650_0‡a Libraries ‡x Moral and ethical aspects ‡v Handbooks, manuals, etc.

jocilyn wagner

Keywords: ethical dilemma, hypothetical scenario, career trauma, dossier building, overcoming professional adversity

Introductory texts that a student of graduate studies in Library and Information Science (LIS) encounters in their first semester often pose tricky hypothetical job-centric scenarios and related ethical dilemmas. Many situate the reader in a no-win scenario that is akin to a traditional Star Trek *Kobayashi Maru* thought experiment with no single implicitly correct response. Perhaps these vignettes are designed to wield a cudgel of sophistry in an effort to scare off the easily intimidated. Perhaps they're designed to paint LIS as a profession in exciting, if unnatural, gravitas-laden colours for reasons known only to admissions specialists and too inscrutable to be easily stated here. In any case, the LIS campfire yarns I was exposed to succeeded beyond their intended purpose and have become forever lodged in the back of my mind as I go about navigating work at an academic library. Fifteen years later, with noted chagrin, I find myself narrating an eerily analogous and frightening yet true tale of my own LIS career woes. In order to better frame my narrative within the aforementioned context, consider the following fictional scenario: imagine you're a Library Head at a busy public library and you've just received a complaint from a male patron that one of your staff members was believed to be using illicit drugs in the restroom at work. However, when you approach the young Library Page, you

quickly learn that they are, in fact, transgender and were simply taking their prescription testosterone. Having run out of the medication and needing to wait very nearly too long between doses while their doctor approved a refill, they had finally received a text message earlier that day that the refill was ready for pickup and had run to the pharmacy and back on their lunch break to retrieve it. Subsequently, they were able to take their medication just in the nick of time when they returned, but doing so necessitated injecting themself in the library men's room. Clearly the most ethical and cogent response you could give your staff member is simply to empathize with their plight and apologize to them for having their name dragged through the mud as it were. Of course, there are various other directions one could take with the situation, such as summarily terminating the staff member for violating protocol by having needles in the library and so forth. As you'll see, the scenario I just described is not unlike my own LIS transgender trial. Though to avoid being quite as pedantic and melodramatic as the haunting hypotheticals I've herein described, I'll lay it out for you straight up: my literary intention is to be merely a cynosure, a guide. Should you choose a career in library science, verily the possibility exists of encountering unexpected ethical dilemmas as an archivist or school media specialist. Additionally, if my experience is in any way characteristic, being trans or non-binary may gift you better odds still. You have been warned; here there be dragons.

My career misadventure occurred in December of 2013, just after finishing graduate school and a few years into the profession. The no-win scenario I found myself in: an accusation was anonymously lodged against me. "There have been complaints that you've been seen in the women's lavatory and staff no longer feel safe using it" should be my epitaph.

I'd finally secured a real job with benefits and the kind of excellent health insurance which, incredibly, would one day cover the costs of my bottom surgery (as well as some badly needed rhinoplasty). I was finally living as an out transwoman for the requisite six months-to-a year that was required at the time for psychiatry to pronounce me fit

for hormone replacement therapy. I was lucky enough to find myself working in a building that boasted single-occupancy restrooms. As it happened though, those facilities were approximately eight flights up, through the stacks and into the South building from my desk in the basement of the North building (and at that, not necessarily designed for staff use). Just down the hall some twenty meters from *Acquisitions* was the North building's secondary, or perhaps tertiary, women's restroom (the freely accessible and open to the public writ large restroom a floor up from me being the more popular destination). As a secondary lavatory, one reserved for staff and even requiring a key for entry as it also housed our lactation room, occupancy was never greater than two or three. Given all of the above, I mistakenly believed it would be all right for me to use this restroom in emergencies while I was in transition—all my peers were professionals who outwardly professed to embrace diversity as one of the institution's core missions.

To be sure, I had actually worn nothing but traditional women's clothing and makeup to work for *ten months* when a complaint was filed that I was supposedly making women feel uncomfortable in the bathroom. It turned out that most people believed an official pronouncement from the library's administration that a transgender individual "is safe to share a restroom with" was needed for people to relax and accept my presence. I assure you, reader: regardless of its lofty status of being the foremost prestigious academic library in the state, one in which a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion continue to feature readily in its mission statement, cultural acceptance of gender variance at my institution should not be assumed.

My supervisor was duly notified of the complaint against me and (for some inexplicable reason) a subsequent inquest was arranged for me.[1] Admittedly, *inquest* is my word not theirs, by which I mean "disciplinary

1. As the editors of this book pointed out, my inquest was without merit—a wholly inappropriate response and **should in no way serve as a template** for corrective action by a supervisor or administration. Recognition of a need for broad diversity training, creation of a general policy, and simply dismissing the complaint as ridiculous would all be considered acceptable responses.

meeting with multiple supervisors and human resources (HR) present and you in the hot seat." Honestly, though, I can't point to a more apt appellation for this most judicious use of our time.

When I learned of this coming inquest, I became despondent, taciturn, and terrified that my career was over. I even begged my trans-masculine ex-boyfriend at the time (a well-respected librarian) to come to this meeting with me as moral support and to demonstrate that gender variance was, in fact, accepted in Technical Services. I have little doubt that I nailed the coffin shut on our relationship that day but to me it made all the difference, and I probably still owe him a boon; but I digress.

My supervisor at the time would be another incredibly understanding and supportive presence at the inquest. I knew he would have my back, and he did. For this, at least, I'm grateful. By itself, unfortunately, these two champions sitting on my side of the table as it were, wouldn't be enough to erase all doubt of my culpability (though of what, I was still unsure). I have never studied law, but it was clear to me where the burden of proof lay. I needed to build a preponderance of evidence that the jury of my supervisor's boss, our HR representative, and that anonymous complainant couldn't ignore.

Thankfully, this episode arrived on the coattails of my decent-if-prohibitively-expensive LIS graduate education. I was a firm believer in the fact that any problem could be solved through project management, and spreadsheets are my métier. I thus produced a multi-colored, eight-tabbed spreadsheet of the "needed" documentation. The dossier I had in mind would verify in exacting clarity that I was indisputably female and would hopefully make the administration feel so foolish as to never put another soul through the ignominy of these proceedings ever again. With apologies to Jennifer Finney Boylan and all my gender variant role models and colleagues (and my later genderqueer non-binary self), for the purposes of this meeting, *gender* needed to be established as an easily verifiable and immutable fact. Presentation being everything, after digging through our supply cupboard, I produced a set of file folders I would frame the needed documentation in: lavender

on the outside, lilac on the inside. I don't know who ordered those file folders, or when, but whoever you are I owe you a hug.

In order to establish proof of something that can't really be proven, I also needed to order these documents well. Courtroom television not really being my thing, I looked elsewhere for inspiration and instead borrowed another trick from grad school: keep pushing the labeled (if empty) tabs back and forth inside a spreadsheet until they seem to resemble a logical progression. In the end, I produced the following materials, which I printed out for all attendees and collated in those lavender file folders: a brief and forthright personal narrative; three very basic educational trifold handouts from Transgender Michigan; the clinical definition of *Gender Dysmorphia* from the then forthcoming DSM-V (thank you Internet Age); a timeline of all the "steps" I'd so far taken in my transition; a list of professional contacts the University's Comprehensive Gender Services Program had gifted me; a confirmation letter from my therapist at said program office; another from my newest doctor (in Endocrinology); a copy of my hormone replacement therapy prescriptions (the inquest was scheduled to coincide with my finally obtaining them); an expenditure report of my personal finances from the previous year (totaling something along the lines of $4,000 spent on clothes, shoes, makeup, the list goes on); and lastly, a list of the State of Michigan's legal name change requirements. After lugubriously flipping through this unending compendium, I felt certain that my claim of being a transwoman would be irrefutable. Thank you, *Library Administration and Project Management 7040* (as well as to my Buddhist Studies instructors in Japan for instilling in me an incapacity to dissemble).

I'd once had a ~~colleague~~ librarian tell me that she couldn't see me as female if I had a trace of facial hair. We clearly were making great strides with our diversity, equity and inclusion training. Of course, being an HR matter, I never learned the identity of the complainant that had accorded me the delight of this meeting, but if I had to hazard a guess it certainly would not have been that staff member. No sense in crying to the administration about the unfairness of the world when you can just

browbeat those who don't subscribe to your ideology with microaggressions. To me, lodging an anonymous complaint of this nature was the work of the spineless and unfeeling; such a person wouldn't be sitting down on the opposite side of a table from me and painting themselves as "conservative transphobe" for the library to shun. No, instead I was given the task of proving myself to a group of colleagues who already wanted to believe me and probably wanted nothing more than to be out of there as quickly as possible. I began to think that, despite a civilized front, our HR interventions tend to fall back on drumhead discipline.

To put us all at ease with the difficult subject matter, HR had given a great deal of thought to the location of this meeting. The six of us were accommodated with a table in a narrow, windowless, former group-study room that the Science Library had given over to HR for staff meetings, probably because it lacked the needed technology for anything else. I was gratified to have skipped preparing a PowerPoint presentation.

Odd accommodations notwithstanding, HR did come prepared by extending an invitation to a staff member from our University's LGBTQ resource center. Although at first this unknown variable seemed intimidating, when the inevitable question arose, incredibly this representative stepped up to the task and was able to rattle off exactly under what legal criteria someone's gender was defined by the University.

Let us be clear: while the intended audience of our deliberations was not at the table and the words that passed among us that day were perfunctory in nature, the meeting itself *was* professionally and emotionally damaging. To date, this inquest remains the greatest trial of my professional career: one which lacked a definitive exoneration to my mind but, in truth, acted simply as a formality needed to put the matter to bed. Thus, I put it to you: If you, reader, were on the receiving end of a complaint about the gender expression of one of your staff members causing "duress," what steps, if any, would you take to mitigate the situation? Or is this (unfortunately less than hypothetical) scenario rendered moot by being non-sequitur to Library and Information Science?

At the time of this writing's publication, my inquest will have happened nine years ago. Said decade has seen a sea change in our diversity,

equity and inclusive zeitgeist and no small amount of progress has been made in the ways human resources managers engage with staffing inequities. However, events like my inquest may still occur as long-standing institutional inequities are finally being openly challenged at all levels. Colleges and universities with far fewer human resources than mine must now grapple with and demonstrably embrace the growing numbers of gender diverse people seen in the latest generation entering the workforce. My sincere hope is for a reader of this monograph to have encountered it in pursuit of knowledge rather than out of a desperate need to defend oneself at the point of inquest. I would, in fact, very much love for this text's existence to be one of ready reference: to be lost in the *Z 682*s after occasionally doing a stint as bibliography fodder for this or that tangentially-related graduate essay. If, however, you have struck upon this text in your capacity as a supervisor or human resources manager looking for an easy solution with which to soothe patrons and others uncomfortable with your gender variant staff, consider this: the only policies that libraries need draft on the subject are those that protect and affirm transgender and non-binary lives.

About the Author

My name is jocilyn paris wagner. i could be described as an amateur photographer, a thirty-something librarian, an avid reader, and a lover of tea and horses. If, like a modern Candide, you wish to think a bit more pragmatically (my default modus operandi), i invite you to imagine a broadly educated human being who happens to be genderqueer, living in the United States circa 2022, and as a consequence, has managed to develop: severe irritable bowel syndrome, hypochondria, migraines, social anxiety, psychosomatic delusions, depression, insomnia, haphephobia, and a wicked haircut. Fortunately for you, tovarisch, said life has yielded haunting experiences as a transgender, non-binary, Library and Information Science graduate student and academic library staff member.