PUBLIC LIBRARY ROUTINES

Darin Freeburg
Associate Professor, *iSchool @ USC*
darinf@mailbox.sc.edu

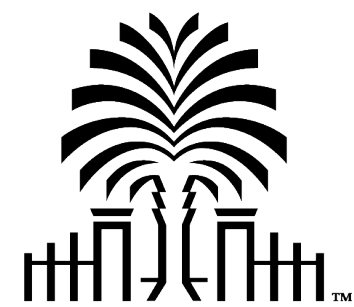**Katie Klein**
PhD Student, *iSchool @ USC*
KK22@email.sc.edu

UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina
College of Information
and Communications

Project Website:
**https://bit.ly/public-library-routines**

INSTITUTE *of*
Museum and **Library**
SERVICES

WHO ARE PUBLIC LIBRARY WORKERS?

- Ad-hoc social workers (Cabello & Butler, 2017)

- Second Responders & *First Restorers* during the pandemic (Fallows, 2020; Zalusky, 2021)

- Face public expectations to do more with less

- Mostly White women

- Fed up

  - Houston public libraries are "hemorrhaging employees"—toxic environment, set up to fail (Gordon, 2023)

  - Face subtle pressure to not organize (Rea, 2022)

Leslie Gill. (1-Sep-43). Model, as librarian, in green coatdress, knitted wool gilet, Gerlou jewelry and Beauty Counselors lipstick. Sailor, back to camera, in front of her desk., Publication: Mademoiselle. Retrieved from https://library.artstor.org/asset/AWSS35953_35953_35712871

ACTIVITY #1
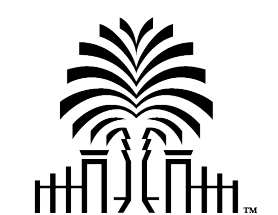
UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina

College of Information and Communications

WHAT'S IN A ROUTINE?

- Identity regulation: An organization's attempts to indirectly shape the self-identities of workers (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002)

- Vocational Awe: "Notions that libraries as institutions are inherently good, sacred, and therefore beyond critique" (Ettarh, 2018)

The Sheet Music
How it's *supposed* to go

Who you should be

The Performance
How it *actually* goes

Who the performance suggests you are

Adapted from the study of Routine Dynamics, outlined by Feldman & Pentland (2003)

UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina

College of Information
and Communications

THE STUDY

Participant Demographics

Job Classification	Gender	Race/Nationality	Sexual Identity	Physical	Mental
Prof.—10	Woman—17	African American—7	Asexual—1	Disability/Chronic Pain—7	Mental illness—12
Para.—10	Nonbinary—2	Asian—1	Bisexual—2	No Dis/chr.—12	No men. illness—7
	Man—1	White—12	Gay or Lesbian—1	No answer—1	No answer—1
			Heterosexual—11		
			Pansexual—2		
			Demisexual—1		
			Queer—2		
			Biromantic/Queer—2		

- **21 participants***
- **93 diaries**
- **Age—22-49 (M=35)**
- **Library experience—1-20 years (M=8 years)**
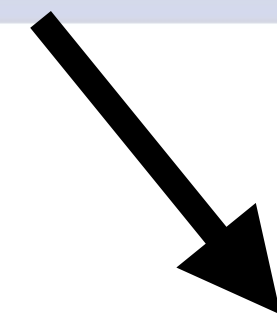
*One participant did not complete demographics survey

UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina

College of Information
and Communications

THE STANDARDS

What's in the Sheet Music?

Role	Personal	Group
What does it mean to be a library worker?	What does it mean to be *me*?	What does it mean to be a woman, queer, etc.?
• Customer advocate • Hard worker • Family	• Normal	• An advocate • A flirt

"There's a lot of pressure in my workplace to think of ourselves as a family, which I definitely don't"
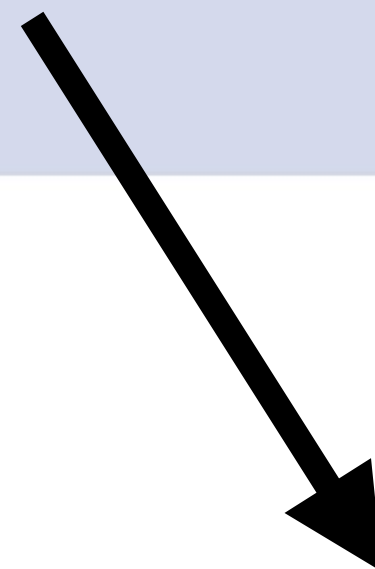
"The mask, the hair, the dress. Are you just trying to stand out?"

ACTIVITY #2

UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina
College of Information
and Communications

WHAT VIOLATES THE STANDARD?

Performance Mismatch

My Performance	Management Performance	Patron Performance	Colleague Performance
• Physical presence • Anxiety • Autism	• Scheduling	• Inappropriate	• Overreliance

"[She] just immediately sidestepped over to speak with my partner who . . . just happened to be a white male . . . and then asked him the exact same question [laugh]"

"So, she tried to grab my attention and said, 'Well, hey, since you're back at the desk, I don't know what I'm doing. Can you help me on my computer?'"

ACTIVITY #3

UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina
College of Information
and Communications

THE WORKAROUNDS
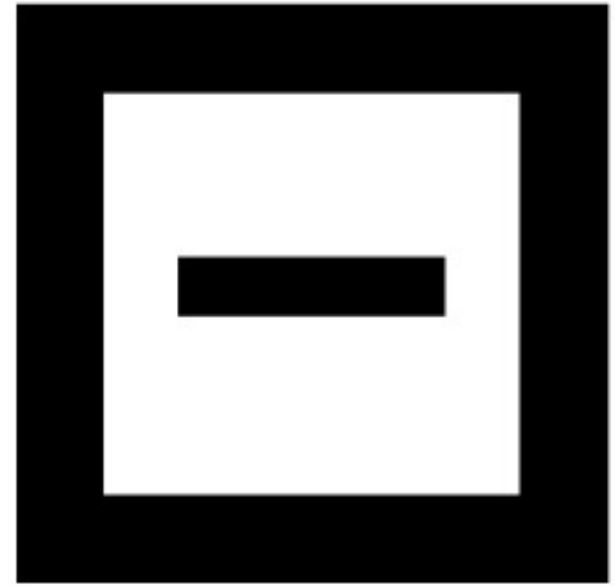
⊟	**Subtraction**

"I have to kind of diminish myself to do a lot of work with families"

🧠	**Reframing**

"I just had to use it as a learning opportunity"

⊞	**Addition**

"I just try to fit in those additional responsibilities."

🥊	**Push Back**

"I'm sorry, I don't answer personal questions at work"

WHAT NOW?

- **Providing workers with contextual supports (Webster et al., 2018)**
  - **Supportive *Policies***
  - **Supportive *Climate***
  - **Supportive *Relationships***

- **Outcomes of contextual supports**
  - **Improved work attitudes, e.g., job satisfaction, commitment**
  - **Decreased psychological strain, e.g., emotional exhaustion, depression**
  - **Increased disclosure**
  - **Reduced discrimination**

UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina

College of Information
and Communications

WAYS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH

- Sign up to participate in the audio diary research

- Host a workshop in year 2 (email Darin—darinf@mailbox.sc.edu)

- Take the professional development course in year 3

- Submit your routine stories at the project website: https://bit.ly/public-library-routines

Go here to participate in the audio diary research

UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina

**College of Information
and Communications**

CITATIONS

- Alvesson, M. & Willmott, H. (2002). Identity regulation as organizational control: Producing the appropriate individual. *Journal of Management Studies, 39*(5), 619-644.

- Cabello, M. & Butler, S.M. (2017, March 30). How public libraries help build healthy communities. Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-public-libraries-help-build-healthy-communities/

- Ettarh, F. (2018, Jan.). Vocational awe and librarianship: The lies we tell ourselves. *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*. https://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2018/vocational-awe/.

- Fallows, (2020, March 31). Public libraries' Novel Response to a Novel Virus. *The Atlantic*. https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/public-libraries-novel-response-to-a-novel-virus/622108/

- Feldman, M.S. & Pentland, B.T. (2003). Reconceptualizing organizational routines as a source of flexibility and change. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 48*(1), 94-118.

- Gordon, M. (2023, Aug. 28). Houston Public Library employees are leaving in droves, citing a 'toxic' culture of fear. https://houstonlanding.org/houston-public-library-employees-are-leaving-in-droves-citing-a-toxic-culture-of-fear/

- Rea, A. (2022, Feb. 14). Library Workers Unite: Unionization Efforts Grow Across All Sectors. *Library Journal*. https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/Library-Workers-Unite-Unionization-Efforts-Grow-Across-All-Sectors

- Webster, J., Adams, G.A., Maranto, C.L., Sawyer, K., & Thoroughgood, C. (2018). Workplace contextual supports for LGBT employees: A review, meta-analysis, and agenda for future research. Human Resource Management, 57, 193-210.

- Zalusky, S. (2021, April). The state of America's Libraries 2021: A Report from the American Library Association. American Libraries Association. https://www.ala.org/news/sites/ala.org.news/files/content/State-of-Americas-Libraries-Report-2021-4-21.pdf

UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina

College of Information
and Communications

THANKS!
EMAIL: DARINF@MAILBOX.SC.EDU

Project Website:
https://bit.ly/public-library-routines

UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina

College of Information
and Communications

INSTITUTE of
Museum and Library
SERVICES