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# Advocating for Librarianship: The Discourses of Advocacy and Service in the Professional Identities of Librarians

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## ABSTRACT

A dedication to service is often cited as a hallmark of a profession. *Service* is included as one of eleven Core Values in the American Library Association's "Core Values of Librarianship" (2004). For librarians, service includes helping people find information resources to meet their educational, recreational, and work needs. Reporting findings from a larger study into the professional identity of librarians, this paper explores the centrality of service, with specific attention to how librarians advocate for their services and, ultimately, for librarianship. Using a discourse analysis approach, this study examines the roles that Service as a Core Value and advocacy play in the construction of professional identity. Three different data sources were used: professional journals, e-mail discussion lists, and research interviews. The data were analyzed for the discourses librarians use when describing librarians, librarianship, and professionalism and their connection to advocacy. When librarians advocate for the services they offer, they are in fact advocating for the value of the profession. Discursively, speaking or writing about advocacy positioned librarians as active participants in their own identity formation. By making advocacy a central activity of the profession, librarians not only challenged others' perception of librarianship, they challenged their own understanding as well.

## INTRODUCTION

Professional service evokes notions of quality and reliability in the minds of clients. Service is so central to our understanding of what a profession is, it is often cited as a hallmark of professionalism. Traditional un-

derstandings of professionalism, however, have shifted in recent years in response to societal, organizational, economic, and political change (Fournier, 1999). Being labeled a “professional” used to denote “someone trusted and respected, an individual given class status, autonomy, social elevation, in return for safeguarding our well-being and applying their professional judgement on the basis of a benign moral or cultural code” (Dent & Whitehead, 2002, p. 1). Shifting societal trends, however, have placed the trust and respect previously associated with professions under question. Professions now have to build “new relationships of commitment and trust” (Karseth & Nerland, 2007, p. 336), and advocacy, at both the professional and organizational levels, is one such way for professions to regain the confidence of their clients.

For librarians, service means helping people find information resources to meet their educational, recreational, and work needs. It is listed as both a Core Value of and a core competence for librarians by the American Library Association (ALA) (2004, 2009): “We provide the highest level of service to all library users. . . . We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession” (2004, n.p.). Librarians have described service as a core value, ethos, and the purpose of librarianship (Hicks, 2014). Libraries and librarians are still considered to be valuable public institutions and a trustworthy profession by the general public (Online Computer Library Center, 2010; Society for Chartered Librarians, qtd. in Price, 2012), but librarians are aware that building and maintaining trust with patrons is necessary to ensure high levels of service (Phelps & Campbell, 2012; Schmidt, 2013). Librarians have used various advocacy strategies to not only maintain public trust in the profession but also to articulate the profession’s values and the worth of librarianship to clients. Both the ALA (2014) and the Canadian Library Association (CLA) (2011) provide their members with advocacy resources designed to articulate the Core Value of the profession and promote library-related issues and concerns. In addition, the professional literature is full of advice and strategies for creating effective advocacy campaigns. Reporting findings from a larger study into the professional identity of librarians, this paper explores the connection among advocacy, service, and the professional identity of librarians. When librarians advocate for their services, they are in fact advocating for librarianship. A deeper understanding of the role that advocacy plays in librarians’ professional identity will help librarians better understand not only the services they offer but also how their own understanding of their professional identity influences the success of their advocacy activities.

Advocacy is often considered part of a continuum with marketing and public relations. In its advocacy training program, the CLA (2011) distin-

guished among these terms by highlighting the purpose of each kind of activity. Public relations “communicates ‘this is who we are, this is what we do, for whom and when’” (p. 3). In other words, public relations activities tell others about the profession, an issue, or a specific organization. Marketing “asks ‘who are you, what do you want, how can I best deliver it to you, tell you about it and what price are you willing to pay?’” (p. 4). Marketing implies a two-way relationship between the librarian/library and the community. In many ways, the activities of public relations and marketing are very similar. Public relations activities can include various forms of advertising, news conferences, and even political lobbying; marketing involves the same activities, except that the decisions about which tool to use and how to use it are based on market research, such as focus groups and community surveys. As part of this continuum, advocacy “says to decision-makers, potential partners, funders, any stakeholder, ‘Your agenda will be greatly assisted by what we have to offer’” (p. 4). Advocacy is a planned, sustained, and often political effort designed to raise awareness. The purpose of advocacy work is, in part, to build relationships with like-minded organizations and individuals to help champion an issue or cause. The public relations advocacy continuum moves from one-way communication to two-way relationships based on meeting client needs to two-way relationships based in mutual need. This paper uses a broader definition of advocacy; here, it is defined as supporting a cause. In the case of librarians, advocacy means supporting librarianship, library services, library users, and other related concerns. This definition encompasses the public relations advocacy continuum described above, as well as less formal uses and descriptions of advocacy found in the speech and texts of librarians.

The focus of this paper is the discourses of advocacy and service in the professional identity construction of librarians—specifically, on how librarians define and use these discourses as part of the practice of librarianship. The details of service provision, advocacy strategies, or what makes a service or marketing plan successful will not be explored in this paper; instead, the focus is on how librarians write and speak about advocacy as part of their professional identities. As such, the questions guiding this research are: What is the discourse of advocacy for librarians? What is the function of this discourse? How does the discourse of advocacy connect to the discourse of Service as a Core Value for librarians? What role do these discourses play in the professional identities of librarians?

## DEFINING IDENTITY

The focus of this paper is identity and not image. Although related, it is important to separate these two concepts. An *image* is a representation or depiction of someone or something; in other words, image—specifically, professional image—is about how others understand the profession, not

how librarians understand the profession. In contrast, *identity* is a description or representation of the self within specific social practices; it addresses the questions “Who am I?” and “How should I act?” (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008). This definition uses a social constructionist theoretical framework in which identity is actively constructed within talk and texts, and is not merely reflected by them. It can be exposed by studying the interpretive repertoires, or language resources, librarians use when they speak about their profession. Repertoires are the common linguistic resources that link groups, like professions; they consist of words and phrases that provide group members with a shared worldview and sense of self. Interpretive repertoires are described by Nigel Edley (2001) as books in a public library “permanently available for borrowing” (p. 198), meaning that repertoires, or the books in the metaphor, can be drawn on and used to construct versions of events. Like the books in a library’s collection, repertoires are available to all group members; all members of a group draw on, or borrow, the repertoire when speaking about their work or profession. These repertoires are not deterministic: people can accept, reject, or use them in their own ways. But, they are available to all professional members and provide them with a shared common sense.

Professionals’ interpretive repertoires are grounded in their professional practices. Stephen Kemmis (2010) described professional practices as a combination of three kinds of knowledge: the propositional, theoretical and/or scientific knowledge unique to the profession; the profession’s craft knowledge, or knowledge of how to do something; and personal knowledge about oneself and in relation to others. These practices are socially, culturally, and historically located and contextualized. Practices are more than just activities performed by professionals; they provide meaning and intention that guide the activities and identities of practitioners. They provide the framework to answer who a person is and how she or he should act by offering a particular view of what it means to be a professional and a specific way to act in the world. Practices are codified in texts and curricula and expressed in social relations with other professionals, accrediting bodies, and educational institutions. These practices are performed when professionals interact with others. Librarians will have one understanding of these practices, resulting from their education and professional experiences, but nonpractitioners, clients, students, and even nonlibrary users will have a different understanding. How professionals interact with their clients will be informed by these different understandings.

The interconnection between identity and social action means identity is more than a description of the self within social practices. People do things with language. As Margaret Wetherell and Jonathan Potter (1988, p. 169) wrote: “People do things with their discourse; they make accusa-

tions, ask questions, justify their conduct and so on. . . . [W]hen people deploy a particular form of discourse, it has repercussions of its own which may not have been formulated or even understood by the speaker or writer.” Therefore professional identity is more than simply a description of the self with specific practices: it also serves a purpose, or function, and as a result has different social consequences and implications. This approach to identity provides insight into the range of repertoires librarians use to form their identities and the functions, both intended and unintended. It can provide insight into the professional experiences of librarians and opportunities for librarians to reflect on who they are and what they do as professionals.

### ADVOCACY, SERVICE, IDENTITY, AND IMAGE

In the literature, advocacy and service are usually discussed in terms of specific advocacy or service activities. There are assessments of advocacy efforts and specific services (Kean, 2013; Kramer & Diekman, 2010), articles offering advice on best practices (Alire, 2010; Luo, 2011), and descriptions of successful advocacy activities (Houghton, 2012; Singh, 2014). Research into the role that service or advocacy play in the professional identities of librarians is limited. Deborah Hicks (2014) found librarians use service to demonstrate the value of the profession to clients, stakeholders, and society at large. Service was connected to professionalism. As professionals, librarians wanted to help their clients by using their expertise, core values, and the latest technologies. By providing high-quality services, librarians hoped to ensure librarianship was identified as a profession, and librarians were identified as professionals. Although advocacy was not a focus of Hicks’s study, given that the intent of providing high-quality service was to ensure that others understood the value of librarianship, the act of service itself could be understood as advocacy.

Advocacy for librarianship, or for a specific service, is a common response to concerns about the profession’s image. The majority of the literature on the profession’s image is written by practitioners and is primarily concerned with how the public’s perception of librarianship impacts the profession’s status. Often, popular images are compared and contrasted with the actual work of librarians. These comparisons focus on how popular representations fail to capture the entire scope of librarianship. Beth Posner (2002) contrasted the “know-it-all” stereotype of librarianship with the areas, in the author’s estimation, librarians were in fact knowledgeable about, such as how to find collect and organize information, how to work with people, and “how to get things done” (p. 119). Not uncommon for these kinds of examinations, Posner ended her investigation by recommending ways for librarians to counteract the negative associations of their popular images. Her recommendations included encouraging li-

brarians to “not be know-it-alls,” being proactive in how they help their patrons, and advocating for a “more complicated and realistic depiction of themselves in fiction and in the media” (pp. 123, 125).

Abigail Luthmann (2007) extended this type of inquiry by comparing popular representations of the profession with the self-image of librarians as illustrated by e-mail discussion lists. Like Posner (2002), Luthmann urged librarians to counteract negative portrayals of the profession “with positive behaviour” (p. 778). Such recommendations act as an indirect form of advocacy for the profession. By recommending librarians change so-called negative behaviors, these authors were asking librarians to support their profession by challenging popular stereotypes. The potential cost of not advocating for the profession in this way was the demise of the profession itself. Jennifer Bobrovitz and Rosemary Griebel (2001) examined perceptions of librarians from the general public to determine if the stereotypical image of them—specifically, that librarians are “mousy”—had changed as a result of the increased use of technology in libraries. They argued the public did not associate librarians with technology, which negatively affected the ability of librarians to contribute to society; the ultimate consequence of this misperception was the profession’s demise: “If librarians collectively and individually fail to change this perception, libraries and the profession as we know it will cease to exist” (p. 263).

In addition to concerns about the influence of public perceptions on librarianship’s status, there are concerns expressed in the literature that public perceptions negatively influence how clients use library services. Jody Fagan (2002) examined how university students perceived the roles of librarians and their willingness to use library services. She found students had a positive impression of librarians; however, they were unaware of librarians’ educational backgrounds, areas of expertise, and specific areas of work (for example, respondents indicated cleaning was a librarian’s responsibility). Even though librarians were favorably viewed, Fagan still recommended that librarians advocate for themselves and their services by posting “their degrees in . . . visible [locations], or [adding] degree letters to nametags and nameplates” (p. 141). This recommendation was based, in part, on the finding that students were unaware of librarians’ educational backgrounds; however, there was limited evidence suggesting that making students aware of librarians’ educations would improve students’ perceptions of librarians and their willingness to use library services.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

This study used a social constructionist–inspired discourse analysis approach, developed by Potter and Wetherell (1987), which focuses on the interpretive repertoires people use to account for their actions, beliefs, and even themselves in different contexts. The intent of this approach is to compare how language resources are used in different contexts to de-

termine their function. For this project, data from three different sources were analyzed to uncover the identity repertoires librarians use: articles from journals widely read by librarians; e-mail discussion lists; and research interviews. The data sources represented all library sectors (public, academic, special, and school) and were chosen because they represented a range of contexts for the repertoires' use. Different contexts of language use may evoke differences in the ways that repertoires are employed. In addition, the use of multiple data-gathering methods provided the analysis with contextual triangulation, which offered reliability to the research findings. According to Sanna Talja (2005, p. 15), "explicit comparisons between different contexts of discussion ensure that the research does not comprise a case study with restricted generalizability."

#### *Data Collection*

Articles from journals widely read by professionals provided a formal context for librarians to articulate their identities. The journals used in this study were selected because they were identified as the top-read journals, as determined by subscription rates and OCLC reports (OCLC, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c), for public, academic, and college librarians, and had a variety of association and publisher affiliations. Titles and abstracts were examined using inclusion/exclusion criteria to determine which articles, editorials, and letters to the editor from these journals were included in the study. Content was included if it was published between 2000 and 2012 and addressed the topics of librarians, librarianship, professionalism, and/or professional problems—with specific attention, for this study, to discussions of advocacy. News reports, articles discussing best practices, conference reports, library profiles, book reviews, and obituaries were excluded. Approximately 1,600 individual articles were included in the final data set (see table 1).

Posts to e-mail discussion lists and interviews provided an informal context for librarians to articulate their identities. Like the professional journals, the discussion lists had high subscription rates and were also

Table 1. Distribution of articles across journals

Journal name	Articles included in data set
<i>American Libraries</i>	189
<i>College and Research Libraries</i>	63
<i>Feliciter</i>	110
<i>Information Outlook</i>	146
<i>Information Today</i>	103
<i>Library Journal</i>	510
<i>Public Libraries</i>	231
<i>School Library Journal</i>	117
<i>Teacher Librarian</i>	126
Total	1,595

sponsored by different associations and interest groups.<sup>1</sup> Each was selected because it encouraged active discussion among its subscribers, was not a “read only” list used to disseminate information, and had a publically accessible archive. Similar inclusion/exclusion criteria to the professional journals were used to determine which messages were included in the study. Only messages and discussions that focused on librarians, librarianship, professionalism, and/or professional problems from September 2010 to December 2012 were selected. These dates were used to provide consistency within this section of the data set. The subject line of each message was first studied to determine whether or not the posting was appropriate for the study. If the subject line was unclear, then the postings themselves were examined to determine if they met the inclusion/exclusion criteria. All postings in a selected discussion thread were included in the data set.

Sixteen interviews with working Canadian librarians representing all four of the library sectors were conducted. In discourse analysis, the size of the sample is secondary to the amount of discourse gathered. The focus is on how language is used, not the language users (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Maximum variation sampling was used to select the interview participants. This sampling technique allowed the variations in the construction of the repertoires among participants to come to the fore. The participants were professional librarians from Alberta, Canada. A *professional librarian* was defined for the purposes of this study as a person holding a Masters of Library and Information Studies (MLIS) from an ALA-accredited Library and Information Studies program, or equivalent, who held a position at the professional level as a librarian or manager. Participants were selected because they represented a broad range of contexts. Of the participants, six worked in public libraries, four in academic libraries, three in special libraries, and three in school libraries (two worked in elementary school, one in high school). Fourteen (87.5 percent) were female and two (12 percent) were male. Three (18.75 percent) were born in a country other than Canada. All of the participants received their MLIS (or equivalent) from a Canadian university. They had a variety of professional experience levels, from two to over thirty-five years. Additionally, some of the participants had only worked for their current organization, while others had worked for various organizations and in a range of library sectors. Topics covered in the interviews included the participants’ descriptions of how they entered the profession, their work, their professional activities, and their thoughts on professionalism. Interviews were conducted in a location of the participant’s choice (such as the participant’s office, meeting room, or cafe) and lasted from one to two hours each. Each interview was recorded, professionally transcribed, and participants were assigned pseudonyms. Ethics approval for this study was granted by the University of Alberta’s Research Ethics Board.



*Data Analysis*

When analyzing a large data set, Potter and Wetherell (1987) recommend first thematically coding the data to produce a set of instances for analysis. The intention at this stage of the analysis is to produce a body of instances of use and not the function of a repertoire. Data was coded using NVivo. Coding, at this stage of the analysis, has a pragmatic, not an analytic, intent. The purpose was to organize the data into broad themes to produce sets of instances of occurrence to be analyzed at a later date. Categories for coding came from the research questions guiding this study, as well as a close reading of the data for recurring words, phrases, and ideas. This initial coding of the data was broad and inclusive. The analysis occurred after the data had been coded.

Discourse analysis relies heavily upon the close reading of coded data sets. The goal of the analysis was to identify when and how each identity repertoire was used, with particular attention to how the repertoires were used in relation to the topics of advocacy and service. Wetherell and Potter (1988) described analyzing for interpretive repertoires as “not a matter of following rules and recipes; it often involves following up hunches and the development of tentative interpretative schemes which may need to be abandoned and revised over and over again” (p. 177). The analysis for this study focused on the language resources librarians used to describe themselves: the professional practices of librarianship, professionalism, and professional problems. These language resources were analyzed to identify the interpretive repertoires used by librarians when describing their professional identities. To provide the analysis with some structure, the data were carefully and repeatedly read to discern patterns and followed a three-step procedure outlined by Talja (1999, 2005). First, individual units of the coded data sets, such as an interview or journal article, were analyzed for inconsistencies and contradiction in descriptions of librarians, professional practices, professionalism, and professional problems. Then these inconsistencies and contradictions were compared to others parts of the data to identify recurring context-dependent patterns. Last, the assumptions that underlay and supported these patterns were identified.

**FINDINGS**

Using the procedure described above, this study found that librarians not only talked and wrote about best service and advocacy practices in journal articles, e-mail discussion lists, and during interviews, but the way they spoke about these topics shared linguistic resources, or interpretive repertoires. People will often draw on different repertoires in a single text, sentence, or utterance to construct a particular identity within a specific context (Potter, 1996). As will be explicated below, advocacy was most often discussed alongside the service repertoire, and to a lesser extent the professionalism repertoire.

In the advocacy repertoire, librarians used both services and the library-as-place as discursive anchors for their identities. Services were a tool librarians used to demonstrate their professional expertise and skills. The specifics of the services in and of themselves were less important. For example, in this e-mail discussion list post, the writer articulated how he advocated for the profession by focusing on the need for an advanced degree when giving his “elevator speech”:

The profession of managing libraries and helping people get the best information long ago realized that some extensive and certified educational preparation is vital to being able to do its many jobs. The calm exterior of the library is what it is because people trained in dozens of facets of the profession work to make it effective in ways that remain hidden to most people. As with many professional level degrees the complex training results in a mastery that is deceptively smooth on the surface. (e-mail discussion list post)

By focusing on the “calm exterior” of the library, this commenter highlighted the services librarians offered (in this example, the library itself) and the professional expertise that “results in [the] mastery” that is the service/library. The library is the tool used to express this professional ability to users. Only highly trained and well-educated professionals could pull off such a feat of “deception.” By using this as his elevator speech when speaking with influential clients, this librarian was able to give these clients a glimpse behind the curtain of professional expertise. He positioned his clients as being unaware of his professionalism until he allowed them to see beyond the “smooth surface” of the library. To further explore the discourse of advocacy as it relates to service for librarians, the following sections will discuss advocacy as a professional activity, what topics librarians advocated for, who they recommend advocacy efforts be directed toward, how they recommend librarians advocate, and the stated purposes of their advocacy efforts. In addition, the function of the discourse, along with its connection to the discourses of service and professionalism, will be discussed.

#### *Advocacy as a Professional Activity*

Advocacy is, for many librarians, part of their job. In interviews, advocacy was described as an obligation, a necessity, and the core of a librarian’s work. Tina, a teacher librarian interview participant, stated, “I’ve accepted that I’m now in a role that needs to be constantly re-advocated over and over and over.” Advocacy-as-obligation was an idea further emphasized in data from both the journal articles and e-mail discussion lists. Advocacy was an obligation because the talent, value, and expertise of librarians, and by extension the social importance of libraries, were no longer enough to garner the attention of important stakeholders: “We know how important our work is. But we have to let the world know” (Freedman,

2002b, p. 7; emphasis in original). In posts to e-mail discussion lists, advocacy was described as sharing one's passion for librarianship—specifically, for spreading the “good word” about library service: “Take the opportunity to speak passionately and well for your profession!” (e-mail discussion list post). Throughout the data, discussions about advocacy were often accompanied by the words “must,” “necessary,” and “need,” which provided the discussions with a sense of importance and urgency. The data from the journal articles provided many examples of this sense of urgency. For instance, librarians “must play the game” (Abram, 2012, p. 31); “must project confidence” (Abram, 2009, p. 38); “competencies associated with development and fund-raising [key advocacy activities] form a necessary component of the knowledge base and skill set for those academic librarians” (Winston & Dunkley, 2002, p. 172); and “we need to rid ourselves of complacency” (Kalan, 2002, p. 42). There was a sense that if librarians did not advocate for themselves, the profession, and their libraries, they were not only letting the entire profession down, but disappointing their patrons, communities, and even society at large: “Librarians should want to be advocates for the profession and advocates for the community they serve” (Howard & Woroniak, 2006, p. 250).

The strong and active language used to describe advocacy as a central activity of librarianship was accompanied by descriptions of advocacy, marketing, and public relations as activities counter to the core ethos of librarianship. Some described advocacy as “not in the nature of most librarians” (Lachance, 2007, p. 5). Others compared librarians to occupations associated with so-called sleazy sales tactics to counterbalance librarianship's more noble intents: “Yes, we too can become salespersons without the stigma of the used-car lot” (Lettis, 2000, p. 30). Throughout the data, librarians described themselves as “complacent,” “reticent,” “bad at,” and “afraid of” advocacy and, as a result, it was librarians' fault that the public was unaware of the importance and value of libraries and librarians. Librarians accused one another of relying upon talent and services, and not marketing and advocacy, to catch their community's attention. As a result, librarians and libraries risked becoming invisible: “Librarians must make themselves more visible by better articulating their mission and the impact they have” (Lau, 2002, p. 54).

Advocacy was understood to be a challenge that librarians had to overcome. Two approaches to this challenge were identified: a change in attitude and skills development. The mechanisms of advocacy, such as marketing techniques, were described as “fun,” and librarians' so-called inherent aversion to advocacy was challenged: “contrary to popular belief . . . we are very good at personal selling” (Richardson, 2007, p. 121). Librarians were also encouraged to conceive of advocacy as a skill they had to develop for their professional lives and during their MLIS degrees, to ensure that librarians and libraries were visible to their communities,

but also so that librarians could be effective and successful professionals who offered their communities invaluable information services: “We have to champion vocally things like good search technique and information evaluation skills until patrons know them in their bones. We have to make them sick of us if we’re going to save them” (Evans, 2007, p. 36).

The significance of advocacy as a professional activity was never questioned. For instance, Sandra Singh, Simon Lloyd, John Durno, and Elaine Maclean (2001) speculated about the state of librarianship in the near future and suggested giving both professional associations and individual librarians responsibility for increasing the profession’s visibility in society: “Thanks in no small part to the coordinated activities of our professional associations and the contributions of many key individuals, there is now widespread understanding of what we do and the positive benefits we provide, and we enjoy a level of support that earlier generations would have envied” (p. 15). Advocacy’s potential to position librarians as community and organizational leaders and help the profession survive economic downturns and technological changes was recognized by librarians. However, it was not without its challenges, some of which came from outside the profession: “multiple providers, multiple formats, and multiple business and access models are complicating rather than simplifying . . . attempts to assess and communicate . . . value” (Scotti, 2010, p. 23). Extra-professional challenges such as these were positioned as opportunities for librarians to explore new marketing and public relations techniques. The more difficult challenges originated from the profession itself. In addition to the assumptions described above that good service was enough to garner the public’s goodwill, the focus on professional image and library-as-place, the need to justify professional choices and services, and an unclear professional identity were all cited as internal stumbling blocks to effective advocacy.

#### *Toward Whom Are Librarians Directing Their Advocacy Efforts?*

The stated purpose of advocacy was, for many librarians, active engagement with local communities, stakeholders, policymakers, legislators, and other librarians. The intended audience of advocacy efforts was where the most variation in the discourse among the various library sectors (public, academic, school, and special) existed. This variation, however, existed mainly in the specifics of who was being addressed. Teacher librarians directed their various advocacy efforts toward government officials, most often at the local and state/provincial level, school administrators, including superintendents and principals, parents, and the local media. Public librarians advocated to users/patrons/customers, officials and elected representatives at all levels of government, policymakers, business and community leaders, library boards, and Friends of the Library groups. Academic librarians spoke to faculty members, students, university ad-

ministrators, and even library administrators. Special librarians directed their attention toward their organizational clients, senior management, colleagues, and those outside their institutions. Although the specific audiences were different, and those listed here do not represent a complete list, they do fall into similar nonexclusive categories: stakeholders, influential people, and policymakers. Stakeholders included clients, users, colleagues, students, and faculty; influential people included parents, library administrators, library boards and Friends of the Library groups, business and community leaders, those outside the organization, and the media; and policymakers included government and elected officials, senior managers, university administrators, and library administrators.

Often the intended audience of advocacy efforts was not clearly articulated by librarians in their text and speech, especially when directed toward other librarians. Sometimes advocacy was intended to sway the minds of “people” (Anna, public library interview participant), specifically “ignorant people” (e-mail discussion list post); “the nation” (often described as “the public” or “citizens”); “the world”; “the powers that be” (e-mail discussion list post); and “opinion leaders” (DiMattia, 2011, p. 15). By only referring to these groups in a vague and broad manner, librarians were able to treat these groups as a cohesive whole. For instance, “librarians [have to] engage with the public not just to *explain* what they’re doing, but to get folks to buy into it” (Poynder, 2003, p. 34; emphasis in original). In this quote, it is unclear who “the public” or “folks” are, but their buy-in is necessary for librarians to provide service effectively. Similarly broad descriptions were offered about named target groups. In the text and speech of academic librarians, faculty members were often referred to as a unified group: “You can remind faculty how the library and library staff support course studies, and also admonish faculty to require students to use quality resources when researching papers” (Thiessen, 2006, p. 101). As this quote illustrates, although faculty were a named stakeholder for academic librarians, they were often treated as an undifferentiated whole; therefore all faculty members, and not just the ones not using librarians’ services, needed to be reminded and admonished that the library and its staff existed. Grouping all faculty together implies that membership in this group equals being ignorant of librarians, their services, and the library.

Regardless of the intended target group, all audiences were described as equally difficult to engage: “The biggest challenge in marketing the library is that they tend to ignore our emails or whatever we sent out with announcements” (Strand, 2011, p. 42). This was an idea supported by posts to e-mail discussion lists: “Marketing our info lit program to faculty has always been a challenge for us too. Our English department have [*sic*] always been very receptive considering the research requirements in their composition classes, but trying to get other departments to take notice is much harder.” In response to this lack of attention, librarians focused

on the importance of helping target audiences “get it,” and turning the so-called ignorant people into educated advocates for librarianship who “take advantage” of librarians’ services (e-mail discussion list post).

Although the intended targets of advocacy efforts were regularly discussed by librarians in their professional literature, e-mail discussion lists, and in their interviews, the groups that advocacy efforts could not reach were not as thoroughly discussed. Librarians profiled in *Library Journal*’s annual “Movers and Shakers” feature, and were identified by the magazine as “advocates,” often spoke about the limits of their advocacy efforts. One librarian, Annette DeFavri, noted “marketing was not going to help librarians reach the socially excluded,” while another Mover and Shaker, Angela Crockett, was described as making a career of “speaking up for those who don’t have her gumption” (“Advocates,” 2006, p. 36). In these instances, librarians shifted their discussions from who to advocate *to*, to who to advocate *for*. The groups librarians advocated for were, for the most part, clients and users—namely, clients and users who were perceived to be less able to advocate for themselves: children, teenagers, students, and underserved and underrepresented community members. David Orenstein, another *Library Journal* Mover and Shaker, stated that he felt his job as a library manager was to advocate for his staff so they could “advocate for the public” (“Make it Better,” 2003, p. S36). The stated purpose of advocating for certain groups was to ensure that these groups had the information skills, including basic literacy skills, and resources they needed to be contributing members of society. Through these contributions, librarians were able to advance their own values: “There are huge and compelling opportunities for the exercise of personal and community advocacy to advance the mission of libraries in the service of society” (Newman, 2009, p. 196).

#### *What Are Librarians Advocating for?*

Librarians advocated for library services, such as specific library programs, public services—including reference service and readers’ advisory and information literacy instruction—and even simply for the provision of computers to their clients, specific members of their communities (as described above), libraries, and librarianship. Librarians focused much of their advocacy efforts on promoting library and information services. In other words, as one e-mail discussion list post stated, this focus on service was about “letting [the community] know about all the things the library can do for them.” Librarians were able to both promote the services themselves and highlight their professional value to their communities: “Together, we must speak out about the essential role of libraries and librarians” (Kranich, 2001, p. 7). Public librarians tended to focus on the roles of libraries and librarians as community services: “Libraries are one of the great equalizers in this society” (“Advocates,” 2006, p. 36). Teacher

and academic librarians focused on their role in student achievement, and special librarians on their roles as leaders and as a value-added service for their organizations.

When services were the focus, librarian and library, or librarians and libraries, were used interchangeably in the texts and speeches of librarians throughout the data set. This was not because the primary location for services was the library. Discursively, librarians were the library and the library was librarians. In the following quote, the “we” referred to is libraries, not librarians; it is the library that is sending a message to its users, not the librarians: “It is important that we use every opportunity to communicate the richness of the library and the evolving and multidimensional nature of what we do. That communication is manifest in the messages the library sends to its users [through the library’s services]” (Baker, 2000, p. 48). This rhetorical slippage between libraries and librarians was common and often done unconsciously. Beverly (a teacher librarian interview participant) spoke about her dedication to advocating for the profession by highlighting the role of libraries: “And that’s why I’ve been such a strong advocate for the profession itself. I’ve really spent the last fifteen, twenty years working very hard towards that, trying to see that libraries get recognized.” Through the library, the librarian is the “connection to the entire world of knowledge” (Abram, 2011, p. 34). Perhaps the most significant service many librarians provide is the library in its entirety through its collections (both physical and online), programs (including information literacy instruction), and services (from photocopying to reference services).

The profession itself was also a focus of advocacy activities. Librarians wanted the profession to be understood by nonlibrarians as unique and valuable, and to position librarianship as an attractive profession to job-seekers and students. To highlight the profession’s uniqueness, librarians focused on advocating for the knowledge and expertise of librarians: “The research reveals that we are much more than a function [or service] and that we must focus on and use language that communicates the knowledge and skills we possess” (Zamora, 2009, p. 3). This focus on expertise enabled librarians to advocate for themselves as information specialists: “Librarians must communicate that librarianship ‘has its own foundations and theory and practice, its own ethical constructs, its own literature and its own type of academic preparation’” (Janet Swan Hill, qtd. in Coker, vanDuinkerken, & Bales, 2010, p. 411). This advocacy allowed librarians to challenge popular stereotypes of the profession, or consciously “build a professional image” as it was described on an e-mail list, and show clients “the hip, cool, and competent information professionals we are” (Baldwin, 2006, p. 13). It also provided librarians with an opportunity to highlight their skills as a reason to advocate for higher wages and additional funding from the “powers that be” (e-mail discussion list post). Tina, a teacher

librarian interview participant, stated that she felt it was necessary to advocate for the profession because librarians' roles were fragile: "But if you come down to it and you need to cut, where are you going to cut? You're not going to cut a teacher in front of the classrooms. You're going to cut someone who's not sitting there with kids in front of them." Although the employment conditions of teacher librarians differ from librarians in other information environments, the need to advocate for the profession to ensure continued employment, higher wages, and additional funding for resources was a common topic throughout the data set.

The rhetorical slippage that librarians employed to discursively position themselves as the library and the library as librarians when discussing advocating for services disappeared in the language used by librarians when they spoke and wrote about advocating for librarianship. Instead, librarians rhetorically separated themselves from the library-as-place when advocating for the profession. Librarians and the library were no longer one and the same: librarians were now the reason libraries are a "vital community agency" (Oberlander, 2003, p. 355): "The people who give libraries their vitality and value should receive compensation commensurate with the education, experience, and skills" (Freedman, 2002a, p. 7).

Professional values were routinely highlighted as something for which librarians should advocate. These included the Core Values outlined in the ALA's "Core Values of Librarianship" (2004): namely, Confidentiality/Privacy, Intellectual Freedom, and Access to information, as well as other values often associated with librarianship though not explicitly addressed in the Core Values document, such as freedom of expression/free speech and the fair use of information. The purpose of this advocacy was twofold: to communicate the value of the profession to stakeholders and to provide services that aligned with these Core Values to their clients, although often these two purposes coincided. For instance, Betsy Baker (2000, p. 49) argued that "the library needs to communicate its value through its services, its words, and its environment." A similar sentiment was echoed by e-mail discussion list posts: "Our profession advocates for free speech and right of unpopular points of view to be heard. . . . The best way to make our students critical thinkers . . . is to expose them to the messy debates." In other words, to advocate for professional values was to advocate for clients: "Advocating for Libraries is really about advocating for the user members of our Libraries, not for any one system or way of doing things or history of who does them in our Libraries" (e-mail discussion list post).

#### *How Do Librarians Advocate?*

The specifics of how librarians should advocate for their causes comprised the largest section of the data. The e-mail discussion lists, for instance, offered many examples of librarians soliciting one another for advice on how to best market to and communicate with specific audiences, especially



in times of economic and political uncertainty, technological change, and changing user demands. As Will Manely (2011, p. 64) stated: "Everybody wonders how best to advocate for libraries amid dwindling resources and Tea Party politics." The advice that librarians offered one another regarding advocacy best-practices falls into two broad categories: show and tell.

*Showing* as an advocacy technique usually involved activities such as gathering statistics (circulation, gate count, number of resources, and so on) to document librarians' "direct contribution" (Goldberg, 2005, p. 41), having a business plan to show stakeholders, effective signage for services in the library and changing the library's layout, presentations to stakeholders, and even training and instruction opportunities for clients and stakeholders. Showing offered librarians a concrete way to demonstrate the value of library services to clients. Mary, an academic librarian interview participant, stated that having a real project, and not simply an idea, was the only way to attract the attention of faculty members: "Once I have a concrete project, concrete initiative to promote and show them, I think that'll start to open up the doors for more contact with them."

The showcasing of services was not about the services themselves but about visibly demonstrating professional knowledge and expertise through the "highest level of service to all library users" (ALA, 2004, n.p.) as a way to show clients "the library in action" (Johnson & Alexander, 2007, p. 40). The services were a tool librarians used to demonstrate how flexible the profession was in meeting client needs. To this end, throughout the data set, words and phrases such as "advance," "support [clients'] aspirations" ("Outgrowing the Library," 2003, p. 58), "active participation" (DiMatia, 2000, p. 40), and "showcase" (interview participant) were used. These words and phrases evoked a sense of achievement and forward momentum in helping clients meet their information needs and achieve their educational and business goals.

In contrast to showing, *telling* was about delivering a message, or telling a story, to client groups. It is not about "how many books and computers" that librarians maintained (Minkel, 2002, p. 48) but about telling "everyone that librarians listen and help solve puzzles" (Stuhlman, 2003, p. 11). Specific advice on how to best tell people about services and librarians included developing an "elevator speech," speaking to the media, using social media (blogs and Twitter), attending community meetings, handing out flyers to clients, bookmarks, library-related survival kits, and even games designed to inform clients about services. The purpose behind these activities was twofold: to ensure the public knew about librarians and their activities ("We can tell that story, over and over and over again, in every way we can think of, until people understand it and internalize it and believe it" [Janes, 2004, p. 58]) and the services they provided, and to develop relationships with clients and other stakeholders. These relationships were understood to be vital to advocacy efforts because they could

create “library converts and end up becoming important goodwill ambassadors for libraries” (Manely, 2006, p. 64). The best way to enlist these ambassadors was to use language that was “consistent with the culture and business context” (Matarazzo & Pearlstein, 2011, p. 18). This advice was most often given by and directed toward public and special librarians, especially toward those working within a business context. By using non-library-specific language, librarians were trying to position themselves as being aware of their ambassadors’ information needs and priorities and, similar to the action words used as part of the showing advice, demonstrate librarians’ focus on and flexibility toward user needs. Whether through entire advocacy campaigns designed around librarians as superheroes (Keresztury, 2004) or advice to challenge “antiquated” (St. Lifer, 2004, p. 11) images of librarians, the focus on professional image was about rhetorically positioning librarians as user-focused, flexible, and prepared to meet the information needs of the twenty-first century. In addition, it highlighted the professional qualities of librarianship that resonated with nonlibrarians, such as quality, reliability, and trust, by focusing on their clients’ needs by using language from nonlibrary contexts.

*What Is the Intended Purpose of Their Advocacy Efforts?*

Librarians offered many different reasons for why they should advocate, but demonstrating value, in all its connotations (importance, significance, worth, respect and esteem, and attraction), was the core reason offered. Showcasing the value of services made “success stories known” (Haycock, 2005, p. 22), provided librarians with a way to show clients how the library fits into their daily lives, rendered visible the work of librarians, got people into libraries and fostered love for them once they were there, and “prove[d] [a service’s] worth” (e-mail discussion list post). Advocacy provided librarians with an opportunity to demonstrate and inform clients and communities about the difference that librarians make through these valuable services. As Sarah Prielipp (2012, p. 25) stated: “Libraries need to get the message out that we do all of our work out of devotion to those we serve.” This idea was echoed in the speech of the interview participants. For Beverly, a teacher librarian interview participant, devotion to her work was perhaps not an advocacy activity government officials would note, but her students and their parents would; ultimately her work would have a genuine influence on society at large: “I can’t change what the Minister of Education’s going to do, but I can change the people’s lives that I can come in contact with. We know that we all pay if people are not literate in this society.” Service, therefore, was the vehicle that librarians could use to get themselves a seat at the table with policymakers, where they would have the opportunity to convince people in positions of power to fund libraries, which in turn would support important services.

As was particularly apparent in the text of the journal articles, creating

and maintaining respect and esteem for the profession was another stated goal of advocacy work: “[We] have to convince them not only that we can supply the information they need but that they need our expertise to be confident that the sources from which it is taken are valid, uncorrupted by hidden motivations, and as compete, current, and authoritative as can be found” (Berry, 2004, p. 8). By earning respect for the profession, librarians hoped to build trust with stakeholders and community members by highlighting the professional skills and expertise of librarians: “[ensure that everyone knows] you are the bridge to meeting their information needs” (Matarazzo & Pearlstein, 2011, p. 19). This trust was essential to gain “acceptance into ‘the club’” (p. 18) in order to “avoid being put on the chopping block” (Affelt, 2009, p. 37). This “chopping block” consisted of not just funding cuts and a lack of professional recognition but also an inability to offer important services and thus ultimately clients and communities looking elsewhere for their information needs. In other words, if librarians are undervalued, then the profession is at risk and clients will suffer: “Librarians do not promote library services well and often are reluctant to borrow from the private sector, although that may be the only thing that will guarantee a viable future” (Sass, 2002, p. 37).

## DISCUSSION

The advocacy repertoire had three main discursive functions in the professional identity construction of librarians: it highlighted librarians’ services and in turn the value of the profession; it attempted to shift discussions of librarians away from popular images and stereotypes to focus on the skills and expertise of librarians; and it attempted to reposition librarians’ relationships with their various communities, including clients, policymakers, and nonlibrary users. Given that the intended outcome of advocacy efforts is to raise awareness, build relationships, and champion a cause (CLA, 2011), the discursive purpose of the advocacy repertoire is perhaps not too surprising. When discussing advocacy, librarians focused much of their attention on *who* they should direct their efforts toward, *what* they should advocate for, *how* they should advocate, and *why* they should advocate. Service and professionalism were closely linked in this repertoire. Librarians both advocated for and with the services they offered and the professional expertise they possessed. The discursive function of advocacy is similar to the purpose of the service repertoire. In the service repertoire, librarians attempted to demonstrate their professional worth through the provision of high-quality services, and the act of providing a service gives librarians something tangible in which to ground their identities (Hicks, 2014). Similarly, this study found that librarians used the provision of service as a way to advocate both for services themselves and the profession. Service provided a way to show and tell specific audiences about the importance of librarians to their local communities and librarianship as a profession.

By becoming advocates for services, the profession, their users, and Core Values, librarians discursively grounded their identity in the act of advocating, which itself was positioned as a public service.

Service was often discursively linked to the library-as-place. By grounding their professional identity in something tangible like a specific service or the library, librarians were able to draw on implicit and socially based understandings associated with these products of their work. The rhetorical slippage between *library* and *librarian* described above illustrates how librarians used service and the library-as-place to describe their professional identities. According to the OCLC (2010), many Americans believe that the library is a valuable social institution, mostly because of the resources, such as books, videos, and music, it offers. By referring to “the library” instead of “the librarian” or by referring to the library as “we,” librarians are evoking these positive associations that many people have for the library. This rhetorical slippage in advocacy activities itself makes sense for, as Wendy Newman (2002, p. 46) stated: “The wellbeing of libraries and that of librarians aren’t mutually exclusive . . . librarians can and do benefit from effective library advocacy.” When communicating with the targets of advocacy activities, positioning the library as librarians and vice versa is an effective way to evoke positive associations in those target populations. The function of this language choice was to highlight the role of librarians as service providers, and the library as the primary tool they use to provide service. For librarians, this rhetorical connection was not just about evoking the positives of the library-as-place: it also served as a reminder about the importance of librarians, and the services they offer via their libraries, to their communities.

When the advocacy repertoire was employed in relation to the profession, this rhetorical connection between librarians and the library was abandoned or minimized. The function of the repertoire, in this context, was to move public perceptions of the profession away from stereotypical images. As discussed earlier, advocating for librarianship, often by promoting high-quality services, was a common recommendation for countering the profession’s negative popular image. These calls for improved advocacy often focused on the ways in which librarians could change their attitudes and behaviors, particularly when engaging in service activities, to counteract negative stereotypes (Fagan, 2002; Luthmann, 2007; Posner, 2002). This study found that librarians focused on professional values, skills, and expertise in their text and speech to promote the profession. The focus was not on changing the attitudes and behaviors of librarians but on demonstrating the value of the profession by providing high-quality services and other advocacy activities. Librarians chose words with active connotations and a sense of urgency to give the sense of the profession in action. This use of action-oriented words countered not only negative public perceptions of the profession but also any negative self-perceptions

that librarians may have had regarding their own abilities to be forthright professionals able to advocate for themselves and on behalf of their communities. The advice to use language consistent with stakeholder values served a similar function: to counter misperceptions of librarians and position them as having concerns and interests in common with their communities.

The relationship between librarians and their communities is central to the advocacy repertoire. The stated purpose of most advocacy efforts was to build or maintain awareness in target populations, or to create allies capable of supporting librarians and their services. The discursive function of the repertoire, when used in relation to clients and communities, was to reposition librarians as community and organizational leaders worthy of both their clients' trust and a seat at the decision-makers' table. This function is in line with how other professions are managing the societal trends influencing the traditional understanding of professionalism (Dent & Whitehead, 2002; Fournier, 1999; Karseth & Nerland, 2007). By making a difference in their clients' lives or advocating on behalf of others, librarians were attempting to demonstrate to stakeholders their commitment to their needs and their trustworthiness. If clients did not respond positively to these messages, there were consequences for the profession, ranging from an inability to recruit diverse and talented people to become librarians to the end of the profession itself. Advocacy efforts therefore were about more than attracting the attention and interests of others in an effort to support the profession and its services; they were also about creating and maintaining the relationships that librarians need to sustain their profession's status and the public's trust. Clients may need the services that librarians market and offer, but librarians require their clients and communities to recognize their professionalism, whether by using the services that librarians provide, giving them a seat at the table, or seeing beyond stereotypical images of the profession.

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This study examined the interpretive repertoire of advocacy in the professional identities of librarians. This repertoire was seen in the text and speech of librarians when they discussed the value of the profession and its services to others, focused on their skills and expertise, and repositioned the relationships they have with their clients and communities. The advocacy repertoire had two main functions: to advise librarians on how best to advocate and market their services and profession, and to create a relationship with client groups and communities that positioned librarians as valuable and trusted professionals who had their clients' information needs at heart. In its "Core Values of Librarianship" (2004) the ALA described Service as a Core Value in two ways: the first focused on providing library users with the "highest level of service"; the second on

improving the profession through skills development and promoting the profession to future librarians (“We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession”) (n.p.). In the advocacy repertoire both definitions of Service were employed. By offering the “highest level of service,” librarians used their services as a way to promote librarianship. Advocacy therefore was as much a professional obligation as a service. Even if librarians chose to forego formal advocacy activities, such as marketing or public relations, the professional act of providing high-quality service was in and of itself an act of advocacy. The second definition was more obliquely addressed. Advocacy was considered to be a skill that librarians could improve upon through professional development, although professional development itself was not something that librarians wrote or spoke about advocating for. In addition, advocacy was considered to be one way to foster “the aspirations of potential members of the profession” (n.p.). This form of advocacy was a way to “future-proof” librarianship. Through advocacy efforts, librarians could improve the public’s perceptions of them, which would encourage people to consider librarianship as their future profession, which in turn would ensure that librarianship has a viable future so that librarians could continue to offer their clients the “highest level of service” (n.p.). In other words, by advocating for services, librarians were actually advocating for the profession.

There is a social value to professional recognition. A *professionalis* “someone trusted and respected, an individual given class status, autonomy, social elevation, in return for safeguarding our well-being and applying their professional judgement on the basis of a benign moral or cultural code” (Dent & Whitehead, 2002, p. 1). By focusing on client needs, librarians were demonstrating their professional value to their clients. Past research indicates that librarians place much emphasis on their relationships with certain stakeholder and client groups. Such studies illustrate that librarians’ perceptions of their clients can be as influential on librarians’ self-perception as popular images and stereotypes (Given & Julien, 2005; Julien & Given, 2002/2003; Julien & Pecoskie, 2009). Through their advocacy repertoire, librarians try to challenge and change these images and stereotypes by focusing on valuable services and professional expertise and skills; the advocacy repertoire gave librarians an active role in their own identity formation. By making advocacy a central activity of the profession, librarians challenged their own understanding of librarianship. Advocacy was not about sleazy sales tactics, but about positioning the profession as valuable, worthy of funding, and attractive to others.

Librarians have been seeking professional status and recognition since Melvil Dewey (1876/1989). Many librarians believe that improving the profession’s status will lead to financial gains for librarians, as well as greater

public respect. The role of advocacy, both for services and the profession, is particularly important to this endeavor, especially given the societal and cultural shifts that have questioned traditional understandings of professionalism (Fournier, 1999). To effectively advocate for services and librarianship, librarians need to reflect on the relationships they want with their client groups and communities, the services they offer, how they want the public to understand librarianship, and how these relationships, services, and understandings intersect. Advocacy and service are two of the core repertoires that librarians draw on when they construct their identities. A deeper understanding of these repertoires and how they interact provides librarians with insights into not only how they design and market their services but also how their relationships with their communities, organizations, and stakeholder groups influence how and why they advocate.

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### NOTE

1. The following e-mail discussion lists were used as data sources: CLA: the official e-mail discussion list of the CLA; ILI-L: hosted by the ALA and dedicated to information literacy; LM\_NET: an independent discussion list devoted to topics related to school librarianship; MEDLIB-L: hosted by the Medical Library Association and open to individuals interested in health sciences information services; and PUBLIB: hosted by the OCLC and focused on public librarianship.

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