

# School Librarians' Roles: preliminary results of a national survey of priorities, performance, and evaluation in the context of professional guidelines

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IMLS grant number RE-04-09-0055-09

**Abstract**

*School librarians' role definition has become increasingly important in light of national trends regarding performance evaluation. This exploratory research included a national survey of school librarians' perceptions of their roles, influences on their role performance, and the perceived fairness of their performance evaluations. Preliminary survey results suggested that school librarians were performing different types of extra-*

*role behaviors, many of them more than once a month. Of the roles described in the professional standards, the school librarians surveyed indicated that they felt the information specialist role was the most important, and was the role they most frequently engaged in, which is in contrast to the instructional partnering role emphasized by national professional guidelines. The majority of survey participants felt that their performance evaluations were either to a small extent or not at all accurate assessments of their performance. The results suggest that a closer coordination between role performance and evaluation is warranted, as well as further examination of the survey data.*

**Keywords:** School librarians, Roles, Professional guidelines

School librarians' roles constantly change to keep pace with the evolving ways in which society interacts with, and education is affected by, information (Neuman 2003). These changes are clearly reflected in the professional standards that guide school librarians, the most recent of which are the American Association of School Librarians' (AASL) *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs* (AASL 2009). *Empowering Learners* represents the Association's most current vision of school librarians' roles. According to their vision, school librarians are expected to be teachers, instructional partners, information specialists, and program administrators. The new professional standards reflect a shift in the relative importance of these roles from the previous set, where the importance of the instructional partner role has risen in the new standards. School librarians are also charged with the additional role of leader; although previous sets of AASL's standards discussed school librarians' leadership, this is the first time it has been presented as a discrete role to be enacted. While these new standards may represent AASL's vision of school librarians' roles, little is known about their relevance to school librarians' own visions of their roles, or even how school librarians craft those visions.

The purpose of this study is to explore school librarians' roles relative to their professional standards, school librarians' self-perceptions of the work they value, and the ways in which school librarians are professionally evaluated. While there is recent research about how pre-service school librarians form their perceptions of school librarians' roles in the context of AASL's current professional vision (Mardis, 2007, 2013; Mardis & Dickinson, 2009), less appears to be known about what influences current practitioners' role perceptions. Because a lack of understanding regarding professional identity has serious implications for the continued survival of AASL and the practice of school librarianship, research to discover whether and to what extent current school library practitioners are using the professional standards to inform their role perceptions is warranted.

Although the most recent professional standards (AASL 2009) indicate that school librarians anticipated their instructional partner role would rise to prominence over their other roles, five years of changes in education policy, information, and technology justify a fresh inquiry into whether this is the case, and whether instructional partnering is still most effectively enacted as AASL defined it in 2009. Even if school librarians have thought that the instructional partner role was the most important, it is also important to explore the barriers and enablers to school librarians' enactment of their roles due to the growing national movement toward high stakes teacher evaluation (Ravitch 2010; Matula 2011). Teacher performance

evaluation is a contentious topic around the nation, and it is not clear whether school librarians feel that their performance is being fairly and accurately evaluated.

The role of the school librarian is becoming increasingly important as technology and educational standards continue to evolve, forcing schools to look beyond the classroom for resources and support. It is important to assess the efficacy of the school librarian as she or he takes on each aspect of the role as envisioned by the AASL. The purpose of this study is to explore how school librarians view that role, and the evaluation of their performance in that role. This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What influences school librarians' perceptions of their roles?
2. Who influences the types of work that school librarians engage in most frequently?
3. What do school librarians consider to be their most important role?
4. Do school librarians feel that they are able to frequently engage in work related to the role they perceive to be the most important?
5. Do school librarians feel that their performance evaluation is an accurate assessment of the typical work of school librarians?

## **Literature Review**

In this section, we present the foundational research that defines school librarians' conceptions of their professional roles, the ambiguity of these roles, and school librarians' autonomy to enact these roles as organizational citizens, especially in the context of performance evaluation.

### ***Role Perceptions***

A role can be defined as the set of behaviors expected of employees in a specific job position within an organization. Job descriptions encompass the work performance expectations of both the employee and the organization (Dierdorff and Rubin 2007; Graen 1976; Schuler, Aldag, and Brief 1977). While employees may base their role perceptions on formal written documents like job descriptions, performance expectations, and assigned responsibilities, role definitions also reflect elements of organizational culture which require employees to reconcile their beliefs about how to fulfill their roles with how their employing organizations believe they should be performed (Graen 1976). Roles also may evolve over time, based on employees' interactions with other employees and supervisors (Yun, Takeuchi, and Liu 2007).

### ***School Librarians' Roles***

For almost a century (National Education Association et al. 1920), school librarians have had a succession of sets of professional standards to guide their role performance. Each iteration of the professional standards contained unique opportunities and challenges for school librarians to address in their work (O'Neal 2004), but it is not apparent whether and to what extent school librarians have used these professional standards to craft their visions of their roles. O'Neal (2004) noted that some school library practitioners may attempt to follow new standards, only to return to how they have always done things once they experience a challenge or setback. McCarthy (1997) found that nine years after the publication of *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* (AASL & Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1988), only 42% of the school librarians surveyed believed they could achieve those standards at their schools, which raises the

question of how much influence those standards had on the school librarians who thought they were not achievable.

Employees who are fulfilling the same job function will perform their roles differently (Dierdorff and Rubin 2007; Morgeson, Delaney-Klinger, and Hemingway 2005) because employees are individuals with their own sociocultural norms and beliefs, backgrounds, and values (Graen 1976); accordingly, school librarians may perceive and fulfill their roles in their own way, based on their own interpretations of what those roles should be. McCracken (2001) found that some school librarians preferred the information specialist role, and were not expanding into the teaching and collaboration roles called for in *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (AASL & Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1998). This stasis may, in part, be related to school librarians' desire to engage in work in which they have a high sense of self-efficacy (McAllister et al. 2007; Sandberg 2000).

According to a recent AASL-sponsored survey, school librarians thought that the role of instructional partner was the most important to the future success of school library programs (AASL 2009). Yet, without administrative support, school librarians have been limited in what they are able to achieve with their programs in the schools (Oberg 2009), and there has been some disagreement about what school librarians' role in the educational program of the school should be (O'Neal 2004).

Some school administrators think that engaging in activities more closely associated with the information specialist role, i.e., providing instructional materials, learning resources, and reference assistance, were more important for their school librarians than collaborating with teachers and developing curriculum (Shannon 2009). Other research has shown that some school administrators facilitated school librarians' instructional partnering by encouraging school librarian/teacher collaboration, supporting school librarians in leadership roles, and encouraging school librarians to serve on important committees in the school (Church 2010). While it is encouraging to see some research has found that some administrators support the roles as described in previous sets of professional standards, little recent research has indicated that school administrators are supporting the newest set of professional standards (AASL 2009) or even universally supporting school librarians' fulfilling the roles from the previous set of standards (Shannon 2009). School librarians and administrators lack a unified vision about the roles of school librarians in schools (Shannon 2009; O'Neal 2004; Hartzell 2002; Dorrell and Lawson 1995), which could be contributing to role ambiguity for school librarians.

### **Role Ambiguity**

Role ambiguity is defined as employees' uncertainty or lack of clarity about their roles in their organizations and how their roles should be enacted (Koustelios, Theodorakis, and Goulimaris 2004; Schuler, Aldag, and Brief 1977). Role ambiguity influences employees' role performance and organizational outcomes (Koustelios, Theodorakis, and Goulimaris 2004). Some employees may capitalize on role ambiguity to focus on their own goals and fulfill their roles as they see fit (Yun, Takeuchi, and Liu 2007). While this autonomy may lead to higher levels of job satisfaction (Dierdorff, Rubin, and Bachrach 2012), role ambiguity may also cause some employees to feel a lack of direction, lose a sense of identity, or be unsure of the importance of their work (Schuler, Aldag, and Brief 1977). Role

ambiguity can also cause stress, as an employee tries to mediate between conflicting demands and multiple outcomes (Kousterios, Theodorakis, and Goulmaris 2004). Some employees may use role ambiguity as an excuse not to set goals for themselves, and deliver only modest task performance (Yun, Takeuchi, and Liu 2007). Schuler et al (1977) also noted that job performance and reward probabilities were lower when role ambiguity was higher.

Role ambiguity has the potential to influence school librarians' role performance by offering them the discretion to fulfill their roles as they see fit, especially if their school administrators have only vague expectations of what school librarians could and should be contributing to the educational program of the school. While the professional standards can provide a framework in which school librarians can develop and set role performance goals, it is unknown whether and to what extent school librarians base their conceptions of their roles on the professional standards.

### ***Role Performance***

However they form their role perceptions, employees typically engage in in-role behaviors, or behaviors that are part of their stated role expectations. Employees may also engage in extra-role behaviors; these behaviors are still organizationally beneficial, but are not part of stated role performance expectations (Van Dyne, Cummings, and Parks 1995). Extra-role behaviors are considered to be discretionary; since these behaviors are not typically part of an employee's role performance expectation and are ostensibly unrewarded or punished, they can be performed or not, depending on an employee's desire to engage in them. Some employees may view their role more broadly, and consider some extra-role behaviors to be in-role behaviors (McAllister et al. 2007; Van Dyne, Graham, and Dienesch 1994; Coyle-Shapiro, Kessler, and Purcell 2004). Similarly, some employees may feel obligated to perform extra-role behaviors (McAllister et al. 2007). Whether behaviors are considered in-role or extra-role can also be affected by the work context (Flynn 2006; Konovsky and Organ 1996; LePine, Erez, and Johnson 2002; Somech and Ron 2007; Werner 1994); stakeholders within the organization may have different performance expectations of a particular role (Belogolovsky and Somech 2010), so that what is considered in-role behavior at one organization may be extra-role at another, and vice versa.

### ***Organizational Citizenship Behavior***

The theory of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) (Organ, 1988, 1997; Organ, Podsakoff, & Mackenzie, 2006; Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000) describes different types of extra-role behaviors and how employee's willingness to engage in these behaviors is influenced by antecedents like job satisfaction. Employees' sense of job satisfaction is affected by their sense of autonomy and organizational justice: when employees perceive they have a high level of autonomy (or discretion about how they perform their roles), and feel a high level of organizational justice (perception of fair treatment by the organization), they are more likely to engage in extra-role behaviors (Coyle-Shapiro, Kessler, and Purcell 2004; Dierdorff, Rubin, and Bachrach 2012; Jiang, Sun, and Law 2011; Johnson, Holladay, and Quinones 2009; Konovsky and Pugh 1994; McAllister et al. 2007; Moorman, Niehoff, and Organ 1993; Peng, Hwang, and Wong 2010; Tepper, Lockhart, and Hoobler 2001). OCB theory has been applied to school work contexts, and the research shows that schools are dependent on teachers to engage in extra-role behaviors for the overall success of their organization (Somech and Ron 2007; Belogolovsky and Somech

2010; Somech and Drach-Zahavy 2000; Somech and Bogler 2002; DiPaolo and Tschannen-Moran 2001).

As mentioned previously, role ambiguity can influence employees' sense of autonomy or discretion, either positively or negatively, which affects their role performance. Employee's role performance is also influenced by organizational justice, or employees' perception of fair treatment by their organization (Coyle-Shapiro, Kessler, and Purcell 2004; Johnson, Holladay, and Quinones 2009; Folger 1993). Johnson et al. (2009), described the dimensions of organizational justice as "employees' reactions to outcomes (distributive justice), the process that led to those outcomes (procedural justice), and their treatment during the process (interactional and informational justice)" (p. 410). Employees' sense of organizational justice may be strongly influenced by how their role performance is evaluated.

### ***Performance Evaluation***

The definition of role behaviors is especially important for performance evaluation. For school librarians, professional performance evaluation has long been a contentious issue. Taylor and Bryant (1996) found that some of the school librarians they surveyed reported not being evaluated at all. When school librarians are evaluated, it may be done using the same instrument that is used to evaluate teachers (Vincelette and Pfister 1984; Pfister and Towle 1983; Bryant 2002; Young, Green, and Gross 1995). Taylor and Bryant (1996) found that almost half of the school librarians they surveyed were evaluated using the same instrument that was developed for teachers. School librarians should be considered as part of the instructional staff (Stronge and Helm 1992), because teaching is an important focus of their roles (AASL, 2009), but this does not mean they should be evaluated using the same instrument as teachers: while a teacher evaluation may be able to assess the instructional role of school librarianship, it will ignore many other tasks critical to fulfilling the other roles of the school librarian (Taylor and Bryant 1996). Even if they have an evaluation instrument specific to school librarians, school administrators may not have the training necessary to use it properly (Wilson and Wood 1996). The job demands placed on school administrators make it difficult for them to spend time observing teachers properly to provide accurate assessment of teacher performance (Blake et al. 1995; Bryant 2002; Matula 2011). Unfortunately, observation, which is all too often brief and unrepresentative, is a favored method of gathering information for most principals (Everhart 2006; Jacob and Lefgren 2008).

### **Method**

To begin to explore the links between role perception, role performance, and performance evaluation in the context of our research questions, we developed a survey to gather school librarians' views.

### ***Description of the Sample***

Upon receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the research, we developed and distributed the survey via the Qualtrics web-based survey tool. The survey was publicized using major school librarian professional email lists: OZTL\_Net, LM\_NET, AASL Forum, and IASL Forum. It is unknown how many school librarians subscribe to these email lists. The survey was open for four weeks, and reminders were sent every seven days. The survey was completed by 692 respondents, 546 of whom were from the United States; as the focus of this study is school librarian practice in the U.S., only those 546 survey responses are included in this analysis.

The first section of the survey, *Section I: About You*, captured demographic information (see survey questions in Appendix), including state of residence, school type, school grade level, and level of professional preparation. As Table 1 indicates, the respondents represented 41 states.

A quarter of the respondents were from Pennsylvania (n=138). The next approximate quarter comprised respondents from Kentucky (n=57), Florida (n=41), and New York (n=38). The third approximate quarter of respondents represented Ohio (n=35), Indiana (n=34), Connecticut (n=32), Texas (n=17), and New Jersey (n=13). The remaining respondents represented every state except Alaska, Idaho, North Dakota, South Carolina, South Dakota, Oregon, Nebraska, Nevada, and West Virginia.

Of the 544 respondents who shared their school type on the survey, the majority (490 or 90%) reported working in public schools and, as Table 2 depicts, of the 542 participants who provided their school level, most worked in high schools (n=197), elementary schools (n=160), and middle schools (n=95). The least number of participants (n=90) worked in combined level schools.

The participants were then asked to indicate their level of professional preparation for the role of school librarian. Respondents were permitted to choose more than one response from a list that included Degree in Library and Information Science; Degree in Library and Information Science and State Certification; State Certification Only; Other State-Recognized Certification (e.g., National Board Certification); On-the-Job Experience in a School Library; One-the-Job Experience in Another Type of Library; New to the Library; and Other. Respondents were able to choose more than one response for this question as the number Figure 1 illustrates their responses. Nine hundred seven total responses were recorded from 545 respondents.

As Table 3 illustrates, the largest number of respondents (351 or 64%) held both state certification and a degree in LIS. Almost 25% (n=134) reported only holding state certification in school librarianship, and 128 (24%) reported on-the-job training in the school library as an aspect of their preparation. One hundred three (19%) respondents held a degree in Library and Information Studies (without state certification) and 18% (n=97) held another type of state recognized certification. The fewest number of respondents selected on-the-job training in another type of library (n=46 or 8%) or some other type of preparation (n=36 or 4%). Twelve respondents reported being new to the library.

### **Data Collection**

To enhance validity and reliability of the survey instrument, it was tested at a professional development workshop for librarians (N=43) approximately two months prior to official distribution. Questions were revised based on participants' feedback. Two sections of that survey are reported here. *Section I: About You* asked respondents to complete four demographic questions that were used to describe the sample. *Section III: Your Professional Practice* contained nine questions regarding professional role perceptions, role performance, and performance evaluation. The Appendix details the questions reported in the Sample and Results sections of this study.

### **Data Analysis**

Survey data were analyzed to determine school librarians' perceptions of their roles, as well as who and what influences those roles. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to establish frequency and descriptive statistics for the responses to each of the survey questions reported in this study.

### **Limitations**

The method of distribution in this study constitutes a convenience sample, composed of 546 volunteer respondents from the United States. According to the United States Department of Education and National Center for Education Statistics, there were over 48,000 school librarians in the U.S in 2013 (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). However, no detailed public data about school librarians' qualifications and experience is available, thus the extent to which the survey participants represent school librarians in the United States is unclear. Therefore, conclusions drawn for this sample are not sufficient to generalize the results to the population of school librarians. However, Creswell describes a convenience sample as being able to "provide useful information for answering questions" (2008, p. 155), which is our goal in this exploratory research.

### **Results**

In this section, we report the results of responses to questions in *Section III: Your Professional Practice*. These questions were designed to determine the influences on school librarians' perceptions of their roles, as well as to gather information about how school librarians perform their roles. The intent of this section was to have participants indicate who and what influences their perceptions of their roles, and whether or not they feel that they are able to carry out their roles as envisioned.

#### **Questions 1 and 2: What Influences School Librarians' Role Perceptions**

The first question in this section asked respondents to think about what influences how they perceive their roles as school librarians. Respondents were asked to indicate whether professional standards, job descriptions, professional preparation, professional reading, professional development, collegial relationships, and/or other influences affected their role perceptions, and they were able to choose more than one influence.

Of the 541 participants who responded to the question, 441 (82%) noted "Professional standards" were influential and 435 (80%) noted that "Professional articles" influenced their role perceptions. Fewer, but still many, respondents selected "Other librarians" (n=430 or 79%) and "Sessions at professional conferences" (n=427 or 79%). Still fewer respondents chose "Professional development sessions" (n=332, or 61%), "MLIS Instruction" (n=302 or 56%), and/or "Job description" (n=286 or 53%). Finally, 64 respondents chose "Other" and were given the option to explain. Sixty of those who chose "Other" provided an explanation, and some entered more than one item in the text box, while others echoed the available choices. The remainder can be categorized as follows: 18 cited collaboration with, and feedback from, stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and students; 15 cited professional networks such as job related email lists, Twitter, professional learning communities, and colleagues; 8 cited their own personal experience; 6 cited guidelines from state or national agencies; the Common Core State Standards and school administration garnered 4 mentions each; 3 people cited instruction received while completing a professional degree other than their Master's; and one person cited the book *Morals and Dogma*, by Albert Pike.



The second question in this section asked respondents to reflect on their stated influences and indicate which among them was the most influential to their visions of their roles; respondents were allowed only one choice for this question. Five hundred forty one respondents chose to answer this question. Figure 1 shows the comparison between the answers to the two questions.

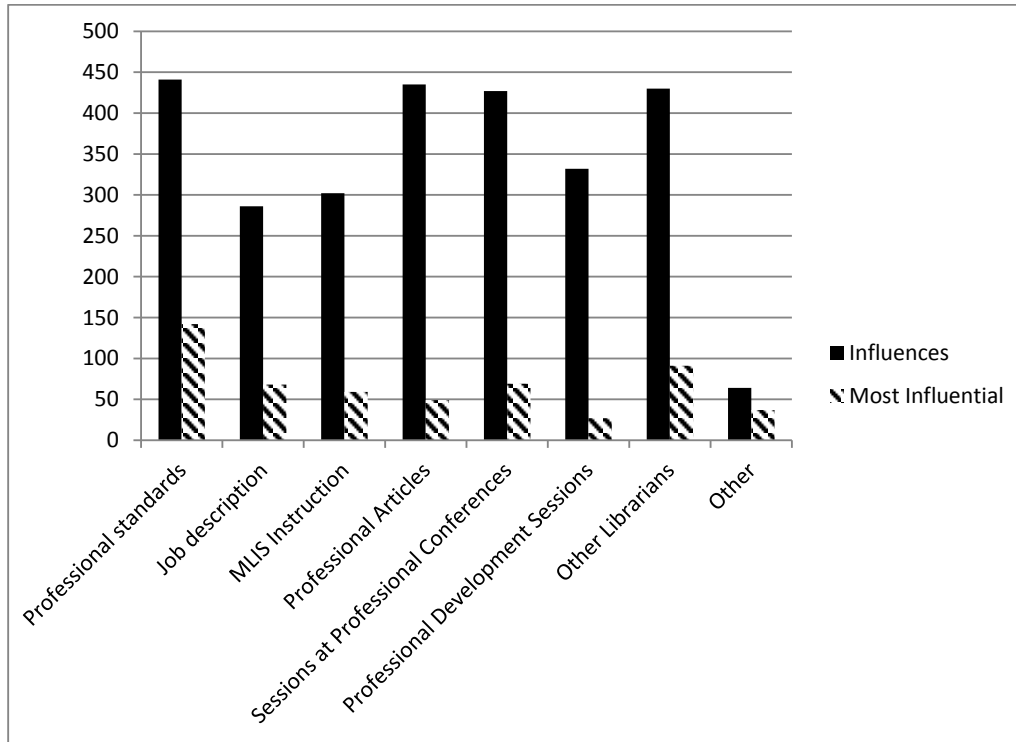


Figure 1. Perceptions of What Influences School Librarians' Roles (N=541)

Over one quarter of respondents (n=142 or 26%) chose "Professional standards" as the most influential to their perceptions of their roles. Ninety one (17%) respondents chose "Other librarians." Fewer respondents chose "Sessions at professional conferences" (n=69 or 13%) and "Job descriptions" (n=68 or 13%). Still fewer chose "MLIS instruction" (n=59 or 11%), "Professional articles" (n=45 or 8%), and "Professional development sessions" (n=27 or 5%). Finally, 37 respondents chose "Other" and were given the option to explain: all 37 did so. Their answers can be categorized as follows: 14 cited collaboration with, and feedback from, stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and students; 6 cited professional networks such as job related email lists, Twitter, professional learning communities, and colleagues; 4 cited their own personal experience, and the same number for school administration; guidelines from state or national agencies and "all of the above" garnered 2 mentions each; and those items mentioned only once included the Common Core State Standards, instruction received while completing a professional degree other than their Master's, professional development outside the school district, the Danielson model, and a district pacing guide.

#### **Questions 3 and 4: Who Influences School Librarians' Role Perceptions**

The next two questions required respondents to report who most influenced their role perceptions. Respondents were asked to indicate one or more of the following: “Students,” “Teachers,” “Administrators,” “School District,” “Other librarians,” “Community,” and “Other.”

The first question in this section allowed respondents to select more than one person as a role influence and 542 participants answered this question. The second question asked for the most influential person or people, and was answered by 543 participants. The second question included one additional response option that was not available on the first question: “Myself.” Figure 2 illustrates the responses to both questions.

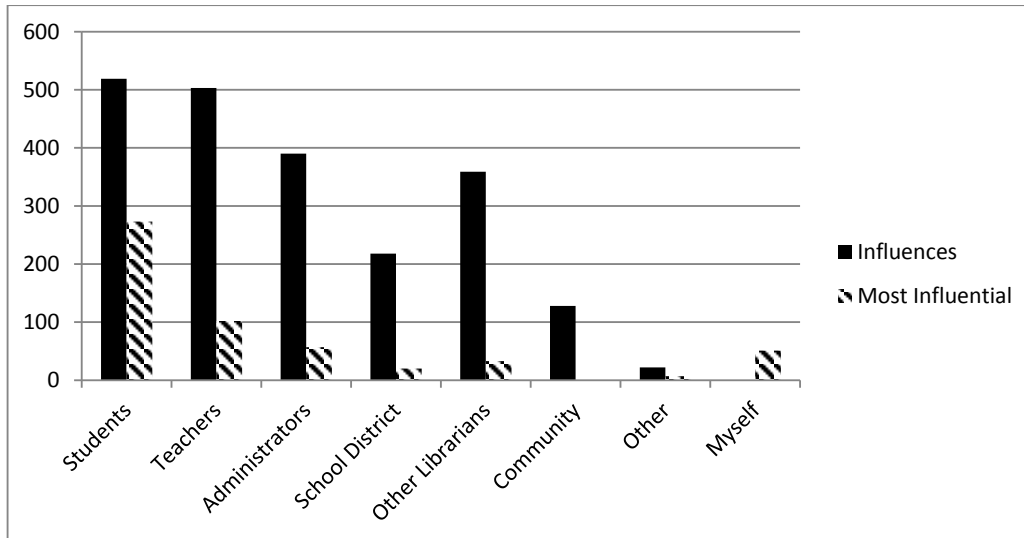


Figure 2. People Who Influence (N=542) and Are Most Influential (N=543) on Role Perceptions

To both the questions that asked respondents to select multiple role influences and the question that asked respondents to select the strongest influence on their roles, “Students” (n=519 and n=273, respectively) and “Teachers” (n=503 and n=102, respectively) were the most frequently reported responses. Fewer respondents chose “Administrators” (n=390 and n=57, respectively) and “Other librarians” (n=359 and n=33, respectively). Still fewer chose “School district” (n=218 and n=20, respectively) and “Community” (n=128 and n=0, respectively). With the option of “Myself” added to the question about strongest role influence, 51 people made that choice. Finally, very few respondents (n=22 and n=7, respectively) chose “Other.”

For the question about influences, 21 of the 22 who responded “Other” chose to provide an explanation. Of those, 13 responded with a “what” instead of a “who,” leaving 8 valid responses. The breakdown of those responses is as follows: myself and parents received two mentions each; the other four respondents listed the curriculum committee, the IB coordinator, the technology coach, and “leaders in my field and other fields.” For the question about what was most influential, 6 of the 7 who responded “other” chose to provide an explanation. Of those, 4 responded with a “what” instead of a “who,” leaving 2 valid responses: students and teachers; and “this changes on a day to day basis-again, it’s hard to quantify.”

### Questions 5 and 6: Extra-Role Behaviors

The majority of the 542 respondents who answered the first question in this section (n=295 or 54%) chose “I engage in these activities once per month or more.” Fewer people (n=125 or 23%) responded “I engage in these types of activities a few times per semester.” Still fewer (n=51 or 9%) indicated “I engage in these activities once or twice during the school year,” and 25 (5%) said “I never engage in these activities.” Forty-seven people (9%) responded “I don’t know,” as shown in Figure 3.

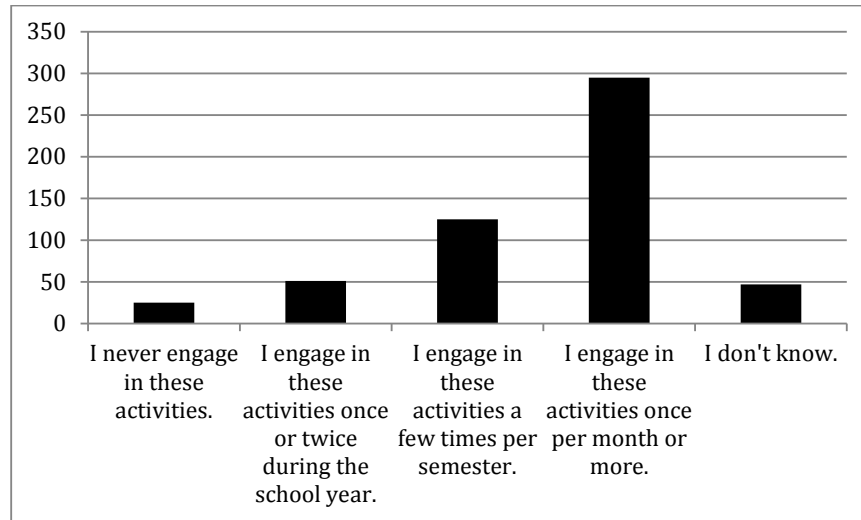


Figure 3. Out of Role Behaviors

The second question in this section was open-ended. Respondents who chose to answer typed duties they consider to be out of role in a text box; 368 respondents chose to do so, and listed a combined total of 837 duties. Figure 4 shows a word cloud created from the duties respondents entered for this question.



Figure 4. Extra-Role Duties Performed by School Librarians

The word “duty” itself is prominently featured in the word cloud; this refers to a variety of student supervision responsibilities that happen outside of the school library and are

unrelated to instructional contact time, such as cafeteria/lunch duty, duties related to supervision of students arriving to or departing from school, supervision of students during transitions between classes, and supervision of students in detention. School librarians also reported having to provide coverage for classes or serving as a substitute teacher. The maintenance or repair of technology was mentioned by many respondents, as was having to serve as a proctor for testing. Fewer respondents mentioned teaching responsibilities that fell outside of the purview of information literacy skills; examples included reading and math remediation, as well as arts and humanities, music, and science. Some respondents also indicated that they were responsible for supervising study halls (sometimes hosted in the school library), clubs, or athletic activities.

**Questions 7 and 8: School Librarian Role Prioritization and Enactment**

The next question asked school librarians to reflect on which one of the *Empowering Learners'* professional roles (i.e., teacher, instructional partner, information specialist, program administrator, and leader) they deemed most important. Five hundred forty two respondents answered this question. Respondents were also asked to indicate which of the five roles they engaged in most frequently. Figure 5 shows the comparison between what school librarians feel is their most important role, and in which of those they engaged most frequently in practice.

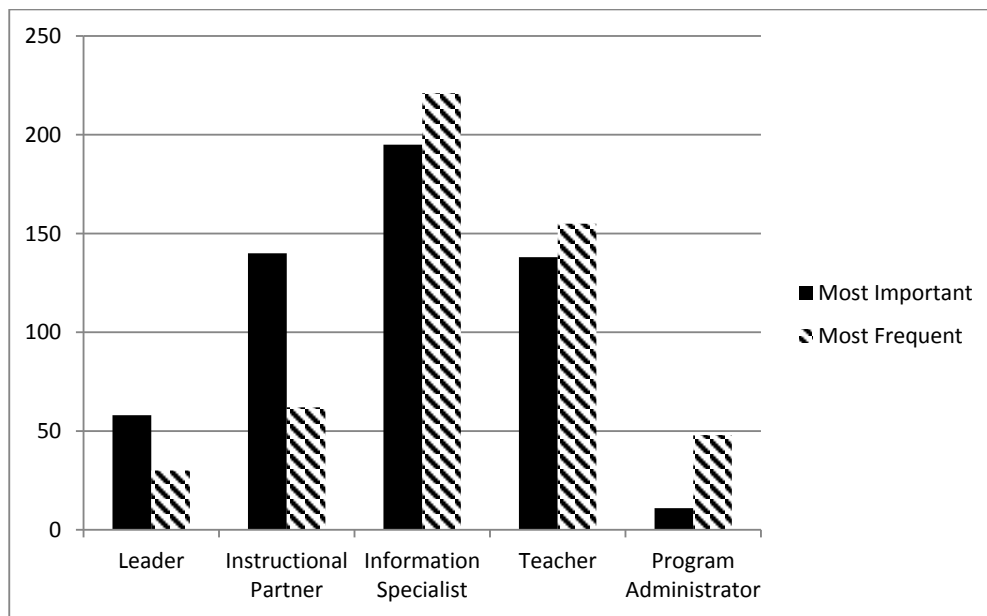


Figure 5. Role Most Important Role and Role Most Frequently Performed (N=542)

As Figure 4 illustrates, 195 (36%) of respondents chose “Information Specialist.” Respondents also frequently reported “Instructional Partner” (n=140 or 26%) and “Teacher” (n=138 or 25%). The fewest number of respondents chose “Leader” (n=58 or 11%) or “Program Administrator” (n=11 or 2%).

When asked to indicate the type of role in which they most frequently engaged, the number of participants who answered the question was again 542. Of those responses, most respondents reported “Information Specialist” (n=221 or 41%), with “Teacher” at 155 (29%)

responses, and “Instructional Partner” with 62 (11%) responses. A smaller number of respondents chose “Program Administrator” (n=48 or 9%), and the fewest chose “Leader” (n=30 or 6%).

**Questions 9: School Librarian Performance Evaluation**

In the final question, respondents were asked how they felt about the evaluation processes used to assess their performance as a school librarian. Five hundred and forty four respondents completed this question. The majority (n=265 or 49%) felt that the evaluation instrument used to assess their performance was accurate “To a small extent.” In contrast, 116 (21%) felt that their performance evaluation was accurate “To a great extent.” More respondents thought their performance evaluation was accurate “Not to any extent” (n=72 or 13%) than thought it was “Completely” accurate (n=23 or 4%). A few respondents chose “No opinion” (n=39 or 7%) or “I don’t know” (n=29 or 5%). Figure 6 shows all of the responses to this question.

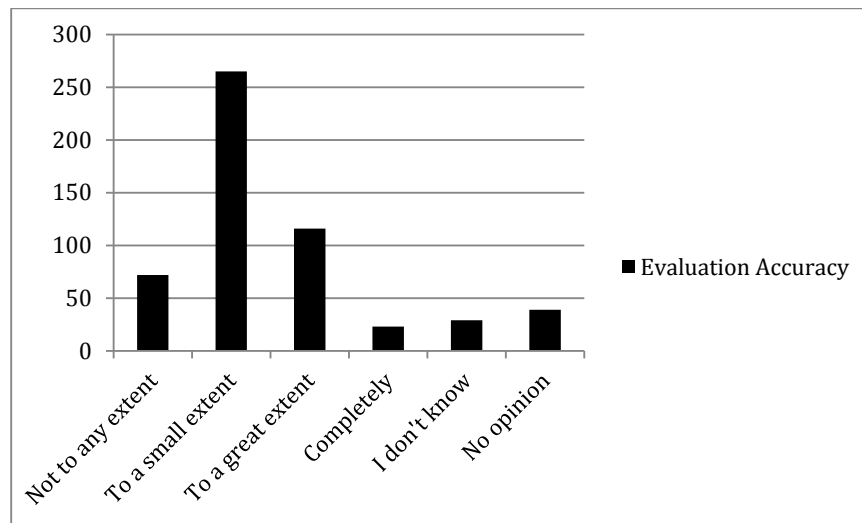


Figure 6. Perceived Accuracy of Performance Assessment (N=544)

**Discussion**

This research was conducted to explore what influences school librarians’ perceptions of their roles, and what those perceptions are. The findings will be discussed in light of the research questions.

**Research Question 1. What influences school librarians’ perceptions of their roles? and Research Question 2. Who influences the types of work that school librarians engage in most frequently?**

The first two research questions pertain to school librarians’ role perceptions and role performance. Professional standards, articles from professional or research journals, other librarians (as peers or mentors), and sessions at professional conferences were the most frequently cited by the school librarians surveyed as influencing their perceptions of their roles. This finding reflects the research indicating that employees may base their role perceptions on formal written documents (such as professional standards) and socialization by their organization (Graen 1976). However, while school librarians may be receiving

context-specific acculturation from their school organization, they may also feel the need for socialization in the wider culture of school librarians. Since many school librarians may be working as the only school librarian at their school, reading articles written by other school librarians, attending sessions at professional conferences presented by other school librarians, and having mentor or collaborative peer relationships with other school librarians may represent the best way for school librarians to experience enculturation and socialization specific to school librarians.

When the school librarians surveyed were asked what most influenced their perceptions of their roles, professional standards received the highest number of responses, but only 26% of respondents chose this answer, which is in contrast to research on pre-service school librarians' valuation of the importance of the professional standards (Mardis and Dickinson 2009). This divergence may be a result of the difference between the ideal of school librarianship as envisioned by pre-service school librarians and the reality in which current school librarians find themselves. McCarthy (1997) found that the majority of school librarians she surveyed did not think the professional standards from *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* (AASL and Association for Educational Communications and Technology 1988) could be achieved at their schools nine years after they had been published. It is possible that some current school librarians don't feel as though the current professional standards are achievable in their schools, either, and therefore don't see them as the most influential to their perceptions of their roles. The school librarians surveyed overwhelmingly responded that students were the people who most influenced their role perceptions; this is likely a reflection of a learner-centered philosophy. While it is good to know that school librarians consider students to be extremely important to their role perceptions, this answer does not address school librarians' sense of autonomy, as students are unlikely to wield influence over the types of work in which school librarians are able to engage.

**Research Question 3. What do school librarians consider to be their most important role? and Research Question 4. Do school librarians feel that they are able to frequently engage in work related to the role they perceive to be the most important?**

A majority (54%) of school librarians in this study felt that they are engaged in work that lies outside of their perceptions of their roles at least once a month, and they described a myriad of different extra-role behaviors. Many of the extra-role behaviors the school librarians cited seemed to be related to fulfilling duties that could have been filled by other personnel if there was a position for them at that school. Since this question only asked for a description of the types of behaviors school librarians performed that they thought were beyond their roles, it was unclear to what extent school librarians voluntarily engaged in these behaviors or whether they were mandatory for the school librarian to perform in their school context. Work context influences the perception of certain behaviors as either in-role or extra role (Konovsky and Organ 1996; Werner 1994; LePine, Erez, and Johnson 2002; Flynn 2006; Somech and Ron 2007), and school librarians' performance of behaviors they consider to be extra-role may be a result of performance expectations from other stakeholders (Belogolovsky and Somech 2010).

Of the five roles (Leader, Instructional Partner, Information Specialist, Teacher, and Program Administrator) described in *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs* (AASL, 2009), 36% of school librarians thought that the Information Specialist role was the

most important, but 41% of school librarians indicated that this was the role they most often performed; there were similar differences in the number of school librarians who thought a particular role was the most important as compared to the number of school librarians who most frequently engaged in that role, with the greatest difference being between the number of school librarians who thought of the Instructional Partner role as the most important (26%) and the number of school librarians who were able to most frequently engage in that role (11%). According to *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs* (AASL 2009), the role of Teacher was the most important at the time, and the role of Instructional Partner was supposed to rise to prominence. This is in stark contrast to the findings, where more of the school librarians surveyed thought the Information Specialist role was the most important.

These findings about the role school librarians perceive to be the most important compared to the role in which they are most frequently engaged have implications for school librarians' sense of autonomy, i.e. some school librarians are most frequently engaged in the work that they do not consider to be the most important. If autonomy is defined as discretion about role performance, these school librarians likely have a lower sense of autonomy, since they are not spending most of their time engaged in the work they consider to be most important; if these school librarians had a higher level of autonomy, they would perhaps be spending more time performing the roles they perceived to be the most important.

Depending on the conditions that have led to this discrepancy, school librarians' sense of organizational justice may also have been negatively affected. For example, imagine a scenario in which a school librarian's administrator decided, without consulting the school librarian, to assign the school librarian to a fixed schedule in order to provide planning time for teachers, and that this administrator ignored the school librarian's protests about this decision. This administrator's decision effectively forces the school librarian to engage most frequently in the Teacher role, which will heavily interfere with performance of other roles the school librarian may consider to be more important, such as the Instructional Partner role, which would require access to teachers during *their* planning times. The school librarian in this scenario would likely disagree with the outcome of the administrator's decision (a fixed schedule), the process that was used (not consulting the school librarian), and her or his treatment during the process (being ignored), meaning that the school librarian would feel unfairly treated, negatively affecting his or her sense of organizational justice.

***Research Question 5. Do school librarians feel that their performance evaluation is an accurate assessment of the typical work of school librarians?***

The majority (62%) of school librarians surveyed felt that their performance evaluations were either not at all or only to a small extent an accurate assessment of their work as school librarians, which may have effect on their sense of organizational justice. These school librarians may feel less inclined to engage in extra-role behaviors, which can be critical to the success of a school (Belogolovsky and Somech 2010; DiPaolo and Tschannen-Moran 2001; Bogler and Somech 2005; Somech and Drach-Zahavy 2000; Somech and Ron 2007). This situation could create a negative feedback loop, as a reluctance to engage in extra-role behaviors may be reflected in lower ratings on school librarians' performance evaluations (Yun, Takeuchi, and Liu 2007; McAllister et al. 2007), leading to an even lower sense of organizational justice, further discouraging extra-role behavior.

## Conclusions and Directions for Future Research

In this study, we presented the initial results of a national survey that aimed to capture school librarians' perceptions of their roles, their abilities to enact those roles, and their feelings about their professional evaluation. Prior research has suggested that myriad factors influence each of these aspects of school librarianship, and that determining the interplay between perception, performance, and evaluation is vital to defining a profession that is threatened by competing financial and policy pressures facing K-12 education.

While many respondents cited the professional standards as an influence on their perceptions of their roles, considerably fewer of the school librarians surveyed said that the professional standards were the *most* influential to their perceptions of their roles. This difference should concern professional associations such as AASL, especially as it stands in contrast to research on pre-service school librarians' perceptions (Mardis 2007, 2013; Mardis and Dickinson 2009). If currently practicing school librarians do not regard their professional standards as being the most influential to their role perceptions, their professional organizations should consider re-evaluating their articulated visions of school librarianship. Further research is needed to determine why more current school librarians do not consider the professional standards to be the most influential factor in their perceptions of their roles, and what school librarians' perceptions of AASL are.

Although students are unlikely to have the power to influence school librarians' role performance, most study participants considered students to be the people most influential to their perceptions of their roles; this student-centered commitment was not also reflected in school librarians' perceptions of role importance or role performance. This conflict calls for further research into school librarians' sense of autonomy, their abilities to perform their roles as they perceive they should be performed, and how other stakeholders influence school librarians' sense of autonomy and role performance.

A majority of school librarians surveyed indicated that they were engaged in extra-role behaviors at least once a month; many of these behaviors were related to non-instructional student supervision outside the library or to fulfilling duties that could be performed by other personnel. It was not clear to what extent these extra-role behaviors are voluntary or mandatory. Further research is needed to develop a more precise idea of what types of extra-role behaviors school librarians engage in, and whether or not they voluntarily do so, as this will give further insights into school librarians' perceptions of autonomy and organizational justice.

The majority of the school librarians surveyed feel that their evaluations do not accurately assess their role performance. A decreased sense of autonomy accompanied by a decreased sense of organizational justice should negatively affect school librarians' willingness to engage in the extra-role behaviors that have been deemed necessary for a school to be successful, but many of the respondents indicated that they were engaged in such behaviors. Further research is needed to fully explore what issues are affecting school librarians' sense of autonomy and how. More research that examines school librarians' perceptions of the facets of organizational justice may provide insights into whether and to what extent school librarians are willing to engage in extra-role behavior and why.



This exploratory research has shown that there are possibly some deeper currents affecting school librarians' role perceptions, role performance, and performance evaluation, and that further research is needed to better understand their implications.

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## Appendix

State	Respondents	State	Respondents
Alabama	7	Mississippi	1
Arizona	3	Missouri	4
Arkansas	4	Montana	1
California	11	New Hampshire	6
Colorado	5	New Jersey	13
Connecticut	32	New Mexico	3
Delaware	1	New York	38
Florida	41	North Carolina	8
Georgia	11	Ohio	35
Hawaii	2	Oklahoma	2
Iowa	7	Pennsylvania	138
Illinois	4	Rhode Island	1
Indiana	34	Tennessee	3
Kansas	6	Texas	17
Kentucky	57	Utah	1
Louisiana	4	Vermont	1
Maine	3	Virginia	9
Maryland	4	Washington	3
Massachusetts	11	Wisconsin	5
Michigan	5	Wyoming	2
Minnesota	3		
<b>Total</b>			<b>546</b>

Table 1. Respondents by Location (N=546)

Grade Level	Respondents
Elementary	160
Middle	95
High School	197
PreK-8	20
Other:	70
<b>Total</b>	<b>542</b>

Table 2. Respondents by Grade Level (N=542)

Professional Prep for Role	Responses	% Cases	% Responses
Degree in LIS	103	11.4%	18.9%
Degree in LIS/state certification	351	38.7%	64.4%
State certification only	134	14.8%	24.6%
Other state-recognized preparation	97	10.7%	17.8%

On-the-job experience in school library	128	14.1%	23.5%
On-the-job experience in another type of library	46	5.1%	8.4%
I'm new to the library.	12	1.3%	2.2%
Other	36	4.0%	6.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>907</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>166.4%</b>

Table 3. Respondents' Professional Preparation (N=545)

## Appendix: Digital Resources Survey Questions

### Section I: About You

1. In which state do you work? (Please enter your two letter state abbreviation) If you work outside the United States, please indicate your country of residence.

2. Please indicate your level of professional preparation for your role as school librarian.

(Please check all that apply.)

- Degree in LIS
- Degree in LIS and state certification
- State certification
- Other state-recognized preparation (for example, teacher certification in non-LIS area or National Board certification in school media)
- On-the-job experience in the school library
- On-the-job experience in another type of library
- I'm new to the library.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3. At which level do you work?

- Elementary
- Middle/Junior High
- High School
- (P)K-8
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

4. My school is:

- Public
- Private
- Charter
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_



*Section III: Your Professional Practice*

1. Think about how you perceive your role as a school librarian. Which of the following would you say influences your vision of that role? (Please check all that apply.)

- Professional standards, such as AASL's Empowering Learners or Information Power
- The job description provided by your school or district
- The instruction you received while earning your master's degree in Library Science
- Articles you read in professional or research journals
- Sessions you attend at professional conferences
- Professional development sessions
- Other librarians (as peers or mentors)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Please indicate which one of these is most influential to your vision of your role as a school librarian.

- Professional standards, such as AASL's Empowering Learners or Information Power
- The job description provided by your school or district
- The instruction you received while earning your master's degree in Library Science
- Articles you read in professional or research journals
- Sessions you attend at professional conferences
- Professional development sessions
- Other librarians (as peers or mentors)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Now think about the work you do as a school librarian. Who influences the types of work you engage in? (Please check all that apply.)

- Students
- Teachers
- Administrators
- School District Officials
- Other librarians (as peers or mentors)
- Community
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Please indicate which person or group most influences the types of work you engage in.

- Students
- Teachers
- Administrators
- School District Officials
- Other librarians (as peers or mentors)
- Community
- Myself
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

5. How frequently are you engaged in activities that you feel are outside the role of school librarians as you perceive it?

- I never engage in these activities.
- I engage in these activities once or twice during the school year.
- I engage in these activities a few times per semester.
- I engage in these activities once per month or more.
- I don't know.

6. Please list examples of duties you perform that fall outside the role of the school librarian as you perceive it.

7. I think the most important role that school librarians do is as a(n):

- Leader (working to improve conditions in the learning community)
- Instructional Partner (collaborating with other teachers)
- Information Specialist (facilitating access to resources)
- Teacher (providing instruction in multiple literacies, critical thinking, and ethics)
- Program Administrator (management of resources and advocacy)

8. The work in which I am able to most frequently engage is related to the role of:

- Leader (working to improve conditions in the learning community)
- Instructional Partner (collaborating with other teachers)
- Information Specialist (facilitating access to resources)
- Teacher (providing instruction in multiple literacies, critical thinking, and ethics)
- Program Administrator (management of resources and advocacy)
- The type of work in which I most frequently engage is not reflective of my perception of the role of school librarian. (Please explain.) \_\_\_\_\_

9. The job performance evaluation used by my school district is an accurate assessment of the typical work of a school librarian.

- Not to any extent
- To a small extent
- To a great extent
- Completely
- I don't know.
- No opinion.