Ice Ice Baby: Are Librarian Stereotypes Freezing Us out of Instruction?

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"empty spaces iv" by vassilis galopoulos

In Brief: Why do librarians struggle so much with instruction? Part of the problem is that we have so many facets to consider: pedagogy, campus culture, relationships with faculty, and effectiveness with students. Research on student and faculty perceptions of librarians combined with sociological and psychological research on the magnitude of impression effects prompted us to more thoroughly examine how perceptions of instruction librarians impact successful teaching and learning. In this article, we look at theories of impression formation, the historical feminization of librarianship, and suggestions for next steps that we should take in order to take charge of our image and our instruction.

May we be honest with you, reader? At one point we were considering calling this article "WTF." But we're going to be a bit more descriptive. Essentially, those three letters were inspired by what seems to be the mystery of successful instruction within librarianship.

Why does library instruction seem to be so difficult for us as a field? This is a question that has followed us for close to 50 years now. Instruction is a more recent pursuit within librarianship, taking shape in the 1970s, where it had "emerged as an authentic movement" with bibliographic instruction (Hardesty, 1995). Throughout this time, librarians have been trying to determine best practices, theories, standards, and more nuanced issues regarding the role of teaching and pedagogy. Some of this effort has centered on how we are perceived by students, faculty, campus, communities, and other stakeholders: specifically how others' perceptions impact our teaching effectiveness with students and interactions with faculty.

Although there has been LIS research exploring these concerns, we are still in a strange position regarding approach, as is evident by the ongoing efforts to transform the ACRL Standards, the field

generally moving away from one-shot sessions, and the sustained emphasis on online learning. Likewise, there continue to be gaps in teaching instruction within LIS education where many graduates note that they feel incredibly unprepared for teaching, and the majority of instruction librarians indicating that on-the-job training is the primary means by which they learned to teach (Julien & Genui, 2011; Walter, 2008; Meulemans & Brown, 2001; Patterson & Howell, 1990).

There are a number of dimensions regarding perception that interested us–both being instruction librarians at research universities–and through doing our own research of the educational psychology literature on impression management (this means what it sounds like: managing others' impressions), there seemed to be a strong tie-in with perceptions of librarians, i.e., our stereotypes. We wanted to examine how student impressions and expectations of instruction librarians impact successful teaching and student learning, and likewise, how faculty impressions of us impact our interactions with faculty and resulting effects in the classroom. Other research in this area has looked at qualitative faculty impressions of academic librarians, student perceptions, and even librarians' own thoughts about ourselves (Christiansen, Stombler, & Thaxton, 2004; Hardesty, 1995; Freedman, 1979; Wilson, 1979; Leigh & Sewny, 1960). However, in applying another field's research to LIS research, a lot of different working parts became apparent… that is, we started to realize how many conflicting perspectives are at play. Let us provide a brief introduction to the relevant theories and concepts before we go into more depth:

- "Warm" and "cold" are considered central traits that determine overall how individuals are perceived (through a halo effect), so projecting warmth is integral in being viewed positively in all other personality components, whereas being cold has deleterious effects (Kelley, 1950; Asch, 1946).
- Educational psychology literature demonstrates that teachers who are "warm" have improved student learning and success in the classroom (Olson & Carter, 2014; Williams & Bargh, 2008; Rosenthal, 1994).
- On one hand, our traditional librarian stereotypes are composed of descriptors that are arguably "cold," (e.g. uptight, meticulous, introverted), so it seems like it would be clear that taking a "warm" approach in our teaching might possibly solve our problems and we could call it a day.
- But wait, because we are a feminized profession (at last count, 80-90% women, American Library Association, 2012) with expectations for female, or warm, traits in our profession, aren't we then inherently presumed to be warm? Faculty often view us as "helpers," which, while friendly, is more subservient than collegial. Could being "warm" hinder our progress as a profession if we remain pegged as caregivers?
- More recent research on impression management, outside of educational psychology, looks at the central traits of *warmth* and *competence*, not necessarily warm and cold. So rather than choosing warmth and avoiding its opposite, maybe we should instead strive to demonstrate both warmth *and* competence.
- But then, are warmth and competence mutually exclusive? What truly comes forward in our interactions in the classroom? If we are perceived as warm, are we not perceived as competent? Do we have… Warmth? Competence? Warmth *and* competence? Neither warmth nor competence?
- WTF? Should we even bother? Are we even interested in this anymore?

We've been kicking around this topic for years. One of us is in the process of finishing her PhD dissertation in Educational Psychology, while the other is about to release a co-edited book on examining librarian stereotypes and how they play into societal discrimination and issues of social justice.[1] As our field continues to explore, test, and establish sound pedagogical strategies for information literacy instruction, we didn't want to give up (well we almost did, but we're not going to!).

As you'll see in our examination of these topics, one of our major points is to highlight that we need more empirical research in this area, particularly in implementing or replicating studies from the social sciences and educational psychology into our framework; likewise, we urge, as Still and Wilkinson (2014) have stressed, that librarianship as a profession should be studied in greater depth in fields outside of librarianship, such as psychology and sociology. We therefore present this roller coaster ride of exploration into instructional strategies in order to encourage discussion, research, and self-examination.

But stereotype exhaustion

> **A couple of minutes after the dawn of librarianship two librarians started worrying about what other people thought of them. They were suffering from what might be called "reverse narcissism." They did not so much want to dive into the pond as flee from the ugly sight it reflected (Fisher, 1993).**

This quote came from a review of (yet another) study on librarian image published in 1993. Fisher's frustration reflects navel-gazing fatigue that has been widely echoed. While we have spent decades pondering this issue we haven't done much in the way of offering tangible solutions; Fisher and others' exhaustion at least partially comes from publications reinforcing negative portrayals and providing little in the way of solutions beyond a "bootstrapping" model as conveyed by Sable:

> The world literally has as yet no concept of its indebtedness to our field. After it realizes and appreciates our contribution to mankind's progress now and throughout recorded history, the matter of "professional image" will present no problem (1983, p. 8).

Clearly, we won't gain respect solely from just doing our jobs, because we haven't: we remain where we have been over time, which is especially apparent considering we are still trying to figure out what impact our relationships with faculty have (ERIAL Project, 2012). Additionally, stereotypes are still widely held, perceptions of the work we do are still skewed, and we continue to struggle with attracting and justly compensating a diverse workforce (Majid & Haider, 2008).

Likewise, although stereotypes are literally about us, stereotype existence is about the other: the one who is doing the perceiving. Garrison speaks to this point by stating, "To call the public image of librarianship a stereotype does not make it an entirely erroneous concept for the popular image of librarians is a by-product of deeper social realities" (1972, p. 152). Our stereotypes are not just annoying or humorous illustrations of us, they can seriously impact the work we do and the respect we are afforded.

Garrison continues to stress the importance of self-study, and "For this reason it is important that librarians assess the basic meaning of feminization and give precise attention to their early history, for the dominance of women is surely the prevailing factor in library education, the image of librarianship, and the professionalization of the field" (1972, p. 143). The more we examine and question our stereotypes, the better we can understand our constituents and improve our perceptions and status. This is an issue speaking to feminism's strides toward equality and the importance of diversity in providing great benefit to the field. We argue here, and as is argued by Pagowsky and Rigby (2014), that those who feel they can ignore the stereotype are speaking from a position of privilege, and this is something we should all interrogate. Redmond makes this case clear for minority professors:

On one hand, we forget that white privilege gives certain groups (in particular, white males) immediate merit and authority. No one questions their authority or whether they deserve their status in the university—or anywhere else for that matter. On the other hand, we forget that minorities and women, especially minority women, are not granted authority even after earning a doctorate and being hired in a very competitive academic market. It is an uphill battle for authority; they must prove their merit. For women and minorities, it is a frustrating process, and feeling as if they don't have the same status creates distance between them and their colleagues and their students (2014).

For a feminized profession with over 80% women, these issues affect a great number of us — all of us to varying degrees, including even white cisgender men.[2] If women have a hard time gaining professional respect, and if professors of color have a hard time gaining professional respect, then what are the implications for women instruction librarians of color, or additional combinations of intersectional other-ness?

What is "Warm" and "Cold?"

An individual's perceived warmth (or lack thereof) has long been found to influence impression formation. Asch (1946) determined this dichotomy is central, meaning perception of a person's warmness versus coldness can systematically influence impressions of additional, peripheral traits. First impressions are crucial because they can influence how other traits are perceived and sustained, or in Asch's words, "Subsequent observation may enrich or upset our first view, but we can no more prevent its rapid growth than we can avoid perceiving a given visual object or hearing a melody" (1946, p. 258).

In a canonical study carried out by Kelley (1950), expectations based on an instructor described as cold prompted students to participate in class less and ascribe negative reviews to the teacher. The reverse was true for warm-based expectations, where students participated more and provided more positive reviews. Regardless of how the instructor actually engaged with students during class sessions following the pre-information, students' perceptions stuck and colored impressions. Kelley attributed this to the strength of first impressions, especially the more difficult to displace negative or hostile ones, stating, "The more incompatible the observer initially perceived the stimulus person to be, the less the observer initiated with him thereafter" (1950, p. 432). After examining 135 mediation studies, Harris & Rosenthal (1985) identified creating a "less negative climate" as one of sixteen central behaviors in mediating student expectancy effects.

In other sociological and psychological studies, numerous researchers pinpoint the two central traits as warm and competent; this could perhaps be an update to the earlier, warm and cold variables (Fiske, 2012; Holoien & Fiske, 2012; Cuddy, Glick, & Beninger, 2011; Brambilla, et al., 2010; Kervyn, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2008; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2006). Vinopal, in discussing research on perceptions of warmth versus competence states a valid concern: "The problem I have with the appeal to 'kindness' is that it tends to express itself in highly gendered (and other discriminatory) ways" (2014).

Cuddy, Glick, and Beninger (2011), as the main research study Vinopal is referring to, describe implications of warmth versus competence traits, noting that mutual exclusivity really only affects women — an effect which is likely magnified in a women-dominated profession, and especially when considering intersectional identities. With this in mind, the researchers elucidate, "This effect illustrates a critical feature of warmth and competence judgments for members of social categories that have historically experienced discrimination — a double bind in which being judged as high on one dimension leads to lower judgments on the other" (2011, p. 77). Later in the study they touch on stereotypes and discuss

warmth and competence having a negative relationship regarding ambivalent stereotypes (p. 80). This activates paternalistic prejudice harmful to groups expected to be warm and incompetent, where occupational tasks involving social skills are imposed and general advancement is stunted (p. 81).

Librarianship being dominated by women and falling into an older demographic equates with two major identities that Cuddy, Glick, and Beninger categorize as invoking *pity*, which involves "low-status, noncompetitive groups perceived as warm but incompetent" (p. 83). It is this configuration that elicits passive harm through neglect — passive harm that many instruction librarians regularly contend with on campus either from individual faculty members or entire departments.

Maybe we are cold?

> **As the practices of the prison transform the person to the prisoner, so, too, do the practices of the library transform the person to the user (Radford & Radford, 2001, p. 304).**

In examining the librarian persona of the matron, which tends to be one of the most widespread librarian depictions, Seale points to a variety of (cold trait) terms used to describe this image, including: shriveled prune, loveless frump, prim, introverted, repressed, mild, civil, and meek (2008). Women currently and historically have occupied between 80 to 90% of professional librarian positions (DPE, 2013), and Melville Dewey set the tone by creating a precedent of hiring cheap, female labor, despite a conflicted history of contradictorily both being a champion of women and patronizing women in their work (Garrison, 1972).

Although librarianship had been around well before Dewey, it was during this time period that the stereotypes solidified. According to Newmeyer, "Melvil Dewey's interest in efficiency and scientific management created and perpetuated a submissive, dependent spinsterish librarian image of such strength and durability that it is now automatically assumed to have a real, not just mythological basis" (as cited in Radford & Radford, 1997, p. 253).

As we are all well aware, librarians have been also depicted as sexy, and more recently, hip. Both of these portrayals were initially used to reverse the prior stereotypes: McReynolds describes how the 40s marked a clear effort to recruit "glamorous" women to be librarians, as well as generate these perceptions in the public eye in an effort to distance the profession as much as possible from the matron stereotype (1985, p. 29). In a sense, the long withstanding matron stereotype paired with the newer sexy stereotype could be thought of creating a virgin/whore dichotomy for women librarians, complicating perceptions even further.

The hipster stereotype presents greater assumed cultural capital, and in present day, more technological savvy; however the library re-imagined as hip might more so be saying that the library is so uncool that it is actually cool through the lens of irony and nostalgia.[3] Although these depictions seem like they might perhaps work in librarians' favor to some degree because they appear to be the opposite of the cold, negative imagery, they are just as detrimental by simply replacing old stereotypes with new ones while still focusing on the inherent feminization of librarianship.

To varying degrees, all of the librarian stereotypes center on power or even sex appeal through patron fear of authority and the ability of the librarian to be a gatekeeper of information amidst an obscure organizational system (Radford, 1998; Radford & Radford, 1997). Radford and Radford (1997) provide more insight into these stereotypes' gendered underpinnings, where "the stereotype of the female librarian can be thought of as a strategy in which this fundamental fear can be managed, defused and

disguised… the power of the librarian is the power of the woman: it is recognized as present but is afforded little respect" (1997, p. 261). Navigating instruction as well as student and faculty relationships through or around these stereotypes makes our jobs even more difficult, particularly when trying to gain respect as professionals and educators.

Cold traits are introduced to faculty and students through this framing prior to interacting with instruction librarians and can determine expectations. Numerous studies coalesce on the fact that faculty have tended to have negative, cold-trait-based impressions of librarians (Miller and Murillo, 2012; Church, 2002; Hardesty, 1995). Negative opinions in this case promote lower expectations that can impact librarians' performance and subsequent relationships with faculty. Holbrook's 1968 summary of English faculty at the University of Kentucky describes librarians' traits as overwhelmingly cold: (a) orderly, meticulous, and acquisitive; (b) conforming and conservative; (c) passive and submissive; (d) introspective, with non-social attitudes and behavior; and (e) anxious with lack of self-confidence (as cited in Church, 2002, p. 11). These traits very closely align with the view of librarians as service providers by faculty, and potentially double in decreasing our status, one as librarians, and two as teachers: professions that both receive less respect.

Accordingly, faculty impressions can influence students' expectations of librarians. Miller and Murillo point out that, "In the absence of an established structure ensuring that students build relationships with librarians throughout their college careers, professors play a critical role in brokering students' relationships with librarians" (as cited in Kolowich, 2011). Solidifying cold-trait expectations through avoidance and assumptions can cause faculty or students to avoid the library on a grander scale, making it more difficult to reverse expectations.

Students specifically have more problematic issues resulting from misperceptions of librarians and libraries. Fagan highlights the abundance of authors studying the problem of students' incorrect perceptions of librarians as a major reason students avoid the library, resulting in a reduction in the amount of time students are willing to spend getting help, and their subsequent success in engaging in library research (2002, p. 141).

This is also true for students experiencing library anxiety, which is still highly present, as Project Information Literacy research demonstrates, with the top twelve adjectives students use to describe how they feel about research assignments being: fear, angst, tired, dread, excited, anxious, annoyed, stressed, disgusted, intrigued, confused, and overwhelmed (2012). These anxious feelings and attitudes can negatively impact student success even more so by students procrastinating or avoiding the library entirely. This can become a negative feedback loop where these feelings also strengthen negative perceptions of librarians, causing students to avoid librarians and getting help.

Ambady and Gray (2002) found that mood can impact perceptions of others. They looked specifically at depressed individuals' negative judgment of teachers, which coincided with mood. As this is one of many studies examining the impact of affect on social judgments (Ashley & Holtgraves, 2003; Forgas, 2011; Ikegami, 2002, as just a few examples), it seems likely that students with library anxiety would form or maintain even more negative impressions of librarians based on their negative feelings toward library research.

The importance of librarians demonstrating warmth has been discussed in different modalities throughout the last few decades of research on librarian reference or teaching relationships with students and faculty (Armstrong, 2012; Fagan, 2002; Land, 1988; Mellon, 1988). This discussion of warmth is independent of the expectancy effects literature, though shows the strength of central trait expectations.

Armstrong specifically states that this warmer image can appeal to both faculty and students since faculty expectations of librarians' roles include "mediator, complimentary voice, or expert" as well as "project[ing] a knowledgeable, encouraging, and approachable demeanor to students who are often overwhelmed and occasionally discouraged by the tasks involved with the research process" (2012, p. 37). This is clearly a more positive description than faculty in earlier studies have espoused, but still falls into some of the same trappings of de-professionalization and the caretaker role many women-dominated professions are assumed to have.

Maybe we are warm?

> **[Enduring] with grace the complaints of the most unreasonable patron. The ideal assistant was expected to emanate qualities of kindness, dignity, and selflessness. At the same time, she was told not to have high expectations of her patrons, yet to restrain any impulse to second-guess their needs. The pressure to attain this ideal was considerable for it was believed that the women who served the public would establish a library's reputation, and subsequently, the image of the entire profession. In very little time, then, the image problem became the women's problem (McReynolds, 1985, p. 26).**

The role of service work is afforded a lower status than production work. Faculty have historically viewed librarians as helpers and organizers, in contrast to their own position in creating and disseminating knowledge (Christiansen, Stombler, & Thaxton, 2004; Kraat, 2005; McGuinness, 2006; Meulemans & Brown, 2002; Wilson, 1979). Christiansen, Stombler, and Thaxton (2004) point out through sociological study how librarians are perceived by faculty: "They are expert servers, and to the degree that social prejudice about service operates in academic settings, viewing librarians as a different status group is reinforced" (p. 119). The role of service provider being of a lower status ties in to the feminized profession of librarianship.

Within faculty's own work, particularly at research-focused universities, the teaching of undergraduates is not considered a "true profession" by professors (Freedman et al., 1979, as cited in Hardesty, 1995). Because faculty work attains higher value when knowledge is expressed through research, grants, or publication, rather than helping others learn (Hardesty, 1995), the latter feminized work receives less attention and status. This is problematic for a number of reasons, but pertinent to this conversation, it maps on to faculty impressions of librarians engaging in teaching.

Looking to stereotypes of instructors, Morley points to Shaw's 1995 discussion of the feminization of pedagogy, "with the slippage from 'good teacher' to 'good parent' to 'good mother' increasing the scope for anxiety about teaching" (1997, p. 24). This expectation of mothering and giving of oneself even in a professional capacity — also discussed as emotional labor — does plague women more than men, however there are implications for all performing within feminized professions. Morley further brings forward the challenge feminist pedagogy faces, which could implicitly apply to librarianship as well, being: "how to facilitate student development, without assuming the role of surrogate mother" (p. 23). The problem does not isolate itself at the individual level with the act of giving oneself, but is systemic within the ivory tower and society at large: emotional labor is not valued.[4]

Bellas examined the reward structure for emotional labor of professors, noting that the work of teaching and service as considered culturally feminine was valued far less than the work of administration and research as considered culturally male:

> Research demonstrates that gendered reward structures can arise when specific job tasks are

valued more or less because of the gendered nature of the work. Skills and responsibilities defined as feminine such as nurturance and face-to-face service to clients or customers (emotional labor), are typically unappreciated and unrewarded by employers and stigmatized even when male workers perform them (1999, p. 107).

This is problematic for librarians who want to both be taken seriously on campus, facing the necessity of proving value, and yet who also endeavor to effectively reach students and show care. We seem to be in a paradox of demonstrating warmth through caring for students and reversing expectations from our cold stereotype, yet perhaps to some degree, warmth hinders us in striving for status, respect, and greater collaborations on campus. Instruction librarians experience the work of emotional labor due to lack of agency and invisible outcomes, often finding ourselves taking on "organizational boundary roles," wherein we are working in some capacity with constituents who we have little to no formal authority over, whether students or faculty (Julien and Genuis, 2009, p. 931).

The notion of reward structures and gendered work is a big picture issue in academia and society at large that continues to generate attention, and could use greater research, particularly for how it affects library instruction and what can be done in efforts for demonstrating value at this point of conflict.

Can we be both?

> **Within the academy, [librarians] generally feel second-class, even librarians with faculty status, even librarians with Ph.Ds. What I really want from faculty is advocacy and solidarity, more than kisses… (Freedman, 2014 in response to recent *Chronicle* article, cheekily titled, "Kiss a Librarian").**

Are we then warm or cold? Is the binary instead warm and competent? Can we be both? Instruction librarians are contending with two professional frameworks, and all of the perceptions, stereotypes, and barriers that go with them: librarians as librarians, and librarians as instructors. Confusion and anxiety in this regard simultaneously stems from librarianship having a slippery identity. What does this mean for us as instructors and for how we are perceived? Do we need to actively choose a central trait instead of having one chosen for us?

We have traditionally been service providers, and so as we move into newer roles, such as educators, our philosophies and perceptions of ourselves must adapt. In addressing this issue, Elmborg explains, "This shift, driven by demand, implies an evolution in what librarians do, and moving from service provider to active educator challenges librarians and library educators to develop new guiding philosophies" (2006, p. 192). Elmborg is more so discussing the need for a shift to critical library instruction,[5] and we add that our guiding philosophies should also be critical of our own status within academia and society.

How we engage with faculty through collaboration and with students through instruction can have multi-directional influences. For example, Swygart-Hobaugh notes that "Moreover, because academic librarians are often solicited by faculty members to do instruction that is solely skill-and resource-focused, and are seldom (if ever) asked to lead critical discussions about the broader social issues of information literacy and access, students are exposed to a limited view of our professional lives and principles" (2013, p. 223).

Looking specifically at instruction personas and impression management, Wheeless and Portoti (1989)

reiterate the importance of warmth in effective teaching demonstrated throughout numerous studies. This seems to make sense in the context of information literacy instruction as warmth and caring would alleviate library anxiety for students experiencing reluctance in using the library or approaching a librarian. However, Wheeless and Portoti's research reveals more for university-level instructors, where a combination of feminine and masculine-associated traits were beneficial to student learning and teacher success (regardless of the gender of the instructor):

> Although feminine qualities (gentle, understanding, sensitive, and helpful) demonstrated the highest correlations with learning, it was the teacher who was able to combine these traits with dominance, forcefulness, and assertiveness – the androgynous teacher – who had the greatest impact on student attitudes toward learning (1989, p. 261).

We stress the importance of this holistic view toward teaching personas. One step on the way to lessening potentially harmful assumptions toward feminine traits, such as warmth and caring, is to reduce classifying instruction personas as either warm/female or cold/male. Instead of thinking of central traits as mutually exclusive, we should view how we present ourselves on a spectrum. Unfortunately, our place on the spectrum is contingent, in part, on society as a whole changing its expectations. In the meantime, in working with faculty and students we need to take control of the fact that how we are perceived influences the work we do, and the work we do influences how we are perceived.

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1. *The Librarian Stereotype: Deconstructing Perceptions and Presentations of Information Work* with ACRL Press, edited by Nicole Pagowsky and Miriam Rigby. Read the first chapter and the foreword for free at http://www.acrl.ala.org/acrlinsider/archives/8818 [?]
2. See numerous research articles by James V. Carmichael, Jr. on male librarian stereotypes and effects on this demographic from the feminization of librarianship [?]
3. For more about hipsters, autonomy, and the essence of "cool," see Warren & Campbell, 2014 [?]
4. Emotional labor can be described as conflicting inner feelings with outer expectations for countenance, particularly in a work environment, and particularly for women. This can also be thought of as "smile work," (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996) where women especially are expected to smile and make others in the workplace feel comfortable regardless of their own true feelings, which are disregarded [?]
5. A necessity with which we concur and would love to discuss at greater length in this article but it would be too much ground to cover [?]