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# A Phenomenological Study of Conservative Academic Librarians

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## **Abstract**

Librarianship posits itself as a profession that strives for neutrality, particularly within customer service and information provision; however, factors such as political activity, conference programming, and disproportionate representations of specific viewpoints in the literature indicate that neutrality may be compromised. These factors may alienate librarians who do not subscribe to majority political opinions within librarianship. A phenomenological study was conducted to understand the career experiences of academic librarians who identify as socially or politically conservative. Themes linking service provision, ethics, workplace relationships, and professional engagement emerged, which demonstrate the professional impact politicized activity has on practicing librarians in all specialties.

*KEYWORDS: academic librarianship, politics, conservative, phenomenology, professionalism, ethics*

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## Introduction

“As one of those rarest of beasts, a conservative librarian, I can attest firsthand to the stifling left-wing orthodoxy of modern American librarianship,” writes David Durant (2005), an academic librarian. “In conversations with colleagues, on library e-mail lists, and at professional conferences, liberal and leftist attitudes are shoved in your face. Because most librarians are left-of-center politically, they automatically assume you are as well . . . You learn to keep your opinions to yourself, except among colleagues whom you know well.” (Durant 2005). Durant ends his essay by sharing the fall-out of his feelings of estrangement not only from his colleagues, but from his professional organization, the American Library Association (ALA): “I have responded in the only ways I can . . . I allowed my membership to lapse and have no intention of renewing it. In June 2004 I started an obscure blog . . . where I can finally express the opinions that I would never dare voice among librarians I don’t know” (Durant, 2005).

Library and information science (LIS) is generally perceived as a field that values neutrality in information access or provision, policy creation, and collection development procedures. Official statements issued by the ALA, namely the “Code of Ethics of the American Library Association” and the “Library Bill of Rights,” include multiple statements that espouse these virtues (Table 1). However, the actions of ALA and subordinate groups within the organization may threaten the public’s perception of librarian neutrality, a point made by Grudnicki (2013) in response to ALA’s promotion of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) via the dissemination of ACA forms in public libraries (rather than just providing information about the legislation):

So the public library—the institution whose foundational principles are the preservation of intellectual freedom and the unbiased promotion of learning—will become politicized

to advance the Obama administration's agenda. This agreement between the ALA and the Department of Health and Human Services violates the so-called "Library Bill of Rights," which declares that "libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues" and that "materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval." . . . Libraries, the time-honored bastions of knowledge and free thought, will now be used to further national ignorance—and at high cost, indeed.

In particular, the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) of ALA has come under scrutiny for its resolutions, many of which are adopted by ALA Council or implemented by ALA's Executive Board (Chandler 1994; Annoyed Librarian 2013; SafeLibraries 2015). The SRRT's Resolution Archive lists a series of resolutions, some of which are explicitly library-related (e.g., service to homeless patrons, free access to information), and some of which are less clearly linked to libraries (e.g., war funding, health care reform, death-row inmates, and foreign policy) (SRRT 2014). In his blog *Library Juice*, Rory Litwin notes that SRRT is a politically motivated group that historically has brought non-library issues to the greater professional body: "The Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) was the permanent structure formed out of progressive political organizing in the American Library Association during the revolutionary time of the late 60's . . . Since then it has served as the *political* [emphasis added] 'conscience of the association,' applying internal pressure from an egalitarian moral and political point of view (e.g. opposing ties to corporate America) and taking a public stand on many issues not directly related to librarianship" (2010).

Complicating the issue of ALA's structure and its impact on perceptions of neutrality are the general lack of acknowledgment of the existence of conservative librarians within the field,

as well as the lack of positive perceptions about librarians who are identified as conservative. Manley's (2010) opinion piece is the only mainstream (read: nonconservative) LIS article noting that "the library profession is quite liberal," recognizing the "professional ostracism" that conservative librarians experience, and making a point to highlight common ground between conservative and nonconservative information professionals. While performing a literature review, the authors quickly noted that nonconservative librarians' articles, essays, and activities were published in traditional printed channels of professional discourse, including *American Libraries*, a magazine published by ALA and *Progressive Librarian*, a journal published by the Progressive Librarians Guild. Conversely, many concerns and observations from conservative librarians are relegated to the blogosphere (e.g., Annoyed Librarian and Heretical Librarian), fringe websites, and forums. Within the latter channels, examples of Durant's experience as a conservative librarian are reflected, including coworkers' expectations for colleagues to participate in nonconservative projects or share nonconservative ideals, feeling shame for having conservative values (Mustang Mamma 2005), and the need to address erroneous perceptions of conservatism (Annoyed Librarian 2010; Conservative Librarian 2011).

Perceptions of conservatism in librarianship can be negative, as shown in an online exchange on the website Ask MetaFilter where user roxie5 (2009) asked, "How do I know if I want to be a librarian?" User jessamyn (2009) responded, in part: "While there are many conservative librarians, the profession is generally anti-censorship, queer-friendly, labor friendly and in favor of children's rights to read what they want (decisions on content are more properly made by a parent)." This statement characterizes librarianship as an inherently nonconservative profession and conservative librarians as a homogenous group of people who promote censorship, intolerance, free markets, and who subjugate self-agency.

The politicized structure of ALA and sparse conservative librarian voices in the communication channels of the profession obscure the lived experiences of conservative librarians. What does it mean to be a conservative librarian? How does conservative ideology impact their working lives, collegial relationships, and professional engagement? A phenomenological research method was applied to elicit a holistic summary of the experiences of conservative librarians working in North American academic libraries. This method of inquiry illuminates political, cultural, social, and other concerns that affect this group of information professionals as they practice in various specialties of LIS.

### **Literature Review**

“The question, as a glance at our history reveals, is not whether politics enters into professional matters (it always has), but rather what politics and to what effect” (Rosenzweig 1991, 2).

In trying to understand the current context of librarianship within which conservative academic librarians work, tracing the history of the debate over the role of political action in librarianship necessitates an examination of the concept of social responsibility as the impetus for such action. Further complicating the discussion of the politicization of the profession are questions about how to reconcile the idea of neutrality as an ethical principle, as espoused by professional organizations such as ALA (Highby 2004) with the assertion that libraries are “important and effective instruments of social change” (Schuman 1976, 251). In looking through the literature, a narrative emerges surrounding librarianship as a profession that, despite early struggles to clarify its responsibilities both politically and socially, has become “a politicized atmosphere of groupthink and even intolerance, in which left-wing politics permeate the library profession and are almost impossible to avoid” (Durant 2005).

The debate over the role of libraries and librarians within the public sphere is one that has existed for decades. As Raber (2007, 676) states, “The notion of *social responsibility* has long been at the center of the professional ideology that grounds thought and justifies practice in librarianship. . . . Its meaning is central to professional identity, yet that meaning is historically and politically contingent.” Citing the 1852 Report of the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston and the Public Library Inquiry report of 1949, Raber concludes that both reports affirmed the ideological premise that libraries are necessary institutions whose services assist in developing a democratic culture. As social unrest grew in the 1960s, the ALA found itself in the midst of a philosophical dilemma—as Raber (2007, 677) questions, “If librarianship’s fundamental moral commitment is to the progress of democracy and democracy is threatened by social problems. . . then does not librarianship have a moral responsibility to address these problems?” Raber then goes on to trace the formation of the SRRT in 1969 as a component of the ALA, and the subsequent formation of two committees (the Activities Committee on New Directions (ACONDA) and the Ad Hoc Activities Committee on New Directions (ANACONDA)) that examined contested definitions of social responsibility of libraries, librarians, and the ALA.

Discussion surrounding the question of whether or not the ALA should take public positions on different social issues continued in the early 1970s in The Berninghausen Debate (Wedgeworth and Summers 1993), a series of responses printed in 1973 addressing an essay originally written by David Berninghausen in 1972 entitled “Social Responsibility vs. the Library Bill of Rights” (Berninghausen 1993). In his essay, Berninghausen argues the role of the ALA is to provide access to information and build balanced collections, not to engage in various social and political issues. But as The Berninghausen Debate responses indicate, at the time

opinions were clearly divided over whether or not social responsibility and intellectual freedom were not only mutually exclusive, but imperative for librarianship. Taking the discussion further, Schuman (1976) reiterates the importance of social responsibility for libraries by outlining several myths about libraries that need to be undone in order to move forward as a profession. One myth addresses neutrality: “Institutions are neutral, and those within them must be neutral in order to be effective” (Schuman 1976, 252). Another myth states “libraries are not political institutions” (Schuman 1976, 253). Schuman’s arguments that libraries are neither neutral nor apolitical are situated within a framing discourse that stresses the need for libraries to build a “socially responsible information agenda . . . which will propel the world we know into a truly participatory society” (Schuman 1976, 254).

Neutrality and the role of political action are recurring themes in the literature surrounding social responsibility in librarianship. As alluded to in the introduction, very little formal scholarship exists surrounding the concept of conservative (or conversely, liberal) identities within librarianship. However, plenty of opinion pieces, letters to the editor, and essays within library publications have been written debating the concept of neutrality, particularly as it relates to professional action. Once proclaimed as a central ethical position of librarianship, several writers critique the concept of neutrality as a potentially dangerous idea, reaffirming Schuman’s earlier assertion that neutrality is a myth. As Blanke (1989, 40) writes, “By perpetuating the myth that their profession should be politically neutral, librarians have created a value vacuum that is easily being filled by the prevailing political and economic ethos. Neutrality, in effect, allows an unquestioned acquiescence to the imperatives of the most powerful and influential elements in society.” Burton (2008) takes a more philosophical approach to the concept of neutrality, arguing that librarianship, lacking its own uniquely



developed philosophical and theoretical history, is a profession that has borrowed heavily from Enlightenment ideas and modern social sciences. This has resulted in a focus on practicality as a guiding force, rather than a clear guiding philosophy. As a result, neutrality has found a foothold as an ethical position in librarianship, without any clear paradigms justifying its place as a central tenet. Good (2006, 28) similarly argues, “Neutrality is the logical conclusion of moral relativism; it is the pose most naturally assumed as a result of an ethical regime whose standards are defined by transient events rather than by consistent and unswerving conviction.” Jensen (2004, 30) critiques neutrality as a way of maintaining the status quo in terms of power: “A claim to neutrality means simply that one isn’t taking a position on that distribution of power and its consequences, which is a passive acceptance of the existing distribution. That’s a political choice.”

The corollary of the idea that neutrality does not exist in librarianship is the concept that librarianship has a distinct political character, and undertakes political action. Public libraries in particular have always been engaged in the political sphere because of public funding issues. As Berry (2002, 8) states, such “support is a nonpartisan concern,” and historically, library support has come from both Republican (read: conservative) and Democrat (read: liberal) politicians. However, in examining the philosophical dilemmas put forth for librarians in the *New York Times Co. v. Tasini* case, Anderson (2002, 22) describes the ALA, the largest professional association of librarians in the United States, as “an organization devoted to the pursuit of a distinctly left-leaning agenda” and later asserts that “a tendency towards political liberalism is, frankly, as inevitable in librarianship as it is in the free press and in public education . . . which share . . . the essential goal of educating and informing the masses, a goal that is central to modern liberalism.” In an earlier editorial, Berry (1996) connects librarianship to the liberal

tradition in the United States, theorizing that if one identifies as a librarian, than one is most likely a liberal. In an opinion piece from 2010, Spackman lays out common ground between conservatives and liberals in librarianship, arguing the values of the profession align with both conservative and liberal principles. Spackman asserts “there is a potential within librarianship for a diversity of viewpoints, and core values like privacy and intellectual freedom resonate at least as well with libertarians as progressives” (25). This tension over whether librarianship is liberal or conservative, particularly as manifested through the actions of the ALA, led one writer to ask the question, “Is ALA creating dissident librarians by becoming too politicized?” (Bivens-Tatum 2006, 25), referring to conservative librarians who have voiced their opinions through informal channels, such as the anonymous blogs mentioned earlier. Bivens-Tatum raises the issue that the actions and official statements of the ALA on issues that he refers to as “politics unrelated to librarianship” (2006, 25) has alienated this group of librarians who ostensibly share the same core values espoused in the Code of Ethics. Considering these questions, this study seeks to find out if these concerns voiced in the literature are manifested in the lived career experiences of self-identified conservative academic librarians.

## **Methodology**

### **Approach**

The goal of this phenomenological study is to find meaning in conservative academic librarians’ professional life experiences. The experiences were collected via in-depth interviews focusing on numerous facets of work-life. Transcendental significance was gained by analyzing participant responses via *epoche*, an exercise that encourages researchers to approach complex and in-depth qualitative data with minimum presuppositions. The absence of presuppositions increases receptivity and allows researchers to discern the phenomena anew (Moustakas 1994).

Phenomenology focuses on common elements of individual experiences, paring them down to create essential descriptions (Cresswell 2007). This study builds a summary of American conservative academic librarians' realities through the descriptions of those who have experienced them.

## **Sample**

An invitation to participate in the study was posted on LIS e-mail lists, including COLLIB-L, ILI-L, and RUSA-L. Additionally, study invitations were sent via email to the Catholic Library Association, the Association of Christian Librarians, and the American Theological Library Association. Respondents were invited to be interviewed. A purposive sample of nine women and eight men (n=17) identifying as conservative and credentialed academic librarians working in the United States of America participated in this study.

Participant criteria for this study were: a) self-identification as a conservative, b) experience working as an academic librarian, and c) appropriate education credentials for librarianship (e.g., ALA-accredited Master's degree). Forty-two percent of participants were between 55-64 years old; thirty-two percent were equitably split between the age ranges of 25-35 years old and 36-44 years old. Ninety percent of participants identified as Caucasian. Sixty percent worked at four-year private colleges or universities and had fifteen or more years of experience. Just over a third of the group indicated reference and instruction as their primary work function while just under a third indicated they primarily worked in administration and management. A majority of the group had some form of faculty status: non-tenure track (28%), tenure-track (22%) or continuing appointment (17%) non-tenure track, and over half of those on tenure-track had not yet earned tenure. Thirty-five percent of respondents indicated they lived in the South Atlantic region of the United States (this region includes Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Maryland,

North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia) (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). See Table 2 for more demographic details about the participant group.

### **Interview Procedure**

Over a two-month period the researchers conducted individual telephone interviews with respondents. Informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to the interviews. Participants were also invited to complete a short demographic survey. Participants then answered questions in an in-depth, semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interview format facilitated focused discussion but allowed space for interviewees to introduce and discuss other details that were addressed by the researchers. Each interview was recorded for verbatim transcription, and clarification and follow-up questions were navigated with participants through e-mail.

### **Data Analysis**

The researchers produced seventeen verbatim transcripts. Colaizzi's (1978) method of descriptive data analysis was used to evaluate the transcripts. The transcripts were reviewed several times to identify or capture initial broad impressions, significant statements, and phrases that were pertinent to conservative academic librarian experiences. From the significant statements, formulated meanings were created and arranged into clusters. These clusters highlighted emerging themes, which were incorporated into an overall experience that was shared with participants for validation. The researchers included new data from participant validation to gain a clearer understanding of the participants' lived experience.

### **Results**

From the data analysis, fourteen major themes emerged. See Table 3 for examples of significant statements and formulated meanings; Table 4 shows an example of a theme cluster, and Table 5 provides a summation of all major themes

### **Theme 1. Definition of conservatism**

Interview participants were asked to offer a personal definition of conservatism based on their own ideologies and experiences. Common elements of conservatism for this group include a focus on personal freedom or individual rights, a desire for small government or limited government intervention (rooted in Constitutionalism), and a belief that individuals should strive for self-sufficiency. Other markers of conservatism include traditional views on family and gender roles (e.g., marriage is defined as one man and one woman) and adherence to a Judeo-Christian religious belief system. A male library administrator with over two decades of career experience explained: “[Conservatism] means that I believe strongly in individual rights, responsibilities—and, I believe in personal responsibility. That I’m responsible for myself. I don’t expect the government to do things for me, I don’t expect others to do things for me. Politically conservative to me means small government, less involvement from outside influences, and that ultimately I am responsible for my success or failure.” A female librarian defined conservatism within a religious framework: “I’m a Christian and so I hold to a lot of those traditional Christian values. And so to me, being conservative is more in line with those religious and political ideologies that I identify most strongly with.”

### **Theme 2. LIS intersects with conservatism**

Conservative academic librarians believe their ideals match well with the core values of librarianship. The action of helping others came up often during the interviews. In particular, respondents mentioned links between the conservative ethos of self-reliance and the library’s

role in engendering this ethos by protecting intellectual freedom and providing unbiased and equitable access to information in a neutral manner. As one female technical services librarian stated:

I believe very strongly in, obviously, freedom and education and I believe that everyone should have the opportunity to learn and to wrestle with ideas and come to terms with those ideas in and of themselves, which often comes through reading books. I think literacy and an informed citizenship—citizenry is important. And so I think that goes along with librarianship very well because that was the roots of libraries before, when books were very difficult to obtain. It was so that everyone could have access to information. And I believe that that actually goes along very well with conservatism.

A male reference librarian respondent said: “I think one of the reasons I like libraries is how they support [conservative] ideals. Instead of a student just reading the four or five books recommended in a course or by some political pundit or party, anyone can come in and read anything in the world. You can find all the ideas known to humans and chart your own course. To me, that is an important element of freedom.”

Some respondents acknowledged conflicts between librarianship’s core value of providing access to information and conservative values. They expressed their desire for some limitations to access in special cases; otherwise, basic political ideology could cause ethical conflicts both within themselves and with their LIS colleagues. A mid-career reference and instruction librarian described her struggle:

[So] when you think about free information for everybody and issues of privacy, a lot of that can be aligned . . . with government things, so if someone needs it, you give it to them. I agree with that in terms of information; I don’t agree with that in terms of a lot of

government programs. So, those things align in my field. If you need it, you give it to them, so we try to serve different populations and whatever they need, we're trying to help to give it to them. But as a kind of as a fiscal conservative, I struggle with that, because I sometimes think we give away too much, and people don't feel that they necessarily have to work for it themselves, including information . . .

### **Theme 3. Values of librarianship**

Participants shared values that they feel are an important part of their work as librarians. They stressed the importance of providing good customer service to their users, and treating their users with fairness and objectivity at all times. Providing unfettered access to information was another value mentioned by participants. Participants stated that it is important to set aside their personal beliefs and views when interacting with users to avoid bias. Avoiding bias in collection development or access was another value that they expressed, emphasizing the need for balanced collections as an important service for users. A mid-career female reference and instruction librarian stated, "The idea of giving good service and accessibility . . . I guess a good work ethic is important, because you need to do the best you can, and I try to do that." A male cataloger shared: "I think there's two aspects that guide my librarianship. One is to be as objective as possible . . . And the second related principle is trying to use terminology in that the way, in the way that proponents of an idea would use it . . . So I try to make sure that my own political or social beliefs do not limit how a resource can be found. That is my core value."

### **Theme 4. The role of the librarian**

Participants believe the role of a librarian is to provide information freely and without judgment to users seeking research assistance, even in instances where the user's information need is in conflict with the librarian's personal conservative views or beliefs. Respondents stated

that a motivating factor in providing access to information for all users is that doing so helps users develop critical thinking skills. They also stressed the belief that an informed citizenry can lead to greater self-reliance which is consonant with their conservative values. A male library director asserted, “[M]y responsibility and obligation as a librarian is to make information freely available. Or as freely available as I can without regarding my own personal views of the content of that material.” A female mid-career department head responded, “I get to help people come to those decisions and conclusions as far as using critical thinking skills and research skills to come to conclusions for themselves, to make decisions for themselves.”

### **Theme 5. Neutrality in librarianship**

Consonant with comments made by respondents regarding the importance of librarians maintaining neutrality in their individual interactions with users, respondents stated that on a macro level, libraries and the wider profession itself should maintain a neutral stance in terms of political issues. Again, they emphasized the importance of maintaining neutrality in their professional work as a standard of professionalism, such as reference assistance and collection development. A female manager disclosed: “I just feel strongly that as professionals and intellectuals and educators, we especially should be making sure that we are apolitical, represent all sides, that we aren’t lobbyists for any issues. I think that that would be a much higher standard for us to attain to than all librarians are liberal or all librarians are conservative.” A female mid-career reference and instruction librarian also noted: “I can be open-minded in terms of providing information for people, no matter where they’re coming from. But that doesn’t mean I have to—and I think this is true with any librarian—that I have to agree with that point of view. And I think, we, I think as librarians, we do need to be very careful about how strongly we



state where we stand. I think it's more important to say 'I'm open to providing information to you if you need it.'"

However, respondents stated that their overall impression of the field of librarianship is that it is identified as a liberal profession, which is often evinced through the activities of the American Library Association, the largest professional association for librarians. One male library administrator observed, "I know the profession perceives itself as being progressive, liberal, free-thinking. Typically not words used to describe conservatives."

### **Theme 6. Navigating and observing ethical behaviors**

Respondents often discussed dealing with ethical dilemmas within the context of their conservative ideology. In particular, respondents experienced conflicts in areas of collection development, issues of filtering, and censorship. In the case of collection development, some respondents discussed mitigating such conflicts by intentionally making personally uncomfortable decisions or deferring to the missions of their institutions. A female reference and instruction librarian said:

I've put myself in a situation where I give examples of things that I'm in opposition to. And maybe that's because I'm trying very hard to show that I'm open-minded . . . I think it comes to protecting that conservative part of myself and trying to keep that separate from what I need to do . . . often times I'm called into freshman history courses to show them how to do research, and one of the courses focuses on American reformers. And though I agree that there are many that did good, there are a few that I don't really agree with their values, so, you know, I try to pick kind of a couple of controversial ones to showcase so that I'm not—I guess my fear is I don't want to—sin of omission, I guess. I

don't want to omit something because I don't agree with. I guess I'm really trying to keep a balance there.

One female technical services librarian thought of her faith-based institution's accreditation body when faced with a collection development dilemma:

I'm not for censorship because it's up to an individual what they're going to look at, but yet, being faith-based, in my mind, trumps some of the things that are librarianship's core values. Because we're also accredited by the [church] and [my administration] would have been very upset to see something like that.

Additionally, participants recounted observed instances of perceived unethical behaviors or decision-making by nonconservative colleagues in areas of collection development, censorship, and hiring decisions. A female public services librarian recounted:

[W]e were looking over resumes for a position that was open, and there were four of us. Two of us ranked one person very high . . . the other two marked [the candidate] very low. When the director asked, "Well, why did you mark [the candidate] low?" one of them said, "Well because [the candidate] used [a certain word] in the cover letter" . . . and the other one said, "We don't need any right-wing Christians." And that was based on the fact that [the candidate had worked at other religious-affiliated libraries and graduated from a religious institution]. The fact that [the candidate] worked there told you nothing about what the candidate's inclinations might be as far as politics but both of those people just jumped to the conclusion that [the candidate] was conservative, and therefore should not be interviewed. And [the candidate] wasn't [interviewed].

## **Theme 7. In the closet**

A key theme in the experience of conservative academic librarians is the need to hide this facet of their identity from their colleagues. Participants generally perceive librarianship and greater academia as environments that are characterized as very liberal, and they reported consciously using discretion and caution when revealing their conservative leanings to others. One female technical services librarian said, “I don’t talk about it except with people I trust, because people let the emotion get involved with the topic versus the ideas of it.” A reference and instruction librarian also shared her feelings of constraint: “I think there are a lot of things I probably keep to myself because I don’t share similar political values in the conversations we do not have. So in that way, no, I certainly am not free.”

Participants also shared that they are counseled by colleagues to keep their ideology to themselves to avoid castigation or shunning. Additionally, participants worried about the reactions of others and the negative impacts that “coming out” or “being outed” as a conservative may have had on their employment or working relationships. One female administrator stated, “[M]y direct supervisor knows my political leanings and she advised me from the get-go. I mean, I’m a pretty open person, but she advised me from the get-go, ‘Don’t go advertising this to people on an academic campus until you get to know them.’” A male user services librarian recalled:

The third year I was here, I was talking with a longtime faculty member in the economics department. I told him I was thinking about dropping my union membership. He took me aside, and he said, “Look, don’t do it. The liberals on this campus will go after you tooth and nail. Keep your union membership until you have tenure, and then you can drop it. If you drop it at this point,” he said, “they will get you.” I knew exactly what he meant: I would not receive tenure.

## **Theme 8. Nonconservative librarians have distorted perceptions of conservatism**

Respondents were asked how they believe conservative librarians are perceived by nonconservative librarians. Many respondents acknowledged the existence of misconceptions of conservatism, and they feel nonconservative colleagues think of them as peculiar.

A female respondent replied, “I feel like there’s a lot of misconceptions about conservatism because of a few crazy people like Glenn Beck and stuff like that.” A male library director shared, “I think it's more of a myth than reality that all Christian conservatives are basically homogenous and they always take the same position on different issues.”

Furthermore, respondents thought that their nonconservative coworkers were under the impression that conservative ideology is not just an unpopular way, but a *wrong* way of thinking and that conservative viewpoints are not credible.

A male library administrator reflected:

I’ve been at other institutions and I’ve interacted with people in my profession--to have conservative viewpoints is wrong. It’s not that- you have the wrong—you’re wrong to have them. You’re wrong to have that viewpoint. To not believe in net neutrality is wrong. You’re a wrong, bad person for having those viewpoints. And that’s a major difference in being a conservative librarian vs. nonconservative. I can disagree with your viewpoint and say, “Ok, you’ve got a right to those viewpoints. I disagree with your viewpoint, but you’re not a worse or lesser person for having those viewpoints.” Whereas if you’re conservative, I’m a bad person for having those viewpoints in the eyes of many of my colleagues. In the profession.

Participants also felt that they are perceived as unintelligent, misinformed, ideologically shallow, and undeserving of respect by nonconservative colleagues. Additionally, they believed

they are seen as anomalies in librarianship (e.g., one cannot be a good librarian and conservative). A female respondent with a decade of experience stated, “I think in general, people who are more of a conservative bent are looked at as non-thinkers. That we don’t think deeply about any subject, otherwise we would have a more liberal view of the world.” Another reference and instruction librarian disclosed, “It’s like, ‘You don’t understand the vast majority of people, um, and what their struggles are.’ That you only have a very limited perspective of how people are and how they live. I think that’s kind of how they would see my views.” A male cataloger plainly stated, “My experience in discussing with other librarians is that a conservative position on any current social issue does not normally receive any respect.” A male electronic resources librarian stated, “[S]ometimes there might be a perception that, for whatever reason, conservatives could not be good librarians. Or at least that’s a sense that I personally have felt just in reading the literature and interactions with other coworkers in the past.”

### **Theme 9. Conservative librarians are belittled and alienated by nonconservative librarians**

Respondents observed that LIS nonconservative colleagues vocally denigrate conservative political figures, viewpoints or ideology, and that conservatives are frequently made fun of, either personally or in general. This group also noted that they have been frequently in situations where nonconservatives assumed that others around them shared similar views.

A male cataloging administrator said, “I mean this happens to me fairly regularly: a discussion will occur within the library within a social setting, and we’ll be discussing something in current events or something in the local community and you become more and more hesitant to voice a conservative viewpoint because people very vocally denigrate that viewpoint.”

Another male access services librarian summated, “It’s like open season on Republicans. You can talk about, denigrate, or chide them for any reason at all or just use them as the butt of jokes.”

### **Theme 10. Choosing silence**

Respondents talked about the need to remain silent about their conservative views and beliefs when around colleagues, including academic librarians and teaching faculty. Respondents who had previously experienced conflict when expressing their views had learned to keep their opinions to themselves in order to avoid future conflict. They also expressed fear that openly expressing their conservative views would negatively impact their career, especially since many had previously stated they perceived the majority of their colleagues to be openly liberal.

A male cataloger explained: “[T]he more times that you are essentially made fun of—and that is exactly that in some cases—the more hesitant you are to participate in those conversations. That is the most common effect on my own participation in social activities: you become hesitant to voice your own opinion on issues because often it’s impossible to have a conversation on why you might believe that. It’s just ridiculed.” Another male librarian clarified issues of career backlash: “I think there’s a silent plurality, if you will, of conservative librarians in public and academic institutions who are fearful or discouraged from s sharing their perspective on some of these issues for fear of some sort of retaliation on the job, or difficulties in finding another job down the road, difficulties in advancing to tenure and promotion, and so forth. So, I think there’s some of that in play.”

Often respondents felt that they had held the minority viewpoint in larger gatherings, so they were less inclined to speak up about their own opposing views for fear of being ridiculed or becoming involved in an argument. Respondents also perceived librarians who identify as liberal

as being much more vocal about their views, which in turn has had a stifling effect on the ability of conservative librarians to express themselves. As one serials librarian explained: “[I]t happens usually several times a year where a topic will come up at a professional meeting and a couple of librarians will inject their own political beliefs to the discussion. And frankly, not often are those political statements even germane to the topic at hand. When that happens, I’ve chosen just to keep silent because I don’t want to antagonize other people.”

Respondents also stressed the importance of remaining neutral about their political viewpoints when in a professional setting, expressing a belief that their conservative views are private and do not need to be discussed professionally. A male serials librarian replied,

I’d feel maybe more liberated to speak out—I just can’t see that happening very often based on the topics that come up in our library faculty meetings. And again, just out of a sense that, for the most part, my political beliefs, my religious beliefs, are my own.

They’re not something I want to cram down other people’s throats or smack them in the face with. Let’s focus on the job and task at hand here, and pretty rarely does that require getting into politics.

A female instruction librarian said, “I suppose if somebody pushed me to the wall, you know, said ‘How do you really feel about this?’ My response may be, if it were something I didn’t agree with, is, ‘I don’t really think that’s right.’ And I would leave it there. I’m not one to get into a battle, over something like that.”

### **Theme 11. Hostility and conflicts at work**

Participants experienced conflict in the workplace that was directly related to their identity as conservative librarians. The type of conflict experienced by participants has come in two forms; one is explicit and characterized by openly hostile comments and actions from

colleagues, the other is implicit, characterized by a workplace climate of friction or tension with colleagues who disagree with their conservative views. As one female public services librarian remembered:

One of the librarians here who was very busy in liberal causes had some little sticky notes that had on them, something like, “Please leave your message below in simple language, it might be read by a Republican.” So that’s not necessarily conservative, but nonetheless, most Republicans are considered somewhat conservative. And she gave that to a faculty member. The faculty member wrote me a note and gave it to me. So, I’m certain he didn’t know what my political beliefs were or anything like that, but nonetheless, it wasn’t a very professional thing for her to do, and I found it offensive.

A male reference department head shared: “I came from a position—one of the reasons I left was because my politically conservative viewpoints were very much an anathema to the rest of the library staff. It was an extremely politically liberal environment and they made it very clear that my viewpoints were not welcome and any works that I would purchase from a politically conservative viewpoint were not well regarded in the collection and were not seen as being academic or relevant to our students.”

Participants reiterated the fact that they choose to be silent about their conservative views for fear that others’ perceptions or beliefs about conservatism could negatively impact their careers or existing and future working relationships. A female respondent recounted, “I quoted one of Donald Rumsfeld’s rules that first reports are usually wrong. And that was thrown back in my face at an evaluation. Donald Rumsfeld was referred to as my ‘friend’ . . . So just that one little thing about how things are often wrong when they are first reported was blown up that I’m a big supporter of this person who said it. So, just jumping to conclusions.”



An early career reference librarian also expressed worry: “I really do feel that in some cases, [my conservatism] could affect whether or not somebody asks me to come into their classroom. I mean, I think it more speaks to the human factor than it does the professional factor. People can be—there are issues that can be very polarizing, and if perhaps somebody feels very, very strongly a certain way, they might find my stance on an issue something that they can’t live with. And wouldn’t want to deal with me.”

### **Theme 12. Professional marginalization**

Respondents frequently mentioned feeling they are a minority among academic librarians, both at their individual institutions and in the larger profession, because they identify as conservative. Their status as an ideological minority has been most apparent at large professional gatherings, particularly at ALA conferences, where they have observed both implicit and explicit instances of marginalization of conservative views, such as openly hostile comments directed at conservatism during conference sessions. A female administrator, a male administrator, and a female reference librarian, respectively, stated:

“I think most librarians that identify as conservative, do feel like outsiders.”

“I feel like we’re a rare breed. I could be wrong! But I do feel that we are definitely in the minority.”

“I’ve been—over the years I’ve been involved in some national committees, and frankly I didn’t—I really didn’t feel welcome.”

Many felt they could not openly engage with other librarians at conferences about their conservative views because they felt those views would be unpopular or lead to conflict.

Coupled with their perceptions of the larger professional associations engaging in political

activities that favor liberal viewpoints, these experiences have created a sense of disengagement for these librarians with ALA.

A mid-career reference and instruction librarian remembered realizing her minority ideological status for the first time, which led to a particular decision:

The first year I worked in um, college library, I attended the ACRL conference in Baltimore. The comments--at that time, George Bush was in office. The comments of the key speakers as well as other speakers who spoke to the group at large were openly critical of George Bush and those that assisted him. And I made a conclusion at that point that um, I obviously thought very differently on those matters than most of the people who were cheering for those comments. And I did not return to the ACRL conference after that and I subsequently dropped my librarianship in ACRL and ALA.

A male coordinator recounted a more direct disinvitation from national library leadership: “[A]n experience that I had at an ALA convention which caused me to drop my ALA membership and never renew it. I was at an ALA midwinter meeting and the president at the time was a gentleman by the name of Gorman, and he was [coughs], he was pontificating on some of his left-wing, uh, ideas. And I asked him in an open session, I said, ‘How do you accommodate librarians who are more conservative than you?’ And he said, ‘They can go somewhere else.’ And so I did.”

### **Theme 13. ALA’s political activities impact professional engagement**

Participants cited activities the American Library Association in which it has engaged as points of contention in considering membership and setting the tone for library practice and advocacy in the United States. In particular, ALA’s political activities, including the creation and dissemination of statements and resolutions supporting political affairs and other activist

exercises are a flashpoint for conservative academic librarians. Participants believe that these kinds of activities bring prohibitive focus to non-library issues and place the organization in peril in terms of the public's perception of librarians as neutral information procurers and providers. A male reference administrator asserted, "I find it annoying—going to meetings and just people going on about issues that have nothing to do with librarianship, be it Israel and Palestine or libraries in Cuba. I don't have the patience for it anymore! You know, I want to get to the heart of the matter." A female administrator expressed a similar sentiment, "[I]t's very bristling when they come out with a stance on something that I feel doesn't have anything to do with the library. And I did make a comment to the committee that put out [a] particular stance several years ago, and they had a reasoning behind it but it still didn't make any sense to me."

Regardless of issues with national-level professional engagement, participants are professionally engaged with local, state, and regional library organizations despite being actively disengaged with the largest national library organization, ALA, for several reasons. Participants stated smaller organizations focus on library operational issues and local resource issues, which is useful for their daily work. They feel smaller organizations offer a more welcoming climate than ALA; some participants stated the smaller organizations to which they belong better reflect their conservative values. A female respondent said, "I have belonged to SLA and MLA because they are less liberal. In the sorts of issues that they promote." A male respondent elaborated: "I feel that the state and local organizations which I am involved in are more focused on library resources and issues. When I have been involved in national groups, frankly, there was a political agenda which had little to do with the task at hand. Some of the agendas may have been more personal (such as self-promotion and padding one's resume) but there were definitely other agendas at play."

Respondents stated they actively left ALA or chose not to join ALA because of ALA's political stances and actions, which have run counter to their personal conservative views and beliefs. They also felt ALA has engaged too frequently in social and political issues that were of no relevance to library work. A male department head said, "I'm not a member of ALA. I don't feel like they're necessarily discussing issues of interest to me, and I don't have a lot to gain from membership. So, I'm not a member. I don't always support some of their positions." A female manager explained her feelings of estrangement, saying, "I would say sometimes when I read some of the statements from ALA, I kind of feel not as interested in being involved."

Those who were members of national library organizations only joined as a matter of career and professional development reasons. They were clear that the national organizations did not reflect their conservative ideology. As one female administrator asserted, "I am a member of ALA because there are things there that I need as far as information for my career and my profession, but I can say that ALA, as a whole overall organization, does not reflect anything that has to do with my political values."

#### **Theme 14. The (political) timbre of an institution matters**

Participants who work at institutions they perceive as conservative feel less pressure to hide their conservative beliefs than those who feel they work at nonconservative institutions. Additionally, the former group feels a sense of safety or protection from being ostracized by colleagues, administrators, or teaching faculty members. Conservative librarians working at conservative institutions cited their enjoyment of traditional elements of campus life, including small classes, traditional liberal arts curriculum, student service or community outreach projects, and codes of conduct. A female library manager explained the link between her ideology, her institution, and the impact on her duties: "I think it's basically conservative, and the way that

affects my daily work is, I guess I do feel more in tune with their mission and their goals and, that helps me have more enthusiasm for what I'm pursuing, for what I'm doing here." Another female working in technical services believed "because I work in a faith-based, private college, I believe I am free to express opinions that are not necessarily accepted or popular within library circles in general."

Participants working at nonconservative institutions noted experiencing or witnessing campus support of liberal-themed events. They also noted campus-wide eschewing of conservative programs or speakers as a marker of academia's general leanings against conservative ideology. Concomitantly, this group also found areas of affinity, particularly in instances where campus administrators have made decisions that ensure affordable tuition or adequate university funding. A male cataloger asserted, "[T]he library, as an institution, sponsored participation in —[what was] essentially a gay pride parade event. The participation doesn't bother me as much as they would have never considered library-sponsored participation in something like a pro-life event. Never would have occurred. Not only that, there would have been an uproar if it was even considered." A user services coordinator reflected on his perceptions of academia as a whole, and how the political viewpoints of academics relate to the deprecation of conservative viewpoints in college and university environments: "I feel that in general academics are liberal in their outlook, and sometimes aggressively so to the exclusion of conservative ideals. If you look at what has happened on college campuses today, for example, with conservative speakers being forced to cancel their speaking appointments, that's an example."

## **Discussion**

Academic librarians who identify as conservative define their ideology as one that includes fundamental tenets of self-reliance and personal accountability. A preference for small government, close interpretations of the United States Constitution, emphasis on personal freedom and individual rights, and a general adherence to a Judeo-Christian religious belief system is also part of the formation of conservative identity. Conservative librarians believe there are definitive links between their ideology and the core values of American librarianship. Librarian core values of protecting intellectual freedom, providing equitable and unbiased service, promoting literacy, and offering access to information support conservative principles of self-reliance, civic participation, and being of service to others. There are some limits to these links in special cases, for example, some have trouble closing the gap between wanting to offer free access to information and recognizing their moral objections about the availability of and access to Internet pornography in public spaces. Conservative librarians' work is guided by principles of good customer service, which includes markers of treating people with integrity, fairness, objectivity, and a willingness to do the very best job they can. The principle of maintaining objectivity also carries over to collection development and cataloging processes. This group believes that a librarian's role is to provide information freely and without judgment in order to promote democracy and foster library users' self-reliance.

Despite the synergy between conservative ideals and American librarianship values, conservative librarians perceive that overall, the library profession is liberal and that the profession's largest national organization—the American Library Association—propagates this perception among librarians and to the public via various activities. Conservative librarians believe that all librarians should be seen as neutral information providers, so the idea that the public may ascribe any political label to the LIS profession is concerning. Driving their

perception that librarianship is liberal are their own experiences and observations of ethical breaches or prejudicial treatment against conservative ideology and conservative people in the workplace. They have witnessed breaches of ethical decision-making in several areas of library work, including reference and public services, collection development, and employment practices. Concomitantly, they admit their own ethical struggles with collection development and for some, with reconciling the principles of librarianship with the conservative missions of their institutions.

A key point in the conservative academic librarian experience is a desire to hide this facet of their identity from LIS colleagues and other people on their campuses. This desire to keep their conservatism “closeted” has arisen as result of several factors: the perception of LIS as a liberal professional community; a wish to be seen as a politically neutral professional; and observations of colleagues’ negative reactions to recognized conservative figures and their ideas. Conservative college and university librarians make conscious decisions to use discretion and caution when revealing conservative thoughts and opinions at work. Moreover, colleagues who are already “in-the-know” about their viewpoints often advise conservative librarians not to reveal their ideology to others until they have either verified that those people are allies or they have reached a point in their career that offers more protection from any negative consequences of being perceived as a conservative. The consequences of being “outed” as a conservative are points of worry because being identified as conservative may negatively affect informal working relationships with colleagues and/or teaching faculty (e.g., people may not want to work with them), and career mobility (e.g., they may not be granted tenure).

Nonconservative librarians harbor misconceptions of conservative librarians; they believe that conservatives are a monolithic group of unsympathetic, ignorant, misguided, and shallow

thinkers whose viewpoints are not just invalid—they are *wrong*—and thus, not worthy of civil discourse or respect. Conservative librarians are nonplussed that nonconservative colleagues have trouble reconciling that a person can be a conservative and a “good” librarian. The misconceptions and disrespect conservative librarians perceive or experience is affirmed by nonconservative colleagues’ consistent jokes about conservative politicians and conservative colleagues or vocal denigration of conservative ideals in a way that presumes everyone involved in the exchange is not conservative.

Misconceptions about conservatism heighten conservative librarians’ need to hide their ideology; thus, when confronted with these misconceptions, they react with silence to avoid conflict. Those who have spoken out in the past have learned there are negative results, including implied threats to career mobility. Nonconservative librarians seem to demand their conservative colleagues’ silence by being extremely vocal about their own ideology and creating work environments that are heavily politicized through images, decor, slogans, and discussions. These environments inherently stifle conservative colleagues’ voices and opinions by emphasizing their perceived minority status in the profession. Furthermore, it places conservative librarians in an awkward position of having to suppress their own ideology and while trying to express their fundamental desire to keep the work of librarianship as apolitical as possible. Those who do not keep quiet about their ideology (or those who have been “outed” by others) experience hostile work environments or conflicts with colleagues. These conflicts affect all aspects of work-life and career, including trying to negotiate interpersonal relationships with colleagues who are against conservatives, contending with blatant anti-conservative parameters or pro-liberal directives placed on materials selection policies, and dealing with being implicitly threatened during formal evaluation processes.



Conservative academic librarians are not only alienated at work. They also feel marginalized in the larger field of librarianship, and this is most evident at national meetings (e.g., ALA Annual Conferences or ACRL conferences). During these meetings, conservative academic librarians are overwhelmed with liberal-themed or politicized conference sessions, keynote speakers, and conference paraphernalia. Experiencing these phenomena at conferences communicates to conservative librarians the message that they are a minority in librarianship. Additionally, if they are national committee members, they are made to feel unwelcome and nonessential to the charge of the groups to which they have offered their time and expertise. ALA further exacerbates alienation of conservative librarians through constant political activism, which most often takes the form of official statements and resolutions supporting political issues or events that are not directly related to American libraries or librarian advocacy.

The estrangement fostered by national professional library organizations affects conservative librarians' decisions to be professionally engaged at the national level, and many choose not to join or subsequently drop their membership from these groups. Instead, they turn to local, state, and regional groups for networking, career development, and continuing education opportunities. Conservative academic librarians feel more welcome at local, state, and regional organizations because these organizations focus on the day-to-day issues of libraries rather than promulgating political agendas. In the case of conservative librarians who are members of national associations, they join solely because they view the national associations as necessary information channels for their career. They staunchly disagree that national professional organizations reflect or support their values.

Feelings of alienation and marginalization are threads running through several aspects of a conservative academic librarian's career, and campus life is included in their experience. For

this group, the political timbre of an institution seems to matter. Conservatives who perceive their institutions to be nonconservative cited their disappointment regarding campus support and funding of pro-liberal events and noted that academia rarely considers offering the same levels of support to programs that focus on pro-conservative viewpoints. Despite these general observations, conservative librarians working at nonconservative institutions did identify points of affinity, especially in cases of campus administrations' adherence to principles of fiscal responsibility and expanded access to education. On the other hand, conservative librarians who perceive their institution as conservative find relief: they do not feel as much pressure to hide their ideology from their colleagues, and they are less likely to feel excluded or estranged by campus events. Furthermore, traditional elements of campus life (e.g. academic rituals or some student programs) increase comfort levels and reflect their conservative ideals.

## **Conclusion**

By utilizing a phenomenological research method, the researchers have been able to capture the experiences of conservative academic librarians working in North American academic libraries. This study finds that conservative academic librarians navigate a complex path through their daily work-lives, as well as through the profession at large, where their conservative views are seen as a minority viewpoint. Despite the perception that librarianship as a field is a profession that values neutrality, the reality of these librarians' experiences demonstrates the politicization of the field. Often these librarians feel their voices are marginalized; many feel that they must keep their conservative identity hidden in order to ensure harmonious work relationships and future career growth. In many instances, the negative experiences these librarians have experienced have pushed many to disengage with the largest national professional library associations. However, despite these challenges, conservative

academic librarians expressed a belief in the alignment of their personal conservative convictions with the core values of librarianship.

Although this study yielded rich information, further study is warranted to gain a fuller sense of how self-identification in terms of conservative versus nonconservative views interweaves with the work-lives of academic librarians. Continued research of conservative librarians could look more specifically at one aspect of their experience. For example, researchers could ask conservative librarians to document instances of alienation at conferences through the process of journaling. Another potential area of study would be to explore the career motivations of conservative librarians—how do they remain motivated in a professional community that they perceive to be hostile? Since type of institution also affected the experiences of conservative academic librarians, exploring the experiences of conservative librarians at non-academic public libraries would be useful as well. In this study, the mission of some of the private, faith-based institutions at which some of the librarians worked "trumped" some of the principles and values of librarianship, especially in terms of collection development. What happens when the "mission" of a library is to serve the public (everyone)? How does that intersect with conservative identity? Are public librarians more or less constrained when it comes to expressing their political beliefs? For conservative academic librarians, being on the tenure-track might make them more likely to choose silence because of the fear of retaliation through tenure reviews, but that would not be an issue at a public library.

Since this study looked at the experience of conservative academic librarians, another study asking the same questions could also be conducted with self-identified nonconservative academic librarians. A comparison between their experiences could then be made in the hopes of locating those points of commonality. Finding common ground is key to creating better

engagement among all academic librarians. As in higher education, which often holds up collegiality (which includes respectful disagreement between colleagues) as a pillar of professional discourse, so, too can academic librarianship champion the idea of dissent as a normal component of professional engagement in the spirit of intellectual freedom.

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## Appendix

### Semi-structured interview schedule

1. What does being socially or politically conservative mean to you?
2. How does your identification as a conservative librarian intersect with the core values of librarianship?
3. What guiding principles do you use in your daily practice of librarianship?
4. Describe an experience when you felt/feel your conservative ideals were in conflict with the practice of the core values of librarianship.
5. Describe an experience when you felt/feel your conservative ideals were in alignment with the practice of the core values of librarianship.
6. How do you think your values are perceived in the general community of academic librarianship?
7. How do you think your values are perceived in the greater academic community?
8. Describe an experience when you felt/feel like your ideals were in conflict with your librarian colleagues.
9. Describe an experience when you felt/feel like your ideals were in alignment with your librarian colleagues.
10. Describe an experience when you felt/feel like your conservative ideals were in conflict with the greater academic community.
11. Describe an experience when you felt/feel like your conservative ideals were in alignment with the greater academic community.
12. How does working at an institution that reflects your identity as a conservative librarian impact your daily practice? (Alternatively, "How does working at an institution that does not reflect your identity as a conservative librarian impact your daily practice?")
13. Describe an experience when you felt/feel like your conservative ideals were in conflict with your institution.
14. Describe an experience when you felt/feel like your conservative ideals were in alignment with your institution.
15. If you are a member of professional library organizations, how do these organizations reflect your values? (Alternative if participant states they are not affiliated with any professional library organizations: "Would you discuss what factors, if any, led to your decision to abstain from professional organizations?")
16. Is there anything else that we have not asked you that you feel is important about the experience of being a conservative academic librarian?



**Table 1.** Neutrality statements and principles in ALA’s Library Bill of Rights and Code of Ethics

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**Library Bill of Rights**

- I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.
- II. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

**Code of Ethics**

- I. We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests.
- II. We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.
- VI. We do not advance private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues, or our employing institutions.
- VII. We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources.

**Table 2.** Participant summary

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Female, Administrative/department head, Texas, 8 years of experience

Male, Administrator/Reference department, Virginia, 35 years of experience

Male, Administrator, Georgia, 25 years of experience

Female, Manager, Indiana, 10 years of experience

Male, Access services, New York, 3 years of experience

Male, Director, Mississippi, 39 years of experience

Female, Reference and Instruction, North Carolina, 11 years of experience

Male, E-Resources & Serials, Nebraska, 15 years of experience

Female, Technical Services, Michigan, 3 years of experience

Female, Reference and Instruction, West Virginia, 5.5 years of experience

Female, Technical Services, Ohio, 11 years of experience

Male, Head of Cataloging, currently interim administrator, Washington, 17 years of experience

Female, Public Services & Instruction, Pennsylvania, 8 years of experience

Male, Coordinator of User Services, Nebraska, 35 years of experience

Female, Public Services & Instruction, Ohio, 30 years of experience

Female, Reference & Instruction, New York, 7 years of experience

Male, Library Director, Florida, 17 years of experience

**Table 3.** Significant statement examples and formulated meanings

<b>Significant Statement</b>	<b>Formulated meaning</b>
I feel that everybody has the right to information that covers both sides, and I was told that ‘no, we don’t purchase materials that are to the right of an issue.’	I believe in providing neutral, equitable access to information, but my colleagues do not agree and have prescribed Anti-Conservative parameters to our collection development processes.
[My colleagues] cannot figure out ‘why are you that way?’ ‘How could you possibly be that way?’ I think that- they’re confused. ‘How can you be a librarian and be conservative?’ They’re unable to conceive of that mixture.	Co-workers cannot rectify my Conservative identity with my profession as a librarian. They think these identities are mutually exclusive

**Table 4. Theme cluster example**

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**Professional engagement**

- regional, state and local organizations are focused on library issues
- ALA is too focused on political issues that are not library-related
- regional, state and local organizations offer more value than ALA
- conservative values are more often reflected in smaller organizations than ALA
- smaller professional library organizations are more welcoming than ALA
- conservative librarians consciously leave ALA because of its political stances and actions

**Table 5. All major themes**

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**Theme 1. Definition of conservatism**

**Theme 2. LIS intersects with conservatism**

**Theme 3. Values of librarianship**

**Theme 4. The role of the librarian**

**Theme 5. Neutrality in librarianship**

**Theme 6. Navigating and observing ethical behaviors**

**Theme 7. In the closet**

**Theme 8. Nonconservative librarians have distorted perceptions of conservatism**

**Theme 9. Conservative librarians are belittled and alienated by nonconservative librarians**

**Theme 10. Choosing silence**

**Theme 11. Hostility and conflicts at work**

**Theme 12. Professional marginalization**

**Theme 13. ALA's political activities impact professional engagement**

**Theme 14. The (political) timbre of an institution matters**