

# Gender Identity and Performance in Library Work

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## What we know

Libraries are patriarchal institutions. But as a majority-women profession, norms are upheld differently than they are in other types of organizations.

- Men are ferried into higher paying, more administrative and supervisory positions faster than women are in traditionally-female jobs. (Williams 1992)
- Library leadership is dominated by men because, while the ethos of librarianship is feminized, leadership qualities are still very masculinized. (Neigel 2015)
- Women are expected to exhibit relational behaviors (mentoring, service, emotional labor) at work, which are devalued or erased in patriarchal institutions (including libraries) when performed by women. However, when men do these behaviors they are praised and rewarded. (Arellano Douglas and Gadsby 2017)

## What we did

Empowered by our fellowship experience at the IMLS-funded Institute for Research Design in Librarianship (at Loyola Marymount University) and inspired by ongoing conversations on gender in the LIS field, we collaborated on a qualitative study using the methods below.

- Researched workplace and gender studies theory and consulted with experts
- Designed a survey and research instrument with 40+ questions
- Submitted to a formal institutional IRB process
- Recruited 30 participants using a purposive sampling technique (in order to ensure diverse representation) for phone interviews lasting 30-90 minutes
- Applied successfully for grants to fund the associated transcription and analysis costs

## Who we thank

Charlie McNabb, Gender & Sexuality Studies Consultant  
University of Oregon LGBTQIA+ Center & Center for the Study of Women in Society  
Claremont Colleges Queer Resources Center  
University of Southern California Libraries  
Ohio State University Libraries

## What we found

### Gender expression and the imperative to “fit in” at work

- Participants discussed pressures to distance themselves from what could be considered overly “gendered” or gender-normative appearances and behaviors, such as those related to pregnancy and motherhood at work.

“A lot of the stuff comes back to motherhood for me. ... The only people who have commented in a negative way about me having a second child before being tenured are older women... I’ve had four different older women say, ‘Why would you do that before?’ Like, you’re an idiot. Don’t do that.”-Roxanne

### Gender identity & expression as a professional resource and as a professional hindrance

- Several spoke about how their gender helps them build connections with students, or the positive impact on students when they see librarians who are gender non-conforming or non-normative.

“Being out [as trans] has been really beneficial for connecting with students. A lot of students who are just coming out feel really alone, and seeing someone who’s an adult who’s out is really a big deal. I know that it would’ve been for me. Generally, what happened is once the word gets out, I get a lot of students visiting me and asking for resources about gender stuff and help talking to professors and so forth...”-Alex

### Experiences in libraries as majority-women workplaces

- Some women and nonbinary participants discuss feeling there is more supportiveness, safety, sense of community and understanding in libraries as majority-women workplaces.

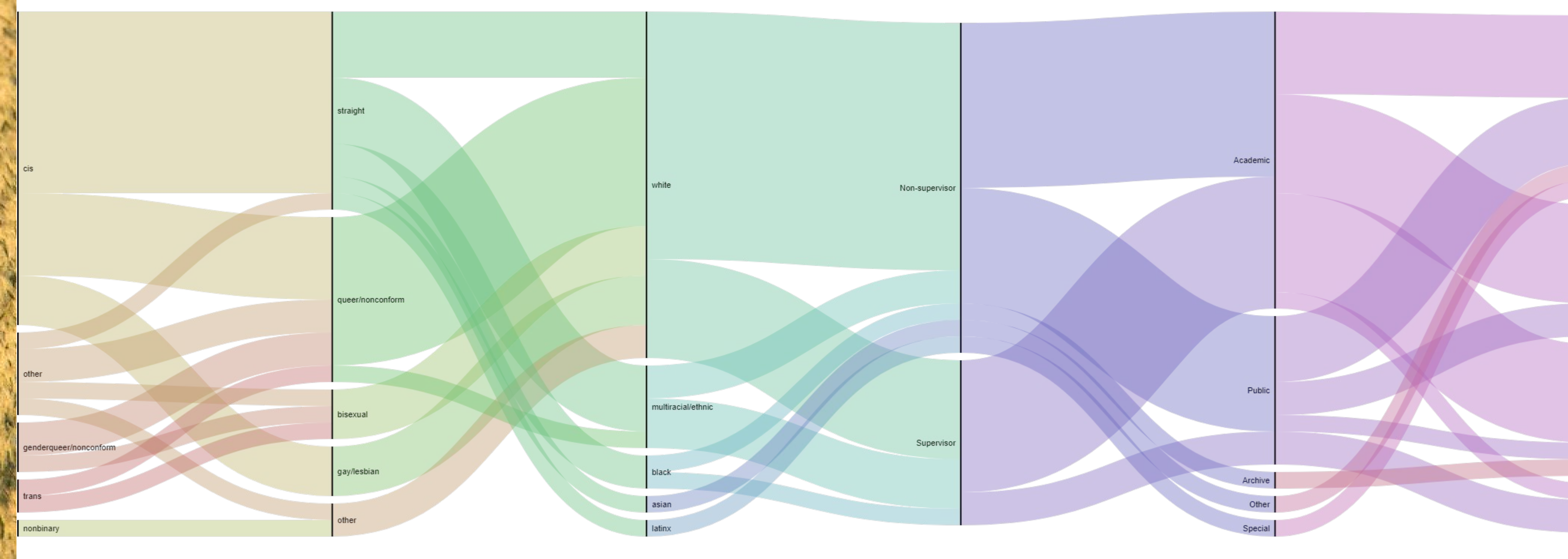
“If I’m being honest I feel like my experiences of working in libraries is that most of the women I work around are like hyper productive and efficient... and then the men are not. ...I noticed that women, or nonbinary people or queer people, it’s like the effort and the work gets exponentially more intense, like as the further you get away from white male.”-Lou

### People with marginalized identities more reflective about actions tied to those identities

- Those not marginalized (especially cis and white folks) know intellectually that their identities impact work interactions, but have difficulty providing examples or describing specific behaviors.

“I would say there is a culture of liberalism, [in my library workplace] but it’s not inclusive. I don’t know if I would call it feminism because my definition of feminism is inclusive and intersectional. Sort of like, ‘Racism is bad. I voted Democrat.’ But that’s as far as it goes often.”-Alex

## Study Population Demographics



## Limitations

These variables may influence our data in unknown ways.

- We used a purposive sampling method instead of others (like snowball sampling, which might have resulted in a more diverse sample).
- We didn’t foresee the need to explicitly ask participants questions about marital or parental status.
- Some research argues that structured interviews are unnatural and restrictive, which then affects the quality of data we can collect from individuals.
- Qualitative study results reveal the breadth and variety of related themes within a population, but are not necessarily generalizable.

We are completing our analysis and plan to publish our findings in 2018.

## Who we read

Arellano Douglas, V., & Gadsby, J. *Gendered labor and library instruction coordinators*. Presented at ACRL 2017.

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## How to ask

Questions? Contact: [genderinlibrarianship@gmail.com](mailto:genderinlibrarianship@gmail.com)



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