The Role of Librarian-Faculty Relations in Academic Instruction Librarians' Conceptions and Experiences of Teacher Agency

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abstract: This article reports on findings of an online survey about academic instruction librarians' conceptions and experiences of teacher agency in relation to their instructional work, and, more specifically, on the role of librarian-faculty relationships in these conceptions and experiences. The research study is informed by an ecological model of teacher agency, according to which agency is understood in terms of not only individual choices and actions, but also relationships and interactions among individuals and groups and the environmental conditions in which they interact. This article builds on the findings reported in a previously published article that concentrated on study participants' conceptions of teacher agency and their affective orientations toward the concept.

Introduction

This article reports on findings of an online survey about academic instruction librarians' conceptions and experiences of teacher agency in relation to their instructional work, and, more specifically, on the role of librarian-faculty relationships in these conceptions and experiences. For the purposes of the study, agency was defined as the ability of an individual and/or group to enact power and choice in the surrounding environments. Teacher agency was defined as "the capacity or enacting of agency that teaching professionals experience in their teaching roles."

This article builds on the findings reported in a previously published article that concentrated on study participants' conceptions of teacher agency and their affective orientations toward the concept. In the earlier publication, the author identified two key dimensions of participants' conceptions of teacher agency:

1) views of teacher agency as an individual experience of autonomy (individual agency) and/or views of teacher agency as more relational and interactive and thus potentially as collective agency), and

2) beliefs about the feasibility of librarians' teacher agency, given librarians' roles and positions as educators."[1]

Librarian-faculty relations played a prominent role in participants' views and experiences of their instructional work and their teaching roles, particularly in relation to teacher agency. The author therefore determined that the role of librarian-faculty relations in academic librarians' experiences of teacher agency warranted a more focused analysis. The term librarian-faculty relations describes the qualities and dynamics of librarian-faculty relationships and interactions.

The research study is informed by an ecological model of teaching agency, according to which agency is understood in terms of not only individual choices and actions, but also relationships and interactions among individuals and groups and the environmental conditions in which they interact.[2] The ecological model of teacher agency is described in more detail in the subsequent literature review. The study's key findings include that:

- librarian-faculty relations played a key role in participants' experiences of teacher agency;
- participants' views of their capacity to enact teacher agency were closely related to power relations and to views of teacher agency as individual or collective; and
- fruitful collaboration, which often accompanied a positive sense of agency, were commonly characterized by open communication and shared goals, a valuing of both one's own expertise and that of the faculty member, and relationship and trust building over time

This research may inform how academic instruction librarians understand and approach their instructional roles and collaborations, as they develop their individual teaching practices and build meaningful partnerships with fellow educators. It also points to the importance of supportive work environments in which instruction librarians recognize and value their own expertise—and are encouraged by library colleagues and administrators to draw on that expertise—as they work and collaborate with fellow educators.

recognize and value their own expertise—and are encouraged by library colleagues and administrators to draw on that expertise—as they work and collaborate with fellow educators. More specifically, this research may inform critical reflective practice, through which librarians consider their teaching practices from different angles and through that reflective process develop new understandings or insights related to their professional practice. It can also be applied to the work of library administrators, managers, and leaders of library and information science graduate programs, as they seek to support librarians in their individual and collaborative teaching and foster more supportive workplaces. Potential implications are discussed further in this article's conclusion.

Literature Review

This study was conducted with the understanding that individuals' conceptions of agency and teacher agency vary, and that variations in these conceptions may provide insight into instruction librarians' views of and approaches to their instructional roles and work. As noted above, agency was defined in this study as the ability of an individual and/or group to enact power and choice in the surrounding environments, and teacher agency was defined as the capacity or enacting of agency that teaching professionals experience in their teaching roles. Of relevance to this article are the concepts of individual agency and collective agency. As Martin Hewson explains in his overview of agency in the *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research*, agency can be understood in relation to an individual's goals and actions (individual agency), as well as in relation to the goals and actions of groups (collective agency).[3] Differences between the goals of individuals or groups may present challenges for experiencing agency as individuals or as collectives. At the same time, collective agency is also possible when people share and work for a common cause or goal. Conceptions of individual and collective agency have emerged from extensive debates in fields like sociology about the extent to which social conditions and human experiences are shaped by individuals' actions and the extent to which they are influenced by social structures and environments (often described as a debate about the primacy of agency vs. that of structure).

As mentioned previously, also central to this study is an ecological view of agency. As conceptualized by sociologists Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, agency involves "active respondents within nesting and overlapping systems," rather than autonomous and independent agents.[4] An ecological model of teacher agency, proposed by Mark Priestley, Gert Biesta, and Sarah Robinson, includes the structures, systems, environmental conditions, relationships, and interactions that occur in specific moments and that change over time.[5] This contrasts notions of individual autonomy that tend to overlook or underplay the role of environmental conditions and social structures that have been predominant in much of teacher discourse and professional training.[6] As Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson argue, individualistic conceptions of teacher agency have often been a feature of educational policies, reforms, and mandates that in actuality limit teachers' choices for how they teach. The ecological model that Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson propose instead encourages critical examination of the many factors that influence teaching by both individual teachers and teachers as collectives. An ecological model of teacher agency moreover approaches agency as an ongoing and dynamic process that changes

with time and across contexts. From this ecological view, teacher agency is influenced by a complex range of factors, including people's backgrounds, experiences, views of their teaching roles and identities, relationships, and environments.

Given the focus of this article, this literature review focuses on teacher agency in connection to librarian-faculty relations. For a more extensive discussion of the literature on agency and teacher agency, please see the previously published article "Academic Instruction Librarians' Conceptions of Teacher Agency and Affective Orientations toward the Concept," which includes more background on the concept of agency, as discussed in the fields of sociology, psychology, and education; the relationship between teacher agency, teacher identity, and emotion; and the role of teacher agency in academic instruction librarianship.[7]

The changing roles and work of academic instruction librarians over the decades, which include efforts to integrate information literacy across the curriculum and collaborate more closely with faculty, make questions and experiences of teacher agency especially important for librarians to consider. While it is no longer unusual for librarians to teach their own credit-bearing information literacy courses or to independently design instruction materials such as online learning objects that can be integrated into courses, most academic librarians' pedagogical work still occurs predominantly within the context of courses and curricula that are taught by other instructors (for example, "one-shot" sessions). This can present challenges for librarians in exercising individual agency, even as the potentially collaborative nature of library instruction can, under the right conditions, also open possibilities for shared agency.

A considerable body of library and information literacy literature about librarian-faculty relations addresses issues of power and social structure that are inextricable from agency, even though the concept of agency is usually not an explicit focus of this work. Much of this research examines hierarchical institutional and social structures in which librarians usually occupy a lower social status in relation to faculty. Some of this literature directly connects these unequal power dynamics to the feminized and emotional labor of library instruction work.[8]

Of particular relevance to this study, Heidi Julien and Jen (J.L.) Pecoskie examined librarian-faculty relations through the lens of "symbolic interactionism."[9] As conceptualized by sociologist George Herbert Mead, "symbolic interactionism" describes roles and identities as constructed and evolving through social interaction.[10] Symbolic interactionism shares with the ecological model of teacher agency a recognition of the complex ways that individuals and social groups are influenced by their environments and social structures. Julien and Pecoskie recognized that librarians can, to an extent, play active roles in shaping these social interactions, at the same time that librarians' roles and actions are greatly influenced by larger social environments, structures, and norms.

Often academic librarians and other scholars who write about librarian-faculty relations encourage librarians to challenge the status quo and act in ways that help position themselves as equal partners with faculty. Julien and Pecoskie, recognizing the characteristically hierarchical nature of academia and of faculty-librarian relations, asserted the need for librarians to find ways to negotiate their relationships with faculty, as librarians recognize and draw from their own unique expertise. Through interviews with academic instruction librarians, Julien and Pecoskie found that many librarians

engaged in "deference discourse," which reflected a view of themselves as occupying a less powerful position than the teaching faculty with whom they worked. This deference discourse occurred as a response to the social environment and norms, while it also reinforced librarians' experiences of occupying a lower social status and feeling limited in the degree of choice and power that they had. Yvonne Nalani Meulemans and Allison Carr, also examining librarian-faculty relations, argued more forcefully that true librarian-faculty teaching partnerships will only occur when librarians move away from a service orientation and toward collaborative approaches that center student learning and position librarians as equal partners with faculty.[11]

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More recently, Lyda Fontes McCartin and Raquel Wright-Mair examined academic librarians' deference behavior in interactions with faculty and have considered how academic institutions, academic libraries, and library education have contributed to this long-standing problem. These authors concentrated on how institutions and library education "can help to dismantle the flawed and inherently problematic systems that contribute to deference behavior in academic librarians."[12] McCartin and Wright-Mair advised that educational leaders seek to dismantle divisive institutional cultures and to foster environments in which academic librarians are valued for their expertise, in part by allocating resources and other supports including professional development to librarians. The authors also recommended that library education programs offer more extensive graduate education that helps future librarians better understand the structures and cultures within academia and how librarians in teaching roles can navigate them. McCartin and Wright-Mair discussed less in that publication about how professional development, graduate training, or other advocacy for librarians might be structured.

Some of the library literature on librarian-faculty relations offers more concrete advice to librarians by exploring conditions and strategies that foster meaningful collaboration and equal teaching partnerships. Ruth Ivey, for example, found through interviews with academic instruction librarians that meaningful librarian-faculty partnerships shared four key qualities: a shared and understood goal; mutual respect, tolerance, and trust; competence for the given task; and ongoing communication.[13] This author, Andrea Baer, found through interviews with librarians and collaborative teaching partners from college writing programs that the four qualities that Ivey describes were reflected in these collaborations.[14]

Documents like the Association of College & Research Libraries' "Roles and Strengths of Teaching Librarians" also demonstrate a shift in the profession toward positioning librarians as equal teaching partners.[15] It describes teaching librarians' work as falling into a number of roles: "advocate, coordinator, instructional designer, lifelong learner, leader, teacher, and teaching partner." As the authors wrote, "These seven roles, which can and do overlap, are intended to help librarians situate our individual work experiences within the broader work of academic libraries and within academic communities,

as well as suggest creative new areas for expansion." Teaching librarians' expanded instructional work is evident in an overwhelming amount of literature, especially since the adoption of the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.[16] At the same time that these expanding roles may help to increase librarians' senses of empowerment and teacher agency, they may also result in greater role ambiguity and role stress, both of which have been shown to contribute to burnout.[17]

Previous Findings

The previous article on this study's findings also contributes to the literature of librarian-faculty relations. That analysis demonstrated that most participants conceived of teacher agency in positive terms and saw it as essential to experiencing a sense of choice, meaning, and purpose in their instructional work. Some participants nonetheless questioned the degree to which teacher agency is possible for librarians given their instructional roles and contexts, which were frequently inseparable from their relationships to faculty. Many participants described navigating ambiguous roles when working with faculty, as they sought to balance their own pedagogical approaches and views of students' needs with faculty expectations.

Another key finding from the first article was that participants' conceptions of teacher agency as an individual and/or a collective phenomenon existed on a spectrum. Some participants focused primarily on their individual sense of self and teacher agency, while others expressed views of agency as partly individual but also potentially shared. Individual-centered views of teacher agency often suggested the importance of participants distinguishing their work as distinct and separate from the work of other educators, while collective views reflected the perspective that through collaboration librarians and faculty could sometimes share agency.

All participants acknowledged that their relationships with others, including fellow librarians and teaching faculty, played important roles in their experiences of agency. Participants who expressed ambivalence about the feasibility or value of librarians' teacher agency appeared to view teacher agency as a primarily individual phenomenon, rather than as something that was shared to some extent with other educators.

While a notable number of participants described this instructional work as primarily an individual endeavor, the majority indicated that their pedagogical work occurred largely in collaboration with others. All participants acknowledged that their relationships with others, including fellow librarians and teaching faculty, played important roles in their experiences of agency. Participants who expressed ambivalence about the feasibility or value of librarians' teacher agency appeared to view teacher agency as a primarily individual phenomenon, rather than as something that was shared to some extent with other educators.

In short, many participants' relationships and interactions with faculty were central to their perspectives and experiences of teacher agency. In this article, the researcher examines more closely the role of librarian-faculty relations in librarians' conceptions and experiences of teacher agency and related factors that contributed to experiences of enacting teacher agency or feeling hindered in one's ability to enact teacher agency.

Methods

This study was intended to identify both themes and variations in participants' conceptions and experiences of teacher agency. This required a sample size that allowed for a representation of many individuals' experiences, as well as close analysis of individual experiences. 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 purposes of the study, library instruction work refers to all encompassed activities, including but not limited to scheduling, designing, delivering, assessing, and coordinating instruction or instruction programs.

The survey consisted of five open-ended questions about participants' experiences of agency, including factors and conditions that contribute to or detract from a sense of teacher agency; strategies, approaches, and ideas that help individuals to experience greater teacher agency; and thoughts, ideas, and feelings that the concept of teacher agency evokes. As noted previously, 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 examined participants' descriptions of their internal thoughts and experiences and 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 including the study purpose; protocol for collecting, analyzing, and retaining data; and 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 an academic librarian with at least one year of professional experience providing instructional services in an academic library setting. If they answered in the affirmative to both questions, they were prompted to consent to study participation. Only those respondents who gave consent were able to complete the survey.

The survey began with an explanation of the term agency, as it was used in the context of the study. 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).

Table 1.
Survey Questions

1. In what ways do you experience agency in your library instruction work? What factors or conditions contribute to your sense of agency?

2. In what ways do you experience lacking agency in your library instruction work? What factors or conditions contribute to this?

3. Do certain strategies, approaches, or ideas help you experience a greater sense of agency?

4. Do certain strategies, approaches, or ideas help you manage experiences of lacking agency?

5. Does the concept of teacher agency evoke for you certain thoughts, ideas, or feelings?

The survey concluded with a series of multiple-choice questions about their institutional contexts, teaching experience, and demographics. (See Appendix for the complete survey.)

This was a grounded theory study, through which themes emerged from the data analysis and were used to generate key findings. Survey responses were analyzed for variations and themes through open coding. Open coding involves identifying emergent themes during data analysis and determining and refining codes that convey those themes through multiple iterations of data analysis.

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 or shared experience; the roles of collaboration and 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). As mentioned previously, this article focuses on the role of faculty-librarian relations in participants' experiences of teacher agency.

Findings

This section begins with a summary of the study participants' demographics. Thereafter, the author presents the key findings about the role of librarian-faculty relations in participants' conceptions and experiences of teacher agency.

Participant Demographics

At the end of the survey, participants were asked to provide information about their institution type, the job classification of their current or most recent position, the country in which they worked, age, race or ethnicity, gender, years of experience in library instruction, and other teaching experience. Table 2 presents these demographics. As is discussed later in the Limitations section, there was a lack of diversity in the study

Table 2.
Participant Demographics*

Institution type
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%

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%

*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.

population, particularly in terms of race or 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.

Key Findings

The central findings of this study can be summarized as follows:

1. Librarian-faculty relations played a key role in participants' experiences of teacher agency. At times relationships with faculty fostered librarians' experiences of teacher agency; at other times these hindered a sense of teacher agency.

2. Power dynamics influence views of agency as individual and/or collective. Participants' views of their capacity to enact teacher agency had an important relationship to two main factors: the perceived degree of hierarchy or egalitarianism between librarians and faculty and views of teacher agency as centered on autonomous action (individual agency) or as potentially involving collaboration and shared agency. Those who described more egalitarian faculty-librarian relationships were more likely to see potential for agency to be shared between librarians and faculty, rather than viewing agency as primarily enacted through individual autonomy.

3. Several conditions foster a positive sense of agency and fruitful collaboration, including: open communication and shared goals, valuing both one's own expertise and that of the faculty member, and relationship and trust-building over time. Conversely, the absence of such qualities appeared to hinder participants' senses of teacher agency and was often a source of participant frustration.

The Centrality of Librarian-Faculty Relations in Fostering or Hindering Teacher Agency

Interpersonal relationships and interactions played an important role in virtually all participants' experiences of teacher agency, and librarian-faculty interactions were the most frequently mentioned type of interpersonal exchanges. Within the theme of interpersonal and professional relationships, 82.2 percent of participants referred to their connections to faculty, often at multiple times. By comparison, librarian-librarian relationships were mentioned by 45.2 percent of participants, and librarian-student relationships were mentioned by 38.4 percent of participants.

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Almost all participants pointed to ways that their experiences of teacher agency were influenced by their relationships with faculty, sometimes in frustrating ways and sometimes in useful ones. 74.0 percent of participants provided enough description of their relationships with faculty to enable

the researcher to assess whether participants' work with faculty was considered overall positive, overall negative, or ambivalent (having mixed feelings). Among these 54 participants, 40.7 percent described overall positive relationships with faculty, 24.1 percent described overall negative relationships with faculty, and 35.2 percent expressed mixed experiences that varied considerably across situations. Each of those who described their interactions with faculty at some point referred to how they partner or collaborate with faculty in some way.

Whether participants viewed their interactions with faculty in overall positive, negative, or ambivalent terms is related but not identical to whether they viewed those relationships as enabling or hindering their own teacher agency, as teacher agency is only one aspect of teaching. That said, those with positive views of these interactions usually described positive experiences of enacting teacher agency.

Power Relations and Views of Agency as Individual and/or Collective

Hierarchical relationships, in which librarians felt that they held less status or power, were central to experiences of teacher agency being constrained, while more equal partnerships with faculty corresponded to more positive experiences of teacher agency. Some participants described having the greatest teacher agency when they were able to teach with relative autonomy. Others described experiencing greater agency because of collaboration and negotiation with faculty. Those who described more egalitarian faculty-librarian relationships were more likely to see potential for agency to be shared between librarians and faculty, rather than viewing agency as primarily enacted through individual autonomy.

Participants' descriptions of the extent to which their teaching was self-directed (individual agency), by faculty's expectations or preferences (a lack of a participant's individual agency), or by collaborative librarian-faculty interactions (collective agency) varied. Some participants indicated that their sense of teacher agency depended on the degree to which they could teach autonomously and the degree to which faculty controlled their teaching. This dynamic reflected a power imbalance, in which faculty appeared to hold a higher social position. Others suggested that they experienced more teacher agency when they collaborated with faculty. Collaborative relationships were often described as more egalitarian in nature, though power differentials were often still evident. In contrast, when librarians described more equal partnerships, they were more likely to have positive experiences of teacher agency and to see more potential for collective agency through collaboration. As is discussed in more detail later, the potential to simultaneously experience teacher agency and to engage with faculty appeared possible under certain conditions that enabled meaningful collaboration.

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Teacher agency enabled by individual autonomy

Many participants conceived of teacher agency in terms of individual autonomy, as they described either having or lacking the ability to act independently. Reflecting on teaching in support of faculty's classes, some participants perceived having a considerable amount of teacher agency because they exercised autonomy. As one individual stated, "I am allowed to teach in any way I want, faculty whose classes I enter rarely control what I do unless it comes to assigning work, the design and delivery is up to me." Another participant asserted their independence when teaching one-shot sessions: "I see the classroom as mine when I'm teaching; I'm not playing second fiddle to the instructor. That helps me have the sense of control that I need to do what's needed." Reflecting that this statement might be perceived negatively, this individual added, "When I type that out it sounds a bit harsh, but I do think it's important that librarians who teach see themselves as authorities and not be overshadowed by the faculty member." Another participant indicated that teaching competently and not making mistakes allowed one more autonomy: "the key is to not screw up, not do stupid things, and outperform anyone's expectations. If you do that, no one argues with you and your position becomes impregnable over time." For all these participants, a sense of autonomy involved having trust and confidence in their own expertise and abilities.

Other participants described teacher agency as involving some degree of autonomy, at the same time that they sought input and instructional context from faculty. As one individual stated, "I experience agency in the autonomy I have planning classes. I ask professors for a copy of their research assignment and what goals they have for the session, then I plan activities that I think will be most helpful to students." This librarian experienced agency when teaching "because I am the one leading class." For these participants, teacher agency was perceived as possible because they could exercise relative autonomy in their teaching.

While the participants quoted above reflected on having individual autonomy in positive terms, one participant who conceived of agency as individual autonomy, in contrast, described that experience as frustrating and overwhelming because they carried the primary responsibility in their library for teaching and supporting information literacy education at their institution. They reflected that they had "almost complete agency" in teaching "because there is no cohesive or comprehensive instruction program currently at my library." As a result, "teacher agency makes me feel overwhelmed, sad from lack of in-house support, and almost burnt-out." As was reported in the first article on this study, this participant was the sole individual who did not describe the concept of agency in positive terms. Their unfavorable view of agency appeared to be linked to an understanding of teaching as autonomous work that might not be supported by an institution, a work environment, or work relationships.

On the flip side of experiencing agency through individual autonomy were experiences of lacking agency when participants were unable to act independently. Many participants described their teacher agency as limited by faculty expectations or preferences. Some participants ascribed these limitations to a social hierarchy in which librarians possessed less power. As one individual shared, "We [librarians] have issues of being second class citizens as 'non-teaching' faculty, despite the fact that we teach - quite a

bit." Another participant implied that this unequal status existed when they stated, "I am at the mercy of the faculty's schedule."

In instances in which a faculty member had specific expectations about how library instruction should be done, many participants who described agency in terms of individual autonomy indicated that their ability to negotiate with faculty was limited. Such statements reflect a perceived power imbalance, in which faculty have greater authority and librarians have limited choice and often are dependent upon faculty's willingness to have librarians teach. One participant reflected, "I feel librarians only have as much agency as the faculty member allows them to have." This person viewed faculty's power lying largely in the fact that librarians needed to maintain these relationships in order to continue working with students: "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

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being utilized (and ultimately help the students - that's why we're all here, after all), it boils down to our having to just be okay with that uncertainty of agency." Another participant described the pressure they felt to teach in a way that faculty liked, since otherwise faculty would not ask them to teach a class again. One librarian indicated that they experienced the greatest agency "when an instructor tells me that I can teach whatever I'd like…but that is not usually the case." Another individual indicated that, as someone relatively new to library instruction, they were learning to assess the degrees to which they could negotiate with faculty about teaching: "[…] the more classes I teach, the better my sense is of what is nonnegotiable to include in a session and what depends on the professor, etc." Comments like this indicate that many participants were cognizant of hierarchical structures and relationships that heavily influenced their experiences of having or lacking teacher agency. Though these participants reported experiencing teacher agency when working relatively autonomously, autonomy depended partly on factors that were outside their control.

Frequently a lack of the librarian's agency appeared to come at the expense of student learning, as faculty expectations for a class session sometimes differed from study participants' views of what would be pedagogically useful. Again, many participants did not always feel they could question or deny faculty preferences. As one librarian commented, "If a faculty member requests something I don't think is the best choice, I feel somewhat constrained to go along with their wishes." Another participant shared, "Many faculty members still seem to want the same old 'library lesson' which often focuses on simply how to use a database, 'the library tour,' finding [information,] and they don't always understand that we need to teach the thinking part that goes hand-in-hand with the searching skills." Another individual reflected, "Sometimes I am asked to cover a lot of content but then given a very limited amount of time. In these cases, I essentially become the talking head plus demo without being able to have much student interaction." For some of these individuals, strategies for negotiating with faculty either did not seem feasible or were limited. One person commented, "I honestly do not know how best to retain agency in the classroom, other than to plan for interruptions and have a back-up plan for covering content that we do not get to in class."

Teacher agency fostered by librarian-faculty relations

While social hierarchies and interpersonal relationships played key roles in all participants' experiences, those who described teacher agency as both individual and collective more often pointed to the potential for experiencing agency through collaboration, even if this potential was not always realized. Some individuals even noted that they experienced greater teacher agency when working collaboratively with faculty. These individuals often expressed a fair degree of confidence and trust in their own expertise, which they frequently had developed over time and with the accumulation of experience. As one participant reflected, "I experience agency most when I'm given enough background information (syllabus, assignment sheets, or a conversation with the instructor) to know how to best connect with students." This individual noted that they "work with teaching faculty who are generally collaborative or very open to me designing information literacy and research sessions according to learning objectives of their class." Another participant described experiencing agency when "[m]eeting with faculty and discussing the problems they see in class, in assignments and then collaborating on how we can work together to fix these problems."

While many participants described valuable collaborative relationships with faculty, participants' responses also reflect that even positive partnerships can involve challenges, including limits on a sense of individual agency. Some participants who described experiencing greater agency through collaboration nonetheless felt constrained at times by faculty expectations. These responses reflect the tension between teaching based on one's own preferences and teaching according to faculty's preferences. Here again many participants could see more potential for experiencing teacher agency when engaged in negotiation and collaboration. One individual first stated that they felt they had agency "when I work with professors who trust my expertise and let me use my best judgment regarding what the students need to know." However, they later described ways that their teaching choices were constrained because of faculty's wishes: "Sometimes I'm forced to teach what they [faculty] want (even if I think I have a better idea) just to keep them happy and maintain their trust in the library. I think a lot of times our librarians and staff defer to them just so they'll keep using our services and requesting instruction." The statement "just so they'll keep using our services and requesting instruction" implies a more transactional relationship, in which instruction lacks a larger purpose but perhaps serves other goals, such as increasing library statistics for user services that this participant found less fulfilling.

The desire to offer something of value through collaborative teaching, and the potential to be constrained by a lack of meaningful collaboration, is echoed in another participant's response: "I feel I have more agency when the faculty member collaborates fully with me, giving me access to class materials that help me understand the assignments students will be working on and therefore what skills are most important." On the other hand, they also found that, "If a faculty member does not contribute to designing the library session, then I do the best I can, but I don't expect the greatest success." On one hand, this individual experienced more agency when collaborating more closely with a faculty member. On the other, they indicated that their agency was sometimes limited by faculty requests that did not align with their own pedagogical preferences.

Varied experiences of librarian-faculty relations

As many of the participant quotes reflect, relationships with faculty were not uniform. Participants often described the degree of their teacher agency varying, based on the faculty member with whom they were working. One librarian described their own and their fellow librarians' teacher agency as "tied to the individual instructor's willingness to work with us [librarians]." They continued, "We have some instructors who will listen to our ideas and allow us freedom to design our instructions sessions based on the needs of the class. We have others who are very specific about what they want." This participant also remarked that librarians' teacher agency is shaped largely by how the relationship with individual instructors develops over time. Another individual noted that they experienced more teacher agency when working with faculty who had less specific expectations about library instruction. In those cases, "I'm the one who suggests what to focus on and it's all up to me in deciding how to teach the concepts." Nonetheless, this person explained that "ultimately, I'm always in some way answerable in some way to the professor." Another participant observed experiencing more agency when the faculty member gave them limited direction: when asked "to present to their class 'on the library,'" they felt free to choose learning content for a class. Conversely, they experienced a lack of agency when the faculty member asked that they focus on a specific topic, which meant that "I'm not allowed to make the decision of what would be best for the students on their own." This individual believed that they would experience greater agency if they were able to teach their own credit course: "It [teacher agency] feels like a concept I cannot fully attain because of the constraint of not being able to teach a for credit course on information literacy." For this participant, their sense of teacher agency was greatly limited by the need to work with the instructor of record.

As many of the participant sentiments reflect, it was often challenging for many participants to negotiate between their own pedagogical preferences and those of the faculty member. As previously noted, the difficulty comes largely from a power imbalance, as the faculty member is usually the instructor of record and librarians are frequently perceived as occupying a lower social status.

Librarians can often take actions that foster the conditions needed for meaningful collaboration. At the same time, experiences of teacher agency are influenced by external factors beyond any one individual's control. The specific librarian-faculty relationship, the teaching context, and the institutional culture and environment all influence librarians' varied experiences of teacher agency.

The notable influence of institutional context and environment on experiences of teacher agency are further reflected in some participants' comments about their experiences of teacher agency having varied at different institutions. One respondent remarked that at their current institution "librarians are very much considered equal

> **Librarians can often take actions that foster the conditions needed for meaningful collaboration.**
> **At the same time, experiences of teacher agency are influenced by external factors beyond any one individual's control.**

peers to faculty, by both the majority of the faculty as well as the administration." However, they had "worked in many academic institutions where that is definitely NOT the case" and believed that in most academic institutions "librarians are considered to be at least one tier below the faculty, which results in lower teacher agency." Another participant similarly emphasized the role of environment and culture on experiences of teacher agency, as they described how their workplace has influenced their relationship to teacher agency: "I've been lucky/privileged to work for a department that allows us a lot of agency. I think if that weren't true, I would have a really difficult time with that." These comments underscore that experiences of agency can be experienced at both the individual and the collective levels, and that there is a dynamic and multidirectional relationship between environment and the individuals and groups that interact with it.

Qualities and Conditions that Fostered Fruitful Collaboration

In this study, several qualities of librarian-faculty relations stood out as characteristic of positive librarian-faculty relations and an overall a sense of agency when working with faculty:

- open communication and shared goals,
- the librarian's confidence in and valuing of their own expertise,
- the librarian's and faculty member's mutual valuing of one another's expertise, and
- relationship and trust building over time.

Conversely, the absence of such qualities tended to hinder participants' sense of teacher agency and was often a source of participant frustration. These qualities of fruitful collaboration are also supported by Ivey's research on meaningful librarian-faculty partnerships.[18] These interrelated characteristics of effective partnerships are evident in the following participant comment, which begins with an emphasis on shared goals and communication:

> Explaining my plan and pedagogy to instructors works for both parties (discipline instructor and library faculty) to see a common goal and establish the worth of the librarian's approach to a lesson. In some cases, the discipline faculty have excellent ideas that are worth using, so it truly can be a strong partnership in which the students ultimately benefit. Clear communication is key, i.e., knowing what the discipline instructor's goals are for an information literacy session and the librarian's communication of how much can realistically be accomplished within a given period of time. I experience more agency when I feel my experience is being respected.

"The biggest strategy [for fostering teacher agency] is taking a collaborative approach to instruction. Looking at the instruction process as a collaborative effort helps to increase my agency, since, as the instruction librarian, I'm the expert on information literacy and can offer that expertise to the conversation as well as tailor it to meet specific needs."

As both the librarian and the faculty member brought something unique to working together with a shared goal, teacher agency in this context appeared to be at once individual and shared.

Another participant reflected on how collaboration fostered agency, while they emphasized trust in their own expertise. "The biggest strategy [for fostering teacher agency] is taking a collaborative approach to instruction. Looking at the instruction process as a collaborative effort helps to increase my agency, since, as the instruction librarian, I'm the expert on information literacy and can offer that expertise to the conversation as well as tailor it to meet specific needs."

Librarian confidence in and valuing of one's own expertise

Effective communication and the establishment of shared goals were often accompanied by librarians' confidence in their own expertise, as well as librarians and faculty's mutual appreciation of one another's unique and complementary knowledge and skills. Many participants reported having built more confidence in their abilities over time and with accumulated experience. Confidence and trust in one's own expertise often manifested in participants applying pedagogical approaches and philosophies that aligned with their understandings of effective teaching and—in the context of one-shot sessions and librarian-faculty collaborations—feeling well positioned to communicate and negotiate with teaching faculty in ways that aligned with their teaching approaches and philosophies.

Often this confidence was described as having grown with experience and time. As one participant reflected, "I have become better at negotiating with faculty as I've aged. I know what words, phrases, and examples will be meaningful to them when I'm talking about, for example, what content to cover and how much time I need." Other participants shared a similar view that, with accumulated experience, they had become more comfortable communicating with faculty in the context of course-integrated instruction and thus had developed a greater sense of agency. As one individual remarked, "I equate agency with confidence. I am much more confident and comfortable in my teaching role than I was as an early career library instructor. And as a result, I feel a strong sense of agency." Another participant shared their perspective that "the longer a librarian is in place, the more they are doing projects that are self-directed. It is unrealistic to expect a just-graduated librarian in their first job to jump into full agency."

Participants at different stages in their library careers affirmed this view when reflecting on their own teacher development. As mentioned previously, one individual commented, "I'm fairly new to instruction so the more classes I teach, the better my sense is of what is nonnegotiable to include in a session and what depends on the professor, etc." Another participant reflected, "My sense of agency has taken time to develop. If I look back when I started as a librarian, I definitely felt that I didn't have as much agency as I do now." They indicated that professional development and self-directed learning about teaching helped them grow their teaching confidence and feel able, if questioned about their teaching approaches, to "intelligently defend them."

While accumulated experience tended to contribute to a greater sense of confidence and agency, this shift was not always linear. One participant noted that when they began

teaching in a different modality (using Zoom for one-shot library sessions), their sense of agency decreased. In this instance, having less experience with a particular teaching approach may have decreased the participant's sense of agency, although confidence and comfort level with negotiating with faculty had generally increased with time.

Mutual valuing of expertise and trust and relationship building over time

It wasn't simply one's own sense of confidence and trust in their own expertise that influenced individuals' experiences of teacher agency: others' recognition and appreciation of that expertise and participants' perceived status at their institutions also played important roles. In addition, relationships and institutional position likely influenced many participants' own confidence. As one individual commented, "I am very grateful for faculty status because it allows other faculty to see me as a colleague. It allows me some freedom to apply professional skills. Greater teacher agency leads to greater professional confidence and pride in my teaching work." Another participant connected their capacity to act on their own expertise at least in part to their tenured status. They related "[e]stablishing my own areas of expertise" and "being willing to hold my ground on ideas" to "knowing that there won't be negative repercussions (I do have tenure)." As these quotes reflect, confidence and trust in one's own expertise often had important relational and structural components. A sense of mutual appreciation also enabled constructive collaboration. As another participant stated, "Collaborating with disciplinary faculty - they greatly appreciate my ideas and approaches, and we generate lots of things together."

Valuing one's own expertise, in addition to perceived mutual appreciation of expertise between the librarian and the faculty member, contributed positively to trust and relationship building, as well as to a sense of teacher agency. As one individual noted, "Once they've [a faculty member] gotten to know me and have developed confidence in my expertise and teaching ability, I find that they give me a lot more leeway about what to cover in a class and how." The kind of relationship that this participant described takes time to develop, as is reflected in this individual's accompanying statement, "I find that I have the most agency when I already have an established relationship with a given faculty member."

Many participants commented on the time required to develop relationships with faculty and, relatedly, to experience librarian-faculty collaboration as agentic. Building trust was vital to these kinds of relationships. As one participant stated, "I think trust is the most important factor in all this." Another participant commented, "Building relationships with faculty members is really key. If they [faculty] trust you in the classroom they are more willing to collaborate and try something new." Another individual noted that "Those to whom I report, and most of the faculty with whom I work, have trust in my work, and they provide a considerable amount of freedom for me to teach in ways I believe are best in any given circumstance."

Participants frequently described such trust as developing over time. One participant emphasized "[b]eing patient and building trust over time." Another commented that they have become trusted to make decisions and are supported in those decisions. They attributed the trust placed in them in part to their community and in part to their "work

over time" in demonstrating their ability to teach effectively. The perception of having gained others' trust by doing good work was echoed in another participant's reflection, "[S]imply doing a good job has helped a lot - I've proven that my instruction program is helping students and that gives me a lot more power and freedom." Faculty for whom they had taught before were "willing to listen when I say, 'hey I have an idea for an activity' or 'I think this would be a good approach to try for the lesson this semester.'"

As the comments above reflect, participants described trust primarily in terms of gaining faculty's trust. This dynamic, in which librarians often did not consider what degree of trust they had in faculty, again reflects the unequal power that is often characteristic of faculty-librarian relations. However, some participants did describe trust in reciprocal terms.

Experiencing mutual trust with faculty often went hand in hand with participants' confidence and trust in their own expertise. One individual expressed such appreciation of reciprocal trust while referencing a scholarly article that argues for equitable librarian-faculty teaching partnerships: "I have built up trust with the instructors I work with, I trust my own expertise (along the lines of [the scholarly article] 'Not at your service: building genuine faculty-librarian partnerships,' Meulemans & Carr 2013)." Another librarian similarly described trust in more reciprocal terms, as they described their own trust in faculty: "I also do trust in the expertise of my faculty and try not to look down on them as not 'getting' information literacy or whatever." This individual simultaneously recognized the value of

> **Experiencing mutual trust with faculty often went hand in hand with participants' confidence and trust in their own expertise.**

what they offered to students and the challenges that faculty face in integrating information literacy into teaching: "I know that they [faculty] have lots of important things to teach, and a single class can't fit in everything, and I'm grateful for the time they do give me, and make the most of what I have." This consideration of both librarians' and faculty's teaching challenges aligns with the reciprocal and more egalitarian relationships that authors like Meulemans and Carr and Ivey characterize as fostering meaningful librarian-faculty partnerships.[19]

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study, including that the study participants may not be representative of instruction librarians as a collective. Those who completed the survey may be more likely to have an interest in the research topic or to have more time to dedicate to professional reading or professional development, given that the survey was advertised through ACRL-hosted professional online discussion forums. Moreover, most participants had extensive library teaching experience (just two participants reported one to two years of library teaching experience), and over half of those surveyed had other teaching experience. Additional factors that are likely to have influenced participants' responses include their understandings of the term teacher agency, their emotional and mental states when completing the survey, and the amount of time that they had to

complete the survey. As noted previously, the participant demographics also reflect a lack of diversity, particularly in terms of race or ethnicity and gender. Future research should seek to reach librarians with a wider range of backgrounds and experiences.

The depth of this investigation is also limited by the initial purpose of the research study: to identify key aspects of academic librarians' teaching that relate to teacher agency, rather than to focus from the outset on a more focused dimension of the broader issue, such as librarian-faculty relations. The survey questions therefore did not explicitly reference relationships to faculty.

Research that focuses specifically on librarian-faculty relationships and interactions would enable a deeper investigation into librarians' conceptions and experiences of teacher agency as an individual and/or shared phenomenon, and into the factors and conditions that foster or inhibit a positive sense of individual or shared agency. Surveys, interviews, or focus groups with questions specifically about librarian-faculty relationships and interactions are possible approaches to such research. Other types of research such as observational studies or analysis of reflective journals could provide different angles through which to examine the conceptions and experiences of teacher agency as an individual and/or shared phenomenon. Prior research on faculty's experiences of collaboration with librarians could also provide a foundation for further investigating faculty's conceptions and experiences of teacher agency as an individual or shared phenomenon. Considering the experiences of both librarians and faculty could further inform understandings of and approaches to collaborative teaching partnerships.

Conclusion

This study was based on an ecological model of teacher agency, according to which agency is understood in terms of not only individual choices and actions, but also relationships and interactions among individuals and groups who are influenced in part by their social and structural environments. Because librarians' instructional work tends to be highly collaborative, with most academic librarians teaching in support of courses taught by other instructors at least some of the time, it is perhaps unsurprising that both opportunities for and obstacles to exercising teacher agency are deeply affected by librarians' relationships to fellow educators. This study suggests that there is a dynamic relationship between librarians' views and experiences of teacher agency as individual or as potentially collective and librarian-faculty relations. Social structures, perceptions of power, communication, and often negotiation, are central to these relationships.

This study, along with much of the previously mentioned research on librarian-faculty relations, also shows that there are important affective dimensions to librarian-faculty relations and, more specifically, to librarians' experiences of teacher agency when working with faculty. The perceived degree of hierarchy or egalitarianism between librarians and faculty plays a significant role in librarians' experiences of teacher agency. These social and power relations vary and change across contexts and can be attributed to a complex constellation of factors. They are also closely connected to librarians' experiences of their teaching roles, which, as is discussed in the literature review and in Julien and Pecoskie's work, can be understood in part through the lens of "symbolic interactionism," according to which roles and identities as constructed and evolving through social interaction.[20]

For librarians who frequently teach in collaboration with faculty, an ecological view of teacher agency and investigation into the role of librarian-faculty relations in teaching can be a generative part of critical reflective practice. Educator Stephen Brookfield, who has written extensively about critical reflective practice, describes it as "a process of inquiry involving practitioners in trying to discover, and research, the assumptions that frame how they work."[21] Through critical reflective practice, Brookfield explains, educators consider teaching and learning from different lenses, including those of students, colleagues, research, and theory. In so doing, educators can gain new insights into teaching and learning and may discover new possibilities for understanding or approaching pedagogy.

Moreover, the process of investigating assumptions and viewing teaching through different lenses may help librarians to disrupt a common tendency in instruction librarianship toward self-blame and imposter syndrome that hinders both engaged teaching and overall well-being.[22] While engaging in critically reflective practice can certainly be done individually, it is most powerful when the effect is collective. As Brookfield writes, "Although critical reflection often begins alone, it is ultimately a collective endeavor. We need colleagues to help us know what our assumptions are and to help us change the structures of power so that democratic actions and values are rewarded, both within and outside our institutions."[23]

Through investigating assumptions about teaching, including about the roles and relationships of librarians and teaching faculty, librarians may sometimes discover or develop new approaches to (individual or collaborative) teaching. Of particular relevance to this study, these investigations into hidden assumptions may include exploration of common qualities and conditions that foster a positive sense of agency and meaningful librarian-faculty partnerships. As was found in both this study and in Ivey's research, such qualities include establishing shared goals, ongoing communication (which often involves negotiation), mutual valuing of expertise, librarians' confidence in and valuing of their own expertise, and trust building over time.[24]

For those interested in applying critically reflective practice to exploring librarian-faculty relations, library literature on this topic can be one catalyst for individual or group reflection, and potentially for individual or group action. Some of the work introduced in this article's literature review that might be particularly well suited to this purpose are Meulemann and Carr's "Not at Your Service: Building Genuine Faculty-Librarian Partnerships," Julien and Pecoskie's "Librarians' Experiences of the Teaching Role: Grounded in Campus Relations," and Ellie Collier's "Stepping on Toes: The Delicate Art of Talking to Faculty about Questionable Assignments," and of course Ruth Ivey's "Information Literacy: How Do Librarians and Academics Work in Partnership to Deliver Effective Learning Programs?"[25] Such explorations may be especially generative for librarians who feel constrained by teaching that involves course-integrated library instruction in which the librarian is not the instructor of record.

Communities of practice, in which librarians feel mutually supported to reflect on their unique and shared teaching experiences and to examine those experiences through different lenses, can be powerful ways to foster reflective practice. Similarly, other professional and peer support, such as informal or formal mentoring and professional development opportunities, can provide varied opportunities for librarians to develop their individual and collective approaches to teaching.

While this article has focused primarily on the work and experiences of instruction librarians, an ecological view of teacher agency and related research on librarian-faculty relations can also inform the work of librarians in supervisory or administrative roles, as well as curricular and pedagogical approaches to graduate library education programs. As McCartin and Wright-Mair argue, hierarchical structures and practices in academia and in academic libraries need to be challenged not only by librarians, but also by educational institutions and those in positions of authority and power, in order to foster more widescale and lasting changes that help position librarians as valued and equal teaching partners at their institutions.[26] Educational and library leaders and administrators can work to develop, promote, and sustain institutional structures, policies, and messaging that position librarians as valued teaching partners within the library, at their institutions, and in higher education more broadly.

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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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