Academic Instruction Librarians' Conceptions of Teacher Agency and Affective Orientations toward the Concept

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abstract: This article reports on findings of an online survey on academic instruction librarians' conceptions and experiences of teacher agency in the context of their instruction work and, more specifically, on their affective orientations (positive, ambivalent, or negative emotions and feelings) toward teacher agency. Two key dimensions of participants' conceptions of teacher agency are evident throughout this analysis: 1) views of teacher agency as an individual experience of autonomy (individual agency) and/or views of it as more relational and interactive (and thus potentially collective), and 2) beliefs about the feasibility of librarians' teacher agency, given librarians' roles and positions as educators. Participants generally expressed positive affect when they felt they were independently in control of their teaching (individual agency), or when they described reciprocal and collaborative relationships with faculty (potentially collective agency). Participants expressed negative affect about experiences of lacking teacher agency. Almost all participants expressed 1) a desire to experience meaning and purpose in teaching and 2) a sensitivity to the highly relational nature of librarians' instructional work. Finally, the author discusses potential implications for academic instruction librarians' teaching practices, professional development, and work environments.

Introduction

Human beings have an understandable need to experience meaning, purpose, and connection in their lives, both within and outside of the workplace. Having some power and choice in one's environment, and moreover acting in ways that align with one's wishes and values, is often referred to as *agency*. The extent to which people experience agency is, of course, greatly influenced by their environment and the conditions and relationships within it.

If agency is essentially the ability of an individual and/or group to enact power and choice in their surrounding environment, teacher agency can be understood as the capacity or the enacting of agency that teaching professionals experience in their instructional roles. This article will discuss the findings of a study on academic instruction librarians' conceptions and experiences of teacher agency in the context of their instructional work.

The nature of academic librarians' instructional roles often presents unique challenges for them in experiencing teacher agency. Because most library instruction is offered in support of a course taught by another instructor, librarians often have limited knowledge of a class's larger context (for example, group and interpersonal dynamics, class climate, previous class learning) and limited time to develop a rapport with students. In addition, negotiating with faculty about the scope and content of a class is vital to traditional one-shot library instruction, as well as to other library instructional work that is highly collaborative such as a collaborative assignment or curriculum design. For all of these reasons, librarians may often find that they need to be more adaptive and flexible in teaching when they are not the primary instructor of record. How do librarians experience and exercise agency in these kinds of situations? More specifically, how do they balance, on one hand, the expectations and requests of others and, on the other, their own teaching practices, philosophies, and approaches? Librarians' conceptions and experiences of teacher agency can provide insight into these kinds of questions and may be generative for librarians' ongoing development as practice as educators.

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Librarians' conceptions and experiences of teacher agency are especially important as their teaching roles and approaches to information literacy education continue to evolve. Research on instruction librarian burnout and the high emotional demands of "caring" professions like librarianship and teaching[1] also points to the potential value for librarians of examining their relationships to teacher agency, particularly as many in the profession seek to improve undesirable work conditions that have contributed to an apparent increase in librarian burnout.[2]

The author investigated academic instruction librarians' conceptions and experiences of teacher agency through an online survey of academic instruction librarians with at least one year of experience in library instruction. This article concentrates on one key dimension of the study findings: participants' affective orientations toward the concept of teacher agency. The term *affective orientation* is used in this article to describe the spectrum of emotions and feelings (positive, neutral, or negative) that individuals have in relation to an idea or experience. Since beliefs, thoughts, and experiences are sometimes expressed through affect and emotion differently than through more neutral description, participants' affective orientations toward teacher agency may offer insight into the role that conceptions of teacher agency play in their instructional work. A focus on conceptions of teacher agency may also reveal alignments and misalignments between participants' ideal views of teacher agency and their lived experiences of it. Future publications will focus more specifically on the role of librarian-faculty relations

in participants' conceptions and experiences of teacher agency, strategies for developing and managing relationships with teaching faculty while maintain a positive sense of individual or shared teacher agency, and the role of librarian relationships in participants' conceptions and experiences of individual or shared agency.

Given the importance of agency to teacher identity, job satisfaction, and the prevention of burnout, this study has relevance to librarians' ongoing development and practices as teachers. The study findings also suggest ways to foster supportive work environments in which librarians can grow and sustain teaching practices that support both their own well-being and student learning.

This article begins with a robust literature review, through which the author examines conceptions of agency in the fields of sociology, psychology, and education. In each of these disciplines, the relationship between individuals and their social environments plays an important role in how agency is experienced or constrained. Education research on the connections among agency, teacher identity, and the emotional dimensions of teaching is especially relevant to academic librarians' teaching roles and practices.

The author then reports on this study's findings about librarians' affective orientations toward the concept of teacher agency, as it relates to their instructional work. After discussing how the abstract qualities of the term *teacher agency* are evident in some participants' responses, the author examines how different affective orientations toward teacher agency reflect views of it as individual or relational and varied beliefs about the feasibility of librarians' enacting teacher agency. Finally, the author considers how the study's findings may serve as a catalyst for professional development, reflective practice, and community building among academic instruction librarians and in library workplaces.

Literature Review

Defining Agency

Although agency can be defined essentially as the ability of an individual and / or group to enact power and choice in the surrounding environment, conceptualizations of it vary. The term *agency* is widely used in both public and academic discourse, but often without a clear definition. In the *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research*, Martin Hewson provides an overview of varied understandings of agency as a concept and a phenomenon. Defining agency as "the condition of activity rather than passivity" and as "the experience of acting, doing things, making things happen, exerting power, being a subject of events, or controlling things," Hewson identifies three main types of agency: individual agency, proxy agency (when one agent acts on behalf of another), and collective agency, through which individuals collaborate effectually and thereby "become collective agencies."[3]

In the United States, which can generally be characterized as a highly individualistic culture, agency is often conceived of in relation to individual choice and action. This conception is particularly common in the field of psychology.[4] Nonetheless, there are also many environments in which agency is understood in more relational or collective terms. In collaborations in which individuals share common goals and some degree of power, agency may also be perceived as mutually shared and exercised (collective

agency), even as individuals also continue to experience agency – or the lack thereof – independently (individual agency). As Hewson illustrates, agency can be conceived in both individual and collective terms, and in relationship to common or divergent goals of individuals and groups.[5] Questions about the extent to which individuals and groups have choice in their actions and what factors enable or constrain that choice have been central to debates about what agency is and how it matters.

Agency and Social Structures

The concept of agency has been most widely debated in the field of sociology, often in terms of the relationship between agency and structure. While agency has tradition-ally been understood as the ability of individuals to act independently and to be active agents, structure refers essentially to systems and patterns in society that influence in-dividuals' choices and actions. While many have debated whether one concept, agency or structure, has primacy over the other, Anthony Giddens challenged a dualistic view of structure and agency when he posited his theory of structuration, according to which agents interact with and influence systems.[6] Drawing on Giddens' work, Sharon Hays discusses how agency can be both constrained and enabled by structures.[7] According to Hays, people affect and shape structures, and structures also affect people and their interactions. Similar to Hays, Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische describe agency as relational and dialogical: "at every step, actors are conceived of not as atomized individu-als, but rather as active respondents within nested and overlapping systems."[8] Stephen Billett similarly argues that the agency-structure connection can best be conceptualized as "a relational interdependence." Applying this view of relational interdependence to work and learning environments, Billett concludes that there are two key outcomes when "individuals actively and continually construct the knowledge required for their working lives": "(i) individual change (i.e. learning) and (ii) the remaking of culturally-derived practices comprising work."[9]

In a similar vein, Ian Burkitt argues in "Relational Agency: Relational Sociology, Agency, and Interaction" for an understanding of agency as a relational phenomenon, rather than an individual one. From this perspective, individuals are better understood as "interactants," rather than as singular agents. Here structure is "webs or networks of relations and interdependencies, both interpersonal and impersonal, in which interactants and their joint actions are embedded."[10]

Agency and Human Psychology

In the field of psychology, which traditionally has placed more emphasis on the individual than on social structures, agency has often been described in relation to self-determination and self-actualization. According to self-determination theory (SDT), intrinsic motiva-tion and the ability to act on that motivation is vital to well-being: individuals have a need to experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness in order to be intrinsically motivated.[11] The degree to which these psychological needs are met in the workplace affects people's engagement and effectiveness in that setting.[12]

Emotions play an important role in people's experiences and enactment of profes-sional agency. Päivi Kristiina Hökkä Katja Vähäsantanen, Susanna Paloniemi, and Anneli

Eteläpelto found that in the workplace the enactment of agency apparently fostered positive emotions, while weak agency provoked negative emotions.[13] Such research suggests that a greater sense of agency is likely to feed a higher sense of purpose, satisfaction, and engagement in one's individual work and in work with others, as well as to prevent burnout. The author will return to the topic of burnout and related research later in this literature review (see the subsection "Teacher Agency, Teacher Identity, and Emotion").

Teacher Agency in Education

Within the field of education, agency has been described as essential to both students' abilities to learn and teachers' capacities to teach.[14] While teacher agency has been a topic of engagement in the education literature for some time, interest in it has grown in recent years, in large part because the increase in the standardization of primary and secondary education can greatly limit teacher agency. According to James S. Chisholm, Jennifer Alford, Leah M. Halliday, and Fannie M. Cox (2019), the topic of teacher agency is gaining attention globally, "as educators speak back to the proliferation and intensification of the aspects of teachers' work that take them away from creative planning that is responsive to their own sense of teacher identity and their learners' experiences, needs and interests."[15]

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As in other fields, within education there has been a tension between conceptions of teacher agency as, on one hand, primarily shaped by the individual and, on the other, socially situated. While for decades many education researchers and practitioners have presented teacher agency as essential to individual teachers' professional development and effectiveness in the classroom, in the past two decades a more critical and complex view of teacher agency, influenced by sociological conceptions of agency, has gained traction.[16] Examining the discursive use of the term *teacher agency* in professional development for school teachers, some scholars have argued that teacher agency discourse often is purported to foster teacher agency, when in actuality it is used to enforce top-down mandates and curricular standards that teachers are expected to uncritically accept and implement.[17] The effect, many of these scholars argue, is ironically to deny teacher agency.[18]

Such critiques of teacher agency discourse frequently draw from sociological literature and challenge individualistic representations of teacher agency. One example is Mark Priestley, Gert Biesta, and Sarah Robinson's conceptualization of an ecological view of teacher agency.[19] From this perspective, which draws heavily from Emirbayer and Mische's view of agency as relational and dialogical, agency involves "active respondents within nesting and overlapping systems," rather than autonomous and independent agents.[20] An ecological view of teacher agency is one that takes into ac-

count the structures, environment, conditions, relationships, and dynamics present in a given moment in place and time.[21] An increasing number of education researchers have drawn on this ecological model of teacher agency.[22] According to Ngo Cong-Lem's 2021 systematic review of the international literature on teacher agency, which reviewed 109 studies, the most dominant framework used was the ecological perspective, which was reflected in 34.6% (46) of the studies.[23]

Teacher Agency, Teacher Identity, and Emotion

A small subset of the education literature on teacher agency has engaged explicitly with the relationship between teacher agency and emotion.[24] This work acknowledges the complex relationships between teachers and their work environments, and thus reflects what Priestley et al. describe as an ecological model of teacher agency. As education scholars like Michalinos Zembylas and Sarah Benesch have demonstrated, emotions and affect play powerful roles in teaching practice in general, as well as in experiences of teacher agency.[25]

For Zembylas, the construction of teacher identity depends on "power and agency," and "an investigation of the emotional components of teacher identity yields a richer understanding of the teacher self."[26] For Benesch, teachers' emotions can enable agency, as those emotions serve "as signals that current conditions may be inequitable or unreasonable and might therefore need to be transformed."[27] The information conveyed through teachers' emotions can be used to initiate meaningful change.

For both Zembylas and Benesch, emotional labor is an important aspect of experiences of teacher agency.[28] Simply defined, emotional labor (sometimes referred to as emotion labor) is the management of emotions within the context of work. Originally conceptualized by sociologist Arlie Hochschild, emotional labor involves attendance to the "feeling rules" that are implicit within work environments.[29] Emotional labor becomes particularly taxing when individuals experience dissonance between their internal experiences and the "feeling rules" in a given environment.[30] These "feeling rules" (social expectations about how people should or should not express emotions) have an especially strong impact on individuals in lower positions of power and in "caring professions" like nursing, mental health, child care, and teaching.[31] Zembylas has examined the challenging ways that emotional labor affects teachers, while Benesch has given particular attention to emotional labor's "agentic potential." According to Benesch, "when viewed in relationship to institutional power, feeling rules and emotion labor can be drawn upon as tools of grassroots organizing for collaborative change among colleagues in conjunction with students."[32]

Experiences of teacher agency can also be understood in relation to job (dis)satisfaction and burnout. Drawing on Sandra Acker's work on the emotional labor of women teachers, Miller and Gkonou explain, on one hand "teaching-as-caring can contribute to teachers' emotional stress and eventual burnout when [teachers] feel forced to demonstrate care which is not reciprocated or is not valued."[33] On the other hand, the same act of "teaching-as-caring" "can have positive effects for teachers' own well-being through motivating particular actions that are often rewarded by student reciprocity, engagement, and high achievement."[34]

The connections among teacher agency, teacher identity, job (dis)satisfaction, and burnout suggest a need for educators, including instruction librarians, to foster a positive sense of teacher agency and to be supported to do so in their work environments. Teachers' affective orientations toward teacher agency may provide unique insight into their teacher identities and their affective experiences of teaching. Research like that of Zembylas and Benesch suggests that such insight can inform teacher development and the cultivation of supportive work environments.

Teacher Agency and Academic Instruction Librarians

While there has been extensive research on pre-service and school teachers' experiences and conceptions of teacher agency, there has been little, if any, research focused explicitly on the role of teacher agency in instruction librarians' work. Although the concept of teacher agency thus far has received limited direct attention within librarianship, literature on academic librarians' teaching identities, roles, teacher development, and relationships with faculty often addresses issues of teacher agency.[35] This body of literature has grown at an increased pace over the past several decades, as academic librarians' instructional roles have continued to expand and evolve. While teacher agency is relevant to much of this literature, the topic is rarely addressed explicitly.

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Particularly relevant to a sociocultural view of librarians' experiences of teacher agency are Lisa Sloniowski's work on librarians and affective labor and Karen P. Nicholson's research on academic librarians and "temporal labor."[36] Though Sloniowski and Nicholson do not engage closely with the concept of agency, their work is largely about librarians' experiences of agency, in light of their environments, structures, cultures, and relationships.

Sloniowski argues that the affective and immaterial labor that characterizes much of academic reference and liaison librarians' work is undervalued in the corporate university, which tends to stress values like efficiency over those like care. Sloniowski asserts that librarians' affective labor needs to be more fully recognized, and that librarians can challenge the dismissal of this work, as they themselves acknowledge and draw attention to their own and others' affective labor. Through that process, Sloniowski argues, librarians may "productively subvert the neoliberal goals" of the university.[37] Though Sloniowski does not concentrate on the concept of agency, their discussion of "productive subversion of neoliberal goals" is a description of librarians acting in ways that influence their environments and align more with their own values and goals. This is essentially agency.

Nicholson, much like Sloniowski, raises concerns about the effects that neoliberalism and a corporate model of higher education have on reference and teaching librarians'

sense of professional value and autonomy. They explore academic instruction librarians' experiences of time and, more specifically, of hastening their work pace in order to be "in time" with the expectations of others, including faculty and students. Nicholson draws on Sarah Sharma's theory of power chronography, according to which individuals must "recalibrate" their actions in order to be "in time" with dominant temporalities.[38] Through analysis of interviews with academic librarians, Nicholson explores ways that temporal labor "erodes professional autonomy and increases physical and emotional stress," as well as how participants' collective action can be a means of resistance through which they reclaim some sense of choice and autonomy.[39] Nicholson's engagement with the concept of agency is evident in their discussion of reclaiming professional autonomy, taking collective action, and resisting institutional structures and practices that misalign with one's own goals.

Research on burnout among academic reference and instruction librarians is also relevant to this research study. In Mary Ann Affleck's 1996 survey of academic instruction librarians, 52.8% of participants showed high burnout in one dimension of the phenomenon and 8.5% demonstrated high burnout in all three dimensions.[40] In alignment with the Maslach Burnout Inventory (upon which the study was based), burnout was characterized by exhaustion, depersonalization, and a lacking sense of personal achievement. Role conflict and role ambiguity in particular contributed to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Affleck's findings were in line with those of Karen Becker[41] and Charles Patterson and Donna Howell.[42]

Reviewing the literature on librarian burnout, Sheesley called for empirical research on effective strategies for reducing burnout among academic instruction librarians.[43] Similarly, in "Understanding the Changing Role of Academic Librarians from a Psychological Perspective: A Literature Review," Ellen I. Shupe and Stephanie K. Pung identified "the instructional needs and models used in universities" as among the central ways that academic librarians' roles have changed and pointed to this as a source of role-related stress, which involves "role ambiguity and increased workload."[44] They recommended that in order to address such work-related stressors, collaborations between research psychologists and library scholars and practitioners should be established.[45]

Subsequent research on academic instruction librarians' work experiences has connected librarian burnout to emotional labor. For example, Shuler and Morgan identified emotional labor as one of the many stressors that lead to librarian burnout and confirmed this through interviews with six academic librarians.[46] The authors identified strategies that the interviewees used to manage the challenges of emotional labor and emphasized that acknowledging librarians' emotional labor can help them in managing the emotional dimensions of their work.

The author of this study previously explored academic librarians' development as teachers, and found that teacher agency, which had a strong affective dimension, played a notable role in librarians' identities and development as teachers.[47] This study is informed by that earlier work and the research discussed throughout this literature review.

The expansive nature of this literature review reflects the multi-faceted nature of teacher agency. In this section, the author has explored understandings of and research on agency from the fields of sociology, psychology, education, and librarianship, and has given particular attention to the roles of emotion and emotional labor in experiences

of teacher agency. The relevance of the research discussed within the literature review will be further considered in the article's Discussion section.

Methods

The purpose of this study was to investigate academic instruction librarians' conceptions and experiences of teacher agency in the context of their instructional work. The study was intended to identify both themes and variations in participants' conceptions and experiences of teacher agency. A sample size that allowed for a representation of many individuals' experiences, as well as for closer analysis of individual experiences, was therefore needed. With this aim, the author developed an online survey with open-ended questions that would be answered by academic librarians with at least one year of library instruction experience. The study explored factors and conditions that influence how academic instruction librarians conceive of and experience teacher agency, or the lack thereof, within the context of their library instructional work. For the purpose of the study, library instruction work refers to all encompassed activities, including but not limited to scheduling, designing, delivering, assessing, and coordinating instruction/instruction programs.

The survey consisted of five open-ended questions about participants' experiences of agency, including about factors and conditions that contribute to or detract from a sense of teacher agency; strategies, approaches, and ideas that help them to experience greater teacher agency; and thoughts, ideas, and feelings that the concept of teacher agency evokes. An ecological view of teacher agency (through which the relationship between individual experience and environmental factors are considered) influenced the researcher's approach to the study. When analyzing the data, the author looked at participants' descriptions of both their internal thoughts and experiences, as well as of the environments in which they worked and interacted with others.

The survey was administered through Qualtrics and was open from February 25 to March 25, 2021. On February 25, 2021, an initial invitation to participate in the study was sent to subscribers of the listserv ili-l@lists.ala.org, as well as to the members of ALA Connect's discussion groups "ACRL" (Association of College & Research Libraries) and "ACRL Instruction Section." (ALA Connect is the American Library Association's [ALA] community platform.) A survey reminder was sent through these channels again on March 10, 2021. A total of 73 individuals completed the survey.

At the start of the survey, participants were presented with information about the study (e.g., study purpose; the protocol for collecting, analyzing, and retaining data; the study's approval by the researcher's institutional review board). Participants were then asked to confirm that they were at least 18 years of age and were an academic librarian with at least one year of professional experience in providing instructional services in an academic library setting. If they answered "yes" to both of these questions, they were asked whether they gave their consent to participate in the study. Only those respondents who provided their consent were able to complete the survey.

The survey began with the following explanation of the term *agency*, as it was used in the context of the study:

> Agency can be defined as the ability of an individual and/or group to enact power and choice in the surrounding environments. This study explores librarians' experiences of teacher agency: essentially, the capacity or enacting of agency that teaching professionals experience in their teaching roles. This survey will ask about your experiences of agency in the context of your library instruction work. For the purpose of this survey, library instruction work refers to all encompassed activities, including but not limited to scheduling, designing, delivering, assessing, and coordinating instruction/instruction programs.

Participants were then presented with five open-ended questions about their experiences of agency in the context of their library instruction work (see Table 1 below).

At the end of the survey, participants were also asked a series of multiple-choice questions about their institutional contexts, teaching experience, and demographics. (See the Appendix for the complete survey.)

Survey responses were analyzed for variations and themes through open coding and with the use of the research software program MAXQDA Analytics. Analysis and coding of the survey data revealed that the key findings could not be adequately reported within a single publication, given the richness of the data collected and the complexity of the research topic and questions. Instead, the findings will be discussed in multiple publications, of which this article is the first.

A number of broad themes emerged during early stages of coding, including affective orientation toward teacher agency; a spectrum of views of teacher agency as an individual and/or a shared experience; the roles of collaboration and of autonomy in teaching and in experiencing teacher agency; work and institutional culture and environment, interpersonal and professional relationships (namely with faculty, fellow librarians, and students); and varying modes of instruction, for example one-shot classes, credit courses, assignment design. This article focuses on participants' affective orientations toward teacher agency, as it relates to their instructional work. As mentioned previously, the term *affective orientation* describes the spectrum of positive, neutral, or negative emotions and feelings that individuals have in relation to an idea or experience. The author describes these affective orientations broadly as overall positive, ambivalent (having mixed feeling), or overall negative. While affective orientations toward the concept of teacher agency are typically connected to experiences of teacher agency, participants' feelings about agency as a concept are not necessarily the same as their feelings about their lived experiences of enacting (or not enacting) teacher agency. Because participants' affective orientations toward teacher agency depend greatly on their understandings of the term, the author also discusses the difficulty of defining teacher agency in simple terms.

Findings

This section begins with a summary of the study participants' demographics. Thereafter, participants' understandings of and affective orientations toward teacher agency are discussed, first in relation to the abstractness of teacher identity as a concept, and second, in terms of general affective orientations (overall positive, ambivalent, and overall negative). Two key dimensions of participants' conceptions of teacher agency are evident throughout this analysis:

Table 1.
Survey Questions

- In what ways do you experience agency in your library instruction work? What factors or conditions contribute to your sense of agency?
- In what ways do you experience lacking agency in your library instruction work? What factors or conditions contribute to this?
- Do certain strategies, approaches, or ideas help you experience a greater sense of agency?
- Do certain strategies, approaches, or ideas help you manage experiences of lacking agency?
- Does the concept of teacher agency evoke for you certain thoughts, ideas, or feelings?

1) views of teacher agency as an individual experience of autonomy (individual agency) and/or views of it as more relational and interactive experience (with potential for collective agency), and
2) beliefs about the feasibility of librarians' teacher agency, given librarians' roles and positions as educators.

Most participants seemed to understand agency as both an individual and a relational experience. While participants focused mainly on an individual conception of teacher agency, many also pointed to the potential for collective agency. Those who described teacher agency as possible solely through independent actions, rather than through interactions with others, more often suggested that teacher agency was less feasible for librarians because of the nature of their instructional roles.

Participant Demographics

At the end of the survey, participants were asked to provide demographic information about their institution type, the job classification of their current or most recent position, the country in which they worked, age, race/ethnicity, gender, years of experience in library instruction, and other teaching experience. Table 2 presents these demographics. As is discussed later under Limitations, there was a lack of diversity in the study population, particularly in race/ethnicity and gender. The generalizability of the study findings to a more diverse group are uncertain, though this qualitative study also provides insight into individuals' unique experiences as well as common patterns across the participants' experiences.

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Table 2.
Participant Demographics

(See the Appendix for all of the gender categories listed in the survey. Some of those categories were not selected by any participants and therefore are not represented in this table.)

Institution type	Percentage of Participants
Doctoral-granting research institution	49.3%
Four-year undergraduate college	17.8%
Regional comprehensive university	15.1%
Community or technical college	8.2%
Other	9.6%

Job classification of current or most recent library position	
Tenured or tenure-track	41.1%
Professional staff	30.1%
Non-tenure track faculty	23.3%
Other	
	5.5%

Country	
United States	97.3%
Canada	2.7%

Age	
30–39	39.7%
50–59	24.7%
40–49	20.5%
18–29	9.6%
60+	5.5%

Race/ethnicity	
White/Caucasian	91.8%
Preferred not to answer	41.3%
Hispanic or Latinx	2.7%
Asian American or Asian	1.4%

Table 2. Cont.

Gender	
Female	91.8%
Male	5.5%
Preferred not to answer	2.7%

Years of experience in library instruction	
6–10 years	30.1%
2–5 years	27.4%
16–20 years	15.1%
11–15 years	13.7%
20+ years	11.0%
Under 2 years (at least one year)	2.7%

Other teaching experience	
Yes	56.2%
No	43.8%

The Challenge of Definition

Prior to examining participants' affective orientations toward teacher agency, it is worth acknowledging the difficulty of defining teacher agency. This challenge is evident in the discourse and debates about the concept from various academic fields (as was discussed in the literature review). The author initiated this study with the understanding that participants' interpretations of the term *teacher agency* could provide insight into their perspectives on their teaching roles, contexts, and experiences. Given that an individual's understandings of the terms *agency* and *teacher agency* are largely shaped by their own backgrounds, experiences, circumstances, and environments, it was expected that individual participants' conceptions of teacher agency would differ. To provide a common understanding of agency and teacher agency as concepts, at the start of the survey participants were presented with the previously mentioned explanation of both terms and their relevance to the study. This explanation provided a shared departure point for participants to reflect on teacher agency, while also being brief enough to encourage participants to reflect on their own understandings of the concept.

Several participants pointed explicitly to the interpretative room for understanding the term teacher agency. One participant commented, "It seems pretty vague.… It seems close to "academic freedom," perhaps? It suggests to me having the freedom to create my own instruction, goals, and assessments in conjunction with faculty, rather than just waiting for someone to hand me a lesson plan." Another participant initially suggested

that librarians may not have much teacher agency and therefore might identify another term "to describe the feeling of agency that we [librarians] have when designing a lesson plan or developing a workshop, but [a term that] accounts for the realization that getting students in the teaching interaction contributes to the feeling of lack of control." Despite this participant's initial thought that librarians do not have much agency, they went on to identify ways that they do have agency. Though they lacked agency in whether instructors or students took advantage of services like library instruction, workshops, or research consultations, they nonetheless felt that once these interactions were occurring, they had "wide latitude to teach in the way that I see fits the situation." This perspectival shift reflects how conceptions and experiences of agency are contextual, complex, and ever-changing. In a given situation, a person is likely to experience agency in relation to some aspects of a situation, while lacking agency in relation to others. How one experiences agency can also change from one context to another and from one moment to another, as conditions and contexts evolve over time.

Though only a minority of participants expressed uncertainty about the meaning of teacher agency, it is possible that other participants had questions about the term's meaning that they did not express directly. Nonetheless, a recurring theme across participant responses was that experiencing teacher agency involved acting with meaning and purpose in one's teaching environment. Affective orientations toward teacher agency provide further insight into participants' understandings of the term and of its relevance to their instructional work.

Affective Orientations

Overview

The interpretive room for understanding the concept of teacher agency is particularly evident in participants' differing affective orientations toward it. Despite the term's abstract qualities, it was rarely something about which participants were indifferent. The feelings and emotions that participants expressed suggest that teacher agency matters to them.

Most participants expressed overall positive associations with teacher agency, while many also expressed ambivalence (or mixed feelings) about the concept. Only one participant expressed overall negative affect toward teacher agency. As mentioned at the start of the Findings section, participants' affective orientations toward teacher agency frequently were related to: 1) understandings of teacher agency as an individual experience of autonomy or as more relational and interactive experience, and 2) their views of the feasibility of librarians' enacting teacher agency. Participants generally expressed positive affect when they felt that they were entirely in control of their teaching (individual agency). They also expressed positive emotions when describing reciprocal relationships with faculty in which they shared agency (collective agency). Participants expressed negative affect about experiences of lacking teacher agency. Often this unpleasant experience occurred when participants felt that relationships with faculty and their positions as librarians disabled them from enacting or sharing teacher agency.

Characterizing participants' affective orientations toward teacher agency as overall positive, ambivalent (mixed feelings), or overall negative offers a lens through which to consider participants' conceptions of, beliefs, and attitudes about teacher agency. At

the same time, these categories cannot capture the full complexity of participants' perspectives. Indeed, participants across these affective categories often expressed similar values and viewpoints. Almost all participants' affective stances toward teacher agency reflected a desire to experience meaning and purpose in teaching, as well as a sensitivity to the highly relational nature of librarians' instructional work.

Most participants (81%, or 59/73) expressed overall positive affective orientations toward teacher agency. This group generally associated teacher agency with qualities like competence, meaning, and purpose. For this majority, more negatively inflected comments about teacher agency were about experiences of lacking it. Positive affect toward teacher agency was often tied strongly to individual action (individual agency). At the same time, the links participants made among agency, interactions and relationships with others, and the purpose of helping others suggested that agency does not require complete independence and autonomy. Participants could potentially experience agency as shared with others (collective agency).

A smaller but still notable number of participants (18%, or 13/73) expressed a considerable degree of ambivalence, or mixed feelings, about the concept. This ambivalence centered primarily on the limits placed on individual actions (individual agency), and less on interactions and relationships with others that could potentially involve collective agency. Ambivalence usually corresponded with uncertainty about whether agency was a realistic or desirable element of librarians' instructional work. Participants who expressed mixed feelings about teacher agency demonstrated high awareness of the relational nature of most library instructional work, which usually is done to support classes and academic programs led by other educators. These participants also often pointed to unequal power relations between librarians and faculty.

The one participant who expressed an overall negative affective stance toward teacher agency described it as a burden that they alone carried at their institution. This strongly contrasted others' views of agency as experiencing purpose or power. This participant instead associated agency with a lack of support and community, as well as an unmet wish to share responsibilities and workload with others. This individual's comments suggest that they experienced agency as individual, while perhaps preferring to share agency with others (collective agency).

Overall Positive

As mentioned, the large majority of participants (81%, or 59/73) expressed overall positive associations with teacher agency. These participants frequently described agency as vital to engaging in meaningful work, as they use their expertise to help others and contribute to a larger goal and often a larger community. Positive affect toward teacher agency was tied strongly to individual action (individual agency). At the same time, participants often emphasized human interactions and relationships, and thus pointed to how their individual actions were connected to others.

Participants' frequent attention to relationality suggests that participants' individual agency could potentially coexist with collective agency. For example, in their positive descriptions of teacher agency, participants often noted the value of supporting student learning and of being trusted and valued by others within the context of teaching.

Respondents also frequently associated teacher agency with a sense of confidence and trust in their own expertise, as well as with positive feelings about their teaching identities and roles. These positive emotions often coexisted with creativity, experimentation, and ongoing engagement in professional learning and growth. As one participant commented, "It [teacher agency] makes me feel as though I'm contributing to the greater good and maybe a more informed public." For this participant, like several others, a sense of purpose and trust in one's expertise went hand-in-hand. Experiencing meaning and purpose in teaching was usually described in relational terms, as something that helps others. As another respondent reflected, "It [the concept of agency] makes me feel empowered to empower others to learn."

> **Experiencing meaning and purpose in teaching was usually described in relational terms, as something that helps others.**

The relational nature of participants' work was also apparent in comments on their expertise being trusted and valued by others. Another participant remarked, "It [teacher agency] makes me dive into my work and feel pride as a professional that I am trusted as an expert." For this individual, agency was experienced in part because they felt that their expertise was recognized and valued by others.

For some, confidence and pride in one's teaching was accompanied by expressions of teacher identity. As one individual stated, "It [teacher agency] makes me think of teaching identity and how I fully view myself as a teacher. It also makes me think about my role as a faculty member and the agency I have in that role." Some participants who described identifying as teachers also expressed the importance of others' recognizing them as teachers. One individual commented on the importance they placed on librarians being "recognized as educators with pedagogical and research expertise [who] have something to contribute beyond point-and-click database tutorials." They continued, "That is teacher agency for me, and it ties into my own sense of identity as a librarian, teacher, and public servant." Here again, agency was understood in terms of one's own actions, as well as in terms of one's interactions and relationships with others.

For many, confidence in one's own expertise and a sense of teacher identity were accompanied by a practice of ongoing reflection that enabled growth in one's teaching practice. One participant described agency as "essential to being able to do our best work and bring our own talents and insights to our instruction," and as "enabl[ing] us to grow as practitioners." They also described agency as "hav[ing] the space to think about my instruction, reflect upon it, notice times when I was not good, notice times when I was great, grab ideas from my colleagues, collaborate with teaching faculty, and design content tailored to learners." This emphasis on continuous reflection and growth suggests that, for some participants, teacher agency was about more than confidence in one's knowledge and abilities. It was also about approaching teaching and learning as organic and dynamic practices with which they have an active relationship. Ongoing reflection and professional growth were also sometimes described as involving conversation and collaboration with others, as is reflected in the previous quote.

Ambivalent

While an appreciation of teacher agency was common among the large majority of participants, about 18% (13) expressed overall ambivalence (mixed feelings) about the concept. Like those who felt positively, those who were ambivalent also saw agency as primarily individual. However, those expressing ambivalence also suggested that the relational nature of librarians' teaching limited their capacity to enact teacher agency, as they often needed to give up agency in order to address the needs or wishes of faculty. From this perspective, the potential for sharing agency was limited. Individuals who expressed ambivalence about teacher agency gave considerable attention to both positive and negative effects that a focus on teacher agency might have. In addition, among those who expressed an overall positive affective orientation toward teacher agency, two expressed reservations about the role of teacher agency for librarians, as they considered ways that it sometimes might not be beneficial. Comments from these individuals are included in this section.

Participants' reservations about the value of teacher agency to their library instruction usually correlated with an understanding of teacher agency as something exercised by independent individuals (individual agency). These comments suggested that agency was not potentially shared or exercised with others. The most common reservations about teacher agency were that it may at times exist in unproductive tension with the needs or wishes of faculty, or that librarians' own teacher agency might not be feasible because of the nature of librarians' professional roles and work (for example, the role of librarian-faculty relationships). Expressions of ambivalence often reflected feelings of frustration and disempowerment, particularly in relation to one-shot teaching and librarian-faculty relationships. Some participants with overall ambivalent orientations toward teacher agency also suggested that agency is less important or necessary in librarians' instructional work than it is sometimes perceived to be.

As mentioned in the overview of affective orientations, when participants expressed ambivalence about teacher agency, they described it as a highly individual phenomenon that is possessed by one individual, rather than something that is potentially shared. These participants gave considerable attention to the relational aspects of teaching that seemed to limit their teacher agency. The view of teacher agency as an individual experience that is limited by relationships with faculty is reflected in comments from one participant who expressed an overall positive view of teacher agency, but who also had reservations: "I love having agency because it gives me the freedom [to] capitalize on my strengths. Too much agency may be a negative thing, however. I need at least some detail about what the faculty member wants and what the students need to learn in order to be effective." At the same time that this individual believed teacher agency enabled them to do their best work, they also suggested that their own agency needed to be limited in order to account for the needs and interests of others. (This comment contrasts other participants' descriptions of experiencing the greatest agency when they collaborate with faculty. The theme of collaboration as fostering and/or hindering agency will be explored in more detail in a future publication on the role of librarian-faculty relationships in librarians' experiences of teacher agency.)

As is reflected in the previous quote, ambivalence about librarians' teacher agency tended to reflect a more individual view of agency, but not necessarily a view of teaching as an individual process. Ambivalence about teacher agency was sometimes connected with questions about whether it was incompatible with librarians' work. Frequently such ambivalence was linked to descriptions of librarians' occupying a lower social status and less power than faculty.

The view of individual agency as misaligned with librarians' roles is perhaps most strongly stated in the following quote: "But a librarian's traditional role is supplemental, and you can't have a terrific sense of agency in this role." This participant seems to imply that the relationship between librarians and faculty is inherently unequal. Other participants expressed this view more explicitly. Two participants who pointed to unequal power relations between librarians and faculty questioned if the phrase *teacher agency* was appropriate for describing librarians' work. One of these individuals stated that, for instruction librarians, teacher agency is a misnomer because "[i]n the academic librarian context, there are still countless disciplinary faculty and administrators who don't even conceive of librarians as educators [...]." The other, whose comments were previously discussed in the section "The Challenge of Definition," suggested that librarians might need a different term "to describe the feeling of agency that we have when designing a lesson plan or developing a workshop, but accounts for the realization that getting students in the teaching interaction contributes to the feeling of lack of control."

Other respondents expressed similar frustrations about librarian-faculty relations, as they attributed a lack of teacher agency largely to the fact that their instructional work was done in support of teaching faculty, rather than in a credit course that librarians taught independently. One individual commented, "I feel librarians only have as much agency as the faculty member allows them to have. They can strip us of agency through interruptions and changes to the lesson at the drop of a hat, but as we value maintaining those relationships to continue being utilized…, it boils down to our having to just be okay with that uncertainty of agency." This person went on to attribute burnout to a lack of control in teaching.

Five participants who expressed ambivalence about teacher agency suggested that the concept of agency, while to some extent useful, is less important or necessary in librarians' instructional work than it is sometimes perceived to be. They moreover suggested that concern about agency can be a hindrance to doing one's work. Several participants also implied that there could be value in surrendering agency or in not being highly concerned with exercising agency. As one individual stated,

> I feel positively in that it [teacher agency] allows us teachers to make the best use of our expertise to support students in their learning journeys. But it has also been used as an excuse for not improving our [librarians'] teaching (e.g., "well everyone just teaches differently, we can't work towards something together") or to brushing away really serious concerns.

They went on to further explain, "I'm all for agency, and also accountability!" This comment suggests that among some fellow teaching librarians, teacher agency may be commonly understood as individual agency and choice, and less often conceived as collective agency that involves collaboration. The quote above also suggests that some

librarians may experience pedagogical discussions or collaborations among library colleagues as a threat to individual teacher agency.

Another individual similarly suggested that teacher agency might stand in the way of other values and goals: "I'm not actually super invested in this idea [of teacher agency]. I think respect for each other and our students is a much more important goal, and would end up giving everyone a better experience." Yet another participant expressed similar concerns when they described giving up agency as a choice that they make because it allows them to do their work. For them, playing this role was part of thinking critically about both their own and other librarians' professional roles within their institutional contexts. As they stated, "My primary management technique is really thinking critically about librarian's place in the higher education environment. At my institution our instruction is dependent on the buy-in of others. With this as our primary model, we are willingly giving up our agency." They related this perspective to their personal beliefs and background: "Being a member of a historical Peace church, and therefore a person who voluntarily surrenders agency, I don't fight it. I am nice about it and then I remove myself from the situation when I have done my job." Like many other expressions of ambivalence, this statement seems to imply that agency is primarily individual (i.e., something that occurs when one acts independently and that such independent actions may not account adequately for the needs and interests of others). The statement also shares with several other participant responses the idea that librarians have a particular role to play at their institutions, one that requires yielding agency in order to support other educators.

Overall Negative

While almost all participants indicated implicitly or explicitly that they saw value in teacher agency, one participant expressed an overall negative affective orientation toward the concept. This individual described teacher agency quite differently than did others: agency as carrying a burdensome and unmanageable responsibility, at least within their present library context. As they stated, "I have almost complete agency over my instruction work because there is no cohesive or comprehensive instruction program currently at my library. Also, I'm the only designated teaching librarian with instruction as a major component of my job duties." For this individual, "teacher agency makes me feel overwhelmed, sad from lack of in-house support, and almost burnt-out."

At the same time that this participant's conception of teacher agency was distinct from common definitions of agency, as well as from other participants' descriptions of the concept, this person shared with other participants a desire for meaningful work. This meaning appeared to be lacking in their current environment. As they stated, "All instruction feels self-serving without any meaningful assessment being done." Their frustration appeared largely tied to an experience of work lacking purpose, adequate support, and community, and to a sense of being accountable for things that they did not have the resources to adequately address. While they experienced teacher agency within their current library context as an individual phenomenon, their comments suggest that they would prefer to share teaching responsibilities with others and might find value in an alternative view of teacher agency as in part collective and shared.

Though that this overall negative view of agency may seem to starkly contrast overall positive conceptions of agency, again it shares with most participant responses an expressed desire for work to have meaning, purpose, and a positive impact on others. If agency is, as was defined at the start of the survey, "the ability of an individual and / or group to enact power and choice in the surrounding environments," this participant seems to describe a lack of agency more than an excess of it. This respondent's comments, like those of individuals who were ambivalent about teacher agency, illustrate that individual's conceptions of teacher agency vary considerably. This may be true even when those individuals share similar wishes for meaningful work that has purpose and that contributes positively to larger goals like supporting learning.

Discussion

An Ecological View of Affective Orientations toward Teacher Agency

In its full complexity, teacher agency can be understood as both an individual and a collective phenomenon, and as something that is experienced and enacted through interactions with others. Teacher agency is embedded within specific temporal moments and contexts, and influenced by larger structures, systems, and histories, including those of higher education and of academic libraries.

Participants' varied responses illustrate this reality. While participants usually conceived of teacher agency in terms of individual action, their responses also illustrate that experiences of agency occurs through relationships, interactions, and at times collaborations with others, and thus is sometimes also shared, or collective. The relational and contextual nature of library instruction, and the many conditions that influence librarians' teaching, point to the relevance of an ecological view of teacher agency, through which agency is understood as occurring among interactants within specific environments and conditions.[48]

> **Teacher agency is embedded within specific temporal moments and contexts, and influenced by larger structures, systems, and histories, including those of higher education and of academic libraries.**

The positive, ambivalent, and negative affective orientations that participants had toward teacher agency reflect the complex relational nature of academic librarians' teaching practices, their professional roles and identities, and their work environments. Regardless of whether participants described teacher agency in overall positive, overall ambivalent, or overall negative terms, most saw it playing a role in their capacity for meaningful work and for contributing their expertise to support student learning. Most participants also saw their teaching as highly relational. For those who taught course-integrated instruction like one-shot library sessions, relationships with faculty played a strong role in experiencing teacher agency or a lack thereof.

That positive associations with teacher agency were the norm is perhaps unsurprising, given that agency tends to be discussed as key to intrinsic motivation and taking actions that align with individual and often shared goals and values. Participants who

expressed positive affect toward teacher agency frequently described feeling competent and doing something meaningful that helped others. Several participants also indicated that continually reflecting, learning, and growing in their teaching was central to teacher agency. Often individuals with overall positive affective orientations toward teacher agency described relational aspects of teaching as related to their experiences of teacher agency. Participants' positive experiences of agency when interacting with, relating to, and sometimes collaborating with others suggest that many participants might view teacher agency as something that at times can be shared (collective agency).

Expressions of ambivalence about teacher agency were particularly reflective of complex thoughts and emotions about librarians' instructional work and roles. When participants expressed ambivalence about teacher agency, they demonstrated a highly individual view of agency, as they raised questions about the degree to which librarians could or should enact teacher agency. Participants who expressed uncertainty about the feasibility or desirability of librarians' teacher agency often suggested that teacher agency could come into conflict with faculty's needs and expectations, or that it might be unfeasible in light of unequal power relations between faculty and librarians.

Although those who expressed overall ambivalence about teacher agency were in the minority, it is possible that such ambivalence was more common among participants than this study's numbers suggest. First, those who expressed ambivalence may have articulated views that other participants shared but did not explicitly articulate. In addition, some participants might believe that ambivalence about teacher agency is undesirable and might therefore be reluctant to express their reservations. Finally, the construction of the survey questions may have influenced the degree to which participants shared feelings of ambivalence about teacher agency. For example, the study survey did not include a question about potential negative effects of teacher agency. Such a question might have elicited more ambivalent thoughts about teacher agency. While it is difficult to know the degree of unexpressed ambivalence about teacher agency that participants had, participants' expressions of ambivalence may offer unexpected insights into many librarians' conceptions and experiences of it. Through their ambivalence, participants pointed to potential limitations of teacher agency that are less commonly discussed. They also illuminated the complexity of participants' teaching roles and experiences in relation to teacher agency.

The fact that only one participant expressed an overall negative affective orientation toward teacher agency underscores the positive associations that the term usually connotes. A closer examination of this participant's response suggests that their frustration with teacher agency may stem largely from associating the term with being expected to carry a large degree of responsibility, without adequate resources and support. Someone who interpreted the term teacher agency differently might view this participant's experience as one of lacking agency, rather than one of having an excess of agency. As this example reflects, conceptions and experiences of a phenomenon are inevitably interconnected. Although this article has focused on participants' affective orientations toward the concept of teacher agency, it is not possible to neatly separate conceptions and experiences from one another. Future publications will explore in more depth the roles that relationships, social structures, and environments play in experiences of teacher agency.

Teacher Identity, Emotion, and Reflective Practice

The positive, ambivalent, and negative affective orientations that participants expressed toward the concept of teacher agency reflect the connections among teacher agency, teacher identity, and emotion that Zembylas and Benesch have explored (and which were introduced in this article's literature review).[49] Like Zembylas and Benesch's research, this study's findings suggest that acknowledging the affective dimensions of teaching, as well as of the social and structural factors that influence teaching, is vital to librarians' ongoing development and practices as teachers.

Zembylas and Benesch's work[50] is also in line with Stephen Brookfield's description of critical reflective practice: "a process of inquiry involving practitioners in trying to discover, and research, the assumptions that frame how they work."[51] As librarians engage in critical reflective practice and consider the conditions and environments in which they teach and the relationships that they have with students and faculty, they may develop new understandings of their teaching roles, identities, and practices that can inform their pedagogical work. For example, instruction librarians who experience unconstructive self-blame, perfectionism, and imposter syndrome in the realm of teaching[52] might use an ecological view of teacher agency and reflective practice to consider a wider range of factors that may be influencing their teaching. This ecological view might be similarly useful for instruction librarians who experience role conflict (a common contributor to burnout among instruction librarians).[53] In such instances, through individual and/or collective critical reflection, librarians might consider the choices that they have within a given instructional scenario, the various factors and constraints that contribute to those choices, and whether there may be other options for acting or for reframing a situation that, while not initially apparent, become evident through individual or collective reflection.

Among the considerations that librarians can take into account during personal or group reflection is the possibility that teacher agency can be experienced not only individually, but also collectively (i.e., in community with others). In considering ways that teacher agency may be enacted both individually and collaboratively, librarians may be better positioned to recognize and share their expertise with fellow educators, to establish shared goals with other educators, and to engage in constructive dialogue and negotiation when pedagogical goals differ. Such an approach aligns with the qualities of meaningful librarian-faculty partnerships that Ruth Ivey identified through her research: namely, a shared and understood goal; mutual respect, tolerance, and trust; competence for the given task; and ongoing communication.[54] Within teaching partnerships, librarians' understandings of teacher agency as potentially both individual and shared may also help them to identify potential within different environments for meaningful collaboration, and within those contexts to cultivate conditions that are vital to genuine partnerships. An understanding of teacher agency as both individual and shared may also help librarians identify aspects of teaching collaborations that they value and/or would like to change. That reflective process may help librarians identify new ways that they would like to engage in those partnerships, or in some instances to decide that to focus their time and energy in other places.

Individual or group reflections about teacher agency are ideally grounded in recognition of the concept's complexity and the fact that individuals' varying conceptions

of it are shaped by their experiences, professional contexts, and teaching philosophies. Discussions with fellow librarians, through which individuals consider their varied experiences and perspectives, may be particularly generative for identifying ways to foster both individual and collective agency and to balance the two when they are in tension with one another. For example, when individuals in the library profession talk about agency or about fostering teacher agency, are they speaking about the same thing? Where do understandings of the concept align or diverge? In light of a group's differing and converging views of individual and collective agency in the context of library instruction, where do a group's goals align or vary? What are points of agreement, disagreement, or uncertainty, and how can groups engage in dialogue and negotiation in order to balance individual and collective goals and to experience both individual and collective agency?

Exploration into such questions may help librarians to affirm what they value about teaching, at the same time that they unearth assumptions about their instructional work. Through this process, librarians may sometimes discover a wider range of possibilities for how they approach that work. For example, individuals or communities of practice that explore the role of teacher agency might consider hidden assumptions about their instructional work that may limit their experiences of agency and thus their capacity to support student learning (for example, the reflex to view faculty instruction requests as non-negotiable, rather than openings for dialogue; or the conclusion that student disengagement must be attributed solely to the librarian's teaching abilities and not to other aspects of students' lives or experiences). Reflections on teacher agency could serve as openings for discussing topics such as how to foster both individual and collective agency and to how to balance the two; the kinds of work and teaching environments and conditions that librarians wish to foster; and strategies for sustaining engaged teaching practices and preventing burnout.

Individual librarians who work in environments that are less supportive of them as agentic teachers may benefit from seeking out supportive colleagues and communities of practice outside their immediate environments, and from engaging with literature and professional development opportunities within and beyond librarianship. Supervisors and managers also have important roles to play in advocating for librarians as experts and equal partners with teaching faculty. (The roles of librarian-faculty and librarian-librarian relationships in librarians' experiences of teacher agency will be explored further in future publications.)

This study's findings, along with the literature that has been explored in this article, could be among the resources used to open such investigations. Such inquiries have the potential to further empower librarians to enact agency in constructive ways that may have previously been out of view, at the same time that they recognize that some environmental factors are beyond their control.

Limitations

While participants' responses to this research study's survey provide insight into their conceptions and experiences of teacher agency, these responses cannot capture the full complexity or participants' thoughts and experiences. Individuals' conceptions and experiences of agency and of teacher agency are complex, varied, and highly contextual.

Among the many factors that influence participants' responses are their understandings of the term *teacher agency*, participants' affective and cognitive states at the time that they completed the survey, and the amount of time that participants had at the time that they completed the survey.

The study participants also may not be representative of instruction librarians as a whole. Those who chose to complete the survey are more likely to have an interest in the concept of teacher agency and may be more likely to dedicate time to professional development, as evidenced in their engagement in the discussion forum through which the survey was promoted. In addition, the large majority of participants had extensive library teaching experience (only two participants had between one and two years of library teaching experience), and over half of the participants indicated that they had other teaching experience. Those who experience more burnout may have been less or more likely to answer the survey, whether because of the time and effort the survey required, or because of interest in expressing frustrations anonymously. The participant demographics also point to a lack of diverse representation, particularly in terms of race/ethnicity and gender. Future research that includes participants with a wider diversity of backgrounds is needed for further investigations into this topic.

Despite these limitations and the impossibility of generalizing experiences of a large group of people, the study's findings and potential implications may prove useful for consideration among librarians as individuals and as collectives, as well as for library science graduate schools and teacher development programs for librarians and other educators.

Conclusion: The Need for An Ecological View of Teacher Agency in Academic Libraries

Both higher education and academic libraries are known to be often competitive environments, in which people sometimes experience conflict over professional territory, status, and limited resources. In recent years, literature on academic librarians' workplace experiences point to structures and conditions that stand in the way of building supportive and inclusive workplaces. (See, for example, research on toxic library leadership and workplaces;[55] the emotional and feminized labor of library instruction work;[56] and low morale experienced by many academic librarians from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups.[57]) Such research further underscores the importance of an ecological approach to teacher agency that acknowledges the complex environments and systems that influence the ways that people interact and experience the workplace, which includes the classroom.

Engaging with this ecological view of agency can certainly occur on an individual level, through personal reflection, inquiry, and experience. However, its power multiplies when this work is collective: that is, when librarians and library administrators look honestly, critically, and reflectively at their work environments and cultures, in an effort to foster and grow supportive environments and experiences for librarians, as well as for students and fellow educators. Engaging with this wider ecological perspective is an essential part of cultivating supportive work and teaching environments in which people have the time, space, and energy for the restorative rest, reflection, and community building that are necessary for sustained engagement in teaching and learning and, even more importantly, for sustained individual and collective well-being.

Appendix

Academic Librarians' Conceptions and Experiences of Teacher Agency: Online Survey

Introductory text:

Agency can be defined as the ability of an individual and/or group to enact power and choice in the surrounding environments. This study explores librarians' experiences of teacher agency: essentially, the capacity or enacting of agency that teaching professionals experience in their teaching roles. This survey will ask about your experiences of agency in the context of your library instruction work. For the purpose of this survey, library instruction work refers to all encompassed activities, including but not limited to scheduling, designing, delivering, assessing, and coordinating instruction/instruction programs.

Questions:

In what ways do you experience agency in your library instruction work? What factors or conditions contribute to your sense of agency? [multi-line text box]

In what ways do you experience lacking agency in your library instruction work? What factors or conditions contribute to this? [multi-line text box]

Do certain strategies, approaches, or ideas help you experience a greater sense of agency? [multi-line text box]

Do certain strategies, approaches, or ideas help you manage experiences of lacking agency? [multi-line text box]

Does the concept of teacher agency evoke for you certain thoughts, ideas, or feelings? [multi-line text box]

For how many years have you been engaged in library-related instructional work? [multiple-choice]

- less than 2 years
- 2–5 years
- 6–10 years
- 11–15 years
- 16–20 years
- more than 20 years

Do you have teaching experience outside of your library instruction work? If so, please describe the nature of this work and the number of years with which you were involved in it.

- yes
     [If yes, text box will appear.]
- no

What best characterizes the type of library in which you work? (Select one.)

● doctoral-granting research university
● regional comprehensive university
● 4-year undergraduate college
● community or technical college
● military college
● Other (Please specify.) _____

What best describes the classification of your current or most recent library position?

● tenured or tenure-track faculty
● non-tenure track faculty
● Professional staff
Adjunct
● Other (Please specify.) _____

In what country do you work?

● United States
● Canada
● United Kingdom
● Other (please specify):
_____

What is your age range? (Select one.)

● 18–29 years
● 30–39 years
● 40–49 years
● 50–59 years
● 60+ years

Q18 With which race/ethnicity do you identify? (Select all that apply.)

☐ African-American or Black
☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
☐ Asian American or Asian
☐ Hispanic or Latinx
☐ Middle Eastern or North African
☐ Multiracial
☐ Pacific Islander
☐ White or Caucasian
☐ Other
☐ Prefer not to answer

With which gender do you identify?

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Trans or transgender
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

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