Information Technology, Change and Information Professionals’ Identity Construction: A Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT
Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are often identified by librarians and information professionals as being a driving force behind the way they perform their day-to-day activities and how they interact with their clients. This study considers the role ICTs play in the shaping and constructing of the identities of librarians. Using data gathered from interviews, email discussion lists, and the professional literature, this study employed a discourse analysis to examine the language resources librarians use when constructing their professional identities, with particular attention to the role of ICTs in this construction. ICTs both challenged and enhanced the identities of librarians. While the changes related to ICTs have left librarians feeling insecure about their professional positions, they have also opened up new roles and opportunities for librarians to pursue. Librarians have a service-oriented identity that is influenced by ICT-related changes affecting their work. These changes will challenge and benefit librarians as they engage with ICTs and determine how, if at all, they can be incorporated into their day-to-day practice.

Keywords
Information technology, discourse analysis, professional identity

INTRODUCTION
The influence of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on the activities of librarians is a well-explored and studied topic in Library and Information Science research. Not only do librarians use ICTs during the course of their day-to-day work, they often point to their innovative and user-centered adoption of ICTs in their professional literature as a way to establish and defend their professional reputations (see for example, Potter, 2013). Emerging information technologies have challenged the traditional role that librarians and libraries play in society. Budd (2008), for instance, argued that “technological development, past and future, and the impact on social, cultural, political, economic, and moral matters, has changed our lives and the way we live them” (p. 194). These developments have influenced not only how libraries are understood, but also the service roles of librarians. For instance, LeMaistre, Embry, Van Zandt, and Bailey (2012) found that librarians were moving away from active public service work and embracing more “off-desk” activities, such as collection development.

The influence of information technology on the identity construction of librarians, however, has not been given much attention. Although previous studies have explored how librarians use ICTs to position themselves in relation to users (Tuominen 1997; Sundin, 2008), there have been few studies examining how librarians use ICTs to shape or maintain their professional identities. The study of professional identity, especially in relation to ICTs, provides researchers with a new approach to examining how people experience what it means to be a professional, as a way to understand professional problems and concerns with an eye to developing professionally appropriate solutions, and a better understanding of the cultural and social origins of professional decision-making (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008).

Identity is defined for this study as a description, or representation, of the self within specific practices. 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, using the three kinds of knowledge outlined above; they provide meaning and intention that guide the activities of
practitioners. In other words, practices provide a particular view of what it means to be a professional as well as a specific way to act in the world.

A profession provides an individual with a set of practices that can be used to form an identity. By focusing on how librarians describe their profession, attention can be drawn to how librarians themselves construct librarianship, and how this construction shapes their interactions with clients, their local communities, other professions, and society at large. Identity can be exposed by studying the interpretive repertoires librarians draw upon when they speak about their profession. Interpretive repertoires are described as “the building blocks speakers use for constructing versions of actions, cognitive processes and other phenomena” (Wetherell & Potter, 1988, p. 172). All members of a group draw upon, or borrow, the repertoire when speaking about their work or profession. When language is examined for its interpretive repertoires, it is examined for its functions – both intended and unintended. These functions can be explaining or justifying, etc., or they can work on an ideological level to legitimate the social position of a group. Therefore, professional identity is more than simply a description of the self with specific practices – it also serves a purpose, or function, and has different social consequences and implications as a result.

The questions guiding this research were: 1) What are the discourses that librarians use when articulating their professional identities? 2) How do librarians describe their own professional identities? 3) How does this identity function socially? This study is part of a larger qualitative research project and will focus specifically on the role ICTs play in the identity construction of librarians.

TECHNOLOGY AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

The influence of technology on the construction of professional identities has received some attention in the organizational studies and information studies disciplines. Walsham (1998) examined three case studies of professionals interacting with new technologies to build upon existing social theories, specifically Gidden’s social theory of high modernity. His first case study examined bank managers learning a new decision-making software designed to provide them with advice on whether or not a specific client should be granted a loan. The second case focused on insurance brokers using a computer system that facilitated long-distance broker/underwriter negotiations. The third case studied professional salespeople and their experiences with software designed to improve professional and client contacts via email and a communally edited contact list. In all cases, Walsham found that the technology was considered to be a threat to the professional autonomy and security of the participants. The bank managers, in particular, felt that their professionalism had been reduced and that their work was now subject to tighter controls and increased surveillance. Walsham tied the feelings of insecurity expressed by participants in all three cases to Giddens’s notions of existential anxiety, construction of the project of the self, and personal meaninglessness.

Ravasi and Canato (2010) argued that ICTs can become an identity referent, a feature or set of features perceived by organizational members to be “central, enduring, and distinctive of their organizations” (p. 51). This occurs once ICTs are perceived by organizational members as essential to the survival of the organization, central in decision-making processes or business model, or are perceived as a unique feature or achievement of the organization. Key to Ravasi and Canato’s argument was the notion that ICTs can only become an identity referent once they are socially acknowledged by external audiences, such as clients and other organizations.

Both Walsham’s (1998) and Ravasi and Canato’s (2010) work highlight the influence that ICTs can have on identity construction. Not only do ICTs change work patterns, they influence how people think about and enact these work patterns, and how others perceive these patterns. This in turn influences how individuals understand themselves to be professionals. Recently, there have been a few studies exploring the effect of ICTs on specific professions, namely scientists (oceanographers and marine biologists) and physicians. Lamb and Davidson (2005) found that, for scientists, ICTs were identity enhancing. Technological advances have changed the focus of marine biology from ecological and observational studies of marine life to studying ocean life at the cellular and molecular level (p. 17). These changes have altered what it means to be a field researcher as well as procedures these researchers use to perform their investigations. Lamb and Davidson argued that these changes could be most clearly seen in the professional identity construction of new scientists, who felt it was necessary to “become proficient with a broader range of ICT-enabled research approaches and knowledge domains than was necessary in the past” (p. 17).

Korica and Molloy (2010) examined the relationship between medical professionals and ICTs. They found that the main purpose of emerging technologies in the professional identity development of physicians was to create an insider/outsider dynamic. The use of ICTs separated junior professionals, who viewed ICTs as a means to establishing a professional reputation, from senior physicians, who were viewed as the existing establishment. The choice to use (or not use) a specific technology created “clubs” marked not by medical specialization or the organization the physician worked for, but by the choice to use (or not use) a new technology. This insider/outsider dynamic was perpetuated by the perceived origin of the technology. If the new technology came from outside the profession, it was viewed negatively and as an imposition. If a new technology was thought to have originated within the profession, it was viewed not only positively, but as essential.
Echoing Lamb and Davidson’s (2005) findings, Reich (2012) and Håland (2012) argue that ICTs are influencing physicians’ relationships with medical knowledge. Reich (2012) found that electronic medical records (EMRs) (also known as electronic patient records) were used to discipline physicians’ activities to ensure that they were more in line with organizational and governmental expectations around diagnosis and treatments. Håland (2012) found that EMRs were changing the relationships between physicians and office staff and nurses. EMRs have shifted the responsibility to maintain patient records back onto physicians, while at the same time opening up the opportunity for nurses, who traditionally had neither the right nor the obligation to maintain patient records, to do so. In other words, while EMRs are seen to be eroding one profession’s identity, they are supporting and expanding the identity of another profession.

These studies highlight the evolving nature of professional identity and illustrate that technology has the ability to change how the practices of a profession are performed, which can change the way practitioners conceive of their professional selves.

IDENTITY, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES AND LIBRARIANS

As stated earlier, the influence of ICTs on the identities of librarians and information professionals is not well understood or studied. Kallberg (2012) examined the attitudes of archivists towards their professional positions and practices with the advent of increased electronic information. Her findings primarily focused on the skills archivists will require to manage both print and electronic information. Her findings primarily focused on the skills archivists will require to manage both print and electronic information. She argued that archivists will need to pro-actively seek out advocacy opportunities so that key stakeholders, such as government policy makers, could understand that archivists are recordkeeping experts.

Tuominen (1997) and Sundin (2008), briefly described earlier, both examined how librarians use technology to claim a jurisdictional expertise over information seeking. In particular, Sundin examined how librarians used web-based tutorials to express their identities as information-seeking experts. He identified four different approaches to information literacy that placed the librarians in four different expert roles – from being experts on specific information resources to being experts in communication between users and librarians. Sundin argued that web-based tutorials acted as a platform for librarians to demonstrate and mediate their expertise to others. Librarians used these tutorials to position themselves as information experts and in doing so expressed some of their professional identity.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A discourse analysis approach was employed to examine the full range of interpretive repertoires employed by librarians when they construct their professional identities. For this study, attention was paid to the role that ICTs played in the construction of this identity. Three different data sources were used: professional journals, email discussion lists, and research interviews. Data representing different library sectors (public, academic, special and school) were included.

Multiple data-gathering methods were used to provide contextual triangulation to offer reliability for the research findings. According to Talja (2005), “[e]xplicit comparisons between different contexts of discussion ensure that the research does not comprise a case study with restricted generalizability” (p. 15). Each data set was analysed for the discourses librarians use when describing themselves, the professional practices of librarianship, professionalism, and professional problems, with attention to their use in relation to ICTs.

When analysing for interpretive repertoires, researchers seek to identify regular patterns that occur in the texts being examined. The identification of patterns follows a three-step procedure:

- Analysing for inconsistencies and contradictions within one part of the data (i.e., a single interview or article)
- Identifying regular patterns within these inconsistencies and contradictions across the data set
- Identifying the assumptions that underlie this variability (Talja, 1999, 2005)

For this study, a textual analysis of articles, editorials, and letters to the editor from nine professional journals from 2000-2012 was completed. The professional journals included in this study were:

- American Libraries
- College & Research Libraries
- Feliciter
- Information Outlook
- Information Today
- Library Journal
- Public Libraries
- School Library Journal
- Teacher Librarian

Half of the professional journals selected for this study were identified by the OCLC’s Snapshot of Priorities & Perspectives reports (2011a, 2011b, 2011c) as the top-read journals in two library sectors. Public librarians identified Library Journal, American Libraries, and Public Libraries (2011c) and academic and community college librarians identified Library Journal, College & Research Libraries, and American Libraries (2011a, 2011b). In addition, journals representing the remaining library sectors, as identified by The Future of Human Resources in Canadian Libraries (known as the 8Rs Study) (2005) (special and school), and Canadian librarians were included. These remaining journals were selected based on their subscription numbers or their affiliation with prominent professional associations and publishers. Approximately
1800 individual articles were included. The titles and abstracts of the articles in each issue were studied to determine whether or not they were appropriate for this study based on broad inclusion/exclusion criteria. Articles were included if they addressed the topics of librarians, librarianship, professionalism, and/or professional problems. News reports, articles discussing best practices, conference reports, library profiles, book reviews, and obituaries were excluded from this study. If there was a question about an article’s suitability for the study, the body of the article was examined to determine if it met the inclusion/exclusion criteria.

In addition, contributions from five email discussion lists from 2010-2012 were analysed. The discussion lists were selected because they encouraged active discussions among subscribers (i.e., were not “read only” lists used only to disseminate information). In addition, they all had publicly accessible archives. The email discussion lists included in this study were:

- CLA
- ILI-L
- LM_NET
- MEDLIB-L
- PUBLIB

Over 800 pages of discussion were collected for analysis. The inclusion/exclusion criteria used was similar to the ones used for the professional literature. The subject line was first studied to determine whether or not the posting was appropriate for this study. If the subject line was unclear, then the postings themselves were examined to determine if they met the inclusion/exclusion criteria.

This data was supported with 16 interviews with Canadian librarians working in all library sectors. 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). What is important, therefore, is the size of the discourse sampled, not the number of participants or texts included. The intent is not to produce generalizable findings, but to have well-supported claims that make general statements: “We ... want to support the general statements that transcend individual episodes. But we want to support the general statements through actual demonstrations, not through sweeping attempts at generalization” (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 78). When selecting a sample, the goal is to ensure that the full scope of the discourse under investigation is sampled.

To ensure the entirety of the discourse was sampled, this study used maximum variation sampling. Maximum variation sampling allows researchers to find participants “who cover the spectrum of positions and perspectives in relation to the phenomenon one is studying” (Palys, 2008, ¶ 9). According to Patton (1990), this approach allows researchers to get both “high-quality, detailed descriptions” that allow researchers to document uniqueness and “shared patterns that cut across cases” (p. 172). This sampling technique allowed the variations in the way the discourse is constructed to come to the fore, while at the same time investigating the whole of the repertoire.

Following the 8Rs Study (2005), a librarian was defined as a person holding a Master’s of Library and Information Science (or equivalent) from an ALA-accredited LIS program with a position at the professional level as a librarian (or equivalent information professional position). Participants from all library sectors were interviewed. Of the participants, six worked in public libraries, four in academic libraries, three in special libraries, and three in school libraries. Fourteen (87.5%) were female and two (12.5%) were male. They had a variety of professional experience levels, from two years to over 35 years. Topics covered in the interviews included the participants’ descriptions of their work as librarians, 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 and professionally transcribed. Ethics approval for this study was granted by a University of Alberta’s Research Ethics Board.

Following Potter and Wetherell (1987), the data was first thematically coded to help “squeeze an unwieldy body of discourse into manageable chunks” (p. 167). Coding, at this stage of the analysis, has a pragmatic not analytic intent. The purpose is to organize the data into broad themes to produce sets of instances of occurrence that can later be analysed. For this study, themes emerged from the data based on recurring words, phrases, and ideas. Eleven broad themes were initially identified:

- Attitudes
- Change
- Expertise
- Library as place
- Other non-professional identities
- Perceptions of others
- Professionalism
- Reputation
- Roles
- Service
- Technology

The analysis occurred after the data had been coded. Discourse analysis relies heavily on the close reading of coded data sets. Following Potter and Wetherell (1987), each “chunk,” or coded data set, was examined with two questions in mind: “[W]hy am I reading this passage in this
way? What features produce this reading?” (p. 168). As stated above, the analysis of the data focused on the variation and similarities both within individual examples, such as a single interview or article, and across the data set. Attention was paid to the context and function of the repertoires and regularities of language use. What terms or phrases were being employed? In what context were they being used? Why were they being employed? What was the speaker/writer attempting to accomplish with their language choices? Are certain repertoires given primacy within certain contexts? Talja (1999) describes the process of identifying interpretive repertoires as “like putting together a jigsaw puzzle” (p. 466). The goal of the analysis is to identify when and how each interpretive repertoire is used and in relation to which topics.

**FINDINGS**

In relation to ICTs, the analysis identified the following interpretive repertoires:

- The change repertoire
- The service repertoire
- Information environment as place repertoire
- The insider/outside repertoire

### The Change Repertoire

Librarians identified ICT-related change as having the largest affect on the profession. These changes were described in the email discussion lists as a never-ending “white water” and a “bottomless pit.” Throughout the professional literature, librarians were urged to reconsider and re-imagine their traditional roles and responsibilities in light of this change. Kennedy (2001) asked librarians to be “proactive rather than reactive” (p. 78) in relation to technology. Quint (2012) encouraged librarians to use technological change as a way to reclaim their professional value: “Now that more people spend more time accessing and relying on information gathered online, they need information professionals to guard their interests more than ever” (p. 8). ICTs were perceived to have changed core professional functions by placing new emphasis on “online search skills, Web page design and maintenance, and the ability to troubleshoot hardware and software” (Saunders, 2012, p. 399) and making their day-to-day work more technology focused: “basically [I explain] what the hell a database is and why [students] need to use it” (Hildy, academic librarian).

These changes were understood to be reframing librarian-client relationships. Words such as “educator,” “facilitator,” “data hound,” “guide,” “Sherpa,” “teacher,” “information navigator” and “technology specialist” were used. These terms evoke a sense of action and recall Kennedy’s (2001) request that librarians be proactive and not reactive in the face of technological change. The discursive function of these descriptors is to challenge popular stereotypes of and other misinformation about librarians. For instance, on MEDLIB-L, one poster advocated using technology to demonstrate to clients just “how sexy clinical information services really is” while another contributor stated that he took “delight in upsetting the apple cart of someone’s expectations” by using up-to-date ICTs. Similar sentiments were expressed by interview participants. Kate, a director of a public library, argued librarians had to be especially conscious of new technologies “because we have all these negative historical stereotypes tied to our profession.” Mary, a scholarly communications librarian, said that she used technology so that others perceived her as a driver of change because that is how “professors are perceived, as somebody who is a wealth of knowledge you can go to.” Like Mary, librarians, especially those in special and academic library environments, often compared librarians to other professions, such as physicians and faculty members, to highlight just how unlike the stereotype librarians were.

The largest misconception librarians wanted to dispel was the notion that computers and the Internet were replacing them. In these instances, the roles of educator, information facilitator and guide were highlighted. The focus was on the information needs of clients, and their clients’ information seeking skills were downplayed. User groups were negatively described if the skills and expertise of librarians were perceived to be questioned. On the email discussion lists, there were repeated “rants” on the lack of respect for librarians and their skills. These rants were often directed towards clients’ own lack of skills and knowledge:

- “Dr. X’s secretary who can do the job of the librarian because its [sic] all on the internet anyway syndrome”
- “[If] you haven’t adapted to how libraries work, IT’S YOUR OWN DAMN FAULT!” (emphasis in original)
- “Here’s wishin’ for a more tech-savvy public in 2011!”

### The Service Repertoire

Service, broadly defined, was described as the core essence of librarianship, and ICTs were identified as service tools. One participant, Olivia, who had over 35 years of work experience in various library settings, stated that, as a result of ICTs, her work had become “very, very virtual,” but the core of her work had not changed. Instead, ICTs now provided “a different way of delivering services.” Similarly, a contributor to MEDLIB-L, in a thread discussing the possibility that technology was replacing librarians, stated: “Technology can free up librarians so that have more time to help people …. But the LIBRARIAN will always be the most important resource in the library” (emphasis in original).

ICTs were understood to be a way to improve service, but, at the same time, there was some trepidation around the longevity of technology-based services. A discussion on PUBLIB about the best uses of Quick Response Codes (QR codes) in public libraries quickly changed into a debate on

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1 All participants’ names are pseudonyms.
their longevity in non-library environments. The discussion ranged from “QR codes are mostly on their way out” to “QR codes are by no means disappearing just yet.” The desire to provide high-quality information services to clients always trumped whatever flaws, such as obsolescence or lack of vendor support, an ICT-based service might have. The QR code discussion, for example, ended with the assertion that librarians “work for the patron, not the trend-setters,” therefore if patrons were using a particular technology, then librarians must as well.

Librarians described their service role, in the words of one email discussion list contributor, as “the first line of defense to make [technology] things usable.” In the service repertoire, librarians reassert their skills and professional value. As seen in the following quote, clients’ perceived lack of information-seeking skills is explained and justified, contrasting the negative description of users’ search skills in the change repertoire: “Are we going to BLAME them for [not being able to search the online catalogue]? No. We are going to help them find the book, movie, audiobook….we are going to help them learn how to download the ebook” (emphasis in original). In the name of service, librarians will go the extra mile, but making clients aware of the services that librarians offer is difficult: “We all know that the big problem is getting them to come to us in the first place” (Kennedy, 2004, p. 19).

**Library-as-Place Repertoire**

In their text and speech, some librarians highlighted the relationship that they have with the library-as-place. ICTs were understood to have an effect on the space of the library in two ways. The first was the physical changes to the space often associated with ICTs, such as shifting or weeding collections to make room for more computers. The second was less tangible in nature. Throughout the data set, the perception that the library-as-place was losing prominence for users was discussed. Reactions to this ranged from a nostalgia for the “magic of the library” (McCombs, 2000, p. 296), to concerns over protecting physical “real estate” (email discussion list contributor), to directly equating the individual with the physical space. Technology was seen as a way to “Make yourself visible” (email discussion list contributor), only “yourself” meant “we (the library).” Two interview participants, both public librarians, stated that they wanted their clients to see them as “Nathan from the library” or “that library lady.” The library was understood to be a reflection the profession. The shift away from traditional library spaces to information and learning commons in academic and school libraries was seen as echoing changes to reference and teacher librarian service. ICTs were understood as a way to help librarians “look beyond their walls” (Naylor, 2000, p. 114), provide new services, and design new spaces that reflect the ICT focus of librarians.

The library’s physical space offered librarians something concrete in which to ground their identities. Breeding (2001), for instance, wrote that while librarians “have expanded their reach beyond their physical walls” there will always be “collections and resources that can only be taken advantage of by those who come to the library” (p. 42). Anna, an IT manager at a public library, even went as far as to associate herself with another “tangible” library-related product, the online catalogue. She informed her clients that “‘Well you know that catalogue that you log into? That’s me’” because “I’m the catalogue because I did it.” By identifying with something real and concrete, librarians were able to readily demonstrate to users what it was they did and the value of their work.

Librarians working in special library positions were less likely to use this repertoire in their text and speech. There was a sense of uncertainty around the space for special librarians. For instance, one interview participant, Jillian, worked for a government-affiliated organization in two different locations each week. In one location, she rarely interacted directly with clients. The other location, a university library, was described by Jillian as “their library” even though she did directly interact with her clients in this location. Related to this was a sense that these librarians had very little control over the physical spaces they inhabited. Dorothy described in detail the many changes to the physical spaces she worked in during her 18 years as a government librarian. This lack of control over the physical space even extended to a lack of control over ICT-related decisions in her workplace: “[A]t the [government] it’s a push on for iPhones. We have iPads now, because we said how are we providing service to people – like sending them out things that they’re reading on devices and we don’t even know if it’s displaying properly.”

**The Insider/Outsider Repertoire**

Librarians often focused on their relationships with clients, users, and administrators in their text and speech. In these relationships, ICTs placed librarians in an insider’s position. Librarians positioned themselves as technology leaders (Link, 2001) whose organizational prowess was the underpinning for the organization of the Internet (Ojala, 2004). They were super searchers who used ICTs every day. Their expertise and experience provided them with an understanding of ICTs that their clients could not have. Jillian, whose work often focused on doing systematic reviews for clients, described a recent interaction with a client where her ICT expertise allowed her deeper insights into her client’s information needs: “I’m doing a lot of systematic researching now for a [client]. So, like she did a search herself in a database. She only found two articles. And she’s like a content expert and she knows her area but she – and she actually uses the database that she used to get this article … a lot but still she doesn’t – she does use it at a very kind of like entry level.”

This repertoire places users into a needs-based relationship with librarians. Clients need librarians not only to help them find information, but also to do their jobs and to build communities. On PUBLIB, for instance, in a lengthy discussion about how much help local job seekers should
receive when using online job application forms, one commenter stated: “In a day and age when discount store clerks, laborers and fast food service workers have to apply for jobs online, we’re a vital link in the local employment picture.” Similarly, on MEDLIB-L, one poster indicated that health-care practitioners would be unable to perform their jobs without the help of librarians: “Medical librarians support the healthcare team by working tirelessly to select essential online and print resources to meet their institutions [sic] medical and nursing point-of-care, research, and education needs.”

This insider status provides librarians with new roles and partnerships. Librarians act as a bridge between IT specialists and users. Interview participant Sharon, a public librarian, described her role as a mediator: “[B]eing able to understand people and to be like a mediator between super techy people and super non-techy people …. So somebody who can talk about like IT and all that stuff but there’s like this missing piece between the middle, between them talking about html and all the stuff that they do and then these people who are like ‘aah, what does this cord do?’” This mediator role allows librarians to create new partnerships with other professions to meet their clients’ information needs in new ways. Academic librarians often positioned themselves as educational and research partners with faculty (Beagle, 2000; Mercer, 2011). In doing so, they highlighted their role as caring educators who use their technology expertise to meet students’ information needs.

This same insider status, however, was often accompanied by a sense that librarians were outsiders who required the recognition of others to maintain their professional value. Participant Mary described how her technological expertise was often ignored by faculty members: “I try my best to make suggestions to them, [but I] don’t always get listened” For some librarians, recognition was so important that without it they feared they would cease to exist. On the email discussion lists, posters regularly wrote about how user support was needed to save the profession from funding cuts. It was hoped that users and other stakeholders, such as vendors and administrators, would see the value and expertise that librarians brought to their work and, as one commenter stated, “finally get it.”

**DISCUSSION**

The repertoires that librarians draw on when describing their identity in relation to ICTs show a profession concerned with status, service, place, and expertise. There is a fear that the perceived transformations resulting from ICTs have placed the value of the profession under threat. From the librarians’ perspective, the expertise they once had as providers of information services is now being questioned. Through the various repertoires they employ, librarians are attempting to reclaim some of their professional worth. This can be seen in the service repertoire. This repertoire focuses on the usefulness of librarians in helping clients navigate the information world. ICTs were a useful tool to aid in this endeavour, but the focus was on the importance of the service provided by librarians as people. When asked which was more important in their work, resources or relationship, all of the interview participants, with the exception of Dorothy, a government librarian, responded that relationships were more important. Without relationships with their clients and other professionals, they felt that they could not do their work. Dorothy, in contrast, suggested that due to the structure of the organization she worked for, this decision was taken away from her: “I have to say I was upset because I have some clients in my [departments] who were talking to some clients in other [departments] and then they went to somebody else – one of the librarians who’s at [named library branch] and said they wanted to do this trial and it’s like you know, those are clients of mine and I wasn’t even told about it.”

The definition of identity guiding this study states that identity shapes how librarians interact with their clients, communities, and other professions. In each repertoire, the description of the relationship librarians had with their clients had a different effect. In the change repertoire, clients were cast in a complicated role. On the one hand, they misunderstood the important work of librarians because of negative stereotypes. In this role, clients were cast as an audience for librarians to perform for. As they provide high-quality information services, librarians hope their clients will see their value and understand that the stereotypes are wrong. At the same time, certain client groups, such as faculty and physicians, were viewed as aspirational examples of how librarians could be viewed. Within the change repertoire, when the status and reputation of librarians was ignored by client groups, the information-seeking skills of these groups were denigrated and dismissed. The discursive function of these negative claims places the expertise and skills of librarians in a positive light and highlights the need for librarians in a tech-savvy world.

In the service repertoire, clients are there to be helped. It is assumed that clients have very few technology skills and that they need librarians to help them find information. This is not just any information, but, as Quint (2004) described it, “solid, reliable – dare I say library-quality – material” (p. 7). Discursively, clients are positioned as information novices, which serves the function of highlighting and reconfirming the value of librarians. In the insider/outside repertoire, librarians draw on their experiences with ICTs in their day-to-day work to position themselves as ICT leaders. Client groups, such as faculty and physicians, are no longer aspirational. Instead, they are peers and colleagues who rely on librarians to do their jobs effectively. The outsider part of the repertoire again places clients in the role of an audience whose recognition is necessary for the survival of the profession. This positioning reverses the needs-based relationship set up in the service repertoire. Now librarians are dependent on their
clients’ recognition of their skills and services for the profession’s benefit.

The library-as-place repertoire illustrates the need for librarians to ground their identities in something tangible. The discursive function of this grounding is to highlight the relationship that librarians have with the library – a place that has a positive association in the minds of clients. For instance, Nathan, who liked to be known by his clients as “Nathan from the library,” said the association was a deliberate choice on his part because “when you walk through the streets, people say ‘hey it’s that guy from the library, it’s Nathan from the library’ … friendly and helpful is how I want to be seen.” In this instance, the library, with its cutting edge ICTs, such as video games and 3D printers, is a fun and happy place for clients. By directly connecting himself to the place of the library, Nathan is able to evoke those happy feelings even when he’s “kind of stern” with some clients. Anna’s assertion that she is the catalogue serves a similar purpose, only instead of evoking the happy space of the library, she is evoking the usefulness of the online catalogue as an information tool. Like the catalogue, she is useful. For the librarians working in special library environments, the relationship between identity and library-as-place appears to be lacking. Instead, they relied heavily on the service repertoire in their speech and texts. This focus on service functioned as a way to highlight the utility of these professionals to help their organization or client group meet their goals and work objectives.

**CONCLUSION**

This paper has examined the influence of ICTs on the construction of librarians’ identities. Librarians believe that ICTs are changing the substance of their work. They are adapting to a “bottomless pit” of ICT-related change that is affecting their day-to-day work. ICTs both challenge and enhance the identity of librarians. Librarians are feeling less secure with their professional positions. ICTs have challenged the perceived dynamic librarians have with their clients. Anti-technology stereotypes and the supposed ease of access to information that the Internet offers obscures the technology expertise librarians feel they have. At the same time, librarians are looking to ICTs to enhance their identities by providing them with new professional roles and areas of expertise.

There is a growing body of literature examining how information users are framed both by information practitioners and information scientists (Hedemark, Hedman & Sundin, 2005; Olsson, 2009; Tuominen, 1997). Understanding how ICTs influence the way librarians construct their own identities deepens this knowledge as it starts to explore not only how librarians conceive of users, but how they conceive of themselves. Both Tuominen (1997) and Olsson (2009) called for a greater reflexivity on and acknowledgement of the complexities around how “the user” was conceived of in information science. This call can be extended to the professional identity of librarians. New technologies are being introduced and the “white water” of change librarians believe they are experiencing will probably not cease in the near future. These changes will challenge and benefit librarians as they engage with these new ICTs and determine how, if at all, they can be incorporated into their day-to-day practice. Professional identities are constantly evolving and, as studies such as Tuominen’s (1997) and Sundin’s (2008) illustrate, these identities have a significant influence on how information services are designed and offered.

Finally, this study opens up further questions around how and why librarians use ICTs. Why, for instance, are certain social networking sites preferred by librarians over others? Why are certain ICT-based services pursued broadly by professionals, such as blogging or social media use, while others, such as open access, are only engaged with in a limited fashion? How does the positioning of the user in the identity construction of librarians influence how ICT services are offered to clients?

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**REFERENCES**


