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Introduction

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Introduction

KATE ADLER AND LISA SLONIOWSKI

Welcome to a weird issue of *Library Trends*. The work is rife with mis-carriages, melancholy, longing, and nostalgia. The writers divulge the personal and explore the political. They examine white supremacy, patriarchy, classism, and colonialism—those complex, hybrid toxicities that spine through our collective circulatory system. Most of the authors rely on methods less familiar to library and information studies (LIS) research, such as autoethnography, close readings of fictional texts and images, and the application of philosophical treatises to complex social questions, rather than using quantitative analysis to gather forms of evidence. A loosening of the epistemological strings can, we hope, intervene upon a set of enmeshed practices in our field that together deploy a sometimes stifling form of LIS-knowledge apparatus. Perhaps, in producing this strange issue we can shake things up a bit, experiment, and pry things open just a little. Afterall, as Leonard Cohen tells us, it is through the cracks that the light gets in.

Taken collectively these articles question what counts as evidence in LIS, the concept of evidence itself, and even the idea of libraries themselves as simple representative collections of facts and the evidential. They turn to questions of values rather than value. As editors we felt this expansion of methodological approaches was appropriate to the study of affect in particular and that it takes up the call to action posed by Emily Drabinski and Scott Walter in their editorial for *College and Research Libraries* where they assert that the debates about method in LIS research complement the epistemological debates in our field as to what constitutes knowledge. As they suggest,

Methodology, after all, is methodical. It is inescapably instrumental. When we focus on the question of which method is “best” . . . we invariably privilege the steps we must take to arrive at an answer, rather

than on the extent to which the question is even worth asking or the degree to which a focus in our field on a particular type of question may be limiting our vision of what our work as scholar-practitioners might mean. (2016, 266)

This issue of *Library Trends* enjoins readers to consider new ways of knowing our work, new registers for asking critical questions about how our work operates in the world, and how the world operates on and through us.

At any rate—how else to wade through these weird waters, the sticky, murky business of affect? How else to talk about the things just out of sight, the things that propel us in-between what is clearly visible? We have no dispute with social science methods, but like any methodological approach, there are limits to their application. Our issue is filled with complicated questions about messy things, from the personally curious to the structurally untenable. Things that implicate us. Things that make us wonder if we sometimes do more harm than good as librarians. Problems that need to be examined in new ways and from new angles. Our colleagues in archives have begun carefully responding to the generative questions of the affective turn, and we thought it time that librarians did as well.

Of course, the first problem is that affect theory actively resists definition. When we released our call for papers, we were heartened by the many excellent proposals received—and chagrined as we began trying to imagine how to weave pieces together. In a terrain marked by disciplines as divergent as neuropsychology and cultural studies, how could we pull together something coherent? Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth gleefully chart the myriad ways affect is used in their introduction to the *Affect Studies Reader*, settling on the playful “an inventory of shimmers” as the broadest possible description of this interdisciplinary area. Commonly misunderstood as “feelings,” affect is more properly considered a state of in-between-ness, the liminal place where thought, emotion, and embodiment float and intermingle with various forces and intensities propelling us in multiple directions (2010, 2). Affect is not emotion nor is it emotional labor—although emotional labor may well produce affect and is certainly produced by it.

Confused yet? Let’s try again. Emotional labor speaks to managing and negotiating the emotion work of work—disciplining one’s subjectivity to deliver services in the emotional register required of the work rather than by oneself and for one’s own needs. For instance, we might consider the impact on the human of providing service with an ever-present smile. We would argue that popular use of the term “emotional labor” is itself a concept that has gotten too big, too baggy, too ill-defined and all-encompassing. Life takes emotional labor, it tests our bandwidth and tries our patience, and it can be exhausting. There is emotional labor and there is the labor of being human, the work of trying (and oft times failing) sim-

ply to be decent. It is to our own detriment when we conflate exploitative emotional labor and structural inequity with the fact that some days are draining. This conflation prevents us from calling out the most insidious forms of exploitation within the neoliberal workplace. A real antioppressive politics would mandate that we move away from aggression; verbal violence; and cruel apathy toward care, empathy, and kindness. Recently this distinction has been obscured, ironically in the name of equity, in the form of a corporate pseudofeminist “lean-in” rhetoric. We would argue instead that it is an ethics of empathy and care that provides the route to a deeper equality. As editors of this issue, we posit that those kinds of questions—the why and when of emotional labor—are affective ones too, and working with an affective lens can help us to attend more keenly to the nuances, politics, implications, and stakes of emotional labor in our spaces. When is it harmful, when does it empower? When are you just being a decent human being, when are you extending the profound connective tissue of empathy and when are you subjecting yourself, and potentially others, to toxicity? We can ask ourselves when is it okay to take one for the team, or to go out of your way for a sobbing student, and when are you an instrument furthering oppression in the name of efficiency and productivity, by smoothing things over and making things “work”?

The study of affect—not of emotions alone, not of emotional labor alone—can also reveal to us the insidious inequality of emotional labor. Affect speaks to the collective. We might understand it, for our purposes here in this issue, at least, as the collective emotional circulatory system weaving through our work with collections, patrons, and technologies. Affect may offer a sharp tool and a generative language for naming, attending to, and interrogating so much of what is alive beneath the surface in our work and suggest new directions for our profession. Our labor as librarians, cast in popular culture as book shelving and fines collecting, is hopelessly enmeshed with other people after all. It is not aloof from humanity, or from the propulsive forces and intensities driving us collectively toward an increasingly perilous planetary future.

Affect then is a critical lens with which to think systematically, systemically, and globally about concepts like emotional labor and to get at their oppressive structural undergirding. And isn’t this the task of critical praxis? Theories that engage affect create space to see, and language to define, emotional labor (and that is just one example), while also giving us a way of looking under the mythos of liberal democracy and neoliberal capitalism to illuminate the often invisible superstructure at its core. It is through an affective lens attending to both patriarchy and white supremacy, for instance, that we can see clearly how unevenly emotional labor is distributed and how it weighs with a more forceful intensity on certain bodies, on the being-ness of some more than others. And we can also see, by looking historically at waged and unwaged labor, how a neoliberal economy

is absolutely dependent on this emotional labor while at the same time valuing it not at all. Many of the articles in this issue share an understanding of emotional labor in relation to collective cultural and political affective forces of identity, belonging, and suffering. One might say they speak more to affective labor than to emotional labor.

Scholar Michael Hardt, in attending to what affects are good for, highlights not only the common affective expectations found in strongly gendered fields (for example, health care workers, flight attendants, child care workers, fast-food workers, bill collectors, sex workers), but also the fact that in all these activities the body and the mind are simultaneously engaged, and that reason and passion, intelligence and feeling, are employed and disciplined together by broad social forces. Affect theory asks what relations bridge these divides and what impact that disciplining has on both the self and society. Hardt suggests that

considering labor this way allows us to consider it together with other forms of labor whose products are largely immaterial—that is to think together the production of affects with the production of code, information, ideas, images, and the like. . . . [This is an] analytical recognition which suggests new political possibilities and brings to light new and intensified forms of exploitation that are shared amongst a range of laboring activities and most importantly opening up new avenues for political organizing and collective practices of refusal and liberation. (2007, xi)

Like Hardt, we believe in the possibility of justice, and so we hope that we can, as a society and certainly as librarians, stewarding our own spaces to the extent that we are able, adjust, bend, and nudge toward mutual aid, communities of care, solidarity, and empowerment. Indeed, it is work that we might perhaps undertake in conversation with our peers in other heavily gendered professions, many far more vulnerably situated than our own. The urgent grassroots activism of fast-food workers, airline attendants, sex workers, and some others has a lot to teach us. We are excited by how we might together work toward practices of refusal and liberation in our work as librarians. We believe that an attention to affect, which also attends to questions of emotional justice in our spaces, can help us to organize better. And that hope speaks to the import of this topic and this issue of *Library Trends*. It's an ungainly process; our authors stumble along through murky territory, staring at mechanisms of oppression sideways, mixing metaphors and methods, occasionally reckoning with their own despair, and in doing so begin to make new conceptual maps that describe and complicate our work.

In the process of thinking along affective terms, the writers in this issue explore facts as feelings and feelings as facts, unsettle and dislodge bedrock ideas of LIS, as well as the potential and possibility of new ways of thinking about access, order, preservation, and dissemination of knowl-

edge. It's possible that all or some of this might make some readers a little uncomfortable. If so, we hope that you will engage that feeling as a challenge to think differently, to examine your reactions, and to begin to look to the affective forces that undergird our lives, our communities, and our libraries.

Indeed, affect is deeply present in our libraries. From the unspoken emotional depth of our conversations at the reference desk, to the ambient politics of our spaces, to our engagement with public memory and knowledge production, affect is fundamentally woven through everyday life in the library. As editors and authors, in compiling this issue we had to deal with the fact that there is really nothing that is NOT affect, or that is not impacted by it, and had to ensure that we were all employing this theory for generative rather than navel-gazing purposes. Which is not to say we held illusions about a false binary of theory and practice. For us, personally, it just meant thinking affect in terms of identity and inequality, in relation to the murkier tensions that structure life chances, and to the ways in which biopower is enforced and structured through affective frames. As Ben Anderson has argued, "attending to the dynamics of *affective life* may become political as a counter to forms of biopower that work through processes of normalisation" (2012, 1). And to echo Hardt once again—this work may open up new avenues for political organizing and for collective practices of refusal and liberation.

At the same time, Gregg and Seigworth remind us that "there is no singular, generalizable theory of affect; not yet, and (thankfully) there never will be . . . there will only be infinitely multiple iterations of affect and theories of affect" (2010, 4). They propose that theory is supposed to be this way—"operating with a certain modest, methodological vitality rather than impressing itself upon a wriggling world like a snap on grid shape-setting interpretability" (4). They also acknowledge, however, that one's first encounter with theories of affect can feel like a sudden methodological and conceptual free fall. In the end they are able to chart eight main orientations that "undulate and sometimes overlap in their approaches to affect" (6). In the articles chosen for this issue, most, but not all, of the papers fall into what they describe as the fifth orientation,

regularly hidden-in-plain-sight politically engaged work—perhaps most often undertaken by feminists, queer theorists, disability activists, and subaltern peoples living under the thumb of normativizing power—that attends to the hard and fast materialities, as well as the fleeting and flowing ephemera, of the daily and the workaday, of everyday and every-night life, and of "experience" (understood in ways far more collective and "external" rather than individual and interior), where persistent, repetitious practices of power can simultaneously provide a body (or, better, collectivized bodies) with predicaments and potentials for realizing a world that subsists within and exceeds the horizons and boundaries of the norm. (7)

As evidenced in Marika Cifor's influential work, archives, those fascinating relatives of libraries, were the logical starting point for theorizing affect in the broad context of LIS—and indeed there is much work still to be done there as well. The emotional complexity of memory, of nostalgia and history are so pronounced in archival work and environments where they deal with the personal papers of unique individuals as well as the documentary traces of statist institutions and their historical impact. Libraries, however, remain undertheorized in the literature of affect or in the archival turn in humanities research. And so one more modest claim—in this issue of *Library Trends*, we try to extend, through a particular vein of affect studies, a broadly based cultural studies approach to libraries and library workers specifically. Working with the definitions outlined above, we simply asked: How are libraries and librarians also attached to, or caught inside, affective forces? How might librarians, despite their challenges and limitations, help to realize a world that exists within and also exceeds the horizons of the norm?

Libraries are (often) more open and chaotic places than are archives. The web of affect in a library, therefore, has different stakes than in archives. Not only does affect provide a lens on so much that is invisible—white supremacy, politics of gender and sexuality, complex class dynamics, invisible labor, collective fantasies of knowledge and order—but articles in this issue connect our work in LIS to broader interdisciplinary conversations where libraries are rarely examined and where the material circumstances of our affective labor and environments are largely unknown or ignored, despite libraries being central to various symbolic formulations of knowledge, memory, and education. This issue begins to chart out the in-betweenness of librarians and library workers in relation to libraries as institutions, our communities of users, and those structural forces that shape everyday life. We see this work as a starting point, a new lens of interpretation for librarians to take up, rather than a definitive account of affect in libraries, and we hope this issue will be generative of more work on the affective forces at work in, around, beside, and between libraries and library workers.

In terms of process, we wanted to be careful. We were worried about your feelings. Our author's feelings. Our reviewers' feelings. We selected the proposals, reviewed the papers ourselves, sent suggested revisions in some cases, and then sent every piece off for a double-blind peer review. Revisions were suggested, arguments were deepened and sharpened. We would like to thank our authors and our reviewers for their time, patience, and deep engagement with the questions animating this issue and our call for papers. Because questions of affect and emotional justice and emotional labor were so close to the surface for us, throughout, we couldn't help but remark on the emotional complexity bubbling beneath the surface of the peer-review process, as people's thoughts, ideas, feelings, and

intellectual investments intermingled in the long plodding work of new knowledge creation.

It was well worth it. We have before us a whole breath of reactions and responses to our call on the theme of affect. To start, situating libraries among other types of state-funded documentation institutions, Ronald Day opens up our issue with a theoretically informed opinion piece that operates alongside this introduction as a call to arms to think broadly about affect and libraries, how LIS research has engaged (or mis-engaged) affect previously, and how institutional libraries participate in maintaining and reproducing mainstream affective forces when considering themselves as merely document-gathering institutions. He asks us to think differently about how we might harness those affective forces that intersect with our work and join the resistance as we enter a perilous time for our planet and humanity. Next, Gina Schlesselman-Tarango challenges us in form and function. Using the form of a photographic essay to reveal an archive of grief, she lays bare her own personal experience to describe her struggles with pregnancy and miscarriage. She provokes us to consider griefwork as a form of information work and to explore the implications for libraries of that formulation. While Day gives us some broad questions to think about libraries as institutions at work for the state, Schlesselman-Tarango insists we consider more specifically the bodies laboring in these places, the flesh and bone of library work, what counts as work, success, and failure, and ends with considering some implications for humanizing information services in general.

Also thinking through the body in information work, Stacy Allison Cassin's article helps us better understand the ways in which cis-women's bodies historically became subservient to the information flows of library work and technology. She uses theories of media to analyze the ways in which women and technology intersect in the films *Dracula* and *Desk Set* and goes on to provocatively explore contemporary digital systems and infrastructures as possible sites for affective resistance within the library. Moving next to racialized bodies, Michelle Santamaria uses a rich autoethnographic technique to explore how race is mediated through and structured by affect in her library. She is interested in how the library functions as a fantasy space, denying its role in ideologies of white supremacy even while intimately and affectively bound to it. Dolsy Smith also explores the legacy of white supremacy and capitalism within our fantasies of the library. Smith proposes the other side of the coin to what Fobazi Ettarh conceptualizes as "vocational awe," asking us to think about a "vocational melancholy" occasioned by a growing awareness of the public affects that circulate in and around libraries. He engages feminist cultural studies and scholarship by women of color as he considers the legacy of the library as an institution devoted to the cultivation of sentiment and the creation of virtual publics that ultimately collide into oppressive realities. Next, Sarah

Mabee and Sarah Fancher explore the affective consequences of poverty and the largely ignored affective dimensions of information-literacy pedagogy for students at their small community college in the Ozarks. They make a compelling argument that the Information-Literacy Framework can and should engage the affective consequences of class status and economic privilege as barriers to learning and to developing information-literate dispositions.

Finally, Deborah Prosser and David Paton both consider how affect is present in the technical processes of our work. Prosser uses theories of material culture to think through weeding of library collections. She asks us to think about the human attachment to books and to the communities and identities that are generated around books and, by extension, around libraries, as a way of understanding and managing seemingly irrational public reactions to necessary deaccessioning projects. Paton looks at the cataloging of artists' books in his native South Africa. He asks if we can capture and note affective qualities through metadata? Can affect be included in our cataloging systems? What would that look like? In posing these questions, he helps us to visualize something new.

And that brings us to the end of the issue and to our gratitude to Melissa Adler for offering us a beautiful afterword that gathers together the articles above and takes us somewhere new. Recognizing cataloging as the epistemological spine of library and information work, she asks us to consider the affective forces undergirding cataloging by examining cataloging practices historically and theoretically. Her account of Thomas Jefferson's affective impact on North American libraries is particularly fascinating. In her insistence on the ways in which affect governs the history of cataloging, she weaves together this journal issue's overarching project—affect undergirds cataloging, and cataloging's affective force underwrites the library.

We hope that you'll enjoy engaging with these articles individually, or with this issue as a whole, and with this murky, strange, and yet deeply important concept of affect as much as we have. The issue has been in the works for a long time. We first started discussing a project around affect theory at the Critical Librarianship Workshop in Toronto in 2016. Co-organized by Emily Drabinski, Dave Hudson, Kelly McElroy, Karen Nicholson, and Lisa Sloniowski, and drawing together a small group of participants from all over North America, the workshop was an intense and experimental space for librarians to read and discuss critical theoretical frameworks—anticolonialism, critical theories of race and disability, queer and feminist theories, and works of political economy in agile and interdisciplinary ways that sought to deeply engage theory. The idea was that such engagement might help to enliven our praxis. While not discussed on its own, ideas around affect were in the air and, it seemed to us, offered potential ways of doing intersectional work which wove anti-oppression-

based theories together in some sort of loose coalition. And, as we hope we've made clear, we do believe this work to be a social-justice project. Affect and the affective labor of library work are inextricably enmeshed with a politics of caregiving, mutual aid, and emotional justice. We firmly believe these ideas should serve as a compass for library workers if we are to harness the as yet not fully realized potential of the library as a democratic institution. As such, we need to approach our practice and our labor with care. We need to attend to race and poverty and class and the spirits of the human beings in our classrooms and at the reference desk and whose voices are hidden in our catalogs, buried in our algorithms, and haunting our stacks. We need to nurture our communities and act as a community, while taking care of ourselves and our own bodies as well. We must push back against instrumental and sexist notions of librarianship because they denigrate and diminish service to and care for others as nonessential, non-intellectual, nonvaluable work. If affect is, as we imagine, the emotional and spiritual webbing that circulates and animates the communities we work with, we must, in conjunction and solidarity with others operating in the public spheres of collective and everyday life, make affective forces more visible and attend to these forces.

A final point needs considering before you get on with the pleasure of reading our strange issue on affect and libraries. Neoliberal capitalism is a mode of political and economic thinking that seeks to eviscerate the public sphere and the space to attend to all of these organic—human, environmental, emotional, spiritual—textures in favor of privatization and hidden, draconian efficiency. And so perhaps it is with and through attention to affect that we can foster and mobilize true, deep resistance. Sometimes it feels silly to spend so much time talking about libraries. Accusations of insularity abound, and they aren't always wrong. But we are librarians, and this is our space, our place, our sandbox to do as much good critical thinking and as much hard work as we can about our work and in doing so contribute back in solidarity to others doing their own work in their own spaces. Libraries are spaces that we have the honor of stewarding. And yet, they are also inextricably trapped inside oppressive affective forces, as well as inside the corporate structures, processes, and institutions of the neoliberal age. They are frustrating and heartbreaking places to work, and beautiful places to work too. And those of us who work in them with full-time, secure jobs have access to deep middle-class privilege in a time of employment precarity, as well as other damaging social, economic, and planetary instabilities. What affective responsibility do we have, then, as privileged stewards in these spaces to help ourselves and our users to read against the grain and to practice the politics of refusal and liberation? Using what we've got—how can we do our part to make ourselves and the world better? Perhaps it starts by trying to build new worlds from inside our libraries and in solidarity with others in caregiving

roles and professions. Perhaps by intervening when we can to offer tools, services, collections, and spaces that privilege, above all, mutual aid, social responsibility, and an ethics of care, we can begin to foster a radical new way of thinking libraries. To create prefigurative microworlds that show us the way to how a world should be—that would be no small resistance.

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Lisa Sloniowski is an associate librarian at York University in Toronto, where she is also a graduate faculty member in the Department of English, and a PhD candidate in the Social and Political Thought graduate program. Working with a feminist lens, her dissertation (in progress) examines the affective labor of librarians as knowledge and memory workers, through exploring the specific archival challenges posed by two special collections: the Barbara Godard library, and an archival collection of feminist pornography. She has published and presented on various topics related to information literacy, linked open data, labor issues in librarianship, library collections practices, and archival theory.