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## Cataloguing Men: charting the male librarian's experience through the perceptions and positions of men in libraries.

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Abstract:

This study explores the perceptions of male librarians working in an academic library. Underpinning the methodology of this paper is a series of in depth interviews conducted over several years with a group of selected male librarians. This paper suggests that the meanings constructed by male librarians in the non-traditional work environment have broader implications within organisational contexts.

*Cataloguing Men: charting the male librarian's experience through the perceptions and positions of men in libraries.*

*Andrew Hickey*

Studies investigating the experiences of women and men in non-traditional, or 'asymmetric' work environments have tended to conceptualise the relationships 'token' individuals have with colleagues in broader organisational contexts [1]. Emphasis has focused on the role assumed by the non-traditional subject in relation to gender majority colleagues and work processes, whilst larger contextual forces operating within the organisational setting are analysed in terms of their maintenance of the gendering process. As such, the data presented by the literature records the perceptions of and by non-traditional subjects and their colleagues from within the work environment, and moves from this 'first hand' basis to develop an understanding of the work environments under investigation.

From this perspective investigations by Williams [2], Chatman and O'Reilly [3], Piper and Collamer [4], and Carmichael [5] have developed an approach grounded primarily in Kanter's notion of 'tokenism' and broader demography studies [6]. The non-traditional subjects in these studies are observed in terms of the differences they possess as compared to the larger work group and some of the symptomatic effects a non-traditional work environment presents. For instance, Williams' landmark study into the construction of gender identities in non-traditional work environments operates in this way by identifying the effects of the 'glass escalator', 'tracking' and discrimination both in and outside the work place [7]. In this, Williams questions earlier assumptions that 'in some ways, men in female dominated occupations experience the same difficulties that women in male-dominated occupations face' [8]. Piper and Collamer similarly question comparisons of men and women's experience in non-traditional work environments and connect into broader gender studies and feminist critiques of dominance by suggesting that 'men may bring into the field with them the male status they hold in culture in general' [9].

Agapiou's suggestion that 'since 1990, there has been a spate of studies that have explored the under-representation of women in non-traditional occupations' [10] aligns historically with explorations of non-traditional work environments being focused on women's attempts to challenge stereotypes and subvert discrimination grounded in work environments and society more broadly. Williams precedes Agapiou's claims by similarly suggesting that 'studies of sex segregation in the work force have focused on women's experiences in male dominated occupations' [11] and argues the point, following Jacobs [12] and Reskin and Roos [13], that 'men are less likely to enter female sex-typed occupations than women are to enter male-dominated jobs' as a possible cause for the relative lack of literature in this area [14]. Connections to feminist movements and the development

of workplace policy, such as affirmative action, are listed as potential reasons for the scope of literature focusing on women's experiences, something that Carmichael responds to by suggesting that 'apparently men, too, need to be liberated' [15].

Since Carmichael's identification of this seeming gap in the literature, several recent studies have investigated the position of men in non-traditional work environments- specifically those of nursing, social work, early childhood education and librarianship. Chatman and O'Reilly's survey applies a critical analysis of similarity-attraction theory, the 'foundation of much recent demography research', to find that the assumption 'that people are attracted to and prefer to spend time with others who hold attitudes that are similar to their own' did not apply accurately to their survey of 189 professionals[16]. Tsui, Egan and O'Reilly used a similar approach for determining the inter-relationships of minority men to their work-groups as related to work commitment [17]. However it is Williams' [18] identification of men's identity formation in key non-traditional work environments and more specifically Carmichael's [19] inquiry into men's experiences in libraries that established a broader investigation of men's perceptions of non-traditional work and work environments.

**In the Library**

A common starting point for much of the literature dealing with the Library as non-traditional work environment for men is with the statistical breakdown of gender amongst Library staff. Piper and Collamer [20], Lynch [21] and Williams [22] provide analyses of statistical data taken from non-traditional work environments, whilst from an Australian academic library perspective, Biskup [23] applies a historical survey of Australian library demographics to detail the shifting identity Australian librarianship has had over the last century. Few works have applied an analysis of gender identity in libraries solely, making Biskup's survey of the Australian library experience particularly important. Biskup highlights that 'librarianship, like most other professions and callings, has been traditionally the bastion of the male sex, both here and overseas', moving on to suggest that it is only until recently that there have been 'a considerable number of women in top ranking jobs in the profession' [24]. Using case study examples of several senior female librarians, Biskup challenges the assumption that librarianship is a female profession, and cites the historical experiences of vanguard women in the profession.

Another significant aspect of the literature refers to the perceptions of men in non-traditional work environments by the broader public. Carmichael identifies popular stereotypes of homosexuality amongst male librarians and moves to situate gay and lesbian issues in the profession within a larger social context [25]. Piper and Collamer's suggestions that 'men in the library profession are in a complex situation', coping

simultaneously with 'how cultural hegemony portrays and perceives librarians in general' [26] and how they are viewed by their colleagues and themselves is echoed by Morrisey and Case's [27] reference to Angoff's [28] contested position on current conceptions of male librarians. In this study, Morrisey and Case suggest that 'men in librarianship are doubly stigmatised' due to stereotypes of librarianship as women's work and a 'traditional negative image of librarians' [29]. However, they also argue that negative perceptions of male librarians are largely self-induced, using survey data to suggest that 'the male librarian sees himself in a worse light than the general population actually pictures him', prompting them to conclude that male librarians 'are fighting an image that does not exist' [30].

Where the literature does become limited is with investigations of the self-realisation of individual identities within the non-traditional work-place. While heavy consideration is given to conceptualisations of the individual as member of a sub-group within a non-traditional work environment, only passing reference is made to the self-reflexivity individuals in the non-traditional workplace engage when locating themselves in the larger work environment. Chatman and O'Reilly [31], drawing on Stangor, Lynch, Duan and Glass' [32] analysis of sub-group characteristics, go some way to investigating the self-awareness and maintenance of an 'in-group' by non-traditional subjects, however the impact this has on understandings of 'self', located-ness of the non-traditional subject within the workplace and subsequent construction of meaning undertaken by the non-traditional individual is largely neglected by the literature.

**Memory and Experience**

The process of identity formation in terms of the larger work-place context is the focus of this study. In particular, an investigation of how men in these work environments consider *their* identities in terms of their location within the library as a non-traditional workplace is the central point of exploration- how do men as non-traditional employees in Libraries come to understand and act on their positioning within the organisation?

Within this, 'memory work' provides a key method for approaching the constructed realities of individuals. As Morrison suggests:

> *Memory (the deliberate act of remembering) is a form of willed creation. It is not an effort to find out the way it really was... The point is to dwell on the way it appeared and why it appeared that particular way* [33].

The reflecting-on of memories taken from the 'lived experience' of working as a non-traditional employee in the library poses significant implications for a self-reflexive construction of identity. The way that events, locations, other individuals and the self are conceptualised draw from understandings built out of the relationships an

individual has with time, place/s and others. From this, memory works simultaneously as a spatialized reconstruction of events, places and interactions and as a reference point for the construction of meaning for the individual. In this regard, memory and the constructed-ness of memory become key locations for the interrogation of an individual's connectedness to place, others and the self. The point here is that, as Mitchell and Weber suggest:

> *Memory contains gaps and silences that take on new significance when*
> *interrogated from the perspective of who the rememberer has become* [34].

It is through the interrogation of meaning generated through memory and experience and the way this meaning comes to be conceptualised and acted upon that an analysis of an individual's locatedness within specific contexts can be explicated.

While the purpose of this study is not to develop an understanding of how workplaces go about incorporating non-traditional employees within the larger organisational dynamic, nor to stratify characteristics of a group of employees, it does intend to explore how meaning and a sense of self, as detailed and built on by interview participants via the excavation of memory, is a constructed process of self-reflexivity. From this perspective, memory and the construction of meaning developed from experiences of being employed in a non-traditional work environment will be grounded and situationally related to the work context. As a process of identity formation, this study suggests that the identity construction engaged in by the interview participants is heavily influenced by the self-awareness of being a non-traditional employee located within the library as work context. It is from this basis that this study's methodology was formed.

**Methodology**

The individual experiences of a small number of male Library staff (*n*=3) working in three different sections of an Australian academic library were elicited using a series of structured interviews and informal conversations conducted and held between July 2003 and March 2005. The respondents were selected according to their self-awareness and articulation of being non-traditional employees, with the investigation focused on the processes of meaning construction these men undertook within their work environment. A detailed survey of responses was collated throughout the interview period in order to construct an impression of each respondent's perceptions of their place within the work context. While the implications of this methodology are discussed in more detail below, the intention here was not to develop a theory of 'meaning making' amongst non-traditional employees generally, but to investigate the individual experiences of these men according to the specific structure of their work context. This approach works to understand how context and individual experience function in the development of meaning construction, and how individuals engage their positions as non-traditional employees within specific work environments.

The respondents were all former colleagues of the author and this was a contributing factor in their selection. As a professional relationship with the respondents existed prior to the interview and discussions, willingness to be surveyed throughout the interview period and the establishment of trust between the author

and each respondent contributed to the elicitation of responses. The interviews were aimed at interrogating the self-perceptions and deeply held views of the informants over a long period of time so as to explore the complexities of the relationship each informant felt they had with their colleagues and workplace, as well as the gendered identities assumed in this context. This required a detailed knowledge and understanding of the positions of these men, and the careful consideration of specific instances occurring in the work context.

Just as this knowledge of the informants allowed access to areas of investigation that might otherwise not have been explored it also opened the possibility for contrived responses. The author acknowledged this and was aware of leading respondents and privileging areas of investigation. To account for this, lines of inquiry were grounded in responses from the informants with the reported perceptions of the informants providing the focus for the investigation of themes. Presented here are accounts of instances excavated from the memories and perceptions of the respondents interrogated through interviews and discussions.

As the interviews progressed the evolution of each informant's perceptions was noted. Particular attention was paid to the attitudes of the informants towards their role and assumed identity within the workplace as they evolved and consciousness of their positions developed. A certain amount of consciousness raising was achieved through this, whereby, and through the revisiting of recurring themes and lines of enquiry generated in the interviews, the respondents began to reflect and act on the articulations of their perceptions. As Korth suggests, 'consciousness raising involves bringing the shape and roots of inequality out from behind the backs of actors and from within the powerful tensions of their everyday lives'[35]. It was this reflective function generated by the consciousness raising nature of the interviews that engaged the informants and provided an opportunity for the development of notions of self and place.

Interview questions were initially divided into sections relating to how each respondent perceived himself as an individual; how he conceptualised himself in the workplace context; what anomalies, contradictions and tensions he experienced between these two locations of identity; and how each respondent made sense of these understandings of his identity. In particular, explorations of how each informant approached and enacted understandings of his role in the non-traditional work environment according to specific events and instances taken directly from the workplace context were applied. Themes were interrogated and explored as they developed with each respondent, and specific lines of enquiry emerged as the interviews and discussions continued.

Each informant was asked to respond to set interview questions in the first instance (see appendix 1), and to also reflect upon and add to their responses to these in subsequent meetings if they felt clarification or further information needed to be included. The initial interview, structured around formally composed questions, provided a basis from which subsequent interviews and discussions developed. A log of responses was recorded for each respondent that identified and generated themes of interest relevant to each respondent. As the interviews and discussions progressed, very specific conceptualisations and avenues of investigation were explored. From this, (tentative and partial) images of each individual's gendered workplace experiences were constructed and it is these that provide the evidentiary or data base of this study. Broad themes and areas of coincidence were excavated from the data and used in the development of the understandings reported on in this paper. The underlying focus however lay in not 'what occurred' as a matter of objective, historical 'fact',

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[35]

but how the events reported on were experienced, constructed and interpreted as central aspects of each informant's realisation of their work environment.

**The Informants**

The position of each informant was unique within their primary work-teams in two ways. Firstly, while the library contained a number of male employees (*n*=9), each informant represented the only male within their individual work-teams. This reflected the broader demographics of the library, with only two of the library's six sections containing more than one male employee. Statistically, approximately 87% of the total staff in the sample library were female- something that each informant identified as being significant to their positions within the library. A breakdown of gender representation in each section of the Library is outlined in Table 1:

| Section | % Women | Men | *n=* Women | Men |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Senior Management | 100 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| Administration | 87.5 | 12.5 | 8 | 1 |
| Client Services | 95.5 | 4.5 | 22 | 1 |
| Reference and Information Literacy | 79 | 21 | 11 | 3 |
| Resource Development | 89 | 11 | 8 | 1 |
| Information Access | 64 | 36 | 7 | 3 |

*Table 1: Statistical breakdown of staff by gender within the sample Library*

These figures are typical of Australian libraries, with recent Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data suggesting that '89 per cent of employed librarians and more than 97 per cent of library technicians are women'[36]. It was noted that one of the six sections of the Library contained no men, and within the sections of the Library where men were represented most highly, they were still very much a minority in gender terms. It was the awareness of this trend by the interview respondents and the way they came to visualise their placement within the organisation that was particularly important to this project.

Secondly, the informants were aged between 24 and 31, and held general positions outside of managerial and supervisory responsibility. In conjunction with these characteristics, two of the three informants had tertiary level, professional qualifications and the third formal industry recognised training to the level of Library Technician[37]. Each informant recognised themselves as being a 'non-traditional employee' prior to interviewing, and identified their positions in terms of their minority status within the larger work context. For purposes of anonymity, a pseudonym has been applied to each informant.

**Results**

A set of common themes was discerned through the analysis of the project data. These themes related to the perceptions of identity held by the informants as non-traditional workers in this environment and are reported and analysed here. The reported experiences and perceptions of the informants identified a number of similar accounts of being non-traditional employees. While the interviews and informal conversations engaged in for this paper may have prompted further self-reflection than undertaken otherwise, each informant maintained that their position within the workplace was a contested one and demonstrated having had reflected on this prior to their participation in this study. A number of themes emerged throughout the interview process that can be broadly categorised as issues relating to *workplace dynamics* and *identity formation*.

**Workplace Dynamics**

Early in the interview process, two of the informants noted:

> *'I know that I am seen as being 'different' in my section. I'm young and I'm male. I think this is new for this section of the Library because it's only been older women who have worked here' (Greg, 20/1/04).*

> *'I work in a very small team... and there is a distinct closer relationship between the female colleagues that they almost appear to be unaware of...*
> *As a male it is very difficult, nigh impossible, to break into the cliques that form in the workplace. You almost feel as though you're an intruder in a discipline that you don't belong. You have to be very conscious of the way you behave, speak, and generally act in the workplace. A joke shared between two female colleagues is not the same as a joke shared between a male and female colleague. Innocuous comments can be taken to be criticism and instead of people checking with you to clarify, a vicious rumour will be started instead' (Pete, 19/8/05).*

'Difference', as noted in this response, operated as a common element in determining stratification in the library. This was primarily activated through the observable extrinsic differences maintained by gender and age. Around these primary differences were built a series of informal but recognised sanctions specifically alluded to by two of the respondents:

> *'I'm usually seen in one of two ways- I'm everyone's favourite 'grandson' or 'son' (depending on the age of the colleague I'm working with), and am 'treated' as such. But this means I need to do certain things- I need to 'play the game' in terms of taking advice and knowing my position in the library, even if I'm in a higher level to the colleague I'm working with. Otherwise I'm seen as being a chauvinist male and represent a threat to the operation of the 'old girls club'. In this role I'm usually treated with suspicion.*

> *Obviously not all my colleagues are like this, but there is a group of long-term women staff who operate in this way (Michael, 25/1/04).*

> *'There is a fine line between being diffident, and being a "door mat". If you allow it colleagues will walk all over you to get things done, and generally present a low opinion of you. However if you stand up for yourself too much, then you're being troublesome' (Pete, 18/8/05).*

The informants each suggested that they assumed specific roles according to the informal sanctions applied in the workplace network. While these sanctions were reported as being applied to all males within the Library, they were seen as being particularly prevalent to newer, young male employees. It was reported that some of the long term male employees had a certain level of immunity to these sanctions, whereby they weren't required to demonstrate participation in 'the game', but were always regarded highly by their female colleagues.

In accounting for the differences they identified between their experiences and the perceived 'immunities' of the long term male employees, each respondent identified their recent inclusion in the Library (each respondent had been in the Library team for approx. 3 years- something identified as being a relatively short time as compared to the greater staff) as being central to their experiences in the library. Two of the three informants identified an era prior to their appointment that was often recalled in conversation and reminiscences by long-term female staff in the Library; an era that the immune male staff in the Library had also been part of. When asked how they felt about these conversations and reminiscences, one respondent suggested:

> *'Obviously it was a good time in the Library. It seems everyone got along and the place had some energy. They talked about particular events and staff who used to work here and how good things were then, which makes me feel that I've missed the boat in terms of being here at a good time. I don't feel like its my fault that the place is now a bit negative, but I think its clear that I wasn't part of the 'golden era' and part of the remaining staff who were there' (Greg, 12/3/04).*

The identification of a 'golden era' in the library was linked to the informant's perceptions and understanding of their own position within the workplace and how this responded directly to the maintenance of traditions and norms in the library. By having accounts of previous staff, events and 'good times' regularly articulated by their female colleagues, the informants felt a lack of connection to the workplace as it was currently organised. Feelings of 'missing the boat' were conflated with being distant from an in-group dynamic that functioned in terms of its shared experiences of the past- whether these reminiscences were actual or embellished. Membership of the 'in-group' functioned in these terms to maintain tradition and a sense of a workplace 'culture' that had since evolved.

When asked how they were inducted into the workplace each informant suggested that a sense of being new was maintained for some time after their appointment, and that legitimacy and the ability to participate in decision making and workplace activities were strongly associated with their difference. By the end of the data gathering phase of this study, the difference each informant noted began to encompass the

legitimacy long term employment provided for the older male employees within the library, and was also connected to authorisation and the roles assigned to individuals by the in-group. One respondent suggested that:

> *'Even our section manager, who is new to the team, but a woman is left out of things by the 'old girls'. They keep doing things like they used to, and pretty much ignore any directives and new initiatives. They pay lip service and agree in meetings and look supportive, but just keep going about things like they always have. Where it's different for me though is that I'm a man. While they ignore* [the section manager], *they still relate to her as a woman. Because I'm just a man, I not only get ignored with professional things, but also with social things. It's like it's expected that I just wouldn't know' (Michael, 25/9/04).*

It emerged that newness, age and gender functioned as perceived key factors for determining membership to the in-group. While the informants suggested that their experiences were contested due to being male, and also young, it was reported that the experiences of other new staff (in particular the female section manager) were similar to those of the informants. This presented an interesting point in this study- it emerged that all new staff to the library, regardless of gender, were marginalised in the social structure of the library. But while female staff might initially be isolated, they did over time, become incorporated far more quickly into the in-group dynamic.

What was recognised by the informants however was a distinction between 'professional' and 'social' interactions. The respondents made repeated reference to interactions that occurred as part of the professional requirements of work in the library, i.e., day to day work based interactions, and those that occurred in social situations away from work. While professionally new female staff had to earn their position in the social structure of the workplace over time, meaning that initially they were in a similarly isolated position to new male staff, the informants suggested that the social relationships that formed rarely isolated female staff, regardless of their newness. This was something that was contrary to the experiences of the informants:

> *'We were invited to a section dinner at a local restaurant to welcome a new staff member to the team. What stood out was that when I started my position, I wasn't treated out to dinner, or even really acknowledged with anything other than an introduction to the people in my team. But this new staff member was a typical old girl. She was going to fit in well because she was about the same age, was a woman and complained about the same sort of things the rest of them did. It was OK for her to have a dinner out because she was being groomed. When everyone got there it was clear that it was intended for certain people only. Me and one other male colleague were excluded from conversation- not directly, but were generally ignored, and topics of conversation that were uncomfortable to us- like women's issues-were raised. It became clear that while the invitation went out to everyone not everyone was* **really** *invited' (Michael, 12/10/04).*

Discussion of the dynamics of the in-group marked a significant point of similarity between the informants. Each had experience of being a 'token' in uncomfortable situations, and noted the functioning of a

politics of popularity and inclusion that operated in terms of the in-group. One striking account of an after work drinks session illustrates this:

> *'It was really obvious to me where the networks were- two very distinct groups formed- about a dozen of the 'old girls' all talking together over a shared bottle of wine and 3 blokes who each bought a beer as the offer of wine wasn't extended to us. We were informed after one of us made a joke about it that we didn't like wine and therefore weren't invited to share. The whole group then moved over to a pool table and a 'girls vs. boys' game was suggested by one of the women. The three of us 'boys' took on a team of the girls. As the game got underway, it seemed that it was appropriate for the girls to cheat by taking balls from the table; with the reason being that 'you boys are naturally better at pool so you have an advantage'. What was worse was that when we challenged this further and argued for a fair game,* [one of the women] *lent suggestively over the table and in a girlish voice said that we boys 'didn't really mind, did we'? Soon after this, I was taking my shot when* [one of the women] *pinched my bum. I wasn't exactly sure at that stage who had done it, and after trying to make light of it by making a joke out of a sexual harassment case, I was told that a case wouldn't stand up because it was done in fun, and* [the perpetrator] *was a manager' (Greg, 8/6/04).*

It was primarily notions of an in-group amongst the longer term female staff that dominated many of the comments of the informants on the workplace dynamic evident here. The informants suggested that while the degree of newness of staff appeared to be the defining factor in identifying membership of the in-group, their positions were doubly stigmatized- they were both young and male. While these descriptions are based in perceptions alone (albeit perceptions that were shared by all informants), they do suggest how *meaning* was made by participants in this workplace environment.

### Identity Formation

The second theme that emerged from the interview data concerned the understandings of identity each informant held. Questions relating to each informant's conceptualizations of his identity within the workplace, and how each informant viewed themselves were applied throughout the interview period. For one of the informants in particular, initial perceptions and understandings of himself and his role were positive:

> *I feel privileged to work at* [the case library]. *It's a big move for me to be here and I'm looking forward to getting into the position (Michael, 12/10/03).*

However this image had changed considerably by the end of the interview period. As he suggested:

> *'I'm tired of trying to be the person with all the energy- who everyone turns to organise morning teas and social events, only to be ripped into when I do. I try to organise things for*

> *the section so we can get to know each other outside of work and get some collegiality*
> *happening, but all I get is criticism when I suggest something' (Michael, 10/8/05).*

What became significant in these changed responses was the emergence of self-reflection and introspection. Each informant, particularly in terms of understanding negative situations and interactions, increasingly questioned their role within the workplace. Invariably this self-reflection involved situating each informant's own position within the larger workplace dynamic, and the related world views of the other staff. The outcome generally resulted in the informant withdrawing from the social interactions occurring within the workplace and the articulation of negative attitudes towards specific colleagues and the operations of the workplace. As suggested by two of the informants:

> *'I don't know why I bother with the place. It's going to the pack. We work*
> *with idiots'(Michael, 10/8/05).*

> *'My supervisor will tell my colleague, on the same level as I, about happenings in* [my] *area*
> *before me. Opportunities are presented to my colleague before me, and there is a closer*
> *relationship. At times you feel excluded from the "team"; however it doesn't appear to be*
> *malicious in that they appear to be unaware that it is happening. And as a male you can't*
> *mention anything about it' (Pete, 18/8/05).*

A common theme that developed was the notion that the respondent's exclusion wasn't intentionally effected. In one respondent's case this was reflected in the formation of conspiratorial assumptions about the working environment. Assumptions about the effectiveness of the organisation in terms of its maintenance of 'bad' staff and its support the in-group had the double effect of causing informants to question the operation and functionality of the workplace and its managers, as well as the role and agency they had within the work environment.

> *'I sat through an entire meeting on Monday and didn't utter a word, even when things being*
> *presented were wrong. Primarily because I knew that any comment I made would be twisted*
> *to suit the needs of the "Alpha female" in the meeting and we already have a strained working*
> *relationship' (Pete, 16/8/05).*

Each of the respondents at various stages through the interview period articulated high levels of frustration and anger towards colleagues and the organisation. In many cases this anger was contributed to by the role each informant felt they played in the organisation and their status as a non-traditional employee.

**Discussion**

While the experiences described here have been filtered through the perceptions of the informants, they have nonetheless had real outcomes in terms of the actions taken by the participants of this study. The delineating

feature of the non-traditional employees interviewed for this study centred on the self-identification of difference within the workplace environment, whereby a simultaneous sense of self and conceptualisation of the work environment was constructed according to gender and age difference. Gender was viewed as a foundational aspect of the difference each informant felt he had with his colleagues, but it emerged that age also featured prominently in the perceptions of the informants. While this is perhaps peculiar to this study and the experiences of the selected informants, it is something that the literature only gave passing reference to, and may form the basis of further analysis in terms of the way that non-traditional employees (particularly 'young' employees) engage their workplaces.

From this identification of difference came the articulation of behaviours that were grounded in the meanings each informant constructed around the work environment. This, in terms of the constructed meanings each informant applied to his work context and interactions with colleagues, worked to build specific conceptualisations of the work environment and identified the boundaries of agency each informant felt he had within the library. Via this realisation of difference, the construction of meaning that derived from this and the sense of alienation that was expressed by each informant produced a self-regulatory environment whereby actions and agency became largely self-monitored. The informants each noted that they were aware of the stratifications (whether they accepted or resisted these) of the workplace that had them positioned quite specifically within the social structure of the library. Invariably the informants repeatedly made reference to both gender and age as the arbitrating forces that these stratifications were structured around.

While an analysis of individual meaning making is in itself nothing new (social psychologists have long suggested that 'people construct their own version of reality'[38]), it is the way the identification of difference by the men interviewed in this study manifests in very real conceptual and physical outcomes that is significant here. How organisations then identify and incorporate 'different' individuals becomes a key issue for the maintenance of effective collegial relationships, morale and individual agency. From this, the literature on non-traditional workplaces detailing problems associated with 'tokenism' [39], 'invasion'[40], the 'glass elevator' [41], 'over-performance'[42], 'representation' [43] , and broader interpersonal relationships [44] [45] might not entirely account for the problems non-traditional employees encounter. Perhaps a more effective way to examine individuals within non-traditional work environments is to understand the way that their realities are constructed and enacted onto these contexts. While the literature explores aspects of the issues associated with being a non-traditional employee, it lacks an interrogation of the lived experiences and construction of meanings non-traditional employees engage. In this sense, it is the individual's experiential realisation of their location, regardless of the 'actual facts' of this located-ness that becomes the essential focus for determining how the experience of being a non-traditional employee functions within a larger work context.

While this opens a necessarily subject focused method of enquiry, it is one that in this study demonstrated various connections and similarities between respondents. A level of shared experience was

articulated between the respondents, with the work environment operating as the common element in the experiences of each respondent. In this sense, the construction of meaning engaged by each respondent was necessarily tied to the workplace as the context upon which meaning was established, enforced and made sense from. Other locations will invariably provide different responses from informants, but again, what is at stake here is not the development of 'general rules' for the experience of non-traditional employees, but case and site specific consistencies of shared experience amongst spatially situated individuals- the focus being specifically linked to how non-traditional workers in a specific work context make meaning about themselves, their work environment and colleagues. It becomes apparent that only when an understanding of how employees construct a sense of their workplace and each other can an analysis of what it *means* to be located within the work environment as a non-traditional employee be made. Engaging the constructedness of identities according to the workplace milieu through an excavation of memory and experience offers this possibility.

**Conclusion**

This study worked to establish how the construction of meaning grounded in the experiential realisation of 'self' functions as a motivating factor for agency in non-traditional work environments. Specifically in the case of the library explored in this study, it emerged that identity and inter-personal interactions were conceptualised and deployed primarily in terms of gender and age. Further work might be performed at different locations to consider how the construction of meaning undertaken by the non-traditional employee is developed and made sense of in the context of the work environment and how this corresponds to larger organisational and personnel issues. Further work might also be done in determining how age demographics affect perceptions of inclusion in non-traditional work environments. While only explored briefly here, age did appear to influence the roles and perceptions of the men interviewed in this study quite significantly.

The evidence presented in this study suggests that the implications of perceptions and meanings constructed around the experience of being a non-traditional employee have real outcomes in the organisational context. The way that self-perceived marginalisation manifests within the organisational context has potentially negative outcomes for both the non-traditional employee and the organisation as a whole. While Williams[46] suggests that men face different challenges to women in non-traditional work environments, they are, as this study suggests, nonetheless confronted with a range of issues that implicate workplace interactions. The 'double stigmatisation' referred to by Piper and Collamer[47] also needs to be explored further in terms of how meaning is constructed by men within libraries. While men may be fighting a negative image of their own construction, interrogating these self-held understandings about their role and place within non-traditional work environments offers a preliminary step for better engaging both traditional and non-traditional employees in the workplace. It follows that if dynamic and energetic men are to be attracted into the stereotypically female profession of librarianship the experiences of men currently working in these environments needs to be further explored, charted and interrogated.

**Footnotes**

[1] Jennifer A. Chatman and Charles A. O'Reilly, "Asymmetric reactions to work group sex diversity among men and women," *Academy of Management Journal*, 47 (April 2004): 193-208.

Chatman and O'Reilly highlight the idea of the 'asymmetric work environment' which applies in broadly synonymous ways with Williams' (1993) idea of the 'non-traditional' work environment.

[2] Christine L. Williams, *Gender differences at work: women and men in non-traditional occupations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

Christine L. Williams, "The glass escalator: hidden advantages for men in the 'female' professions," *Social Problems*, 39 (August 1992): 253-267.

Christine L. Williams, *Doing "women's work": men in non-traditional occupations* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1993).

Christine William's work on the experiences of non-traditional work environments provides a solid survey of the experiences of men in female dominated work places. Her surveys of men in nursing, social work, teaching and librarianship are particularly important for establishing an organisation theory approach to understanding the non-traditional work environment.

[3] Chatman and O'Reilly, "Asymmetric reactions to work group sex diversity among men and women," p 193-208

[4] Paul S. Piper and Barbara E. Collamer, "Male librarians: men in a feminised profession," *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 27 (September 2001): 406-411.

[5] James V. Carmichael, "The male librarian and the feminine image: a survey of stereotype, status and gender perceptions," *Library and Information Science Research*, 14 (October-December 1992): 411-446.

James V. Carmichael, "Gender issues in the workplace: male librarians tell their side," American Libraries, (March 1994): 227-230.

James Carmichael's exploration of gay and lesbian issues in the representation of librarians forms an integral base of literature on the representation of librarianship and highlights the double stigma attached to men in the profession.

[6] Rosabeth M. Kanter, "Some effects of proportions on group life: skewed sex ratios and responses to token women," *American Journal of Sociology*, 82 (1977): 965-990.

Rosabeth Kanter's work in organisational relationships, and more specifically 'tokenism', is drawn on here in terms of the way that men in librarianship come to see themselves within the organisational setting.

[7]Williams, "Doing women's work". Williams' ideas of the 'glass escalator' and 'tracking' are particularly relevant here, and are applied in terms of the experiences of the respondents to this study. Advantage through minority status wasn't noted by the respondents here.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Paul S. Piper and Barbara E. Collamer, "Male librarians: men in a feminised profession," *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 27 (September 2001): 410.

[10] Andrew Agapiou, "Perceptions of gender roles and attitudes toward work among male and female operatives in the Scottish construction industry," *Construction Management and Economics*, 20 (2002): 699.

[11] Williams, "The glass escalator: hidden advantages for men in the 'female' professions," p. 253.

[12] Jerry A. Jacobs, *Revolving doors: sex segregation and women's careers* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

[13] Barbara Reskin and Patricia A. Roos, *Job queues, gender queues: explaining women's inroads into male occupations*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

[14] Williams, "The glass escalator: hidden advantages for men in the 'female' professions," p. 253-267. This landmark study of non-traditional work environments highlights the issues of the 'glass escalator' and 'tracking' related to men's progression through the organisation in female dominated work environments.

[15] Carmichael, "Gender issues in the workplace: male librarians tell their side," p. 227.

[16] Chatman and O'Reilly, "Asymmetric reactions to work group sex diversity among men and women," p. 193, p. 206. In this article Chatman and O'Reilly develop their idea of 'similarity-attraction theory' for explaining the experiences of individuals working in non-traditional work environments.

[17] Anne S. Tsui, Terri D. Egan, and Charles A. O'Reilly, "Being different: relational demography and organisational attachment," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 37 (September 1992): 549-579.

[18] Williams, "Doing women's work".

[19] Carmichael, "The male librarian and the feminine image," p. 411-446.
Carmichael, "Gender issues in the workplace: male librarians tell their side," p. 227-230.

[20] Piper and Collamer, "Male librarians: men in a feminised profession," p. 406-411.

[21] Mary Jo Lynch, "Retirement and recruitment," *American Libraries*, (January 2005): p. 28.

Mary Jo Lynch, "What we know about librarians," *American Libraries*, (February 2000): p. 8-10.

[22] Williams, "The glass escalator: hidden advantages for men in the 'female' professions," p. 253-267.

[23] Peter Biskup, "Gender and status in Australian librarianship: some issues," *Australian Library Journal*, (August 1994): p.165-179. Peter Biskup has applied an exhaustive survey of literature dealing with gender diversity within Australian libraries. He highlights that librarianship has until recently been a male dominated profession, an idea that challenges stereotypes about the profession. This survey is particularly important due to the depth of its historical investigation.

[24] Ibid. p. 165.

[25] Carmichael, "The male librarian and the feminine image," p. 411-446.
Carmichael, "Gender issues in the workplace: male librarians tell their side," p. 227-230.

[26] Piper and Collamer, "Male librarians: men in a feminised profession" p. 406.

[27] Locke J. Morrisey and Donald O. Case, "There goes my image: the perception of male librarians by colleague, student and self," *College & Research Libraries*, (September 1988): 453-464.

[28] Allan Angoff, "The male librarian- an anomaly?" *Library Journal*, 84 (1959): 553-556.
Angoff presents a particularly clear position regarding perceptions of 'librarianship as women's work' and suggestions that 'no good man should be found dead in the library business' (553).

[29] Morrisey and Case, "There goes my image: the perception of male librarians by colleague, student and self," p. 454.

[30] Ibid, p.461.

[31] Chatman and O'Reilly, "Asymmetric reactions to work group sex diversity among men and women," p.193-208.

[32] Charles Stangor, LaureLynch, Changming Duan and Beth Glass, "Categorisation of individuals on the basis of multiple social features," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 62 (February 1992): 207-218.

[33] Jon Austin (ed), *Culture and Identity* (2nd ed.) (Frenchs Forest: Pearson, 2005), p. 21.

[34] Claudia Mitchell and Sandra Weber, *Reinventing ourselves as teachers: beyond nostalgia* (Philadelphia: Falmer Press, 1999), p. 54.

[35] Barbara Korth, "Critical qualitative research as consciousness raising: the dialogic texts of researcher/researchee interactions," Qualitative Inquiry, 8 (2002): 381-403.

[36] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force Australia, cat. No. 6203.0*, (Canberra: AGPS, 2005).

[37] In Australia, the minimum qualification requirement for professionals is an undergraduate Library and Information Management degree or similarly Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) accredited qualification. Two of the three respondents interviewed for this paper held professional level qualifications, with one of the two professionals holding Masters level qualifications in LIM. Each of these respondents were employed as professionals in the sample Library, with the third holding certificate level Library technician qualifications and employed within the sample Library as a Library technician.

[38] Heuer, R.J. (1999). Psychology of intelligence analysis. Centre for the Study of Intelligence. Retrieved 30th June 2005 from http://www.cia.gov/csi/books/19104/index.html

[39] Rosabeth M. Kanter, "Some effects of proportions on group life: skewed sex ratios and responses to token women," *American Journal of Sociology*, 82 (1977): 965-990.

[40] David Morgan, *Discovering men* (London: Routledge, 1992).

[41] Chatman and O'Reilly, "Asymmetric reactions to work group sex diversity among men and women," p.193-208.

[42] Williams, "Gender differences at work: women and men in non-traditional occupations".

[43] Tsui, Egan, and O'Reilly, "Being different: relational demography and organisational attachment" p. 549-579.

[44] Rosemary Pringle, *Secretaries talk* (London: Verso, 1988).

[45] Anne Witz, *Professions and patriarchy* (London: Routledge, 1992).

[46] Williams, "Doing women's work".

[47] Piper and Collamer, "Male librarians: men in a feminised profession"

**Appendix 1: Interview Question Transcript**

The following questioned were presented to the interview informants during the first meeting with the author. Responses to the questions below were organised according to themes presented by each informant and constituted the foundation for subsequent meetings and interviews. From this interview were developed a number of lines of enquiry that worked to interrogate the individual experiences of the informants in terms of their workplace experiences of being 'non traditional' employees.

**Sample Frame**: Respondents were male employees from a regional University Library in Australia
**Interview Date**: Interviews were conducted between July 2003 and March 2005, with this initial interview conducted in July 2003.
**Interview Method**: Interviews were conducted face to face during the interview period, with follow up conversations held via telephone and email.

**Introduction**: *Firstly, welcome and thank you for committing your time to this interview. This interview is part of a larger research project that is investigating the experiences of male librarians. Questions will be broadly focused on your experiences as a male employed in a Library, with the interview expected to take approximately 45 minutes. Please take your time in preparing your responses and feel free to revisit questions during the interview process. As mentioned, this interview will form the basis of further interviews and discussions. Your anonymity will be preserved, with no mention of your name, position, distinguishing characteristics or workplace being identified.*

**Questions:**

If I could begin by asking you what your initial thoughts on being a male employed in a Library are?

As a male working in what is known as a 'non-traditional workplace' for men, have you had any experiences where your gender has affected the way you function at work?

Research suggests that men in non-traditional work environments, such as Libraries, experience the effects of *tokenism*- i.e., they are identifiable in the workplace due to gender difference. According to tokenism, men working in non-traditional work environments become noticed in-proportionally to their female colleagues.
- Would you identify yourself as being part of a minority at work due to your gender?
- In your experience, would a member of a minority gender group be treated differently to others at work?
- If a member of a minority gender group were treated differently, can you list any reasons why this might occur?

Have you had any experiences where relationships with colleagues in the workplace affected by gender?

Morgan (1992) suggests that in some cases 'token' employees can be considered by others to be *invading* a work environment, even though they remain as a minority.

- As a male working in a Library, have you ever experienced circumstances where you were considered to be *invading* the social structure of your workplace?
- If a *token* employee was considered to be invading the social structure of a workplace, can you list any reasons for why this might be?

Are you aware of your 'normal' daily behaviours being altered to accommodate the interactions you have with colleagues (in particular your female colleagues) at work?

To follow this a bit, does/is the way you react to work 'events' (by this I mean all day to day activities, with particular reference to those ones that require you to work with others) affected by this underlying awareness that you are a non-traditional employee?

In term of a 'sense of self', do relationships at work cause you to consider/reconsider your 'world view' or ontology of life?

As a counter to Hutlin's (2003) *glass elevator* theory, William's (1989) suggests that staff from gender minorities need to 'over-perform' to become successful.
- In your experience, do you feel a need to over-perform in order to be recognised and acknowledged in the workplace?


Do events, activities and relationships with colleagues cause you to consider your 'place' in the work environment?

Do past events, experiences and your responses to these occurrences influence your approach to future interactions with colleagues and your workplace?

Can you list some reasons for why you chose Librarianship and Libraries as a career and place of employment?

Were issues of gender composition in Libraries considerations in determining this choice?

Tsui et al. (1992) suggests that the more outnumbered in terms of gender representation an employee feels with his/her colleagues, the more likely that person is to have lowered commitment to work, and will subsequently be more likely to leave.
- Would you agree with this theory?

Theorists have suggested that men working in non-traditional workplaces often feel isolated, and subsequently seek employment in more traditional employment roles.
- Does the gender composition in your Library cause you to question your career choice?

Theorists have suggested that workplaces operate on gender lines, where men are drawn to work with other men, and women to other women.
- Are you intrinsically drawn to work with colleagues of the same gender?
- Do you feel encouraged through workplace and social pressures to work with colleagues of the same gender?
- Do you work as co-operatively with women as you do with men?

Witz (1992) suggests that a process of demarcation occurs in workplaces with asymmetric gender representation, whereby minority groups cluster together, but then move to identify, establish and promote this difference within the broader work environment.
- Does there occur a process of identifying and demarcating a 'men's group' in the Library in which you work?
- Does there occur a process of identifying and demarcating a 'woman's group' in the Library in which you work?
- Do informal groups, formed through work contact but divided on gender lines, meet socially (outside the workplace)?
- Do you feel having an informal network of other male colleagues is important?

Theorists have suggested that men often exceed more than women in non-traditional work environments. Much of this is linked to ideas to 'social' and 'instrumental' work relationships. 'Social' relationships refer to friendships and collegial networks, whilst 'instrumental' relationships refer to alliances formed for professional benefit and career enhancement.

- Are you aware of these sorts of relationships in your workplace?
- Do you form Social relationships at work with colleagues?
- Do you form Instrumental relationships at work with colleagues and superiors?

Do you feel that you are able contribute to decision making and formal processes in your Library?

Do you feel that the workplace values your involvement in workplace processes?

Pringle (1988) suggests that a range of popular conceptions of women lead them to be considered differently in positions of authority and leadership as compared to men.

- Is gender a factor in developing the relationships you have with your supervisors and managers?
- Do you feel more comfortable working with supervisors and managers of the same gender?
- In general, do you consider female supervisors and managers to be as competent as male supervisors and managers?

Popular stereotypes and representations about Librarianship often gender and type-cast the role of the Librarian into a specific *image*.

- Is the formation of your own professional *identity* a recurring issue for you in terms of popular stereotypes?
- Do you feel capable of developing your own professional identity regardless of popular stereotypes of Librarianship?

Williams (1993) suggests that men working in non-traditional workplaces are often subject to questions of their gender identity, whereby notions of masculinity are bought into question in terms of career choice.

- Are social pressures regarding gender evident to you in your position as a librarian?
- Do you feel required, through workplace and social pressures, to actively affirm and identify your gender due to your career choice?

Theorists suggest that men working in non-traditional workplaces often feel that they have no identity from which to moderate actions and workplace behaviour. As such, men working in these environments might sometimes over-emphasise or under-emphasise their understandings of masculinity in order to establish a social position within the work group.

- Do you feel required to over-emphasise masculinity in your Library?
- Do you feel required to under-emphasise masculinity in your Library?

Are notions of masculinity, as commonly understood by you, encouraged by your workplace?

Is there anything further you would like to contribute to this interview, or points that you would like to revisit?

Thank you for your time.

*Close of Interview*