

Every Appearance of Common Sense? Applying Pierre Bourdieu's "Sociological Gaze" to the Profession of Librarianship

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article utilise une résolution de l'ALA de 2016 et les arguments qui en résultaient lancés pour et contre sur un forum public de l'ALA comme point de départ pour analyser la profession de bibliothécaire dans une perspective éclairée par les théories de Pierre Bourdieu. En nous appuyant sur des textes en sociologie, études organisationnelles et en bibliothéconomie, je soutiens que le concept de profession est une forme de capital symbolique oeuvrant à travers multiples domaines de pouvoir. Analyser la bibliothéconomie à travers ce cadre nous permet d'identifier les luttes internes et externes menées pour le contrôle du capital symbolique dans les champs de pouvoir, et de nous demander pourquoi nous valorisons autant « la profession ». Au sein de la profession, les professionnel.le.s, les para-professionnel.le.s et les gestionnaires tentent constamment de consolider ou d'acquérir du capital symbolique supplémentaire. De l'extérieur, plusieurs professions peinent à maintenir leur capital symbolique les unes par rapport aux autres ; certaines professions, tels la médecine et le droit, ont été plus habiles à consacrer du capital culturel, social et économique en capital symbolique. En fin de compte, cette approche montre clairement que le concept de « profession » n'est ni absolu ni neutre ; il s'agit d'un système de classification socioculturelle construit et profondément historique qui s'est incorporé à notre compréhension collective de la valorisation du travail. Ultimement, renforcer le soutien à la notion de « profession » n'est peut-être pas la ligne la plus prudente pour les bibliothécaires à l'avenir ; en fait, je suggérerai que soutenir sans critique la « profession » va à l'encontre des principes philosophiques que les bibliothécaires sont censé.e.s défendre.

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Every Appearance of Common Sense?: Applying Pierre Bourdieu’s “Sociological Gaze” to the Profession of Librarianship

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ABSTRACT

This paper utilizes an ALA resolution from 2016 and the resulting arguments on an ALA public forum to analyze the profession of librarianship from a perspective informed by Pierre Bourdieu’s theories. Drawing on scholarship from sociology, organizational studies, and LIS, I argue that the concept of a profession is a form of symbolic capital working within multiple fields of power. Analyzing librarianship with this framework enables us to identify the internal and external battles being waged over control of symbolic capital within fields of power, and ask why we value the profession to such a degree. Within the profession, professionals, para-professionals, and managers are constantly attempting to shore up or acquire additional symbolic capital. Externally, professions are struggling to maintain their symbolic capital in relation to each other; some professions, like medicine and law, have been more adept at consecrating cultural, social and economic capital into symbolic capital. Ultimately, this approach makes clear that the concept of a profession is neither absolute nor neutral; it is a constructed, deeply historical socio-cultural classification system that has been embedded into our collective understanding of how labour is valued. Ultimately, bolstering support behind the notion of a profession might not be the most prudent course of action for librarians going forward; in fact, I’ll suggest that uncritically supporting the profession goes against the philosophical tenets that librarians are purported to uphold.

Keywords: ALA · Bourdieu · profession · professionalization · sociology

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article utilise une résolution de l’ALA de 2016 et les arguments qui en résultaient lancés pour et contre sur un forum public de l’ALA comme point de départ pour analyser la profession de bibliothécaire dans une perspective éclairée par les théories de Pierre Bourdieu. En nous appuyant sur des textes en sociologie, études organisationnelles et en bibliothéconomie, je soutiens que le concept de profession est une forme de capital symbolique oeuvrant à travers multiples domaines de pouvoir. Analyser la bibliothéconomie à travers ce cadre nous permet d’identifier les luttes internes et externes menées pour le contrôle du capital symbolique dans les champs de pouvoir, et

de nous demander pourquoi nous valorisons autant « la profession ». Au sein de la profession, les professionnel.le.s, les para-professionnel.le.s et les gestionnaires tentent constamment de consolider ou d'acquérir du capital symbolique supplémentaire. De l'extérieur, plusieurs professions peinent à maintenir leur capital symbolique les unes par rapport aux autres ; certaines professions, tels la médecine et le droit, ont été plus habiles à consacrer du capital culturel, social et économique en capital symbolique. En fin de compte, cette approche montre clairement que le concept de « profession » n'est ni absolu ni neutre ; il s'agit d'un système de classification socioculturelle construit et profondément historique qui s'est incorporé à notre compréhension collective de la valorisation du travail. Ultimement, renforcer le soutien à la notion de « profession » n'est peut-être pas la ligne la plus prudente pour les bibliothécaires à l'avenir ; en fait, je suggérerai que soutenir sans critique la « profession » va à l'encontre des principes philosophiques que les bibliothécaires sont censé.e.s défendre.

Mots-clés : ALA · Bourdieu · profession · professionnalisation · sociologie

IN late 2016, Keith Fiels, the Executive Director of the American Library Association (ALA), announced his retirement. Subsequently, the ALA Board of Directors began a measured process of selecting Fiels's replacement. Part of this process involved a reassessment of the requirements for the position of the Executive Director (ED), including such criteria as education, relevant experience, and required accreditations. On 16 December 2016, Peter Hepburn, on behalf of the ALA Executive, released to the public a draft of a resolution that was the result of the Board of Directors' reflection. Hepburn posted the draft resolution on an ALA Connect public forum, which was readable by non-members and open for member comment.¹ The resolution read as follows:

Be it Resolved, that the American Library Association (ALA), on behalf of its members Amend the educational qualification for the ALA Executive Director to make an ALA-accredited Master's Degree *a strongly preferred but not required educational qualification.* (ALA Draft Resolution 2016, emphasis added)

The rationale behind this resolution is clarified in an appended document that describes the advantages and disadvantages of such a change. For example, with regard to the question of the values of the profession and knowledge of library environments, the Board writes, "There are a variety of other avenues for acquiring and demonstrating a deep understanding of the values of the profession and of library environments," and that the "[MLIS degree] content does not necessarily provide the educational expertise needed to manage and lead an organization the

1. If you would like to explore the thread as it exists today, visit <https://connect.ala.org/communities/community-home/digestviewer/viewthread?MessageKey=74D7B72F-C0B6-4C79-9BB5-6DF707F1B451>. The thread has also been archived here: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230517165950/https://connect.ala.org/communities/community-home/digestviewer/viewthread?MessageKey=74D7B72F-C0B6-4C79-9BB5-6DF707F1B451>

size and complexity of ALA; therefore, we need a broader pool of individuals who may or may not have the ALA-accredited graduate degree or one who might not have the degree but might have significant experience within ALA.” Elsewhere, the document notes that “We need to attract a large pool of applicants who are interested in an executive position – no matter their education.” Overall, these justifications are reflective of larger organizational changes within the ALA, and associations more broadly.

Unsurprisingly, most respondents in the ALA thread are opposed to the resolution. Several comments take exception to “worrisome corporatizing trends.” For instance, one commenter warns that “Opening up a loophole makes it possible to end up with a person with a corporate background, who will want to run the association even more like a corporation.” Similarly, another individual writes, “How can we lose such faith in ourselves as a profession? Keeping the requirement is imperative for maintaining integrity, holding to our values, and showing the next generation of librarians that there are high places for them to strive toward.” While these critiques are valuable, I want to concentrate on a rhetorical strategy that is used by many of these commentators. Specifically, I’d like to focus on the “defense of the profession” argument. For example, another comment reads:

Are we not constantly reminding the public every year why we still need librarians? If our own leadership does not see the value, how can we expect it for others?

Likewise, another individual contributed the following:

We are seeing a widespread de-professionalization of library services nationwide as boards and administrators with a bottom-line mentality increasingly hire non-MLS staff to do work that has traditionally been done by professional librarians. In the face of this de-professionalization, ALA should be standing up for our values and not undermining them further by hiring a non-librarian to lead our professional association.

Finally, another respondent situates the ALA’s decision in reference to other professional associations: “EDs and CEOs of professional organizations are almost always drawn from the ranks of the profession.” He then continues to list examples: “ED of the American Medical Association? A medical doctor. CEO of the American Marketing Association? Someone with marketing background. Head of the American Bar Association? A lawyer.” His final argument is reflective of a profound belief in the MLS curriculum: “The ED of the ALA must be a librarian... [and must] deeply understand librarians and librarianship. This deep understanding is not something that can be taught in a weekend ‘short course’ or something that can be picked up ‘on the job’ once the ED is hired.”

This paper utilizes this resolution along with the arguments for and against as a departure point to analyze the profession of librarianship from a perspective informed by Pierre Bourdieu's reflexive sociology. It employs Bourdieu's approach to field analysis, one of his many contributions to cultural criticism, to librarianship. This is a conceptual piece that uses an event to ground and illustrate a way of thinking, rather than offering a representative argument about the ALA, librarianship, or a combination thereof. Analyzing librarianship with this framework enables us to identify the internal and external battles being waged over control of value and prestige within a professional field, acknowledge that the urge to professionalize knowledge work is an attempt to legitimize and consecrate capital, and ask an important question along the way: why do we value *the profession* and *professionalization* to such a degree?

Field analysis, compared to *symbolic capital* and *habitus*, is a lesser-known aspect of Bourdieu's reflexive sociology, a framework that "places a methodological obligation on its practitioners to address their own positionality within the field and social space in general" (Albright and Hartman 2018, 2). Applying field analysis in this way is a unique contribution to the growing critical literature in LIS contending with librarianship's structural problems around de/professionalization (Abbott 1998; Davis 2006; Hicks 2016; Seminelli 2016; Ettarh 2018). Bourdieu preferred to speak of *fields* rather than of *professions*. For Bourdieu, individuals within a field "employ two types of knowledge" of said field. The first is an understanding of how one should comport themselves within the field — the rules of the game. The second is an understanding of one's own reflexive relation to the field — where one exists, and can exist, within the field. Considering the large field of knowledge organization in general and librarianship specifically, professionals, paraprofessionals, and managers are constantly attempting to shore up or acquire additional *capital* (in both a Bourdieusian and Marxian sense of the word). External to librarianship, other professions are struggling to maintain their own symbolic capital in relation to one another. Some fields, like medicine and law, have been more adept at consecrating (the act of transmuting one type of capital for another) cultural, social, and economic capital into symbolic capital; others, like librarianship, have been less successful (Wien and Dorch 2018). This approach makes clear that the concept of a profession is neither absolute nor neutral; it is a constructed, deeply historical socio-cultural classification system that has been embedded into our understanding of how labour is valued. Ultimately, the value of a Bourdieusian approach to the question of professionalization is that it reveals and makes evident an orthodoxy rife with problems and contradictions.

Pierre Bourdieu and the Profession in LIS

Despite the wide-ranging applicability of his theories, LIS scholars interested in critical theory have not embraced Bourdieu as they have other critical theorists, such as Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux (Tewell 2015). Nevertheless, in the past decade, some attempts have been made to apply Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus, as well as fields of production and power in LIS contexts. France Bouthillier, for example, examines a small public library system in Montreal, Canada, and uses Bourdieu's theory of habitus to describe what influences librarians and library-techs to create "symbolic resources" for their patrons (Bouthillier 2001). Alternatively, John Budd and Lynn Connaway apply a Bourdieusian discourse analysis to examine the relationship between content and power in LIS education. They conclude that certain discourses carry symbolic weight, which are "designed to mobilize, either by affirmation or by silence, a group to accept the claims that are made" (Budd and Connaway 1998, 151). Blaise Cronin and Debra Shaw apply the concept of symbolic capital in their analysis of citations as a measure of research quality and impact. They argue that in scholarly communities, increased citations translate into an objective indicator of symbolic power (Cronin and Shaw 2002). Building on prior work, John Budd, quoting Swartz, applies Bourdieu's reflexive sociology to wave a cautionary flag about what can happen when agents in a field of power cease to reflect on their own positioning and in the process "unwittingly reproduce the social order by classifying the social world with the same categories which classifies them" (as quoted in Budd and Conaway 1998). More recently, Emily Knox argues that the underlying philosophy of librarianship — one that supports intellectual freedom, among other values — increases the symbolic capital of librarians, enabling them to continue upholding intellectual freedom principles (Knox 2014). Perhaps most pertinent is Wien and Dorch's 2018 study of the changing status of the research librarian in the context of Danish higher education. Therein, Wien and Dorch use Bourdieu's field analysis as an "interpretive and exploratory frame" (2) to tease out the myriad of ways that the research librarian, as a position within a field, has been marginalized over the years.

Beyond Bourdieu, LIS researchers have concerned themselves with the concept of *the profession* and *professional identity*. In *Technology and Professional Identity of Librarians: The Making of a Cybrarian*, Deborah Hicks briefly tracks the wide range in debate within librarianship (Hicks 2014). In the 60s and 70s, practicing librarians were focused on bolstering the status of the profession by referencing trait theory. Trait theory posits that an occupation must meet certain criteria to qualify as a profession. In 1938, A. F. Kuhlman argued in "Librarianship as a Profession" that librarianship meets the six requisite criteria: intellectual operation; a learned nature; practical; highly specialized education discipline; common interests through an association;

and an emphasis on public service (Kuhlman 1938, 73). In 1968 Bayless and Wasseman argued that the professional capacity of librarianship was endangered by ineffectual LIS education (in Hicks 2014). A decade later, Bayless argued that the “career-ladder” programs being run by some libraries, a system by which non-professionals could be hired for librarian-level positions based on experience, endangered the professional status of librarianship (Bayless 1977, 1716). According to Hicks, Bayless’ argument was prompted by severe unemployment and underemployment for librarians. The following comment, from Bayless, is reflective of the animosity harbored by some towards paraprofessionals: “If a person has... a good educational background, there is no excuse for not making an effort to go one or two more years to get an MLS, and a refusal to do so shows a lack of commitment to the profession” (Bayless 1977, 1716.) More recently, Lonergan argued that librarians do not meet the requirements of a profession because a LIS education is too short, it does not require license examinations, and codes of ethics are not legally binding or strictly enforced (Lonergan 2009, 121).

In contrast, there are authors that have argued against the professionalizing mission altogether. In 1981, Leigh Estabrook argued that professionalization had limited the earning potential of librarians by distancing them from labour unions (Estabrook 1981, 125-127). Furthermore, she argued that professionalization created a hierarchy within librarianship that is adversely affecting relationships between librarians in management roles and those on the front line. Finally, in *Librarianship: The Erosion of a Woman’s Profession*, Roma Harris presented a similar critique of professionalism. According to Harris, professionalization is a masculine project that is displacing the feminine nature (i.e., service ethic) of librarianship. As Harris notes, the “pervasive anxiety about image and identity” faced by librarians has engendered an urge to “adopt a more professional manner” on one hand, and to “mimic the higher status male professions” on the other (Harris 1992, 1). This act of mimicking results in a turn away from reference and instruction to technology, management, and information systems skills. Ultimately, Harris contends that this pursuit lies in the “commonly held, but seldom expressed view, that female occupations are somehow less than other, usually male, types of work” (4-5).

From Profession to Bourdieu’s Fields

This brief review of literature demonstrates that among LIS scholars, librarianship is a fully established profession; indeed, the conversation lately has been squarely focused on the profession’s status. But what is a profession and what is a professional? While difficult to define precisely, the general starting point for defining a profession begins with a clear set of behaviours and practices of workers involved in that space. The workers — professionals — are at once shaping and are being shaped by

the profession's standards and expectations. Furthermore, the profession requires collective effort from said professionals to set parameters, standards, and to defend the legitimacy of the profession while maintaining self-awareness in relation to other professions. As Noordengraaf and Schinkel write, "medical doctors fit this very basic definition: their medical acts are part of an occupation — medicine — which is organized and regulated by a collective – the medical profession. Such a profession secures the technical underpinnings of occupational practices (that is, knowledge and skills), defines successful practices and makes sure its members have a higher calling" (69).

Two approaches to professionalism serve to complicate this simple narrative: the functionalist approach and the power-centered approach. The functionalist approach posits that professions are necessary elements of socio-economic ecosystems (Noordengraaf and Schinkel 2011, 101). In short, professionals are highly specialized experts by means of intellectual and technical training that supply a valued service to others. The barrier to entry is high, either by means of study or accreditation, because of the assumed benefit of these skills to society. Professions evolved from less specialized occupations as society grew more complex and the body of relevant knowledge grew larger. Over time, it became unacceptable for a medic to perform surgery, or for clergymen to double as judges. However, this understanding of professionalism has been critiqued by some for being artificially functionalist. This line of critique posits that professionals have worked to shield off encroachment onto their domain by erecting artificial barriers, such as winning support from universities and colleges, generating marketable services, and resisting attempts by other workers to form a jurisdiction around their jurisdiction. For these critics, being a professional is not a functionalist necessity; it is a power-centered one. The power-centered approach, developed by occupational sociologists, sees professionalization as an attempt to control power in post-industrial, service-oriented societies (Schinkel and Noordegraaf 2011). Seen in this light, the increasingly high barrier of entry, and the pseudo-occupational caste system that exists in many organizations are elements of this struggle for control and legitimacy. It is here where Bourdieu's theories help us to question why certain groups control others, how power is manifested, appropriated, and exploited, and why shifts in power occur.

Bourdieu's writing on the concept of a profession is terse but biting. Bourdieu's critique of professions and professionalization is one element of a larger project: that is, to instigate an "epistemological rupture." In addition to promoting a break from concepts that we have come to accept benignly, Bourdieu's "epistemological rupture" would have us break from the positivist tradition. The positivist tradition that Bourdieu aims to rupture from is one shaped by scientific experimentation and prevailing notions of objectivity (Jain 2013, 106). As Bourdieu writes,

The task is to produce, if not a 'new person,' then at least a 'new gaze,' a sociological eye. And this cannot be done without a genuine conversion... a mental revolution, a transformation of one's whole vision of the social world. What is called 'epistemological rupture,' that is, the bracketing of ordinary preconstructions and of the principles ordinarily at work in the elaboration of these constructions, often presupposes a rupture with modes of thinking, concepts, and methods that have every appearance of common sense, of ordinary sense, and of good scientific sense (everything that the dominant positivist tradition honors and hallows) going for them. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 251)

Bourdieu's main critique of the concept of a profession is that it involves an uncritical acceptance of a concept laden with idiosyncratic profit and symbolic value to a specific social practice (the practice of professionalizing). As Shinkel and Noordengraff summarize, "Bourdieu calls into question notions such as occupational taxonomies for the reason that these are not sociological but bureaucratic categories" (72). "The notion of profession is all the more dangerous," argues Bourdieu in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, "because it has, as always in such cases, all appearances of neutrality in its favour." He continues:

Profession is a folk concept that has been uncritically smuggled into scientific language and which imports into it a whole social unconscious. It is the social product of historical work of construction of a group of representation of groups that has surreptitiously slipped into the science of this group. (242)

The cornerstone of Bourdieu's critique is that the concept of a *profession* paves over the nuances of individual experiences and deliberate acts of exclusion and other practices within said profession. According to Bourdieu, as both a mental category and social category, a profession is "socially produced only by superseding or obliterating all kinds of economic, social, and ethnic differences and contradictions which make the 'profession' a space of competition or struggle" (243). In other words, the symbolic title of a lawyer, doctor, nurse, or even librarian, does not fully represent the tacit and explicit acts of prohibition and sequestration that are embedded within a profession and in the process of professionalization. Consider Bourdieu's example:

If, in an inquiry into the French intellectual field of the 1950s you leave out Jean-Paul Sartre, or Princeton University in a study of American academia, your field is destroyed, insofar as these personas or institutions alone mark a crucial position. There are positions in a field that admit only one occupant but command the whole structure. With a random or representative sample of artists or intellectuals conceived as 'a profession', however, no problem. (243)

Bourdieu's example illustrates the homogenizing process and product inherent in any professionalizing project. By uncritically accepting *professions* at face value we overlook the struggles of individuals attempting to enter the profession, and those desperately working to exclude others out of it. As Bourdieu notes, "The very notion

of a writer, and lawyer, doctor, or sociologist, despite all efforts at codification and homogenization through certification, is at stake in the field of their profession: The struggle over legitimate definition, whose stake is the boundary, the frontiers, the right of admission, is a universal property of fields” (245). The concept of a field, according to Bourdieu, brings these sites of contention into the foreground.

Librarianship as a field of Bourdieusian Analysis

To rectify this situation, Bourdieu suggests that we abandon our notion of a unified *profession* as defined by “theoreticians and methodologists,” and adopt the concept of a *field* instead. Bourdieu’s notion of a *field*, a designated social space with specific practices, reflects a general structure and one’s individual agency within it (Colley and Guéry 2015, 117). Importantly, fields do not operate independently from one another, as the autonomy of one field can be analyzed for its ability to operate while also dealing with the demands of other and pressures of other fields. As Bourdieu writes, “External influences are always translated into the internal logic of fields, mediated through the structure and dynamic of the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 105). As a result, more secure fields are buttressed against these external influences while weaker fields are subject to greater outside influence upon the supposed value within them. These outside stressors are not simply metaphorical; they engender very real changes within fields.

Bourdieu’s framework is only salient if we accept an underlying premise: individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions are constantly vying for cultural and economic capital. Capital circulates internally within fields as well as outside of a single field’s borders. It is exactly this struggle for cultural and economic capital, which ultimately gets *consecrated*, as Bourdieu describes, into symbolic capital, that Bourdieu’s sociological gaze reveals and makes evident. As Albright and Hartman write, “in any field, there are struggles for legitimisation... the right to exercise the ‘symbolic violence’ of the domination of one set of ideas over others. This legitimisation produces an orthodoxy in a field” (8). This orthodoxy, or *doxa*, is what reflexive sociology reveals.

With this in mind, what would an analysis of librarianship informed by Bourdieu’s field analysis reveal? In general, a field analysis involves three levels: 1) the field in relation to other fields; 2) the field itself; 3) the orthodoxy of those within the field. As Grenfell writes, “It is not so much that any Bourdieusian orientated study must include all of these; it is just that, anyone utilising this theory and practice will hardly be doing justice to it without at least considering these levels” (Grenfell 2018, 274). Applying Bourdieu’s theories provides us with a critical perspective with which to analyze how librarianship operates as a field of power. Moreover, Bourdieu’s theories equip us with a vocabulary which allows us to compare different fields. Therefore, the product of a Bourdieusian analysis of librarianship would first

acknowledge that librarians are in a constant struggle for capital and legitimacy in internal and external fields of power, and second, identify how and at what cost this symbolic value is acquired. Adopting this “sociological eye” understands the professionalization project as an attempt by librarians to reinforce the symbolic authority of the profession over a field of knowledge organization. As Schinkel and Noordengraaf argue, for a professional title to function as symbolic capital, “its access needs to be restricted on the basis of a submission of occupational fields lacking the symbolic status of ‘profession’” (2011, 87). This act of submission by paraprofessionals and casual workers thereby recognizes and reinforces the legitimacy of professionalism as symbolic capital (orthodoxy). Given that symbolic capital is an increasingly scarce resource, the realization of a utopic vision in which everyone has access to the profession would bring an end the symbolic value of professionalism.

Applying Reflexive Sociology to Librarianship

For the remainder of this paper, I turn our attention back to the responses launched for and against the ALA resolution mentioned above to experiment with Bourdieu’s application of field analysis. In particular, I want to concentrate on two points of contention: internal conflicts within a single field and external conflicts within a larger field of power. On the internal level, I mean the struggle for symbolic capital between non-professionals, librarians, and managers and the symbolic violence that struggle produces. Externally, I mean a struggle for legitimacy between fields within a larger field of power. Importantly, the objective of this approach is not to offer a generalizable evaluation of librarianship based on the comments of several individuals on a website. That is neither possible nor methodologically appropriate. Instead, I want to approach these comments from a slightly different tack—informed by Bourdieusian theory—to illuminate the existing pressures and tensions within the field of librarianship which are compounded, not addressed or resolved, by our wider acceptance of the professionalization scheme.

“If the MLS is unnecessary as an indicator of dedication to the profession and its values and work,” writes one commenter, “then why don’t we just all agree that you can have whatever degree, or none, and we can just train you on the job, not just for this position, but all positions in libraries?” She continues,

It’s yet another nod toward the idea that the MLS is worth little to nothing to libraries as institutions, and to the profession. If that’s the case, then let’s be honest [about the fact] that it’s just a moneymaker degree for higher-ed and stop pretending that you need the union card to have the skills necessary to do the work and hold the values.

Implicit in the comment above are a series of social classifications based on the symbolic value of the accreditation. This commenter classifies the MLS holder

apart from those with “whatever degree, or none,” who receive “training on the job.” Library-techs, for example, would fit this description. Indeed, for them and those who share this belief, the MLS is what distances the “librarian” from “whatever else,” in part because the MLS is a means of imparting an understanding of the values of the profession: intellectual freedom, service, and access among others. This belief, that an MLS degree is tantamount to a knowledge of and conviction in library values, is an argument launched against resolutions that work to undervalue the accreditation. For example, in a subsequent comment, an individual notes that after returning to school to receive an MLS, she “developed a greater appreciation for my chosen profession—its history, its foundations, its beliefs. That education has permeated the work I’ve done since then.” However, the relationship between the two (the degree and the ability) is never made explicit and seems to assume that the degree is a proxy for the requirement; in other words, it symbolizes a set of desired aptitudes. However, these aptitudes are not necessarily the ones an executive needs to possess as one individual notes, “I don’t see how a library degree confers any of the knowledge or expertise necessary for managing a membership organization of 60,000.”

The original commenter seems to be less concerned with the specific skills and abilities required to perform the duties of a librarian than with the supposed depreciation of consecrated symbolic capital. Their anxiety is caused by the degree to which the MLS has slipped out of favour, becoming, as she writes, nothing but “a money-maker.” To an extent, accreditations are money-makers; by definition accreditations are earned by those that have the social, cultural, and, more often than not, economic capital, through their families or position in society, that enable them to exchange such levels of resources for others. The result of that investment is an act of “consecration,” from one form of capital to another via the degree, accreditation, and what the associated title means within a field and outside of it (Bourdieu 1986, 10). But in a context where economizing trends continue to destabilize the nature of professions, some accreditations are seen as more legitimate or bulletproof than others. As Schinkel and Noordengraaf explain, “In competing for symbolic status with other occupations, a profession is structured as one subfield of the field of power able to claim such status in the form of professional capital recognized as such by others in the field of power, including occupations unsuccessfully claiming such recognition. That is why the traditional professions are still most readily visible as such” (2011, 87).

Other commenters utilized this same rhetoric. For example, one individual writes, “Departing from this requirement doesn’t help us in the fight that the MLS is necessary for the rest of us,” directly pointing to the conflict surrounding the value of accreditation. Another, on the other hand, contours the parameters of librarianship

when she writes, “Simply enlarging the field to include a ‘larger pool’ seems like an extremely weak and unconvincing reason to change the requirement for a job. If we value the ALA accreditation process, why would we even consider not taking an opportunity to actively prove our commitment?” It is difficult to determine from these comments if individuals are genuinely concerned about what jettisoning the accreditation will mean for the new ED of the ALA, or if their concern is more strongly tied to downstream consequences of this symbolic act. The answer likely lies somewhere in the middle; however, the emergence of the professional manager has had similar impacts on other fields. According to Noordengraaf and Schinkel, in an increasingly economized landscape, professional managers offer skills and competencies that overlay perfectly with neo-liberal policy. These professional service managers are educated through MBA programs but also through other programs, such as MPA (Master of Public Administration) and Master of Non-Profit Management programs, the latter being a program that is cited by certain librarians as being beneficial for the ALA (a non-profit organization). Ironically, professional managers subscribe to standard professionalizing strategies to secure their positions: “managers build associations, they set-up educational programs, and they establish work codes in order to standardize technical bases and service ethics” (Noordengraaf and Schinkel 2011, 109).

Ultimately, this understanding of impinging fields of power helps us understand why dozens of comments on this thread seem to conflate the operational nature of the ALA with that of a library. Having an ALA ED who is not a librarian is seen as tantamount to having a library director that is not a librarian. In the context of librarianship, the process of consecration of symbolic capital is only made possible by the American Library Association. As a result, the ALA assumes the “totality of social capital... in the hands of a single agent or a small group of agents,” such as the ALA President, ED and Board of Directors, to represent librarianship and exercise “power incommensurate with the agent’s personal contribution” (Bourdieu 1986, 10). The subtext of “not giving in” is reflective of a perceived imbalance between the incommensurate power of an individual librarian, and the formalized legitimacy of an institution.

Symbolic Violence within the Field of Librarianship

This paper has so far gestured to how Bourdieu’s theories can help us identify internal and external conflicts in different fields of power. Bourdieu’s work can also help us identify how supposedly benign and commonsensical exclusionary tactics, like accreditation requirements, are tacit acts of symbolic violence against certain groups and communities. Symbolic violence, according to Bourdieu, denotes more

than a form of violence operating symbolically within fields: it is “the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 167). This concept can be applied to our scenario in two ways. The first perspective posits that by uncritically supporting the “profession,” librarians are doing a disservice to large communities of individuals that are not represented within the ranks of librarians but are nonetheless representative of what a qualified candidate would look like. This is because a “profession” is constructed with certain individuals and qualities in mind; those who have attained the accreditation are precisely the people who were meant to complete the process of accreditation. Over the last decade, Suzanne Stauffer has published extensively on the construction of librarianship, as it shifted from a predominantly male occupation to one represented mostly by women (2016). Through historical analysis, she shows how librarianship was constructed as a profession equivalent to the other white, masculine professions of their day. Furthermore, the educational ladder of librarianship was created according to the same mold. We can see these very arguments within the comments expressed in the ALA thread. One member of the Association for Library Services for Children (ALSC) explicitly points to the product of this social construction as she defends the new resolution:

Statistically, the current demographics of credentialed librarians—88% white, 83% female—indicate that people of color would be less represented in the candidate pool if an MLS is required because they are underrepresented among MLS holders. Underrepresentation should not be mistaken for under-qualification; if a candidate pool is limited by a specific credential, and that credential disproportionately favors one group (or disproportionately undervalues others), the process is flawed and inequitable and denies the association the opportunity to consider all truly qualified candidates.

Immediately following this comment, another member of the ALSC bolstered the same sentiment, focusing specifically on the damaging effect of credentialing on initiatives that attempt to increase representation. No rebuttals were offered against this argument. In the context of conflicts within fields of power, these comments suggest that librarians opposed to loosening the requirements for the ED are implicitly committing to a system wherein the largely white nature of librarianship is bolstered and reproduced.

A second perspective, informed by feminist theory, posits that loosening the requirements of the ED to include non-MLS holders is another attempt at eroding the feminine elements of librarianship. The statistics (88% white, 83% female), while jarring, fail to indicate that women — in particular women of colour — are acutely underrepresented in management positions, including non-profit organizations (Pynes 2000; Hakim 2004). This argument builds on Roma Harris’ work in *Librarianship: The Erosion of a Woman’s Profession*, where she suggests that the

professionalizing project is an entirely masculine pursuit, wherein managerial and technology skills supplant service-oriented proficiencies traditionally seen as feminine. In keeping with Bourdieu's perspective, that individuals are at once structured and structuring, this approach points to mechanisms in society that try to maintain certain circumstances by making individuals internalize them as the natural order of things: an orthodoxy. Consequently, the generous appeal for increased diversity and equity within the ALA are structured by, and continue to structure, deeply embedded inequalities in our social order. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence ("the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity") provides us with another potentially fruitful avenue from which to approach this issue (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 167). Thus, while not explicitly articulated as such, the comments that opposed the resolution can be considered not as attempts to bolster the homogeneous makeup of the profession, but rather as a desperate attempt at safeguarding against further *defeminization* of librarianship.

Conclusion

As Michael Grenfell concludes, "Bourdiesian concepts seem to define not only what we see but what we *can* see" (285). At first glance, the conflicting views illustrated by the responses in the ALA thread are to be expected. ALA members have a vested interest in their work and the wider profession, and have strong opinions about what the values of the executive director of the ALA should represent. But what else can we see if we adopt a Bourdiesian frame? Bourdieu considered the classification system of professions to be a flawed bureaucratic process of categorization; instead, he opted for a sociological view that considered humans as agents in a series of interacting and overlapping fields. Within these fields, human agents endeavour, within a field's orthodoxy (rules, customs, positions) to bolster different forms of capital. Indeed, this process works at the level of the individual and in aggregate at the level of the field, as fields attempt to accrue capital in relation to other intersecting or overlapping fields. In this work, I have adopted a Bourdiesian field analysis to reveal how a proposed policy change within the main accrediting body of librarianship (in the United States and Canada) engendered serious debates over librarianship orthodoxy (*doxa*), the relationship between librarianship and other professions (*fields*), and over a profession's positioning in society (*capital*). Bourdieu's call for a sociological eye together with his suite of theoretical concepts helps us to question the seemingly benign modes of thinking and acting that have "every appearance of common sense." But in a context where neo-liberal economizing is the dominant political and economic philosophy, professionalism is no longer seen as a strong shelter, relatively unaffected by market logics, merit, and performance. As a result, there are increasing sites of tension as professionals attempt to reinforce the faint perimeter around their very own field of power.

One might be tempted to simply accept these circumstances as a feature of modern society. However, applying Bourdieu's reflexive sociology to our labours and efforts helps us to point out the structural realities that make it im/possible to evade an orthodoxy that "[requires] absolute obedience to a prescribed set of rules and behaviors, regardless of any negative effect on librarians' own lives" (Ettarh 2018). Indeed, the problem with orthodoxy in a Bourdieusian sense is that as an accepted doctrine it works to cement and replicate itself, engendering a type of misrecognition of what is wrong or right in society in general and with labour specifically; furthermore, it can lead to a misdiagnosis of what needs to be corrected in a social practice (take, for example, the seeming paradox between representation initiatives and credentialing). A reflexive approach, such as the one I have experimented with above, which tries to *see* biases and assumptions and their impact on our sense-making, can become "a powerful tool to enhance social emancipation" (as quoted in Navarro 2006, 16).

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