as a researcher (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 144). This would be like working as a waiter at a restaurant, but not informing coworkers that one is working there in order to write a dissertation at the local university. Of course, the benefit for this approach is that the researcher immerses one’s self in the setting, coming to a more complete understanding of the experience. Subjects might be more likely to reveal personal or sensitive information because they feel connected to the researcher. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) argued, however, that it is often quite

difficult to separate one's identities for long stretches of time. Researchers operating in this role often worry about the ethicality of concealing one's true purpose. Lindlof and Taylor also warned that researchers might "lose their analytic detachment" (p. 146). In other words, one might feel protective of one's identity or of the relationships established with participants. Furthermore, being able to conduct work and still make observations is a mentally taxing process and may result in holes in the data.

Another approach is for researchers to share with participants their role as a researcher. They still, then, interact with group members, taking on varying degrees of responsibility and involvement. The fear of being deceitful is removed and researchers can more easily distance themselves from the group members. Researchers attempt to build trust and rapport with the group members in order to get a better view of the social scene. The researcher still acknowledges that she is not an objective bystander, but avoids some of the problems associated with immersion. Of course, there is the possibility that other individuals hide things from the researcher or change their behaviors as a result of the observations.

The researcher may also function as an "observer-as-participant" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 149). In this role, the researcher is an observer, but does not attempt to hide from view. They may occasionally interact casually with participants, but spend most of the time observing. One difficulty with this approach is that the researcher does not easily make lasting relationships with participants and is less likely to truly understand their experiences. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) remind researchers to be aware of the pitfalls associated with this approach: namely, "reading too much of [one's] own conceptions into what [one] sees" (p. 149). One advantage to this approach is that individuals can witness more participants at a time. Furthermore, access might be easier when participants are not concerned that they have to teach, supervise, or

generally notice the researcher. This kind of observation can result in more accurate and true recording of individuals' communicative behaviors. On the other hand, participants might also self-monitor their behavior. During the data collection for this project, participants regularly included me in their work activities, directed comments to me, and asked for my assistance. I observed as much as possible, participated when asked, and alerted all library employees to my presence and role as a researcher.

Finally, the researcher can be the complete observer and avoid any interactions. She attempts to be as unobtrusive as possible, almost hiding her presence. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) noted that this has several obvious problems. The first is that researchers want to be accountable to participants, so hiding one's presence seems unfair and serious problems can arise if a researcher is discovered. Secondly, it is nearly impossible to actually be unobtrusive. If one is sitting in the waiting room day after day, watching nurses' daily tasks, eventually someone is likely to take note of one's presence. The advantage of avoiding interaction, of course, is that the researcher is better able to avoid influencing the subjects. Still, as Lindlof and Taylor noted, when one does not have to recognize oneself as an actor in the scene, there is less reason to be reflexive about one's own biases or influences. It would not have been possible in this project to be a complete observer. In order to observe, I required close proximity to my participants' workspace and followed participants throughout the library. Furthermore, when an individual chose not to participate, I could not observe them. Several librarians work together at one time, so to protect those non-participants, I alerted all to my presence.

Observations can be challenging for any researcher. In order to get a complete picture of a scene, one must spend a considerable amount of time at the field site. Bantz (1983) reminded researchers that one can only be in one place at a time, thus potentially missing other events or

interactions. He also warned against the possibility that those observed change their language or behavior as a result of the observer's presence. Observing also requires strong listening skills, the ability to recognize a relevant moment as it happens, and the willingness to challenge one's own assumptions and perceptions.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) also noted the pitfalls of observation. They argued that not only is it impossible to capture everything relevant to phenomenon via observation (though it might feel like one can), it is also possible that one ascribes meaning to what one witnesses without verifying with participants. One way to prevent this issue is to combine observations with interviews. For organizational communication scholars, observations allow us to build rapport with individuals. In the process of observing, we become familiar with participants' vocabulary, organizational events, and the overall context of the organization, including its daily pace. Unstructured interviews allow us the opportunity to ask individuals to describe and articulate their own meanings, not just those we think we are seeing. This works in the reverse as well. Observations help interviews gain traction by allowing us to witness the organizational life.

Weiss (1994) suggested, "interviewing gives us access to the observations of others" (p. 1). By interviewing participants, we hear their perspectives, their eyewitness accounts, and their experiences. This is particularly useful when one's research focuses on people's experiences of some particular phenomenon. Of course, interviewing can also be useful for a variety of other interests as well. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) suggested that the interview is a "remarkably adaptable method" because it allows the researcher to gather data in nearly any setting about nearly any topic (p. 171).

Though interviewing does not allow us to witness real-time interaction, only participant's reports or perceptions, it does also allow us to gather data about events that have passed or

inaccessible events. If field-entry is difficult given the nature of the topic (say observing couples discuss infertility treatment options), interviewing may be the only available method. One risk in all interviews is that participants may have little to say, or think they have little to say. In other cases, interviewees fear the interviewer's judgment (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Later in this chapter, I will discuss how I address this potential limitation.

Researchers employ a variety of interview types or formats: structured interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2003), group interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), unstructured interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2003), ethnographic interviews, informant interviews, and respondent interviews (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). In a structured interview, each participant is asked the same set of questions (Fontana & Frey, 2003). Group interviews, or focus groups, bring several people together and the interviewer then “directs the inquiry and interaction among respondents in a very structured fashion or in a very unstructured manner” (Fontana & Frey, 2003, p. 71). Another interviewing format is the unstructured interview. Unstructured interviewing is usually an “open-ended, ethnographic (in-depth) interview” (Fontana & Frey, 2003, p. 74). The researcher enters the interview with specific topics or ideas in mind and uses open-ended questions to stimulate conversation. I chose to use a semi-structured approach to interviewing. I used a set series of questions with each participant and asked additional questions depending on the conversation. I used mostly open-ended questions so participants could speak freely about any topic they found interesting or important.

Each of these formats has its advantages and disadvantages. A structured interview may limit respondents' answers and stifle dialogue. However, it allows the researcher to remain in control and compare specific question response across individuals. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) warned that there are several disadvantages of group interviews. For example, certain individuals

might dominate, while others remain silent. On the other hand, focus groups might also stimulate individuals. One individual's comments, for example, might trigger thoughts in another individual. Unstructured interviews can be difficult to control and without a recording device, handwritten notes must be detailed. The presence of an audio recorder, microphone, or even a pad and paper, however, can stir up nervousness or hesitation in the participant. It may also be difficult to compare responses across participants. I chose to use an audio recorder during the interviews and found that many participants simply forgot it was there. Others were much more conscious of the recorder's presence. In fact, one participant asked me to turn the device off so he could share private information.

For this project, I chose to conduct observations and interviews. Though interviews do not provide a complete picture of a social phenomenon, they give us more access to individuals' experiences of it. We also can observe and analyze individuals' accounts of experiences, thus exploring the ways individuals communicate about their experiences. I am primarily interested in the ways professionals define their professional identity and relate to their profession. In order to explore what *profession* means to professionals, I felt it was important to ask them directly. Interview responses allow me to witness how professionals use intentional or strategic rhetoric to define themselves and their profession. Recognizing participants' communication in interviews or during observation as intentional and rhetorical deepens our understanding of the way individuals respond to and are influenced by their environment. Interview and observations also provide a means for considering how professionals may refer to the profession in their own talk. Furthermore, the combination of interviews and observations helped me familiarize myself with the organizational environment in which my participants worked. Given my limited familiarity with the operations of a library, and the language or vocabulary of libraries and librarians,

observations and interviews painted a more nuanced picture. Additionally, a qualitative perspective allows me to explore the influence of profession as part of the context for professionals' communication and witness professionals' daily social reality. In the following sections, I advance my view of interviews as rhetorical situations and move on to discuss the particular methods used in this study.

Interviews as a Rhetorical Situation

In this section, I advocate for a view of interviews as rhetorical situations. My research questions consider what profession means for individuals and how they define their professional identity and in doing so constitute the profession. Interviews provided better access to their own perceptions and also allowed me to consider participants' rhetoric. As noted in Chapter 2, rhetorical analysis "invites us to talk about our conceptions of ourselves as individuals and communities" (White, 1985, p. 44). For this project, a rhetorical analysis of professionals' talk allows us to consider how they conceive of themselves as professionals and participants in a broader social community: the profession. As Hartelius and Browning (2008) suggested, rhetoric can be a:

theoretical lens focused on organizational interactions, as well as a practical mode of intervening in those interactions; the substance that maintains organizational order and institutional logic, as well as the means of challenging that order; a producer and facilitator of individual and organizational identity...and a framework for understanding the role of narrative and rational organizational discourses (p. 33).

Using rhetorical approaches in qualitative organizational studies provides scholars systematic ways of analyzing the language choices individuals make and how particular rhetorical choices

(e.g., titles, symbols, jargon, definitions) are used over time to create meaning and negotiate identities.

I view interview texts as the “rhetoric of socially situated speakers” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 172). The interviewer influences the conversation; the interviewee influences the conversation. The interviewer should examine the interview as a “rhetorical construction of...experience” (p. 173). Foss, Foss, and Trapp (1991) asserted that rhetoric is “purposive,” “symbolic,” and “human” action (p. 14). Individuals make choices about how they will communicate and those choices are influenced by a variety of contextual factors. I view the communication of my participants in the interview setting as purposeful and symbolic. One concern for researchers using interviews is that individuals will say what they believe the researcher wants to hear. Rubin and Rubin (2005) remarked that interviewees might fear the interviewer’s judgment or assessment. I believe that professionals may have this concern. Professionals may feel they need to perform a certain way and may feel they represent the profession. It is this performance, however, that I believe researchers can explore. Interview communication can be seen as strategic and purposeful, thus indicating to researchers what matters to participants and how they define or construct their identities and experiences.

Bitzer (1968) defined the rhetorical situation as

a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence that can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about significant modification of the exigence (p. 6).

Bitzer emphasized the need to understand the contexts in which individuals engage in rhetorical discourse. Specifically, he argued that “rhetoric is situational” (p. 59). Rhetoric takes on meaning

from the situation and is in response to a situation. Individuals create and react to their social surroundings and experience. In particular, individuals respond to an exigence. Bitzer defined an exigence as “an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be” (p. 6).

Bitzer also emphasized the need for a rhetorical audience as part of the rhetorical situation. He proposed that the rhetorical audience must be “capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change” (p. 8). In interviews, a researcher, given her request for the interview and expressed plans for sharing findings, serves as the rhetorical audience. The researcher is willing to listen and the research may help serve change. Bitzer also included constraints as a part of the rhetorical situation. These constraints can include people or events that make up the situation and may limit an individual’s response. Jasinski (2001) noted that while Bitzer initially insisted that an exigence must be real, other scholars have argued that “advocates not only respond to situations, they also help to create and/or define situations” (p. 517). Perception of an exigence is just as important as the reality of an exigence.

In the case of interviews with professionals, the exigence may be a variety of things. For example, librarians are facing image challenges and even existence challenges. Librarians not only need to respond to the way the public views librarians, but justify the funding, use, and existence of libraries. The threat of privatization or outsourcing may also be an exigence. Additionally, librarians are defending the professionalization of the field. The larger exigences faced by librarians are more salient during an interview in which they are called upon to define themselves and their work. Constraints for participants, especially professionals, may include fear of retaliation from managers for participating, the location of the room, the time of day (e.g., an interruption to their work day), the presence of an audio recorder, or even their own title in the

organization (e.g., supervisor). The interview itself may serve as a constraint. The participant is called upon to ask a series of questions about their work and their identity, questions they feel pressured to share an appropriate response to, in whatever way they define appropriate. The interview is an interruption to the normal proceedings of the day. The identity of the researcher may also be a constraint. For example, the researcher's age, gender, or social status may influence the participant.

One important component of a rhetorical situation is whether the exigence can be modified. Participants in interviews may see the interview as an opportunity to be heard and to influence the exigences they face. Indeed, during informal conversations with my participants after the interviews, several librarians asked me if they had done a fair job in representing librarians and the profession. Another encouraged me to publish in the field and in mainstream media to get the word out about librarians. Given these responses, and even the willingness of individuals to participate, I feel confident that researchers can be viewed as the rhetorical audience.

Jasinski stated that individuals "render the world, or some part of it, intelligible or understandable; they have to make confusing or troubling events meaningful for their audience" (p. 517). Interview participants are doing just that when responding to the questions of an interviewer. The interview serves as the rhetorical situation that presents or makes salient an exigence and provides individuals an opportunity to respond to an audience. Viewing interviews in this way highlights the importance of context and offers a systematic way for reframing and talking about the concerns researchers have about interviews. For example, as noted earlier, qualitative research calls for sensitivity to the influence of the context on the participant and researcher and the relationship between participant and researcher. A view of interviews as

rhetorical situations allows us to account for these concerns and speak about them in descriptive and consistent ways. For this project, this approach to interviews also allowed me to appreciate the purposeful nature of my participants' communicative choices and the influence of broader concerns on the participant and myself. This view guided me in my understandings of the constitutive nature of participants' rhetoric and the ways people construct a response to both my interview questions and the larger context influencing us both.

The next sections discuss data collection and analysis. I begin by describing the process of participant recruitment and summary information regarding participants. I then discuss data collection procedures. Finally, I describe my analysis process, including my use of qualitative data analysis software.

Method for Current Study

Data Collection and Procedures

Participant recruitment and characteristics. An initial participant recruitment statement was emailed to the library director of a local public library (see Appendix A). This library was chosen due to its location and my friendship with a library employee who was willing to encourage my access. The recruitment e-mail included a description of the study, an introduction of myself as the researcher, and a request for a formal meeting. I met with the library director two weeks later in her office. I elaborated on the purposes of the study and the process of data collection. She expressed concern about patron involvement in the study and did not feel comfortable having details regarding reference interactions included. After assurance that I was not interested in the patron interaction or in patrons specifically, she agreed to send the recruitment e-mail to all library staff. Her e-mail introduced the study and me. I offered the option of participating observation only, interview only, or both. The recruitment e-mail also

informed potential participants that the study was voluntary, confidential, and would not interfere with work activities. Though the library director did not initially specify whether participants could use work time to participate, individual supervisors agreed to allow participants to use work time to speak with me so long as it did not coincide with their shift on the reference desk. At first, I received only one response from a supervisor in the circulation department of the library. She agreed to participate in an interview and allow me to shadow her during a normal work shift.

My first participant took me through a tour of the library facility. During this tour, she introduced me to several librarians and library staff members. She also asked several questions about the purpose of my study. In particular, she was concerned that I was probing for griping about management. After our interview and an hour of observation, she declared that she would be happy to assist me in recruiting additional participants. I revised the recruitment email to clarify the purpose of the study and the time commitment required. My first participant also mentioned my study in the next staff meeting, assuring people that it was brief and enjoyable. She also invited me to observe her staff. She introduced me to her staff as we toured the facility and I gained each individual's permission to observe them during their next shift. It was during these observations that I was able to recruit more individuals for interviews. At the end of each interview, I asked participants if they knew of anyone that might be willing to speak with me or allow me to observe them. As word got around, I was able to interview more librarians and library staff. For each person I observed and then interviewed, I gained the name and contact information of another.

Given the limited response from the first location, I decided to expand my recruitment call. With the aid of my colleagues and friends, I reached out to additional locations including

several public libraries in the state and one academic library. Just as in the first location, it took one interview and a few hours of observation to earn more names. I was fortunate, also, that one librarian shared her experience with me on a social networking site. As a result, three additional participants contacted me.

In total, I conducted 32 interviews in ten locations including five public libraries, three academic libraries, two library systems, one hospital library, and one special library. I conducted 28 interviews in person, one over video chat, and three phone interviews. I interviewed 32 individuals over a period of 5 months. Four participants reported some college, two participants held Bachelor's degrees, and 26 participants held a Master's Degree in Library Information Science (MLS). Participants ranged in age from 25 to 65. I did not compare participants on the basis of gender; a very small number of participants were male and identifying their gender would potentially violate their confidentiality. In this dissertation, I will refer to MLS-holding participants as *librarians* and all other participants as *library staff*.

Procedures. Before each interview began, informed consent was obtained from each participant. Each participant was asked to read and sign the consent form. This form included a description of the study, a statement that participation was voluntary and confidential, a reminder that one could withdraw from participation at any time, and the contact information of the researcher, supervising researcher, and University of Illinois Institutional Review Board (see Appendix B). Participants were also asked if they were willing to be audio-recorded. Each participant agreed to be recorded.

Interviews were held in a location of the participant's choice. Many participants chose small, private study rooms within their library. Those participants with private offices asked to be interviewed there. Two participants asked to be interviewed among the book stacks. One

participant was interviewed in a conference room in my department office. A digital recorder was placed in front of the participant. Interviews lasted from 22 minutes to 77 minutes, with the average length being 45 minutes. Each interview was semi-structured (see Appendix C). Interview questions were written in relation to the research questions proposed earlier. The questions were reviewed by my committee and revised as needed during the data collection process.

In addition to interviews, I conducted 76 hours of observation. 60 of those hours were conducted at a large public library in the Midwest. Twelve hours were conducted at an academic library in the Midwest. The remaining hours were conducted at two small public libraries. During these observations, I took a participant-as-observer role (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). In most cases, I was able to sit near the participant and observe. Often, the participant would share commentary with me as others left the area. In a few cases, I was asked to help out. For example, several times I helped carry a few books, look through a shelf for an item, or deliver items as I moved around the library. If my participant walked around, I usually was encouraged to follow. In this way, I was able to develop an understanding of the daily tasks of my participants. As Corbin and Strauss (2008) noted, observation can have its limitations. It is not possible to capture everything relevant to a phenomenon through observation, as Bantz (1983) warned. Participants may also change their language or behavior as a result of an observer's presence. In the case of my primary observation location, I was in the building several times a week and at different times of day. After several visits and interactions with supervisors and library employees, I was offered more access for observation and contact. I also used the location as a place for my own writing and research. This visibility and my developing relationships resulted in permission to freely enter areas of the library for observation, even areas restricted to patrons. I believe the

added visibility aided in my participants' willingness to communicate with me honestly and openly, though I acknowledge they may still behave differently. Throughout the observation, I kept notes about what I was witnessing and my own assumptions and perceptions.

Each interview recording and transcript was assigned a code and a key matching participants' names to the identification number and was kept in a secure location for future contact. The key continues to be stored in a location separate from the transcripts. Each librarian was assigned an initial code and, for ease of reading, pseudonyms were later substituted for the original codes.

I transcribed all interviews verbatim. Transcription included the use of a foot pedal-operated playback device, transcription software called Express Scribe, and a word processor. Half of the interviews were transcribed in this way. The remaining transcripts were transcribed using speech recognition software called Dragon Naturally Speaking (Version 10). Transcripts were then imported into a qualitative data analysis software program called MAXQDA (Version 10). In the next section I will discuss qualitative analysis procedures as well as my use of MAXQDA.

Data Analysis and MAXQDA

Data analysis. Qualitative analysis is the “process of labeling and breaking down” data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 210). Data analysis happens early and often. From the very first field note or interview, researchers begin writing notes and keeping records. I chose to follow grounded theory approaches to data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For example, I wrote memos containing my analysis, interpretation, and self-reflections. In addition, I wrote theoretical memos, conceptual memos, and methodological memos through my data collection and analysis. I also followed grounded theory

approaches to coding. Coding helps make sense of the data collected. This process includes categorizing data with similar properties and coding using concepts that emerge from the data. Though my intent was not to develop a specific theory, the approach provided the best systematic guidance for analysis and leaves room for future theoretical inquiry.

Perhaps the most influential coding procedure is Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory approach. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) considered two major features of the grounded theory approach. The first is that theory comes from the "relationships between the data and the categories into which they are coded" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 218). The second is that codes might change constantly throughout the analysis because the researcher is still in the field. The researcher employs the constant comparison method by comparing each incident to each incident, looking for similarities and differences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The researcher uses open coding, which means she combs the data looking for interesting or relevant themes or ideas and marks them, line by line, into categories. The researcher also uses "in vivo" coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 82). This kind of coding uses the actual terms of the participants. Axial coding includes relating categories to each other (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). This process is a part of integration strategies that push the categories towards theoretical constructs. Researchers also examine the constructs looking for the constructs' characteristics or dimensions (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). To aid in my analysis, I chose to use qualitative data analysis software. In the next section, I first discuss the program and advantages of the program. I then describe my analysis and use of the software.

The use of MAXQDA. In this section, I will first share my reasons for choosing qualitative data analysis software (referred to from here on as QDAS) I will then address concerns some scholars have regarding the use of QDAS. Finally, I will describe my analysis of

my data. I chose to use QDAS to assist in data management (e.g., storage and retrieval) and analysis (e.g., coding and memos). QDAS have a variety of functions. Most qualitative data analysis programs include similar functions such as coding, memo writing, text retrieval, document organization, and attribute tracking. Some programs also include word frequency features, and a variety of content searching and mapping functions. I specifically chose the program MAXQDA for several reasons. First, the program has all the primary features I intended to use including coding, memos, and text retrieval. Secondly, the layout of the program's screen was visually appealing to me. The main screen has four windows: document system, code system, text browser, and retrieved segments. The document system provides access to each of the documents imported into the program such as interview transcripts or organizational documents. The text browser displays the individual text one is working on. The code system is a hierarchical tree showing each of the codes created. Clicking on a code reveals the texts containing the codes in a retrieved segments window. In addition to preferring the four-window screen, the program included functions that might prove useful at a later date including word frequency, matrices, and concept mapping. Finally, the program was affordable.

Before choosing to use QDAS, I considered the criticism of some qualitative researchers about programs in general or QDAS. Bourdon (2001) pointed to the increased use of software to aid qualitative data analysis. He noted that software is seen either as a time saving tool or as "some kind of threat to methodological purity, distancing the researcher from the data" (p. 1). Roberts and Wilson (2002) shared the latter fear and warned that closeness to the data is not possible or likely with software. They warned against the temptation to over-code the data and the possibility of stifled creativity. For them, the sole role of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software is as a storage or retrieval tool.

Qualitative researchers have noted that coding is not and should not be synonymous with analysis (Bong, 2002; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The researcher should remain self-reflexive and, as Bong (2002) emphasized, avoid seeing codes as an objective way to discover meaning. Instead, codes are one way of viewing the data and the researcher recognizes that there could be many other views and many variations of codes depending on the researcher. Seidel (1991) warned that one risk associated with QDAS is “distancing of researcher from data” (p. 112-114). The researcher loses sight of meaning and overall concepts and focuses on the process of coding discrete samples of text.

Gilbert (2002) conducted a study to examine the possibility of losing closeness to data when using QDAS. Her study considered researchers’ switch from manual qualitative data analysis to the use of QDAS. She proffered three stages of distance from the data. She called the first the “tactile-digital divide” (p. 216). She described this as the transition from working on a computer instead of traditional paper methods. Essentially, this is the start of the learning curve when using qualitative data analysis software. At this stage, some individuals in her study felt they were distanced from the data and many combined paper and computer methods. Gilbert referred to Stage 2 as “the coding trap” (p. 218). At this stage, researchers were too involved with the data, spending too much time creating codes and not enough time looking for relationships or analyzing. Some of her participants expressed concern that coding became “mechanical” or simply overdone (p. 219). The third stage is called “the metacognitive shift” (p. 220). Researchers in this stage have developed a better appreciation of the software’s tools and “[learned]” to think about software processes with the same degree of reflectivity that should accompany qualitative research processes” (p. 220). Researchers devised ways of avoiding the coding trap and were cognizant of their own ways of working especially with regards to the

software. Gilbert suggested that researchers should choose their software carefully and preserve the self-reflexivity necessary in qualitative research.

Despite the concerns shared above, I believe QDAS can be a useful analysis aid. Gilbert's participants finally reached a stage in which they could productively use the functions of the software while also preserving their self-reflexivity and creativity through rigorous analysis. Bong (2002) declared that data analysis is not only "expedited" through the use of QDAS but is "more rigorous, thorough, creative, and fun" (p. 4). The software allows for faster coding, better management of the code system, and faster text retrieval. One particularly useful function of MAXQDA is the text retrieval system. The researcher can view all text segments sharing the same code to look for similarities and make conceptual comparisons. Also, the program allows the researcher to see the original text in full, which provides quick access to the context of the quoted segment.

My use of MAXQDA resembled the paper and word processor methods of research. Paper methods of coding and analysis often include printing the interview transcripts, writing codes by hand, cutting up the segments with scissors, and spreading those segments out in front of the researcher. Foss and Waters (2007) provided a helpful and detailed description of this process. Their process included piles of excerpts, sticky notes, envelopes and lots of space. They suggested researchers create initial codes, check those codes by working through the piles of excerpts and experimenting with larger categories and concepts, and develop an explanatory schema using the organized excerpts. Another option for coding and analysis includes word processor assistance. The researcher can have multiple windows of a word processor open. One contains the interview transcript. Another is meant for copying and pasting excerpts for a code. Some researchers also use a third window for keeping an active list of codes. In either of these

options (paper or word processor) it is important that the researcher keep track of the original text by labeling each excerpt carefully. Using the software provided several advantages, in comparison with the paper methods. First, each code was linked to the excerpt from which it came and back to the original interview document, making it easy to keep track of quotations. Also, I could see several coded excerpts side by side, and also several excerpts with similar codes side by side. Secondly, I did not need additional physical space. Also, I was able to limit printing costs and save time. I also felt that the program allowed me to move in and out of my data with ease, make more substantive observations, and engage in the constant comparative method with more precision and better tracking of ideas.

Analysis process. Before data collection began, I wrote several memos using MAXQDA's memo system. In the program, one can create stand-alone memos or attach memos to any document or text segment. My first memos included broader theoretical and methodological reflections about my project. I also wrote several memos about my concerns with field entry. For example, my initial interactions with librarians indicated a certain hesitation to participate. It became clear to me that these potential participants were concerned about my relationship with management. I was required to seek permission from the library director in order to observe in the facility so several librarians and library staff were concerned that I was working for management and might be checking up on the employees.

As interview transcripts were completed, they were uploaded into the document system and given an identification number. One advantage of MAXQDA, or any QDAS, is the audit trail it leaves for increased organization and accountability. I read through each interview transcript once and wrote a summary memo with initial ideas. Additionally, I differentiated between theoretical, conceptual, and methodological memos as recommended by Corbin and

Strauss (2008). I then began the open coding process. In paper methods, the researcher writes a code in the margins of an interview transcript. MAXQDA works in much the same way. One selects the excerpt or text segment and adds a code, which appears in the margin and is also added to the code tree. One can add as many codes to a segment as one likes. Additionally, I added memos as needed. I used in-vivo coding frequently, using the original words of the participant. When I started to see a repetition in a code, I added it to my Code Bar. This is a feature that allows the researcher to more quickly code by using existing codes as opposed to retyping the code. This feature also allows the researcher to make initial notes regarding themes and patterns. Initial codes, for example, included “what we actually do,” “everyone in a library is a librarian myth,” and “education.” I first worked through each interview, one at a time, assigning codes to that interview. I then compared across interviews as well.

After I had my initial list of codes, I began the process of axial coding in which the researcher starts combining categories, creating subcategories, and making connections. Using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), I moved back and forth between interview transcripts. With the assistance of the text retrieval window, I was also able to make comparisons by code. I could look at several excerpts sharing the same code or similar codes in one window. For example, several codes were related to what librarians *do*. There were also several codes related to *librarian-related* work tasks. It was through the process of comparison across interviews that I came to the idea of *activity*. Several codes such as *mousy*, *Marian the Librarian*, and *shush* were grouped into a broader category I called *misconceptions*. I continued to refine the codes and create memos to keep track of themes and patterns. Also, I used the attribute feature in which I had entered each participant’s library type, age range, and degree. This feature enabled me to look specifically at individuals holding the MLS or look across age

groups. I was able to use the code tree to look more broadly at the codes I had developed, consider themes and concepts, and make connections to move toward explanation and theory.

I reviewed memos, categories of codes, individual codes, and text segments several times throughout the process. I began to group codes together, discovering similarities across participants' descriptions of their education, their activities, their concerns about the public's misconceptions, and the values of librarians. I completed several rounds of coding and several rounds of comparisons. I attempted comparisons between librarians and library staff, but due to a considerably low number of library staff I did not have sufficient data to make broader claims about the differences. I wrote several memos, also, regarding issues I was not able to explore further at this time. For example, some participants indicated conflicts with management, but asked that these discussions be held off the record. This memo serves as a reminder to explore such issues in future projects.

It was during this stage of analysis that I began considering how the codes and corresponding excerpts were examples of constitutive rhetoric and how the codes created a picture of profession, librarians, and librarianship. For example, several participants mentioned *librarian work*. It became clear to me that they were defining this phrase in particular ways, such as by describing it as work that involved knowledge acquired in a degree program or work that was complex. Using the code tree and the retrieved segments, I was able to review the rhetoric of librarians and work in a broader conceptual framework. As a result, I connected to themes and patterns in more detailed and narrow ways as well as more abstract ways. This process also kept me aware of the broader context of the interview. In additional rounds of analysis, I reviewed codes and interview excerpts focusing on the rhetoric defining, negotiating, protecting, defending, or constituting profession and professional identity. I also made a note whenever an

individual appeared to be performing professional identity or when a participant recognized the interview as a situation in which they felt they needed to perform an identity for me. For example, one participant expressed concern that she was giving me enough “useful” information.

Earlier, I mentioned that some researchers warned against losing the process of analysis in the process of using a software program. I found that the program allowed me to do the same activities I had performed in paper methods with greater speed and also allowed me a better system for keeping track of my thoughts, findings, and process. In an effort to compare the paper methods to the software, I printed out several interview transcripts I had not read in some time and performed my coding by hand. I also printed out the text segments of several codes and used the scissor and sticky note method mentioned early. Not only did I find the paper method more tedious and time-consuming, I found it limited my ability to try more combinations and make more comparisons. Within the software, I could very quickly and easily move back and forth between texts and codes and start over as often as necessary. The paper method made this more difficult. Whenever I felt the software was potentially limiting my ability to make connections, I returned to the paper methods and sought the input of colleagues. As a qualitative scholar, I believe in making a mess of the data before you organize it into informative categories.

With regard to Gilbert’s (2002) three stages of distance from data, I did experience these stages to some extent. During the learning stage, I felt daunted by the task of using the software and was unsure that I could work within the box on the screen. I did not, however, miss the tactile sensation of papers in my lap or the printing expenditures. I remained conscious of the coding trap and after each interview, reviewed how many codes I had assigned and considered whether I had lost sight of my research questions in the process. One advantage of open coding in a system that encourages more, faster coding is that I identified issues that were not directly

related to my current research questions but might be useful in future projects. At times during the open coding, I did feel overwhelmed and perhaps too close to my data as many of Gilbert's participants shared. Taking breaks to write memos, and return to earlier conceptual ideas, helped move me along. Finally, I sensed my "metacognitive shift", as Gilbert called it (p. 220). As noted above, I found ways to escape the coding trap and used memos as one way to remain self-reflexive.

In this chapter, I have reviewed qualitative research assumptions and methods. I then argued for a view of interviews as rhetorical situations. Next, I shared the data collection procedures including recruitment and interview procedures. Finally, I discussed my data analysis methods in combination with my use of qualitative data analysis software. My findings are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: DEFINING *LIBRARIAN*

Researcher: What do you think people say when they describe a librarian?

Library Staff: Well, they see all of us as librarians because I always have to turn and correct them.

Researcher: You correct people when they call you a librarian?

Library Staff: I do correct them, 'cause I don't want them to think I'm librarian 'cause: one, I can't do the searches like everybody at the, as the librarians can, and so I don't want them to think that I'm stupid (laughs).

My very first interview for this project was with Jan, the library staff member quoted above. She worked at a Midwest public library and was the first to respond to my recruitment email. I was ecstatic to meet and interview my first librarian. She gave me a tour of the library, introduced me to various librarians and library staff, and taught me a few things about the way library hierarchy works. When she informed me that she was not, in fact, a librarian, I panicked. The conversation quoted above does not adequately reveal my surprise. When I asked, “So you correct people?” it sounded, in my head, a bit more like “What? You aren’t a librarian? Wait, should I be interviewing you? Wait, does it even matter? No, you have to be a librarian!” Fortunately, my better judgment prevailed and I asked the simpler question. Though I make light of this moment here, it was an important moment for my understanding of my participants. Using the word *librarian* means something. Jan didn’t feel comfortable using that word to describe herself. Her primary reasons included her lack of an MLS degree and her inability to perform searches as well as librarians. Jan was also not surprised at my surprise. She noted that most people do not really understand librarians. This sentiment was repeated time and again by

every participant I interviewed and each participant attempted to articulate a more accurate description of a librarian.

Librarians in this study felt that the public has misconceptions about librarians and especially about what they do. Participants resisted negative stereotypes and problematic perceptions in three ways. First, participants rejected negative stereotypes as false. Second, participants articulated what librarians actually do, in contrast to the public's view and in contrast to non-librarians. In fact, participants spent less time responding directly to the stereotypes, and more time discussing their sense that the public does not understand or appreciate the complexity of their activities as librarians. Participants focused on the activities librarians do, and stressed the unique, complex, and important nature of the work. Third, participants aligned librarians with the larger profession and, in particular, described librarians as individuals committed to the values and standards of the profession. Participants added meaning and value to their work by associating it with the profession's broader mission and values. The findings in this chapter suggest that librarians' define the profession, and their own professional identities, by the specialized activities, values, and standards of the discipline.

When a librarian speaks to me as a librarian, she establishes her identity, my identity, and our relationship. For most of my participants, I was a community member and researcher. Talking with me was a part of their job. I do not mean this to imply it was a part of their organizational job duties. Rather, participants saw communicating with me as serving their public and by extension serving their field. This study finds that the title *librarian* carries special meaning for degreed librarians. The rhetoric of librarians in this study reveals how individuals differentiate types of work and ascribe meaning and value to their activities and titles. In this chapter, I first consider participants' reports that the public has serious stereotypes and

misconceptions of librarians: stereotypes and misconceptions librarians feel lead to a lack of respect and social status. I then provide participants' construction of librarians by considering how they differentiated job activities, justified the need for advanced education, and endorsed the values and standards of their profession.

Stereotypes and Misconceptions

When asked about what people say when they describe a librarian, participants' responses usually indicated that they felt the public has several misconceptions about librarians. These included people's misconceptions about librarians' appearance and personality, job tasks, job title, and educational background. Many participants noted the negative stereotypes of librarians. They felt this problem either stemmed from, or perhaps led to, larger misconceptions plaguing the discipline. In this section, I begin with participants' discussion of negative stereotypes and then turn to participants' comments regarding the various misconceptions they face.

Stereotypes about who Librarians are

My participants shared a variety of terms when explaining how they think the public views librarians. Though I had not asked about stereotypes, each participant started with similar adjectives they felt the public would use to describe librarians. These adjectives included: mousy, shy, bookish, spinster, glasses, bun, and smart, among others. When I asked one librarian, Connor, what people outside of libraries say when they describe a librarian he paused, raised his eyebrows, and said with a chuckle: "Dare I say it? Marian the Librarian?" For this participant, the name rolled off his tongue with ease and a sense of humor. The Marian image is of a single, bookish, hardworking, socially awkward, spinster woman.

Though not every participant mentioned the Marian character, this reference represents a larger theme in my data. All of my participants noted negative stereotypes they feel patrons have of librarians. For some participants, the stereotypes were unimportant and even a nuisance to think of during the interview. For other individuals, it was simply funny. For most, the stereotypes were a serious problem in and for the profession. Reagan frowned and said “I don’t know. I think people tend to focus on the bad rather than the good, so I’m a little bit scared, you know, nobody’s perfect.” Emily, on the other hand, joked: “Oh, I know what they say! They think we are old and poor dressers and quiet; you know shushing and all that kind of stuff.” Another participant, Caitlan, looked down sheepishly and said “I do shush people sometimes (pause) but I’ve never had a bun!” The majority of my participants mentioned words like “shush,” “shy”, and “mousy.” The repetition of these terms alerted me to the widespread concern over these images of librarians. Participants were often offended by these images and felt they distracted from their mission and role in libraries. Lewis found the stereotypes “irritating” and “damaging”:

Cats, knitting, buns. Shhh (pause) um, I’ve followed the word librarian in popular culture, and it’s not well thought of. We have a terrible stereotype. It’s a curmudgeonly old bitty, a crone, a prude (pause) and unfortunately I’m not a ‘typical’ librarian, so that stereotype rubs me wrong. Though I certainly saw a bit of that. People’s images of what we are and what we do is so limited.

Lewis was very animated while discussing this issue. Being a male between 35 and 45 years old, he was offended that the public does not recognize younger, male librarians. Lewis felt librarians were in a difficult loop: negative stereotypes led to people not appreciating or

respecting what librarians can do and the lack of appreciation or awareness of what librarians do reinforces negative stereotypes.

Not every librarian was as frustrated or even animated about the issue of stereotypes. Some, to my surprise, did not seem to care. Matt shrugged and said, “I don’t know. I don’t pay attention. It’s funny; this is a place where we are so busy just trying to get the work done. And I don’t worry much about those outside types of issues.” I was struck by his use of the terminology “outside types of issues.” Matt seemed to feel these larger issues were a matter for the profession at large. For him, getting through the day did not rely on addressing image issues. Later, Matt indicated that he expected the ALA to deal with the issue, though he acknowledged he wanted to work hard to give people a good experience with a librarian.

In some cases, participants seemed resigned to the stereotypes. Jason said, “Oh, well, bookish. Somebody that likes books.” Kim remarked, “You know, I don’t know. I know there is that stereotype of the librarian going ‘shush’” and Ruth commented, “A lot of times there is the idea that librarians are quiet little people who are there to answer your questions and get a book.” Ruth emphasized *book* and rolled her eyes. She went on to say that librarians are most certainly there to help answer questions, but not just any question. She also insisted that they do much more than get patrons books. Debbie simply sighed and suggested that “people have these misconceptions that we may be somebody who wears orthopedic shoes, has her hair in a bun, who is saying shush (pause) and some of the people I have met are not that way at all.” Debbie went on to joke that since she has been in the library for over 20 years, she has started wearing orthopedic shoes! She was quick to point out, though, that this did not mean she was not extremely skilled at searches and other tasks. Though some participants dismissed these

stereotypes, all of them felt that the public focuses on these negative stereotypes when they think of librarians.

Some librarians indicated, however, that a shift in those perceptions might be occurring. Beth claimed, “People are starting to say ‘oh, I know some really cool librarians’.” Charlotte pointed out that media outlets are starting to highlight librarianship as a new and cool profession:

Gosh it seems like every year there is some new media outlet that discovers librarians and declares them the new hip occupation. And a couple of years ago it was the *New York Times* and they had these pictures of young, hipster librarians with tattoos, and big, thick, black glasses (pause) and I see that and I’m like that’s great, you want to make us hip that’s fine. Just make sure that people understand that, you know librarians have always been that way. Librarians have always been in the forefront of free speech and advocating for access to information.

In this comment, Charlotte emphasized the values she wants individuals to recognize. Later in this chapter, I discuss these values in more depth. Here, however, this quotation draws attention to the librarian’s desire to distance librarians from physical depictions and focus instead on the profession’s values and the role of librarians in protecting those values.

Several librarians referenced an article entitled “A Hipper Crowd of Shushers” (Jesella, 2007). Jesella (2007) mentioned the old view of librarians as “bespectacled women with a love of classic books and a perpetual annoyance with talkative patrons” and suggested the image is changing. The article credits shifts in technology and the need for information not found in books with some of the change. According to the article, there has been “an increasing number of librarians who are notable not just for their pink-streaked hair but also for their passion for pop culture, activism, and technology” (Jesella, 2007). Charlotte felt the image of librarians is

changing every time the media “discovers” librarians again. On the other hand, the title of that article reinforces the shushing stereotype. Caitlan also noted the portrayals of librarians in recent years: “Oh, well, you can read plenty of examples when you read articles about ‘it’s not just the librarians with the bun going shush anymore.’ Although, we do actually (pause) I do shush people sometimes.” Beth suggested that some people even use “geeky” with pride or use a “hot librarian joke thing.” In a July 2010 National Public Radio post, Linda Holmes declared libraries the “Next Big Pop-Culture Wave After Cupcakes,” referencing recent press about librarians as professionals and the importance of libraries. Librarians and libraries have been in the press frequently in 2010, from a YouTube video called “Librarians do Gaga” and the Old Spice actor doing a video for libraries to the Chicago Public Library Commissioner taking Fox Chicago to task for questioning the existence of libraries. Some participants saw this increased media attention as an opportunity to change perceptions of librarians.

Misconceptions about what Librarians do

Most of my participants felt that the stereotypes represented a larger problem for librarians: the public does not understand what a librarian does. Often, they expressed this in direct response to my question regarding the public’s perceptions. Additionally, however, when describing their job, discussing an ideal day, or sharing what they felt it means to be a librarian, they would mention these misconceptions. Aubrey sighed and said: “Even my own family thinks I just sit here and read books. That’s all I do? I wish!” Carol wondered if one reason for this perception is the assumption that “we are sitting at a public desk waiting for someone to come in” and use that time to read. Librarians noted that patrons often have a narrow view of a librarian’s role. Marilyn remarked: “I think they have really very little understanding of what goes on, of what librarians actually do. I think what they see is people who check out books in a

circulation desk.” Emily joked: “I haven’t checked out a book in five years. And that was to myself.” Another librarian, Jillian, suggested that people think librarians shelve books.

Participants expressed frustration at the perception that librarians get to read all day.

Aubrey declared loudly:

Oh yeah! People think we read all day. Well, that would be really great. I would totally love my job every day if that were the case. We don’t read on the job. Occasionally, I’ll flip through a professional journal [on a break] (pause) but you don’t read every day.

Reading happens at home. It is really busy here.

In this example, not only does Aubrey reject the reading misconception, but justifies any reading on the job by claiming it would only be professional journals and, presumably, an acceptable activity. Trina believed that “people who went through library school and they went through all the schooling to get to that level, may be frustrated sometimes that they are not [respected].”

Joann shared this sentiment and claimed people “don’t realize the technical complexity that goes into (pause) um (pause) getting records into the catalog, providing system support for electronic resources.” An academic librarian, Marilyn, shared her concern that even the faculty at her institution didn’t see “the degree to which [librarians] are involved in the technology...that they use and take for granted.” Many librarians felt that they are under-appreciated. Kevin elaborated:

I think that people have no idea how public and academic librarians are working with technology every single day, having to keep up with rapid changes in technology, thinking about the future of technology, working on how to take existing technology that may not be library technology and apply it to libraries (pause) I don’t think people have any idea how much technological and computer savvy librarians have and have to have.

These comments suggest that participants believed if the public understood the complexity of librarians' activities or appreciated the tech-savvy nature of librarians, people would come to appreciate and respect librarians more. One public librarian, Caitlan, spoke for several minutes about all the hard work librarians have to do even though none of the patrons appreciate that fact: "It is the hardest job I've ever had (pause) although it's interesting, it is really the hardest. But people don't realize that. And they don't realize how many problems we have to deal with." Participants did not appreciate having their job reduced to reading books, shelving books, or checking out books. In fact, some librarians were frustrated that patrons only see the library as a place to get books, at least in the public library. Connor noted, "People assume it is just about the book. I don't think people understand that it's not necessarily about books, but it's basically a transmission of information, knowledge, wisdom, whatever you would like to call it." Jason felt that people see libraries as "big book warehouses." Lewis echoed this sentiment:

Our brand of book is so strong, that they only think of books, and they have no idea anything else we do. Not even an article database. I don't even think most people even know that we do articles.

Librarians, especially in public libraries, lamented that patrons don't realize the resources available to them both in the form of material and help librarians can offer. These complaints were not simply aimed at patrons' lack of awareness. Participants emphasized the consequences of the misconceptions: patrons do not respect a librarian's role or status. Many participants noted that patrons think they are limited to helping locate books or plugging in mp3 players. During one observation a librarian, Reagan, returned to me after helping a patron and said sarcastically, "Sure, all I wanted to do all day today was help you play with your music. Answering a real question just seems like too much work." Several participants said that people will ask just about

anything from where the bathrooms are located to what time it is. Lewis described these types of questions as frustrating:

And when your reference questions go from, say, less than 10% are where the bathrooms are, to over 70% are where the bathrooms are, and you realize that the simple addition of a sign would probably help... we could have eliminated that huge chunk of our time-wasting experience, and you wouldn't be sitting there behind the desk saying to yourself 'I got a master's degree for this?' That was a frustration.

Fewer bathroom questions would allow librarians to spend more time with serious reference questions. These kinds of questions were not only representative of patrons' lack of awareness about the abilities and skills of the librarians; they also, to participants, indicated a lack of respect for the education and skills librarians possess. Some participants even blamed the library administration for not ensuring that the degreed librarians worked on activities commensurate with their education and skills. For Reagan, and many other participants, these types of questions were an affront to their self-perceived status. Julie felt responsible for helping people realize how much a librarian can help:

I have really made an effort to be proactive about. If people are coming to me that means they have wasted a lot of time looking for it themselves, and I want to be their first stop, not their last.

Julie in this comment is literally hoping to have the chance to help someone. This quotation also reveals that Julie believes some people are not able to do the same information searching quickly and efficiently, hence the need for a librarian like her. Rachel complained that

the other negative thing...is that our time is spent answering a lot of questions about 'how do I get on the computer?' or 'why can't I get this to work' or 'why can't I get Wi-Fi to work' and it puts us in a position where we feel a little unbalanced...and it kind of means you can't do some of the other things that used to be more librarian related jobs.

This comment illustrates that librarians see the true nature of their work as different from other tasks in the organization. For Rachel, there are certain activities that are "more librarian related" and helping someone on the computer is not one of those activities. Furthermore, Rachel and other participants shared this sensation of being "unbalanced" when they were not able to work on *librarian activities*, or those activities more central to their roles and professional identities.

Though not every participant used the phrase *librarian related*, most participants made comments that echoed this sentiment. It became clear to me as I worked through the interview transcripts that all of my participants shared a sense of differentiation. I returned to several participants during observations and asked them more directly about this idea. They were each able to provide me a description of which activities they felt were part of their role as a librarian and which were not. After my seventh interview, I wrote a memo describing my observation that each participant, to that point, had described frustration, anxiety, aggravation, or a sense of being unbalanced regarding certain kinds of tasks. For example, I asked participants to describe an ideal day and a bad day. In both cases, participants often indicated that certain work activities such as staff meetings were interruptions to their day and made them feel like something was keeping them from being librarians. All librarians in this study, whether directly or indirectly, echoed the idea that certain activities were librarian related.

Another misconception librarians emphasized relates to this idea that certain activities are more *librarian* than others. Participants claimed that the public assumes that everyone working in a library must be a librarian. Julie complained,

Seriously, I think there's (pause) anybody who works (pause), to somebody who walks in a library anybody who works in a library is a librarian. It doesn't matter, they could be a student page, they can be civil service if you are in an academic library and actually some public libraries, and it's just assumed that everybody who works there is a librarian.

This librarian listed other available and common job titles within a library but felt patrons do not recognize the differences. Trina said, "A lot of people think that whoever is working here is a librarian. And for people who went through library school and they went through all the schooling to get to that level, may be frustrated some times." This participant suggested that the mistaken labeling might be problematic for librarians who worked for the title. Some participants felt that assuming all library employees are librarians is insulting and diminishes the status a librarian deserves. As evident in Trina's comment, being a librarian means having worked to a higher "level" than other library staff. My first participant, the one I quoted at the start of this chapter, felt strongly that she did not have the same skills as a librarian and it would be a disservice to patrons if she tried to do the same activities. As such, she did not claim the title librarian and even corrected patrons when they referred to her as a librarian.

Rachel was quite frustrated with this misconception and claimed that people are always "making the assumption that everyone who works in a library is a librarian. And they're not!" Megan was slightly more dismissive about the misconception. She said, "Most people that come to our desk pretty much think that anybody that works in a library is a librarian." She laughed and continued, "Which I'm ok with." For her, it was simply easier than trying to find a way to

correct people. Megan said that she could not envision a way of correcting people without taking away time from more important tasks like helping a patron get the information they needed.

Participants delineated carefully between which activities were librarian activities and which activities any other library staff member could perform. In doing so, participants were attempting to construct a particular view of librarians and carve out their space as professionals.

Another participant's comments illustrate the value associated with the title *librarian*. At one academic library, I interviewed a civil service staff member, Ruth, who had an MLS degree. She informed me that usually civil service individuals do not have the MLS. Despite having the degree, which she felt would normally entitle her to use the title librarian, she did not call herself a librarian within the academic library. In her particular organization, the division between the staff and faculty precluded her from using the title. However, Ruth said,

Outside the library, I call myself a librarian, because I work in a library and people think that if you work in a library you are a librarian. I don't want to go into that here. I'm staff and they're faculty.

Ruth felt insulted that she was not allowed to use the title. Ruth told me she felt better about herself when she could just say outright that she was a librarian. She wanted this title, and felt the right to claim the title when she was away from internal library politics. Though she identified as a librarian, she followed the organizational culture that labeled civil service employees as library staff and only allowed use of the title *librarian* if one had a degree and faculty status.

Other librarians seemed hopeful that patrons are starting to realize that librarians are different from other library workers. Matt said, "I think things have changed with, you know, technology has pushed things in every field and maybe professionalized [librarianship] more in people's minds." The use of the word "professionalized" here is noteworthy. This librarian

associated complex activities as markers of professional work. Though I had not yet used the word profession or professional, this participant, and several others, called forth the idea of professionalization. They wanted the public to understand their role as professionals, a role requiring training and skill. For my participants, however, the public's perceptions of librarians as mousy, shy women who shelve and read books was a major limitation to the status, respect, and appreciation librarians felt they deserved.

In fact, several participants felt that the stereotype led to patrons mistaking the job of a librarian as one that did not require a degree. Debbie said, "I don't think that people realize that librarians have to have a master degree either, you know. I didn't know that really, until I got into the field and really started looking." Emily laughed and said:

[Patrons] are surprised to learn that you need a library degree (pause) because they think all we do is check out books. 'You need a degree to check out books?' Oh, I don't know how many times I've heard that!

Rachel expressed more frustration: "Someone always says 'why in the world do you need a master's degree to do this job?' They're sort of denigrating to what you do." Ashley shared similar agitation:

A grad student in education said something like 'oh that must be an easy degree to get' and I said 'excuse me, I actually took classes on how to evaluate reference materials, how to value a book to know what's good for the library, I took management classes...there is a lot you have to go through.

For these librarians, the degree indicated a level of effort necessary to earn the title *librarian* and should have been a sign that librarians have complex and unique skills. Kim questioned whether it was a "popular perception" after her friend "didn't think [librarianship] was something that

would need a degree and that it was just something easy, like any person could just walk off the street and manage a library.” Librarians not only felt that patrons minimize their daily job tasks, but also doubt their professional status.

Near the end of each interview, I asked participants “Would you call yourself a librarian?” Usually by that point in the conversation, it was fairly clear to me whether each person self-identified as a librarian or not. Still, I felt it important to ask if they used this label. Every MLS degree-holding participant said yes to this question. All but one non-degreed participant said no. The exception was a library director at a smaller public library. She used the term but did not feel it meant much, nor did she feel her lack of a degree mattered. She also did not feel strongly that she was a member of a profession.

For many participants, the answer to my question was obvious. For example, Jason replied immediately, “Oh, yeah,” and nodded vigorously. Beth simply said “Mm-hmm” and admitted to me later that it seemed a strange question with an obvious answer. Trina, a library director who had not engaged in more traditional librarian activities in many years, said, “Yes, I think I still would.” At the end of the interview with this library director, she actually thanked me for helping her remember the things she loved about her job and that she was still a librarian. Troy answered “Yeah, without a doubt.” Several of my interviews were conducted during the spring, right around tax filing deadlines. Some of those participants even referred to what they answered when filling out their tax form. Matt said, for example, “Oh, sure. I mean, that’s what I put on my tax form when they say ‘what’s your occupation,’ when you put your 1040 and it asks ‘what’s your occupation’ it’s very simple.” Participants’ responses were very similar, however one stands out. Aubrey sat straighter in her chair and declared loudly: “Yes, I would! Absolutely!” She expressed great pride in her profession, her title, and the work she did to get it.

Of course, all of these comments about the title and who has the right to claim it beg the questions: What makes a librarian a librarian? How does one decide she or he can use that title? One answer was that librarians do certain kinds of activities. Another was that librarians are individuals who have an MLS. Finally, participants defined a librarian as someone who understands the principles of the field, upholds shared values, and is committed to the standards of the profession. Participants countered stereotypes and misconceptions by articulating what they saw as the true features of librarians and the profession. Librarians emphasized the uniqueness and complexity of their daily activities, differentiated *librarian* activities from other work, and aligned themselves with the profession's educational requirements, values, and standards. In the next sections, I first discuss further the activity focus participants used to reject misconceptions and defend their professional status. I then turn to the values and standards participants emphasized.

Defining *Librarian*: Activities

Participants not only rejected misconceptions, but they defined the activities they most associated with their discipline and title and those they found most enjoyable. When librarians were asked to describe what it means to be a librarian, many answered with action verbs, describing the activities they associated with their role. Troy described it as

one way or another providing access to information, whether that's helping people use what's there, finding what they need, defining what they need, selecting things that they could use, organizing things so they can use them, all of those things.

Each part of this list is a specific action related to information: providing, finding, defining, selecting, and organizing. Joann's response sounded similar: "It means that my specialty, my role, is organizing information and interpreting it in a form that is usable to patrons." Jason, an

academic librarian, also emphasized the librarian's job to "facilitate the learning of students." Matt said, "The librarians are the ones who pick the collections...do regular programming." During an observation with Matt, he turned to me after working with a patron and said: "See, I answered that tough question. That's what a librarian has to be ready to do." Many of my participants defined their roles as librarians by sharing a set of tasks they associated most with their job. From organizing to interpreting to facilitating, librarians were strongly tied to the tasks they must perform and most often linked their identity to these tasks. Earlier, I quoted Rachel who said certain activities were "more librarian related." These tasks were considered complex, specialized, and essential to their *librarian* identity. Librarians defined their role by defining their activities and differentiating them as uniquely librarian. This rhetorical strategy of labeling certain activities *librarian* indicates participants' desire to protect their professional status, assert their skills, and improve their image. Rachel acknowledged that librarians must do a variety of other tasks in the organization. However, she noted that these activities were not part of what makes an individual a librarian, nor were these non-librarian activities as fun.

Participants associated certain activities with fun and personal accomplishment. One of the ways I was able to understand their delineation between *librarian* and non-librarian activities was through which activities they valued and enjoyed the most. These activities were specifically related to librarian work: talking with patrons, answering reference questions, working with or building the collection, teaching, leading programs, or taking care of other library projects. Rarely did librarians credit organization-sponsored events with bringing enjoyment or pleasure to their day. Several librarians mentioned library administration sponsored events such as employee-of-the-month lunches or picnics. These events, however, were seen as the organization attempting to create fun and not as truly enjoyable or fulfilling as other activities. For librarians,

the real fun was tied to their professional activities and motivation was derived from enjoyment of completing interesting and challenging *librarian* tasks. Julie, a librarian at a special library that helps local business create sustainability plans, said:

I like talking to other people, I like doing. I really like doing the workshops, I like talking to people about how to live a more sustainable life in the workplace... I really like developing new information resources, so it is always fun for me to be able to when I have the time to do it sit down and develop a new guide or something like that, on the subject guide or something like that. I also just like going out and scanning, reading news, I do an environmental news blog so I like going out and looking for stories for that trying to find a good mix of stuff that's kind of fun with stuff that's a little more serious.

The fun at work was in the *doing* of the work. A crucial aspect of this work was helping patrons get the information they need. The hunt for information and the developing of resources to share that information were equally important. Beth shared this love for developing resources and enjoyed “figuring out a cool way to get information to other librarians.”

The act of helping the patron was also an important part of fun. The fun happens when “the light goes on and they think now ‘I know how to do it’ and you know, it’s sort of like when that happened that made everything else worthwhile. And let me tell you it is a long, long struggle up that hill” (Connor). Another librarian, Ruth, also saw the reward in helping the patron: “It is rewarding when they are like ‘oh, that’s just what I need’ or ‘I didn’t know how to search for that, thank you so much’ and I know then they can go off and do the rest of their research.” Troy felt “completely invigorated” after teaching students at an academic library. Kevin described working with students as “a lot of fun” when they ask interesting questions and seek help finding materials. Librarians described what it means to be a librarian, in part, by

explaining to me what a librarian's job entails. They also used these explanations as a way to clarify that librarians do not merely read books, shelve books, or help patrons find a bathroom. Instead, participants saw their role as librarians as complex and essential to serving a patron's information needs.

Participants also emphasized the importance of completing these specific tasks above all other tasks. I asked participants to describe a good day. Most of them described a good day as seeing their specialized activities through to completion, without interruption. Interruptions were typically associated with the organization. For example, staff meetings or paperwork were seen as interruptions. Librarians did not, however, complain about additional patrons interrupting them while working with another patron; serving additional patrons was an important librarian activity. Instead, they lamented not being able to help and faulted the organization for limiting their ability to complete job tasks.

Though emphasis on finishing a day's work might seem, at first glance, a universal desire for workers, participants emphasized completing activities related to their professional role. For example, Kevin described a good day: "I'd accomplish a lot of tasks...and they were all related in some way to satisfying people's need for information or for action and solutions." In this example, information, an important part of a librarian's mission, is most important. Joann, an academic librarian responsible for cataloging and training other librarians, saw a good day as a day to "get a lot of cataloging done" and leading a good training session. Beth exclaimed, "I love working at the reference desk" and felt a good day was completing several transactions with patrons in which patrons left satisfied. Violet shared this feeling: "When I can help a patron resolve an issue or help them find something or have the time to be able to do a little above and beyond to help them find something and if they are appreciative...it makes you feel good." These

participants wanted to perform the activities of their field because these activities brought them enjoyment and satisfaction.

Participants also wanted a “mix of things” (Troy), which included time at the reference desk, teaching or running a program, and doing a side project like research or book purchasing. Reagan specifically chose public libraries because she “liked the variety.” She wanted to work in a place where she could engage in all the various activities she trained for in library school. For example, Reagan liked a day that included ordering books and magazines, working in the teen area, recommending a few books, and working with materials. Participants appreciated a day in which they could work on all aspects of their position. Several participants even mentioned the joy of working with materials. For one librarian/archivist, Cara, getting to “play with the old stuff” made for a complete day. Kim saw working with the books, whether ordering them or seeing what’s being checked out, as a fun part of the day. Ruth declared: “I care about the books that I want patrons to be able to continue to use.” Several children’s librarians expressed excitement for days when new materials arrive in the department because they could decide where to put them and how to advertise them to patrons. Participants claimed that one of the reasons they wanted to work in libraries was because of the variety of skills they could employ in a single day. Once again, however, the activities they really wanted to engage in were specific to their profession.

Defining *Librarian*: Education and Values

In addition to delineating activities as a way to assert a professional identity, participants also ascribed meaning and value to those activities by associating them with advanced training and professional values. Participants defined librarians as individuals with degrees who support the standards and mission of the discipline. By aligning themselves with a broader mission,

participants added meaning to their work and aligned their individual professional identities with the collective identity. In this section, I review participants' construction of a librarian as someone with a degree who understands the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the discipline and is committed to upholding the values and standards of the profession.

The Degree: "I'm an MLS"

Some participants associated the title *librarian* with individuals holding an MLS. Numerous times, participants used phrases like "I'm an MLS" or "She's an MLS." For example, when I was recruiting, several people offered to connect me to their friends in other locations. Typically their comment sounded something like: "I'd be happy to help you. I can hook you up with my friend; she's an MLS." Librarian identity was so closely tied to having the degree that one could be called the degree. It is no wonder, then, that participants were offended when patrons did not understand the difference between a degreed librarian and any other library staff member. Ashley, for example, complained that people think "that anyone who works in a library is a librarian." Her defense for differentiating between librarians and other library staff emphasized the education:

No. No. Because, like, I have the degree. Most of the rest of them don't have a degree in library science. They are library employees and I am not saying that they can't help people, but I've taken classes for some of this stuff, but they haven't. But most people think that everybody who works in a library is a librarian.

Ashley indicates sensitivity to rejecting some individuals as non-librarians. She suggests that individuals without the degree are still serving patrons. Still, Ashley separates professionals from all others. Jenny, a library staff member, said the "official difference" between support staff and librarians is the MLS degree. Aubrey also focused on the degree:

Um. I hate to be one of those ‘it means I have a Masters’ degree in Library Science’ people. But to me to some extent, that is part of what it is. I see this as my profession. I see this as my career. This is what I do. And I have [pause] no problem with people who don’t have the degree calling themselves a librarian. As long as they are doing professional level tasks and they treat it as something they do professionally.

Once again, we see a participant trying to avoid giving offense when differentiating library workers. Her justification is that when an individual has a degree she sees the position as a profession or career. She also felt that certain tasks are more professional than others. These tasks included traditional library tasks such as reference interviews, collection development, and cataloging. However, these tasks had to be at a certain “level.” Though she could not articulate what that level meant, her comment that people using the term must see their job as “something they do professionally” is telling. These words suggest a type of attitude or motivation that is somehow unique to being a professional. Her comments also indicate that defining *professional* is difficult because it is a taken-for-granted, understood kind of term. Aubrey’s comments, as well as the comments of other participants, allude to a difference in the actual professional (in this case, the librarian) and the person “calling themselves” or borrowing the title and performing professionally (professional tasks and professional attitude). The people who borrow the title are not actual professionals; they are just behaving *like* professionals.

Matt also implied that being a librarian means a certain commitment or attitude, though he was less comfortable than Aubrey with non-degreed individuals using the title:

I mean, I’m not big on people calling themselves librarians and they’re not because it did take a lot of work for people. ‘Cause I think the difference is that, there are folks, even though you have people who work in libraries for their entire careers and don’t have an

MLS and work stuff like that, but they're in for a penny in for a pound when you go to library school and do the whole thing. That's what you've chosen.

The phrase “in for a penny in for a pound” is a colloquialism that means one is all in, willing to take all the risks and consequences that come with one's decision. Matt seemed to feel that people who do not pursue the degree but continue to work in a library are not willing to make that sacrifice or commitment. He went on to explain that people with a degree have an “ethical background” and understand “this is why it's developed that way, these are the good reasons it was developed that way, and this is why...the profession pushed it.” In other words, when one has the degree, one is capable of understanding best practices and the foundational reasons behind those practices. Matt also noted the difference in activities librarians get to do because they have that foundation, such as collection development and regular programming. Matt pointed out that librarians don't “wear rank and insignia and things like that” so sometimes you only know what skills each person has as opposed to their formal title. In this case, giving someone the title in the library indicates what activities he is capable of doing.

I noted, with each of these examples, the hesitation with which these participants defended the degree. In other words, I sensed that, to some extent, participants were apologetic about the degree as a requirement for the title. Even Matt, who did not like people using the title if they hadn't earned it, started with “I mean...” and continued to justify and explain his reason for protecting the title. Aubrey used the phrase “Um, I hate to be one of those people.” She actually expressed guilt at defending the expectation of having a degree to be a librarian. Jenny called it an “official” difference and hesitated to say she agreed with it. My concern for my participants was that their language and their timidity about their advanced education might contribute to the public's misconceptions about librarians. Despite their hesitations in associating

the degree with the role, participants still, ultimately, defended the degree as important for librarians.

What is it about the degree, then, that makes someone a librarian, apart of course from the official title? Participants offered several ideas explaining what a librarian gets from the degree that individuals without a degree do not. Julie said degreed individuals have an ethical background. She claimed one learns things “having to do with ethics and the main, just kind of underpinnings and theory of the profession that I think you missed out on if you’re only doing, if you’re only going out with your experiences.” Megan thought non-degreed individuals might be able to get experience but librarians have “different ways of looking at the ethics of information and information sharing.” Similarly, Rachel felt that if people can be “appropriately trained and stay up on their training” they could do the work of librarians. However, she supplemented this comment by saying, “But I do think you lose certain things about overarching philosophies and principles that shape your policies and your practices.” She also asserted that libraries “can lose some of the quality...of the in-depth reference questions” and the collection may suffer as a consequence. Each of these participants felt librarians have a common understanding of the ethical issues and standards of the profession. For Rachel, a lack of degree could lead to poor quality of service. Participants framed the degree as essential to successful librarian work. By endorsing the degree in this way, participants elevate their status as librarian: not only are they more educated, but that education gives them a special advantage over other library workers.

Jason claimed the degree “gives you a broader sense of the library mission. You know the service attitude; you know the world of information to give you a broader scope of the world of information and the mission of libraries.” Debbie also used the word “broader”: “you need to have certified librarians that have that broader background.” This background, according to

participants, makes an individual more capable of doing and appreciating librarian activities. According to Caitlan, librarians can do more “bigger picture thinking” which is not possible if one is without a degree. She noted that this is partially because individuals without the degree may not have a sense of where to start and partially because without the degree the employing library may not allow the person to share ideas. If one wants to participate in the direction of the library or the profession, according to participants, one must earn the title by getting a degree. These comments indicate that even library management is responsible for differentiating certain activities from others and adding meaning to the word *librarian*.

The degree had important practical implications as well. Participants felt the degree provided a foundation from which to base practice, a foundation one cannot get without the degree. Beth claimed librarians “get taught a bunch of best practices” that would otherwise be neglected through experience alone. Kevin felt the “standardized regimen of training” influences his practice. Much of what one learns in library school, according to Connor, is directly related to “the basic skills you need,” but also to learning ways to handle more complex issues such as choosing materials, searching for complex information, or managing personnel. Ashley contended that she learned things in library school that were essential to her work: “There were things I was taught in my library school that do affect management, how to deal with personnel, and if you haven’t gone through some training in these classes, you can handle situations really poorly.” She suggested that the degree offers something to “fall back on” to make good decisions. Rachel wondered if support staff could be appropriately trained in similar best practices, but concluded that her practices are shaped in ways not possible without the MLS. Even if trained staff can perform as well as librarians, Kevin claimed that “it matters in the professional world to have that master's degree” and declared “I worked hard to get it, and I paid

a lot of money for it. I earned that title, you know. So I am proud of that.” My participants not only felt that the degree gave them something special, but that they had a right to be proud of the degree.

Several librarians brought up a debate regarding library staff members performing degreed librarian tasks. Due to shrinking budgets, many libraries cannot afford to hire individuals holding a degree. As a result, more library staff members are performing the tasks of degreed librarians. Rachel remarked: “There’s lots of discussions about certain jobs people should perform in the profession (pause), whether or not you need MLS librarians to do certain tasks.” Rachel and Megan felt that budgeting shortages meant the library would not necessarily be able to hire more MLS librarians and thus would “lose something” in hiring non-degreed staff. Tracey argued that, “in a world where money isn’t a question mark” it would be best to hire MLS holding individuals. Caitlan also said the debate over this degree issue was something they “regularly talk about” and remains a “big question for the discipline as a whole.” In Chapter 3, I discussed many of the image problems facing librarianship. These participants’ comments highlight these problems and suggest that many of them have serious consequences for practicing librarians. Participants in this study advocated for the degree as the standard for entry and as essential for using the title *librarian*.

Several participants conceded that during rough economic times it is difficult to expect all libraries, especially small public libraries, to hire degree-holding librarians. Emily felt the line between degreed and non-degreed “is a little bit blurry” because “it has to do with passion” and if a library staff member is doing the work of a librarian and shares the same passion it is hard to say they are not a librarian. Carol, however, felt that individuals without the degree really do not understand the “value” in certain library practices or ethical standards. Charlotte acknowledged

that not all libraries have much of a choice in hiring for the degree. She felt that “de-professionalizing is not a concern” because

the nature of our work is always changing so what an individual with a degree is expected to do as opposed to someone without will change as well. The more complex tasks and tasks related to the future of the library and the profession will still fall to librarians.

Charlotte believed that the label *librarian* will continue to be reserved for individuals with an MLS who are responsible for the complex activities in the library. However, what those activities include may shift over time.

Overall, my participants supported the need for a degree. Lewis decided to argue on behalf of the degree, after thinking about it for some time: “I’m going to come down 51% on the side of having a degree and being a librarian does make a difference because of the urge to continually educate yourself and improve your skills” if not always because of a difference in current ability. Joann said “it is important to have the Masters.” Trina shared that when her library hired people without “library science training” they had to “teach them about censorship and what our approach is supposed to be: everybody’s ideas get their fair shake” and they had to push the library staff to “accept questions from patrons that come from all over.” This additional training takes time, which understaffed libraries cannot afford. Jason argued that “you protect the profession” by requiring and encouraging the degree but pointed out “where we need to do a lot of organizational change” based on changes in the field and the economy. Jason’s use of the word “protect” suggests that removing the degree requirement threatens the discipline as a whole. Ultimately, he believed librarians “will be doing different things, and staff members and classified staff or paraprofessionals or whatever, people who don’t have a degree are going to be doing stuff that librarians have been doing in the past.” Just as Charlotte suggested, as new, more

complex activities are assigned to librarians, library staff members will have to take over librarians' former tasks and be trained to do so.

Participants carefully differentiated between librarians and non-librarians. The differences included activities and educational background. Endorsing of the degree protects the profession, as Jason might say, and sustains the status of MLS librarians. Julie compared librarianship to law and librarians to lawyers: "I think you get in trouble legally if you call yourself a lawyer and you are not a lawyer. And I think that librarianship is a profession just like [law]. And I think like doctors and like lawyers." Participants valued the title and what they did to earn that title. The discussion to this point has also revealed librarians' insecurities about how the public views them. Participants defended the complexity of the work they do, the need for the degree, the special meaning the title brings, and thus their professional status. In addition to distinguishing from librarian and non-librarian activities, participants articulated the values and standards of the profession and aligned themselves with those values. The next section considers participants comments regarding the values and standards of librarianship.

Values and Standards

Much of the justification participants offered for requiring a degree rested on the importance of the philosophical and ethical standards of the discipline. Participants also used these values and standards as a means of defining the field and their relationship to it. They claimed to support the values and standards and pass them forward. Several values were mentioned repeatedly during interviews. These included: fair access to information, Internet filtering, privacy, opposition to censorship, privacy and confidentiality, opposition to censorship, intellectual freedom, copyright, and an ethical code of conduct.

Many of these ideas are stated in the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights and the Code of Ethics. Four participants referred directly to the documents. Though not every participant referred directly to the documents, much of what participants said reflected the principles and values found in the documents. The Library Bill of Rights (1996) provides these policies for all libraries in the United States:

- I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.
- II. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.
- 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.
- VI. Libraries that make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.

The Code of Ethics (2008) was created to guide members of the profession in making ethical choices:

- I. We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests.
- II. We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.
- III. We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted.
- IV. We respect intellectual property rights and advocate balance between the interests of information users and rights holders.
- V. We treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairness, and good faith, and advocate conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees of our institutions.
- VI. We do not advance private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues, or our employing institutions.
- VII. We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources.
- VIII. We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.

I heard many of these ideas from my participants. For librarians in this study, adhering to the Bill of Rights and behaving according to the Code of Ethics were important parts of being librarians.

Participants shared and endorsed these tenets and attributed their awareness and appreciation of these ideas to their education. When asked why they valued the degree or what the degree provides librarians, they referred to these values. The following section discusses the comments participants made regarding the values and standards of the discipline.

Participants felt that all librarians “value access to information and fair access to information” (Charlotte). Jillian pointed out that in a library “we have every ethnic group; we have every religious group; we have every kind of person you can imagine...so you try to meet everybody’s needs as best you can.” Regardless of background, individuals are entitled to get the information they want and it is the librarian’s job to help them get it. Lewis said, “my mission is to get information to the people that need it.” For Lewis and others, a librarian’s purpose and professional role is to get people information. Participants believed it was important that they protect their patrons’ ability to access materials and information. For example, at one public library popular books and DVDs are available for rental. The idea is that more people will be able to get access to the most popular materials without having to wait as long. By charging a small fee for these materials, the library can purchase more of them. However, the children’s librarians were concerned that this practice might bleed into the children’s’ department. Megan said it had her “hoping that no books for children are going to be rental because I don’t think I could stand having, telling a kid that they have to pay a dollar. In fact, I’ll give you a dollar to read this book”

One issue tied to access to information was Internet filtering. For example, when a library is given funds for computers to be used in a children's area, they must follow the Children’s Internet Protection Act (2000), which requires certain filters on the computers. One librarian, however, felt that it is "being interpreted way more rigidly than it should" and results in children

not being able to get to the information they need. Tracey brought up the debate over pornography and how to handle limiting people's ability to access it with non-filtered computers. Ashley claimed the "biggest debate for me has always been Internet access in the library." In most of the libraries I worked with the computers in adult reference were not filtered, while the computers in the children areas were filtered. Jan, a library staff member, shared a story about a staff meeting in which they were trying to decide whether filtering the adult reference computers was reasonable:

I know that I am sometimes in a room full of librarians, and I feel like my voice is the only one that sounds like a librarian which I'm sometimes horrified with. And so, in situations like that sometimes there's people who I expect to more value the openness of information and sharing of information and, um, and then I'm the person who's saying 'how do we choose?'

She felt like she could sound like a librarian, though she would not claim to be a librarian. She also associated a librarian voice with one that protects "openness of information and sharing of information." Her comments indicate these assumptions about what it means to be a librarian. One of these assumptions is that librarians respect the values of the profession. During observations in a circulation area at one public library, library staff members felt it was obvious who was and who was not a librarian in the building. One way they could tell was that librarians fought the hardest to protect access while non-librarians were more worried about paperwork and taking a break. The features of librarian are taken-for-granted assumptions for librarians and library staff alike and once again we see participants' belief that librarians are different from other library staff members.

The taken-for-granted element was even more evident to me when I considered how participants discussed these values. Many of them listed them briefly and with an air of indifference. I quickly came to realize that it was not indifference. Instead, the values were so apparent or obvious to my participants that they felt it unnecessary to spend more time on them. Through continued conversations with participants willing to talk with me again, I realized that these librarians figured these values were expected and commonplace.

In addition to filtering, participants also mentioned privacy and censorship. It was important to participants that patrons could check out any material they wanted without fear of being judged. At one large public library, the checkout process was completely automated. Lewis emphasized the increase to privacy that a self-checkout system offered patrons:

I think part of it is that it increased their privacy; you know if you are a fifteen year old boy and you want to check out a book on sex, you are gonna feel a lot more comfortable if you can do your own check out.

Ashley claimed there "is a privacy issue that goes with being a professional; if someone's coming in here looking for something because they are having a family concern or a health issue, I'm not going to tell other people about it." She also said that individuals holding the degree understand the philosophy behind the right to privacy and confidentiality, and the challenges in protecting that privacy since 9/11, more so than non-degree library staff members.

Participants also shared their struggles with censorship, intellectual freedom, copyright, and collection digitization. The common theme in these stories was the desire to protect free access to information for all people. Charlotte mentioned "the whole tension between publishers and librarians and organizations that want to make information really openly accessible and some publishers are very understanding and have made it easier to do it and some publishers do

not." With regard to digitization, several librarians noted that patrons assume all material is on the Internet. Marilyn shared her frustrations with intellectual property and access that come with digitizing collections. Joann pointed out that while digitization can be very useful, the physical formats do not disappear. In fact, the library must absorb all the formats, making it difficult for libraries to keep up with all the materials. One preservation librarian noted that digitization could be a threat to preservation departments within a library; if all the material is available electronically it is harder to justify the preservation unit. So on the one hand, the digitization is important for patron access to information, but on the other has a potentially negative impact on the future duties of librarians. Even when discussing this impact, however, participants did not advocate for avoiding digitization. Instead, they saw it as their responsibility to navigate the changes and make sense of new expectations and duties. Privacy and open access were held as important values in the field.

For participants, another feature of being a professional is continued involvement in the profession. Participants who did not have a degree emphasized their contribution or involvement in the local organization. For example, Jan, a library staff member, felt that while she made "an impact in the [library] and to the community" she did not contribute to the profession: "I don't think I [contribute] in that way." During an observation she emphasized her distance from the field, once again pointing out to me that she was not a librarian. Another library staff member, Anne, did not think of her job as part of a profession: "In a customer service, public service capacity, I guess I've always thought, well, I've never thought of it as a profession as such."

On the other hand, participants holding the MLS felt they engaged in the profession. Lewis started grinning when asked if he felt involved in the profession: "I do. I'm really happy. I got a librarian's email the other day saying they were quoting me in a paper." Involvement in the

profession was characterized by membership in professional associations, reading in the discipline, attending or presenting at conferences, and publishing.

Many participants emphasized professional association membership and participation as an important demonstration of their involvement. Marilyn pointed out that throughout her career she has been "involved in different professional organizations, both at the state level and national level." She presents at conferences, publishes in professional journals, and conducts research as an academic librarian. Beth noted that she is a member of the American Library Association and a division of the ALA: Association of College and Research Libraries. She is also a member of a state library association. Carol serves as a member of a task force for a state consortium of academic libraries. Several public librarians were members of the state public library association in addition to membership in the ALA. Aubrey, for example, is an active member of the ALA and has served as president of a roundtable. Matt works on a children's book committee. Participants were typically members of both their state association and the national association and divisions within each. In addition to being association members, some participants attended even presented at conferences. Most participants who claimed to present at conferences were located at academic libraries. Public librarians were more actively involved in the state associations, though also attended the national conference when funding from their employing library permitted it.

Participants also associated professional involvement with reading professional journals, trade journals, and listservs. Some participants also pointed to blogs written by other librarians. Professional journals are peer-reviewed, research-based journals such as the *Journal of Academic Librarianship*. Trade journals are those publications by the American Library Association (e.g., *American Libraries Magazine*) or state public library associations. In addition to journals,

participants regularly check listservs associated with their membership in various divisions, committees, and associations. Participants felt that the listservs were an important way to stay up to date on current events in the field and were a minimal time commitment. Participants agreed that finding time to read journal articles was difficult, but the listservs provide a short digest of current news. Within a library, librarians and library directors share articles that might be of interest. Usually, this was done via email and participants suggested that this sharing within the community made it easier to know what to read.

Some participants turned more frequently to blogs. Rachel suggested this was because "blogs are a little more casual" than journals which can "be a little too research-y and isn't necessarily frontline applicable." Rachel noted that busy librarians do not have time to worry about issues that do not immediately affect their work. She said it is better to leave it up to academic librarians who research as part of their faculty status. Aubrey used blogs as a means to "keep up with things professionally." Participants mentioned several blogs including "The Annoyed Librarian," "Tame the Web", and "Librarian in Black." During my observations, I did not hear people discussing these blogs. Participants who claimed to read such blogs emphasized the humor of the blogs and their appreciation of the authors' frustrations. They liked the voyeuristic aspect of reading someone else put voice to their own complaints. When asked if they respond to the blogs via comments, none claimed to contribute in this way. Though participants did not make these blogs an active part of their interactions, they felt that these resources helped them stay connected to the larger discipline. Regardless of what they chose to read, librarians noted the importance of being aware of the issues facing the discipline at large. They felt that the controversies or issues in the field are often reflected within libraries as well.

This interest in staying connected was also reflected in participants' desire to educate new librarians. They also emphasized continuing education. Connor insisted that librarians should "pay things forward, which means even though you have to turn around, you have a responsibility to those people who are coming up." Lewis advocated for continuing education: "But being a librarian I guess I'm biased to think that it does denote, as I said before, professionalism, which means continuing education." As noted earlier, participants felt that most library staff members or civil service staff did not share the desire to improve their skills. They credited this shared focus on education and professional advancement to their experiences in library school. For example, Matt directly referenced the code of ethics: "I mean, there is, there is an ethical code for librarians and I mean the things you learn in library school and you try to remind yourself of following a set of standards amongst your line of work." He stressed the importance of understanding exactly why the policies are as they are and exactly why the code of ethics is as it is. This understanding, according to my participants, comes from education and socialization and practice. Participants felt that continuing education, and sharing their knowledge with new librarians, were important parts of being a librarian. Participants revealed their support of and relationship to the broader profession by emphasizing certain values from protecting the mission of libraries for free access to information for all to understanding the philosophical and ethical responsibilities of the librarian role.

Discussion

Participants' rhetoric indicates insecurity about the public's lack of appreciation and respect for librarians as professionals. Their rhetoric also reveals a sense of librarian as someone who performs certain complex activities grounded in a body of knowledge learned in a degree program and who upholds the values and standards of the discipline. However, participants felt

that patrons do not understand what librarians do or what they stand for. Participants rejected negative stereotypes they believe the public holds and attempted to replace them with images of skilled, professional individuals working for a greater cause.

It was clear to me that my participants were attempting to explain to me, as a member of the public, what a librarian does and to provide me a more accurate perspective on librarians. In fact, several participants offered an alternative character to Marian the Librarian: the detective.

Rachel suggested that librarians are

a little bit being detectives. It's the thrill to find that answer and uncovering all those places where you can find that answer. They're also inquisitive people who like to learn, because you're exposed to new ways of doing things, new information.

Caitlan said, "Somebody once told me that reference librarians do detective work. I like that."

Ashley also liked the idea of the detective. In her case, it is a detective in the midst of a murder mystery: "I like looking at it as a murder mystery...you never know what's going to happen."

Lewis referenced the popular television crime drama CSI: "I mean, being a librarian is awesome; it's like a mystery, it's like CSI. It's very cool. You gather clues and you do the thing...and I have a witty little banter." During several observations, librarians would look at me after a patron request and say things like "Let's see what we can dig up" or "Hunting for this should be interesting" or "Oo...this one's a fun little mystery."

Perhaps the metaphor of the problem solving detective is quite apt for describing and defining what a librarian is. A librarian is a detective type that can solve complex information problems creatively. I found it particularly interesting that participants attempted to find an alternative fictional character to help counter the Marian character. It seemed that participants figured I would understand the life of a detective and thus better understand the life of a librarian.

Their use of this image also suggests that they'd prefer a character that portrays a more complicated and valuable role. Furthermore, both the Marian and detective images are culled from a broader cultural context and discourse. Librarians' rhetoric is both in response to broader discourses but also draws from broader discourses and contributes to those discourses. Even in the act of rejecting the Marian stereotype, librarians are preserving Marian as part of the discourse surrounding librarians.

One way librarians in this study defined their professional identity was through articulating *librarian* activities. As noted in Chapter 2, an individual who identifies with a group will begin to define himself by the same features associated with the group and certain identities will be more salient than others. Kuhn and Nelson (2002), for example, argued that certain activities would trigger certain identities more than others. For librarians in my study, the *librarian* identity was most salient when they were completing activities they viewed as part of their role. Furthermore, participants preferred to perform those activities that made them feel more like librarians and even felt "unbalanced" when they could not focus on those activities. Participants tied their professional identity to the specialized activities of the profession of librarianship.

During my analysis, I returned to the Lammers and Barbour (2006) sensitizing propositions. The first of these is that "communication sustains institutions" (p. 364). They argued that institutions are sustained by "day-to-day practices enacted, endorsed, routinized, and recorded" (p. 363). I find this proposition useful in examining my librarians' emphasis on activity and its relationship to the profession. Their belief in and commitment to their librarian activities is a way of endorsing the profession and of managing their role within it. I argue that in the act of sharing descriptions of these tasks with me they were recording their beliefs and

practices. By paying attention to the way librarians framed their role, we get a glimpse at how they make sense of their “individual identity” (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002, p. 13).

Additionally, by paying attention to the way librarians defined the profession and aligned themselves with those features, we get a sense of their “collective identity” (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002, p. 13). Librarians in this study emphasized several features of librarianship and being a professional: specialized skills, advanced training and a degree, an understanding of the foundations of librarianship, and shared values and standards. Librarians even suggested that no matter where one travels, all librarians will believe in the same basic principles. Their rhetoric emphasized the values of the field and endorsed the expectations and philosophies of the profession at large.

Analysis of their rhetoric also reveals what is absent from their discussion. For example, I asked participants to discuss how technology influences their work. I expected to hear a great deal regarding the role of technology in their everyday work or the threat of technology to their positions and to libraries. Participants did say that technology allows them to serve a greater number of people and many said that when technology fails they have an extremely difficult time completing their work. Several pointed out technology’s role in expediting searches, increasing access to information, and organizing information. Also, they discussed that the public wrongly assumes all material is available digitally. Participants, to my surprise, did not indicate any concern that technology might threaten their jobs. Though participants did indicate a reliance on technology, few indicated that technology has changed their work. I found this surprising since many of my participants had worked in libraries through various technological advancements. Noting what is absent further supports the notion that individuals will choose to support or dismiss certain ideas, and in doing so reveal to us what is important or salient to them.

As Lammers and Barbour (2006) suggested, communicative actions help constitute and “sustain institutions” (p. 363). Librarians painted a picture of the profession for me, literally creating its image while talking to me. Lammers and Barbour also suggested “communication aligns organizing with institutions” (p. 365). We see this very thing in the librarians’ rhetoric. They emphasized the mission of libraries and connected it to the philosophical foundations of library science as a profession. They also reproduced the expectations of the field such as advanced training and adhering to the code of conduct. When individuals talk about protecting freedom of speech or providing fair access as part of their daily activities and professional role, they are aligning their organizational roles with the institution—that is the established beliefs and practices, not just a specific library organization—and its principles. Librarians’ communication about what it means to be a librarian was rooted in their understandings of the profession. Being a librarian means being a part of this larger discipline, which is tied to the features I’ve discussed here. Those very features, which come from the profession, also make up the profession. As librarians define themselves, differentiate their activities, and endorse professional values and standards, they (re)constitute the profession. In the next, and final, chapter, I offer the theoretical and practical implications of these findings, reflect on limitations to the study, and provide directions for future research.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning of profession and professional identity. I define professions as institutionalized occupations, with formalized practices, beliefs, and values that transcend the organization and influence and are influenced by communication. I define professionals as individuals with advanced training and education operating within a particular profession. Through this research, I wanted to consider what profession and professional identity mean to individuals claiming attachment to these terms and what the rhetoric of professionals can tell us about the construction of profession and professional identity. As noted in Chapter 1, the terms *profession* and *professional* evoke certain assumptions about who is doing what work. This project explored librarians' rhetoric about their work, their profession, and their professional identity. By using constitutive rhetoric as a framework, my research considered the ways individuals construct what it means to be a professional, and in doing so, (re)constitute the profession. I interviewed and observed librarians at public and academic libraries. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed, with the aid of qualitative data analysis software, using modified grounded theory approaches. I specifically viewed transcripts as examples of professionals' constitutive rhetoric, which revealed how professionals strategically define their work and professional identity.

I believe this research contributes to organizational communication, especially with regard to our understandings of professional identity, profession, and institution. First, I find that profession is constituted through the rhetorical strategies of professionals, especially as they define professional activities. I also suggest that this activity focus reveals how professionals make sense of their professional identities. These findings contribute to our understandings of profession by revealing that, for professionals and their professional identities, activities may be

as important as membership in the profession. In fact, this research suggests, that the social category of the profession is defined through activities, and the values and meanings associated with those activities. Furthermore, these findings suggest that individuals draw upon the relatively stable structure of their profession to make sense of their work.

Second, my use of the constitutive rhetoric framework views professionals' communication as strategic and purposeful rhetoric as they define, assert, and defend professional identity. In particular, this research suggests that as individuals speak as professionals (e.g., using the title *librarian*) they enact their professional identities, and define and sustain the profession. Additionally, a rhetorical perspective led me to argue that interviews can be usefully seen as rhetorical situations. This approach provides a solution to qualitative scholars' concerns regarding social desirability effects. Though scholars worry that individuals may be performing based on fear of the interviewer's judgment, I suggest that these performances are opportunities for analysis rather than problems. Later in this chapter, I discuss these contributions further. First, I summarize the major findings of this study. Then, I discuss the theoretical and practical implications, especially with regard to the contributions noted above. Finally, I consider potential limitations of the study and provide avenues for future research.

Summary of Major Findings

Exploring professional identity contributes to our understandings of how people make sense of their work. Librarians' rhetoric about their professional identity and profession revealed insecurity about the stereotypes and misconceptions held by the public. This insecurity was also apparent in the literature discussed in Chapter 3 (e.g., Davis, 2008; Preer, 2006). My participants focused on common negative stereotypes and pervasive misconceptions. For example, participants felt the public views all librarians as bookish, shy women who simply read and

check out books. Participants rejected the negative stereotypes as false, and suggested that these stereotypes were reflective of a larger problem for librarians. Participants felt that the public does not understand or appreciate a librarian's skills or role. As a result, participants claimed, librarians struggle to garner respect and status. During interviews, participants articulated a more coherent picture of a librarian than the public version, one that focused on the activities, education, and values associated with the profession.

Librarians in this study differentiated between *librarian activities* and all other library work. I argue that by delineating certain activities as *librarian*, participants gave meaning and status to their work and carved out their space as professionals. These activities included reference interviews, cataloging, programming, collection development, and research. Participants defined these activities as unique and complex and aligned them with the mission of libraries. Librarians also complained about patron questions and expectations that minimized their skills and educational background. Questions regarding mp3 players and copy machines were seen as degrading and insulting to MLS librarians. These questions also represented, for librarians, a threat to their social status.

Additionally, librarians preferred *librarian activities* above all others. Many even reported feeling off-balance when they were unable to focus on the activities most associated with their role. Participants felt most like *librarians* when they were working on *librarian activities*. Not only was their professional identity more salient while working on these particular activities, but participants also preferred to work on these activities. For the librarians in this study, these activities brought fun and motivation, in addition to the feeling of centeredness.

The activities librarians cited as crucial to their role and essential to their sense of self as professionals were tightly linked to the profession, as they understood it. The activities they

chose to emphasize were those activities that most supported the mission of libraries and on which librarians in MLS programs are trained. The findings of this study also suggest that librarians added meaning to their work activities and their professional identities by aligning both with the profession of librarianship. Participants differentiated types of library work by emphasizing their complexity, which they claimed required advanced education. Librarians also claimed that their education taught them more than simply how to perform these activities, which anyone with experience could try to learn: the education also gave them the philosophical, theoretical, and ethical foundations essential for performing these skills well.

Librarians endorsed the need for the MLS degree. Librarians also emphasized the values and standards of the field including freedom of speech, free access to information, intellectual freedom, and privacy. Completing the degree and supporting the values and standards of the discipline were seen as necessary traits in a librarian. Participants defined a librarian as someone with a degree, who can complete certain complex activities, and who respects and supports the values and standards of the profession. By aligning their activities with the profession, librarians added meaning and value to the work they do. Participants were frustrated by the public's lack of respect because they felt they were professionals worthy of greater social status. Librarians actively defended their title and its professional status. Furthermore, librarians used the activities, values, and standards as a way to define librarianship as a profession.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretical Implications

Professionals' rhetoric revealed that professionals constitute the profession and make sense of their professional identities by carefully defining their work activities as complex, unique, and professional. Wilensky (1964) noted that a profession must be able to demonstrate

the uniqueness or “mystery of the craft” (p. 150). Librarians differentiated between *librarian* work and other library work, and defined that work as unique and complex. Librarians felt that if the public were to better understand the role of librarians and how complex their work actually is, perhaps the public would appreciate and respect librarians as professionals.

Furthermore, librarians in this study aligned their activities and professional identities with the profession and its values and standards. These findings suggest that individuals still associate *profession* with the features described in Chapter 2, including an esoteric body of knowledge, advanced training, field standards, and professional values. Though some scholars (e.g., Leicht & Fennell, 2001) criticized the use of traits to define professions, this research suggests that for professionals these features provide coherence and meaning to their work and status. Furthermore, librarians used activities, education, values, and standards to differentiate between types of work and workers. Because professionals are often held to different standards than other groups of workers, it is helpful to know how we decide what being a professional means.

This research also contributes to our understandings of professional identity. As noted earlier, literature on professional identity often emphasizes membership in a social category (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Gossett, 2002). In addition to associating themselves with the profession or claiming to be members, however, librarians emphasized the specific activities that make up that social category and define their professional identities. Once an individual perceives a professional identity, they carry that identity across “sites” (Ashcraft, 2007, p. 13). Librarians in this study recognized that other librarians in other organizations would not only share the same values, but also perform the same activities. The activities of librarianship culminate as an identity: who they are is tied to what they do.

Observations across sites consistently revealed which activities librarians performed most frequently and, also, which activities they felt were most important. Furthermore, the profession of librarianship, as a social category, was largely defined by the activities, values, and meanings librarians associated with the profession. These findings suggest that activity should be included as one of the characteristics of profession.

Freidson (1986) argued that it is important to consider how professionals “‘make’ or ‘accomplish’ professions by their activities, and what the consequences are for the way in which they see themselves and perform their work” (p. 36). My research supports the idea that professionals make their profession by performing certain activities. I extend Freidson’s argument to suggest that profession is not only made through the physical performance of activities, but also through the way individuals rhetorically define and ascribe meaning to those activities. For example, not all activities performed by librarians accomplished profession, in their views. Instead, certain activities were more professional than others. Selznick (1957) suggested that through institutionalization, certain practices become “infused with value beyond the requirements of the task at hand” (p. 17). By associating certain activities with the profession and defining those activities as unique and complex, librarians elevated those activities and imbued them with additional value and meaning.

Using constitutive rhetoric as a guiding perspective contributes to our understandings of institutions and professions by viewing communication as strategic, purposeful, and influential in the defining and sustaining of social categories such as professions. Though organizational scholars have called for more examination of the role of language in institutions (e.g., Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005) few borrow from the communication literature, and many do not even use the word *communication*. My research offers a communicative perspective of one type of

institution: the profession. Lammers and Barbour (2006) argued that “communication sustains institutions” (p. 364). This project explored how librarians defined, supported, and sustained the profession. I believe we can view individuals’ communication as constitutive rhetoric, which reveals the strategic ways individuals (re)produce institutions over time and space, and in turn, how institutions come to influence organizations and individuals. For example, librarians in their interviews reproduced the profession by defining it in strategic ways and allowing me to record and share those beliefs. As a result of my findings, I also argue that individuals, through their strategic and purposeful rhetoric, assert their agency and help construct and define the very institutions that come to constrain or enable their actions and communication.

As Scott (2008) argued, professionals are the primary agents of institutions. Analysis of participants’ communication as constitutive rhetoric revealed that as individuals speak as professionals (e.g., as a librarian), they enact their professional identity and define and sustain the profession. Scott’s (2008) cultural-cognitive pillar refers to the symbolic systems guiding individuals. The title *librarian* is one part of this pillar. Participants used this label to indicate a certain level of skill, commitment, and education. The label was also used to differentiate between types of work and who could perform that work. Other vocabulary of the field (e.g., reference interview, reader’s advisory) also makes up this pillar. This pillar consists of the ways individuals label work and workers and ways of making decisions (e.g., based on the values of librarianship). The normative pillar consists of the prescriptive features of the institution. Participants emphasized that *librarians*, as opposed to library workers, understand the best ways to handle various situations and the reasons behind those ways. They claimed librarians learn best practices through their degree programs. This defense of advanced education as an entry requirement for librarians reinforces the discipline as a profession: an institutionalized

occupation requiring advanced training and education. By speaking and performing as a *professional*, and by reinforcing the cultural-cognitive and normative features of the field, professionals sustain and (re)constitute the profession. The profession, therefore, becomes a stable structure individuals draw upon to define themselves and their work. Scott, Corman, and Cheney (1998) argued that identity and identification vary from situation to situation, with certain situations or activities making certain identities more salient. I extend this, however, to suggest that a professional's identity is also rooted in the broader, more stable profession. Though certain activities will evoke certain identities more than others, professional identity is more stable across time, space, and situations.

A rhetorical perspective also led me to argue that interviews can be usefully seen as rhetorical situations. Qualitative scholars are often concerned that our participants are putting on a show or saying what they think the researcher wants to hear (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). By viewing interviews as rhetorical situations, scholars can appreciate participants' interview communication as strategic and purposeful and account for the performing individuals often do in interviews. We can pay attention to the rhetorical choices our participants make and what this tells us about their beliefs, attitudes, and identities. For example, librarians chose to emphasize certain activities over others and even labeled those activities *librarian*. My sensitivity to my participants' rhetorical choices allowed me to explore the ways they created a professional identity and added coherence and meaning to their work. Librarians in this study sincerely wanted to be seen as professionals. By analyzing their rhetoric as constitutive of their identity and profession, I recognized the choices librarians made when defining the profession. The interview provided my participants with an opportunity to be responsible for defining the profession, and triggered their concerns regarding the profession's perception issues. As a result,

participants emphasized the features they associated with the profession and attempted to articulate what it means to be a librarian.

Furthermore, librarians in this study used the interview as an opportunity to define and defend their professional status. For example, many librarians agreed to do the interview because it was an opportunity to educate the public, through me, about librarians. Several librarians saw the interview as a part of their professional role, as well. This supports my argument that the interview can be seen as a rhetorical situation complete with exigences, constraints, and a rhetorical audience.

A rhetorical sensitivity also led me to be more conscious about the larger discourses that could potentially influence participants. This led me to ask whether they were involved in the profession, which resulted in discussion about what the profession is and how they relate to it. I also recognized the reflection of the Bill of Rights and Code of Ethics even in the rhetoric of librarians who did not directly reference the documents. Though I cannot assert that these comments are a direct result of exposure to those documents, they reflect the assumptions librarians share about the profession.

Practical Implications

In this project, I explored how individuals make sense of their professional identity. We may be able to use this information to improve relationships and communication with administration and employees, especially professionals. For example, my participants occasionally suggested that administration's refusal to visually differentiate librarians from library staff (e.g., with employee badges showing titles) limited their ability to garner respect and understanding from patrons. This also led to librarians being asked questions they felt minimized

their status and wasted their time. Additionally, librarians felt that the field's emphasis on libraries was unsuccessful at securing professional respect for librarians.

Communication scholars have often considered the practical implications of professional identity on stress, control, burnout, resistance, and the like. For example, Ashcraft (2005) found that pilots resisted outside control through discourse that focused on masculinity. Real and Putnam (2005) found that pilots attempted to control their work environment and professional standards, asserting an image of the profession as “unique and irreplaceable” (p. 103). These issues have implications for identification. High organizational identification can lead to increased performance and job satisfaction, while also lowering absenteeism and turnover (van Dick, Wagner, Stellmacher, Christ, and Tissington, 2005).

As noted in Chapter 2, however, professionals may be less likely to identify strongly, potentially limiting the positive benefits of high organizational identification. Professionals may find their professional identity more salient than their organizational identity. This project did not directly consider participants' identification with their employing libraries and I do not mean to suggest that librarians are less likely to identify with the organization. However, I believe this research strengthens our understanding of professional identity and suggests that organizations hiring professionals should be conscious of the activities professionals perform in the workplace. Ashforth and Mael (1989) argued that in some cases multiple identifications could be compatible with each other, while in other situations conflicting interests, values, and beliefs may cause role conflict for individuals. Individuals may then become ambivalent regarding the organization (Pratt, 2000). If a professional is engaging in activities they strongly associate with the profession, identifying with the organization may not present a conflict. On the other hand, if an organization, especially a heteronomous one such as a library, impedes a professional's ability to

work on professional activities, the individual may be less likely to identify and even feel their professional identity is threatened. This research is one step toward improving our understanding of professional identity, which in turn will help us understand identification for professionals and the issues identification implicates such as stress, burnout, and satisfaction.

This research also has implications for library information science education. Librarians referred to the importance of education for learning best practices and the philosophical foundations of the discipline. However, participants also noted debates about the educational requirements, especially the need for advanced education. These debates likely contribute to the identity crisis. Librarians indicated that they learned some of the philosophical underpinnings of the field from their education. However, many felt that MLS programs focus too heavily on best practices, making it seem that the degree was more of a how-to than a true professional requirement. Given librarianship's image and status struggles, the field should review library school curriculum to be sure course offerings provide philosophical and theoretical knowledge, in addition to best practices and ethical standards. They may also consider offering additional certifications or continuing education. Several participants claimed they found the field by accident and many said they did not know you needed a degree to be a librarian until they started looking for jobs. Other participants also said that they were not sure where they could complete a degree until they began searching for programs. Perhaps library schools can increase marketing and advertising. Libraries and the ALA may make the degree more accessible to library employees by offering financial incentives, tuition support, and work-release time. Furthermore, library administration, librarians, library staff, and professional associations must agree on the educational requirements for the field. Debates about the educational requirements do not help

the profession improve its status. If the field cannot agree that librarians need to have advanced training, it is not surprising that the public doubts it.

I believe librarians have an opportunity before them to improve the status and image of the field and their professional role. Increased media attention and a changing information world open the door for librarians to market themselves as professionals. First, librarians should educate the public, including patrons and public officials, about the nature of their work activities. I did not know the extent of a librarian's job prior to this project. I found that libraries rarely advertise what a librarian can do for a patron. Instead, libraries advertise community programs such as author visits or educational programming. I encourage libraries to publicize the variety of tasks a librarian can perform and introduce the public to the varied and complex information needs a librarian can meet.

Second, library administrators may want to consider a system that differentiates status between MLS librarians and support staff. One librarian indicated that his library has a triage system. When a patron approaches a desk, he is asked about his needs and the library staff member determines what level of expertise the patron requires. The first person a patron speaks with is likely, though not always, support staff. If the request is more complicated, the patron is passed to a librarian. This was the only library in my study with such a system. The participant informed me that he has been criticized for this system, but felt it was necessary at his library. Though every library gave individuals different titles and pay within the organization, no other library differentiated librarians from support staff in any visible way. Therefore, the public views all library staff as librarians. This issue is not the case in many other professions. One difficulty, of course, is that many library staff members perform the same functions as librarians. Library

staff assist with reference questions, search for materials, and assist patrons with technology. However, librarians assume additional responsibilities and have additional expertise.

I am not advocating for a clearer separation of tasks as I appreciate the financial crisis facing many libraries across the country. It is, frankly, necessary to have well-trained support staff in order to keep up with increased circulation and visitation. On the other hand, I would suggest that libraries review their current system and consider finding ways to highlight their librarians' status and expertise. If differentiation is not possible or desirable, improving the public's understanding of what librarians do (even if they assume all library staff are doing it), the public may come to appreciate the complexity of the field and the expertise of the professionals operating in it. The image crisis facing librarianship has real consequences for librarians. From pay to respect, librarians have much to gain if they can improve their image. Furthermore, if patrons understand what librarians can provide, librarians will have much to give communities by way of better experiences and more information services.

Potential Limitations

This project has, of course, limitations. One primary limitation is generalizability. Though interviews typically lasted an hour, and observations were conducted to supplement the research, the sample size is small. As such, my ability to generalize is limited. Furthermore, all of my participants are from Midwest libraries. I cannot account for regional differences that may exist. Additionally, most participants were from the Midwest, and likely educated in the Midwest. Though they did not all attend the same graduate program, it is possible that similar socialization plays a role in the similarities observed here. Also, most of my participants are from public libraries. I was not able to make reliable comparisons across library type or librarian

specializations. Most of my participants were female, also, therefore providing an inadequate representation of male librarian perspectives.

As with any qualitative study, interviews also present limitations. I recognize that individuals may not present their true selves. Also, participants may not be able to clearly articulate their feelings about certain subjects. I acknowledge that several librarians questioned my relationship with management. This represents concerns that management may hear their comments or complaints or the information may be shared outside of my research. I assured each of these individuals of the confidentiality of the research, but this may still have influenced their comments. The presence of an audio recorder may also influence participant response.

Observations helped me establish relationships with several participants. I found these participants to be more open. Therefore, increased observation hours would be helpful in deepening this research. Another limitation is my focus on self-report in interviews. Though I was able to observe librarians at work, I was not allowed access to patron interaction. I did witness interactions, but could not take detailed notes on these conversations. As a result, I did not analyze professional identity and profession as it is constructed or enacted in daily activities. I am forced to rely on individuals' reports of these activities. Additionally, I was not privy to many administrator/employee conversations, nor was I able to gain access to staff meetings. My observations were limited strictly to librarians during a normal work shift.

I believe it is important for any qualitative researcher to recognize personal assumptions and biases. My interests and knowledge may have, without my knowing, influenced participant responses or the direction of the conversation. For example, my interest in professions and professional identity may have led me to respond more enthusiastically to comments that alluded to these ideas. My identity as a professional may also have influenced interviews. Furthermore, I

often sympathized with my participants and very much liked my participants. Though this may have led to a stronger relationship and comfort level for participants, it may have influenced my analysis. I kept careful memos of my reactions to transcripts and attempted to distance myself as much as one can. However, I acknowledge that in any research, complete objectivity is impossible. Additionally, my age may have influenced conversations. For example, one librarian commented on my age. She was thirty years older than me; this may have led her to educate me more or focus on explanations that she may otherwise have left out. My background as a researcher or student may have influenced participants' communication or even willingness to speak with me. On the one hand, this led to several people agreeing to participate. On the other, several individuals declined to participate because they felt uncomfortable with researchers. Any conversation is influenced by the communication tendencies of all parties and as such I acknowledge that my own communication style may have helped or hindered various interactions. In order to avoid bringing additional preconceptions to my analysis, I delayed reading the literature on librarianship until after analysis.

Future Research

Despite limitations, this project offers exciting new avenues of research. In this section, I suggest opportunities for future research and conclude this dissertation. With regard to the aforementioned limitations, future research should include librarians from different regions of the United States and certainly a larger number of librarians. It would also be beneficial to interview and observe other library staff in order to compare between professionals and non-professionals. Attending national conferences may also provide insights into the field's image crisis and increase exposure to how professionals enact their professional identity in these settings. Future research with librarians could answer more questions. For example, future

research could study patron/librarian interactions in reference interviews. Do librarians assert their status or expertise when interacting with patrons? Also, do librarians' have ideas for improving their image and what are the reasons library administrators do not advertise librarians' skills more?

This research only offers one small piece of the profession picture. Not only did I have a limited sample, I only focused on one profession. Future research should explore other professions or perhaps the public's view of professions. It could also be advantageous to work with occupational groups working towards professional status. This project inspires additional questions for the future. What does profession mean to other professional groups? What are the features of communication during the process of professionalization? How is profession experienced, negotiated, or enacted during work activities? Do other professional groups face different issues regarding professional identity? For example, do other professional groups share librarians' activity focus? Does the perception of public respect influence professional identity? How is the communication of other professional groups different from what we have seen here? Issues surrounding gender, control, and technology might also be important areas for future exploration. Future work should extend these findings to consider how other professionals experience and (re)constitute profession. Research in other contexts is necessary to gain a thorough understanding of the influence of institutions and the role profession plays in workplace communication and our understandings of work and organizing. Furthermore, research should consider the meaning of profession more broadly. For example, what do the terms *profession* or *professional* mean to individuals without advanced training or specialization? Do expectations of autonomy or status change based on level of certification or training?

The choices we make are influenced by the context in which we make them. Institutions are part of this context. Institutions are constellations of established and enduring practices, beliefs, roles, and meanings, which shape and are shaped by individual actions. They provide rules, norms, ideas, and assumptions and constrain or enable us. Institutions can be powerful influences on our personal and work lives, especially our identities. As we enact, endorse, and reproduce the practices, beliefs, and roles, we infuse them with meaning and begin to take them for granted. How we talk about what we do and who we are is situated in the larger social context. As I mentioned at the start of this dissertation, though it is possible to see institutions as disabling agency, I believe we help construct, define, and potentially change those institutions.

In this study, I set out to explore the meanings of *profession* and *professional*. These terms evoke certain expectations of skill, appearance, behavior, and status. Through this project, I found that professional identity is often tied to activity. Activity is used to differentiate between types of work and workers. Furthermore, the label *librarian*, and likely any other professional title, is used to add meaning and value to work. By aligning their activities and professional identity with the broader beliefs, practices, values, and standards of the field, professionals add meaning to their work, assert their social status, make sense of their roles, and (re)constitute the profession. White (1985) suggested that law is a “social activity—a way of acting with others—and a cultural activity, a way of acting within a certain set of materials found in the culture” (p. 35). I argue, through this research, that *profession* is a social and cultural activity, which determines how we organize, label, and add meaning to specific types of work.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Greetings!

I am a Communication PhD candidate at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign studying the way(s) professionals communicate at and about work. My dissertation research project focuses specifically on librarians. I am seeking librarians willing to be interviewed. Participation is voluntary and completely confidential, and will help further develop our understanding of professionals and communication. Interviews typically last 30-40 minutes and scheduling is flexible and will not interfere with work duties. I very much look forward to talking with you. If you are interested in being interviewed please contact me at mgarcia2@illinois.edu.

Thank you,

Mattea A. Garcia
PhD Candidate/Teaching Assistant
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Dept. of Communication

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

Researcher: Mattea A. Garcia

Greetings:

I am a PhD student in the Department of Communication at the University of Illinois. I will be conducting a research project, under the direction of Dr. John C. Lammers, on the subject of communication among professionals in their workplaces. I am asking you for 45 minutes of your time to participate in an interview about your experiences working at a Library.

We will keep your comments during the interview in the strictest confidence. Although we need participants' names on this consent form, we keep the consent forms completely separate from our interview notes. Only members of the research team will see our notes. All of our notes will be kept in a locked office and desk. All interview transcripts, if you agree to be recorded, will be kept separate from the consent forms and will again only be seen by the researcher. Any reports or other documents that arise from our interviews will use summaries or unattributed quotes.

Your participation in our interviews is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time or decline any questions you prefer not to answer. If you have questions regarding the nature of the project or your rights as a participant, you may contact the primary researcher Mattea A. Garcia at mgarcia2@illinois.edu or the supervising investigator, John C. Lammers, at jclammer@illinois.edu. You may also contact the Institutional Review Board at the University of Illinois at 333- 2670, and you may keep a copy of this consent form if you so wish.

Discussing the communication at the workplace may be a sensitive topic for some people. It is possible that people hold differing views about the best way to manage services or to communicate with each other. I hope to understand better how to improve communication and understanding of professionals through this project.

If you are willing to participate in this project, please sign and date the form below.

Name: _____

Date: _____

This form is valid until 10/31/10

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. What is your job?
 - a. Title and Job tasks
2. Tell me about what brought you to the Public Library.
 - a. Education?
 - b. Previous jobs or professional experience
 - c. Why this location?
3. How long have you been here?
4. Why did you become a librarian?
5. Describe for me a recent good day at work?
 - a. What are the things that usually make for a good day?
6. Describe for me a day recently that was difficult or frustrating or less “good.”
7. What do you think motivates or excites people who work here?
8. Tell me about something you think frustrates people who work here.
9. What do you think people outside the library say when they describe a Librarian?
 - a. Do you think people have misconceptions about what librarians do? Their age? Their gender? Their education?
10. How do you think technology affects your job and your relationship with patrons/coworkers?
11. What policies, practices, or debates where you work or in the field at large get talked about/debated? What do people typically say about those issues? Your stance?
12. Do you ever feel like your professional standards conflict with anything at the Library?
 - a. Do you ever feel rushed to help a patron? Why? How do you handle this?
13. What is stressful for you at work?
14. How do you manage stress at work?
15. What’s fun for you at work?
16. If you had to guide me to two or three things to read to truly understand what it means to be a librarian, what might you advise me to look at?
 - a. Do you read any journals in the field?
 - b. Articles?
 - c. Books?
17. What does it mean to you to be a professional?
 - a. Would you say you are a member of a profession?
 - b. Do you feel you are involved in the overall profession (library)?

Are you willing to share a brief summary of demographic information?

Age, Gender, Educational Level

During this interview, how did you feel? (e.g., were you comfortable? Confused? Interested? Was it enjoyable?) Would you be willing to recommend talking with me to your colleagues? Any suggestions?