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Career Plateauing among Senior Librarians

Career-related discussions in the library literature often focus on mentoring and job satisfaction in general. Some emphasize the advancement needs of librarians who are entering the profession or those in the early stages of their careers (Mallon, 2014; Peng, 2014; Sare, Bales, & Neville, 2012). Marginal attention is given to examinations of mid-career and senior academic librarians who have attained many of their early career goals and to whom day-to-day tasks may have become routine. What actions are being taken to challenge and inspire this valuable population? Career plateauing, job satisfaction, and positive career paths are covered in great detail in the business literature (Armstrong-Stassen & Cameron, 2005; Duxbury & Halinski, 2014; Ference, Stoner, & Warren, 1977) and are discussed in the higher education literature (Baldwin, 1990; Brookes, 1980; Farmer, 1993; Jackson & Simpson, 1993; Kanter, 1979; Machell, 1991) but are less common in the library literature. Academic librarians may find case studies in higher education of particular interest since they often face many of the same research and service responsibilities as other university faculty.

Literature review

Bardwick (1986) provides a detailed discussion of plateauing in her book, *The Plateauing Trap*. She describes three types of plateauing: structural, content, and life. In structural plateauing, organizational structures restrict workers from moving forward. Content plateauing refers to the stage in a career where an employee feels that he or she mastered every skill needed

to learn and few, if any, challenges remain. Content plateauing is not necessarily related to work load or to accomplishments—busy, successful employees may still find themselves dissatisfied because of the lack of new challenges. Life plateauing occurs when work dominates all other facets of life and becomes the primary basis for one's self-worth (Bardwick, 1986). In academic libraries, structural plateauing may occur when librarians attain the highest level available in the career ladder. There may also be a minimum number of higher level administrative positions available hampering organizational advancement. The importance of content plateauing was confirmed in a 2005 study of professional women aged 50 to 64. Although these women reported a high level of structural plateauing, content plateauing was much more strongly related to their job satisfaction (Armstrong-Stassen & Cameron, 2005).

Similar to studies of plateauing, Kanter (1979) examined top administrators in higher education and has categorized them into those who are “moving” and those who are “stuck.” In some cases, workers become stuck because of structural plateauing—there are too few opportunities for advancement for all the people who may qualify. Others can become stuck because they lack a qualification or skill needed to advance. Whatever the reason, Kanter contends that those who are stuck behave, and may be perceived, differently from those who continue to advance. Stuck individuals may tend to have lower ambitions and self-esteem, are less likely to take risks, and are more likely to disengage themselves from their work. Movers often find constructive mechanisms for resolving difficulties or grievances but stuck employees are less willing to cooperate with others to find solutions (Kanter, 1979). Brookes (1980) differentiated between burnout and feeling stuck and suggests they should not be treated in the same way. Burnout is brought on by stress, and those who are burned out cannot function effectively because of fears and anxieties. In contrast, stuck employees may not be stressed, but

they lack motivation to function effectively because they feel trapped in a situation and by the lack of opportunities. Brookes' study of community college faculty found that the faculty who were most likely to be stuck took fewer leaves, had lower rank, had fewer promotions, and experienced longer periods of time between promotions (Brookes, 1980).

In a frequently cited study, Ference and his colleagues (1977) classified employees based on their actual and potential performance. They defined four types of employees: learners, stars, solid citizens, and deadwood. The learners are those who have great potential but are not performing to their abilities. Stars are the fast-track employees who are already performing at a high level and are expected by their administration to continue to advance. Solid citizens perform at a satisfactory or even outstanding level but are not seen as candidates for advancement. Finally, the deadwood are those who do not perform at a satisfactory level. This study found that a great deal of attention is often given to the stars and the deadwood. Solid citizens are seen as plateaued but still working effectively; however, without appropriate attention they could move into the deadwood category. Since they are not seen as having potential for advancement, the solid citizens may be passed over for professional development and challenging new assignments, yet they are essential for providing stability and continuity within an organization (Ference, Stoner, & Warren, 1977).

Building on Ference and colleagues' work but focused on senior workers, a recent study suggests four new categories for aging workers (50 years or older): disengaged exiters, engaged-high-performers, retired-on-the-job, and exiting performers. Related to plateaued employees, retired-on-the-job workers no longer feel committed to the organization but may have to continue to work for financial reasons. It is not unusual for these employees to have a negative impact on both morale and productivity. It behooves managers to find ways to re-engage them.

Possible solutions include suggesting professional development or lateral move options for these workers (Duxbury & Halinski, 2014).

Baldwin (1990) interviewed college faculty in an effort to determine how “vital” faculty, those recognized for their ability to challenge students and for their intellectual commitment to the institution and their discipline (p. 180), differed from their colleagues. His study found that vital professors spent more time on the job, were collaborative, apt to set goals and take professional risks, had changed their work role during their career, considered their administration to be supportive, and were willing to take advantage of the opportunities offered them. Although vital professors did acknowledge that they face obstacles, they were less likely to perceive themselves as being stuck or plateaued. In spite of these commonalities, Baldwin suggested that no two people follow the same path and managers should provide individualized attention (Baldwin, 1990). Focus groups with 73 tenured faculty indicated that faculty vitality cannot be taken for granted and confirmed that associate professors continue to need mentoring and full professors benefit from support and encouragement (Trower, 2011).

The Senior Teaching Fellows Program at the University of Georgia is one example of the value of providing new challenges to senior faculty. In an attempt to reinvigorate senior faculty participation in undergraduate instruction, the administration developed a year-long program offering small grants for instructional improvement plans, biweekly meetings that included guest speakers, and time to discuss new ideas. This supportive environment proved very successful for the university resulting in more effective undergraduate teaching. The individual participants who thought highly of the program chose to continue meeting after the year-long fellowship had ended (Jackson & Simpson, 1993).

Intrinsic motivation should be considered as an important component of job satisfaction. When goals are motivated by a personal passion, challenge, or enjoyment for the work (intrinsic motivations) rather than by external rewards or deadlines (extrinsic motivations), employees are more creative. Amabile encouraged workers to “do what you love and...love what you do” (1997, p. 55). When implementing senior faculty performance appraisals at King’s College, administrators found that, though senior faculty appreciated extrinsic rewards, they were more motivated by intrinsic incentives such as encouragement to revitalize their teaching methods and the opportunity to create their own professional development goals (Farmer, 1981). At the opposite end of the scale, when faculty reach career stagnation they may slide into “professorial melancholia (PM)... a progressive emotional process characterized by the negating of a university professor’s professional motivation, positive attitudinal focus, and personal self-esteem” (Machell, 1991, p. 174). Not surprisingly, PM can lead to negative effects both individually and institutionally.

When focusing on the library profession, there are some early studies relating to plateauing, job satisfaction, and aging. In his discussion of the “graying” of librarians, Arthur noted that research does not support the stereotypical portrayal of the older academic worker as less productive and unwilling or unable to learn new skills (Arthur, 1998). Although specific to the need for additional computer training in the late 1990s, Woodward echoed similar sentiments stating that older workers may be perceived as reluctant to learn when, actually, they just haven’t been given the opportunity (Woodward, 1997). Longevity in a position has also been shown to increase job satisfaction in studies of librarians (Galbraith, Fry, & Garrison, 2016; Horenstein, 1993). A survey of southeastern academic librarians found that as librarians grew older, their satisfaction with their career increased, although their feeling of being entrapped in the job also

increased (Phillips, Carson, & Carson, 1994). When comparing the needs of younger versus older library employees, Long and Sheehan (2015) remarked that workers of any age essentially want the same things: to be treated with respect and to have opportunities for growth. Keeping that in mind, they recommended that library management should work on “success planning” for all rather than succession planning (Long & Sheehan, 2015, p. 753). Pollack and Brown (1998) interviewed librarians at different stages of their career. They noted that the mid-career stage “... is often pivotal in that an individual either moves in new directions or stays at essentially the same point in a career” (p. 38). Most mid-career librarians in their study felt the need to continue to develop their skills and relied on both formal educational development and informal learning through interactions with their colleagues. Librarians in the advanced stages of their careers (more than 25 years) also sought educational opportunities as mechanisms for staying enthused about their careers. After mastering many of their goals, senior librarians may look for new directions that spark their own personal interests (Pollack & Brown, 1998).

A 1986 Association for College & Research Libraries (ACRL) presentation gave an overview of the literature on plateauing and how it relates to libraries. This review included Ference and colleagues’ classification of workers, emphasizing again that managers need to support solid citizens to prevent them from becoming deadwood (Comes, 1986). Conroy maintained that not every worker is interested in moving up within an organization and plateaued workers are necessary in libraries as they may provide the basic skills and the knowledge that keep the organization running. However, it is important that those plateaued workers are still satisfied with their role and responsibilities (Conroy, 1995). Using Bardwick’s (1986) definitions, it appears that Conroy’s conclusions refer to organizationally plateaued workers, since content plateaued workers are probably not satisfied with their job assignment. This

emphasizes that content plateauing may be the more important situation to address. As DeLon stated, “People do not leave their organization because of lack of promotion, but because of lack of growth” (DeLon, 1993, p. 13).

Intrinsic factors may play a major role in combatting content plateauing in libraries. A 2016 survey of post-tenured academic librarians (Hollister, 2016) also indicated an appreciation of intrinsic rewards. These senior librarians felt that, once they were released from the pressures of tenure, they were able to continue their scholarly production in a more personally meaningful way. In a survey of academic librarians in the United States, high levels of job satisfaction were related to relationships with library users and colleagues, job variety, and the freedom to utilize their judgement, skills, and creativity (Horenstein, 1993). Communication is another very important factor in improving job satisfaction. Several studies noted the importance of job performance evaluations to help identify issues of concern and potential areas for professional development (Arthur, 1998; Bernstein & Leach, 1985; Montgomery, 2002).

A number of solutions for overcoming plateauing have been suggested. Library studies, like those in business and higher education, suggest lateral job moves, job rotation, and professional development (Comes, 1986; DeLon, 1993; Montgomery, 2002). Tucker (2008) provided an interesting plan for helping mid-career librarians assess their career path and consider ways to avoid stagnation. Among other things, he suggested writing an “ideal” job description and re-examining early career goals to see if they have been met and if they are still relevant. These specific activities may help an individual examine how their goals and priorities can change over time and assess whether they are ready to alter their career path accordingly (Tucker, 2008).

The current study uses a survey combined with semi-structured interviews to provide a current look at what factors motivate senior academic librarians in Florida to stay vital and engaged.

Method

For the purposes of this study, senior academic librarians are defined as those who have worked for 10 years or more or have achieved the rank of associate or full professor (or the equivalent) in an academic setting. Potential participants were identified from 28 Florida academic libraries, which were classified as either master's or doctoral organizations (Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, n.d.). Using information from library web sites, librarians at each institution and their ranks (when available), were identified and recorded on an Excel spreadsheet. The top-ranking librarian dean or director was not included. Those who have not reached the highest administrative level in their library system (assistant or associate deans, directors, or unit heads) were included in the list if it could be determined that they met the other criteria for years in the profession.

A total of 447 librarians were identified as working at Florida master's or doctoral universities. All associate and full librarians or professors were included in the survey pool. Assistant librarians with more than 10 years of experience were also included in the sample for a final list of 230 potential participants.

A demographic survey instrument and a semi-structured interview script were created using information gleaned from the literature review. The instruments were pilot tested on two colleagues who were not in the survey pool, and the instrument refined as needed. After Institutional Research Board approval of the protocol and the survey instruments, the 230 potential participants were sent individual email messages explaining the study and inviting them

to participate. If interested, the respondents were asked to complete the brief online survey, administered via a Google form (see Appendix). Responses were anonymous, although the final question asked if the respondent would be willing to participate in an additional telephone interview, in which case, they provided their name and contact information.

Thirty-nine respondents expressed interest in an interview, with 20 of those agreeing to participate in the actual process. Telephone interviews lasted 30-45 minutes and, after obtaining permission of the respondent, were recorded. One author asked the interview questions and any subsequent probes, while the second author took notes. The recordings were not transcribed verbatim but were checked against the notes for accuracy.

Mean satisfaction scores were calculated for a variety of demographic groups to see if any trends emerged. Modes and medians were also calculated for each group to indicate outliers. In most cases, the modes and medians were the same or very close to the mean; therefore, only those that deviated from the mean are discussed. Although statistical correlations are not possible with such a small data set, the authors looked for any issues that might warrant additional research in the future.

Results

Survey

Initially, 56 people responded to the online survey. When creating the pool of potential participants, it wasn't always clear whether a person met the criteria for inclusion, so questions were included in the survey to verify their rank and years of post-MLS service. This additional information was used to confirm eligibility, resulting in a final pool of 54 responses (23% response rate).

A primary focus of the survey was to document the respondents' opinion of their overall job satisfaction and if they felt plateaued or stuck, as defined in the literature, in their career or current position. The mean job satisfaction rate for all respondents was 7 with a mode and median of 8. Table 1 details the responses to the question "On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the most satisfied), how satisfied are you (today) with your job situation?"

[place table 1 here]

The institutional affiliations of the respondents included both private and public universities and varied in size from small (1,000 - 5,000 students) to institutions with more than 20,000 students. The majority of respondents were from larger institutions, with 72% (39/54) coming from institutions with enrollments over 10,000, and only 22% (12/54) at institutions with enrollments at or below 5,000 students. Associate librarians outnumbered full librarians (28 to 18) and the majority of all respondents have worked for more than 15 years since receiving the MLS (33/53, 62%). Nearly all of the respondents have faculty status (48/54, 89%), but only 22% (12/54) of the total respondents were at institutions offering tenure to librarians. Most types of library job assignments were represented. The largest group of respondents (18/53, 34%) identified reference or instruction as their primary duty but access services, systems, technical services, and collection management are also represented. More than half of the respondents reported having some kind of administrative duties (29/54, 54%).

[place table 2 here]

[place table 3 here]

The respondents are relatively stable in their positions with 61% (33/54) having worked at their current institution for more than 10 years. Moving from job to job is also somewhat limited, as 67% (36/54) of these senior librarians have worked at three or fewer libraries since

obtaining the MLS. Despite many years of experience, retirement plans are not on the horizon for most of the respondents, with only 23% (12/53) planning to retire within the next 5 years and 53% (28/53) having no plans to retire within the next 20 years. Tables 2-4 provide a more detailed analysis of the demographics along with the associated mean job satisfaction score.

[place table 4 here]

Participants were asked to select what they found most satisfying or most frustrating about their current positions. Respondents could choose up to three items from a pre-defined list of potentially satisfying motivations. In this category, the items that were considered most satisfying were recognition and respect of one's supervisor and rapport with colleagues (Table 5). An "other" category was also available; responses included values such as recognition by other faculty, organizational climate, and working with students.

[place table 5 here]

Respondents were also asked to select one item from a pre-defined list of situations that might be most frustrating in their current job. Salary ranked highest for frustration level, with lack of opportunity for advancement and the physical environment also providing frustration to many (see Table 6). A number of participants added frustrations that were not included in the pre-defined list, such as unclear job assignments, difficulties in managing change, and a lack of university support for the library.

[place table 6 here]

Interviews

Twenty of the librarians agreed to participate in a telephone interview to discuss some of these issues in more detail. During the interviews, the participants were asked to provide additional information about their career motivations and frustrations. Each was asked to

comment on what constituted a “good” day at work and what contributed to a “bad” day. A number of the interviewees commented on their love of teaching and working with students. Many also commented on their desire to be part of academia and the intellectual community. Mentoring junior librarians and contributing to the mission of the institution led to a good day. Frustrations included personnel problems, dealing with administrative bureaucracy, inability to influence change, and not getting tasks accomplished.

All librarians were asked whether they considered themselves to be risk-takers. Allowing the respondents to define risk in their own way, some spoke about risk as relating to their career changes, eagerness to try new things, or the willingness to speak out in difficult situations. Using their own definition of risk, 15 of the 20 participants (75%) considered themselves to be somewhat or very much a risk-taker.

To explore organizational plateauing further, interview participants with administrative responsibilities were asked if that was a duty they actively sought. Those without administrative duties were asked if they were interested in a position with more administrative responsibilities. Eight of the participants (40%) commented that they had chosen administrative positions or that it was a future goal. Five participants (25%) said that they had evolved into administrative roles and six (30%) commented that they had specifically chosen to avoid positions with administrative tasks.

Finally, each librarian was provided with an overview of Bardwick’s (1986) definition of content plateauing and asked whether they felt “plateaued.” Although most of the respondents (60%) indicated they did not feel content plateaued, the mean satisfaction rate for this group (8.00) was only slightly higher than those who expressed some level of content plateauing

(mean=7.80) (Table 7). This may be related to the small sample size but it bears closer examination.

[place table 7 here]

Discussion

The authors initially assumed that most of the respondents to the survey would be associate and full librarians but assistant librarians with over 10 years post-MLS accounted for 15% (8/54) of the participants. The assistant group indicated a slightly higher satisfaction rate than those with an associate rank. While the highest level of satisfaction was expressed by librarians with full rank, assistant and full professors show the same median (8) and mode (8). Those in the assistant rank may benefit from more opportunities than associates. Responses from the full librarians in this survey seem to confirm findings in other studies, indicating that longevity plays a role in contentment as they had the highest level of satisfaction when compared by rank (Armstrong-Stassen & Cameron, 2005; Galbraith, et al., 2016; Horenstein, 1993). Tenure plays a role in satisfaction as well. The mean satisfaction for those on the tenure-track was 9, and although the mean satisfaction for tenured librarians was 7.73, the mode was 9. A study of tenure with a larger sample would be interesting to see how tenure relates to job satisfaction (see Table 2).

In this study, respondents represented many areas (disciplines) within academic librarianship. Overall, the cataloging, metadata, e-resources, and systems librarians reported higher levels of satisfaction (mean scores of 8.50 and 7.71). While not particularly dissatisfied, a few lower scores were reported by some who serve in administration, reference and instruction, and interlibrary loan (see Table 3).

Bunge (1987) noted that certain types of positions emphasized different sources of stress. For instance, public service librarians had higher stress resulting from working with the public, while technical service librarians found stress in their workload and the lack of appreciation from their colleagues (Bunge, 1987, pp. 49-50). In a future study, an analysis of a larger sample of those librarians having more interactions with their customer base or who serve in sometimes stressful administrative roles would be necessary to confirm this as fact or artifact.

Although 61% (33/54) of the participants have stayed in their current institution for 11 or more years, 33% (18/54) reported changing jobs four or more times. Those with the most years since receiving the MLS had the highest mean satisfaction. In analyzing satisfaction levels relating to time at the same place of employment, those with the fewest years at their current institution showed the highest level of satisfaction with the largest dip in satisfaction coming in the 6-10 year range. As respondents stay at an institution for more than 10 years, their satisfaction begins to rise again. Librarians approaching retirement in 5 years or less (12/53, 23%) expressed slightly more dissatisfaction than other groups (see Table 4). Participants in this study shared that a variety of assignments was important. Changing jobs, either within an organization (job rotation) or moving to a new institution, to advance one's career or to improve salary and working conditions are strategies to prevent "stuckness" or plateauing, both organizationally and personally (Comes, 1986; DeLon, 1993; Montgomery, 2002).

In reviewing Bunge's (1987) list of sources of satisfaction and frustration (stress), it appears that many remain the same almost 30 years later. It is apparent that librarians, at least in this study, are primarily motivated by intrinsic factors, considering five of the top six motivators cited in the survey are intrinsic in nature (see Table 5). Additional factors that were brought out during the interviews, including mentoring of junior colleagues, collaboration with colleagues,

making an impact, and helping students and faculty, are also intrinsic motivators. The value of intrinsic rewards to senior faculty was established by Farmer (1993) and in Amabile's work on motivating creativity in the work place (1997). Studies of academic librarians also reported the importance of intrinsic motivators (Bernstein and Leach, 1985; Horenstein, 1993; Peng, 2014).

While salary was selected most often as a frustration in the job, lack of opportunities for promotion or advancement were also high on the list. It was obvious from the interviews that once the highest rank has been achieved, there are few opportunities to improve one's salary. Physical environment also placed high on the dissatisfaction list, but few offered specifics. Several respondents expressed some unhappiness with changes in the profession: "This isn't why I became a librarian; "you don't get to do the work that you got into this profession for;" and "too much change for change's sake." Lack of recognition, lack of influence within the organization, job creep, inability to use skill sets, and lack of university support were other frustrations expressed during the interviews (see Table 6). These appear to be similar to complaints exposed in other studies (Bardwick, 1986; Bunge, 1987; Conroy, 1995).

Many of the senior librarians in this study seem to find mentoring both important and personally fulfilling. One interviewee commented that his or her career had been a combination of luck and timing, leading to a desire to provide opportunities to newer librarians who may not have entered the field at such an auspicious time. To follow up on attitudes related to mentoring, the interviewees were asked if they had ever felt as though they were asked to step back from a professional opportunity to allow a less senior colleague a chance at limited funding or key committees. With very few exceptions, most respondents did not see that as a problem. For some, there was a feeling that the organization provided enough funding and professional opportunities for everyone. Several commented that they might have had to step back on

occasion but that they were perfectly okay with that and felt it was an important part of the mentoring process.

Teamwork and collaboration, both within the library and in the larger academic environment, were regularly cited as contributing to job satisfaction. Appreciation by one's administration and colleagues is also important. Collegial respect seemed to be demonstrated most often in an informal manner such as by being asked for opinions, offered new job responsibilities, or being elected to important committees.

In 1998, Arthur debunked the myth of non-productive, aging librarians. Although ageism was not considered in the original development of the survey instrument or the semi-structured interview questions, concerns related to age were mentioned by a few interview participants as an issue they face in their work environment. The perceived bias works in both directions. Younger librarians, although they had experience and expertise, felt they weren't always valued by their older colleagues. Long and Sheehan (2015) also noted that younger librarians may feel that their senior counterparts expect them to "pay their dues" (p. 753). An older librarian believed some colleagues considered their opinions to be outdated, "It is challenging to be part of the team and not be seen as a stumbling block or a dinosaur." Many articles in the library literature discuss handling intergenerational workplaces and age discrimination (Chu, 2009; Pankl, 2004; to name two). A recent study by Munde and Coonin was able to document actual age preferences finding that junior librarians in their study "valued" mid-career librarians more than senior librarians but senior librarians valued their peers more than junior librarians. Morgan (2014) discovered that some older workers believed that more training opportunities went to younger colleagues. This might be related to a perception that training may be wasted on older employees since they could leave before the institution recoups the expense of the training.

However, a recent study noted that the return on investment for many types of training is as little as one to 3 years (Hitch & Kirkman, 2014). Whether perceived or documented, ageism can contribute to job dissatisfaction and may also be a factor in plateauing. Supervisors will want to address these issues to avoid seeing their stars and solid citizens transition into deadwood (FERENCE, et al., 1977).

It is not unusual for senior librarians to seek out or be asked to perform administrative and leadership duties in addition to their other job assignments. A lack of opportunity or interest in administrative tasks may lead to organizational plateauing, since other methods for advancement may be limited once full faculty rank has been achieved. Most interview respondents had obviously given this a great deal of thought and had made a concrete decision on whether they were interested in pursuing that avenue for advancement. Six of the librarians interviewed (30%) had specifically opted out of adding administrative duties and cited personnel issues as a reason. One librarian commented, "I never want to supervise anyone. I'm happy in my stagnant job." Others commented on the love of working directly with students or fulfilling any personal desire for leadership opportunities by looking outside of the institution. This would support Conroy's (1995) description of the "productively plateaued," "partially plateaued," and "pleasantly plateaued" workers, all of whom are happy with their current level of responsibility. As long as these employees remain productive and satisfied, they are essential components of a healthy organization (p. 14).

Many of the interviewees demonstrated a strong personal responsibility for improving job satisfaction to avoid career plateauing. An attitude of "It's up to me" was not uncommon, and many expressed a need to learn new things and to continue to be productive. Montgomery (2002) recommended "taking an active" role in one's own career as one mechanism for avoiding a mid-

career plateau (p. 711). Supervisors may be instrumental in helping to avoiding plateauing.

Several respondents commented that encouragement to take on new challenges and to assume new responsibilities was instrumental in keeping them motivated and energized. Conroy (1995) suggested this positive attitude strategy, and interviews conducted by Pollack and Brown (1998) revealed similar efforts made by mid- and advanced career librarians.

Conclusion

Although this is an exploratory study, some interesting themes regarding plateauing and job satisfaction emerged:

Academic librarians generally love their jobs and are strongly motivated by intrinsic rewards.

Despite the slight differences, it appears that librarians in this study, regardless of rank or tenure, are generally happy with their jobs; only 13% (7/54) of all of the respondents described their satisfaction level at 5 or below.

The importance of a positive attitude.

Many choose to be positive, and, while they admit there are challenges and obstacles, they explore ways to stay satisfied within their current position.

Continuous learning and job variety are valued.

The strong willingness to learn new skills expressed by interviewees indicates that a drive for professional growth continues throughout a librarian's career. All of the librarians who were interviewed regularly participate in professional development opportunities such as conferences and webinars. Since there isn't a lot of movement from one institution to another, finding variety and new challenges within the organization becomes increasingly important.

Teamwork and collaboration should be encouraged.

Opportunities to collaborate were often expressed as an important motivation for senior librarians. Teaming up with colleagues can be energizing. It inspires creativity and enhances satisfaction by working together on a common goal.

Risk-taking may lead to higher job satisfaction.

In this study, 75% (15/20) of the librarians indicated that they were at least somewhat willing to take risks. Some had changed jobs or even careers to stay motivated. Others expressed satisfaction and pride in their ability to speak up on important issues.

Organizational plateauing may occur by choice.

Some librarians find satisfaction and challenges within their current assignments and have no desire to move up in faculty rank or add additional administrative responsibilities. As long as they continue to be productive and satisfied, these employees are often valuable additions to a healthy organization.

Potential age bias should not be ignored.

Whether it is younger librarians feeling under-valued or senior librarians feeling unappreciated and outdated, supervisors will want to monitor their environment for potential age biases, as these issues may have a serious impact on the organization.

Supervisors need to communicate.

The importance of regular dialogue between librarian and supervisor cannot be overstated. Several librarians in this study commented on how the encouragement and support of a supervisor motivated them to take advantage of new and interesting opportunities. Arthur commented that performance evaluations are still the primary means of feedback and goal-setting (1998). The use of constructive faculty performance evaluations and growth plans are

mechanisms for acknowledging the contributions of senior faculty while encouraging them to experiment with new ideas (Farmer, 1993).

Limitations and future studies

The intent of this study was to explore a small, defined group of academic librarians to gauge their views on job satisfaction and career plateauing and compare findings to the studies from the business and higher education fields. Statistical correlations and definitive conclusions cannot be made with a sample of this size. It is also possible that the job-satisfaction rates reported for the respondents who agreed to be interviewed may have been higher than those reported by the larger survey sample because the survey did offer anonymity if so desired.

Having located some common themes from this sample, a study surveying a much larger sample of senior librarians, and representing all disciplines of librarianship, would verify if these sentiments and opinions are commonly held. Do public librarians have the same motivations and frustrations as academic librarians? The survey respondents were not specifically asked about content plateauing. It would be interesting to expand this area of investigation to see if results from a larger sample are similar. The topic of ageism in librarianship also warrants additional qualitative studies. There has been a good bit of literature about the graying of the profession and cross-generational workgroups, but there is limited information on how the perception of age bias may affect job satisfaction. The possible effect of organizational culture was not explored in any depth in this study but came up in some of the interview discussions. Additional work on this topic would be helpful.

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Table 1: On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the most satisfied), how satisfied are you (today) with your job situation? (n=54)

Satisfaction level (10=highest satisfaction)	Number of respondents
10	5 (9%)
9	8 (15%)
8	19 (35%)
7	8 (15%)
6	7 (13%)
5	3 (6%)
4	1 (2%)
3	2 (4%)
2	1 (2%)
1	0 (0%)

Mean=7

Median=8

Mode=8

Table 2: Rank and Faculty Status

	Number of respondents	Mean satisfaction score (10=highest satisfaction)
Rank (n=54)		
Assistant Librarian/Professor	8 (15%)	7.63
Associate Librarian/Professor	28 (52%)	7.07
Full Librarian/Professor	18 (33%)	7.78
Faculty Status (n=54)		
Has Faculty Status	48 (89%)	7.38 ^b
Doesn't have Faculty Status	6 (11%)	7.50
Tenure status (n=13)		
Tenure-track but not yet tenured	2 (15%)	9.00
Tenured	11 (85%)	7.73 ^c

^aAssistant Librarian/Professors were included if they had more than 10 years post-MLS

^bmode=8

^cmode=9

Table 3: Primary Job Assignment^a (n=53)

	Number of respondents	Mean satisfaction score (10=highest satisfaction)
Cataloging and Metadata	4 (8%)	8.50
E-resources or Systems	7 (13%)	7.71
Collection Management or Special Collections	8 (15%)	7.63
Access Services or Interlibrary Loan	5 (9%)	7.40
Administration ^b	11 (21%)	7.18
Reference and Instruction	18 (34%)	7.11

^aSome categories were combined to protect anonymity

^bMany of the respondents reported having administrative duties, but only 11 listed administration as their primary responsibility.

Table 4: Employment history and plans for retirement

	Number of respondents	Mean satisfaction score (10=highest satisfaction)
Years since receiving MLS (n=53):		
6-9 years post MLS ^a	5 (9%)	6.60 ^b
10-15 years post MLS	15 (28%)	7.40
More than 15 years post MLS	33 (62%)	7.42
Years at current institution (n=54):		
0-5 years	9 (17%)	8.33
6-10 years	12 (22%)	6.58 ^c
11-15 years	17 (31%)	7.29
More than 15 years	16 (30%)	7.56
Number of libraries worked since obtaining MLS (n=54):		
1 library	9 (17%)	7.33
2-3 libraries	27 (50%)	7.44
4-5 libraries	14 (26%)	7.21
More than 5 libraries	4 (7%)	7.75
Plans for retirement (n=53):		
Within the next year	1 (2%)	6.00
Within the next 3 years	5 (9%)	7.40 ^d
Within the next 5 years	6 (11%)	6.17 ^e
Within 6-10 years	5 (9%)	8.00
Within 10-20 years	8 (15%)	7.50
More than 20 years	6 (11%)	6.83
Haven't decided	22 (42%)	7.82

^aLibrarians with fewer than 10 years post-MLS were included if they had achieved the rank of

Associate or Full Librarian/Professor

^bmode=6, ^cmode=8, ^dmode=9, ^emode=8

Table 5: Which of the following do you feel is the MOST important to you for job satisfaction?

(Select top three choices, n=49)

	Number of times selected
Recognition by and respect of your supervisor	25
Rapport with your colleagues	24
Variety in your work	18
Salary	15
Opportunity to learn new skills	14
Increasing responsibility	13
Professional service (university committees, national or state library committees, etc.)	9
Research and scholarship; (personal or collaborative presentations, publications, etc.)	9
Physical environment (office space, geographic location, etc.)	5
Other	6

*Participants could select up to three choices. Those who selected more than three options were removed from the results.

Table 6: Which of the following do you feel is the MOST frustrating to you about your current assignment? (n=54)

	Number of times selected
Salary	11
Lack of opportunity for promotion and/or advancement	8
Physical environment (office space, geographic location, etc.)	7
Lack of recognition or appreciation by your supervisor	5
Lack of opportunity to learn new skills	3
Lack of recognition or appreciation by your colleagues	2
Lack of variety in your work	2
Requirement for professional service (university committees, national or state library committees, etc.)	2
Requirement for research and scholarship (personal or collaborative presentations, publications, etc.)	2
Other	12

*Participants selected one option

Table 7: Are you content plateaued? (n=20)

	Number of respondents	Mean satisfaction score (=highest satisfaction)
No	12 (60%)	8.00
Yes	5 (25%)	7.80
Have been in the past but not now	3 (15%)	6.67

Appendix

Survey questions

Your academic rank:

- Full Librarian / Full Professor / University Librarian (or equivalent)
- Instructor Librarian (or equivalent)
- Assistant Librarian / Assistant Professor / Assistant University Librarian (or equivalent)
- Associate Librarian / Associate Professor / Associate University Librarian (or equivalent)
- Other :

Your current primary assignment:

- Acquisitions
- Access Services
- Administration
- Cataloging
- Collection Management
- Electronic Resources
- Interlibrary Loan
- Reference and / or Instruction
- Scholarly Communication
- Special Collections
- Systems
- Other :

Number of years since receiving your MLS:

- 0-5 years
- 6-9 years
- 10-15 years
- More than 15 years
- Do not have an MLS
- Other :

Number of years worked at your current institution:

- 0-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- More than 15 years
- Other :

Size of your current institution (head count):

- Less than 1000

- 1000-2000
- 2001-5000
- 5001-10,000
- 10,001-20,000
- Over 20,000
- Other :

Number of different libraries where you have worked since obtaining your MLS:

- 1
- 2-3
- 4-5
- More than 5
- Other :

Do you plan to retire...

- Within the next year
- Within the next three years
- Within the next five years
- Within the next ten years
- Haven't decided
- Other :

Do you have faculty status?

- Yes
- No

Are librarians at your institution tenured?

- Yes
- No
- Have the option of being on a tenure-track or non-tenure-track line
- Other :

If you are promotion earning, how long ago did you receive your last promotion?

- Within the last year
- Within the last 3 years
- Within the last 5 years
- Within the last 10 years
- More than 10 years ago
- Not applicable
- Other :

Are you currently an administrator or have administrative duties?

- Yes, Department Head
- Yes, Director or Dean (head of the library)

- Yes, Assistant Director/Dean
- Yes, Associate Director/Dean
- No
- Other :

Is research and/or publication a requirement for your position?

- Yes
- No
- Other :

On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the most satisfied), how satisfied are you (today) with your job situation?

least satisfied

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

most satisfied

Which of the following do you feel is the MOST important to you for job satisfaction? Please select your top three choices.

- Increasing responsibility
- Opportunity to learn new skills
- Physical environment (office space, geographic location, etc.)
- Professional service (university committees, national or state library committees, etc.)
- Rapport with your colleagues
- Recognition by and respect of your supervisor
- Research and scholarship (personal or collaborative presentations, publications, etc.)
- Salary
- Variety in your work
- Other:

Which of the following do you feel is the MOST frustrating to you about your current assignment? Please select one.

- Lack of opportunity for promotion and/or advancement
- Lack of opportunity to learn new skills
- Lack of recognition or appreciation by your colleagues
- Lack of recognition or appreciation by your supervisor

- Lack of variety in your work
- Physical environment (office space, geographic location, etc.)
- Requirement for professional service (university committees, national or state library committees, etc.)
- Requirement for research and scholarship (personal or collaborative presentations, publications, etc.)
- Salary
- Other :

Briefly describe what motivates you to stay interested in your position and your career in librarianship.

Any additional comments you would like to make.