"It took you three years to learn how to return a book to the shelf?"
school, public and academic librarians' : professional self-perception in regards to the librarianship/information science status /
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Abstract

The information age in which information is accessible for all, brought with it a change in the classical librarianship and the librarian's work environment. The librarian is not only the physical collection's keeper, but is also responsible for the collection's development and for providing electronic services to the library's patrons.

Besides the traditional expertise in cataloging, classification and references services, today's librarian is required to encourage and integrate new technologies in the library, which make his work much more complicated, dynamic and multidimensional.

Despite the significant development of the library profession and the requirements for advanced technological expertise and academic education on the part of librarians, some studies indicate that their professional self-image is still low. Other studies show a different picture in which librarians perceive themselves as efficient, intelligent, ambitious, initiatives, dynamic, inspiring and as staff which contributes added value to the academic institute.

In view of these two opposite attitudes, on the one hand, low professional self-image and on the other hand, high professional self-image which stems from the added new expertise, the goal of this research is to understand what is the true professional self-image of librarians and how do they perceive the professional self-image of librarians of other groups: school, public and academic.

The research was conducted according to a quantitative paradigm, through a semi-structured questionnaire adapted to each library group. The study's findings are the product of twenty seven interviews: nine librarians of each library's group.

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There were three central research questions:

1. How is the librarian's professional self-image influenced by the job requirements for advanced technological expertise?
2. Does the library affiliation influence librarian professional self-image? How does the librarian perceive his professional self-image in comparison to other groups of librarians?
3. How does the librarian's self-image affect his professionalism?

Analysis of the findings was divided into three main categories:
- Professional self-image and use of information technology.
- Professional self-image of his group of librarians in comparison to the two other groups.
- Librarian's perception of librarianship field.

The findings showed that in relation to the use of information technologies, teaching the use of these technologies is an important part of librarian's work, and demonstrates his expertise and the symbolic capital associated with that.

Practical training can be seen as a tool which distinguishes between the three librarians groups. This practical training defines and ranks the librarians and at the same time demands of the other librarians from the other two groups to define and rank themselves accordingly. Therefore, the academic librarians whose training is essential part of their job base their high standing on comparing themselves to other groups which have less training because of lower professional requirements. The great use of information technology by academic librarians gives them a higher symbolic capital and a better professional self-image.

Analyzing the librarians' stories from their interviews, points to different approaches by semi-professional occupation individuals who deal with low professional image. Similar to the findings in past research, the comparisons made by librarians to their colleagues and also with other professional and semi-professional occupations, indicate that in order to differentiate between occupations which are struggling to define their

professional status, librarians have used the strategy of self presentation, in order to elevate their status to informational scientists rather than librarians. However, according to current theories and previous research findings, the effort to enhance ones image is not sufficient in order to gain professional mobility, since such mobility can only be achieved through increased knowledge.

The effort to create an occupational status by adopting terminology that aims to raise their self professional image, which leans on discourse rather than on professional competence, harmed rather than advanced librarian's professional status.

The theoretical lens through which the findings can be analyzed, is the librarians' use of system of ranking upon which to base their professional status in each of the examined categories: use of information technology, library affiliation and professional perception of the vocational field. According to this system of ranking, academic librarians are graded higher both by themselves and by their colleagues in both of the other groups. At the same time, it seems that they don't gain the expected recognition by academic staff and students and are perceived as secretaries / clerks or in stigmatized ways. As a result, their professional self-image is damaged.

Examining the interviews findings which relate to self-image of librarians who work in public libraries regarding their library affiliation, brings up a continuous feeling of harm which arises from inferior salaries and work conditions as much as from a vocation perceived as clerical and trivial from the reader's perspective.

Therefore, according to system of ranking, it's possible to say that the school librarian's status is perceived as higher than that of the public library librarians. At the same time, regarding the self-ranking of both the school and public library librarians by themselves, it can't be unequivocally determined which group is more highly ranked. Both groups have similar characteristics in the use information technologies, in working conditions and salaries. Thus, it can be argued that they attempt to raise their self-image by lowering the image of the other group.

The study's findings indicate that librarian's self-perception of low status is a result of several factors which stem from the characteristics of a semi-professional vocation: librarians are not involved with acquiring new knowledge, they are not appreciated by their patrons or the general public and their supervisors do not encourage their

professional development or group interests. Most of the librarians in Israel are women and their working conditions and salaries are much inferior compared to other occupations and don't reflect their educational level.

In order to enhance the field professionaly and to create opportunities for advancements in status, it is important to encourage librarian's professional development in all groups, and at the same time to preserve the sense of mission and self-esteem which stems from them. Such activities can result in a strengthening of the way the profession sees itself, to higher professional self-image of the individual librarian and improvement in how the profession is perceived by the public and readers.

The librarian's stories indicate that they have few opportunities for development and that this engenders in them a sense of being stuck in place. The findings of the present study suggest that in order to promote professional development it is important to create learning opportunities for self-development. These actions along with the need of a strong professional association that will improve their working conditions, can lead to a rise in librarian's self-esteem and professional image and at the same time, improve public standing for their profession.

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