CATALOG CARDS FROM THE EDGE: PRECARITY IN LIBRARIES

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Welcome!
Everything is fine.
OUTLINE

● What’s the big deal?
  ○ Motivating problems, research, and questions
● What does precarity in (BC) libraries look like?
  ○ Partnership Job Board data
  ○ Interviews on precarity
● What can we do about it?
  ○ Further questions, resources and discussion
OUTCOMES

• More familiarity with research on precarity
• Critical consideration of its effects and possible solutions
• Increased discussion of precarity in libraries
WHAT IS PRECARITY?

A state of material and psychological vulnerability resulting from uncertain pay, hours, or employment duration as well as a lack of access to social protections and benefits often connected with employment.
WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Precarity:
- Reduces investment in places of work (Zhang & Zuberi, 2017)
- Disproportionately affects those with marginalized identities (PEPSO, 2015; Vosko, MacDonald & Campbell, 2009)
DISCUSSION OF PRECARITY IN LIBRARIES
RESEARCH:
WHAT WE DID & WHAT WE FOUND
WHAT DOES PRECARITY IN (BC) LIBRARIES LOOK LIKE?

Part 1: Quantitative data

- Methodology: content analysis of job advertisements posted on the Partnership Job Board over a period of 20 weeks (Nov 15, 2017 to April 5, 2018).
- Sample: 342 postings
  - Of the total postings, 102 were in BC (30%)
LIMITATIONS

- Limited time period (20 weeks)
- Job postings only
- Partnership Job Board has limited scope
  - Some institutions do not post there (fee to post)
  - Missing internal job postings
  - Tendency towards academic and public
  - Focus on librarian & library technician positions
TERMINOLOGY

- Auxiliary: no regularly scheduled hours (on-call)
- Part-time: 1-34 hours/week
- Full-time: 35+ hours/week
- Contract: position with a limited term (FT or PT)
- Continuing: position is ongoing (FT or PT)
Type of position by province

- auxiliary
- contract
- contract/auxiliary
- continuing

n=342
Type of position by job category

- Manager/Administrator: 5 auxiliary, 10 contract, 1 contract/auxiliary, 66 continuing
- Archivist: 4 continuing
- Librarian: 4 auxiliary, 10 contract, 44 contract/auxiliary, 86 continuing
- Technician: 1 auxiliary, 6 contract, 11 contract/auxiliary, 37 continuing
- Assistant: 1 auxiliary, 5 contract, 13 contract/auxiliary, 16 continuing
- Other: 2 auxiliary, 9 contract, 23 continuing

n=342
46% of jobs posted in BC are precarious

Type of employment in British Columbia

- **Temporary**
  - not specified: 2 (Auxiliary/On-Call: 0, Regular: 0)
  - part-time: 2 (Auxiliary/On-Call: 0, Regular: 5)
  - full-time: 14 (Auxiliary/On-Call: 0, Regular: 14)

- **Continuing**
  - not specified: 1 (Auxiliary/On-Call: 0, Regular: 1)
  - part-time: 17 (Auxiliary/On-Call: 17, Regular: 0)
  - full-time: 53 (Auxiliary/On-Call: 0, Regular: 53)

n=102

46% of job postings were precarious
BC LIBRARIES: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

● In the 20 week period, BC institutions make up 30% of the postings on the Partnership Job Board.
● BC job postings are:
  ○ 61% public, 30% academic, 9% special
  ○ 39% temporary (no permanent part-time or full-time hours)
  ○ 46% precarious (19% auxiliary, 13% part-time, 14% temp full-time)
  ○ 85% of the total auxiliary job postings on PJB are from BC
WHAT DOES PRECARITY IN (BC) LIBRARIES LOOK LIKE?

Part 2: Qualitative data

- Interviews on precarity
  - Initial process: conducted 12 interviews and analyzed 8 interviews as of May, 2018.
  - Population: library workers who are currently or previously employed at a library in British Columbia OR are actively searching for employment at libraries.
METHODOLOGY

The Hermeneutic Dialectic Process

“[This process] is hermeneutic because it is interpretive in character, and dialectic because it represents a comparison and contrast of divergent views with a view to achieving a higher-level synthesis of them all” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 149).
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your experience of precarious work?
2. Has the existence of precarious work influenced decisions you have made?
3. What do you see as positive outcomes of precarious work?
4. What do you see as negative outcomes of precarious work?
5. What do you see as factors that contribute to the existence of precarious work?
6. How will it change in future, are there any ways it can be improved?
FINDINGS: THE IMPACT OF PRECARIOUS WORK

Personal Life:
- Decisions about where to live
- Economic pressure to support family

Career:
- Obstacle in searching for the next position
- Accepting permanent full-time positions not in preferred and specialized areas
- Lower career expectations

“Everybody is afraid to talk about it very clearly.”
“A reality that sucks!”
payroll fluctuation
FINDINGS: THE POSITIVE OUTCOMES OF PRECARIOUS WORK

**Individual:**
- Flexibility: spend more time with family
- A variety of work experience

“I get to try positions that I wouldn’t have been able to get otherwise.”

**Organization:**
- Flexibility: meeting service requirements; economic efficiency
- Cross-pollination of ideas

“It gives flexibility in free time—if you can afford it.”
FINDINGS: THE NEGATIVE OUTCOMES OF PRECARIOUS WORK

Individual:
- Stress: mental and physical health; financial stress
- Lack: benefits; work-life balance; integration with the organization; supervision and support; professional development and training; freedom to take risks; control over one’s time and career; time and desire to be involved in professional activities; deep experience and knowledge
- Difficulty in transitioning to full-time work
- **Vulnerability** pertaining to discussions of precarity
FINDINGS: THE NEGATIVE OUTCOMES OF PRECARIOUS WORK

Organization:
● Higher turnover
● Higher cost of training
● Difficulty with scheduling
● Weaker relationships between employees and organizations
● Poorer library service
● Reduced capacity for teamwork
● Lack of mutual commitment

“I wish we could offer a more stable working thing.”
FINDINGS: FACTORS

- Tight budget
- Public policy: insufficient financial support
- Challenge of filling unwanted shifts with permanent employees
- Work ethic
- The lack of initiative and willingness to change the existing structure

"failure of imagination" to find other ways to manage shift work.

"It's not just for libraries!"
FINDINGS: CHANGES & THE FUTURE

- advocacy
- "This is a worthwhile issue to cover!"
- not optimistic
- silencing effect
- role of union
- trend of increasing precarity
QUESTIONS TO TAKE WITH YOU

● (How) is precarity discussed? In general? In the workplace?
  ○ Are conditions in place for us to talk freely and openly about it?

● What are precarity’s effects on service, work, and organizational culture?
  ○ Are the economic efficiencies worth these effects?

● How does precarity relate to professional values—diversity, access, inclusion, community, and freedom of information?
  ○ Are there better ways to live out these values?
OUR VALUES AND PRECARITY

“We treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairness, and good faith, and advocate conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees of our institutions.”

ALA Code of Ethics
SO WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

- Talk about it
- Learn what your union is doing & participate
- Take note of where it is occurring in your institution & to whom
- More research!
FUTURE RESEARCH

- Proportion of precarious work within institutions
- Impact of precarious work on ability for profession to live up to its stated values
- More granular / longitudinal analysis of precarious positions (geographic location, year over year trends)
- Relation between precarity and privilege
- In what way can or should things change?
RESOURCES:
https://osf.io/ybczlx/
DISCUSSION

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