Bad (Feminist) Librarians: Theories and Strategies for OER Librarianship

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Abstract

As more academic libraries recognize the potential of open educational resources (OER) initiatives to impact students’ ability to save money and transform pedagogical models to support student learning outcomes, these institutions may develop pilot programs to test the viability of open educational practices. However, if these institutions use a neoliberal mindset in which libraries are encouraged to “do more with less” or when large projects fall under “other duties as assigned,” questions about the additional labor these librarians undertake remain unaddressed. For example, are position descriptions renegotiated when additional duties are assigned? How is OER work quantified and recognized? Like instructional librarians, OER librarians invest significant time and effort in work that is relational in practice. Relational labor is work that is contingent on building relationships with others and may be undervalued, as the output is often
intangible. As such, how is this neoliberal climate reproducing feminized expectations for labor? To truly operate within open education, librarians need to practice the same transparency, accessibility, and agency as OER practitioners as we advocate for our resources. This article examines OER labor practices by exploring pedagogical models and using a critical and intersectional feminist lens to provide concrete ways for librarians doing OER work to advocate for themselves.

Keywords: open educational resources, critical theory, feminist theory, intersectional feminism, OER labor

Like any emerging trends within a profession, librarians who support or lead open educational resources (OER) programs may find the path forward to be amorphous and dependent on unquantifiable variables, such as faculty interest or administrative support. Of particular importance are the relationships that librarians develop and cultivate with faculty and other stakeholders. OER librarianship does not exist in a vacuum and replicates many of the service components of academic librarianship at large, including feminized labor that may be underacknowledged, underappreciated, and undercompensated. This paper analyzes librarians’ OER labor by examining power structures using the frameworks of critical models and an intersectional lens in order to propose solutions to make OER labor more transparent, accountable, sustainable, and just.

We critique the ways that power dynamics inform library work by all types of library workers. We recognize the complicated debate regarding the Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree or its equivalents as the requirement to be considered a credentialed librarian (Farkas 2018; Robertson 2018) or a library leader (Michalak, Rysavy, and Dawes 2019). Throughout this article, we use the term “librarian” to describe any library worker, regardless of their credentials. Relatedly, using an intersectional feminist lens centers the individuals doing the work rather than the degrees or institutions they represent. In that spirit, we
intentionally use personal pronouns throughout this article and affirm our stance that librarianship cannot be neutral. We operate from the belief that neutrality supports existing systems of oppression (Ferretti 2018).

We acknowledge our power, privilege, and positionality, which enable us to attend rewarding professional development opportunities, which our institutions pay for on our behalf. Working at R1 institutions means that we are supported by tangible benefits, such as yearly professional development allotments, work flexibility, and access to expensive resources and services. One of us works at an R1 institution with a Library and Information Science (LIS) program, which provides the benefit of graduate student labor to support OER work; this labor is essential to the success of the institution and raises additional questions of power and privilege.

We met while participating in the inaugural Open Textbook Network’s (OTN) Certificate for Librarianship program, an intensive certificate program with an online and in person component. OER librarianship is relatively new and LIS programs have not incorporated OER into their curriculums (Bolick, Bonn, and Cross, n.d.). Many OER librarians seek professional development opportunities outside of formal coursework by participating in listservs, webinars, and other free and openly accessible opportunities. A privileged few can participate in conferences, certificate programs, and other professional development opportunities. These opportunities are cost-prohibitive, particularly for those working in underfunded institutions; by excluding our colleagues, these opportunities reinforce the existing hierarchical system that is prevalent in higher education. Given this system, the conversation about open education may prioritize—and in turn be shaped by—the voices and values of those who work at institutions with more financial resources and the motivation to invest in open education.
During the in-person session of the OTN program, about thirty participants from across the United States met to develop action plans for their respective institutions. Many librarians in the room talked about how they were responsible for reference, instruction, collection development, cataloging, and more on top of their OER duties. This reality might be especially prevalent at smaller institutions where the adage of wearing “many hats” is normalized. For some librarians, OER is the focus of their assignment documents and they are evaluated accordingly. For other librarians, OER is something added to their existing job duties without much room for negotiation. This second scenario is emblematic of the ubiquity of “doing more with less” in the neoliberal college or university. In the neoliberal context, public colleges and universities operate using private business models (Slaughter and Rhodes 2000) where educational decision-making is influenced by factors of profits and costs. Fister (2015) posits that effects of this neoliberal mindset include the reality that students face rising tuition costs and faculty find that tenure track lines are increasingly adjunctified. For academic librarians, the response may involve major decreases in materials and operating budgets remedied by big deal cancelations (SPARC n.d.) or hiring freezes or cuts (Guarria 2011). This piece continues the informal conversations that we began during the OTN program, asking questions and raising concerns about whether academic libraries are adequately recognizing and compensating OER librarians’ labor.

**Foundations of Open Educational Resources and Open Education**

To better understand how and why librarians support and run OER programs, we need to examine the larger background and context of open education. The OER movement began in the 1990s with the creation of open repositories and the development of concepts and language to describe the openness of learning materials, with various converging open movements in the
software and educational sectors (Bliss and Smith 2017; Wiley 2006). Since OER describe learning objects that can be collected, described, organized, and disseminated, librarians’ training to collect and promote collections of books, periodicals, media, and other materials for the use of learning makes them particularly well suited to work with OER. The American Library Association’s (2019) core values of access, democracy, education and lifelong learning, and social responsibility align with the intent of the open movement to leverage open licenses to remove barriers to access and promote use for the public good. Since most librarians do not have direct control over textbook adoptions, they often position themselves as a resource to connect faculty to concepts and resources related to open education.

Education is a universal human right, affirmed by Article 26 of the United Nations’ Declaration of Human Rights and Articles 13 and 14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Education as a universal human right in practice is complex and idealistic, as systemic issues of social and financial inequality are significant barriers for students. Access to higher education in the US is shaped by the fact that the national student debt in 2019 totals $1.5 trillion dollars (Friedman 2019), state-sponsored funding of higher education continues to decline (Chronicle of Higher Education 2014), and the neoliberalism of higher education prioritizes departments that are profitable over those that are not (Slaughter and Rhoades 2000). Some educators find promise in open education’s potential as a mechanism to reform the ways that students access education (Jhangiani and Biswa-Diener 2017), with the tacit understanding that an overhaul of higher education would be necessary to make real systemic change and that open education and OER are not quick fixes.
Deconstructing Power: Theory and Praxis

We see significant parallels between the work of OER librarians and instructional librarians. Arellano Douglas and Gadsby’s (2017) exploratory research found that the work of instructional coordinators is relational in practice and centers student success. Similarly, OER projects require librarians to build relationships with faculty, administrators, student government, bookstore managers, registrars, public relations departments, and university presses due to the collaborative nature of OER work (Goodsett, Loomis, and Miles 2016). Relationship-building through outreach campaigns may include emailing, networking at campus events, meeting with stakeholders, conducting workshops, running programs, and more. These similarities suggest that OER librarians can benefit from the literature by instructional librarians and their pedagogical practices in order to deconstruct power in OER spaces. Specifically, this section reviews the potential of critical, feminist, and open pedagogies and critical librarianship to guide OER practices.

Critical pedagogy, theorized by Paulo Freire in the 1970s, has influenced generations of critical educators and theorists. Critical pedagogy positions the praxis of teaching as a mechanism to break down systems of oppression, giving agency to those whose voices are not traditionally valued in the academy. Working against the long-established concept of banking whereby students are meant to store—or bank—and regurgitate concepts, educators who practice critical pedagogy believe that students can co-create knowledge by reflecting and contributing their lived experiences and perspectives. For example, in the LIS curriculum, critical educators might push back against the idea that libraries are neutral spaces, encouraging students to examine the ways that institutions may uphold whiteness through its history of segregation and assimilation (Collins 2018; de jesus 2014; Schlesselman-Tarango 2016).
One of the hallmarks of critical pedagogy is the challenge it presents to traditional ideas of authority. Academic librarians use the frame “Authority is Constructed and Contextual,” developed by the Association of College and Research Libraries (2016) in the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, to teach students how to evaluate information. As many librarians have moved away from bibliographic instruction toward information literacy instruction, the adoption of critical theory into library instruction reflects a shift whereby librarians reimagine instruction to be dynamic, reflective, and engaging rather than methods-based (Elmborg 2016; Tewell 2015). Instruction librarians have long used self-reflection, metacognition, and inquiry—skills we teach our students—to reimagine ways we can leverage our power and positions to become effective change agents (Elmborg 2006) who center social justice in the classroom (Eisenhower and Smith 2009). For example, instead of demonstrating how to use a library database by focusing on the use of limiters, subject headings, and truncation as strategies, critical librarians might facilitate a conversation about the cost of databases to encourage students to think about whose voices are highlighted and whose voices are left out in the peer review process. Recently, the ACRL Immersion Program overhauled its curriculum to incorporate critical reflective practice, noting that the program “builds upon critical theory and praxis in education, libraries, and society in order to challenge inequities and promote social justice” (Association of College and Research Libraries 2019).

Critical librarianship—popularly known as #critlib because of the prominence of the use of the hashtag #critlib during chats on Twitter—has adopted elements of critical theory to incorporate social justice into the general practice of librarianship (critlib n.d.). #critlib offers people of varying experiences and practice the opportunity to learn about and contribute to the conversation. Past #critlib chats have focused on medical librarianship, subject heading
appraisals, organizational culture, bias in web searching, vendor relations, and patron privacy, indicating the breadth of areas into which librarians can incorporate critical practice.

Feminist and open pedagogies build on Freire’s work to address the changing nature and needs of education and to further engage students in the learning process. Feminist pedagogy posits that the learning environment can be a democratic and liberatory space (Accardi 2013; Shrewsbery 1987). Feminist educators, like critical educators, deconstruct traditional ideas of authority. For example, feminist educators might invite students to call them by their first name, rather than use titles such as Ms. or Dr., which carry a sense of perceived power based on traditional values. This mode of thinking shifts from how one might declare their authority to how one might first build trust in order to demonstrate their knowledge. Feminist educators are more likely to move away from lectures and lecture-style seating arrangements, favoring discussion-based and participatory models. At the core of feminist pedagogy is the idea that everyone in the classroom is equal and welcome to share knowledge.

As an emerging pedagogical model, Jhangiani and DeRosa (n.d.) suggest that open pedagogy resists definition, proposing that one should first ideate what open pedagogy could be before agreeing upon a definition. This metacognitive process highlights open pedagogy’s potential. Ultimately, Jhangiani and DeRosa (n.d.) define open pedagogy as “a site of praxis, a place where theories about learning, teaching, technology, and social justice enter into a conversation with each other and inform the development of educational practices and structure.” Jhangiani and DeRosa (2017) also define open pedagogy as “a participatory model, conceptualized as an interaction between a learner and their learning materials.”

Critical, feminist, and open pedagogies are distinct pedagogical frameworks, yet their intersections offer tools and strategies for recognizing, understanding, and deconstructing power
in academic librarianship. Just as these frameworks have been used by instruction librarians to
examine power and authority in the classroom setting and within the profession, OER librarians
can employ the tenets of critical, feminist, and open pedagogies to interrogate how power
operates not just in scholarly publication models, but in the labor of OER as well. These
frameworks remind us that equity is not inherent in our work or in our profession; OER
librarians must be intentional about building equity, individual agency, and social justice into our
work.

Feminized, but not Feminist: Feminized Labor and Intersectional Feminism in LIS

This section is inspired by Arellano Douglas’s (2019) statement: “As a feminized
profession, we don’t embody … feminist practices.” Feminized professions are those that are
dominated, in terms of numbers, by women. This numerical majority does not guarantee that
women are proportionately represented in leadership and other prestigious positions within the
profession. Welde and Stepnick (2014) note how data from Integrated Postsecondary Education
Data System (IPEDS) show that faculty who are “women are outnumbered by men at all ranks at
all four-year institution types… yet women outnumber men at all two-year institution types…”
That is, male faculty members outnumber women except at the least prestigious institutions, with
the fewest resources and lowest salaries” (7). Unsurprisingly, academic libraries mirror this
dynamic, as women make up the majority of the profession, yet men disproportionately comprise
the ranks of library leadership (Beck 1991; O’Brien 1983), despite representing only 19% of the
profession (Rosa and Henke 2017).

Feminized labor is work that is coded as traditionally feminine, namely, labor that is
affective, emotional, and relational. Feminized labor is frequently invisible and undervalued in
the workplace, particularly when it is performed by women (Arellano Douglas and Gadsby
LIS scholars have analyzed how feminized labor and its devaluation is manifested in the academic library. Sloniowski (2016) uses the Marxist construct of immaterial labor to distinguish between the ways that institutions categorize and value affective (emotional) labor as productive and unproductive. Emmelhainz, Pappas, and Seale (2017) analyze the Reference and User Services Association’s *Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers* to critique the ways that reference librarians are encouraged to do emotional labor in order to manage how patrons *feel* (emphasis added) rather than on the outcomes of the reference transaction, e.g., whether or not the patron learned how to find relevant library resources. Arellano Douglas and Gadsby (2019) use relational-cultural theory, which was developed by feminist psychologists Jean Baker Miller, Judith V. Jordan, Janet Surrey, and Irene Stiver, to analyze the unique power dynamics that instructional coordinators face as those who coordinate, but do not necessarily supervise instruction librarians. As with other forms of feminized labor, this type of relational work is undervalued and not always accompanied by real authority to enforce policies.

This paper employs an intersectional feminist framework to analyze OER labor. Intersectionality is a concept in legal theory developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to describe the ways overlapping aspects of one’s identity—such as race, class, gender, or ability—impact one’s lived experiences. For example, Crenshaw’s theory details examples of how Black women, in cases of rape and intimate partner violence, face both racism and sexism in reporting whereas Black men and white women are viewed only through the lens of their race and gender, respectively. Intersectionality has entered the mainstream discourse through popular feminism (Coaston 2019; Coleman 2019).
While first- and second-wave feminism historically centered the gender disparity between white men and white women through the mainstream discourse of suffrage and women’s equality, intersectional feminism is intentionally inclusive of how one’s gender works in tandem with one’s class, race, ethnic background, ability, national origin, or creed, for example. In recent years, LIS scholars have used the frameworks of feminism (Accardi 2013, 2017) and intersectionality (Ettarh 2014; Hathcock 2018; Lew and Yousefi 2017; Pho and Chou 2018; Thomas, Trucks, and Kouns 2019) to identify, critique, and counter the ways that librarianship has historically been feminized and exclusionary to those who are not white, cisgender, male, or able-bodied. These intersectional critiques demonstrate how the profession espouses values of diversity and inclusion and yet does not reflect these values in practice. In order to address the gap between stated values and actual practice, Espinal (2001), DiAngelo (2018), and Galvan (2015) suggest that individuals need to acknowledge the centering of whiteness in librarianship. Collins (2016) uses critical discourse analysis to illustrate the ways that “The LIS field does not have a diversity problem—it has a white supremacy problem, a heteropatriarchy problem, an ableism problem, an anti-Semitism and Islamophobia problem, a Western-centrism problem, a classism problem. LIS has an oppression problem” (44). Librarianship has historically employed white women, traced to the rapid growth of the profession between 1876 and 1905, a time when women’s labor was inexpensive and positions in the library were plentiful (Garrison 1972). The 2017 ALA Demographic Survey (Rosa and Henke 2017) shows that the American Library Association’s (ALA) members are 81% women and 86.7% white. Schlesselman-Tarango (2016) uses the archetype of “Lady Bountiful” to critique the ways that the “patriarchy, white supremacy, and notions of ideal femininity have worked to craft a subject fit to perform the work of colonialism in its variegated and feminized forms” (667). Ettarh’s (2018) concept of
vocational awe describes the ways that library rhetoric conceives of the library as a sacred space and librarianship as a higher calling. Ettarh argues that this mindset leads to job creep and burnout, as it encourages librarians to do more with less, overwork themselves for an imagined greater good, and excuse problematic policies and behaviors that perpetuate the violence of white supremacy. While the scholars cited here and other like-minded practitioners endeavor to bring an intersectional feminist lens to librarianship, it is clear that this approach is not ubiquitous in the profession and that the field continues to perpetuate patriarchal white supremacist systems. Therefore, we argue that although librarianship is feminized, it is not feminist.

Why does this matter? Because OER librarianship, like instruction librarianship, is heavily predicated on relational work; relationship building and fostering community are essential to OER work. Yet this type of affective, relational labor is coded as feminine and is therefore undervalued. When labor is undervalued, there is a high potential for it to be undercompensated and under-supported. Additionally, knowing that librarianship is not inherently feminist and instead upholds systems of inequity and oppression, we can assume that OER librarians with minoritized identities will face additional challenges in receiving adequate compensation and administrative support. While we recognize that major changes are required to undo these unjust systems, we find hope and encouragement in the liberatory promise of critical and intersectional feminist theory. In the next section, we examine how OER librarians can apply this theory to our practice to create a more just working environment.

In Context

This section seeks to apply the critical and intersectional feminist frameworks outlined above to the context of day-to-day work for OER librarians. Although the philosophy of open education aligns with critical and intersectional feminist values, these values are not always
reflected in the open community, nor are they easy to incorporate into practice. Currently, peer-reviewed studies that analyze job descriptions or contractual statuses of OER librarian positions are absent from the literature. Informal conversations among practitioners suggest that aspects of OER labor—particularly those aspects that are relational or feminized—may go undervalued, unrecognized, or undercompensated. We interpret this absence of research into OER labor practices as a reflection of the relative newness of OER librarian positions. More research is needed in this area. At the OTN Certificate program, our colleagues expressed concerns about managing added OER responsibilities, ensuring the sustainability of OER initiatives when they are funded and staffed through soft money rather than permanent funding sources, and balancing the competing—and frequently changing—needs of various stakeholders. We are encouraged by the emergence of spaces for OER librarians to share concerns, collaborate, and create solutions. For instance, the Rebus Community and OTN’s Office Hours recently hosted a two-part webinar series focusing on “The Invisible Labour of OER” and “Strategies for Dealing with Invisible Labour.” This series formalized a space for frank conversations and featured the stories and perspectives of OER practitioners. We hope that this paper contributes to these ongoing discussions about the labor of OER by encouraging practitioners and library administrators to have these conversations and incorporate equitable and inclusive practices into our work.

Based on the literature, our personal work experiences, and conversations with our peers, we propose three strategies for self-advocacy and mutual support for OER librarians to counter the replication of oppressive practices in OER labor. These strategies include asking the right questions, documenting labor, and building community support. These strategies employ an intersectional feminist lens that centers individual agency, reflection, and cooperation to support OER practitioners by infusing critical theory into open educational practices. In proposing these
strategies, we focus on actions that are within the control of individual practitioners rather than reliant on external stakeholders. We recognize that substantive change requires the active support of administrators to enact change at a systemic level rather than the individual level, but this is not always feasible. Therefore, we offer these strategies as small yet powerful tactics for individuals who are interested in improving their working conditions. These strategies may not be appropriate or possible for everyone but are suggestions for further exploration and discussion.

**Asking the Right Questions**

Whether beginning a job at a new institution or negotiating the addition of OER duties to a current position, it is important for practitioners to communicate frankly with supervisors about reciprocal expectations. By asking these questions early in the process, librarians can clarify their role and their institution’s ability to support its stated expectations. Too often, librarians—especially those who are early career or first-generation academics—might not realize that they can and should advocate for themselves. This reluctance may be due to a variety of factors such as imposter syndrome or the desire to fit into the existing organizational culture. Initiating these conversations with supervisors early on establishes a precedent for open and honest conversations. Some librarians might not have a healthy working relationship with their supervisor, which adds a layer of discomfort to this discussion. Those in this situation will find that it is even more important to have these conversations, even if the supervisee has to initiate or feels the need to request a mediator. During this meeting, it is imperative to take detailed notes and follow up with an email to summarize and confirm the mutually agreed upon action items. The email serves as a record in case there are future disagreements or confusion. While it is best to have these conversations at the start of a new position or project, it is never too late to
schedule a meeting to revisit expectations. Consider initiating this conversation by stating: “Now that I’ve been working on OER for X amount of time, I want to revisit our expectations and goals to plan my work going forward.” Below, we offer three questions to ask supervisors.

**How does OER align with institutional priorities?**

Aligning OER work with institutional priorities helps practitioners and supervisors negotiate and manage expectations. Use institution- and library-wide strategic plans, mission and vision statements, and conversations with stakeholders to identify priorities and key collaborators in order to develop an action plan or roadmap. As your OER program develops, you might find that institutional priorities shift with changes in leadership, goals, budgets, and personnel. Scheduling regular check-ins with stakeholders and collaborators allows you to keep abreast of such changes and adjust your work accordingly. This in turn enables you to take a proactive, rather than reactive, approach to planning and programming.

**What percentage of my time will be spent on OER?**

Frankly, there are only so many hours per week that we are compensated for our work. It is essential to make the commitment to not work beyond those hours without additional compensation. Of course, this is easier said than done, especially when there are pressures to meet a deadline or prioritize projects that have similar timelines. Clarifying the percentage of time you are expected to dedicate to OER work helps build in accountability for your workload and advocate for additional compensation, work flexibility (such as flex schedules or remote work), or fewer responsibilities. For librarians with OER as their sole area of focus, the delineation of time may be straightforward. For librarians adding OER duties to a list of other responsibilities, such as serving as a subject specialist or instruction librarian, clarify which responsibilities should take precedence with your supervisor. Establishing firm boundaries not
only ensures that you are fairly compensated and working a sustainable schedule, but it also provides a model for your colleagues, empowering them to say no to uncompensated work. It is especially important for supervisors to model these boundaries and expectations for those they supervise.

*What resources will I have available to support me in this work?*

In spite of calls to do more with less in the face of seemingly endless funding crises, the fact remains that adequate resources are required to achieve institutional goals. Solutions such as working additional hours without compensation may be normalized or unofficially expected but are not healthy, fair, or reasonable. By presenting administrators with documentation that directly links the institutions’ desired outcomes with the necessary resources to support those outcomes, OER librarians can strengthen the case for adequate resources or revised institutional goals. Such documentation should address needs for funds, human resources, and time, which are three of the most significant resources to secure in order to develop a robust and sustainable OER program.

A program budget might include funds for grant programs, workshop incentives, or participation in open education networks such as SPARC or OTN. Budgets can also include a modest allocation of funds for supporting relationship building in the form of treating faculty and other campus stakeholders to coffee to discuss OER. While big budget expenditures like institutional memberships are clearly the responsibility of the institution, librarians sometimes face pressure to pay for smaller expenses out of pocket, especially if the need for such funds is not considered in the first place. This is not feasible for many OER librarians, nor should it be expected.
For OER librarians taking on additional responsibilities such as supervision, the budget should also include increasing your salary proportionately and making provisions to fund student worker or staff pay and professional development. OER is not yet a standard component of LIS curricula; therefore, librarians must engage in continuing education opportunities. Many professional development opportunities require substantial fees and all require significant time commitments that may extend beyond the typical workweek. If a particular professional development opportunity is necessary in order to meet the demands of a position, the institution should fund that experience and provide flexible work support. If funding for professional development is not a priority for administrators, be prepared to explain how abstaining from participation negatively impacts the growth of the OER program.

OER work is collaborative and cannot be the purview of a single individual. Coordinating work across departments can be difficult and requires supervisors’ support to get buy-in from colleagues whose primary duties do not include OER. Colleagues can support OER initiatives in the form of disseminating notices of workshop opportunities and information on OER collections to academic departments, co-facilitating workshops, connecting OER librarians with interested faculty members, and providing technical support for digital materials. Even in a collegial work environment, it is helpful to formalize these partnerships. This might take the form of a meeting with supervisors and the heads of other departments to codify how OER initiatives fit into the library’s and respective departments’ strategic goals. In these situations, it’s important to emphasize how your work can support their strategic goals as well. Partnerships with units outside of the library can be managed through a memorandum of understanding and regular check-ins to revise or reaffirm the terms of the agreement.
OER programs take time to develop and the process can be measured in years rather than semesters, so it is important for supervisors and OER librarians to have reasonable expectations of what can be achieved in a given timeframe. This is especially true for OER librarians in contingent positions, as it is unrealistic for a supervisor to expect contingent employees to develop multi-year projects with long-term impact, especially if the terms of their employment are uncertain. It is not sustainable to rely on contingent labor. In the same vein, it is not reasonable to expect OER librarians to engage in immersive professional development or scholarship while maintaining normal working schedules. Supervisors should work with OER librarians to discuss options for accommodating professional development and scholarship opportunities, particularly for librarians whose position description includes a percentage of time dedicated to scholarship. Solutions may include flexible scheduling, telework days, and research days. Request support for periods when you will be out of the office for travel or other professional obligations. Supervisors and colleagues can provide additional support by agreeing to take over certain duties, such as temporarily covering reference desk shifts, negotiating deadlines that accommodate your schedule, and respecting your out of office message. Being upfront about your workload and vigilant about protecting your time can help establish boundaries, avoid job creep, and resist vocational awe.

**Documenting Labor**

Annual reviews, assessment tools, and portfolios are some of the institutionally supported mechanisms for tracking, evaluating, and rewarding workplace performance. With a neoliberal mindset, these tools may place a higher value on outputs, while obscuring or omitting process-driven work. This is especially problematic for OER librarians, considering the relatively high proportion of relational practice that enables OER work. Sometimes, these procedures can feel
like requirements to document for the sake of documenting, which take time from actually doing the work.

Annual reviews or assessments can be important and useful tools. Librarians should leverage and build on existing documentation requirements and procedures to reflect on our work, honor our labor, and increase transparency. In approaching documentation with a feminist lens, we hold ourselves mutually accountable to stakeholders and our community while supporting our professional growth. Reflective documentation strategies can be used to align our time with our values and to illustrate discrepancies between expectations and realities, which in turn can be used to self-advocate for changes in workload. In keeping with the principles of OER, which emphasize transparency and shared resources, OER librarians should consider converting internal documentation to be openly available to the larger community. Not only would this allow scholars to engage in textual analysis of trends in OER position descriptions and workloads, but it would also offer concrete tools for our colleagues to leverage in their own work.

**Position descriptions**

OER librarians and supervisors should regularly update position descriptions to reflect actual responsibilities. Because OER librarian positions are relatively new, it is likely that your initial position description does not capture the nuances of OER work. Annual reviews are an excellent time to revisit position descriptions, particularly when there have been significant changes to your workload or to the scale of your OER program. Ensure that the position description accurately reflects the percentage of time you dedicate to OER, revising the official percentage of time dedicated to other responsibilities as necessary. In updating your position description, intentionally include forms of invisible labor, such as relationship building, that is
essential to OER work, yet traditionally undervalued in annual reporting. By incorporating these
duties into the position description, it is easier to make the case that time dedicated to invisible
labor is well spent.

Since OER librarianship is relatively new, most institutions will not have many internal
examples to use for developing OER position descriptions. External examples are also difficult
to find, as position descriptions are attached to job postings, which often disappear once the
position is filled. While informal exchanges occur among OER librarians, this type of
information sharing privileges those who have access to such a social network, neglecting those
who do not possess the same social capital. We pose this question to our colleagues: how might
OER librarians make our positions and our labor more transparent? Where can we share
materials so that they are accessible to all of our colleagues? As we are unaware of such
resources, we hope that more librarians prioritize openly sharing this type of information, so that
the community is better equipped to assess OER librarianship labor practices.

Workplan

Workplans are a method of goal setting for the academic year, aligning job
responsibilities with specific action items. They can also be used to reflect on the past year and
reassess future objectives. While some workplans follow a formal template as required of annual
review procedures, this practice can also be used for informal individual goal setting and
reflection. To present one approach to workplans, we offer an example from one of the authors’
own documents (Figure 1). At the top of the table is an item from our position description. In the
table, we list specific action items that we plan to take to fulfill that area of responsibility. At the
beginning of the year, the first column of the table offers a space to set a projected timeline or
completion date. At the end of the year or upon completion of the task, this column can be
updated with the actual timeline or an indication that the task is ongoing. This is particularly useful for OER initiatives in the early stages, as it can provide data on the actual amount of time required to perform a task and highlight factors that may alter the anticipated timeline. The final column is used to record the impact of the action item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provides leadership in the area of Open Educational Resources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date and Status</strong> (Complete, Incomplete, Ongoing)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Spring 2019–Fall 2019 Complete</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Spring 2019–Fall 2019 Ongoing</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Spring 2019 Complete</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Fall 2019 Complete</strong></td>
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Figure 1. Sample Workplan

To record impact, use all types of evidence at your disposal, documenting both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data might include links to materials you have developed and program descriptions, thank you notes from students and faculty, and narrative
descriptions of partnerships. Quantitative data might include numbers of workshops offered, numbers of workshop attendees, and time spent on preparing for workshops and events.

Workplans should not just include the big programs or initiatives, but should highlight the day-to-day tasks required to maintain the program. Quotidian tasks, such as meeting with faculty members and students, providing one-on-one consultations to colleagues, responding to outside inquiries about the OER program, and corresponding with campus technology departments, are vital. To reflect the importance of these tasks and to honor your time and labor, record how much time you invest in these activities and their impact on the overall success of OER initiatives.

Journaling

Reflective journaling is a central practice of feminist teaching (Accardi 2013). This practice can also benefit OER librarians, especially as a way to develop and refine processes. OER librarians might journal after meeting with faculty, student, or other OER stakeholders to capture thoughts on the conversations. Journaling after a workshop or program can help you reflect on what went well and what you might change in the future. Journaling does not have to be tied to a specific event or interaction; it can also be used to record points when you are feeling particularly inspired or burned out. At the time, it may be hard to pinpoint what part of your work or life is contributing to these feelings. With consistent journaling, you can look back at previous entries to identify causes and patterns. Is your work tied to the rhythm of the academic semester? In that case, you might look back and realize that your most stressful times correspond to midterms, finals, and other high traffic points of the semester. If your work is governed by external deadlines like grant application deadlines or production schedules, you may begin to recognize a pattern linked to those times of the year. This information can help you plan for
stress points, but it can also remind you when you need to be more intentional about self-care.

We do this work because it is important to us, but it does not need to consume us. Journaling can help us reflect on ways to better care for ourselves.

In addition to free-form journaling, time diaries offer another method for tracking and reflecting on how much time we spend on given tasks over the course of a day or week (O’Meara et al. 2017). Time diaries work best when used consistently to capture each activity during a set period. Recording activities for even a week can have surprising results; you might find that you spend far more time corresponding with faculty over email than you previously realized or that your “writing day” has turned into a “writing hour” due to competing priorities. After assessing the results of your time diary, review whether your stated priorities are reflected in your practice; if not, revisit what needs to change to ensure that your practice aligns with your goals and values. Time diaries can be used to inform the tasks and time allotted to them that you include in your workplan. This in turn can be used to argue for changes to your position description as necessary or to advocate for assistance in the form of additional team members.

**Building Community**

As OER librarians are often the sole person or one of a small number of individuals working on OER initiatives at their institutions, it is essential to make connections with individuals outside the library to learn from other perspectives, experiences, and ideas. This section highlights different approaches to informally and formally build connections with other OER advocates. Participation in listservs, social media, and communities of practice offer low-stakes, informal opportunities to build community. Formal community building might include participation in official organizations or embarking on research and publication projects with colleagues.
Community building begins at our own institutions. Strong OER initiatives require the participation of units outside of the library. Other units might have better access to stakeholders, more power in decision-making at an institutional level, access to additional resources or funds, or simply different perspectives on furthering OER initiatives. These partners may include academic departments, student organizations, units that support faculty development, the Provost’s office, the bookstore, or student affairs units. These relationships not only support the success of OER initiatives, but also provide allies with whom librarians can discuss theoretical and practical challenges of implementing open education.

Although most listservs are associated with established organizations, participation in listservs is often done informally as the format does not require much upfront commitment and allows members to jump in and out of conversations as appropriate. Fortunately, most listservs, such as the SPARC LibOER (https://sparcopen.org/our-work/sparc-library-oer-forum/) and the Community College Consortium for OER (https://www.cccoer.org/), are freely available to join and to share ideas and resources. Some listservs are supported through institutional membership subscriptions and are not open to everyone. OER librarians might consider joining OER-adjacent listservs as well, such as those that discuss scholarly communication, open access, and instruction, as conversations in those spaces can be relevant to the theory and practice of open education.

Social media, especially Twitter, can be a useful avenue to connect with others from outside your institution. Many people who work in the open community use Twitter to share resources, blog posts, news, and nascent thoughts. Whereas moderated listservs may require review of messages before posting, Twitter allows users to quickly and easily interact, offering a more convenient and real-time venue for conversation. Users do not need to create a Twitter
account in order to view public Twitter accounts. By creating an account, users can follow individuals or hashtags such as #OER, #OpenTextbooks, #OpenEducation, and #OpenEducation. Creating an account also allows users to directly engage in conversations with other OER practitioners and scholars.

Communities of Practice (CoP) represent an intentional form of community building that requires the active participation and commitment of its members (Lave and Wenger 1991). CoP can be formal or informal, virtual or in-person. Wenger (2015) identifies three components of a CoP: a shared domain or area of interest; a community in which members “engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information” (p. 2); and a shared practice, defined as a “shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, [and] ways of addressing recurring problems.” Building a CoP can be as simple as identifying OER librarians with similar interests or positions and coordinating regular conversations to discuss this shared interest. With tools such as video chat software, CoP need not be bound by geographic location and can instead include members from across a wide range of regions and institutions.

Participation in formally recognized communities may occur at the individual or institutional level. Individual membership in state, regional, and national professional organizations provides the opportunity to build relationships beyond a single institution. Participation in state and regional organizations presents an opportunity to advocate for change at the local level. Although these professional organizations are not related solely to OER, smaller interest groups present an opportunity to connect with librarians doing similar work. The workshops, webinars, and conferences hosted by these organizations offer valuable professional development. As noted above, librarians should not be expected to pay out of pocket and should instead advocate funding these memberships and professional development opportunities
through administrative funds or as part of OER initiative budgets. The cost of institutional memberships should also be factored into budget requests. Membership in national organizations such as SPARC, OTN, and the Library Publishing Coalition, provide access to training, voting rights, advocacy materials, and a network of colleagues brainstorming solutions to shared challenges. State or regional consortia, such as Affordable Georgia and the Maryland Open Source Textbook Initiative, also offer excellent opportunities to connect with peers, contribute to multi-institution initiatives, and leverage shared resources.

In addition to collaborating as practitioners, OER librarians can build community through shared scholarship, a process we used in the conceptualization and writing of this article. From the conversations at the OTN program, we realized that we shared an intersectional feminist approach to our work and felt strongly that this theoretical framework should inform the practice of OER. We recognize the potential of scholarly articles as a venue to expand our initial conversations to a larger audience. In doing so, we hope to demonstrate the importance of applying critical and intersectional feminist values to our work, while contributing to an emerging body of scholarship about the labor of OER and open education (Drabinski 2019). Transforming this project from a casual conversation to an actual article required camaraderie and more formal expectation setting. For OER librarians seeking to build community through scholarship, we recommend beginning the partnership by identifying and discussing shared values, expectations, goals, and timelines. It is also helpful to share details about other work and life commitments to help identify realistic timelines and division of responsibilities. Beyond partnering with your co-authors, consider reaching out to colleagues who are not directly involved in the project to request feedback. We benefited immensely from the time and insight generously shared by our colleagues. We hope to return the favor by supporting our colleagues in
their scholarship as well. This project allowed us to put our ideas in writing, but it also allowed us to build relationships with each other and with our colleagues, which will continue beyond this single project.

Conclusion

Drawing on the literature of instructional librarianship and on critical and intersectional feminist frameworks, we argue that the affective labor of OER librarianship is feminized and therefore at risk of being undervalued and undercompensated. This is compounded by the LIS profession’s replication of patriarchal and white supremacist systems, which present additional barriers for OER librarians whose racial, ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic identities are marginalized in the profession. Despite librarianship and the open movement’s stated goals of transparency, democracy, and equity, these values are not always reflected in our practice. To address the gap between stated values and practice, we suggest strategies for OER librarians’ self-advocacy and community support. These strategies, grounded in intersectional feminist theory, present opportunities to honor the invisible labor that powers OER programs and to advocate for adequate compensation for such labor. We recognize that institutional contexts and personal identities impact librarians’ abilities to effectively employ these strategies. Therefore, we hope that this article serves as a starting point for further conversations about how OER librarians can affect systemic change to apply the open values of transparency, accessibility, and reflection to our working conditions. In an invited talk at ACRL 2019, “Becoming a Proud ‘Bad Librarian’: Dismantling Vocational Awe in Librarianship”—the message of which inspired our own title here—Ettarh describes “bad librarians” as those who challenge vocational awe and critique injustices in the profession. Ettarh (2019) observes: “highlighting these injustices, speaking about them at work, etc. makes me bad. I personally think any librarian who speaks up
about these deficits in our field, are truly upholding the ideals we espouse.” We are inspired by Ettarh’s work and message and agree that OER librarians should join her in becoming “bad librarians” who are unafraid to reject vocational awe and critique the profession in a desire to make it more just.

We urge all OER librarians to initiate conversations with their supervisors, peers, and partners to establish more equitable relationships that adequately value and compensate for OER labor. If you are a supervisor, administrator, or someone else who holds power through your position or access to resources, consider how you might support others in these efforts. We remain optimistic about the liberatory potential of OER informed by intersectional feminism.
References


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