

d'aucun examen. Notre recherche effectue une analyse critique à la fois historique et linguistique des consultants dans les bibliothèques universitaires. Cette approche critique permet d'encadrer une discussion sur des questions que les bibliothécaires n'ont pas nécessairement pu soulever auparavant dans le dialogue concernant la bibliothéconomie. Notre analyse documentaire se penche sur un historique des consultations dans les bibliothèques. Cet examen, ainsi que l'étude ciblée des ressources en bibliothéconomie et en sciences de l'information, guideront deux axes d'analyse linguistique. Le premier effectue la critique des principes fondamentaux utilisés pour définir et caractériser les consultants en bibliothèques. Particulièrement l'affirmation selon laquelle les consultants sont des professionnels impartiaux qui font bénéficier les bibliothèques de leur « expertise » et de leurs idées « nouvelles ». Le deuxième axe s'intéresse aux stratégies rhétoriques employées dans les textes actuels : le vocabulaire polarisé, l'argumentation épouvantail, et le langage figuratif et indirect. La section de discussion décortique ces stratégies linguistiques, examine les lacunes des textes, et s'interroge sur la manière dont les connaissances et l'influence sont exprimées par le langage, tout en établissant des liens avec le contexte général du néolibéralisme.

Mots-clés : bibliothèques universitaires · consultants · pratiques néolibérales

Aping business rhetoric and models doesn't save libraries[;] it transforms them into something else. We're a profession and an institution in crisis because we have a structural contradiction between our purpose and practices as they've historically evolved and our adaption to the current environment.
— John Buschman, "Libraries and the Decline of Public Purposes"

THERE is a present trend in academic libraries to hire consultants for internal crises, change management projects, strategic planning processes, assessment of outcomes, evidence-based decision making, information literacy instruction, and more.¹ Although we hear informally about the use of consultants in academic libraries, the practice has gone unexamined. In the context of academic libraries, we have found that there is no formal research about what consultants do, nor is there evidence to support successful outcomes of their work. Tracing the origin of the unquestioned use of consultants in libraries is critical for understanding where we are today. The limited research about consultants in libraries may be attributed to a view, advocated in texts about library consulting, that hiring consultants is a beneficial activity and hence need not and should not be challenged. It is understood that consultants have an unquestionable place in such areas as large-scale systems or building and renovation projects. When it comes to core library organizational activities, however, the roles afforded to consultants and the characteristics attributed to them invite criticism. Grounded in a call to engage critically with “the power structures, technologies,

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histories, and ways of life of information societies” (Capurro 2000, 276), our research is an analysis and discussion about the use of consultants in academic libraries.

We begin with a literature review consisting of three parts. First, we present an abbreviated historical review of consultants in libraries. This chronological review is followed by a short literature review to situate academic libraries in neoliberal times and an introduction to consulting as a neoliberal practice. Finally, to set the groundwork for the textual analysis used in our research, we conclude with a review of library and information science (LIS) literature that urges attentiveness to the discourse used in libraries.

I. An Abbreviated History of Consulting in Libraries

While consulting in academic libraries is the focus of our research, a comprehensive examination of libraries is essential to capture the variety of literature written by consultants, scholars, librarians, and others. Consequently, we have also integrated into our review relevant literature written about academic, public, and special libraries and literature across disciplines such as management and organizational psychology.

Construction and Survey Work (1940s to 1960s)

Consultants were part of the library landscape well before the 1930s, but it was during this decade that architectural and building expertise started to be regularly required for library planning and construction projects (Schell 1975, 201). In the 1870s, other types of consulting began in private, for-profit, and commercial organizations, when Frederick Taylor developed time-and-motion studies to increase efficiencies in the workplace (see review in Noble 1986). These “scientific management” studies addressed the improvement of human efficiencies to save time and money on repetitive tasks. Business efficiencies such as Taylor’s were transformed into survey work in libraries. Initially called surveyors, these library consultants conducted basic questionnaires and interviews that included reviews of library holdings, equipment, staff, facilities, and patrons. The earliest recorded library survey was in 1951, when the New York Public Library hired a management firm to create and implement a review of the library system to help library administration manage large-scale change (Dougherty 1980, 425).

The outcome of the surveyors’ work was usually a formal report, which was not made publicly available due to the sensitive issues raised by respondents. The reports were regarded as significant despite a general lack of documented evidence about their results or contents. According to Dougherty, due to a problem with transparency of the survey data and reports, skeptics questioned the results and whether policies created from the data were implemented, and if so, whether they were effective

(1980, 426). In 1967, the director of the School of Library Science at Simmons College expressed his extreme discontent about library consultants in a *Library Journal* report: “Inept Library Consultants Attacked by Shaffer.” Shaffer claimed that consultants were not using current survey techniques and hired poorly qualified staff to administer the surveys (*Library Journal News* 1967, 3946). He dismissed the work and the role of consultants because the low quality of surveys meant the results were inaccurate and misleading.

Just as corporate business practices directly influenced the early roles of consulting in libraries, LIS literature also relied on what was written for the business world. Schell acknowledged that there was little written about consulting in libraries specifically and recommended that library and information studies should bring basic theory and practice from business consulting and apply it directly to libraries (1975, 209). Dougherty reported that early consultants often made recommendations that were more appropriate for private corporations than for non-profit, socially oriented institutions such as libraries (1980, 425). The connection between consulting and corporate practices was explicit during this time.

In the introduction to the 1969 *Directory of Library Consultants*, Blasingame wrote that library problems large and small were now being solved by consultants, and he considered consultant activities to be commonplace in libraries. Consultants were involved in projects ranging from renovation, construction, and the development of new library services in public libraries to organizational, managerial, and financial rejuvenation in academic libraries.

The consulting trend was not specific to North American libraries. In the mid-1960s in the United Kingdom, the Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux (Aslib) established a consultancy service. Aslib members were primarily from industrial and commercial domains, and the association grew rapidly. Comparable to what was happening with survey data, transparency in consulting work was also minimal. That is, the advice of the consultants or outcomes of consulting projects were rarely reported beyond the host institution. Gilchrist believed that the more conservative and public service-oriented members of the UK Library Association were slower to accept consultants because they were more skeptical than their Aslib counterparts toward management strategies in general (1999, 211). The use of consultants in organizational management was a precursor to the widespread use of neoliberal strategies seen in libraries today.

Service and Operational Changes (1970s and 1980s)

As technology continued to develop rapidly, libraries became increasingly dependent on consultants for supporting service and operational changes (Courtney and

Johnson 1992, 264). Additional comprehensive survey approaches evolved, such as problem analysis, data collection, mathematical models, and implementation plans (for an example, see Rouse and Rouse's library operations model, developed at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1973).

Dougherty forecast that consultants would play an increasing role in academic libraries in the 1980s. He theorized that library managers would be plagued by pressures to keep current in a fast-changing economic and technological environment, which would require the use of "specialist problem-solvers" (1980, 427). He also speculated that management consultants would become increasingly important due to the fast pace of technological change, and he further predicted the concomitant growth of discontent and resistance among academic library staff because of these changes in libraries (429). He argued that the prosperity seen in academic libraries over the previous 40 years could not endure. Large comprehensive collections, new library construction, increased staff complements, and more services for users could not be sustained, particularly when the growth in post-secondary education and budget allocations started to slow. To help library directors manage organizational change and budgetary decline, the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) began a consulting program. Dougherty wrote that it was key for ARL to formalize its consulting service due to the complexities of the era and to expand the pool of qualified consultants for academic libraries (434). According to Adler, this was the beginning of neoliberalism's hold on libraries. In her review of Library of Congress documents from the 1980s, she found that because libraries are supported by public funds and fall into the category of public goods, they faced serious governmental budget cuts, which led to strategic management practices within the library (2015, 30).

Although consulting can now be considered common in libraries, as indicated by an increase in consultant contracts and the establishment of professional organizations and directories, there were no regulations guiding the practice until the 1980s. Blasingame originally called for professional and ethical guidelines for consultants in his introduction to the first directory of library consultants in 1969. But it wasn't until 1983 that "Guidelines for Consultants Working in Librarianship and Information Science" were approved by the UK Library Association (Courtney and Johnson 1992, 272). The American Library Association (ALA) also developed a code of ethics through the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies (ASCLA 2016, n.p.). Derived from the Institute of Management Consultants, the "Library Consultants Code of Ethics" is still used today, but the association does not offer certification. ASCLA currently has 800 members, including library agencies, networks, co-operatives, and consultants. The creation of ethical guidelines further

substantiated organizing practices and continued to establish the normative use of consultants.

Environmental Changes and Budget Challenges (1990s to 2000s)

New Public Management (NPM) practices surfaced in the United States and United Kingdom during the 1980s, but it was not until the 1990s that the neoliberal doctrine of NPM seeped into the public sector and slowly reached the field of education (Serrano-Velarde 2010, 130). The NPM expectation that service provision in the public sector should operate like a private-sector venture became well established in higher education (Lorenz 2012, 601). Rapid changes in library technologies continued, and new expectations from user communities were widespread in the 1990s. Consultants were hired to help libraries adapt to these external environmental changes and user expectations. Four trends identified by Lippitt and Lippitt prompted the rise of consultants in libraries: technological development, crises in human resources, undeveloped consulting skills of workers, and discretionary time (1986, 28).

Thus, new opportunities were created for library consultants to fill roles related to these trends and crises. In 1994, Rogers described LIS consulting as a small niche within a larger billion-dollar industry. Gilchrist proclaimed that library and information consulting in the United Kingdom could be regarded as “legitimate, professional, and almost respectable” (1999, 211). By 2006, Skrzyszewski stated that strategic planning consultants earned 15 percent of consultant revenues in the business and non-profit sector and predicted that the revenue for consultants in all sectors would continue to grow (2006, 125). Although there is no information to support why revenue for consultants might continue to grow, the increasing use of neoliberal management practices in library operations may be an indicator. For example, it was during this time that Stoffle, Renaud, and Veldof called for academic libraries to respond to the crisis in libraries with “unprecedented,” “radical,” and “revolutionary” change by using corporate business models and practices (1996, 213). As Harvey articulates, a key neoliberal strategy is to manufacture a crisis to justify change, and crisis talk has become common conversation in librarianship (2005, 2).

Organizational Changes and Change Management (2010–)

Library consulting continues to grow in the 21st century. The use of consultants has become particularly prevalent during library restructuring and strategic planning initiatives, with the narrative of change becoming the norm in academic libraries. Today, professional library associations play a major role in the consultation process. The ALA currently supports two groups that provide consultancy services. ASCLA established a new library consultant interest group in 2011, with membership doubling from 32 to 63 members within the first year (Smithee 2013, n.p.). Targeting

academic libraries, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) advertises consulting services to implement the “ACRL Standards for Libraries in Higher Education” (Mueller 2012, n.p.). ACRL consultants can also be hired for a broad range of other activities. These activities include planning and executing a library program review, preparing for accreditation, thinking strategically, environmental scanning, leading and managing change to enhance organizational effectiveness, facilitating retreats for leadership and team development, planning kickoff events, facilitating departmental and other stakeholder meetings, and developing and implementing focus groups. Seale proposes that professional associations such as ACRL work hard to maintain a single discourse (in this case, the value of consultants) to encourage members to follow the association, not question it (2013, 46). Following the lead of professional associations and accrediting bodies such as the ALA, it makes sense that a call emerges in the *Associate University Librarian Handbook* for LIS schools to offer coursework for students to learn how to set up and operate a consulting business (Eden 2012, 208).

In recent years, little has been written about consulting in libraries. For example, only 16 articles were found with the descriptor “library consultant” in *Library Literature & Information Science Full Text*. This database indexes and abstracts over 400 key LIS journals, since 1980. Why is there such an imbalance between the growth of library consulting as a field and available literature on the topic? As Kaspar and vanDuinkerken, proponents of internal, do-it-yourself consulting, observe, there is a resignation with the profession over the last 20 years to accept consultants for internal organizational changes rather than owning it ourselves (2014, 1). This discrepancy between the indiscriminate and accepted use of consultants and the lack of discourse about their role and impact on libraries is addressed further in our discussion section.

II. Neoliberalism, Consultants, and Critical Perspectives

Academic libraries do not exist in isolation but rather function within the governance and administrative structures of higher education and within the broader realities of public institutions in a time of neoliberalism. There are many examples of neoliberal practices within higher education, including what Mills calls a focus on “marketised and contractual knowledge exchange processes and flows” and the creation of other roles to support knowledge, including corporatized knowledge actors: “consultants, brokers and experts” (2015, 209). Similarly, there are many organizational behaviours in libraries that align with neoliberal practices. Adler suggests that some of these practices include “private sector’s involvement and influence, strategic planning, information commodification and marketing, deskilling and downsizing labor forces, commercial-technological approaches to market research, and entrepreneurial

funding structures” (2015, 34). When consultants are hired in public institutions such as libraries, the pressures of economic impact overshadow systems of education (Serrano-Valarde and Krücken 2012, 279). Nicholson proposes that librarians have accepted without question corporate models such as these in their workplaces (2015, 332).

In academic libraries, there are many reasons why hiring a consultant may threaten the practice of librarianship. First, consulting is a business and aligns with neoliberal practices of employing business solutions to address crises and change. Second, the practice also raises questions of agency and power. Who has the power in a consultant/client relationship? And finally, using corporate solutions for library restructuring, strategic planning, or other organizational change may create conflict between the ethical guidelines and values of librarianship and the consultant’s recommendations for a library. Seale highlights issues around hiring an information literacy consultant to define and measure value in academic libraries. Seale questions how a critical distance from the consultant’s own work is maintained if the consultant is also a library and information scholar. Does the repeated use of the consultant’s work within academic libraries create a “closed discursive system that undoubtedly promotes the uncritical adoption of ideas that seem authoritative and obvious” (2013, 54)?

A critical perspective gives us a structure to talk about issues that we may not have been able to historically fit into our dialogue about library practice. The growing critiques of neoliberalism in higher education (for example, Harvey 2005, Olssen and Peters 2005) lend themselves to a critical perspective and are well represented in literature written about higher education, including a recent proliferation of scholarship related to librarians and archivists in academic libraries (see Cifor and Lee 2017, Nicholson 2015, and Waugh 2014). The broader critical librarianship movement (#critlib) has resulted in new journals, conferences, and research dedicated to questions, structures, and assumptions that reinforce power and oppression in academic libraries. There are only a few substantive examples of scholarly literature about consultants in higher education, however. In 2015, the *Journal of Educational Administration and History* published a special issue offering a critical perspective on the use of consultants in higher education. Similarly, Serrano-Valarde investigated issues of importing private-sector practices into public-sector domains such as public universities, placing her analysis within a broader neoliberal critique (2010, 280). These examples demonstrate that there has been some engagement with the use of consultants within a broader academic discourse, but not specific to libraries.

Fincham and Clark (2002) trace two distinct types of literature about consultants. The first type focuses on organizational development, which started in the late

1950s and continued into the 1980s. They characterize organizational development as primarily existing for and by consultants, a literature “located inside the activity itself” (6) that possesses an “essentially self-congratulatory manner” (7). In contrast to the literature on organizational development, Fincham and Clark refer to the second, emerging trend as the critical literature:

Critical literature on the whole has not been concerned with the effectiveness of consultancy work or been motivated by a wish to improve practice. Instead, the growth of the management consultancy industry has been seen as indicative of broader social and economic changes, and the critical literature has sought to utilize the example of the consultancy industry to contribute to academic debates in a number of discipline areas, particularly geography, history, management, and sociology. (7)

A lack of critical approach in libraries is also evident within LIS literature. That is, there are many examples of how-to guides, editorials, and literature by and for consultants, but there are remarkably few that critically engage with the practice. Literature that informs the reader about “how to hire a consultant” (e.g., Matthews 1994) or “how to be a good consultant” (e.g., Wormell, Olesen and Mikulás 2011) implicitly assumes that using consultants is standard, expected, beneficial, and conventional. For example, in Matthews’s “The Effective Use of Consultants in Libraries,” the role of consultants is not questioned. While this report aims to provide insight into selecting consultants and using them effectively, the consultant’s expertise is presumed, not discussed (1994, 747). Literature written by and for library consultants also reiterates the normative practice of hiring consultants (see, for example, the professional publication *AIIP Connections*, 2015). Fincham and Clark remind us that organizational development literature “assumes that management consultants have already convinced clients of their value and know how” (2002, 6). In the LIS scholarship to date, this assumption seems to have stifled any ongoing discussion about the practice or its efficacy.

III. Language in the Library

The language of consumerism and commodification of knowledge is now part of the language of libraries, but this should not entail an uncritical acceptance of the ideology behind the language and what the language represents in practice. As Budd recommends: “The library’s language, and practice, should flow from as clear an idea of purpose as possible. And librarians should examine purpose independently from the pressures of capitalism and consumption” (1997, 319). A textual analysis allows us to unpack the discursive practices used in written work about consultants, because the ways in which realities are represented in language have effects beyond what is written. According to wa Mwachofi, Alfino, and Wynyard, language is not neutral but is a performative act that is able to negate or confirm the validity of social structures.

The ideologies created and conveyed through language are reproduced in texts, providing the conditions or frame for the performance to happen:

The more a frame becomes part of our culture, the more it escapes scrutiny; also, the less “visible” it becomes. In other words, paradoxically, it becomes more absent as it becomes more present. And ironically, the less visible it becomes, the more power it gains because it escapes our scrutiny. (1998, 155)

Is this what has happened with the role of consultants in libraries? Are the language strategies used in texts about consulting negating or validating their use? As we consider the impact of neoliberalism, academic libraries serve as a particularly interesting context for asking these questions.

Seale’s critique of ACRL’s information literacy standards demonstrates that discursive practices repeat themselves and may “constrain alternative discourses that might critique, contest and challenge their hegemony” (2013, 46). Seale submits that critical theories of knowledge production and discursive practices analyzed with a neoliberal lens in education also apply to libraries. And importantly, discursive practices are not innocent and need to be dismantled to allow space for further discussion and alternate perspectives.

IV. Methodology

The goal of our research is to investigate the type of language used in published texts about library consultants. To reach this goal, we examined and categorized the words and phrases used to define, describe, and characterize consultants in a variety of texts. To begin, we reviewed dictionaries, encyclopedias, directories, handbooks, and guides—what we refer to here as LIS reference materials. We selected these materials by searching for LIS reference materials in the library catalogue of a research-intensive Canadian university. For materials published in more than one edition, we reviewed the editions available. This academic library houses a comprehensive collection of current and legacy LIS resources, as it supports an ALA-accredited master’s program in library and information science that is in its 50th year.

LIS reference materials are created for the teaching, learning, and research needs of a targeted audience: LIS students, scholars, and practitioners. The authors of these works include consultants, researchers, practitioners, LIS scholars, and others. We were motivated to analyze this literature because it is representative of the resources that influence student learning about LIS topics, which in turn may influence perceptions of the value of consultants. For a fuller analysis, materials presented in our chronological literature review were also considered for textual analysis even though they may refer to consultants generally or in other fields not specific to libraries. All reference materials were reviewed, along with a small number of works

in each category of directories, handbooks, and guides. Appendix A provides a full list of titles.

To begin, formal definitions of library consultants in LIS reference materials were recorded. Clear themes emerged from these texts due to the repetition of words and phrases and noticeable use of a variety of linguistic strategies when describing what consultants do. Once these themes emerged, we re-examined the LIS reference materials to find other instances of the themes. We also re-examined materials from our literature review section to include in our findings. Weaving the two strands of literature together (LIS reference materials and other consulting literature that may be general or LIS-specific), we identified themes in language used in these texts.

V. Findings

The first theme is consultant as expert: consultants are “experts” who bring “fresh” ideas and are “unbiased.” The second theme is the use of rhetorical strategies to talk abstractly and indirectly about consulting, specifically by using polarizing language, straw man reasoning, and figurative and indirect language.

Consultant as Expert

To begin, we note that not all LIS reference materials we examined define or discuss library consultants. For example, neither *The Bookman's Glossary*, a dictionary edited by Peters in 1975 and 1983, nor the *Encyclopaedia of Librarianship*, edited by Landau in 1961 and 1966, includes information about consultants. As shown in Appendix B, however, many of the reference materials that do define or characterize consultants do so within a range of three general themes: consultants are “experts,” consultants have “fresh” ideas, and they are “unbiased.”

Consultants Are “Experts”

The first instance of defining and representing library consultants in reference literature appears in the *ALA Glossary of Library Terms*, published in 1943 (Thompson 1943). With subsequent editions published in 1983 (Young and Belanger 1983) and 2013 (Levine-Clark and Carter 2013), the representation of library consultants expands from an emphasis on the general value of consultants to the increased importance of their role. Specifically, a consultant is defined in the 1943 edition as a “specialist in a particular subject” working on “special problems” (Thompson 1943, 36). Forty years later, however, a consultant is “an expert in a specialized field brought in by a library or other agency for professional or technical advice” (Young and Belanger 1983, 57). Also, “library consultant” has its own entry in the glossary in the 1983 and 2013 editions and is defined as an “external expert,” “commissioned by a library to give professional or technical advice on planning, management, operations, physical

facilities, or other areas of concern” (Young and Belanger 1983, 131; Levine-Clark and Carter 2013, 153). The *Dictionary for Library and Information Science* also consistently includes a definition of library consultants across a ten-year span, reinforcing the expertise claim (Reitz 2004 and 2013).

Over time, “consultant as expert” becomes a defined attribute. It must be acknowledged that there is a significant difference between a specialist, with special qualifications to offer, and an expert, who provides unchallenged recommendations. According to the *OED Online*, a specialist assumes training and skills for a specific subject, activity, or business. In contrast, an expert assumes competence, authority, proficiency, and comprehensive knowledge and skill in an area (*OED Online* 2017).

By continually assigning the role of expert to the consultant, there is an unspoken assumption about levels of expertise available in the library. The implication is that those in the library lack that expertise or at the very least may not have adequate experience to fill the role. In the case where the expertise sought lies within another disciplinary field, such as architectural planning, the underlying assumption regarding the capacity available in the library is not meaningful. However, as consultants advance to roles related to the core work of librarians, the implication becomes more significant. Robbins-Carter attempts to clarify roles of consultants and clients, stating that hiring a consultant signals that library staff are not capable of solving a problem without external help (1984, 90).

Although consultants are predominantly presented as experts, one notable exception is in *Harrod’s Glossary*, published in 1990, 1995, 2000, and 2005 (Prytherch). Across these editions, the definition remained the same:

An individual offering a range of professional skills and advice relevant to the operation of libraries. Usually these skills will be marketed on a commercial basis by a freelance, self-employed person who is not directly employed by the library concerned, but retained on contract for a fee. (2005, 420)

This characterization is neutral and acknowledges a commercial transaction, two key elements that are missing from other definitions.

Consultants Have “Fresh” Ideas

The recurrent notion of library consultants who bring “fresh” ideas, solutions, perspectives, and approaches to the library undermines library workers. The “fresh” restatement is significant not because it is based on any real evidence but rather because it is repeated and affirmed. As with the use of the “expert” label, “fresh” may imply that the contributions from those in the library are stale.

The “fresh” theme originates in the introduction written by Blasingame for the *Directory of Library Consultants* in 1969:

There are many potential advantages in having such a consultant to aid not only in the solution of specific problems but to bring into the organization a continuous supply of fresh ideas, unfettered by the traditions and limitations of the past. (n.p.)

Subsequently, Bob cites Blasingame's passage in full in his 1969 professional article "And a Consultant Shall Lead Them." Bob's short, lighthearted exposé outlines problems that may be encountered with library consultants, then unexpectedly concludes with Blasingame's tips on how to successfully select consultants (1969, 45).

In their 1984 handbook, Rawles and Wessells continue to restate the fresh element of consultants. Similarly, in their six-page guide to selecting library consultants, Finn and Johnston propagate both the expert and fresh qualities of consultants (1986). Even in a work such as the *International Encyclopedia of Information and Library Science* (1997 and 2003), consultants are characterized by their "implementation of fresh solutions" (Feather and Sturges 1997, 105). De Stricker presents consulting as an option for graduating LIS students in her vocational guide *Is Consulting for You?*, stating that one of the reasons consultants are needed is that "consultants bring a fresh perspective" (2008, 4). Finally, in a guide to good practice for information consultants, consultants are identified as the evaluators and assessors "who come with fresh perspective, (without institutional or professional blindness)" (Wormell, Olesen and Mikulás 2011, 117). In these examples, the "fresh" agenda maintains the authority of the consultant and legitimizes the "expert" view afforded to them.

Consultants Are Unbiased

The last concept that strengthens the theme of consultants' expertise is that consultants bring an objective and unbiased perspective to an organization. As seen in her column for the *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, de Stricker claims that consultants bring an "unbiased approach" (2010, 46). LIS reference materials also reinforce this claim. The *International Encyclopedia of Information and Library Science* states that consultants offer "a detached and objective view of the organization's needs and problems" (Feather and Sturges 1997, 105). Similarly, Lockwood characterizes the consultant as an "impartial, objective advisor" (1977, 498), and Skrzyszewski's vocational guide for librarians supports "unbiased opinions and advice" provided by consultants (2006, 121).

Use of Rhetorical Strategies

Three rhetorical strategies were identified in the texts we reviewed: polarizing language, straw man reasoning, and the use of figurative and indirect language. All three strategies act to persuade readers to accept the author's characterization of consultants.

Polarizing Language

Beyond LIS reference materials, there is also a dichotomy of positive and negative characterizations seen in words and phrases used to describe consultants. Some examples include consultants writing in self-congratulatory to antagonistic styles, and non-consultants writing in conciliatory to combative tones. In one text, consultants are portrayed as innovative, forward thinking, and transformational (de Stricker 2010, 46). In another, there are expressions of skepticism and concern about the use of consultants because they are viewed as untrustworthy (Morris 2003, 3).

De Stricker, a consultant herself, makes a case for hiring consultants using a “consultant as expert” statement: consultants as professionals bring “expertise, experience, and insight” to the organization. She also states that consultants are “experienced and capable people, with a track record of delivering worthwhile results [who can] minimize risk and maximize the likelihood of success” (2010, 46). Fincham and Clark would categorize this as “essentially self-congratulatory” literature (2002, 7). De Stricker further defines the powerful role of the consultant by positioning the client as naive in comparison: “The most important benefit clients mention is associated with peace of mind. . . . [T]hey like the stress reduction inherent in not having to venture into unfamiliar territory to take on tasks for which they are not prepared” (2010, 46). Additionally, de Stricker refers to “teaching by example,” positioning herself in the teacher role. In this scenario, the consultant is the teacher, the one with knowledge, and the one in control. Conversely, we infer that the client is the student, and the one with less agency.

Others rebut pro-consultant claims and suggest that consultants “waste time, cost money, demoralize and distract your best people, and don’t solve problems” (Townsend 1970, 68). For those who disapprove, their representations of consultants are equally problematic. Morris’s editorial includes “why you should be suspicious of any consultant’s recommendations,” and “Consultants can give you a service, but watch out for their hidden agenda” (2003, 3). This rhetoric does little to substantiate the claim that “Any consultant with whom you might work automatically has baggage, and a routine which is followed that expands the sequence of steps to meet the consultant’s goals—a lucrative contract” (3). Rather, it serves to position consultants firmly on one end of a spectrum and fails to leave room for any nuance, let alone evidence of consultants’ successes or failures.

Although conflicting representations may prompt a dialogue informed by a more critical perspective, in fact the opposite happens. The representation of consultants in the language of Morris’s editorial does not provide an alternative understanding but rather a hostile one that uses the same basic approach as the overly positive representation of consultants. In short, taking an antagonistic and

negative stance is just as problematic as taking an overly positive one, because it does not lead to an engaged dialogue to discuss the facts about consultants. Both the pro and con representations use language that portrays consultants through polarizing caricatures that the reader is asked to accept without evidence.

Though much of the literature frames consultants as experts who impart knowledge, there are some examples that speak to the consultant/client relationship through the lens of a partnership (see Scale 2016). In their handbook for hospital libraries, Timour and Fink present an approach to library consultants in which the consultation is described “as a dialogue between two (or more) individuals about current operations and potential changes” (1972, 297). Beyond the library literature, Lippitt and Lippitt’s handbook on consultants in action frames consulting as a two-way interaction focused on the seeking, giving, and receiving of help (1986, 28).

Straw Man Reasoning

Straw man reasoning consists of the use of unproven examples, exaggerations, or distortions to intentionally misrepresent a statement because it is easier than addressing pertinent questions in a nuanced manner (Walton 1987, 117). In consulting texts, we see a demonstration of straw man reasoning in relation to consulting work. For example, it is not uncommon for authors to use cliché when describing what they think a consultant does: “A consultant is someone who borrows your watch to tell you what time it is” (Morris 2003, 1). This straw man distortion is used to advance the author’s own arguments or agenda. Rather than truly engaging with fact-based arguments that may stand in contrast to the author’s views, the author opts for engaging a straw man purely to strengthen his or her own arguments. For example, de Stricker writes:

Some have an impression that consultants, as glib purveyors of the management fad of the day, cruise through client organizations leaving behind, along with their six-figure bills, politically fashionable but impossible-to-implement-in-practice recommendations—in other words, delivering no value but causing lots of resentment on the part of the staff on the group. Naturally, the truth is otherwise. (2010, 45)

In contrast, Morris, a librarian, offers:

If you contact a consultant . . . you are likely to hear the following: “I can help you choose a system that is the best for your library. I will help you save time and money, and give you a solution that meets all your need.” Tempting as it would be to believe those statements, it would be unfortunate for you to do so, since the promises are just not true. (2003, 1)

In both cases, writers choose to use a straw man to assert their truth claims. The trouble with straw man reasoning is that it fails to adequately substantiate the

author's claims, and, more problematically, it fails to encourage a conversation that would engage people in detailed, objective discussions about consultants.

Figurative and Indirect Language

Fincham asserts that metaphors are deeply ingrained in the discourse around consultants because this language can help to emphasize the varied aspects and perceptions of consultant work:

Metaphor may suggest the kinds of sharpened and polarized images needed for expressing such contradictions. Another factor may be that consultancy (or some of it) involves colorful and dramatic activities (and people); and to account for it, storytelling and emotive description are needed. (2002, 68)

The use of figurative language such as idioms, metaphors, similes, and hyperbole are present in the literature on consultants, within and beyond libraries. Fincham provides a concise analysis of this phenomenon, noting

the extent to which metaphors of consultancy have been employed. . . . [A]pparently, in not knowing what consultancy is, we can only say what it is like. For example, dramaturgical images of the consultant as performer, and consultancy as a kind of manipulative theatre[,] have been influential. . . . [T]he consultant as a type of magical figure, a shaman or witch doctor, has been even more widely used and emphasizes the surreptitious or insidious nature of the power of managers' advisors. (2002, 68)

As demonstrated by the quotations from de Stricker and Morris, the use of figurative language does not help to clarify what consultants do or the impact they have. We noted above that consultants have been characterized as teachers. Smith also describes consultants through the proxy of mechanics and physicians (1992, 217), and Steele defines consultants through four roles: teacher-instructor, student-learner, detective, and barbarian (1975, 4). Robbins-Carter adds others to Steele's list, including timekeeper, monitor, talisman, advocate, and ritual pig (1984, 92). Kakabadse, Louchart, and Kakabadse (2006) liken business consultants to "magicians" (435), "gardener, pilot, guide, troubleshooters, and parasites" (483).

Similarly, consultants are characterized using figurative language, which signifies an abstract rather than straightforward description of their role. For example, Courtney and Johnson use "the chicken-and-the-egg dilemma" to highlight the inseparable roles of task and process that consultants use (1992, 263). Malinconico writes that being a consultant is not just to turn "a fool out of work into an expert" (1983, 2032). And Frankenhuis believes that a good consultant is a "living compendium of case studies" (1977, 136).

By using figurative language, the unquestioned acceptance and outcomes of the use of consultants are obscured, compromising the possibility of a more nuanced

critique of the practice. Psychologists Roberts and Kreuz state, “Understanding when and why an utterance is produced is crucial in understanding its meaning” (1994, 159). Certain figures of speech are used to accomplish specific communicative goals, as when advertisers use figurative language to promote a product or service. Research analysts in advertising have discovered that advertisers who use figurative language produce more successful campaigns than those who do not (Kronrod and Danziger 2013, 726). The goal of figurative language in the case of advertising is to create a positive impression of a product or service. In the texts studied, positive and negative impressions are created with figurative language, depending on the sentiment of the writer. The use of rhetorical strategies such as metaphor is a shortcut to insinuating a value judgment and communicating assumptions about the impact of consultants without naming the assumptions or rigorously investigating them.

VI. Discussion

The language strategies that we uncovered in texts about consultants blur the realities of the role of consultants in libraries and, in turn, point to the need for further analysis and research. Hence, we frame our discussion around gaps that emerge from our findings. First, we unpack the linguistic strategies we identified to reveal what is missing in the current literature. Next, we introduce agency theory to acknowledge and unpack the claim of objectivity in the texts. And third, we identify and acknowledge the unspoken implications of knowledge and power in consulting relationships in libraries.

Identifying Missing Elements in the Current Discourse

Although the analysis of existing texts is enlightening, it is equally enlightening to consider and discuss the missing elements in the literature. Most notable is the absence of academic research with a critical examination of consultants in libraries. Scale found that there is minimal academic research, critical or supportive, about library consultants in any type of library setting (2015, n.p.). Fincham and Clark have noted that “the lack of research on management consultancy has constrained and even distorted our understanding of the phenomenon” (2002, 9), and we propose that the same is true for consultants in libraries. Theatrical metaphors make consulting sound like entertainment, and ambiguous and figurative language make the practice sound obscure and mysterious. Because of the prevalence of and focus on these rhetorical strategies, the need remains to examine some of the basic facts of consulting work: consulting is for-profit, commercially driven work that directly affects library workers and users. The very real and complicated impact that consultants may have on library organizations has not been addressed. Obscuring

this impact, whether it is significant or not, normalizes and entrenches the role of consultants in libraries.

Literature focused on clients in a consultant/client relationship in libraries is also lacking. Pozzebon and Pinsonneault found literature reviews about consultants in management scholarship but no comparable reviews about clients in any field (2012, 37). The role of the client is discussed only in relation to the consultant. This imbalance demonstrates the dominant role afforded to consultants over clients.

The imbalance between consultant and client continues as the “expert” role is also afforded to library consultants, without scrutiny. As demonstrated in our analysis, consultants are portrayed as unbiased professionals who bring “expertise” and “fresh” ideas to libraries. The “expert” claim, time and again, has the potential to disempower library workers. Furthermore, if we couple disempowered workers with constant concerns regarding deskilling and deprofessionalization in the profession, the seemingly harmless restatement of consultant as expert carries with it weighty implications for librarianship.

Questioning Objectivity with Agency Theory

To unpack claims of unbiased, objective consultants, we turn to agency theory. Eggertsson offers a critique of bias using agency theory in economics (1990, 169). In the case of library consultants, agency theory explains how to best organize relationships in which one party (library administration) determines the work, while another party (consultant) does the work. Agency theory also assumes that both parties are motivated by self-interest. Eggertsson claims that there will always be an asymmetrical distribution that gives the consultant the strategic advantage in any consultant/client relationship. Consultants are also the agent in the relationship, working under the purview or bias of an economic rationale that both legitimates their practice (they get paid to do it) and affords them power in the consultant engagement. Fincham emphasizes that a consulting relationship is based on the set of rights given to the consultant by the client (2002, 72). The consultant is then bound by a formal or implicit contract to represent the client’s wishes and interests. Nevertheless, consultants will also have their own bias, as the interests of the client and consultant are never identical. Maintaining a veneer of objectivity is in the best interests of consultants and those who hire them. Serrano-Velarde offers a nuanced reading of objectivity in the context of higher education:

By introducing an “objective third person,” consulting reveals the demarcation line between the different actors involved in the change process and clarifies their scope of action. [Consultants] render managerial action possible/acceptable by serving as buffer between academics and administrators. [Furthermore,] knowledge transfer (from the consultant to the university community) thus consists of making the consultants’

“otherness” and their “objectivity” (or impartiality in the ongoing power struggle among academics and managers) work for the university’s change project. (2010, 141)

The claim of objectivity also adds value to the consulting practice. For example, with declining budgets to support academic libraries, there is external administrative pressure to demonstrate the return on investment in libraries (Kaufman 2012, 62). Neoliberal practices such as strategic planning, and hiring consultants to define and measure the library’s value, are implemented to demonstrate the importance of library services and resources. Consultants may be hired to assist with defining and measuring the library’s value, often through the development of a strategic plan. But the consultant’s work cannot be unbiased or objective, because consultants bring with them knowledge from previous projects. Paradoxically, consultants are hired because of their previous experiences.

Acknowledging Knowledge and Power in a Consulting Relationship

Pozzebon and Pinsonneault theorize that there are two inseparable dimensions in a consulting relationship, power and knowledge, with power operating through knowledge production (2012, 36). Their work is based on Foucault’s proposition that “it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, [and] it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power” (1980, 52).

Pozzebon and Pinsonneault were unable to dissociate the roles of knowledge and power to demonstrate the independence of each concept in a consultant/client relationship (2012, 38). Because consultants are hired as “experts” (the knowledge dimension), they are given authority and control to make decisions (the power dimension). For example, consultants who are hired for their expertise in ACRL-sanctioned information literacy standards also bring with them the power of organizational standards, in this case, the standards of ALA. Seale indicates that professional organizations are motivated by power and have created a “claim to territory” within the information literacy sphere (2013, 46). As shown in our literature review, the same can be said for organizations that recommend and support consultants, particularly when they are maintained by divisions of ALA (ACRL and ASCLA), the organization that governs LIS accreditation.

According to Fincham and Clark, the uncritical tradition of organizational development literature bases consultant power on “a body of expert knowledge,” where knowledge is a static entity that the consultant possesses and passes on to the paying client (2002, 6). While knowledge and power reside with the consultants in the organizational development view, the critical perspective enables us to question where that knowledge and power come from. To do so, we must still, or rather, more so, contend with the very real effects consultants have within an organization. If

consultants' power does not come from their expert knowledge, where does it come from? Salaman suggests, "Although consultancy ideas may be 'smoke and mirrors,' faddish and false, they still contribute to the nature and exercise of power within the organization" (2002, 254). That is, even if specialized knowledge or expertise are absent, an enactment of power is still present. Serrano-Velarde and Krücken propose:

From a neo-institutional perspective, management consultants must be seen as knowledge carriers who transfer knowledge from one sector to another, thus helping to expand an economic rationale for organizing, deciding, and evaluating a "business" or organization. (2012, 277)

While both knowledge and power may reside with the consultant, they are further strengthened by the weight of the neoliberal ideals of evaluation and assessment.

Not only does a critical perspective invite us to interrogate the knowledge claims in a consulting relationship and question the broader drivers behind a consultant's power, it also allows for a more reflective reading of power that considers the interaction and mutual influence of the consultant and the client. Serrano-Velarde notes that consultants can succeed only "if the inner organization structure is open to it and they find support and translation for their ideas" (2010, 133). In fact, within the academic domain the imbalance between consultant and client is even starker, because consultants and clients are driven by different paradigms. Consultants are driven by a private and corporate agenda of economic rationale, whereas academics are driven by a public and humanistic paradigm of what Serrano-Velarde and Krücken label "scientific reasoning." "As the knowledge base of consultants is seen as biased and insufficiently reliable for scientific reasoning, consultants are denied the status of peer in the academic community" (Serrano-Velarde 2010, 141). Consequently, for consultants to succeed in academia, they "must co-opt the ethos of science and a consensual, democratic approach" (Serrano-Velarde 2010, 141). How this plays out within academic libraries can be questioned: Are academic library consultants more credible if they have an degree, or were previously a chief university librarian, because they may understand and apply the core principles and values of librarianship? While academic libraries function within the academic domain (and could be assumed to function by the organizing dominant core values of the academy), they also have specific challenges that may put them on its periphery.² This does not mean that the power landscape in academic libraries does not fit within the logic that Serrano-Velarde attributes to the university but rather that a closer reading and further research is necessary.

2. Some challenges include the influence of private enterprise when it comes to our collections and vendor relations, the varied access to academic freedom for librarians at some academic institutions, and the impact of precarious employment, as seen in non-tenured status for academic librarians.

By recognizing the power dynamics at play and questioning the factors that influence these power dynamics, we can move beyond the existing language used about consultants. It is not necessary to frame consultants as unbiased experts who bring fresh ideas to the table. Instead, we understand that consultants are agents of capital who work within the confines of and are enabled by present-day neoliberal practices. From this perspective, we are better able to interrogate the choices made and evaluate the effects of consultants in our libraries.

VII. Conclusion and Next Steps

Our research has uncovered an absence of scholarly scrutiny in LIS regarding the role of consultants in libraries. Such scrutiny is urgently needed in the broader context of neoliberal trends in both academia and librarianship. In our abbreviated history of consultants in libraries, we revealed an imbalance between the growth of the field and available literature on the topic. We presented the unchallenged hiring of consultants in libraries along with an evolution of language used to describe and characterize their role. A change in the description of consultants over time is reflected in the transformation from “specialist” to “expert” in our textual analysis.

We also defined consulting as a neoliberal practice by framing academic libraries in neoliberal times. Then, by unpacking the specific language used in texts about consultants, we observed how consultants are defined and characterized in LIS texts. Importantly, we found that it is not only the lack of research about consultants that has blurred our understanding about their role but also the language strategies used in the texts about them. The theme “consultant as expert” reveals that consultants are assumed to be experts, without bias, and with perpetual access to fresh ideas. The theme is significant, not due to evidence of expertise but due to the restatement of these attributes across time and throughout the texts we analyzed. We also identified the overuse of rhetorical language strategies in texts about consultants. Polarizing language about consultants and clients creates diverging claims, not engaged dialogue. Indirect and figurative language provides emotive and dramatic descriptions of consultants, and abstract representations emphasize the variety of elements involved in consultant work. Straw man reasoning is used to cause exaggeration instead of engaging in a factual dialogue. Rather than clarifying the role of consultants, these strategies further obscure the impact of consultants, normalizing and entrenching their role in libraries.

Our literature review has laid groundwork for further research on consultants. We plan to address missing elements in the current discourse, including the lack of scholarly research about consultants in academic libraries and the lack of attention to the voices of library workers and others involved in consultant/client relationships. Starting with a general survey of library workers and administrators,

we will extend the dialogue to capture the experiences, perspectives, and perceptions of those involved with consultants in academic libraries. Unpacking motivations for consultant use, we will identify similarities and differences across a variety of experiences. Following our initial survey, we plan to construct a case study of two Canadian academic libraries undergoing core organizational change: one library working with consultants, and one that is not. Library workers, administrators, and consultants will play a role in our case study. A combination of these analyses will allow us to look more closely at the impact of consultants on library organizations and library workers.

Expanding on Nicholson's ideas in "The McDonaldization of Academic Libraries," we acknowledge the neoliberal context within which we practice librarianship and aim to think critically about its impact and consider the existing consequences (2015, 333). Our current research expands the LIS literature written about consultants in academic libraries with the goals of challenging, renewing, and extending the dialogue. By exploring some of the problematic aspects of language, we have made a space to proceed with a more nuanced approach to inform future research. The historical review and textual analysis is the first step to define our research and to extend the discourse about consultants in libraries.

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Appendix A: LIS Reference Materials Consulted

Material Type	Abbreviated Citation
Dictionary	<p>Thompson. 1943. <i>ALA Glossary</i>.</p> <p>Peters. 1975, 1983. <i>Bookman's Glossary</i>.</p> <p>Young. 1983. <i>ALA Glossary</i>.</p> <p>Prytherch. 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005. <i>Glossary</i>.</p> <p>Reitz. 2004. <i>Dictionary for Library and Information Science</i>.</p> <p>Levine-Clark. 2013. <i>ALA Glossary</i>.</p> <p>Reitz. 2013. <i>ODLIS</i>.</p>
Encyclopedia	<p>Landau. 1961, 1966. <i>Encyclopaedia of Librarianship</i>.</p> <p>Kent. 1975. <i>Encyclopedia of LIS</i>.</p> <p>Feather. 1997, 2003. <i>International Encyclopedia of LIS</i>.</p> <p>Drake. 2003. <i>Encyclopedia of LIS</i>.</p>
Directory	<p>Berry. 1969. <i>Directory of Library Consultants</i>.</p> <p>Klement. 1984. <i>Who Knows What</i>.</p> <p>Rogers. 1994. <i>Directory of Canadian LIS Consultants</i>.</p>
Handbook/Guide	<p>Rawles. 1984. <i>Working with Library Consultants</i>.</p> <p>Finn. 1986. <i>Selecting Library Consultants</i>.</p> <p>Lippitt. 1986. <i>The Consulting Process in Action</i>.</p> <p>Garten. 1992. <i>Using Consultants in Libraries and Information Centers</i>.</p> <p>Line. 1991, 1992, 1998. <i>Librarianship</i>.</p> <p>Matthews. 1994. "The Effective Use of Consultants in Libraries."</p> <p>Skrzeszewski. 2006. <i>Knowledge Entrepreneur</i>.</p> <p>de Stricker. 2008. <i>Is Consulting for You?</i></p> <p>Wormell. 2011. <i>Information Consulting</i>.</p> <p>Eden. 2012. <i>The Associate University Librarian Handbook</i>.</p>
Professional/scholarly publication	<p>Bob. 1969. "And a Consultant Shall Lead Them."</p> <p>Lockwood. 1977. "Involving Consultants in Library Change."</p> <p>Robbins-Carter. 1984. "Library Consultants."</p> <p>Morris. 2003. "Library Consultants."</p> <p>de Stricker. 2010. "Part II: Consulting."</p> <p>Murphy. 2011. <i>Transforming Reference for the Information Age</i>.</p>

Appendix B: Examples of Descriptions and Characteristics of Consultants across Three Themes

Year	Language Used	Abbreviated Citation	Theme	Material Type
1943	"specialist"	Thompson. <i>ALA Glossary</i> .	Expert	Dictionary
1969	"fresh ideas"	Berry. <i>Directory of Library Consultants</i> .	Fresh	Directory
1969	"outside experts"	Bob. "And a Consultant Shall Lead Them."	Expert	Professional publication
1977	"impartial, objective advisor"	Lockwood. <i>Involving Consultants in Library Change</i> .	Unbiased	Scholarly publication
1983	"an expert in a specialized field brought in by a library or other agency for professional or technical advice"	Young & Belanger. <i>ALA Glossary</i> .	Expert	Dictionary
1984	"the combination of new ideas and fresh, disinterested confrontation with the problem"	Rawles & Wessells. <i>Working with Library Consultants</i> .	Fresh & Unbiased	Handbook
1986	"Consultant studies are regarded as expert insurance"; "consultant's expertise brings . . . fresh ideas and approaches"	Finn & Johnston. <i>Selecting Library Consultants</i> .	Expert & Fresh	Guide
1997	"implement fresh ideas"	Feather & Sturges. <i>International Encyclopedia of LIS</i> .	Fresh	Encyclopedia
1997	"detached and objective view"	Feather & Sturges. <i>International Encyclopedia of LIS</i> .	Unbiased	Encyclopedia
2003	"implementation of fresh ideas"	Feather & Sturges. <i>International Encyclopedia of LIS</i> .	Fresh	Encyclopedia
2004	"expertise"	Reitz. <i>Dictionary of LIS</i> .	Expert	Dictionary
2006	"unbiased opinions and advice"	Skrzeszewski. <i>Knowledge Entrepreneur</i> .	Unbiased	Guide
2008	"consultants bring a fresh perspective"	de Stricker. <i>Is Consulting for You?</i>	Fresh	Guide
2010	"expertise, experience, insight"	de Stricker. <i>Consulting</i> .	Expert Unbiased	Professional publication
2011	"implementation of fresh solutions"	Wormell, Olesen & Mikulás. <i>Information Consulting</i> .	Fresh	Guide
2013	"expertise"	Reitz. <i>ODLIS</i> .	Expert	Dictionary
2013	"expert"	Levin-Clark & Carter. <i>ALA Glossary</i> .	Expert	Dictionary