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Generational Stereotypes

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Abstract

Over the past 30 years, as the American workforce has become more generationally diverse, library administrators and academic librarians alike have focused on navigating dynamics that arise in a multigenerational workplace. Much scholarly research has been conducted on generational differences; however, most of this research assumes that the individuals studied adhere to or believe in generational stereotypes. This exploratory study used a hybrid experience-perception survey to examine the role or influence generational stereotypes have on academic librarians and how those stereotypes influence the academic library workforce. While few specific generational stereotypes were found to be held by participants, perceptions of generational stereotypes still have a significant influence in academic librarians' interactions with their colleagues. This finding means that regardless of their validity, the impact of generational stereotypes cannot be disregarded in academic library workplaces.

Keywords

Generations, generational differences, multigenerational, age diverse workforce, stereotypes, academic librarians, library management, Millennials, Baby Boomers, Generation X

Introduction

Currently, there are three generations actively working together in academic librarianship: Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial. Library administrators and academic librarians alike are interested in learning techniques that will help navigate work dynamics, including those that arise in a multigenerational workplace (Graybill, 2014). Unfortunately, a widespread belief in mostly negative generational stereotypes often hinders productive conversations about valid generational differences. This not a twenty-first century issue as

complaints about older and younger generations have persisted for centuries; a more modern problem is the fortification of these generational complaints as stereotypes in non-academic publications and in pop culture representations. This fortification can be problematic as most of these generational stereotypes are primarily based in anecdotal evidence or corporate-based research, with little support from academic research (Giancola, 2006). With respected sources like *Forbes* and the *New York Times* reinforcing these negative generational concepts, it is very likely that that these can ingrain stereotypes into the culture (Faw, 2010; Lester, et al., 2012; Rentz, 2015). In this article, we pose two questions: 1) what role or influence--if any--do generational stereotypes have on academic librarians' perspectives; 2) what role or influence do they have in the academic library workplace? Our research used an exploratory study to begin answering these questions.

Literature Review

Many disciplines have contributed to our current understanding of generational differences and stereotypes, so this review is necessarily multidisciplinary. It begins with psychological research on stereotype formation more broadly, then discusses significant research on generational differences specifically from the fields of psychology, sociology, and business. It concludes with an examination of the library science research on generational differences.

Stereotypes

While this is not a psychological study, significant scholarship in psychology has examined the formation and development of stereotypes for many different groups, and that research informs how academic librarians develop and understand stereotypes about generations specifically. Stereotypes are formed automatically and are evolutionarily beneficial because they help humans process information and make decisions quickly (Fiske 1998; Macrae & Bodenhausen 2000). However, studies such as those done by Devine (1989), Madon et al. (2001), Fiske (1998), Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu. (2002) argue that stereotypes are at least

partially based in various social conditions and are not fixed; Devine (1989) likens such change to the breaking of a bad habit. Regardless of their mutability, stereotyping is a natural way of interpreting the world around us, and age or generational stereotypes are among the most common due to the relative ease of assessing others' age (in comparison to sexuality, political views, etc.) (Fiske, 1998). The danger of stereotypes lies in their potential to create prejudicial attitudes which can cause negative consequences in the workforce, specifically regarding intercommunication procedures, establishing a shared vision and goals, and developing policies (Fiske & Lee, 2008; Stanton, 2017; Heilman, 2012)

Generational Cohort & Generational Differences

During the second half of the 20th century, research emerged which posited that individuals born during a specific year range comprised generational cohorts (GC), and as a cohort, they all experienced significant "societal or historical" events at approximately the same age which contributed to GCs developing unique "peer personalit[ies]" and differing characteristics specific to their cohort group (Ryder, 1965, p. 843; Riley, 1971; Inglehart, 1971; Inglehart, 1977; Strauss & Howe, 1991; Dou, Wang, & Zhou, 2006). During the 1990s, as public interest grew, research on generational differences expanded as well, specifically regarding how they impacted multigenerational workplaces (Lyons, Urick, Kuron, & Schweitzer, 2015; Twenge & Campbell, 2008, p. 863; Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010; Campbell, Campbell, Siedor, & Twenge, 2015; Becton, Walker, & Jones-Farmer, 2014). This literature often examines major traits that are often associated with the Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial generational groups.

Baby Boomer Traits

Researchers have identified the Baby Boomer cohort as being loyal company personnel, hardworking team players who remained individualistic, ambitious, achievement-oriented, and competitive. Boomers have been described as motivated to change the world with their idealism and are considered optimistic (Twenge & Campbell, 2008; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Lyons,

Duxbury & Higgins, 2007; Coomes & DeBard, 2004; Becton, Walker, & Jones-Farmer, 2014;
O'Bannon, 2001). Some literature has identified this cohort as too committed to work and
company loyalty because it came at the expense of their family life (Dixon et al., 2013; Zeeshan
and Iram, 2012).

Generation X Traits

Research has shown that members of Generation X demonstrate a strong work ethic,
are generally satisfied with their work, and value family-friendly benefits (O'Bannon, 2001). Gen
Xers are typically self-sufficient and value their quality of life, are adaptive to change, and they
regularly opt to work alone (Broom, 2010; Hahn, 2011). Some literature indicates Gen Xers
distrust authority, do not like work rules, and eschew company loyalty in comparison to their
predecessors (Ferri-Reed 2013). Others have described this cohort as cynical and easily
frustrated by lack of promotions and increases in pay (Holt, Marques, & Way, 2012; Heng &
Yazdanifard 2013).

Millennial Traits

Researchers have found that Millennials want flexible career paths, open communication
with supervisors, and work best in teams (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Lyons, Duxbury, &
Higgins (2007), noted that Millennials scored higher on measures of self-enhancement values
than other generations, while Kleinhans, Chakradhar, Muller, & Waddill (2015) found that
Millennials exhibited lower levels of work/life imbalance and institutional loyalty, with an
increased emphasis on fairness. Still other researchers point out that this cohort may prefer
changing jobs multiple times (Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2012), and that they desire constant
feedback with frequently added challenges (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002).

Despite the body of research on these generations, a lack of consensus exists among
researchers about specific traits held by each generation and the validity of research on
generational differences at all. Kelan (2014) highlights the challenges in drawing firm
conclusions about generational differences from cross-sectional analyses, which is a common

method in popular literature and corporate research on multigenerational issues (Hastings, 2012). Authors such as Trzesniewski & Donnellan (2010) concur and posit that any differences between members of generations are the result of where individuals are in their life cycle. Levenson (2010), Arnett (2010), Costanza & Finklestein (2015), Lyons, Urick, Kuron, & Schweitzer (2015), and Becton, Walker, & Jones-Farmer (2014) came to similar conclusions that minimize the actual levels of difference between generations. The lack of consensus about generational differences demonstrates that debate on this subject is far from settled, and the library science literature proves no different.

Generational Stereotypes in LIS Scholarship

Compared with the volume of scholarly work on generations in other fields of study, the library science research is limited, and even more so for research on academic libraries specifically. Generally, the existing literature can be classified into three categories with a majority combining aspects of each type. Some attempt to determine if stereotypical differences create negative situations in multigenerational academic library workforces, and if it does, giving strategies on how to mitigate the negative impact created (Chu, 2009; Hutley and Solomons, 2004; Gordon, 2006; Lancaster, 2003). Other library science research tries to prove or disprove the existence or validity of generational differences, specifically within the academic library profession (Emanuel, 2013; Martin, 2006). Still others use popular stereotypes, either consciously or subconsciously, to measure generational groups' conceptualization of the academic library, and identify possible changes to the institution's services, resources, and/or facility (Munde & Coonin, 2015; Walker, 2006). Regardless of category, the common elements within the current literature, as Gardner & Galoozis (2018) emphasized, are "unquestioned assumptions" that generational stereotypes heavily influence those in academic librarianship (p. 180).

Our research differs from the existing literature significantly, in that we challenge this assumption, like Gardner & Galoozis' analysis on the way in which generational stereotypes are

presented and discussed in LIS literature (2018). However, we not only question the presumption but go further than previous literature by studying the current perceptions of academic librarians. It fills the gap between research like Gardner & Galoozis and existing library literature promoting stereotypical concepts.

Existing literature on generational stereotypes is largely based on the assumption that most individuals do believe generational stereotypes, and act based on that belief (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015). While stereotyping is an inevitable psychological phenomenon, the extent to which academic librarians believe in and adhere to particular generational stereotypes has real-world implications for the workplace yet has not been studied in depth. Ultimately, our study will serve as a multidisciplinary bridge connecting generational research from the fields of psychology, sociology, LIS, and others.

Research Design

As we intended this to be a preliminary investigation, we chose an exploratory design as it offered flexibility throughout the process and it allowed us to learn more about the various aspects related to the topic. It allowed us to address the research questions and opened up new avenues for further research (McNabb, 2015).

Research Instrument & Methodology

While the birth-year range for the Baby Boomer generation is commonly accepted as 1946-1964, argument exists over what birth years divide Generation X and the Millennial generation. For our study, we used the Pew Research Center-defined ranges, as they were in June 2017. Since our study exclusively focused on professional academic librarians who currently possessed a MLS/MLIS, we considered that very few participants who met this criteria would be 22 years or younger. To narrow the scope of our participants, we altered the Pew Research Center range of 1981-1998 to the cut-off year of 1995. Interestingly, in early spring 2018, Pew announced their determination of 1996 as the last birth-year for Millennials; this aligned our year selection more closely with Pew (Dimock, 2018).

Table 1.

Generational Label	Generational Year Range
Baby Boomers	1946 - 1964
Generation X	1965 - 1980
Millennial Generation	1981-1995

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board at our institution, we created a nineteen-question experience-perception hybrid survey in Qualtrics (see full instrument in Appendix A). The questions were a mix of open- and closed-ended to gain a more comprehensive view of participants' opinions. The survey began with a brief introduction of the topic, the IRB informed consent statement, and the definition of the three generational year ranges. Following the introductory section, we asked demographic questions related to educational attainment and current employment status. Participants then were asked to give their birth year, as we would use their answer to group participants with their assigned generational group. Asking for the year of birth gave a general idea as to participants' age without requiring any personal information such as a birth date.

After participants provided their demographic data, they could select which, if any, generation group they most closely identified with. The three groups were listed for selection, along with the option "I do not identify with a specific generation group". Immediately after this question, we asked participants in question 10 to give feedback on whether they felt that they could easily identify others as members of a particular generation.

Similar to some of the original studies on stereotypes (Katz & Braly, 1933; Gilbert, 1951; Karlins, Coffman, & Walters, 1969), the next section (questions 11, 12, and 13) provided a list of thirty-four characteristics compiled from academic and popular literature on generational stereotypes, including the traits highlighted by the sources cited in our literature review as well as popular sources such as Forbes (Hayes, 2018), and Buzzfeed (LiterallyDarling, 2014). We asked participants to select the terms they perceived to be an accurate description of each generation (Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial). There was no limit to how many items

participants could select for each generation, and the same set of 34 terms was provided for participants to choose from for each generation. Participants could also select "Other" (which provided a free-text box) or "None of the above" for each generation.

The next section of the survey gave us the opportunity to collect preliminary information on several secondary topics we identified during the literature review. First, we asked participants their experience, if any, in managing a multigenerational workplace, or their experience being managed by a member of another generational group. In the follow-up question, we gave them the option to indicate what generations they managed, or were managed by. We also wanted to assess awareness of some emerging generational labels, so we included a series of questions asking participants if they had heard the terms "Early Millennial" and "Recessionist Millennial", and if so where they had heard them.

Lastly, we collected participant thoughts on the role generational stereotypes play in academic libraries using an open-ended question (question 19). We phrased the question using neutral wording with a direct prompt so as not to influence participants answers by asking them to recount personal experiences. This question was optional so not all participants chose to respond, but the responses we received offered context for their previous selections.

Once completed, we distributed the survey through a number of American Library Association, Association of College & Research Libraries, and regional library association listservs as well as several library association Facebook pages or groups. The survey was open for 37 days and was distributed multiple times during that period. We received 1,474 responses; of those, only 1,080 were valid with the respondents possessing an MLS/MLIS degree and currently employed as an academic librarian in a position that required an MLS/MLIS.[1] Of those 1,080 responses, 345 respondents were defined as Baby Boomers according to our birth date ranges, 400 were members of Generation X, and 335 were Millennials.

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[1] While there were several duplicate responses, the sample size is great enough to minimize the impact of duplicates.

Data Processing and Analysis

We analyzed the responses to questions 11, 12, and 13 ("Please select all terms you consider to be an accurate description of members of the [generation]") by tallying the selections of each descriptive term for each generation to show how frequently specific traits were chosen for that generation, and calculated the percentage of participants in each group that selected each trait.

Our qualitative analysis was done in two parts which resulted in numerical ratings data as well as identification of primary themes for generational research. First, we compiled data using a numeric system to rate responses to question 10, which asked if the participant could easily identify someone else's generational membership, and question 19, which asked participants to share their thoughts about the role of generational stereotypes in the academic library workplace. After all responses were rated, we calculated the average response rating for each question and generation, disregarding zeroes that represented an incomplete response. See ratings, criteria for applying those ratings, and sample language for each rating in Table 2.

Table 2.

Numerical rating	Criteria	Example
0	No response or did not answer the question asked	-
1	Response utilized negative language	Stressful, misunderstood, dismissed
3	Response utilized neutral language or language that was not clearly positive or negative	Fine, uneventful, describes a normal amount of tension or collaboration
5	Response utilized positive language	Great, wonderful, enjoyable, productive

Using a self-created grid system, we organized the responses from each generational group and identified specific themes found within the responses. We identified themes that

appeared across every cohort, and themes that had significant presence in one or two groups were considered the primary themes for our research.

Discussion of Quantitative Findings

When asked in question 9 to select the generation with which they identified, the majority of each generational group identified themselves as belonging to the generation they fall under based on their birth year. However, 20% of Millennials (almost all of whom were born before 1987), 18% of Generation X, and 23% of Baby Boomers indicated that they do not identify as a member of a specific generational group. A few members of each group identified with members of another generation; notably, 7.8% of Millennials born before 1987 identified as members of Generation X.

Participants' selection of traits that they felt accurately described each generation in questions 11, 12, and 13, demonstrated that while stereotypes are not universal, there are traits that are ascribed to certain generations, especially Millennials. Tables 3, 4, and 5 show the top three most selected traits for each generation both overall and broken down by generation, as well as the top three traits we found in the literature for each generation. It is important to note that each generation's selection of traits about themselves may represent more of a self-perception than a true stereotype, as those selections are likely influenced by each participant's own self-image in addition to their conception of the generation as a whole (Levy, 2009).

Table 3. Baby Boomer Traits

Top Traits of Baby Boomers from Literature	Top Traits of Baby Boomers, Overall	Top Traits of Baby Boomers, according to Boomers	Top Traits of Baby Boomers, according to Generation X	Top Traits of Baby Boomers, according to Millennials
Resistant to change	Loyal to companies/jobs/ and/or jobs and/or institutions and/or brands (47%; n=503)	Hard-working (55%; n=190)	Loyal to companies/jobs/ and/or jobs and/or institutions and/or brands (43%; n=171)	Reluctant and/or resistant to change (59%; n=196)

Hard worker	Hard-working (44%; n=477)	Loyal to companies/jobs/ and/or jobs and/or institutions and/or brands (50%; n=171)	Hard-working (40%; n=159)	Loyal to companies/jobs/ and/or jobs and/or institutions and/or brands (51%; n=171)
Bad with technology	Reluctant and/or resistant to change (40%; n=429)	Independent (38%; n=131)	Reluctant and/or resistant to change (39%; n=155)	Bad with technology (41%; n=137)

Table 4. Generation X Traits

Top Traits of Generation X from Literature	Top Traits of Generation X, Overall	Top Traits of Generation X, according to Boomers	Top Traits of Generation X, according to Generation X	Top Traits of Generation X, according to Millennials
Independent / individualist / self-reliant	Independent (33%; n=358)	Tech savvy (35%; n=122)	Independent (40%; n=159)	Independent (33%; n=109)
Tech savvy	Tech savvy (32%; n=342)	Independent (26%; n=90)	Tech savvy (36%; n=143)	Comfortable with job/company change (27%; n=90)
Self-centered	Comfortable with job/company change (28%; n=299)	Loyal to personal goals over goals of institution or jobs (24%; n=84)	Comfortable with job/company change (32%; n=129)	Loyal to personal goals over goals of institution or jobs (24%; n=79)

Table 5. Millennial Traits

Top Traits of Millennials from Literature	Top Traits of Millennials, Overall	Top Traits of Millennials, according to Boomers	Top Traits of Millennials, according to Generation X	Top Traits of Millennials, according to Millennials
Tech savvy	Tech savvy (50%; n=539)	Tech savvy (48%; n=166)	Tech savvy (46%; n=185)	Tech savvy (56%; n=188)
Lazy / unmotivated	Desires constant/consistent feedback	Desires constant/consistent feedback	Desires constant/consistent feedback	Comfortable with job/company change

	and positive reinforcement (39%; n=418)	and positive reinforcement (38%; n=130)	and positive reinforcement (42%; n=169)	(46%; n=155)
Self-centered / self-absorbed	Comfortable with job/company change (34%; n=368)	Self-centered (33%; n=113)	Loyal to personal goals over goals of institution or jobs (32%; n=128)	Tolerant or open-minded (44%; n=149)

However, it is important to note that even the traits that were selected the most frequently were not selected at rates higher than 60%, so these stereotypes should not be considered to be universally held. Wide variations existed across generations for some traits, and many traits were selected by less than 20% of participants. Additionally, Generation X and Millennials had two of their top three traits in common based on survey responses (both Generation X and Millennials were perceived to be tech savvy and comfortable with change), denoting some possible confusion or blending of the two generations in participants' perceptions. From these results, we cannot determine the reason behind the low selection rate; there are too many variables involved to know any specific motivation. The findings from our qualitative analysis allowed us to explore the open-ended comments and glean insight on the mindset and emotions of some participants.

Discussion of Qualitative Findings

Across the identifiable themes, participants' comments about their perception of generational stereotypes and their impact on the academic library workplace were overall negative in tone. On the rating scale (see table 2 for details) where 1 represented a negative response, 3 was a neutral response, and 5 was a positive response, the overall average response rating was 1.98: a mostly negative rating. Baby Boomers' free-response comments were slightly less negative, with an average rating of 2.21. Generation X and Millennials had more negative responses, with averages of 1.95 and 1.77 respectively.

From the open-ended comment sections, we identified two primary themes. In our discussion, we include participant comments that offer insightful perspectives on this topic. A more extensive selection of responses can be found in Appendix B.

Theme 1: Views of Generational Stereotypes and Generational Labels

Our thematic analysis showed that academic librarians do not hold one overwhelming view regarding generational stereotypes. Different views were expressed from participants of all generational groups. Some participants expressed a disdain for these stereotypes and dismissed the belief in stereotypes as complete nonsense, or as one Baby Boomer put it, generational stereotypes are pure "hokum". They did not deny stereotypes existed in collective societal thinking, but they claimed that they personally put no credence in the stereotypes. Other participants acknowledged that "there do [sic] seem to be commonalities between members of the generational groups" and stated that using popular stereotypes can help in navigating the differences.

However, these participants also emphasized that people are individuals, and broad generalizations are "certainly not universal to all members of [a] group" are not do not apply universally. Still other participants' comments indicated a negative opinion about different generational group(s), often citing terminology and concepts used in popular or professional literature; this indicates the possible influence of negative generational stereotypes. Others discussed past situations in which they experienced negative or unfavorable treatment from colleagues from other generational groups, which they described using generational stereotypes.

In addition to comments about the negative impacts of generational stereotypes, we also expected and found negative responses towards other generational groups. Even participants who disliked the idea of stereotyping voiced negative views about individuals from other generations. One Baby Boomer expressed that colleagues from the Generation X act like "they can do what suits them without as much regard for workplace rules or working as a team".

Another Baby Boomer explained that they found "the millennial generation to be a challenge in that they are very self-absorbed". Some members of Generation X made negative comments about the other two generations, with one participant saying "Millennials feel entitled to skip ahead without having any experience or institutional knowledge." However, some comments supported the idea that their group is stuck between these two monolithic generational groups. As the middle child, they expressed concern that because of many reasons - delayed retirements, rising Millennials, etc. - as the smaller generation, they would be professionally forgotten. One participant from Generation X noted, "I feel sandwiched between Boomers...who try to mentor me...and Millennials, who seem to lack the values and ethics I value in professional librarians…"

Some comments from Millennials indicated frustration over feeling misunderstood by older generations. One participant explained that, despite the stereotypes of Millennials as "lazy and entitled", they are not, and the comment went on to describe how they "have had to work against this stereotype with a former boss". Still other participants expressed their own negative perception of those from other generations. A participant described their experiences with library administrators from older generations, and how their resistance to change maintained the "static nature" of their library. Another comment noted that Baby Boomers were "close-minded" during the hiring processing, and how "they're unwilling to hire millennials with visible piercings beyond their ears…[s]ometimes someone with a nose ring is the best data librarian".

In addition to the negative Millennial comments, we found that there appeared to be a split, or division amongst the generation group as a whole. One Millennial, born in 1985, explained that they couldn't "relate to younger Millennials... things [such] as tech advancements, 9/11, etc. make a Millennial born in 1983 drastically different from one born in 1993. I will relate to Gen X and Baby Boomers easier". This participant is not alone in noticing this distinction, as the idea of a possible Millennial split has garnered attention from academic literature to popular magazines (Debevec, Schewe, Madden, & Diamond, 2013; Singal, 2017; Neal, 2017). The

distinction seems to exist between those born 1982-1987 and those born 1988-1996, and some of the comments from Millennial participants shows evidence of differences between the two groups. In addition to the previously mentioned differences (9/11, War on Terror, etc.) younger Millennials highlighted differences in their relationship with technology, and how the Great Recession of 2008 significantly influenced their perceptions of employment and economic independence.

The comments in this theme showed how controversial the idea of generational stereotypes is among academic librarians. However, while the opinions about stereotypes differed, the comments indicated that these stereotypes can still impact academic libraries. These participants' experiences and opinions show the internationalization of these generational stereotypes and the impact generational stereotypes have had on many individuals.

Theme 2: Influence of Generational Stereotypes on Perceptions of Technological Proficiency

Since technology is essential to librarianship, we were not surprised to see a theme emerge that related to the participants' views of the stereotypical idea that younger (Millennials and younger Generation X) academic librarians are technologically proficient while older academic librarians (Baby Boomers and older Generation X) are technologically inept.

Among the Baby Boomers, it seemed that this stereotype was a significant source of professional contention. One Baby Boomer argued, "...a librarian of any age who is not technically competent will not be respected", which has made it essential for all librarians to know various aspects of technology. The same participant said "older [librarians] have had to learn the technology on the job, and sometimes understand how it works...just as much or more than younger people." While agreeing that Millennials, and to some extent younger members of Generation X, were born "digital natives", many participants noted that this did not necessarily mean that younger individuals were more adept at technology, and even if they were skilled with certain technological aspects, that did not mean they knew how to use library resources, and tools. Non-Baby Boomers also voiced support of the idea that Baby Boomers, especially

academic librarians, are "more tech savvy than they are given credit for…"As the generation in the middle, Generation Xers held a mixed view of the generational stereotype of technical proficiency. Older Generation Xers, born between 1965-1975, were more likely to describe a situation in which they were considered technically inept by others. One Generation X expressed frustration that though they had been a "leader" in technological advancement, as soon as they entered their early 40s, they discovered that they were considered "'resistant to new technology' by the younger librarians". Younger Generation Xers, born approximately 1975-1980, were more likely to make comments that aligned with the Millennial experience, as one younger Generation X participant said "I grew up in a house that was full of technology (computers, internet, satellite TV, cell phones)..."

Millennials noted that often they are considered an "expert in technology, and praise me for doing technical tasks that are actually quite simple." This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it can become harmful if technology is not their specialty or interest and even more detrimental if they have older colleagues who are more technologically experienced. Moreover, members of the older generations can feel pushed aside when it comes to technology as noted by a GenX librarian who indicated that "[a]s I've grayed over the past few years...my younger colleagues tend to talk down to me about tech and social media, even though I came to this job from an I.T. career. It reaffirms my feeling that generational stereotypes are a bad influence in the workplace." The idea that Millennials can be seen as technological masters is supported in some of the comments from older generational group participants, as evidenced by feedback from a member of Generation X who explained that their dislike of generational stereotypes came about due to their library director assuming that "all millennials were tech wizards, even in the face of overwhelming qualitative and quantitative evidence to the contrary." While some comments indicated a belief that Baby Boomers or older members of Generation X struggled with technology, they also stated that Millennials can also struggle with technology for various reasons. One Millennial participant noted that while older generation groups can struggle with

"new technology…I am also seeing the same struggles in my students born after 1995 who have only ever used technology for entertainment."

Despite the responses that expressed resistance to this stereotype, some comments still indicated a belief in the idea of older generations being technologically inept, and younger individuals being more adept. This belief emerged in one particular comment from a Generation X participant, who succinctly expressed how they "identif[ied] Millennials by their facility with, and dependence on, technology, particularly their use of social media...Generation X by their somewhat more sceptical [sic] embrace of technology...Baby Boomers by their reluctance to continually adopt new technologies or adapt to updated user interfaces." Finally, each generation group had participants expressing concern about how this stereotype of technological proficiency, or the lack thereof, because it can negatively impact academic librarians' assumptions, and treatment of both colleagues, and users. Some comments noted that since academic librarianship is very dependent on technology and technology usage, it is important to realize that most of the academic librarians currently employed are technologically competent due to the nature of the profession.

Limitations and Areas for Further Research

As with any study, there are limitations and ways for this topic to be further explored. Several limitations to this study are problems that are inherent in any text-based survey, including misinterpretation of one question in particular by some participants, which may be a result of poor question design on our part. Question 10, which asked participants if they felt confident in identifying others' generational membership, was interpreted by some participants to be asking if they themselves identified with a specific generation.

Another limitation related to the text-based nature of the survey is that it is impossible to accurately interpret the exact meaning of participants' open-ended comments in every case. Even with a clear numerical rating system and close readings of each comment, we ultimately had to rely on our comprehension and make some assumptions. Though unintentional, it is

likely that some responses were misinterpreted, and thus the rating may not accurately reflect the individuals' opinions in some cases. It is also possible that our personal biases impacted our interpretations despite efforts to be objective.

The exploratory nature of this study means that it leads to many other areas of research. This study barely skimmed the surface of identifiable impacts on academic library workplaces; in-depth focus groups, questionnaires, or interviews could be used to further explore the impact of specific stereotypes in academic libraries. This study also utilized a convenience sample; a more targeted sample may yield further insights. The resistance to generational stereotypes in particular and stereotypes in general is a potential avenue of inquiry, as is the split between Early Millennials and Recessionist Millennials. Soon, the impact of Generation Z will also begin to be felt both in the patrons that academic libraries serve and in the newest members of the academic library workforce.

Conclusion

Whether generational stereotypes are based in reality or are widely held by academic librarians, they still can have a significant impact on the academic library workplace. The fact that many participants are aware of generational stereotypes' existence (as demonstrated in their comments) --even if they rejected their validity or resisted the idea of stereotypes at all-- suggests that stereotypes are an issue that cannot be ignored. The perception of stereotypes' existence may be more important than whether or not stereotypical beliefs are actually held by any specific person or group. For example, Millennial librarians may be concerned that their Baby Boomer colleagues expect them to do everything technology-related even though technology is not where their interests lie, while those same Baby Boomers may worry that their Millennial coworkers think they are technologically illiterate even though they have expertise with technology. Neither of these concerns are necessarily based in reality, but they may cause real workplace tension just the same.

Though most of the open-ended comments indicated strong opinions about generational stereotypes, there was little evidence that participants shared a singular belief regarding specific generational stereotypes. Quantitatively, very few stereotypes were shown to be held by a large number of respondents, as demonstrated by the low level of trait selection across the board, where even the most-selected trait was chosen by less than 60% of participants. The traits that were selected at the highest rates did tend to correspond with stereotypes found in both the popular and academic literature, though that raises chicken-and-egg questions. Qualitatively, some respondents indicated that generational stereotypes are detrimental to any type of relationship and should not be considered in academic librarianship. Some respondents expressed that generational stereotypes had some validity; however, these comments also said that stereotypes should only be used for general navigation of working relationships and should not be held to as firm truth. As with the quantitative results, the technology stereotype - specifically that Millennials are good with technology while older generations were unskilled - were the most widely held among the participants in this survey.

One of the clearest themes to emerge from the results despite the lack of specific stereotypes demonstrated is that the idea of generational stereotypes strikes a nerve with many participants. Many different opinions about generational stereotypes were expressed through the survey, but participants clearly had strong feelings about the topic regardless of their perspective. The attitude of participants about generational stereotypes was generally negative, with many participants rejecting the idea of stereotypes at all, being reluctant to label themselves or others, and/or feeling like their generation was unfairly stereotyped.

In this, generational stereotypes are not fundamentally different from other stereotypes. Generational membership is one of many characteristics that make up an individual's identity. Just like any other aspect of identity, it has its stereotypes, pitfalls, and sensitive spots that can lead to tension between individuals, especially if assumptions are made about others' adherence to and belief in certain stereotypes. However, generational membership cannot be

ignored as a piece of an individual's identity, as doing so minimizes a potential source of conflict in the workplace, especially if individuals in those workplaces do believe in these particular stereotypes.

As with other types of identity, generational membership and stereotypes should not be used to dictate policies or services in the academic library. If academic librarians change their practices based on stereotypes alone, then library services will suffer. For example, if librarians assume that their Millennial students love technology and so must only want eBooks--despite research and student feedback that says otherwise--then their students would not truly be served. This also applies to staffing and the assignment of job responsibilities. A reluctance to hire younger librarians because they are perceived to be "less loyal" or an insistence on hiring younger librarians because they are "better with technology" leaves out qualified candidates across the generational spectrum.

While this study yielded few conclusive results about the impact of generational stereotypes in academic libraries, this exploratory study allowed us to address with our primary research question of obtaining a better understanding of academic librarians' perception of generational stereotypes. It also gave us success in our secondary goal of determining topics, and themes in this area of research for further study. We hope that this study and the follow-up research will provide academic librarians a better understanding between the generations, and assist in mitigating potential conflict in academic library workplaces.

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Appendix A
Survey

Introduction
Good day and thank you for participating in our research!
Popular culture is full of ideas and assumptions about generational stereotypes; and while some academic research exists, there is little academic research on generational stereotypes within the academic librarianship workforce. In the existing library science specific research, most of it works from the common assumption that librarians, whether consciously or subconsciously, adhere to popular/common generational stereotypes and view their colleagues from different generation groups in light of this perception that has been influenced by these generational stereotypes

The purpose of this experience survey is to discover if that common assumption is actually true by discovering what, if any, specific stereotypes academic librarians possess in relation to a multi-generational workforce in the academic library.
Ultimately, the researchers hope that this exploratory study will produce data that can lead to a detailed hypothesis; thus, allowing the researchers to conduct more in-depth research in the near future.

Informed Consent
This survey is anonymous and is anticipated to take 15 - 20 minutes. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. Your participation is voluntary.

You may choose not to take the survey, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your completion of the survey serves as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 or older.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to [redacted for anonymity]. This study has been granted IRB approval (Category 7 - Expedited Review Process) in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact institution's IRB coordinator [redacted for anonymity]

Thank you!

Definitions
For consistency, the researchers have defined the generation groups based on the following year ranges:

- **Baby Boom Generation -** 1946 - 1964
- **Generation X -** 1965 - 1980
- **Millennials -** 1980 - 1995

For consistency, the researchers have defined these terms in the following ways:

- ***Academic Library*** - A library that provides services in a 2-year, 4-year, or professional institution of higher education.
- ***Academic Librarian*** - An individual who holds an MLS or equivalent degree from an ALA-accredited school and works in a professional role in an academic library.
- ***ALA-Accredited Institution*** - A degree-offering program that the American Library Association has approved for accreditation.

Demographic Questions
Do you currently have a Master in Library Science (MLS) or equivalent from an American Library Association (ALA)-accredited graduate program?
☐Yes ☐No ☐Other (please explain)

Are you currently employed in a professional academic librarian position that requires an MLS or equivalent from an American Library Association (ALA)-accredited graduate program?
☐Yes ☐No ☐Other (please explain)

How many years have you worked in an academic library? Please include years worked in both staff/paraprofessional and librarian/professional positions.
☐Less than 1 year ☐1 - 5 years ☐6-10 years ☐11-15 years ☐16-20 years ☐20+ years

How many years have you been employed as a professional academic librarian?
☐Less than 1 year ☐1 - 5 years ☐6-10 years ☐11-15 years ☐16-20 years ☐20+ years

In what year were you born?
[Free response]

Generation-Related Questions
Do you identify with a specific generation group?
☐Millennial (1981-1995) ☐Generation X (1965-1980) ☐Baby Boomer Generation (1946-1964)
☐I do not identify with a specific generation group

Do you feel like you can easily identify someone else as a member of a particular generation? Please explain why or why not.
[Free response]

Trait Selection
Please select all terms you consider to be an accurate description of members of the **Baby Boom Generation**: [check boxes]

- Desires constant/consistent feedback and positive reinforcement
- Rigid and/or Inflexible
- Optimistic
- Tech savvy
- Loyal to personal goals over goals of institution or jobs
- Easy-going and/or relaxed
- Self-centered
- Pessimistic
- Slackers
- Risk-taking
- Independent

- Idealistic
- Close-minded
- Bad with technology
- Rebellious and/or suspicious of authority
- Loyal to companies/jobs/ and/or jobs and/or institutions and/or brands
- Cynical
- Maintains a good work-life balance
- Condescending and/or patronizing
- Group or team-oriented
- Comfortable with job/company change
- Reluctant and/or resistant to change
- Individualistic
- Materialistic
- Self conscious or image-obsessed
- Lacks wisdom
- Hard-working
- Skeptical
- Controlling
- Unmotivated/Lazy
- Self-reliant
- Tolerant or open-minded
- Driven and/or ambitious
- Entitled
- None of the above
- Other (please explain):

Please select all terms you consider to be an accurate description of members of **Generation X:** [check boxes]
- Desires constant/consistent feedback and positive reinforcement
- Rigid and/or Inflexible
- Optimistic
- Tech savvy
- Loyal to personal goals over goals of institution or jobs
- Easy-going and/or relaxed
- Self-centered
- Pessimistic
- Slackers
- Risk-taking
- Independent
- Idealistic
- Close-minded
- Bad with technology
- Rebellious and/or suspicious of authority
- Loyal to companies/jobs/ and/or jobs and/or institutions and/or brands
- Cynical
- Maintains a good work-life balance
- Condescending and/or patronizing
- Group or team-oriented
- Comfortable with job/company change
- Reluctant and/or resistant to change
- Individualistic

- Materialistic
- Self conscious or image-obsessed
- Lacks wisdom
- Hard-working
- Skeptical
- Controlling
- Unmotivated/Lazy
- Self-reliant
- Tolerant or open-minded
- Driven and/or ambitious
- Entitled
- None of the above
- Other (please explain):

Please select all terms you consider to be an accurate description of members of the **Millennial Generation:** [check boxes]
- Desires constant/consistent feedback and positive reinforcement
- Rigid and/or Inflexible
- Optimistic
- Tech savvy
- Loyal to personal goals over goals of institution or jobs
- Easy-going and/or relaxed
- Self-centered
- Pessimistic
- Slackers
- Risk-taking
- Independent
- Idealistic
- Close-minded
- Bad with technology
- Rebellious and/or suspicious of authority
- Loyal to companies/jobs/ and/or jobs and/or institutions and/or brands
- Cynical
- Maintains a good work-life balance
- Condescending and/or patronizing
- Group or team-oriented
- Comfortable with job/company change
- Reluctant and/or resistant to change
- Individualistic
- Materialistic
- Self conscious or image-obsessed
- Lacks wisdom
- Hard-working
- Skeptical
- Controlling
- Unmotivated/Lazy
- Self-reliant
- Tolerant or open-minded
- Driven and/or ambitious
- Entitled
- None of the above

- Other (please explain):

Academic Library Workforce Questions
As a professional academic librarian, have you ever reported to a supervisor who was a member of a different generation?
☐Yes ☐No

If Yes → Which generations? [Select all that apply]
☐Millennial ☐Generation X ☐Baby Boomer Generation

As a professional academic librarian, have you ever supervised an employee who was a member of a different generation?
☐Yes ☐No ☐I have never supervised anyone as a professional academic librarian

If Yes → Which generations? [Select all that apply]
☐Millennial ☐Generation X ☐Baby Boomer Generation

Early and Recessionist Millennial Questions
Have you heard the term "early Millennial"?
☐Yes ☐No

If Yes → If so, where did you hear it?
[Free Response]

Have you heard the term "recessionist Millennial"?
☐Yes ☐No

If Yes → If so, where did you hear it?
[Free Response]

Other Comments
Provide your thoughts and comments regarding the role you think generational stereotypes play in the academic library workforce:
[Free Response]

Appendix B
Selected Comments from Thematic Analysis

Selected Baby Boomer Responses
- Somewhat. I hesitate to even classify myself. I believe in looking at everyone as an individual and looking for their talents and gifts individually rather than as a generation or group. Due to technology and culture, there are similarities among those growing up during certain time periods, but I don't believe we should lump all individuals together and make assumptions based on that.

- They [generational stereotypes] can be used as an excuse to allow for a lack of professionalism. The generational groups are too fluid to be accurately represented by stereotypes.

- In my experience, they have been imported from the business literature or pop culture. I do not see them playing out in professional interactions.

- Not really -- it's not easy to tell how old someone is, and what their generational mindset is, just by looking at them. Someone born in the 1980s might have the mindset of the "Greatest Generation". Generalizing is one way to study subsets, but it's not precise.

- Generational stereotypes are unhelpful ways of categorizing people. When colleagues or student-workers treat each other poorly based on negative generational stereotypes, without bothering to verify their assumptions, it creates an ineffective, inefficient workplace.

- I interact with people of all ages on a regular basis, and I realize that I employ cultural expectations - stereotypes - in some of those interactions

- Not specifically, I don't think about people fitting into these generational categorizations and I have never really studied the differences but I am aware of newer skill sets in the younger generation librarians

- Generational stereotypes can cause a person to be perceived with characteristics that are not accurate. The person can then be given or denied opportunities based on inaccurate assumptions.

- I think the general traits are good to reflect on and keep in mind, but I've seen Baby Boomers better at technology and change than Gen Xer's or Millennials and other times that the generational stereotypes don't stay in their neat boxes

Selected Generation X Responses

- At times, generational stereotypes cause some interpersonal conflict and misunderstandings. It definitely leads to conflict, whether personal or professional.

- ...when the term [Generation X] was first used I objected strongly to the term because of the class and race/ethnic markers. Gen X was primarily targeting a particular demographic, middle class white and mostly college educated people. As a person of color who did not identify with the middle class whiteness despite attending a predominantly white elite university this sorting and marketing technique was quite striking and to be honest enraging. Seeing this marketing technique applied to

Millennial/Gen Y was equaling disturbing as it too wiped out divisions of class, race and ethnicity having been explicitly articulated as a marketing category and had a disturbingly, unexamined acceptance with librarianship. A digital native cohort which had significant populations with low incomes, poor public school options and limited access to high speed internet access was not represented in the category.

- In my place of employment, there are roughly equal numbers of baby boomers, millennials, and generation X. The baby boomers condescend to those who they perceive as inexperienced youngsters, and the millennials dismiss the often valid criticisms or concerns of older generations because they perceive those librarians as change averse. Generation X is pulled one way or another depending on the day.

- I think Millennials often feel entitled to skip ahead without having any experience or institutional knowledge. Several have said to me that the duties other professional librarians do in our libraries is a waste of their time. I feel like they often play into the stereotype by actively voicing a sense of entitlement with no self-awareness or awareness that others have the same training, more of it, more experience, etc., and do the work that the team/job requires.

- ...specific work habits and dedication do seem related to specific generations at times. I have also considered that this may be related to age rather than a generation.

- I tend to assumed [sic] that Baby Boomers will have a sharper learning curve with technology such as our ILS and may be less confident dealing with questions about our patron computers. I tend to assume that Millennials will be completely comfortable helping patrons figure out how to use their email, the college LMS, etc. I also assume that BBs will have better customer service skills that Ms. I've found that both assumptions can be wrong. I now initially approach everyone in the same way; professionally & straightforward. I try to ask about their comfort level/knowledge level of various areas of their jobs before jumping into training.

Selected Millennial Responses

- They [generational stereotypes] form a lot of attitudes, preconceived notions, and habits that most people are not even aware of in themselves. In my experience, many librarians work off the assumption that others bring the same style, habits, and attitudes that they do. When they experience someone different, this can cause conflict. I hope that instead of librarians assuming that their generational approach is the best, we can leverage each others differences to benefit ourselves and the library.

- Working with Boomers who are resistant to change and Millennial patrons who need constant feedback to negotiate tasks have been my biggest generational challenges. With the Boomers, I've overcome these by learning to listen to their concerns and be

very clear about my logic for wanting to make changes. With the Millennials, I've had to work on my patience and encourage independence in accomplishing tasks.

- I was hesitant to apply any of those stereotype terms to any of the generations, because everyone is different. However, I think stereotypes sometimes affect views of technical abilities. Some people feel older librarians may not be as tech savvy, but this often isn't the case since technology is such a daily part of the job.

- As a millennial myself, I think many people do not respect my opinions because I haven't worked in the industry long enough or because I've "had it easy". I do not think it's appropriate to compare work experiences when the workplace and industry itself is so different now. Of course I never had to type filing cards for the card catalog, that didn't exist in my time. That should not be held against me.

- As a "Millennial" born in 1983, I actually associate most with the subgeneration called either the "Oregon Trail" or "Xennials". My childhood was mostly analog, with the early computer systems I used not having internet access (Commodore 64s, Atari 800s, and then Windows 3.1 machines).

- I think they are harmful. Most of my colleagues think they are bullshit like I do, so, we don't let them effect our attitudes or decisions.

- As more Millennials have moved into the workforce over the past decade, the assumption that we are all computer-coding prodigies has faded quite a bit (thankfully)!

- My experience has been that many other generations will speak to millennial stereotypes without seeming to realize that they now have millennial colleagues, and that I sometimes find myself trying to explain student habits that seem to make more sense to me as a millennial.