

# THE LIBRARY PARAPROFESSIONAL MOVEMENT AND THE DEPROFESSIONALIZATION OF LIBRARIANSHIP

by Rory Litwin

At the American Library Association Annual Conference in Chicago, 2005, ALA Council established the ALA Policy on Inclusion and Mutual Respect by a near-unanimous vote.<sup>1</sup> The title of the policy refers to the inclusion of library support staff, or paraprofessionals, meaning library workers who are not working as librarians and whose jobs do not require a master's degree. The Council vote authorized a statement officially recognizing the value of support staff, and established a policy of inviting their participation in the association's activities and including paraprofessional jobs in the image that ALA promotes of library workers. This policy was the result of well-organized lobbying within the association by the Library Support Staff Interest Round Table (LSSIRT) in cooperation with the ALA Human Resources Development and Recruitment Advisory Committee (HRDR), which is primarily composed of library administrators.<sup>2</sup> The discussion on the Council floor concerning the resolution that brought this policy up for a vote treated it as more or less a long-awaited and much-deserved gesture of support and respect. Whether it was because the policy was viewed as lip service, because the issue of class status was too difficult to discuss openly, or because Council is made up primarily of library administrators who, as a group, had something to gain from the measure, Councilors brought no questions about what changes to the business of the association the new policy might bring, and no opposition to the resolution was suggested.

Since ALA is, technically, not a professional organization representing the interests of library professionals as a profession but an educational association concerning libraries in society, there was nothing revolutionary about the new policy of inclusion, even if it were to be taken in all sincerity. ALA has long had other non-librarian constituencies, including faculty in library science programs, trustees, vendors, and members of the public. However, there has always been an informal connection between the association as an organization of librarians and the association in its standards-setting role and as a voice in society representing libraries. Despite not formally being a professional association in legal terms, the ALA has served as a de-facto professional association from its beginnings and has an important accreditation role in library education programs, and

has thereby supported librarianship's claim to professional status, and, consequently, lent authority to its pronouncements about libraries.

This paper will explore the implications of the current library support staff movement for the professional status of librarianship by examining it in the light of sociologist Marie Haug's original work on the concept of deprofessionalization and subsequent discourse. Librarianship has been undergoing a process of deprofessionalization, along with other professions and semi-professions, as a result of a set of social trends going back to the 1960s. Deprofessionalization can potentially have some social benefits from a class struggle perspective, as Haug and Sussman pointed out in their early writing on the subject.<sup>3</sup> I will argue, however, that our concern about the loss of autonomy in the library profession is not entirely a selfish concern, for two reasons: first, because a loss of autonomy for librarians is a net loss of autonomy for front-line library workers, and not simply a redistribution of it; and second, because attention to the ethical foundations of professional practice depends to a great extent on the maintenance of professional identity through a graduate education requirement and a strong professional association. The deprofessionalization of librarianship and the transfer of the job functions of librarians to paraprofessionals serve as an opportunity for library administrators to take a greater share of control over library practice and to advance a business framework of metrical efficiency to the fore, displacing the ethical framework that derives from the professional orientation of librarians.

Part of the management strategy for shifting to a deprofessionalized library is to exploit the class tension between working class library workers and professional librarians by offering paraprofessionals an alliance. Management does this by calling all staff members "professionals," blurring the distinction between librarians and non-librarians and shifting attention away from the autonomy that, to a significant extent, belongs to librarians as professionals and guides them in their work according to their own expertise and professional service ethic.

#### *The Library Support Staff Movement*

The 2005 Policy on Inclusion and Mutual Respect was a landmark event in the advancement of library paraprofessionals, but was not a culmination; nor was it a beginning. The larger movement of paraprofessionals for a higher level of status in the library world has earlier beginnings, has progressed since 2005, and is presently going strong. Indications of this can be found in a variety of places. For example, support staff are now viewed by ALA presidential candidates as an important constituency to be catered to for their electoral votes. ALA 2008 Presidential Candidate Camilla Alire wrote in her campaign letter to LSSIRT,

One of my strengths I bring to the ALA presidency is my passion for advocacy. I can say that this advocacy included advocating

for support staff in every library I led. Examples of this support include:

- Advocating for support staff promotions based on their skills and not their library classification; and,
- Advocating for support staff involvement in library committees and taskforces as well as their involvement in university-wide service.<sup>4</sup>

Alire supported LSSIRT's desire for a weakening of the barrier between the professional and the paraprofessional role within the association and the workplace. Kenton Oliver, in his letter to LSSIRT requesting support for his 2009 presidential candidacy the following year, wrote in a similar vein but went further:

As a lifelong advocate for libraries, locally and nationally, you may be sure it is inclusive of library staff. I will continue that advocacy as ALA President focusing on LSSIRT specific concerns that will:

- Focus on obtaining LSSIRT representation on ALA committees and in decision making arenas, including Council;
- Support the ALA-APA as it moves forward with initiatives related to salaries and support staff certification.
- Support ALA agendas that will provide for better compensation and training of our library workforce and improves the quality and development of our library services nation wide.
- Continue President-elect Camila Alire's commitment to any future Empowerment Conferences through my support and attendance.<sup>5</sup>

Oliver's opponent, Roberta Stevens (who was elected), was less explicit but still attentive to the issues of inclusion within association decision-making, writing in her campaign letter to LSSIRT, "I am committed to being inclusive. If elected president, I will seek LSSIRT's representation and involvement in task forces, working groups and committees."<sup>6</sup>

Oliver mentioned two initiatives in his letter that should be discussed: ALA-APA efforts to develop support staff certification and ALA's "Empowerment Conferences" for support staff. The Empowerment Conferences are mini-conferences for library support staff that take place during ALA Annual Conferences. Their name expresses the overriding concern that is pursued by the exchanges that take place there. The following excerpt from the Dorothy Morgan's keynote at the 2008 Empowerment Conference provides a good example of the flavor and direction of these conferences and the support staff movement that they represent:

Carla Stoffle, in her 1996 book entitled *Choosing our Future: College and Research Libraries*, wrote that librarians must place

a higher value on the contribution of support staff, examining their ideas and suggestions on an equal basis with those of librarians. She advocated for libraries to move away from staff who perform narrow tasks within the tightly defined job descriptions toward staff who are empowered to make decisions about the work they do and how they do it in a manner that, in her words, results in “delighted customers.”

Look at the opportunities gained by support staff over the past several years: the establishment of LSSIRT (15 years ago), Library Journal’s Paraprofessional of the Year Award, COPE-3 (The ALA Third Congress for Library Support Staff held in Chicago in 2003), National Library Worker Day, special membership rate for support staff joining ALA, and more inclusiveness of library workers in professional journals. We now have many more opportunities to contribute to our profession. When we talk about new technologies, just look at how our jobs have moved into dramatically different roles as new services are implemented. We are challenged to develop and implement those services while maintaining traditional services, usually with no increase in staff. Advances in Acquisitions, Technical Services, Cataloging, and the ubiquitous Web have become the platforms for electronic patron service. What becomes inherently important to recognize is that library support staff are the backbones of libraries. We are Webmasters, systems administrators, and library skills/information literacy instructors. We are supervisors in charge of entire departments, paraprofessionals who run their own “Information Provider” enterprises, and that is just the beginning.

But, you may be asking yourself, “What’s in it for me?” When you Captain your destiny, you are attesting to taking care of your career. That it matters enough to you. Your goal is what you have set as your vision or your imagination to guide you through everything you do. You need to focus your thoughts on reasons that you can succeed, rather on why you can’t. You need to see change as a glass half full rather than half empty.<sup>7</sup>

Morgan is making a claim for a blurring, if not an end, of the distinction between professional and paraprofessional staff in terms of their roles within the workplace and the larger profession. The implication is that the master’s degree is no longer or should no longer be a requirement for library work at a professional level. Most librarians support the requirement of the master’s degree for professional-level work, but many find the issue difficult to discuss when it is restated in terms of fairness toward working-class library workers, who are pursuing their rights. As can be seen in Morgan’s statement, as well as in the minutes of LSSIRT board meetings,<sup>8</sup> the primary issue of concern for the support staff movement, at least at present, is their own career advancement and pursuit of inclusion

as professionals. Little interest in the advancement of libraries, of the core values of libraries, or of issues in professional practice are in evidence. In other parts of the association these are the concerns that merit discussion. They are, not coincidentally, the concerns that are based on the values into which librarians are acculturated in graduate school and on the knowledge of foundations for practice that is gained there. (Occasionally LSSIRT plays a supporting role in a Council resolution or initiative led by HRDR or LLAMA, the Library Leadership and Management Association, ALA's division for management.)

If Morgan's pronouncements in her keynote seem somewhat overstated in relation to the actuality of the division of labor in our own workplaces today, it is worth paying attention to a policy direction in library education that supports her vision. When the ALA Allied Professional Association (ALA-APA) was originally formed, its key purpose was to organize a certification program to supplement graduate education in librarianship. The certification program that was discussed in the early stages was for public library administrators. (This certification program has now been underway for a few years.) Recently, ALA-APA has been developing standards for a certification program for library paraprofessionals, and announced the official debut of this program at the ALA Annual Conference in Washington, DC, in 2009.<sup>9</sup> The certification program specifies "competency sets" that are at its core—three required and six elective:

The three required competency sets:

1. Foundations of Library Service
2. Communication and Teamwork
3. Technology

The six elective competency sets, from which three need be chosen:

4. Access Services
5. Adult Reader's Advisory Services
6. Cataloging and Classification
7. Collection Management
8. Reference and Information Services
9. Supervision and Management
10. Youth Services<sup>10</sup>

It is evident from the competency sets that ALA-APA has instituted a certification program that can stand in place of the MLS as an educational requirement for library workers in work functions now performed by professional librarians. While it is difficult to say exactly what will be required of students who go through this certification program, one can assume that the academic standards of graduate education will not apply, and that the process will not have as one of its aims the creation of a professional self-awareness in the sense of a shared responsibility for guiding the development of the profession and the institutions in which the students will later work as graduates. A certified paraprofessional, it is reasonable to expect, will continue to earn an hourly wage rather than a

salary and will continue to perform her work in a relatively tightly managed way. It is reasonable to expect this because management is in a relationship of tension with professionals in institutions, such that the professional worker has a degree of autonomy that, though limited and contested, exists, and to that extent limits the control that management is able to enjoy. Librarianship's claim to professional status, and the knowledge base that underpins that claim, are what give librarians the limited degree of autonomy that they have in an institution. It is in management's interest to shift the job function of librarians to a paraprofessional group for the purpose of gaining greater control (as well as saving money).

This process has been ongoing in the 2000s. Ransel, Fitzpatrick, and Hinds reported in 2001 that at Auburn University Libraries they had implemented a new career ladder structure as a way of compensating paraprofessionals for taking on more complex duties.<sup>11</sup> The more complex duties that the new paraprofessional career ladder accommodates are duties formerly performed by MLS-holding librarians.

There are librarians who raise the question of whether the MLS should be a requirement for employment for librarians, noting the experience, skill with patrons, and often the educational background of library paraprofessionals and non-MLS holding librarians.<sup>12</sup> There can be no denying that many paraprofessionals are more talented, more experienced, and even better educated than many MLS-holding librarians. There are also libraries that fill their professional positions with non-MLS holding librarians who, after years of working closely with their communities, can serve as positive examples for the profession in many respects. This is all true. The problem with framing the question in these terms, however, is that it overlooks the value of the professional status of librarians itself, both for the institutions in which they work and for the world of libraries as a whole.

#### *Professional Status*

Sociologists going back to Durkheim have been interested in understanding the nature of the professions, their role in society, and the forces that cause them to change. The distinction between professions and other occupations has been defined and refined and re-refined numerous times over the decades. Keith Roberts and Karen Donahue provide a useful synthesis of these definitions, positing six factors that are common to the professions as opposed to occupations:

1. Mastery of specialized theory
2. Autonomy and control of one's work and how one's work is performed
3. Motivation focusing on intrinsic rewards and on the interests of clients – which take precedence over the professional's self-interests
4. Commitment to the profession as a career and to the service objectives of the organization for which one works

5. Sense of community and feelings of collegiality with others in the profession, and accountability to those colleagues
6. Self-monitoring and regulation by the profession of ethical and professional standards in keeping with a detailed code of ethics<sup>13</sup>

This formulation encompasses most sociologists' understanding of the professions, with the exception of one frequently cited element that should be mentioned. Many find the monopolization of a particular sphere of knowledge and practice to be an essential factor defining a profession. Not only is it important that the professional have mastery of specialized theory but that outside access to this knowledge and the ability to perform the functions claimed by the profession are limited. In the case of the two most well-established professions, medicine and law, the monopoly on practice is supported by a legal requirement of professional licensure for performance of the work, that licensure being controlled by the profession itself. Michael Winter describes the regulatory support for the monopoly on practice of the professions as "structural authority," as distinguished from the "normative authority" that binds the profession together.<sup>14</sup> The most important consequence of structural authority for professionals is the support it provides for their autonomy in institutions (although the profession's normative authority also provide this support).

Professional autonomy can be both operational and strategic. Operational autonomy refers to professionals' freedom to determine the way their work is done, while strategic autonomy refers to their freedom to determine what is done.<sup>15</sup> Joe Raelin, in a study on the organizational status of research labs, noted an inevitable conflict between management and professionals over control, finding that in this tension, the professionals' strategic autonomy is less secure than their operational autonomy. The ability for professionals to set their agendas is somewhat more limited than their freedom to determine the way their work will be done.<sup>16</sup> This is logical given management's inherent control of resources and relative lack of mastery of the profession's knowledge base. In fields where managers typically begin their careers as members of the profession, such as librarianship, the knowledge base is likely to be less protective of operational autonomy.

Many occupations that we commonly call professions only exhibit the features of professions, in sociological terms, to intermediate degrees. Examples of occupations that are usually considered as "semi-professions" in the sociology of the professions are social work, nursing, teaching, pastoral care to religious congregations, and librarianship. While these professions are supported by a specialized knowledge base, that knowledge base is generally believed to be less developed than that of the full professions and therefore less of a barrier to entry and practice. The lower educational requirements for entry into these occupations support this impression. Sociologists consider these occupations as semi-professions based on the way that the work is organized within them, the educational requirements, and their degree of self-governance and autonomy (though

it seldom goes without mention in the literature that the semi-professions are mostly female occupations).

The term “semi-professional” is a sociological term and not a term of self-definition, of course. Nurses, teachers, and librarians do not refer to their fields as “semi-professions” (unless that are writing in a sociological context). In terms of librarianship, all of the authors whose works I reviewed for this paper, if they referred to librarianship and were sociologists, referred to it as a semi-profession. Authors who were librarians or sometimes library science professors tended to refer to librarianship as a profession. This difference may indicate the state of flux and contestation that exists for the professional status of librarianship, but it also indicates that the vocabulary of academic disciplines is specialized. Suffice it to say that librarianship is a profession for me, in the context of my professional life, and a semi-profession for the sociologists whose concepts I am attempting to relate here.

Since the semi-professions are also mostly female-intensive professions, an analysis of their formation and organization must give attention to underlying issues of sexism. Andrew Abbott, a sociologist who specializes in the study of the professions, wrote in an article that addressed the status of librarianship in particular, “[T]he conceptual difference between profession and semi-profession probably has more to do with the difference between men and women than with anything else.”<sup>17</sup> Without arguing for it directly, Abbott accepts the idea that it is feminine personality traits, rather than a sexist society, that have resulted in the female-intensive professions holding their semi-professional status and the corresponding relative lack of autonomy. Roma Harris’s 1992 book, *Librarianship: The Erosion of a Woman’s Profession*, took up this commonly held prejudice, providing an analysis that any paper on this topic would be incomplete in not discussing. Harris’ book is useful for illuminating some of thornier issues affecting workers in the semi-professions who desire greater control of the means to fulfill service objectives but find themselves frustrated by having a subordinate status. Harris presents an argument from the complex position of both wanting and not wanting the status and authority enjoyed by the male professions. As a way of resolving the paradox inherent in her stance, Harris advocates a female style of professionalization based on a female model of service, one that would result in greater respect and control, which is wanted, but not greater status or professional autonomy, which she views as problematic. Her main point, that the subordinate status of the semi-professionals is related to their female-intensivity, is an analysis that certainly needs to be taken into account in any consideration of librarianship as a semi-profession. However, she did not attempt to sort out the interactions between sexism and other factors that have influenced the development of the semi-professions, a project which, had she pursued it, might have saved her argument from its somewhat fatalistic double-bind. She left her proposed female style of professionalization and service undefined, as apparently outside the scope of the book, giving it the quality of a utopia rather than a potentiality that is subject to an analysis of its own



upsides, downsides, consequences and interactions.<sup>18</sup> Her book stands as an important reminder that gender politics and the politics of the library profession are deeply intertwined, but the threads remain to be sorted out, and the analysis needs to be multidimensional and historical.

The prevailing view in sociology in the 1960s and 1970s was that society was in a process of becoming more professionalized, as a result of the explosion of technical information and the need to manage it.<sup>19</sup> The idea of a trend toward professionalization was tied to what Daniel Bell called “post-industrial society” (although it had currency in sociology a decade prior to Bell’s coinage of this term).<sup>20</sup> As contexts of work became more bureaucratized and information-laden, more technical expertise and more education would be required to do much of the work in semi-professional jobs, which would have the effect of raising their professional status.<sup>21</sup> Blue collar occupations were envisions to be fading into the background. The idea that work in post-industrial society, and in the semi-professions in particular, was becoming professionalized was the consensus view in sociology during that period. This view generally did not give much attention to the autonomy of professionals in the institutions in which they worked, painting a picture of future professionals as skilled technicians working in highly bureaucratic contexts.

#### *Deprofessionalization*

Dissenting views about the professionalization thesis did appear during this period. Harold Wilensky studied the process by which occupations strive to attain professional status in the early ‘60s, noting especially the barriers to the attainment of autonomy in institutions, and doubted any great trend toward professionalization.<sup>22</sup> It was not until the populist social ferment of the late ‘60s, however, that the contrary thesis of deprofessionalization began to emerge.

In 1969, Marie Haug and Marvin Sussman looked at the relationship between clients and professionals in the context of social unrest. The authority of the professional in this relationship (the social worker/client relationship was under focus) came not so much from their knowledge base but from the legal structures that authorize their work and obligate the client to comply with their instructions, as well as from the class structure through which power relations are communicated more generally. The professional knowledge base served a gate-keeping role for the profession, as well as justifying the legal structure as it came into being. In this context Haug and Sussman discussed what they termed the “revolt of the client,” where young, working class, or non-white clients rejected the authority of professionals as alienating and turned to grass-roots, peer educated systems as an alternative to established institutions. As society integrated this shift, the “New Careers” movement began to establish avenues within the social system for paraprofessionals, in medicine, social work, and other fields, to perform many of the functions previously reserved for professionals.<sup>23</sup> The populist mood cut against the authority and autonomy

of professionals in institutions. As problematic as the revolt of the client may have been over time for the autonomy of the professions, it arguably brought about changes that resulted in service to clients that was more relevant and culturally aware. (Today's conservative, populist, anti-elitist current is possible to see as a second wave of the "revolt of the client" that Haug and Sussman originally observed, and may be a contemporary factor in deprofessionalization.) The beginning of the current trend toward deprofessionalization in the populist revolt of the 1960s is mostly forgotten in the discussion of the issue within the Left, and is worth recalling.

Haug continued to develop her ideas regarding deprofessionalization through the 1970s, locating its causes in deeper, more structural trends than the manifestations of social unrest that originally made the issue evident. In addition to the populist democratization of service in the New Careers Movement, Haug noted two major trends supporting her deprofessionalization thesis: mass public education and computerization.<sup>24</sup> As higher education had become available to a much greater portion of society, the knowledge base of the professions became less inaccessible to clients and paraprofessionals. This worked against the professional's authority as well as making him less necessary, where individuals were able to take care of a greater share of their needs on their own or with the help of paraprofessionals, whose knowledge was often considerable (e.g. nurse practitioners), learned both in vocational education programs and on-the-job experience with clients. Computerization served as a facilitator of rationalization and bureaucratization, which work to bypass the autonomous, humanistic professional, by providing a way to demystify and codify technical knowledge in order to make it usable by non-professionals in bureaucratic settings. Haug wrote,

Data retrieval from memory storage and the computation and reporting of complex joint probabilities are the forte of the modern computer. To the extent that scientific professional knowledge can be 'codified', it can be broken into bits, stored in a computer memory, and recalled as needed. No longer need it be preserved in the professional's heads or in books alone. A great deal of the learning transmitted to professionals-in-training can be made accessible in this way. In fact, almost by definition *academic* knowledge, upon which the diploma credentials validating professionals' expertise are largely based, is codifiable and therefore amenable to computer input. And what is put into the electronic machine can be extracted by anyone who knows the output procedures. ... The accessibility of this intellectual warehouse has already taken away some of the professional's knowledge monopoly, and will undoubtedly continue to do so.<sup>25</sup>

The trend that Haug predicted in the early and mid-'70s is observable today in the disintermediation and remediation that have been so frequently discussed in the past couple of decades.

Where Haug wrote about the erosion of professional autonomy, it was mostly vis-à-vis a relationship of tension between professionals and their clients. The trend toward deprofessionalization also affects the dynamics of the professional's role within institutions and the tension between professionals and administrators. In a Marxist overview of professionalization and deprofessionalization (highly recommended to readers who are interested in a deeper general treatment of these topics), Rajendra Pandey described the origin and structure of the tension between professionals and administrators in institutions.<sup>26</sup> The professional class, in this analysis, originated out of the bourgeoisie as a result of the need for technical experts. Firms externalized the cost of their education by shifting it to a system of public universities, which had the result, over time, of instilling in professionals, and into the professions, a concern for the collective common good. As a result of the professional's knowledge base and public values, professionalism (which is an ideology in Pandey's view) makes a tacit claim to technical and moral superiority over the moneyed class and is in conflict with it. In the mid-1980s, Pandey believed that deprofessionalization was underway and was explainable by the related Marxist concept of proletarianization, in which the fundamental cause is the shift from self-employment to employee status, which deprives professionals of an independent economic position, a development that parallels the proletarianization of craft workers in the early industrial era. Describing this contemporary trend of deprofessionalization, Pandey wrote,

The deprofessionalization involves erosion of characteristics of the profession, dequalification, and class formation. The process of deprofessionalization is underway in several ways, namely, the erosion of the monopoly of technical knowledge; the beginning of professional accountability; suspicion of service orientation; the violation of the professional code of ethics; the refutation of the professionals' claim of being liberal and humanitarian; the cutting of the professionals' control; and the creation of class antagonism.<sup>27</sup>

The deprofessionalization thesis, though it has been elaborated and built upon, has also been called into question. In the mid-1980s, Eliot Freidson examined the deprofessionalization and proletarianization theses and found that the professions had in fact retained their autonomy in society through the advancement of legal supporting and governing structures, and that the deprofessionalization story is inaccurate.<sup>28</sup> It should be noted, however, that Freidson's study focused on professional bodies rather than individual professionals working in institutions, and that it was limited to the full professions – medicine and law – and did not include an analysis of semi-professions, which have far less legal leverage and much less of a knowledge monopoly, which are the keys to maintaining professional autonomy. The deprofessionalization thesis does seem to be born out in a way that affects the autonomy of professionals in institutions in a range of professional and semi-professional fields.

### *Deprofessionalization and Librarianship*

If the semi-professions are in a weaker position in terms of maintaining their autonomy against forces of deprofessionalization, librarianship has a special problem owing to its ideological opposition to the very notion of a monopoly of knowledge. A profession that is dedicated to sharing knowledge is unlikely to create effective barriers to its knowledge base, a factor undercutting the profession's defense of its degree of autonomy. Furthermore, the role of librarians in society in helping people do research is one that would not be possible to support through a legal structure, the way medicine and law, and even social work, are supported. (Although a state government could require a license to work as a "librarian" it could not require a license to organize information or help people do research). These factors have made librarianship especially vulnerable to deprofessionalization among the semi-professions.

The idea that librarianship could be facing a trend of deprofessionalization began to be discussed widely in the early '80s (for example, William Birdsall's 1982 *Library Journal* article dealing with the subject<sup>29</sup>). An early sign that this trend was in fact underway in librarianship was a 1980 proposal by the federal government to reclassify its 3,300 federal librarians, which would have substantially lowered the pay scale and educational requirements of the positions.<sup>30</sup> Where the idea of deprofessionalization first began clearly to fit was in developments in technical services emerging later in the decade. Technology had begun to enable easy sharing of catalog records, which allowed libraries to employ fewer professional catalogers and to assign paraprofessionals the task of loading catalog records containing intellectual labor done elsewhere (an example of what Haug predicted in the effects of computerization).<sup>31</sup>

As the decade of the nineties progressed, a conflict between management and front line librarians, especially catalogers, over the process of deprofessionalization began to emerge, and management's collective strategies for dealing with objections began to make their appearance. At the 1998 ALA Annual Conference in Washington, DC, the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services held a program in which an invited speaker offered the management spin on deprofessionalization. Virginia Gillham, University Librarian at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario, expressed a definition of "professionalism" as indicating a high quality of work.<sup>32</sup> By this definition, paraprofessionals, who rightly take pride in their work, can expect to be called professionals in their workplaces (perhaps this is the state of affairs in your library). They are unlikely to hold any expectations of professional autonomy in the library, in either a strategic or an operational sense, or to be motivated by intrinsic rewards or the ethical foundations of practice instilled in graduate education, but are rewarded in a token, psychological sense by being called "professionals." This reward owes its value to paraprofessionals to the tension existing in the class conflict with the librarians in the workplace.

In calling paraprofessionals professionals, management uses their desire for higher status to undercut the autonomy of professional librarians by blurring the distinction between them, paving the way for proletarianized “professional” work with flattering but meaningless job titles. (This echoes the management strategy that emerged during the same period in other spheres of classifying front-line workers as management in order to make them ineligible for union membership, and likely had similar origins.)

In addition to redefining a professional as a worker who does a good job, Gillham also offered a new definition for an MLS-holding librarian in technical services. A librarian in technical services, according to Gillham, is a manager, meaning that the department is left without an autonomous professional presence and the attributes that accompany it (code of professional ethics, graduate-level education, intrinsic reward of service, etc.). The logic of this strategy in technical services was very much the result of the implications of shared cataloging, but it can be extended to other areas of library work as well, especially as the effects of computerization are increasingly felt (e.g. in statewide virtual reference services).

Management’s strategy of false alliance with working class library workers in the deprofessionalization process is all the more problematic because the tension between professionals and the working class is structural and not a result of this strategy. This class tension has led some in librarianship to call for librarians to identify as workers rather than professionals. Leigh Estabrook expressed this view in a 1981 *Library Journal* article, writing

Professionalism is an ideology which prevents librarians from organizing into unions, obscures the fundamental difference between labor and management within library organizations, and creates tension and conflict between librarians and their clients. Professionalization is not a naturally occurring event. It is not a phenomenon which simply happens to an occupational group. Rather, it is something members of an occupational group strive for and create, often at great expense to themselves and to the individuals they serve.<sup>33</sup>

What Estabrook left out was the function of the ideology of professionalism in maintaining a class that is formed out of the bourgeoisie in opposition to it, able to act autonomously from it, to hold a share of power, and to have as a part of its makeup an interest in the public good. For Estabrook, unionization was the answer to the loss of autonomy implicit in deprofessionalization. The possibility of replacing the autonomy of librarians as a professional group with the kind of autonomy that could ideally be attained by library workers as an organized labor body is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is an argument that responds to the problem of the loss of autonomy and ethical foundations for practice. Estabrook’s opposition to the ideology of professionalism, though, was separate from her analysis of the loss of autonomy that librarians were beginning to face in the early ‘80s, which she viewed in terms of economic and technological

change affecting all library workers, rather than in terms of deprofessionalization.<sup>34</sup> In my view, she did not sufficiently appreciate the autonomy of librarians as a professional group and the consequences of its loss for library work in general. (She based her analysis on the work of Harry Braverman in *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, which was similarly quiet about the role of the autonomy of the professional class.<sup>35</sup>) In any case, her vision of a renunciation of professional status by librarians is quite different from the present reality of management bestowing the title upon paraprofessionals without the autonomy, ethical foundation, or education it implies, with different implications for the prospect of greater solidarity with clients or patrons.

### *Conclusion*

The phenomenon of deprofessionalization was first predicted, then emerged, and has now been accelerating. The ongoing causes of deprofessionalization include the populist “revolt of the client” (in whatever political forms it has taken over the decades), improved access to education and information, the disintermediating effects of technology, and the increasing economic dependence of professionals on the institutions in which they work.

Deprofessionalization affects professionals in the degree to which their work is characterized by the attributes of the professions, and, importantly, in the degree to which their service to clients is correspondingly conditioned by these attributes. To revisit Roberts’ and Donahue’s summary of these characteristics of a profession:

1. Mastery of specialized theory
2. Autonomy and control of one’s work and how one’s work is performed
3. Motivation focusing on intrinsic rewards and on the interests of clients – which take precedence over the professional’s self-interests
4. Commitment to the profession as a career and to the service objectives of the organization for which one works
5. Sense of community and feelings of collegiality with others in the profession, and accountability to those colleagues
6. Self-monitoring and regulation by the profession of ethical and professional standards in keeping with a detailed code of ethics

To the extent that service to clients by institutions ceases to be given by individuals who have a mastery of theory, a motivation focusing on intrinsic rewards, a commitment to the service objectives of the organization, a sense of accountability toward colleagues, and who are monitored by their professional peers, institutions are able to operate with greater economic efficiency, but are less helpful to the people who encounter them.

While some may ask legitimate questions about the ideology of professionalism in terms of class solidarity, it is important to be realistic about the shifting of control that is taking place as librarianship is deprofessionalized, and the effects that this control-shift has on the nature of libraries and library service. If the current paraprofessional movement were motivated by a class-conscious “revolt of the client” as it was in the late ‘60s, then its discourse would be very much about the superior ability of paraprofessionals to help regular working-class people use libraries. Clearly, the contrary is true. The library paraprofessional movement, as much as we would like it to be otherwise, is focused on career advancement and elevated status and little else. (As Barbara Morgan asked rhetorically, “What’s in it for me?”) Paraprofessionals may be seeking greater inclusion in ALA decisionmaking processes, but will seldom receive funding to participate, and, lacking the foundation of graduate education and possessing a lower status position than their management sponsors, are likely to continue functioning primarily as supporters for the initiatives of their management “allies.” This should not be surprising given the structural position of wage earners versus professional groups, but its implications for the nature of deprofessionalized library service should not be ignored.

The certification program for library paraprofessionals that has just been instituted is important to watch for its effects on the deprofessionalization process. This certification program is based on a set of competencies that reflects the graduate library education curriculum minus the rigor, ethical emphasis, and professional acculturation, and delivered in contexts where students expect technical training rather than education for professional practice.

A paraprofessional library workforce performing the work now done by librarians can be expected to be a desire of management given management’s natural relationship of tension with professionals as a class, and their desire for greater control. The objectives of management and professionals in institutions are not necessarily congruent, given management’s focus on measured business outcomes and the professional’s emphasis on direct service. The autonomy of professional librarians is thus a problem for management, one for which solutions can be found in the forces bringing about deprofessionalization initially cited by Marie Haug, as well as in the class conflict between librarians and support staff.

To be fair and to lend the issue a degree of complexity that is very much owed to it, “library administrators” as a group are also mostly professional librarians and therefore occupy a dual class position within their institutions. Perhaps their identities and ways of thinking are often shaped more by their status as library professionals than as managers. The conflict should therefore be seen not so much as a conflict between individuals as a conflict between roles, with library administrators, as librarians, often occupying a difficult position. That said, deprofessionalization still represents a net loss of autonomy for front-line library workers and a weakening of those

professional values that are in conflict with managerial prerogatives and business methods, despite the apparently worthwhile increase in status that paraprofessionals currently seem to be achieving.

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