

Intergroup Dynamics

Librarians and Paraprofessionals in the Workplace

Marian G. Fragola

The term *librarian* connotes a professional, as do the terms *doctor* and *lawyer*. To become a professional librarian, one must first earn a master of library science (MLS) degree. At the same time, approximately 60 percent (or more) of people who work in libraries do not have MLS degrees.¹ In today's libraries these workers, most often referred to as paraprofessionals, library technicians, or support staff, perform tasks that were the sole purview of professional librarians in the not-so-distant past. Both anecdotally and in the professional library literature, especially regarding academic libraries, there is evidence of perceived tension between librarians and paraprofessionals. Larry Oberg, former university librarian at Willamette University and a staunch advocate of support staff, posits that because librarians have not been able to "articulate clearly who it is that we [as librarians] are and what it is that we ought to be doing, considerable indifference to the status and working conditions of library staff has been created."²

Paraprofessionals sometimes grumble that librarians do not respect paraprofessionals' work, or librarians act superior because of their degree. In *The Library Paraprofessional: Notes from the Underground*, Terry Rodgers writes that "much of the impetus for and rancor behind this book is epitomized in an oft-made and emblematic witticism with far-reaching implications habitually uttered by a retired, well-regarded librarian and library supporter. Her watchword for the library [paraprofessional] staff who issued her books to her was, 'Clerks are jerks.'"³ Indeed, a job satisfaction study published in 1993 found that "support staff resent the master's degree barrier dividing them from librarians" and that support staff expressed a perceived lack of status, recognition, and appreciation for their work.⁴ In a similar job satisfaction study performed at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill in 1998, Murray found that paraprofessionals often feel a lack of respect for their contributions to the library.⁵ In a 2005 survey conducted by the North Carolina Library Association, 20 percent of the 213 respondents (which included both MLS librarians as well as paraprofessionals) indicated that they felt that "underlying tensions" existed in working relationships between paraprofessionals and librarians.⁶

These tensions seem to run in both directions, with paraprofessionals having less than positive things to say

about their librarian coworkers. Rodgers's aforementioned book enumerates many concerns and complaints of paraprofessionals and includes two interviews with anonymous support staff members. In answer to the question "How much do you respect librarians and the work they do?" one answers, "There are a few librarians I do respect . . . However, most aren't doing anything that a person of average intelligence and some common sense couldn't accomplish *without* all the years of library school; their job isn't as demanding—especially *mentally*—as the clerk's job."⁷ Few studies, however, have explored how librarians actually feel about their paraprofessional coworkers. Do librarians, in fact, exhibit a strong degree of what researchers and sociologists refer to as "in-group bias," a feeling that those in one's own group (however it is defined) are better and more deserving of preferential treatment than those not in one's group? Some librarians have publicly expressed disdain with their paraprofessional colleagues, only to be sternly chastised by fellow librarians. In a letter to the editor following a cover story in *American Libraries* about paraprofessionals, Norige suggests that they should "pursue a degree in library science or stop complaining you don't have the respect and wages you would like to have,"⁸ an attitude professional librarian and library director John Richmond characterizes as "unbelievably haughty and condescending" in a letter of response.⁹

If librarians do look down on paraprofessionals, there are obvious repercussions for the workplace. Because rapport with coworkers has a clear effect on job satisfaction, it is important that paraprofessionals feel respected and supported by their coworkers who hold MLS degrees. Indeed, a substantial amount of research supports the positive relationship between perceived coworker support and job satisfaction.¹⁰ Library managers need to understand if the phenomenon of in-group bias is part of the intergroup dynamic in libraries and, if so, what steps may be taken to counteract it. Furthermore, managers may want to know precisely what efforts will be most effective in lessening in-group bias. For example, should library leaders schedule seminars or workshops to discuss in-group bias? Should they sponsor all-staff outings or social get-togethers where

Marian G. Fragola (mfragola@durhamcountync.gov) is Humanities Coordinator at Durham County (N.C.) Library.

staff members can get to know each other on a more personal level? Research and common sense suggests that contact increasing intimate or true acquaintance lessens prejudice between groups more than casual, non-personal contact does.¹¹

Through interviews with librarians and paraprofessionals, this article attempts to answer three questions: (1) Do librarians exhibit in-group bias, favoring librarians over paraprofessionals? (2) If librarians do exhibit in-group bias, to what extent does it affect the working relationships between librarians and paraprofessionals? and (3) Are there other factors that seem to have an effect on the intergroup dynamics of librarians and paraprofessionals?

The Concept of In-Group Bias

The concept of in-group bias has been studied for decades. In fact, the phenomena in which “individuals value, favor, and conform to their own membership groups (in-groups) over groups to which they do not belong (out-groups) is among the most well established . . . in social psychology.”¹² Numerous studies show that the tendency to favor the in-group over the out-group in evaluations and behavior is a “remarkably omnipresent feature of intergroup relations.”¹³ Henri Tajfel, a pioneering researcher of in-group bias and social identity, conducted experiments that showed group members exhibited bias toward their own group at the expense of another group (the out-group) even when there was no pre-existing conflict between the groups or a conflict of interest between them.¹⁴ In other words, group members would show a preference for their own group, even when they had nothing to gain or lose by doing so. Some in-group bias may be inevitable, the byproduct of people’s need to identify themselves with a group in order to create a positive sense of self. Social identity theory posits that people need to feel good about themselves, and one way to do so is to create an identity based on membership in groups.¹⁵

One groundbreaking analysis in the field of in-group bias and conflict was a field study conducted in the early 1950s by Sherif known as the “Robbers Cave” study. In this study, groups of boys at a summer camp were separated into two groups that, nearly immediately, showed remarkable hostility toward one another. To see if they could shift intergroup dynamics, the researchers constructed a series of events that forced the boys to work together on super-ordinate goals, such as finding a leak in the water supply for the camp. Only after working together on a series of tasks did intergroup hostility abate.¹⁶ Another analysis, contact theory, demonstrates that in-group bias can be mediated, if not remedied entirely. Contact theory holds that intergroup contact under certain conditions can lessen prejudice. Those conditions are: “equal group status within the situation; common goals; intergroup cooperation; and the support of authorities, law, or custom.”¹⁷

Allport’s work and much of the work that has followed, however, has focused on racial divisions. For example, Brown and Hewstone cite that researchers have conducted more than five hundred contact studies involving 250,000 participants of various nationalities, with findings of those studies supporting the theory that “contact under the right conditions is efficacious in making intergroup attitudes and behavior more positive.”¹⁸

Researchers have continued to explore how and under what precise circumstances people can actually alter their in-group bias. Using the half-century-old Robber’s Cave experiment as an example, Gaertner and Dovidio developed the Common In-Group Identity Model. In this model, people move from a strict in-group/out-group mentality to one in which they develop a more inclusive, overarching group that includes both the in-group and the out-group. Following the Common In-Group Identity Model, individuals can move beyond a mentality that favors their own in-group and develop a sense of common in-group identity, or what they call a sense of we-ness.¹⁹ Other recent research points to the possibility that personalized contact, or contact in which “one responds to other individuals in terms of their relationship to self” is helpful in lessening in-group bias.²⁰ One component of personalized interaction is self-disclosure, or “voluntary provision of information to another that is of an intimate or personal nature.”²¹

Research in the current study was undertaken to explore whether personalized contact between members of two groups, librarians and paraprofessionals, seemed to affect the degree of in-group bias exhibited by members of the higher status group (librarians). As mentioned earlier, much of the research on in-group bias to date has focused on racial divisions. More recently, however, researchers have been looking at different kinds of workers and how in-group bias manifests itself in the work world. For example, in 2006 Lipponen and Leskinen published a survey-based field study of permanent Finnish restaurant employees and their relationship to their contingent (or not permanent) counterparts.²² While researchers are beginning to examine in-group bias between different groups of workers, there is no body of evidence relating in-group bias to librarians vis-à-vis paraprofessionals. In fact, considering the significant role they play in libraries, paraprofessionals are largely overlooked in the library science literature. For example, no journals are specifically geared toward the concerns of the library paraprofessional. *Library Mosaics*, a magazine that focused on the concerns and interests of support staff, ceased publication in December 2005 citing financial issues and decreased circulation.²³

On the other hand, concerns of paraprofessionals are gaining a foothold at the national level, evidenced by American Library Association’s (ALA) increased support of paraprofessional activities. In 2003 paraprofessionals were the subject of ALA’s third Congress on Professional Education (COPE). According to a news report, one theme of COPE III was increasing respect and prominence for

library support staff.²⁴ Despite these strides, however, research is still needed to explore whether librarians have in-group bias and, if they do, whether that bias impedes the working relationship between professional librarians and paraprofessionals. In an article in *Libraries and the Academy*, authors Jones and Stivers assert that COPE III did not go nearly far enough, claiming that COPE III failed to pinpoint the underlying problem of “the rigid dichotomy between librarians and support staff.” They went on to call for an analysis of the chasm between the two groups.²⁵

Research Method

In-group bias, the tendency to give preferential treatment to members of one’s own in-group, is a phenomenon that has been observed in a variety of intergroup settings. But do librarians exhibit in-group bias? If librarians do exhibit in-group bias, does it seem to negatively impact the intergroup dynamics between professional librarians and paraprofessionals? Do other factors, including personalized contact, have an effect on the intergroup dynamics of librarians and paraprofessionals? For this article, the author explored these questions through a case study of the opinions and perceptions of professional librarians and paraprofessionals at a public library in North Carolina. Following data collection, the author used participants’ comments to perform a cross-case analysis to determine the different perspectives on central issues held by members of both groups.²⁶ In order to collect data on in-group bias and perceptions about intergroup dynamics, semi-structured interviews of eleven subjects, comprising five professional librarians and six paraprofessionals, were conducted. For purposes of this study, a librarian was defined as holding an MLS degree from an ALA-accredited program and employed full-time in a library for one or more consecutive years. A paraprofessional was defined as a full-time library employee without an MLS degree employed in a library for one or more consecutive years. Typical paraprofessional job titles include library assistant, library associate, circulation assistant, or branch manager. These job titles are illustrative only and do not necessarily reflect specific titles of participants of this study.

Based on the staffing arrangement of the library system selected for this study, one modification was made to the operational definition of paraprofessional. Some paraprofessionals there actually have an MLS degree, but are serving in a paraprofessional role with a paraprofessional job title. For the purposes of this study, the participating staff members who fall into this category were categorized as paraprofessionals and their comments included along with other paraprofessionals’ responses in the results section. Because this study does not attempt to measure whether or not paraprofessionals exhibit in-group bias, favoring other paraprofessionals (their in-group) over librarians (their out-group), paraprofessional subjects were not asked to complete a survey created to determine in-group bias. With

exception of the survey, professional librarians and paraprofessionals were interviewed in the same manner, with similar questions. By asking nearly identical questions of the two groups, responses can be more easily compared for similarities and differences. Research in the current study focuses on qualitative interview data from both paraprofessionals and librarians, and the author used stratified purposive sampling in order to study a small subset of a larger population.²⁷ After receiving approval from the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill’s Behavioral Institutional Review Board, the author corresponded with the assistant director at a public library in North Carolina to develop a strategy for participant recruitment. Participants were recruited via an all-staff e-mail sent by the library’s assistant director. Staff members willing to participate in the study contacted the author directly and an interview time and location was arranged.

Seven interviews were conducted face-to-face in a private space within the library and four were conducted via telephone. The interviews lasted approximately thirty to forty-five minutes each, and the author took detailed notes during each interview. Personal information on gender, ethnicity, race, age, job title, or length of employment was not collected as this information, if included in the results in conjunction with participant comments, might have identified study participants. However, it may be assumed that the participant pool consisted of a diverse population in regard to these factors. The interview sessions with librarians began with a ten-item survey that was developed to measure in-group bias, or the phenomena in which people behave more positively toward in-group than toward out-group members.²⁸ Librarians were asked to rate each question on a five-level Likert item format with the following choices:

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Following the survey, librarians were asked a series of ten questions. As mentioned earlier, because the current study does not attempt to measure in-group bias among paraprofessionals, they were not asked to participate in the survey instrument designed to measure in-group bias. Interview sessions with paraprofessionals consisted only of the ten interview questions.

Results of Professional Librarian Survey

Responses professional librarians gave during the survey portion of the interview can be stratified into three categories. In the first category, professional librarians display unanimous or near-unanimous agreement in sup-

port of paraprofessionals. In the second category, professional librarians gave a wider range of answers, but those answers still convey mostly positive perceptions about paraprofessional. The final category is one in which librarians' answers exhibit negativity about paraprofessionals. It is in this category that the author found some evidence of in-group bias.

Category One: Highly Positive

Several of the survey statements elicited highly positive responses from all five professional librarians. The following three statements—*Paraprofessionals are important to the effective functioning of a library*; *Libraries could not function without paraprofessionals*; and *Paraprofessionals' concerns and problems should be given equal consideration with those of librarians and/or senior staff members*—all received strong support, with all five professional librarians responding with an “agree” or “strongly agree” to those statements. In fact, the first statement received a unanimous “strongly agree.”

Category Two: Mostly Positive

In the next category were statements that received a slightly wider variety of answers, but still elicited positive responses about paraprofessionals. The first three statements in this category—*Most of the paraprofessionals I know seem competent*; *Most of the paraprofessionals I know seem intelligent*; and *Most paraprofessionals I know strive to improve the workplace*—all received one “neither agree nor disagree,” two “agree,” and two “strongly agree” responses. The fourth—*Paraprofessionals work as hard as librarians*—received one “disagree” but two “agree” and two “strongly agree” responses.

Category Three: Ambivalent to Less Positive

The final category of questions elicited responses that were slightly more negative than the first two categories, but even within this category some of the professional librarians gave paraprofessionals high marks. The statement *Some of the paraprofessionals I know could do my job* received the survey's most varied response, receiving two responses of “disagree,” one “neither agree nor disagree,” one “agree” and one “strongly agree.” The responses to the statement *Paraprofessionals have specialized skills* were split, with three respondents agreeing, one disagreeing, and one strongly disagreeing. The statement that elicited the most negative response was *Except for the MLS degree, librarians and paraprofessionals are basically the same*, to which two professional librarians strongly disagreed, two disagreed, and one agreed. (See table 1.)

Interview Results

In addition to the survey discussed previously, which was given only to professional librarians to assess their level of in-group bias, interviews were conducted with both professional librarians and paraprofessionals. The interview questions were designed to explore intergroup dynamics, the perceptions of bias, and what factors may impact those perceptions. Several interview questions elicited similar perceptions from both professional librarians and paraprofessionals. For example, all eleven participants had the perception that the relationship between professional librarians and paraprofessionals at their library was fairly good, ranging from adequate to excellent. Librarians categorized the relationship as: perfectly adequate; excellent with no problems at all; very cooperative and mutually appreciative; and friendly. Paraprofessionals answered in much the same way. One responded that “for the most part, people are pretty good.” Another said that the relationship is very good and that professional librarians were respectful of coworkers. One subject replied, “many paraprofessionals have been here a long time” and that “[the people in this location] don't think in terms of paraprofessionals and librarians, but in terms of experience” and mentioned the fact that particular staff members have developed a reputation for various types of expertise, like troubleshooting computers or working with the catalog. While all subjects reported good working relationships between professional librarians and paraprofessionals at their library, several mentioned that they had either heard about friction between the two groups in other libraries or had read about it in professional literature. One paraprofessional noted, “I don't think we have issues here, but I have heard of situations where librarians have problems with those who were not librarians.” Another remarked:

I once went to a conference about fifteen years ago at NCLA when there was a meeting of paraprofessionals when they were first trying to organize and I was surprised to hear the comments about how paraprofessionals were treated—that professionals looked down on them. I kept thinking, “I've never really felt that.” Some people have adverse reactions to the public, but I never felt like that as a coworker. Some of them were made to feel that their work was not as important, and I've never felt like that from the administration. I've always felt that they see our contribution as important to keep the library functioning.

In addition to categorizing the relationship between professional librarians and paraprofessionals as congenial, all subjects said that the two groups interacted with one another on the job and had opportunities to interact with one another socially. One professional librarian said, “We sometimes have a luncheon or party of some sort.

Occasionally there's a party at someone's home outside of work. Most socializing goes on during the working day, but it's certainly a friendly environment." One paraprofessional indicated that social interaction between the two groups was not a problem. She elaborated that there was "no snobbery about 'I'm a librarian and you are not'—not from my perspective."

Moreover, all professional librarians indicated that, at their library, librarians knew paraprofessionals personally (in the sense that they knew personal information about paraprofessionals, such as where they were from, whether or not they were married and had children, and so on). For example, one librarian said, "Probably we don't know about all of them, but probably a great many of them." Another, when asked whether librarians knew paraprofessionals personally responded, "Definitely" and another said, "I don't think there is a social or academic hierarchy . . . people relate to each other and develop friendships based on age or personal interests." Paraprofessionals supported this

perception, agreeing that professional librarians did know the paraprofessionals at their library personally. A representative response was, "We rub shoulders eight hours a day. The people you work with, you are with more than your family. We've got a very good group at [this location]. We're very close here."

While none of the interview questions asked about professional development or training, two professional librarians and four paraprofessionals commented that their library system encouraged all staff to take part in trainings, regardless of job title. For example, one paraprofessional noted, "Whatever goes on here is for library staff. There is ongoing training and training is offered for everyone equally. There's not separate training for paraprofessionals. Everyone gets the same type of opportunities." In addition, several subjects mentioned that committees were inclusive, and that all staff members were encouraged to participate in committee work. One professional librarian said, "In our library we have a lot of committees (like collection

Table 1. Results of the Professional Librarian Survey

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Highly positive					
Paraprofessionals are important to the effective functioning of a library.	0	0	0	0	5
Libraries could not function without paraprofessionals.	0	0	0	1	4
Paraprofessionals' concerns and problems should be given equal consideration with those of librarians and/or senior staff members.	0	0	0	3	2
Mostly positive					
Most of the paraprofessionals I know seem competent.	0	0	1	2	2
Most of the paraprofessionals I know seem intelligent.	0	0	1	2	2
Most paraprofessionals I know strive to improve the workplace.	0	0	1	2	2
Paraprofessionals work as hard as librarians.	0	1	0	2	2
Ambivalent to less positive					
Some of the paraprofessionals I know could do my job.	0	2	1	1	1
Paraprofessionals have specialized skills.	1	1	0	3	0
Except for the MLS degree, librarians and paraprofessionals are basically the same.	2	2	0	1	0

development) with both professionals and paraprofessionals. We don't say 'A and B are professionals so they have more say than C and D do.' They are able to participate." Paraprofessionals also brought up the topic of committee work. One offered, "I was on the collection development committee. I was the least degreed [person on the committee], but my views were respected as much as anyone else's." Two paraprofessionals did mention a committee had been developed exclusively for library associates (a paraprofessional category) but said that the committee was currently defunct and had not met in years.

There was not agreement on whether roles of professional librarians and paraprofessionals were clearly defined. In answer to the question "Do librarians and paraprofessionals at your library have clearly defined roles?" there was a wide variance of opinion. Five participants (four professional librarians and one paraprofessional) felt that roles were clearly defined. For example, one librarian said, "Our job descriptions are clear. All the professionals (in information services, branch managers, and children's librarians) have work plans and those are quite clearly defined. The basic division of responsibility is pretty clear." The paraprofessional who answered affirmatively said, "Everyone at this branch has clearly defined roles, but many tasks are self-selected. Like, 'I'm going to take on this task because this is what I want to do' and people say, 'great.'" All other paraprofessionals and one professional librarian said they did not feel that roles were clearly defined or that they were only partially defined. For example, one paraprofessional said, "For the most part, yes [roles are clearly defined], but sometimes there can be some gray areas. Working closely with the professionals . . . sometimes it gets confusing." Another said that the roles are "not really" defined and that "we mix everything up. If you are on the floor—you're it." A few subjects differentiated between branches, where staff, regardless of job title, perform a variety of duties and the main library location where jobs appear to be more clearly defined.²⁹ One paraprofessional said, for example, "It depends on the department you're working in. I would say they definitely [have clearly defined roles] in reference, but in other departments it's basically whatever the job description is for your position."

During the course of the interviews, six subjects—three professional librarians and three paraprofessionals—indicated they believed that instead of a division between professional librarians and paraprofessionals, more important distinctions could be made based on an employee's status as a manager or as one who was managed, or whether an employee was classified as full-time or part-time. For example, one professional librarian explained that because the library was part of a government agency:

Management or non-management is more of an issue than whether you are a professional with a professional degree. If you are a manager, even without a degree, you are seen as having more

authority. A lot of that distinction (like who socializes with whom) is managed versus manager rather than librarian versus paraprofessional.

A few participants made a strong distinction between full-time employees and part-time employees, regardless of their job title. "I feel that part-time staff don't seem to be real clear on what their job duties are," one paraprofessional indicated. And a professional librarian suggested, "There are different types of paraprofessionals—full-time and [those who work] twenty hours or in the evenings and there is a vast difference in how they see their positions." Another said:

The hard material reality is that lots of paras are part time and work nights and weekends and are isolated. If you are only here weeknights, you have no opportunity to pick up, by osmosis, the things we pick up. You can't have that word of mouth. Paraprofessionals disproportionately work nights and weekends.

At the same time, some professional librarians did think there were some generalized distinctions between paraprofessionals and those with an MLS degree. For example, one professional librarian said:

I do see very clear distinctions between librarians and paraprofessionals. I've just noticed that paraprofessionals—speaking generally because some have more credentials, work ethic, etc. than others—tend to be more task-oriented and oriented toward what is convenient for staff and what makes sense for staff and librarians look at the big picture. Librarians think, "How can I market what we do, how can I reach this customer base? How can I change what I do to benefit the customer" and paraprofessionals resist that. [They think], "What is easier for us to do?" Paraprofessionals have a tendency to focus with blinders on a task but not see the big picture of positive customer outreach, accessibility. I never thought about accessibility until I went to grad school . . . [Paraprofessionals] are all hardworking, nice people, but there is a philosophical difference about what [the library] is there for.

Another professional librarian noted that there was a significant difference between professional librarians and those without the MLS, saying:

There is a difference personality-wise between those who have an MLS and those who don't. It's a matter of self-selection. People who choose to go into librarianship as a career have a personality profile . . . a good librarian is not too shy, is inquis-

itive, has good follow through, and is an OK critical thinker. Has a broad interest in a lot of topics. Is congenial, competent, and bright enough . . . People who don't pursue the degree are less likely to be that kind of people. The people who work in circ[ulation]—it's just a good city job.

In addition, another professional librarian expressed the opinion that some paraprofessionals did not have a full understanding of what professional librarians did, saying, "Paraprofessionals rarely do programming so I'm not sure they have an appreciation of how much time it takes. So sometimes the odd part-time paraprofessionals don't realize that sitting at our computers is really work—we're not just playing solitaire."

While several of the professional librarians voiced perceived distinctions between their roles and the roles of the paraprofessionals, five of the six paraprofessionals interviewed indicated that they did not see many, if any, distinctions between the two groups, particularly as it related to job tasks. One said, "It wouldn't occur to me whether someone has a degree, but whether they know their stuff." Another said, "We all look at things the same . . . At a branch you have to jump in and do it all." A third said, "In a lot of cases, the paraprofessionals don't know who has the MLS. The work involved could be done by anyone, regardless of whether they have a degree, except for children's librarians, because they are more specialized." Although no questions specifically asked about salaries or pay, all five professional librarians and two of the paraprofessionals brought up the issue of pay inequity. Each indicated that it was a potentially divisive issue. Comments from the professional librarians ranged from, "It's a little troubling to think that people are doing the same tasks and are paid at different levels. We asked HR about it, but they don't seem interested," to "Paraprofessionals have very low wages" to "Library assistants are paid lower than librarians. There have been attempts to reclassify those jobs upwards but it's been unsuccessful." One paraprofessional who mentioned money said, "There's always the underlying money issue. Professionals get paid more. I work the same hours and even though I don't have quite the same responsibility I think, 'I'm doing this job too.' I don't know how much more [librarians] get—\$20,000?" The other paraprofessional who brought up salary issues said, "I know I'm doing what librarians do [but] the pay and the pay scale does not keep up with responsibilities. That creates a problem."

Discussion and Recommendations

The current study was conducted to determine whether librarians display in-group bias—a sociological phenomenon in which members of a group display a preference for others in that group, valuing them above members in

the out-group. Based on professional librarians' responses to the survey designed to test their level of in-group bias, it seems that they do exhibit some in-group bias, but to a lesser degree than what has been commonly attributed to them in professional lore and in the professional literature. For example, librarians do not seem to endorse any sort of segregation based on library qualifications, despite the accusation from some paraprofessionals.³⁰ Professional librarians categorized paraprofessionals as important, critical even, to the effective functioning of libraries, and felt that paraprofessionals' concerns and issues should be given equal consideration with those of librarians. These responses would all indicate a low level of in-group bias. Through their responses to other survey questions, however, professional librarians showed more ambivalence. Unlike the measures mentioned previously, in which there was agreement among all professional librarians surveyed, there was not consistent agreement on statements that asked professional librarians to assess whether paraprofessionals were as competent, as intelligent, or worked as hard as librarians. Finally, statements that measured whether professional librarians felt that paraprofessionals could do a librarian's job, had specialized skills, or were basically the same as librarians, elicited the most disagreement. Still this disagreement was not unanimous, with some professional librarians responding that paraprofessionals did have specialized skills and that some paraprofessionals could do the professional librarian's job.

Interestingly, only one librarian agreed with the statement, "Except for the MLS degree, librarians and paraprofessionals are basically the same." The other four either disagreed or strongly disagreed. These responses seem to imply that while professional librarians value paraprofessionals and consider them equals in many ways, they do think there is distinction between the two groups—a judgment that is consistent with at least some degree of in-group bias. A few of the librarians in this study felt that, as compared to paraprofessionals, professional librarians have a broader vision of libraries. As such, they consider themselves to be more attuned than paraprofessionals to issues like strategy, programming, customer service, and access. As one professional librarian noted, these issues are among those taught in library school. There was also a feeling expressed that not all paraprofessionals understood what professional librarians did, and they did not always have an appreciation for how much time certain professional duties, such as programming, entailed. By refusing to cede that professional librarians and paraprofessionals are basically the same, professional librarians may be attempting to maintain intergroup distinctiveness, perhaps because that distinctiveness has been called into question as paraprofessionals perform more tasks that used to fall strictly within the purview of professionals. This dynamic may be an instance of the reactive distinctiveness hypothesis—a theory that posits that when there are threats to intergroup distinctiveness, the in-group will "instigate attempts" to

restore it.³¹ It is clear that professional librarians do not agree they are the same as paraprofessionals, whether because of professional perspective, personality, or other factors. Interesting future research could include exploring instances of the reactive distinctiveness hypothesis among professional librarians.

Despite the existence of some level of in-group bias among the professional librarians interviewed, it is remarkable that paraprofessionals did not report feeling a sense of bias within their library system. While several mentioned they were familiar with the stereotype of negative intergroup dynamics within the profession, no paraprofessional interviewed perceived that the relationship between the two groups was strained. If any tension existed it was attributed to the particular personalities of individuals involved, rather than groups to which those individuals belonged. One reason paraprofessionals may not feel professional librarians exhibit in-group bias is that from their perspective, they do not see much difference between professional librarians and paraprofessionals. For example, most paraprofessionals reported that job roles were blurred and indicated they felt no real distinctions existed between the work performed by librarians and that performed by paraprofessionals. One exception was in the case of children's librarians. During the interviews several participants indicated they deferred to children's librarians about specific questions related to children's materials as librarians had a greater degree of expertise in that area.

There was agreement among all the subjects that professional librarians and paraprofessionals had a high degree of interaction, both on the job, in social situations (either on the job in the form of parties), or outside of work hours. Subjects of both groups also felt members of the two groups knew one another personally—knew the sort of details that typify disclosure or “the presentation of significant aspects of self to another.”³² This type of disclosure has been shown to “reduce the negative bias toward the out-group that ordinarily characterizes intergroup relations.”³³ As mentioned earlier, much of the research surrounding in-group bias and its possible remedy, contact theory, has been in terms of racial differences. This study suggests that many of the theories that have been developed in the fifty years since Allport first introduced contact theory, including personalized disclosure, the powerful effect inter-group friendships have on reducing bias and the sense of we-ness that characterizes the common in-group identity model developed by Gaertner and Dovidio, may be at work with regard to the employees of the library system.³⁴ Because the results found reflect only one library system, they may not generalize to other systems. For example, the staffing situation of this particular library system, in which MLS-degreed individuals hold paraprofessional jobs, means that the two groups are not as differentiated as they may be in other systems. The public library system studied is fairly small and lacks the departmental groupings (for example, cataloging, acquisitions, systems,

manuscripts, and so on) that characterize larger academic library systems. Finally, because subjects are all employed by the same library system, there is no basis of comparison with another group that might help determine which variables impact the degree of professional librarians' in-group bias, and the variables that impact the intergroup dynamics between the two groups. Despite its limitations, however, results of the current study could be used by library managers to see what is working in another system. Employees at the library system studied enjoy good rapport with one another, the level of in-group bias evidenced among librarians studied is low, and paraprofessionals interviewed do not perceive a high level of in-group bias among their system's librarians.

While various factors that cause this congenial atmosphere cannot be parsed, several seem to be related to the positive atmosphere. The fact that all employees, regardless of job title, are encouraged to participate in training and professional development may contribute. Another factor may be employees at all levels are encouraged to participate in committees and their contributions are considered equally. By not only allowing, but also encouraging, librarians and paraprofessionals to interact during training sessions and committee work, the library administration is strengthening the positive effects of intergroup contact. In fact, support of authorities is one of the tenets of effective contact theory espoused by Allport, as institutions can greatly enhance the salutary effect of contact by sanctioning that contact.³⁵ A final factor contributing to the positive intergroup dynamic at the library in this study may be the library leadership. Subjects gave high marks to the library's administrative team, which was praised for its openness to new ideas, its ability to foster a variety of opportunities for employees at all levels, and its history of giving encouragement to promising employees. One paraprofessional said, “The administration and my coworkers have been very encouraging. The administration has done a good job of recognizing who wants to . . . stick around for the long haul.” Another said, “This system is not afraid to reconsider something—to back up and punt . . . You have recourse, so you don't feel stymied or like you can't ask for something. There's not many hoops before you can talk to a professional and that's nice.” It is possible that without this sort of encouragement from the top, as perceived by both professional librarians and paraprofessionals, the relationship between the two groups would not be as strong.

Conclusion

This study offers insight into the much-discussed but under-researched area of intergroup relations between professional librarians and paraprofessionals. More study is needed, however, to determine the best ways of mitigating the negative effects of in-group bias in the workplace. As roles of professional librarians and paraprofessionals

continue to blur, library managers and administrators will need to understand the dynamics that undergird the relationship between these two interconnected and vitally important workplace cohorts.

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