Educating from the Margins: Academic Librarians and Academic Freedom

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Abstract

In this article, we highlight how academic librarians' distinct and often precarious role on campus, together with our profession's focus on the parent concept of intellectual freedom, complicates librarians' ability to enact academic freedom in their daily work. After a brief review of the literature, we share findings from our original research into this topic. We then offer two scenarios that showcase how the familiar, routine work of librarians is subject to scrutiny and pushback in ways that have been normalized and rationalized by higher education colleagues. Throughout the article, we attend to how social identity and positional power affect higher education workers' experiences of academic freedom. Ultimately, we argue that academic freedom limitations for academic librarians matter in their own right, and also illuminate problems with precarity in higher education as a whole.

Introduction

Our goal in this article is to pull back the curtain on the topic of academic freedom and librarians, and share why we think this issue has implications for higher education professionals far beyond the library. Academic librarians' position in the academy is more precarious and less well-defined than that of departmental tenure-line faculty. Some librarians are protected by tenure and academic freedom policies, others are completely unprotected, and most experience limitations to their exercise of academic freedom in practice. Libraries are hierarchical

operations situated within research and teaching contexts. Most librarians' daily work is performed under supervision, and they are expected to organize their work almost entirely in service of students and faculty. Yet librarians have disciplinary expertise in library and information science that informs their work. The work librarians do relies on the enactment of independent, expert theory and knowledge, and these daily tasks and choices are vulnerable to censorship, pushback, and control. When librarians avoid purchasing certain books, change their instruction, or cancel controversial exhibits, the academic mission is deeply compromised. In our previous research on this topic, which included surveying academic librarians on their experiences and attitudes toward academic freedom, we found that librarians felt their academic freedom is on shaky ground. This was particularly the case for librarians from underrepresented or lower-status groups. This article explores these issues, including highlights of our own research findings, and through two scenarios informed by experiences of the authors, survey respondents, and others whose stories we have encountered in news articles and social media posts. These composite sketches illustrate how the familiar, everyday work of librarians is subject to scrutiny and pushback, practices that have been normalized and rationalized on many campuses. How meaningful and useful is our traditional understanding of academic freedom when it is increasingly reserved for a powerful few on campus, and so much of the core work of the academy is excluded from its protections?

At the Periphery

Academic librarians sit at the periphery of the academy, where their academic freedom protections and experiences are complex, uneven, and poorly understood even within the profession. Whereas faculty as a whole began to professionalize their status in the late nineteenth century and advocated for their academic freedom, academic librarians were unable to successfully align with faculty and cohere around similar goals.[1]

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[1] Gemma DeVinney, "Academic Librarians and Academic Freedom in the United States: A History and Analysis," *Libri* 36, no. 1 (January 1, 1986): 24–39.

Academic librarians occupy a myriad assortment of statuses and roles on their campuses, ranging from positions nearly identical to those of other disciplinary faculty to being designated "faculty-like" to some kind of "academic professional" staff, among many other designations.[2] This highly variable status across institutions obscures any singular understanding of academic librarians' freedoms and inhibits the ability to organize for better rights.[3] Perhaps even more important, the absence of tenure protections associated with many of these librarian positions inherently limits the enactment of academic freedom. Even when academic freedom protections are extended by written institutional policy beyond tenure-line faculty to librarians or other kinds of staff, those protections are regularly tested by administrative decisions and the latent threat of job loss.[4]

Another challenge is that the library profession prioritizes long-standing core values that reinforce existing power imbalances and overlook structural inequalities, often at the expense of library workers and marginalized community members. Librarians' free speech advocacy continues to be focused almost entirely on intellectual freedom for library users, rather than library worker protections like academic freedom. For example, the primary professional organization for librarians, the American Library Association (ALA), has allocated significant resources for decades to fight against censorship.[5] The ALA is also vocal and strong in its support of librarians caught up in censorship battles. However, the ALA primarily focuses on the concerns of public librarians and even in

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[2] Shin Freedman, "Faculty Status, Tenure, and Professional Identity: A Pilot Study of Academic Librarians in New England," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 14, no. 4 (2014): 533–65, https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2014.0023.

[3] Richard A. Danner and Barbara Bintliff, "Academic Freedom Issues for Academic Librarians," *Legal Reference Services Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (July 23, 2007): 13–35, https://doi.org/10.1300/J113v25n04_03.

[4] Henry Reichman, *The Future of Academic Freedom* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019).

[5] American Library Association (ALA), "Banned Books Week," Banned and Challenged Books, http://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/banned, accessed February 3, 2021; ALA, "Freedom to Read Foundation," http://www.ala.org/aboutala/affiliates/relatedgroups /freedomtoreadfoundation, accessed February 3, 2021.

that arena struggles to balance tensions between the interests of libraries and librarians, managers and workers.[6] The few professional proclamations issued by library associations concerning academic freedom are out of alignment with those of the AAUP,[7] 'whose 1940 principles of academic freedom claim academic freedom to be "essential" protections for faculty in their teaching and research duties, and also defend faculty's right to speak freely as citizens and representatives of their institution. The AAUP also links tenure to academic freedom protections.[8] Librarian Gemma DeVinney, in her history of academic librarians and academic freedom, argues that the implication for nearly all statements issued during the twentieth century is that "academic freedom is seen as necessary for academic librarians in performing their collection development responsibilities, so that professorial faculty and students are able to exercise their academic freedom."[9] More recent statements from the Association for College & Research Libraries (ACRL) proclaim academic freedom to be "indispensable to librarians in their role as teachers and researchers," and also support tenure for academic librarians. However, ACRL still does not connect tenure to academic freedom and continues to give primacy to collection development by stating, "Censorship of any type is unacceptable whether individual or organizational. All librarians must be free to provide access to information regardless of content."[10]

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[6] DeVinney, "Academic Freedom and Academic Librarians in the United States"; Noriko Asato, "Librarians' Free Speech: The Challenge of Librarians' Own Intellectual Freedom to the American Library Association, 1946–2007," *Library Trends* 63, no. 1 (2014): 75–105, https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2014.0025.

[7] DeVinney, "Academic Freedom and Academic Librarians in the United States."

[8] American Association of University Professors, "1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure," https://www.aaup.org/report/1940-statement-principles-academic-freedom-and-tenure.

[9] DeVinney, "Academic Freedom and Academic Librarians in the United States," 33.

[10] Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL), "ACRL Statement on Academic Freedom," approved June 2015, http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/academicfreedom, accessed May 7, 2021; ACRL, "ACRL Standards for Faculty Status for Academic Librarians," revised October 2011, http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/standardsfaculty, accessed May 7, 2021.

The library profession's elevation and codification of the concept of neutrality is another impediment to librarians' academic freedom. Neutrality is typically framed in librarianship as an objective good, something to declare proudly, and necessary for rigorous research and public service. According to this understanding, librarians' neutral position is in service of the intellectual freedom of our users. At its most extreme, insistence on neutrality leads some librarians to defend the rights of hate groups to use library spaces for their events.[11] However, this absolute deference to the intellectual freedom of users suppresses the academic freedom of librarians and other users in our spaces. Running a library involves making difficult choices that require librarians to exercise their expertise at every turn: what materials to acquire, to withdraw, how to respond to reference questions, what programming to support, and how to create an inclusive and welcoming space. To uphold neutrality as a core value is to ignore its ontological impossibility and also the way neutrality is weaponized to silence our most marginalized and targeted workers and community members.[12] As a result, librarianship's so-called neutral enactment of academic freedom can directly interfere with its stated commitment to social justice.[13]

The meaningful enactment of academic freedom is also inextricably linked to professional and socioeconomic status. Librarians' position as "third space" professionals on their campuses, particularly their positions in rigidly hierarchical workplaces (unlike disciplinary faculty), inherently limits their experiences of academic freedom.[14] Librarians of color and

[11] ALA, "Are Libraries Neutral?," *American Libraries Magazine*, June 1, 2018, https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2018/06/01/are-libraries-neutral/.

[12] Amelia N. Gibson, Renate L. Chancellor, Nicole A. Cooke, Sarah Park Dahlen, Shari A. Lee, and Yasmeen L. Shorish, "Libraries on the Frontlines: Neutrality and Social Justice," *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal* 36, no. 8 (2017): 751–66, http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/EDI-11-2016-0100.

[13] Sam Popowich, "The Antinomies of Academic Freedom: Reason, Trans Rights, and Constituent Power," *Canadian Journal of Academic Librarianship* 6 (2020): 1–28, https://doi.org/10.33137/cjal-rcbu.v6.33980.

[14] Danya Leebaw and Alexis Logsdon, "Power and Status (and Lack Thereof) in Academe: Academic Freedom and Academic Librarians," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*,

those from marginalized backgrounds have been targets of harassment campaigns in recent years.[15] Librarians from underrepresented backgrounds also encounter a pervasively white and elitist environment where they experience discrimination and microaggressions, leading to self-censorship and worse.[16] This mirrors the experience of faculty of color for whom, as higher education scholar Holley Locher argues, self-censorship is the primary barrier to academic freedom; for these faculty, tenure protections are more effective than institutional academic freedom policies.[17]

In this article and our previous work on the topic, we make the case that academic freedom limitations for academic librarians illustrate the problems with precarity in higher education as a whole. Increasingly, institutions of higher education are dispersing what was once the work of tenured faculty to a range of contingent faculty and academic staff.[18] Researchers, lecturers, part-time faculty members, librarians, academic advisers, and others are taking on the core research, teaching, and service

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September 16, 2020, http://inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2020/power-and-status-and-lack-thereof-in-academe/.

[15] Lara Ewen, "Target: Librarians: What Happens When Our Work Leads to Harassment—Or Worse," *American Libraries Magazine*, June 3, 2019, https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2019/06/03/target-librarians-harassment-doxxing.

[16] Angela Galvan, "Soliciting Performance, Hiding Bias: Whiteness and Librarianship," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, June 3, 2015, http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/soliciting-performance-hiding-bias-whiteness-and-librarianship/; Jaena Alabi, "Racial Microaggressions in Academic Libraries: Results of a Survey of Minority and Non-minority Librarians," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 41, no. 1 (2015): 47-53, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2014.10.008.

[17] Holley M. Locher, "Academic Freedom for Whom? Experiences and Perceptions of Faculty of Color" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2013), 207, http://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/150960.

[18] Celia Whitchurch, "Shifting Identities and Blurring Boundaries: The Emergence of Third Space Professionals in UK Higher Education," *Higher Education Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (October 2008): 377–96, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2008.00387.x.

work that in decades past was the purview of traditional faculty.[19] Academic freedom has long been understood to be an essential protection for research and teaching, but many people undertaking this work on college campuses do not have meaningful academic freedom protections. It is also important to keep in mind *who* on college campuses is most likely to occupy precarious positions. Women, Black and Indigenous people, people of color, and other groups are less well represented in the most secure positions on campus and far more likely to be faculty members holding contingent positions and academic staff.[20]

Survey of Librarians and Academic Freedom

Many librarians are unclear about their academic freedom protections but say they experience pushback and silencing in their work. In a 2018 survey, we asked academic librarians about their perceptions of academic freedom, experiences with academic freedom, and also about their socioeconomic status.[21] Do they have protections, do they care about these protections, and have they experienced freedom in their work? Our hypotheses when we began our research were that academic librarians are unclear about their academic freedom protections, that academic freedom matters to them, and that experiences of academic freedom will vary depending on respondents' socioeconomic status.

The degree to which academic librarians perceived themselves as having academic freedom, and experienced academic freedom, varied by the workplace activity and type of silencing or punitive measure we asked about. Librarians felt the most free to perform their collection

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[19] Bruce Macfarlane, "The Morphing of Academic Practice: Unbundling and the Rise of the Para-academic," *Higher Education Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (January 2011): 59–73, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2010.00467.x.

[20] National Center for Education Statistics, "Characteristics of Post-secondary Faculty," *Condition of Education*, May 2020, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_csc.asp.

[21] For details on our survey methodology and a summary of our findings, see Danya Leebaw and Alexis Logsdon, "The Cost of Speaking Out: Do Librarians Truly Experience Academic Freedom?," *ACRL Conference Proceedings*, 2019, http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/conferences/confsandpreconfs/2019/TheCostofSpeakingOut.pdf; and Leebaw and Logsdon, "Power and Status (and Lack Thereof) in Academe."

development activities, in line with the literature cited above. Unsurprisingly, librarians felt the least protected in social media activities. It was more surprising to discover that fewer than one-third of respondents felt secure "all of the time" in their research and publishing activities. The most common infringement on academic freedom for our respondents was an informal penalty (such as being scolded or shut out of opportunities) for questioning a workplace decision, while the least common experience was a formal penalty (such as being demoted, written up, or fired) for the same act. More than 20 percent of our respondents reported being directed not to participate in a particular workplace activity and slightly less than 20 percent were told to change their teaching or another aspect of their work.

Librarians with higher socioeconomic and professional status responded differently than librarians with marginalized status and less security. For instance, white librarians were more likely than nonwhite librarians to perceive that they have freedom of expression in a variety of work-related tasks and adjacent contexts. This difference was more pronounced when it came to activities that are both more visible but also less circumscribed, including workplace interactions, social media, off-campus activities, and programming. Nonwhite librarians reported more infringements on their freedoms in all scenarios compared to white librarians, except for complaints from the public. Librarians who reported less financial security also felt less protected and reported more infringements on their academic freedom. Librarians with faculty status were more likely in every single job task to feel protected.

In the open-ended comments, librarians told us they felt particularly constrained by their workplace hierarchies. One commenter said, "It feels like our library leadership wants it both ways: librarians that will be active in high-profile research, publishing, professional and community orgs, etc., but also never say anything leadership doesn't like." Another commenter stated, "There is a silent understanding that [academic] freedom really only means 'Freedom to uphold the "party" line.'" Another commenter said their "institution embraces social justice, but the library does not."

Academic Librarians Need Freedom to Contribute to the Academic Mission

Academic librarians contribute to the academic enterprise through their disciplinary expertise in all sorts of ways. Some of these are quite familiar and well understood, while others are likely invisible to anyone outside the library. Libraries are central to the research and teaching mission of universities. Librarians are experts in library science, with skills and knowledge across the spectrum that this entails. We create and maintain vast systems to organize materials and make them findable and accessible. We preserve library collections, which requires technical expertise to repair and protect fragile books and other materials. We create and maintain archives and special collections. We teach students how to find and evaluate information for their classes, and we aid faculty in pursuit of their research projects. We visit classes to teach students how to conduct a literature review, how to find secondary data, how to identify a scholarly article, and much more. We answer questions from students, faculty, and staff about resources and research topics. We manage budgets in the tens of millions of dollars, some of the biggest outlays on university campuses, to license subscriptions for the institutional community to essential journals and databases. We maintain important professional networks and consortia in order to facilitate the borrowing and lending of materials from all over the world, to coordinate collection development, to ensure acquisition and preservation of rare and foreign-language materials. In all of these and many more tasks, we apply the disciplinary expertise of librarianship. Much like social work, educational studies, public health, and other fields, librarianship is an applied social science. Many, but not all, librarians also contribute to the development of librarianship as a discipline by conducting research into the core problems of the field. Library science scholarship employs a variety of methods, from the highly quantitative to the purely theoretical. In addition to subject area and functional and technical expertise, many librarians come to the profession with rich backgrounds in other fields and industries. Additionally, an increasing number of professional staff in libraries do not hold master of library and information science degrees

but rather come with graduate degrees or experience from other disciplines and fields.[22]

When protected by academic freedom policies and norms, academic librarians are able to apply their expertise freely and thus to the greatest benefit of our community. To understand why this matters, it helps to consider specific cases where it is obvious that interference with librarian expertise would be detrimental. Collection development, as noted above, is often the easiest library task for nonlibrarians to recognize as in need of academic freedom protections. Censorship of library materials inherently limits the academic freedom of not only librarians but also anyone on campus who would wish to encounter or use censored materials. Another case where academic freedom matters for librarians is in our one-on-one work with students to aid them in their research assignments and other library-based coursework. Librarians should feel free to introduce students to whatever resources they deem relevant to students' assignments, to be able to speak freely about these resources, and to help students understand them in a comprehensive way. Another area where academic freedom is essential in libraries is library cataloging. Catalogers should feel free to describe materials in their collections in ways that, drawing on their expertise, make them both accurate and easily findable. Academic freedom is also key when archivists are processing a collection or helping researchers work with it. They must be able to collect the materials they deem important for the historical record, and then describe contents in a way that provides access to the collection from a number of approaches, including in ways the original donors had not anticipated. In the following scenarios, we attempt to provide further illustration of why academic freedom matters for academic librarians and the significant limitations librarians bump up against in this arena.

The DEI Exhibit

Josephine, a librarian at a small private college in the Midwest, is part of a campus committee on improving the campus climate when it comes to

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[22] David Lewis, *Reimagining the Academic Library* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 61–74.

diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). The DEI committee decides to engage in education and outreach on campus for Black History Month that February. They arrange to bring several Black speakers to campus and conclude the month with a panel composed of faculty and staff. Josephine decides that the library can contribute in two ways: a special exhibit and a research guide on the library website. Josephine works with another librarian who is responsible for the Black studies collection to stage a small exhibit in the library featuring Black authors from their collection. One of the items they display is *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (a frequently challenged book in libraries).[23] Josephine also pulls together a research guide featuring books recommended on the Charleston Syllabus, a crowd-sourced reading list on race and racial violence assembled by academics in response to the Charleston church killings in 2015.[24] She carefully finds links to catalog records or journal articles for each of the items held by the library and uses her small budget to purchase a number of items the library did not yet own. When this guide is posted, many faculty members and students share their appreciation of the guide. Several faculty members develop assignments based on the guide, encouraging students to read a minimum number of articles featured and write about them.

When the exhibit goes up, a community member sends an email to the library director complaining about the Malcolm X book specifically but also the exhibit as a whole: "I bet the library won't do an exhibit on white history!" The library director responds politely but dismisses the complaint as meaningless and a form of "trolling." Josephine, however, is a bit shaken by the email and her library director's lackluster response. She wishes he had more forthrightly stood behind the exhibit and called out this community member for their racism. Then, a right-wing student group publishes articles in the student newspaper complaining about the research guide, especially the readings about whiteness and racial

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[23] Princeton Library, "A Dozen Notable Challenged or Banned Books by African American Authors," https://princetonlibrary.bibliocommons.com/list/share/140796781/199921233, accessed February 3, 2021.

[24] African American Intellectual Historical Society, "#Charlestonsyllabus," https://www.aaihs.org/resources/charlestonsyllabus/, accessed February 3, 2021.

violence. They name Josephine specifically, and soon her name, the library, and the college find themselves under attack on social media. At this point, Josephine is frightened. Caught off-guard by the foment, college leadership instructs the library to take down the guide. Josephine feels like she can't push back because her supervisor has made it clear she won't have his support, and she worries about her job security. Librarians are at-will employees at the college. While she thinks it unlikely that she would actually be fired for taking a stand, she relies on her small annual discretionary merit increases in pay and also wants to continue being given opportunities to take on important projects. These will add to her CV should she want to seek a new job in the future.

Coming out of this experience, Josephine decides to keep a much lower profile. She needs this job and she also wants to avoid trouble, so that she is positioned well professionally for something new in the future. She steps down from the DEI committee after her term is up that spring and avoids college committee work for the time being. When Black History Month is over, she takes down the exhibit and vows to not do anything in the future, even if asked, for that month. After the Charleston syllabus was taken down, no one in the library takes the initiative to replace it with another guide in Black studies. Josephine and other staff don't have the stomach to go up against the social media outrage again, and they don't want to anger the college president. The library is regularly targeted for budget cuts by the college leadership, and the staff knows they were expected to do everything possible to make their work valuable to the administration controlling the purse strings. The self-silencing described here echoes comments we received on our survey. One respondent, for instance, said, "I am definitely at a place where keeping my head down in situations that might bring the attention of campus leadership is the survival method that I, and others here, have adopted."

In this scenario, the silencing of the librarian—who lacked formal faculty status, tenure, and sat outside the college's academic freedom policy—had a clear and negative impact on the scholarly, educational enterprise of the college. Applying her expertise as a librarian, Josephine acquired important resources for the library and provided educational opportunities. She encountered pushback on multiple levels, from

community members to her own supervisors, and felt unsupported. Even
though she was never threatened with even a formal reprimand, she felt
vulnerable and unsafe in her job and in general. Students and faculty lost
out on her library expertise and consequently missed opportunities to
learn, specifically on topics related to anti-Black racism. While this
scenario is a composite sketch and not based in any one reality, aspects of
it were taken from the real experiences of the authors as well as other
librarian colleagues. One comment on our survey captures how
suppressing the academic freedom of librarians interferes with
educational opportunities in this way: "My colleagues and I created a
research guide in conjunction with a midterm election literacy panel on
our campus and were told that the guide was 'unbalanced.' We were then
given the option to make specific changes or take down the entire guide.
We did not agree with the specific changes being asked of us and decided
to take the whole guide down." We did not assign Josephine a specific
racial identity, but it is worth noting that the literature and our own
research shows that if she were Black, Indigenous, or a person of color,
she would be more likely to encounter pushback and silencing than if she
were white. Similarly, we know from our own experience and other
stories in the news that topics around race and white supremacy in the
United States are a particular target for community backlash and right-
wing media outrage.

The New Professional
Marisa is a newly hired, early career instruction librarian at a public state
college, where librarians have faculty status and a tenure and promotion
process that resembles that of most faculty on campus. Alan Paterson, a
member of the history faculty who has long relied on library instruction
sessions in his courses, asks Marisa for one for his 300-level Early
American History seminar. Paterson has strong feelings about how
library instruction should be conducted, based on previous sessions
conducted by Marisa's predecessor: he expects that Marisa will stand at
the front of the room, laptop projected to the screen, and go through a list
of databases and tips and tricks for using the library catalog. The library
has a number of video tutorials and static guides that cover this kind of

baseline instruction, but Paterson is not convinced students will look at them, so he wants Marisa to cover it in the session. Not wanting to alienate a faculty member on first contact but skeptical of this approach, Marisa attempts to split the difference by doing some "point and click" content at the start of the session. As students' eyes glaze over, she quickly pivots to a more engaging strategy: small group, task-oriented, hands-on methods. Throughout the activity, Paterson repeatedly tries to redirect the session back to database "show and tell," resulting in an awkward class session where Marisa toggles between visiting the small groups to offer advice on their research strategies and running to the lectern to show them a primary sources database that Paterson recommends. Marisa leaves at the end of the session frustrated and somewhat nervous because she feels like she failed both herself and the students, and maybe their professor, too.

Part of what makes Marisa's experience so fraught is that even though she and Paterson are both faculty, the power differential is stark. Paterson has tenure, while Marisa is very early in the probationary period of her career. There is an unspoken understanding that Paterson is a domain expert in the subject matter, while Marisa is there to serve a narrowly defined function. Marisa is not a historian, but she is trained in information literacy learning outcomes that are designed to integrate with the course subject and materials. Much of this had to be suppressed in order to appease the instructor of record. Marisa had no choice but to acquiesce to the faculty member's wishes to some degree, because she is evaluated on her ability to successfully do outreach to her liaison departments.

For many librarians concerned about their academic freedom, the classroom is the site of interference but for different reasons than for traditional faculty. Whereas faculty are subject to student evaluations of their teaching, which can also be in tension with academic freedom, librarians depend on faculty permissions to meet their own teaching and learning goals. If Paterson doesn't invite her back to his class next year, or expresses his dissatisfaction with her teaching methods to other colleagues in his department, Marisa might struggle to demonstrate her progress to her supervisor, leading to poor performance reviews, stalled

pay increases, and worse, potentially impeding her progress to tenure. There are other, subtle ways that Marisa might be punished. As one of our survey respondents described informal punishment: "Often the chastisement is silent, carried out over several months, and you don't realize right away that it is connected to your incident." Scenarios like this play out in library instruction sessions all the time. Librarians have sophisticated and important learning goals around information literacy and research inquiry but typically lack their own credit-bearing courses. We must integrate into the established curriculum through its assigned gatekeepers, the instructors of record. This often requires performing invisible emotional labor: placating, deference, and gentle suggestions.[25] When we reject this model of behavior in favor of asserting our expertise and bringing our authentic selves to the classroom, it can result in negative response, even bullying. Indeed, several studies have noted that the precarious position of librarians in the academy puts us in prime

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[25] Many scholars both within and outside librarianship have discussed the role of emotional labor in feminized professions like librarianship, and how it can lead to burnout if not acknowledged and mitigated where appropriate. See, for example, Tatiana Bryant, Hilary Bussell, and Rebecca Halpern, "Being Seen: Gender Identity and Performance as a Professional Resource in Library Work," *College & Research Libraries* 80, no. 6 (2019), https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.80.6.805; Lisa Sloniowski, "Affective Labor, Resistance, and the Academic Librarian," *Library Trends* 64, no. 4 (2016): 645–66; Ean Henninger, Adena Brons, Chloe Riley, and Crystal Yin, "Perceptions and Experiences of Precarious Employment in Canadian Libraries: An Exploratory Study," *Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research* 14, no. 2 (2019), https://doi.org/10.21083/partnership.v14i2.5169. Many authors have discussed emotional labor in context of low morale and burnout among librarians of color, notably Fobazi Ettarh, "Vocational Awe and Librarianship: The Lies We Tell Ourselves," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, January 10, 2018, http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2018/vocational-awe/; Kaetrena Davis Kendrick and Ione T. Damasco, "Low Morale in Ethnic and Racial Minority Academic Librarians: An Experiential Study," *Library Trends* 68 no. 2 (2019): 174–212, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/746745; and Tarida Anantachai and Camille Chesley, "The Burden of Care: Cultural Taxation of Women of Color Librarians on the Tenure-Track," in *Pushing the Margins: Women of Color and Intersectionality in LIS*, ed. Rose L. Chou and Annie Pho (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice, 2018).

position to be bullied, with dramatically worse consequences for librarians of color.[26]

Discussions about librarians and academic freedom are almost always outwardly focused on our ethical principles around protecting the academic freedom of others. Paradoxically, librarians' own academic freedom is primarily addressed within the framework of our position as precarious workers. This tension between librarians as instructors with academic freedom and librarians as conduits for academic freedom of others is attendant even in this special issue's call for papers: "How does academic freedom function for precarious faculty and staff, for students, for tenured and tenure-track faculty from marginalized groups?" This question includes librarians as precarious staff, while the category that explicitly names librarians asks, "How do issues around collections, catalogs, access, reference, and information literacy affect academic freedom? How have librarians expanded academic freedom in fights against austerity budgets, profit-driven publishers, and surveillance, and in fights for open access, privacy, and freedom from harassment?" The latter framing squares with the ALA's aforementioned focus on the freedom to read—that is, the support of the intellectual freedom of our faculty colleagues and students (through privacy rights and in other ways)—but it leaves out important questions about our own academic freedom rights.

Conclusion
Academic librarians' experiences with academic freedom are complex and distinct from others on our campuses. Librarianship has long been focused on fighting censorship on behalf of our users and promoting an

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[26] For more on bullying in academic libraries, see Jo Henry et al., "Incivility and Dysfunction in the Library Workplace: Perceptions and Feedback from the Field," *Journal of Library Administration* 58, no. 2 (February 17, 2018): 128–52, https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2017.1412708; Shin Freedman and Dawn Vreven, "Workplace Incivility and Bullying in the Library: Perception or Reality?" *College & Research Libraries* 77, no. 6 (November 1, 2016): 727–48, https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.77.6.727; and Kendrick and Damasco, "Low Morale in Ethnic and Racial Minority Academic Librarians."

ideal of neutrality as an ethical, foundational principle for librarianship. This framing dominates librarians' professional discourse while simultaneously decentering the experiences, professional expertise, and rights of librarians. The fact that academic librarians occupy such a wide range of job statuses on their campuses and work within rigid hierarchical bureaucracies further muddies the water. When we surveyed academic librarians on their academic freedom experiences and values, they reported significant limitations and confusion around what they could even expect. In the comments, many of our survey respondents described supervisors interfering with their work and telling them what they were allowed to research. Since we asked about sociodemographic variables, we can also see that librarians who have less status and power have it worse. They are more likely to experience pushback in their work and feel less free to express themselves in many areas.

We suspect that many faculty members outside the library have only a superficial awareness, at best, of how academic freedom plays out for their library colleagues. It is perhaps easiest for nonlibrarians to grasp why academic freedom matters for libraries when it comes to our collections. Yet there are many other ways that barriers to academic freedom negatively affect academic librarians and our ability to do our best work as educators and researchers in our own right. Our goal in the scenarios we shared was to highlight implications for academic freedom in day-to-day library work, especially situations that might be less familiar to nonlibrarians. We also wanted to illustrate and discuss the ways that social identity and status influence academic librarians' ability to truly enact their academic freedom. It is worth noting that we could also have developed stories that illustrate challenges to cataloging, archival, or reference work. Ultimately, we hope that these stories and the context we provide at the outset of this article help make more tangible the real issues at stake here. As we stated in the introduction, it is unclear how these challenges should be addressed. Fighting for broader tenure protections for academic librarians feels misplaced when challenges to these protections continue to rise. However, we hope that simply unpacking academic librarians' experiences with academic freedom brings new insight and clarity to begin imagining a way forward. The

specific issues that affect librarians also have an impact on contingent faculty and nonfaculty academic staff on our campuses. Many roles once performed by traditional faculty have been dispersed to other contingent faculty and academic staff on campus, leaving the core work of teaching and research increasingly unprotected. This has implications for shared governance on campus, independently directed academic work, and labor rights for all academic workers. Overall, the experiences of librarians demonstrate that protection of academic freedom for all academic staff and faculty is essential to the educational mission of universities.

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