New Librarians and the Practice of Everyday Life

Lisa Levesque

Ryerson University

Alison Skyrme

Ryerson University

ABSTRACT

*In this article, the authors take a critical look at the challenges faced by librarians new to the profession. Using Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, they examine how the coping tactics for new librarians described in the literature mirror the "tactics" de Certeau describes individuals using to "make do" within systems of power. This includes how individuals make do in their personal lives by coping with stress and how they succeed at work by developing networks and manoeuvring politically. This article will also discuss what de Certeau refers to as "strategies," or moves undertaken by the system of power itself, within the context of onboarding and mentorship. Examining the literature on new librarians through the lens of de Certeau allows the authors to consider the ways in which the individual may choose to act tactically and integrate into a system of power, or may use the limited means available to them to quietly rebel. It also allows the critique of the use of tactics, which require individuals to take on additional work in order to adapt to the needs of the institution. Requiring new librarians to adapt to their institution is problematic, specifically in relation to precarious labour and to barriers to entry. These systematic issues require a collective response beyond what individuals can address. Using de Certeau's work, the authors critically examine the literature that exists on new librarians and how individuals adapt and change to the needs of the academic library as a system of power.*

Keywords: *academic librarianship · early-career librarians · Michel de Certeau · new librarians · precarious labour*

RÉSUMÉ

*Dans cet article, les auteurs jettent un regard critique sur les défis auxquels font face les bibliothécaires qui débutent dans la profession. À l'aide de *The Practice of Everyday Life* (d'abord publié en français en 1980 sous le titre *L'invention du quotidien : Arts de faire*) de Michel de Certeau, ils examinent comment les tactiques d'adaptation pour les nouveaux*

bibliothécaires décrites dans la littérature reflètent les « tactiques » utilisées par les individus selon de Certeau pour « se débrouiller » dans les systèmes de pouvoir. Cela comprend la façon dont les individus se débrouillent dans leur vie personnelle en faisant face au stress, et comment ils réussissent au travail en développant des réseaux et en manœuvrant de façon politique. Cet article traitera également de ce que de Certeau appelle les « stratégies », c'est-à-dire les mouvements entrepris par le système de pouvoir lui-même, dans le contexte de l'intégration et du mentorat. L'examen de la documentation sur les nouveaux bibliothécaires à travers le prisme de de Certeau permet aux auteurs d'examiner les façons dont l'individu peut choisir d'agir tactiquement et de s'intégrer dans un système de pouvoir, ou d'utiliser les moyens limités dont il dispose pour se rebeller en silence. Il permet également de critiquer l'utilisation de tactiques, lesquelles exigent des individus qu'ils effectuent un travail supplémentaire afin de s'adapter aux besoins de l'établissement. Exiger des nouveaux bibliothécaires qu'ils s'adaptent à leur établissement est problématique, particulièrement en ce qui a trait à la précarité du travail et aux obstacles d'accès. Ces problèmes systémiques exigent une solution collective qui va au-delà de ce que les individus peuvent aborder. À l'aide des travaux de de Certeau, les auteurs examinent d'un œil critique la documentation existante sur les nouveaux bibliothécaires et la façon dont les individus s'adaptent et changent selon les besoins de la bibliothèque universitaire en tant que système de pouvoir.

Mots-clés : *bibliothéconomie universitaire · bibliothécaires en début de carrière · Michel de Certeau · bibliothécaires débutants · emplois précaires*

THERE has been a substantial amount of research published on the broad topic of new librarians that addresses two perspectives: the new librarians themselves¹ and the institutions that hire them.² Many of the articles include strategies for institutions on how to integrate new employees into the organizational culture,³ the development and success of mentors and mentorship programs,⁴ or training and professional development for new librarians.⁵

Research focused on the perspective of the new librarian highlights the areas of stress, obstacles, and anxieties faced by new information professionals.⁶ These

1. See Lacey and Parlette-Stewart 2017; Dale 2016; Connor et al. 2012; White 2010; and Newhouse and Spisak 2004.

2. See Brown, Wolski, and Richardson 2015; Goodsett and Walsh 2015; Graybill et al. 2013; Snyder and Crane 2016; Berry 2011; Bosque and Lampert 2009; Byke and Lowe-Wincentsen 2009; Markgren et al. 2007; Hallam and Newton-Smith 2006; Bird 2005; Simmons-Welburn and Welburn 2003; and Black and Leysen 2002.

3. See Mallon 2014; Graybill et al. 2013; Snyder and Crane 2016; Berry 2011; Robinson et al. 2011; Byke and Lowe-Wincentsen 2009; Leong and Vaughan 2010; Bird 2005; Simmons-Welburn and Welburn 2003; and Black and Leysen 2002.

4. See Bell 2013; Goodsett and Walsh 2015; Lee 2011; Floyd 2010; Hallam and Newton-Smith 2006; Kanchier 2003; Kuyper-Rushing 2001; and Wang 2001.

5. See Benjes-Small and Miller 2017; Brown, Wolski, and Richardson 2015; de Jager et al. 2014; Gruber 2007; and Shaughnessy 1992.

6. See Connor et al. 2012; Dale 2016; Lacey and Parlette-Stewart 2017; Larrivee 2014; and Oud 2008.

include the inadequacy of preparation many new librarians feel they received in their LIS education,⁷ the financial stress caused by the expense of library school (Dale 2016, 265; Halperin 2018), and the uncertainty of precarious, contract labour that new librarians encounter after graduation (Lacey and Parlette-Stewart 2017). In addition, the difficulty of socialization and adjusting to the culture of a new workplace is outlined as a major problem for new librarians (Oud 2005, 2008). Oud's research on new academic librarians finds that significant anxiety is produced by the disparity between expectations new librarians have about their new job and the reality of the job requirements. The greater the distance between the two, the more difficulty librarians have in transitioning successfully into new roles and the lower their job satisfaction (Oud 2008, 256). This anxiety is exacerbated by the indifferent approach that many academic libraries take towards new-employee orientation and unclear expectations of new librarian positions (Lacey and Parlette-Stewart 2017). For new librarians, the difficulties of taking on a new role in an uncertain environment and the perpetual state of flux within the profession (Sare, Bales, and Neville 2012) can also result in stress that manifests as mental and physical health problems. Stress can also result in imposter syndrome (Lacey and Parlette-Stewart 2017) and burnout (Librarian Burnout Blog; UNC Chapel Hill 2018).

De Certeau and the Theory of the Practice of Everyday Life

In order to apply a critical lens to the literature on the coping tactics of new librarians and their integration into the institution, this article draws on the work of Michel de Certeau, whose writing on the individual provides a useful paradigm for understanding new librarians. Michel de Certeau was a French historian who analyzed religion, culture, and everyday life. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), de Certeau describes how individuals navigate systems of power, which span from consumer mass culture to organizations such as the market and the workplace. Individuals are enmeshed in these systems of power that they do not control but that they have to navigate. As de Certeau writes, they are “immigrants in a system too vast to be their own, too tightly woven for them to escape from it” (xx). They are trapped within the system, and their agency, which de Certeau calls an individual's “tactics” (36), takes place within the constructs of this system.

De Certeau is interested in how individuals “make do” in everyday life, arguing that they must use tact and skill in order to navigate systems of power (xv). The individual can be “sly,” use “wit,” and “disguise or transform themselves to survive” (xi). They seize opportunities when these present themselves (35). Their tactics are “determined by the absence of power” (38). In de Certeau's theory, the system

7. See Newhouse and Spisak 2004; 8Rs Research Team and Cultural Human Resources Council 2006; Cirasella and Smale 2011; Connor et al. 2012; and Goodsett and Koziura 2016.

is inherently strong and the individual is inherently weak. The strong create representations, systems, and “strategies,” or prescribed actions, and the weak respond to them using borrowed “tactics” (xv–xviii). To explain this, he uses the helpful, if now somewhat dated, example of a housewife navigating a grocery store (xix). The housewife must use skill to shop the sales, compare what is available to what is in the fridge at home, and then determine what to purchase for a meal. As a shopper, she is at the mercy of the grocery store, which holds power when it comes to selecting what products appear on the shelves. She must “make do” with what she finds there. The “strategy” presented to her is to shop the shelves; her “tactic” is to select only what she needs, using her skill and ability.

Similarly, employees “make do” and work tactically within a workplace: by prioritizing some tasks ahead of others, by determining whom to ask for new information, and by deftly navigating office politics. “Making do” is equivalent to “fitting in,” or to developing coping tactics that allow employees to adapt themselves to the environment in which they find themselves. While all library employees do this type of navigation throughout their careers, new academic librarians are more acutely aware than their peers of the need to “make do” and to make tactical moves, because they are newer to the system of power. The culture, the conventions, the rules, and hierarchical structure of the academic library itself are not yet fully known to them, and they must work actively to navigate them if they are to integrate into the system, overcoming issues specific to new employees.

Before applying de Certeau’s thought to the situation of new librarians, it is worth noting that generalization cannot supersede individual differences; the individual librarian and how they “make do” is the focus of this article. Not all new librarians experience precarious labour, imposter syndrome, or uncertainty, although it is likely that they will. While these conditions affect them generally, new librarians are affected by issues that may intersect and amplify one another, especially in relation to their personal identity. For instance, rates of mental and physical health problems are higher among precariously employed individuals than among those with secure jobs (Lewchuk et al. 2003), meaning that new librarians who have ongoing mental and physical health concerns may be further affected by the strain of taking on precarious work. Similarly, imposter syndrome has been found to be more prevalent in women in the academic sector (Villwock et al. 2016; Cowie et al. 2018), meaning that new academic librarians who are women have two strikes against them, so to speak. Personal traits such as physical ability and gender affect how new librarians navigate entering the profession, but of course no one has just one defining trait, as “we all embody multiple axes of identity and oppression throughout our lives that often affect us simultaneously” (Ettarh 2014, para. 5). Having multiple marginalized intersecting identities can “play into each other” and compound the difficulty of

entering the profession (Satifce 2015, para. 18). As a result, “making do” is different for each individual.

Furthermore, academic librarianship is not a neutral setting equally accessible to all. The demographics of librarianship are predominantly white⁸ and middle-class (Ettarh 2014), meaning that individuals who do not match this demographic have to do more to fit in. These problematic demographics can be contextualized by examining the challenges faced by first-generation students. In comparison to other students, first-generation students are more likely to be racialized individuals or to have limited access to financial resources (Postsecondary National Policy Institute 2017), to fear homelessness between academic terms, and to suffer from “feelings of alienation as they transition to an unfamiliar space” (Nguyen and Nguyen 2018, 147). Additionally, Trejo (2016) found that first-generation university students are more likely to select majors “with strong labor market rewards and a clear career path,” neither of which librarianship can boast, making it less likely to attract first-generation students (part 8, para. 2). New librarians who are not first-generation students have access to an ingrained knowledge of academia that is not available to first-generation students. Individuals who already face barriers to entry related to race, class, background, or access to financial resources will find the challenges inherent in entering the profession more difficult to overcome.

Institutional Strategies

On the topic of integrating into a new workplace culture, it is here the literature shifts from the perspective of the individual to that of the institution and the “strategies” it employs, to use de Certeau’s term. There are a number of texts that focus on integrating new professionals into the system, offering programs, how to’s, and checklists for the employer.⁹ This integration benefits the institution, with goals such as improving retention, the development of staff and leaders, and the “increased flow of good ideas” (Leong and Vaughan 2010, 638). New librarians are supposed to bring “innovative ideas” that will benefit an organization (Mosley 2006, 119), and improvements to librarians’ performance (reviewed by Shaughnessy 1992) are improvements to the organization itself. Other benefits, such as good working relationships, are desirable because “employees are more likely to perform better on behalf of the organization if they have a trusting relationship with their supervisor

8. The 8Rs Research team in its 2006 survey found that only ten percent of recent graduates and current students identify as a visible minority or aboriginal individual, a trend that was reaffirmed in the update 8Rs Redux (DeLong and Sorensen 2018, 60). This percentage is also confirmed in a Canadian context by the 2016 Census of Canadian Academic Librarians conducted by the Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians, question 22.

9. See Snyder and Crane 2016; Brown, Wolski, and Richardson 2015; Mallon 2014; de Jager et al. 2014; Graybill et al. 2013; Berry 2011; Leong and Vaughan 2010; Byke and Lowe-Wincentzen 2009; Boyd 2007; Bird 2005; Black and Leysen 2002; and Shaughnessy 1992.

and are sufficiently motivated to engage in behavior that benefits the organization” (Mallon 2014, 597–98). Retention is framed as a positive because when employees quit it is detrimental to the institution. As Markgren et al. (2007) point out, “When the new librarians leave, their knowledge and expertise departs with them” (73). The primary concern of this portion of the literature is on the health or well-being not of the individual but of the institution, although these concerns may coincide.

The Individual and Integration into the Library System

While the literature on new librarians offers individuals coping solutions for work stressors, the lens of de Certeau's theory reframes these actions as tactics, as the “making do” required due to the imbalance of power between individuals and the system of power. Individuals use tactics in order to survive, and the tactics available to them are derived from the system of power and are based on opportunities that present themselves. Using adversarial, military metaphors to describe this, de Certeau (1984) writes that “The space of a tactic is a space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. . . . it is a maneuver ‘within the enemy’s field of vision’” (37). Tactics do not change the system of power itself, but they can change the individual to better fit within the system of power and its strategies. This explains the focus on integration within the literature.

Integration into the system is a concept that is explored in detail by Mokros and Aakus (2002) in their work on meaning engagement. They describe how recent graduates in their first academic librarian job must engage in the process of developing practical skills while also becoming “a member of a professional community that cultivates standards and presuppositions,” which means “interpreting and judging professional action” (308). Adaptation for new academic librarians is a multi-layered process: rules have to be learned for the new institution, the profession, and for academia in general. Given the difficult terrain that new librarians must navigate, socialization into this existing structure is key to the success of the individual. Simmons-Welburn and Welburn also describe this in their 2003 study, highlighting the tension that exists for new employees as they make sense of the institution and their role in it. New employees go through two socialization processes: learning about the profession and about the institutional culture. It is the institutional culture that Oud (2008) finds to be one of the main areas of opaqueness for new librarians, with institutional politics often cited as “one of the most disliked and most difficult aspects of the job” (199). This difficulty may be due to each workplace culture being different, and new librarians who work short-term contracts find themselves having to adapt again and again, “and occasionally unlearning some things which had been obtained at previous institutions a few short

months before” (Lacey and Parlette-Stewart 2017, 3). Even many established academic librarians find navigating university environments challenging, due to the difficult relationships they have with teaching and research faculty (Hosburgh 2011; Hill 2005). Just as de Certeau (1984) characterizes systems of power as inescapable, Oud (2008) says of workplace politics: “Remember, you can’t escape organizational politics. However, if you’re aware of the political forces at work and treat them seriously, you will be able to develop skills to help you deal more effectively with politics” (207). In other words, new librarians must integrate into the system of power to survive.

This integration may take place through onboarding and mentorship. Onboarding is often the first development step for new librarians led by the administration. Snyder and Crane (2016) find that onboarding is not well documented in library science literature, and no literature exists for onboarding that includes an introduction to institutional politics, academic library jargon, or unspoken rules. While onboarding is often successful at practical training in processes and workflows, it misses the aspect that Oud (2006) finds to be the most difficult to grasp: navigating the culture. Teaching about culture is often overlooked by long-term employees who are supervising the onboarding process, as they have become accustomed to, and embedded into, the system of power and do not easily recognize that cultural navigation is a learned skill. Onboarding also takes place over a much shorter time period than the adjustment time of nine months or more that new librarians face (Oud 2008). Snyder and Crane (2016) find that participants preferred a three-month process (3), and most libraries do not offer this type of extended onboarding. Instead, there is a “‘let me show you to your desk’ approach” (Lacey and Parlette-Stewart 2017, 2) that leaves “many new librarians feeling they are left to peek out from their lonely office, learning what they can through observation” (Faulkner 2015, 266). As a result, many new librarians recommend finding a mentor as a way to cope (Lacey and Parlette-Stewart 2017; Faulkner 2015).

Mentorship is one process of helping a new employee “adopt the organization’s values” and develop a positive work experience (Payne and Huffman 2005, 598). New librarians seek mentorship and use it to help them understand workplace culture; in that sense, this is a tactical move, and new librarians are eager to hear from colleagues about what tactics have worked for them. When they are institutionally approved, however, both onboarding and mentorship can be considered strategies of the system of power used to ensure that new professionals integrate into the workforce. Mentorship is widely cited in LIS publications, and in their literature review Farrell et al. (2017) found 900 articles published on this topic in two of the major LIS databases. They describe a disconnect between new librarians’ expectations for mentorship and what is offered. Surveys of new librarians in Canada and the US have found that

the majority of new librarians “view mentoring as important for their professional growth and expect it to be offered at their institutions,” but an ARL report found few libraries—about 30 percent—had “established formal mentoring programs” (53). New librarians might even find they must arrange their own mentorship (Oud 2008, 264). Informal mentorship arranged like this can still be as effective (Wang 2001, 27), or more effective, than formal mentorship (Simmons-Welburn and Welburn 2003), but it does place the burden on the individual to find and arrange a mentor. As an everyday practice, mentorship can help one understand the minute details of a job, from how to navigate politics to how to use the printer. Mentorship is about “teaching one how to navigate the complex web of one’s unique organization” (Byke and Lowe-Wincentzen 2009, 82), and the mentor, or more established employee, shares what has helped them navigate this web and fit in. Mentorship is especially emphasized as a tool for success for librarians who are people of colour and who face barriers to enter the profession (Hathcock 2015; Quon 2016), and those suffering from imposter syndrome or burnout (Farrell et al. 2017), categories that are often related. Mentorship and onboarding have flaws, however. The power imbalance between tenured mentors and untenured mentees opens the door to additional problems, including workplace harassment (Kendrick 2017, 870). Having to find a mentor might be a challenge for new librarians who are already unsure of themselves and overwhelmed.

Librarians and Their Tactics

While the new librarian is vulnerable to a number of issues at once, stress and burnout are recurrent issues within librarianship generally, with a myriad of solutions offered within the literature.¹⁰ Despite the fact that librarian workplace stress is widespread, “the problem is treated as an individual one” rather than an organizational one, and “there has not been a focused effort to address the problem of stress across a system of libraries or on a state-wide or profession-wide basis” (Wilkins Jordan 2014, 295). In the course of conducting her study on the topic, Wilkins Jordan received detailed accounts of mental and physical health issues from individuals who considered them both normal and their fault alone. She recounts being told stories of people “crying in their cars in the library parking lot, dreading to go inside—but feeling as though it was something they individually were doing wrong, instead of experiencing the same widespread stress of many librarians” (295). Wilkins Jordan is writing about public libraries, but these issues are also present in academic libraries. Kendrick (2017) notes that harmful work environments are an issue within academic librarianship, and stressful incidents, ranging from ineffective, indifferent leadership to direct abuse, can have long-term effects on one’s ability to

¹⁰. See Christian 2015; Shuape et al. 2015; Larrivee 2014; Mestas 2014; Wilkins Jordan 2014; Mastel and Innes 2011; Harwell 2008; and Affleck 1996.

participate in the profession. She writes that “demoralized academic librarians have persistent feelings of reduced professional confidence, skepticism of autonomy, and mistrust of colleagues, supervisors, library and campus administration” (874). Given the stress that many librarians feel when first joining the profession, and the long-term effects of stress, it is not surprising that the profession at large suffers as a result with internalized stress.

In order to overcome stress, new librarians are inundated with literature that describes personal coping tactics. These can be considered “tactics” in the sense used by de Certeau, though the library literature frames them as necessary and useful tools rather than as reactions by the powerless to systems of power. These tactics are described in advice articles, self-help activities, and how-to lists for the new librarian.¹¹ They are often general in nature, mirroring the abundant popular literature that exists on the topic of how to manage stress (Spencer 2013, 12). The personal coping tactics suggested to librarians include stress-reduction techniques such as meditation (Mastel and Innes 2011), having a snack (Spencer 2013), developing a social network (Sheesley 2001), or making time for physical activity (Larrive 2014). This type of literature does not address workplace stress as the systemic issue it is, affecting everyone to some degree or another. Instead, it frames the problem of stress as a personal one, and the solution for workplace problems is often to get away from the workplace for a period of time, either physically or through mental diversions. Coping tactics such as these might be used by new librarians after they encounter difficulties. For instance, Lacey and Parlette-Stewart (2017) describe suffering low confidence as a result of imposter syndrome and combating it by keeping a record of personal successes (7), and Kendrick (2017) states that librarians adopt coping tactics after recognizing the “negative effects” of low morale on “their mind, bodies, and daily work” (873). The tone of this self-help literature is often cheerful and light, offering simple, practical solutions to complex systemic problems.

The literature also describes coping tactics specific to the workplace that again place the onus on the individual. New librarians are encouraged to actively change their work style to “adjust to [a] new workplace and colleagues” (Duke and Boyd 2006, 37), to fit in by acting, speaking, and dressing professionally (Byke and Lowe-Wincentsen 2009), to deal with busy schedules by developing time-management skills (Larrive, 2014), and to learn enough about office politics to know “how things work” in order to get things done effectively (Oud 2008, 253). Integrating into the existing culture is a priority, but it takes time and effort. In an academic library, adjusting to the culture can take “six to nine months or more,” a highly stressful time period that might last the duration of a new librarian’s contract (Oud 2008,

11. See Mastel and Innes 2011; Spencer 2013; Harwell 2008; Newhouse and Spisak 2004; Byke and Lowe-Wincentsen 2009; Cox 2007; and Kanchie 2003.

264). This process has to begin again with every new workplace, as professional development must be “bounded by the organizational context in which one finds oneself” (Shaughnessy 1992, 287, referencing Stone 1986). In academic libraries where “it is quite uncommon for a supervisor to clearly define their expectations of direct reports,” new professionals are taught to overcome their uncertainty with assertiveness techniques (Leong and Vaughan 2010, 639) and to “jump right in” (Newhouse and Spisak 2004, 45). Responses to workplace culture like this are examples of tactics as described by de Certeau, or attempts by individuals to navigate, adapt, and integrate into systems of power. Coping methods are tactics the individual appropriates from the system of power in response to stressors that cannot be controlled.

Assimilation and Resistance

Oud (2006), who writes about integration into the workforce, is careful to note that “the goal in learning about the culture is not to ‘assimilate’ into it” but to learn enough to “function well in your job” (200). Oud is describing how individuals can use tactics without losing their sense of self; but it is worth noting that librarians are sometimes subsumed by their professional identity. As a result of vocational awe, or the championing of the “sacred duties” of librarianship, including “freedom, information, and service,” librarians find themselves unable to advocate for their own health and well-being through even the smallest coping tactics, such as taking a lunch break (Ettarh 2018). Vocational awe glorifies librarianship as a noble calling rather than a job, marginalizing library workers and the everyday work that they do. The expectation that librarians act like heroes and saints leads to financial and personal sacrifice and to librarians taking on additional work. From de Certeau’s theoretical point of view, the system of power is visible; the individual is invisible. It is worth noting that the dedication of *The Practice of Everyday Life* is to the everyman as a “no one,” who is “absent,” “anonymous,” and unnamed (1984).¹² There is a risk for some individuals of being subsumed by their professional identity and erased beneath an idealized conception of librarianship.

Yet the use of tactics to navigate a system of power also gives rise to the opportunity for agency and resistance. De Certeau argues that “power is bound by visibility,” and as a result those in the spotlight that power generates are bound to the limits and constraints of visible structures (37). By contrast, individuals are free to deviate from the prescribed path if they so choose. De Certeau gives the reference of a map when explaining systems of power (35). A map is a representation of a rigid

¹² In de Certeau’s work, the examples given about the everyman do not paint an entirely neutral portrait. Activities such as grocery shopping, factory work, and participation in consumer culture describe a middle-class, Western paradigmatic individual contemporary to de Certeau’s life. The everyman is a particular kind of “no one.”

structure that contains suggestions for the use of space: walk on this road, take this path. It is up to the individual, however, to decide how to navigate space. Desire paths, such as the footpaths that appear next to built walkways, are an example from the everyday world that show how individuals deviate from the paths set out for them, over time creating a path different from the one designed in concrete (Figure 1). The concept of “desire paths” is prevalent in architecture and urban planning and is often attributed to Gaston Bachelard, the French poet and philosopher who wrote that “we cover the universe with drawings we have lived” (Bachelard 1994, 12).

FIGURE 1 Desire Path by Gordon Joly, <https://flic.kr/p/jRIPE> CC BY-SA 2.0.

Most of the literature within LIS that uses de Certeau's work focuses on the concept of resistance. Specifically, researchers are interested in the way that patrons and readers can appropriate spaces and texts. This is a much-discussed concept from *The Practice of Everyday Life* that expands on the parallel model already described: visible and invisible, producer and consumer, writer and reader. Wiegand (2007) uses de Certeau's work to conceptualize the way that readers filter the meaning of texts through their own interpretive lenses, writing that “people appropriate texts differently and that many of these differences can be traced to race, class, age, and gender perspectives” (64). In her work, Pawley (2003 and 2009) focuses more on relationships of power to examine the emancipatory potential of information literacy and the resistances of everyday readers. Patterson (2009) and Ross (2009) also engage in the idea of readers as non-compliant, as “creators of knowledge” (Patterson 2009 353), and as “poachers” (Ross 2009, 647). Rothbauer focuses on de Certeau's work related to “spatial tactics” (2010, 58) and how the library fosters a sense of identity for LGBTQ individuals as they appropriate spaces and collections (2007). LIS researchers

are able to use de Certeau's work to look in depth at individuals, and specifically how the differences between individuals, including race, gender, and sexual orientation, affect reading and library use.

While LIS researchers have focused on the patron, everyday resistance can also be seen in how new librarians engage in a practice which de Certeau refers to as *la perruque* (1984, 25). The French word for wig, "*la perruque* is the worker's own work disguised as work for his employer." It "may be as simple a matter as a secretary's writing a love letter on 'company time' or as complex as a cabinetmaker's 'borrowing' a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room" (25). For de Certeau, *la perruque* is subversive but not harmful, and differentiated from material theft for the purpose of profit. This kind of theft is described in the library literature, such as the study by Kendrick (2017). She describes participants who are suffering from the effects of stress and workplace toxicity engaging in "subterfuge behaviors or misconduct, including time wasting, time stealing, or procrastination" (862). She recounts the experience of one female cataloguing/metadata librarian:

I started wasting a lot of time after all this [low-morale incident] went down. And I was doing things on the job that weren't really job-related. . . . Like, if I had been reading [an ebook] at home, rather than settle down and do my cataloguing, I'd call it up and read it on my PC at work. (862)

This is an example of time theft for the sake of leisure, but Sloniowski (2016) argues that resistance can also be undertaken to advance the profession. By performing affective labour within the context of the neoliberal academy, where this work is undervalued, and "by fostering spaces for dissent, civic engagement, nonneutrality, and even nonefficiency in our libraries and classrooms, we offer disruptions in the affective flow of the corporate university" (663). By using critical theory and by engaging with other academic disciplines, academic librarians can move library labour into the realm of the "visible," the powerful (662). In effect, academic librarians can use the tools available to them—classrooms and conferences—to alter the system of power itself, where the system in this case is both the nature of the academic library and the university as an institution.

Stories of subversion are also present on Twitter, where librarians have a strong online community. This is exemplified in tweets posted by the Twitterbot @lis_grievances, an art project by librarian Tim Ribaric. Through the use of this moderated, scripted program, librarians are able to anonymously post their workplace complaints and commentary via a Twitter avatar. LIS Grievances tweets often concern topics that suggest that they have been written by new librarians who are venting their frustration, focusing on contracts, financial issues, mentorship, unclear work directives, problems with management, and emotional labour. For

example, the tweet in Figure 2 uses sarcasm to mock precarious labour, and the fact that it was posted at 2 p.m. on a weekday means that it was very likely written during work time. The tweet in Figure 3 describes non-profit-driven theft in the workplace as a tactic for emotional revenge. In posting to @lis_grievances, new librarians engage in *la perruque* through time theft, an everyday manoeuvre available to them when they are otherwise powerless to express their frustrations.

FIGURES 2 AND 3

Posting subversive content anonymously to Twitter shows how individual librarians might cope with stressors. And Twitter is not a frivolous example. It is both an artifact of popular, everyday culture in line with de Certeau's work and a forum for new librarian community-building. New librarians are often encouraged to use social media to develop their online presence and to seek out information (Turbitt 2012). Stranack (2012) describes creating an online network as a form of sense-making, and argues that for librarians Twitter "is one of the most effective tools for connecting with others" (1). While LIS Grievances uses the platform for resistance and subversion, Twitter is more often used as a method of integration.

Precarious Labour in New Librarianship

As the literature shows, there is a lack of understanding among librarians that individuals are united in their powerlessness and that with problems as widespread as stress, we each act alone in our responses. A new librarian's sense of isolation is

exacerbated by the very competitive market for entry-level librarian positions. In a study of available entry-level positions within the US, Tewell (2012) found that there are a “small number of jobs that recent graduates can viably apply for” (421). This is due to the high number of applicants for a low number of entry-level postings, which means that successful candidates are “more likely to have several years of previous experience in libraries” (420). As a result, new librarians are kept out of entry-level positions, and what work they can find tends to be precarious. Markgren et al. (2007) find that many new librarians are on contracts for the first five years of their career. This phenomenon of a competitive marketplace, contract labour, and uncertain prospects within librarianship matches the trend within academia towards higher levels of adjunct teaching positions (Sloniowski 2016) and the rise of precarious labour within all realms of work (Gehl 2011). A 2013 study of precarious labour prepared by the research group Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) found that precarious employment in this region has “increased by nearly 50% in the last 20 years” (5) and that “a growing body of evidence suggests [that] precarity is becoming a new norm for Canadian workers” (36). Neoliberal policies within the past several decades have seen a shift in labour practices, with employers reducing full-time staff, limiting labour protection, and allocating “additional responsibilities to the individual,” who is made a “free agent” responsible for their own success (Lewchuk et al. 2003, 25). Added to this trend is the fact that precarity has been a recurrent issue within librarianship. Low compensation and a lack of respect for the value of library labour can be traced back to the founding of the profession (Ettarh 2018; Sloniowski 2016). This makes it all the more apparent that issues that repeatedly happen to individual librarians, such as stress and burnout, are not isolated incidents but the result of ongoing employment conditions.

Precarious labour can be considered a strategy, in the sense intended by de Certeau, when the system of the power sets the field for action to its benefit. Precariously employed workers cost employers less in training, benefits, vacation, pensions, and overall compensation, and are available as needed. To use a phrase from an interviewee in the 2013 PEPSO study discussing the power that employers hold, precarious labour is “cheap and easy” (48). Due to their powerlessness, precarious workers must “accept things that workers in permanent employment might not” (PEPSO 2013, 48). In an article about Millennial burnout, Peterson (2019) argues that improvements to labour conditions might come from advocacy or collective action but will not originate from the system of power itself, as “our capacity [as precarious workers] to burn out and keep working is our greatest value” (para. 74). For academic libraries, which are themselves enmeshed in the neoliberal university, the question of whether or not precarious labour is ultimately beneficial is complex and beyond the scope of this paper; many academic libraries would hire more permanent staff if

they had the budget. What is clear is that the current labour conditions strategically bolster power in systems of power—organizations, institutions, and industries—at the expense of individuals.

When labour is systematically devalued, individuals devise tactics using the tools at their disposal in order to survive. Ironically, these tactics can reiterate the problems they are addressing. This is the case with vocational awe when “love and passion” are championed as a solution to burnout (Ettarh 2018), or with precarious work when new librarians participate in unpaid internships in order to gain paid employment. A librarian’s chosen tactics can indirectly contribute to the devaluing of librarian labour. As an example of this, Gehl (2011) critiques the idea of using social media to gain a professional advantage. Creating a polished online presence requires one to invest time and emotional labour during unpaid, off-work hours. It also requires scrutiny of one’s own online identity, self-monitoring, and normative compliance. In doing so, precariously employed individuals, whom Gehl (2011) calls “precariats,” “willfully adopt the logic of capitalism in order to build their human capital” (part 3, para. 18). This exhausting work contributes to what Ettarh (2018) calls “job creep,” or the expansion of job roles to include what were once additional, exemplary tasks (part 3, para. 7). Gehl’s (2011) major critique of the use of social media as a tactic is that it divests personal energy from contributing to collective responses to a systemic issue. He writes:

If we spend all of our time building individual brands, if we believe that each of us is alone in “owning” our circumstances, if our social lives are reduced to rationalized emotional exchanges such as “likes,” tweets, and friend requests, we are distracted from collective solutions to life in precarious times. (concl., para. 13)

In other words, social media is an example of an individual solution to a mass problem, one that places extra burdens on the individual and requires them to be active participants in a system that does them harm. Gehl’s critique of social media could be applied to other workplace tactics in general, all of which, from stress-reduction techniques to choosing the right clothes for work, place the onus on the individual to resolve their workplace issues through the limited means at their disposal.

Tools like Twitter that span the personal and professional also break down the division between a home and work self. Indeed, de Certeau contends that the division between work and home is a false one: “The dividing line no longer falls between work and leisure. These two areas of activity flow together. They repeat and reinforce each other” (1984, 29). An example of this within LIS might be Critlib Twitter conversations ([HTTP://CRITLIB.ORG/](http://critlib.org/)), which often take place in the evening but which aim to advance critical dialogue about the profession. That work and life cannot be separated is

certainly true in the effects of precarious labour, where the individual's personal life is profoundly affected by the conditions of their employment. To illustrate this, Lacey and Parlette-Stewart (2017) describe how contract work caused imposter syndrome, resulting in

panic attacks, anxiety, and low self-esteem . . . especially during transitions between contracts. . . . It has led [her] to put in more hours than needed on a given project, neglect [her] own self-care in terms of eating and sleeping, and not make an effort to make friends in new places due to the expectation of moving. (3)

Similar to this description of delaying making friends, Halperin (2018) details how librarians in debt “delayed other life decisions like purchasing a home, getting married, or having children while working with low salaries and high loan burdens” (36). Halperin's study of librarian debt is specific to the US, where university costs are higher and academic librarian salaries are lower than in Canada, but the general trend to delay major life events is common among precariats (PEPCO 2013, 77) and specifically Millennials (Halperin 2018). Negative health effects are also common, as described in Kendrick's study on low morale in academic libraries. She describes a female cataloguing/metadata librarian whose “migraines doubled during the height of her low-morale experience” and a male cataloguing librarian who “was diagnosed with high blood pressure” after two years of being at his institution (2017, 860).

In a 2018 Ontario Library Association conference presentation on the culture of “yes” in the academic library, Cassidy, Versluis, and Menzies (2018) noted the connectedness of the concepts of job creep, precarity, vocational awe, and the expectation of resilience, with each facet contributing further to the stress on the individual. They note that “in all of these conversations, what consistently comes up is a preference for what's best for the system, not what's best for the individuals or the profession” (5). A gallery walk with attending library workers facilitated during the presentation further showed that imposter syndrome and general feelings of inadequacy are driving factors in job creep and burnout, citing loss of social life, untaken vacation days, working while ill, and overtime as ways they have been affected by vocational awe (Cassidy, Versluis, and Menzies 2018). The stresses intrinsic to academic librarianship are intensified by feelings of inadequacy; the individual feels incapable of saying no to more work, and the coping mechanisms become additional burdens, relegated to personal time.

While advice articles for new librarians often emphasize the importance of maintaining work-life balance, the profound effects of contract labour on everyday life, work creep, and tactics that span the personal and professional make maintaining a separation exceedingly difficult for precariously employed individuals. Due to the importance of emotion in sense-making practices that individuals must

engage in when learning about workplace culture, it is also not possible for new librarians to be dispassionate while engaging in precarious labour. The separation of work and life is simply an illusion. Who could be personally unaffected by a move across the country, financial struggles, or escalating health problems?

Systems and Structures

De Certeau's focus on making do is specifically about the everyday, the individual, and responses by the powerless to the powerful, and does not address the need for collective action that critics such as Gehl (2011) argue for. In this way, de Certeau's work prompts us to consider the need for better responses to workplace issues than "making do" can offer. How could librarianship solve its systemic issues related to entry into the profession instead of requiring the individual to integrate, to scheme, to manoeuvre, and to experience stress? The answers, including an end to the precarious labour that drastically affects the market for new librarians, are larger than this article can address. What is clear is that requiring that individuals change in order to integrate is not a viable solution to many of the problems affecting new librarians. This is particularly true when it comes to individual characteristics that cannot be changed and that serve as barriers to entry for new librarians.

As an example of such an issue, there is a growing body of research by scholars on the experience of racialized individuals in libraries (Riley-Reid 2017; Galvan 2015; Hathcock 2015) that resonates with the work of de Certeau, specifically given that the focus on the everyday and the experiences of the individual are major topics within critical race studies and critical race feminism. Griffin, Ward, and Phillips (2014) use a composite counter-storytelling approach to explore the experiences and coping tactics of black male faculty, and Griffin (2013) examines her own experience of tenure and promotion as a black female academic librarian. Using an autoethnographic approach, Griffin details the tactics she used throughout her education and career to navigate systems that were not created to accommodate her, including changing her dress and behaviour. The use of tactics by racialized librarians to integrate into systems like the library often means "performing" whiteness (Galvan 2015), and those who are "not able to play successfully at whiteness will be continually excluded from the profession" (Hathcock 2015, part 3, para. 6). The advice offered to new professionals for how to integrate often contains inherent exclusionary biases. For instance, the advice that new librarians should fit in by dressing professionally, an institutional strategy that preferences the dominant white hegemony, assumes a specific type of dress and body type. Those "whose shape/stature make it difficult to find professional dress," or who have "natural hair," do not fit this mould (Galvan 2015, part 3, para. 13). Although barriers to entry within librarianship is a much larger issue than this paper can address in detail, racial discrimination is a clear

example of why it is problematic to require individuals to adapt rather than solving systemic issues. It is important to acknowledge that not all individuals have equal opportunity of tactics to cope with workplace issues. Furthermore, using tactics that are inherently discriminatory does not alter the biases that exist within the system, the preference for “sameness” that leads “to practices of replication” (Henry et al. 2017, 311). This is true for whiteness as for other forms of discrimination related to race, gender, physical disability, class, and other identities, and intersections of these, that could be explored in further research related to new librarians.

What the use of de Certeau’s work brings to librarianship is a critical view of the way that individuals navigate, uphold, and respond to systems of power. The structures that permeate this kind of critique—maps, webs, and houses—are metaphorical as well as physical. Drabinsky (2018) describes this when she connects the two in her description of critical librarianship. Conferences take place in rooms booked by real people; knowledge is made available through organizational systems that designate locations for physical objects. In her words, critical librarianship is “about surfacing these structures and the work that goes into maintaining them” (para. 3). Focusing on the material world is a way of reminding oneself that the conceptual is formed out of the everyday and our reactions to it, as is the case when we enact professionalism by choosing what to wear in the morning. As Illouz (2007) argues at the end of *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*, “critique is most forceful when it moves away from Olympian purity and is grounded in a deep understanding of the concrete cultural practices of ordinary actors” (93). The issues addressing new librarians, including unclear paths to employment, precarious labour, and burnout, are happening to real people. It is important to emphasize the micro as well as the macro (Satifce 2015) and to be aware that general issues that are having an impact on new librarians, such as precarity, play out in individual circumstances. Using the work of de Certeau is one way to better remember that and to critique the everyday work that new librarians must do in order to join the profession and the barriers that prevent their doing so.

Conclusion

The literature that is available to new librarians might help them adapt and integrate through tactics, but these tools do nothing to change the system of power itself, and it is problematic that individuals do not have equal access to tactics. Collective responses are required to change the system of power; individuals alone cannot do it. The dynamic between the individual and the institution that they serve is an interesting area of critical inquiry, one that can better help us understand the struggles experienced by new librarians. By examining the challenges faced by new librarians through the theoretical lens provided in Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice*

of *Everyday Life*, the strategies employed by systems of power, the powerlessness of individuals, and means of “making do” can be more clearly understood.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Lisa Levesque is an Evaluation and Assessment Librarian at Ryerson University Library. She holds an MLIS degree from the University of Western Ontario and an MA in English literature from the University of Ottawa. Her recent research has included a critical analysis of the experiences of new librarians, qualitative studies of student research processes, and evaluative web-literacy research.

Alison Skyrme is a Special Collections Librarian at the Ryerson University Library in Toronto. She holds an MLIS from the University of Toronto and an MA in photographic preservation and collections management from Ryerson University. Her previous scholarly work focused on unpaid internships in information science education and issues in new librarianship.

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