

Selected Demographic Trends in the ARL Professional Population

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Previous analyses of the 2015 demographic data from the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) have focused on population-wide issues such as retirements, hiring patterns, and the emerging youth movement. But the 10,000-plus population of professionals¹ in this data also contains multitudes: identifiable groups of individuals, some of which have different, even surprising characteristics. Some of these characteristics may relate to practical managerial concerns, while others speak to our values as a profession, or our concern for basic fairness.

The following analysis focuses on four such demographic groups:

Canadians; historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups; women; and millennials. The identification of these groups, and the differences noted among them, owe much to the nature of the data we

happen to have available. The ARL demographic data series is among the strongest such professional data in existence, but it has all the limitations inherent in such long-standing, and strictly quantitative data. That said, there is beauty in ARL's multitudes.

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Canadian Salary Advantage

Advice to salary-conscious research library professionals with a tolerance for cold weather: move to Canada, early and often. When the ARL Salary Survey data combines US and Canadian libraries, salaries are expressed in terms of US dollars.² In 2015, professional salaries among the 16 Canadian ARL libraries were significantly higher than

those in US libraries, and uniformly so across all income ranges. At the high-income end, for example, 39% of Canadian ARL professionals earned adjusted salaries of \$100,000 or more, compared to just 14% of those in the US.

The discrepancy is equally stark at the low-income end of the spectrum. In the US, 28% of ARL professionals had salaries below

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\$60,000, compared to just 7% of Canadian professionals. Comparing the salaries of individuals with either zero or one year of professional experience gives further insight into the Canadian salary advantage. Fully 81% of those new professionals in Canadian libraries earned \$60,000 and over, double the 40% of their colleagues in the US.

Have Canadian ARL salaries always been higher than US ARL salaries? I have salary cohort data for the 2005, 2010, and 2015 data sets. (See Table 1.) Curiously, the 2005 data shows virtually no disparity between US and Canadian ARL professionals. The disparity sets in by the 2010 data, however, which looks very similar to the 2015 data.

	2005		2010		2015	
	Under \$60,000	\$100,000 and up	Under \$60,000	\$100,000 and up	Under \$60,000	\$100,000 and up
Canada	57%	2%	7%	39%	7%	39%
US	56%	6%	39%	10%	28%	14%

Table 1: Percentage of ARL Professionals Earning Less Than \$60,000 and Earning \$100,000 or More, by Country, in 2005, 2010, 2015

Canada has a higher percentage of new hires (10% of the population of ARL professionals in Canada have zero to one year of experience in their current institution compared to 7% for the US) and also of new professionals (6% of the population compared to 4% for the US). Better pay and more hiring are factors that bode well for the future of

Canadian ARL libraries.

It is easy to imagine a broad range of possible explanations for the US/Canadian salary disparities, but the ARL data can do little more than eliminate some of them. For example, Canadian professionals do not have higher percentages of professional experience, PhD degrees, or supervisory positions. To be sure, there are some modest differences between the two groups: Canadians are somewhat more female (69% compared to 63% in the US), and somewhat younger (45% under 45 compared to 39% in the US). None of these differences seem likely to explain the salary differences, however. I suspect that the primary drivers are macroeconomic in nature, and outside the scope of this study.

Historically Underrepresented Groups

The demographic profile of historically underrepresented groups in professional positions in US ARL university libraries is frustrating in that 2015 proved to be yet another year in a series that has exhibited only excruciatingly slow improvement.³ (See Figure 1.) The Caucasian portion of the population fell in the 35 years between 1980 and 2015, but only slightly, from 88.6% to 85.1%. This metric alone can't support the conclusion that our diversity efforts have failed. It's always possible that without these efforts, our situation could have gotten worse! But our profession aspires to far greater progress in this area, and the 2015 data should spur commitment to redoubled efforts, or entirely new efforts, or both.

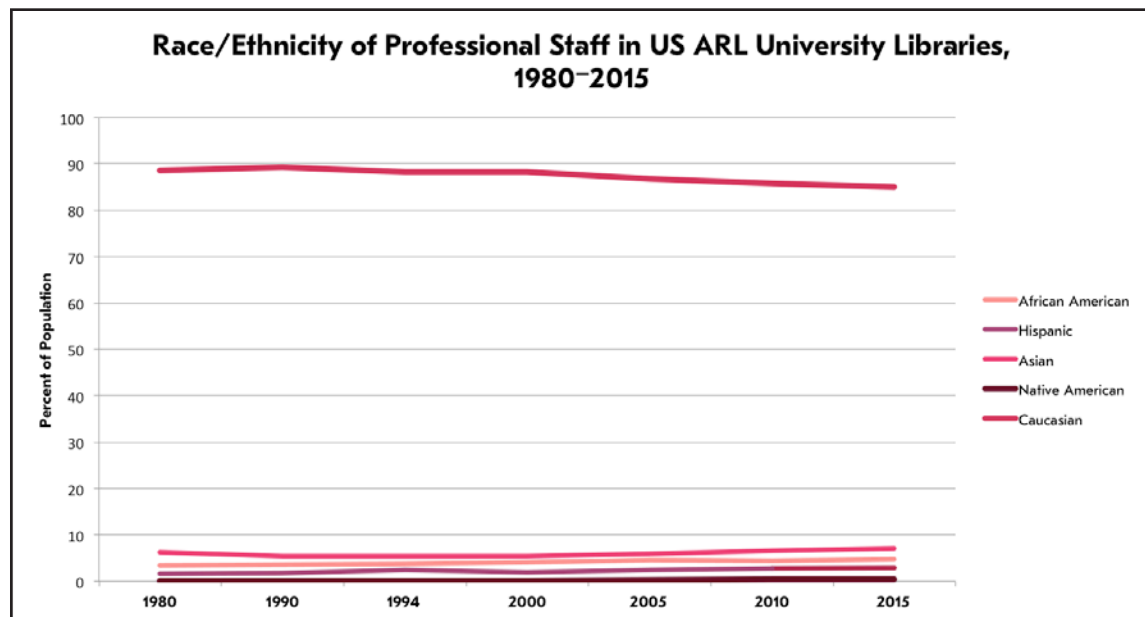


Figure 1

Eliminating the Caucasian trendline and tweaking the scale on the “percent of population” axis allows us to highlight the growth in diversity that has occurred. (See Figure 2.) All of the underrepresented racial and ethnic groups increase in the period, and the Hispanic portion of the population nearly doubles, albeit from a very small number in 1980.

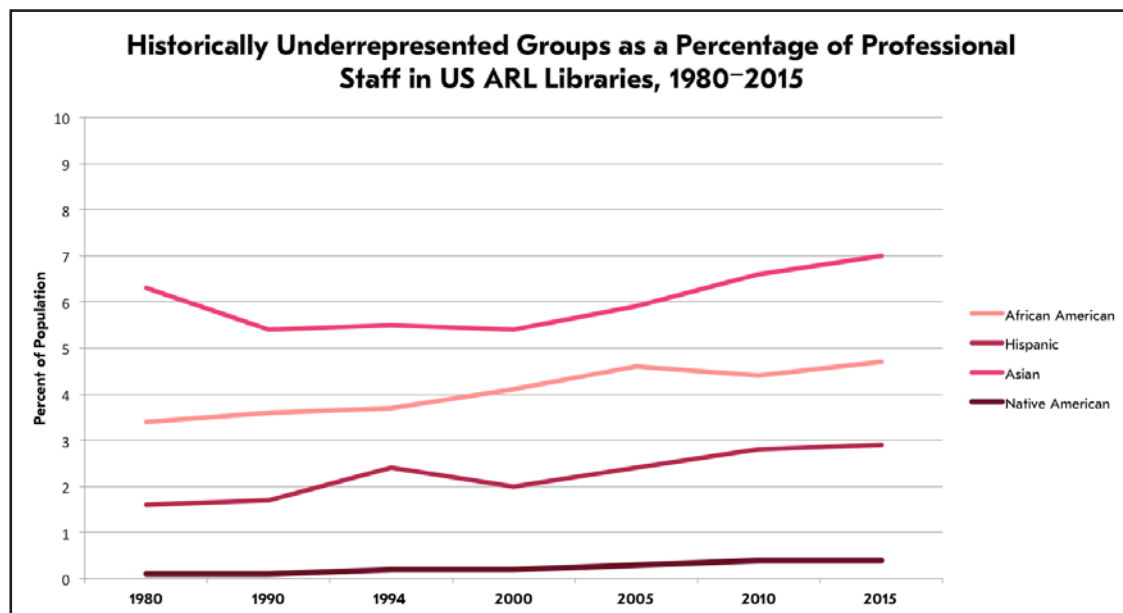


Figure 2

There are modest disparities in diversity by region, with western ARL libraries exhibiting the smallest percentage of Caucasian professionals. (See Table 2.)

	Northeast	North Central	South	West
Native American or Native Alaskan	0.2%	0.3%	0%	1%
Asian or Pacific Islander	7%	5%	5%	13%
African American	4%	5%	6%	3%
Caucasian	86%	87%	85%	78%
Hispanic	2%	2%	3%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 2: Race/Ethnicity of Professional Staff in US ARL University Libraries by Region, 2015

Another measure of diversity across US ARL libraries is the distribution of racial and ethnic groups across these broad regions. (See Table 3.) If these groups were equally represented according to region, we would expect to see 25% throughout. There are some notable disparities throughout, however, possibly the result of regional differences in the distribution of racial and ethnic groups in the broader US population.⁴ While ARL libraries routinely recruit nationally for most professional positions, regional and local labor markets surely play an important role.

	Northeast	North Central	South	West	Total
Native American or Native Alaskan	17%	20%	20%	43%	100%
Asian or Pacific Islander	31%	18%	23%	27%	100%
African American	24%	24%	42%	10%	100%
Caucasian	31%	24%	32%	14%	100%
Hispanic	25%	17%	32%	25%	100%

Table 3: Proportional Distribution of Professional Staff in US ARL University Libraries by Race/Ethnicity and Region, 2015

In analyses of previous ARL data sets, examining the age of racial and ethnic groups gave some hope that normal retirements might

diversify the population. As an example, in 2000, 48% of Caucasian professionals in US ARL university libraries were aged 50 and above, compared to just 35% of African Americans, and 39% of Hispanics. Other factors

being equal, the African American and Hispanic populations should have risen slightly in subsequent years as a result. By 2015, however, it was African Americans who were slightly older: 53% aged 50 and above compared to 49% of Caucasians. “Normal retirements” in this context now constitutes another diversity challenge for ARL.

“Diversity is of particular importance in leadership positions, and examination of [ARL] positions with supervisory responsibilities yields disappointing results.”

If the percentage of Caucasian professionals is inadequate as an indicator of the success of diversity efforts among ARL libraries, a better indicator can be found in the percentage of underrepresented groups among new hires. In 2015, we find halting progress: a slight improvement in African American recruitment, and fairly disappointing numbers of Asian and Hispanic new hires. The number of Caucasian new hires is almost identical to the portion of the larger ARL population, 85.5% compared to 85.1%. (See Table 4.) The 2015 class of new hires can’t be said to be diversifying the population.

	N	% of professional staff	% of new hires
African American	416	4.7%	6.0%
Hispanic	259	2.9%	2.1%
Asian or Pacific Islander	619	7.0%	5.7%
Native American or Native Alaskan	35	0.4%	0.7%
Caucasian/Other	7,576	85.1%	85.5%

Table 4: Race/Ethnicity of Professional Staff in US ARL University Libraries, Overall and as a Portion New Hires, 2015

Diversity is of particular importance in leadership positions, and examination of positions with supervisory responsibilities yields

disappointing results. As Table 5 demonstrates, the Caucasian portion exceeds that of the larger population.

	African American	Hispanic	Asian or Pacific Islander	Native American or Native Alaskan	Caucasian/ Other
Director	5%	0%	5%	1%	89%
Assistant/Associate Director	4%	1%	4%	0%	91%
Head, Medical	11%	2%	0%	0%	87%
Head, Law	5%	3%	2%	2%	89%
Department heads	4%	2%	6%	0%	87%

Table 5: Racial and Ethnic Groups as a Percentage of Supervisory Job Categories in US ARL University Libraries, 2015

Female and Male ARL Professionals

The ratio of female to male professionals in ARL university libraries has been as consistent over time as this population's racial and ethnic composition.⁵ Going back decades, women account for about 64% of

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the population. As with racial diversity, this consistency is the more remarkable against the backdrop of social upheaval in this sphere. In the case of biological sex, the biggest demographic shift over the past 50 years has been the movement of young women away from traditionally female-dominated professions beginning in the 1960s and 1970s.⁶ In the case of librarianship, while younger women were not drawn to the profession, older women were, resulting in no discernable

change in the ratio of females to males. Recent hiring trends seem unlikely to change things, as in 2015, women accounted for 67% of new hires, just slightly higher than their share of the overall population.

There is at least one social upheaval related to the ratio of female and male professionals that has had a dramatic impact on the ARL professional workforce, and that is the trend towards women choosing to pursue, and being chosen for, leadership positions. The case of ARL directors is the most visible, and arguably the most important. (See Figure 3.) The steady rise in the percentage of female directors is impressive between 1986 and 2005, the first year that females outnumber their male counterparts. Since 2005, that growth rate declines, such that in 2015, 57% of directors were female.

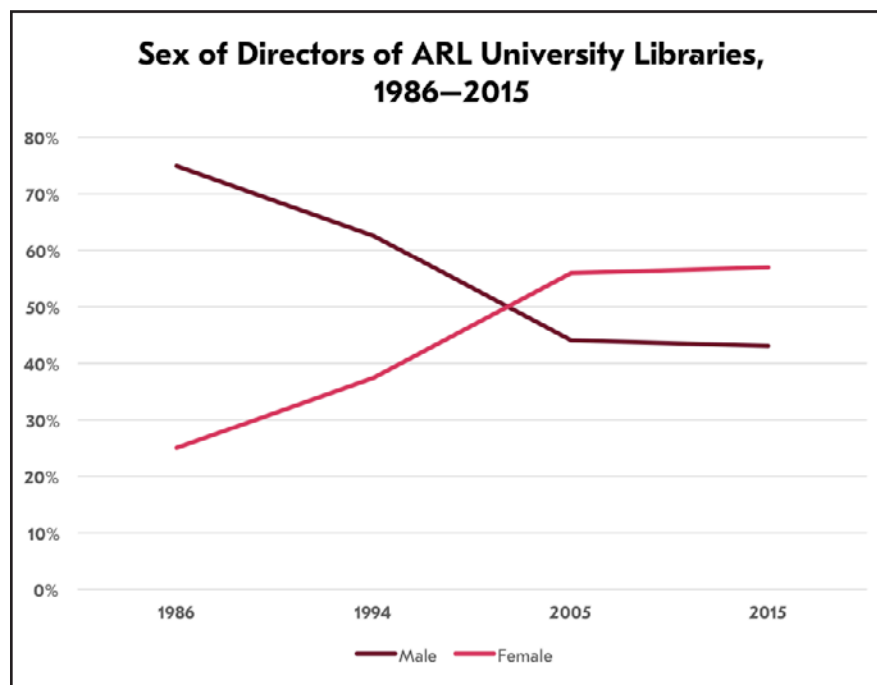


Figure 3

It is natural to expect the percentage of female directors to match their portion of the larger population, but there is no reason to think that it might not go higher still. ARL medical library directors are a case in point: interestingly, women held the majority of such positions going back to 1986, but began a steady rise in 1994, reaching 78% in 2015. (See Figure 4.) By contrast, the graph of law library directors looks much closer to that of ARL directors, both groups having reached a tipping point around the years 2000 and 2005. (See Figure 5.)

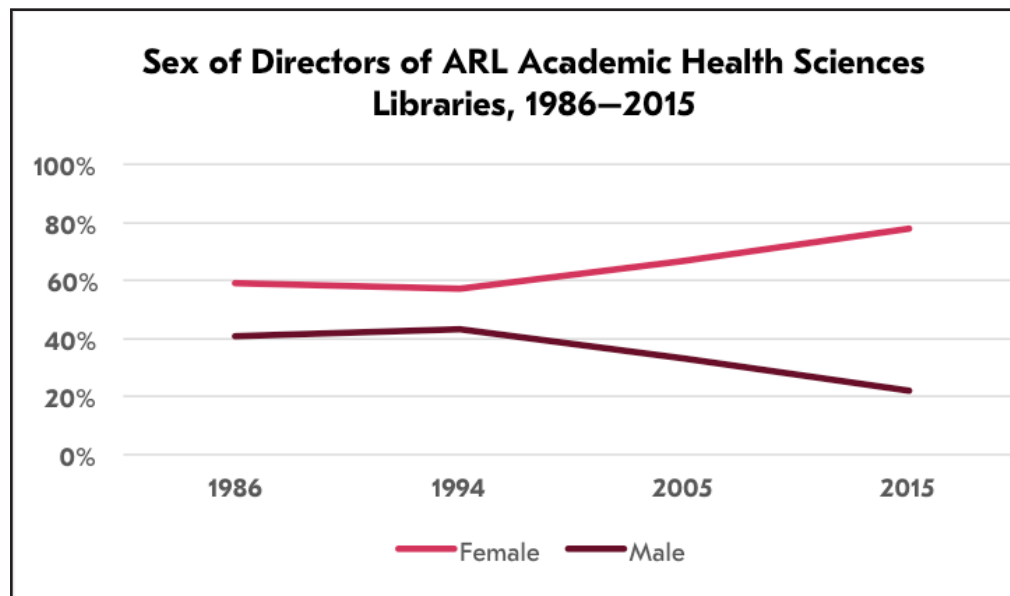


Figure 4

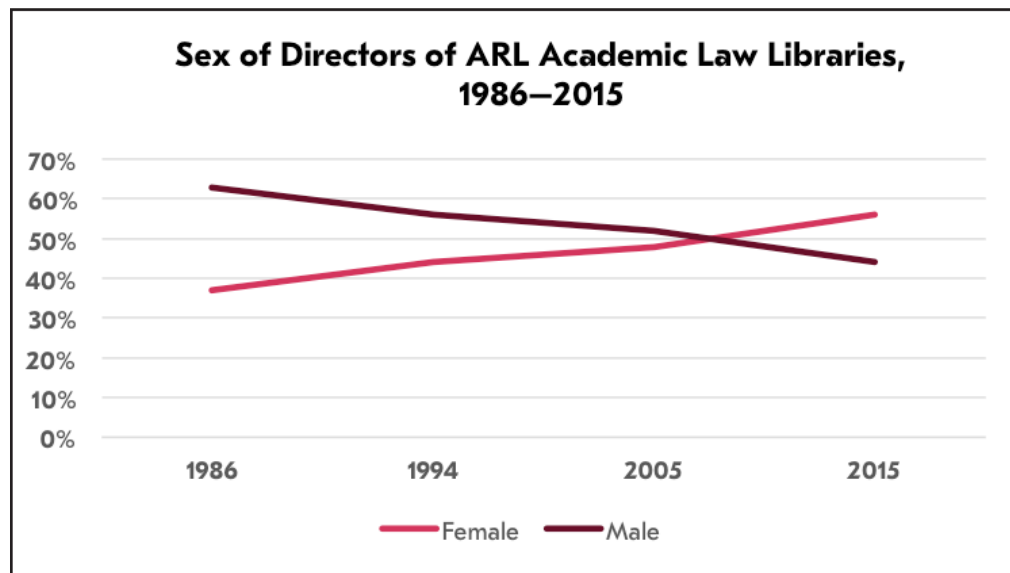


Figure 5

One reason the percentage of female ARL directors might go much higher is the numerical advantage that women held in 2015 in terms of associate and assistant dean (AD) positions, typically a springboard for director-level positions. (See Figure 6.) It must be said, however, that numerical superiority at the AD level did not seem to help women become directors in 1986. In any case, by 2015 the portion of male ADs had fallen to 37%, the lowest number in the data series, and a level that approximates the overall ARL professional population.

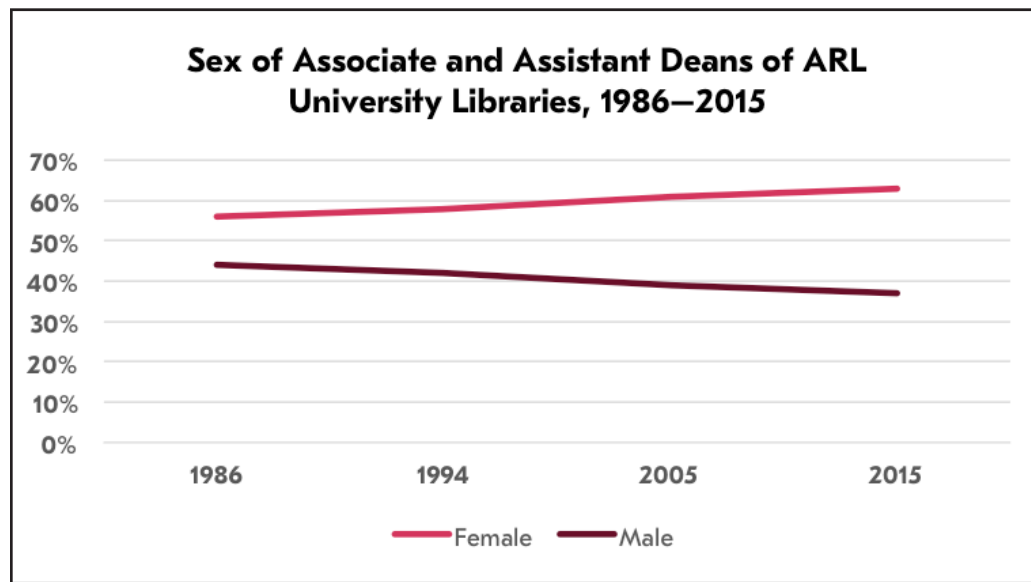


Figure 6

The distribution of females and males across department head positions has been remarkably stable dating back to 1986, mirroring the overall ARL population. (See Figure 7.)

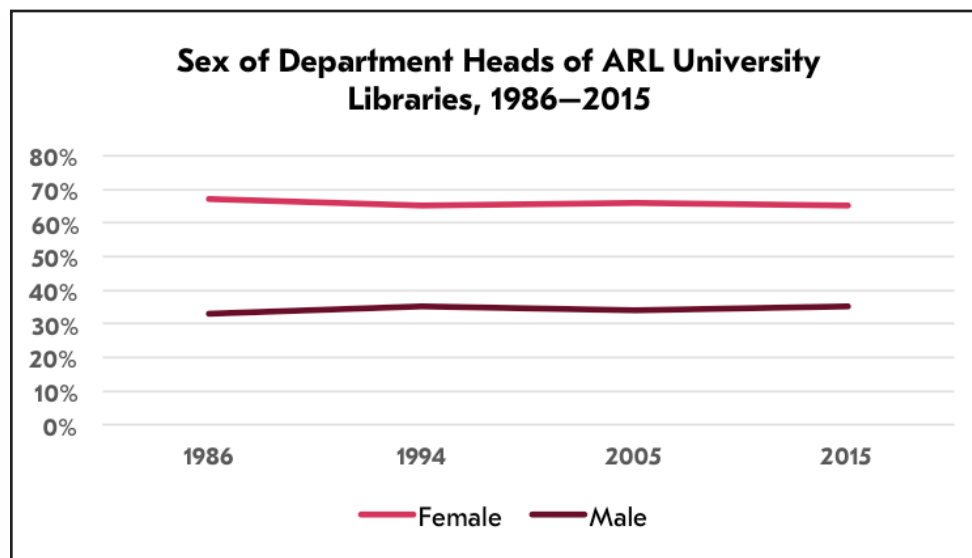


Figure 7

It is tempting to use this data set to examine female/male differences in compensation, but the data sets at my disposal are not capable of producing appropriately nuanced results. No matter, Quinn Galbraith’s 2018 study covers the topic admirably, finding “relatively low pay gaps

for women versus men.”⁷

It is worth noting that Galbraith, along with Heather Kelley and Michael Groesbeck, published a similar article on the wage gap between Caucasian ARL professionals and those in historically underrepresented groups. Their analysis found that while wage gaps existed in the past, “there is no longer a statistically significant wage gap between racial minorities and nonminorities in ARL libraries today.”⁸

Millennials

By 2015, the oldest millennials had reached age 33, old enough to have a presence in the professional workforce. Millennials accounted for 12% of the ARL professional population in 2015, up from 2.4% just five years earlier, and in the time-honored way of generational change, their numbers are sure to grow for the foreseeable future. This process was already well under way when viewed from the perspective of new hires, 41% of whom were millennials in 2015.

What do we know about millennials in the ARL population? These are early days for this cohort, but there is already one important emerging trend: millennials are much more likely to work in positions I have classified as “non-traditional.” A “traditional” position is one for which the primary educational preparation can be traced to master of library science (MLS) degree program content, such as cataloging, reference, subject specialists, and public and technical services. “Non-traditional” jobs by contrast are those that draw principally on skills from other disciplines, such as functional specialists, the IT-based positions, and those that perform financial and human resource functions. The traditional/non-traditional categories are thus rough

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approximations, but they are useful in pulling together the emerging skill sets required by modern research libraries, skill sets that often benefit from strong demand beyond libraries.

Millennials are a case in point, insofar as 43% of them occupied non-traditional positions, compared to 32% of their older colleagues. It seems likely that a defining characteristic of millennial-age library professionals will be their grounding in work that may not have existed for previous generations. Millennials are a revolution in the making.

Except when they are perfectly ordinary. In many of the ARL demographic variables, the 2015 millennials aren't noticeably different from their colleagues in terms of the distribution of females and males, underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, or credentials. Millennials are underrepresented in leadership positions, but no more so than their youthful counterparts in previous years. If millennials are going to change the culture, values, and product of research librarianship, it is not at all clear what that change will look like.

But of course millennials will change all those things, just as every generation before them did. The cognitive scientist Alison Gopnik addresses this phenomenon when discussing how the minds of children are wired to think the world afresh, and the principle of biologically driven generational change applies in any context. The writer Michael Pollan quotes Gopnik speaking on this point in his book *How to Change Your Mind*:

Each generation of children confronts a new environment...and their brains are particularly good at learning and thriving in that environment. Think of the children of immigrants, or four-year-olds confronted with an iPhone. Children don't invent these new tools, they don't create the new environment, but in every generation they build the kind of brain that can best thrive in it.⁹

Coming to understand the kinds of brains that our millennial-aged

professional colleagues are building feels like a compelling, even urgent question, but we will not get there with demographic data such as ARL collects. The problem here isn't that the ARL data doesn't ask enough questions, or even the right ones. It is instead a reflection of the limitations of demographic research, and maybe quantitative research altogether. The impact of millennials on culture, values, and product are better suited to qualitative research methods. In the meantime, we can be grateful for the emergence of a fresh generation that will see our current challenges with eyes uniquely qualified to adapt and then shape the next environment. The kids are alright.

Endnotes

- ¹ The meaning of “professional” is self-defined by each library that responds to the ARL Annual Salary Survey.
- ² Martha Kyrillidou and Shaneka Morris, comps. and eds., *ARL Annual Salary Survey 2014–2015* (Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, 2015), 25, <https://doi.org/10.29242/salary.2014-2015>.
- ³ Canadian ARL libraries and non-university ARL libraries do not report data on racial/ethnic group status.
- ⁴ Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, “Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, for the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States,” Working Paper no. 56, Washington, DC: US Census Bureau, Population Division, September 2002, 154-162 (164-172 in PDF), Table F-1: Race and Hispanic Origin, for the United States and Historical Sections and Subsections of the United States: 1790 to 1990, <https://census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2002/demo/POP-twps0056.pdf>.
- ⁵ Currently, the ARL Salary Survey collects data on the distribution of male and female professional-level employees in ARL university libraries, in keeping with the sex categories utilized by the US Census. Although this allows ARL Salary Survey data to be compared with state, local, and national labor statistics, the Association realizes the limitations

of this approach and acknowledges the distinct and important ways that gender identity, sexual orientation identity, and biological sex intersect and contribute to each person's unique way of experiencing the world and the workforce. ARL is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion as guiding principles of the organization and recognizes and embraces the full spectrum of human and social identities, including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, national origin, gender and gender identity and expression, sexuality, ability, veteran status, class, and religion.

- ⁶ Stanley J. Wilder, *Demographic Change in Academic Librarianship* (Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, 2003), 16.
- ⁷ Quinn Galbraith, "The Effect of Gender and Minority Status on Salary in Private and Public ARL Libraries," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 44, no. 1 (January 2018): 75–80, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2017.10.005>.
- ⁸ Quinn Galbraith, Heather Kelley, Michael Groesbeck, "Is There a Racial Wage Gap in Research Libraries? An Analysis of ARL Libraries," *College and Research Libraries* 79, no. 7 (November 2018): 863–875, <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.79.7.863>.
- ⁹ Michael Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us about Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence* (New York: Penguin, 2018), 327.

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