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Toward a Conceptual Path of Support for School Library Media Specialists with Material Challenges

[Dianne McAfee Hopkins](#)

the importance of role models: “On the few occasions when leaders of the profession have taken

related to interpersonal relationships with clients, coworkers, supervisors, and the work environment.

Nauratil recognized burnout as a growing phenomenon among human service professionals. She characterized burnout as a manifestation of alienation. While noting that the most effective intervention occurred at levels beyond the librarian, she suggested that individual coping could also be useful.

Of particular interest because of references to censorship as a stressor are the findings of Caputo. Caputo's focus on stress and burnout was based particularly on the research of stress researcher Hans Selye and Selye's theory of three reaction stages to stress. In stage 1, the alarm stage, the body recognizes a stressor and responds to the stressor both physiologically and physically. In stage 2, the resistance stage, the stressor is either removed or remains. If the stressor remains, the body stays alert at stage 1 levels, and moves eventually to stage 3, the exhaustion stage, that if not relieved, results in death. Selye's studies suggested that stress was a cumulative process of increasing stress levels without appropriate reductions after initial alarms. Caputo also described personal and work environment causes of stress. Caputo cited research that suggested that the causes of stress were found both in the person as well as within the work environment.

Caputo provides a list of stressors that are specific to the library environment. Censorship is one of nine stressors listed. Noting that the most carefully selected materials could be considered controversial by someone, and having no limit of time in which a challenge might or might not occur (including challenges to titles owned for decades without complaint), the most stressful censorship efforts reported were those highlighted in the media, those ongoing for long periods, and those presented directly to a governing body with no prior notification to the librarian. In these cases, librarians felt that they were forced to act as crusaders for freedom of choice whether they personally supported the material or not. They felt unfairly attacked, and felt that censorship challenges suggested that they were bringing harm to the community. Caputo ended by offering suggestions to managers for effective stress management and burnout reduction. Supervisory support including mentoring was suggested. Peer support and active staff discussion

Much of the research on stress is related to job stress. When this is taken into account, another definition emerges. Job stress is a condition in which related factors interact with the worker to change (disrupt or enhance) her or his psychological or physiological condition such that the person (mind, body, or both) is forced to deviate from normal functioning (Haack, Jones, and Roose 1984, 6–7).

The interest in stress in the workplace is compounded in light of adverse effects that stress places on employee behavior. These effects include neuroses, coronary heart disease, alimentary conditions such as ulcers, cancers, asthma, hypertension, backaches, and the use of alcohol and drugs. For the past two decades an estimated \$45 billion dollars in lost economic productivity has been attributed to stress each year. Another indicator of stress's importance is worker compensation laws that include mental as well as physical illness due to or made more severe by employment (Beehr and Bhagat 1985).

Social support is the term used most often within sociology, psychology, and communications research. It has been defined as “the verbal and nonverbal communication becat mar8(due)-8,(l)-6()-

approach that acknowledges and builds upon, rather than separates, the research of other disciplines (Tardy 1985).

Of these research approaches, the sociological perspective is said to be the earliest. Early sociological research investigated support's relationship to health as promoted through s

Albrecht and Adelman use their definition of social support to summarize current research

The words “perception” and “coping” occur frequently in research discussions of stress and social support. Both areas represent special, interdependent interests that may apply to library media specialists’ responses to challenges to materials.

Perceptions

Of particular interest to researchers concerned with those experiencing stress is the individual’s perception of support available to them or received by them (Albrecht and Adelman 1987; Winnubst, Buunk, and Marcelissen 1987; Sarason, Sarason, and Pierce 1990). The perception of social support is closely related to health outcomes, for example (Sarason, Sarason, and Pierce 1990). Research shows that perceptions of both the need for social support and its availability affect the amount of stress that is experienced. Thus, the manner in which support is offered is less important than the perception of value experienced by the individual in need.

Support offered by a significant other may not be as effective in reducing ~~gains~~ as that offered by a coworker. Support may be fully realized only by those sharing the organizational context, for people in the workplace share common organizational referents which include a shared code and value system. Supervisors and coworkers are in a better position than nonorganizational members to provide support (Ray 1987).

Values held by the referent group also impact perceptions. Such values influence whether events or behaviors are labeled as serious problems. Gender may ~~also~~ affect problem perception. In research by Fisher and others, women were more likely than men to regard their difficulties as problematic, acknowledge a need for support, and actually seek aid (1988). Demographic variables such as age and socioeconomic status and the personality of the stressed individual may also affect her or his problem-solving behavior (ibid).

An individual’s experience of stress depends upon the interaction of her or his own perception of the environment with individual skills, needs, and characteristics (Wells 1984). Thus, something that produces stress for one person may not produce stress for another. An individual’s response to stress may alleviate the stress or provoke even more stress.

Coping

The act of coping is an important response to stress. Wells provides a basic definition: “Simply, coping is what people do, either behaviorally or psychologically, to deal with stress in their lives, and social support is what others do to help people cope” (1984, 137). Drawing on research, coping has been more specifically defined by Schuler as a “process of analysis and evaluation to decide how to protect oneself against the adverse effects of any stressor and its associated negative outcomes, and at the same time take advantage of its positive outcomes” (1984, 46).

Several aspects of coping are associated with Schuler’s definition:

- Coping is an intentional, cognitive act of analyzing the perceived qualities or conditions in the environment that are associated with a stressful experience.
- The degree to which the stressor is identified, uncertainty over the outcomes, and its importance determine the challenge and effort involved in coping.

- Stress can be tied to positive or negative outcomes, as long as they are important to the individual, and the process of coping can take place in either circumstance. In negative outcomes, an individual copes in order to protect. In positive outcomes, an individual copes to take advantage.
- The selection of a coping strategy is influenced by an evaluation of the personal environmental resources and constraints in addition to personal values and needs. Selection is also influenced by the immediate and future costs and benefits. The potential effectiveness of various strategies is also taken into account

While similar in approach to Schuler, Rosenbaum (1988, 1990) emphasizes learned resourcefulness, which he suggests is a set of behaviors and skills by which individuals self regulate internal responses that interfere with the smooth execution of an ongoing behavior.

Rosenbaum believes that any effort to cope with stressful events involves attempts at self regulation in three phases of representation, evaluation, and action. In representation, the individual experiences an automatic emotional or cognitive reaction or both to real or imagined changes within herself or himself or within the environment. The reactions trigger automatic thoughts about one's self and the environment. The reactions trigger automatic thoughts about one's self and the environment. The reactions trigger automatic thoughts about one's self and the environment. The reactions trigger automatic thoughts about one's self and the environment.

and why?"; and "What is known in support research, generally, that can assist in understanding the responses of the school library media specialist to challenges?"

Social support research represents a major area of interest to sociology, psychology, and communications researchers. While conceptual frameworks relating to support research are still evolving, the literature clearly suggests that actual support to individuals experiencing stressful situations, or the perception that support is available, is an important contributor to effectively coping with stressful situations. Social support effectiveness is dependent upon the individual's personal characteristics, the message that is conveyed, the person(s) delivering the message, and the environment in which that message is given. Support that serves to reduce uncertainty and enhance the individual's ability to problem solve and gain mastery of the situation seems to be the most effective in improving individual skills and in promoting self-acceptance.

The research on stress and social support can help library and information studies researchers and professionals gain a better understanding of the nature of effective support to library media specialists experiencing challenges to school library media materials.

House (1981) posed a question that was adapted for the review of the support research from the standpoint of challenges to library media materials: "Who gives what to whom regarding which problems?" It can be more specifically worded, "What support should be provided to school library media specialists experiencing challenges to school library media materials, and from whom should the support come?" In library and information studies, the emphasis is on which individuals or groups are likely to be best suited to provide support, who just seek support, and what kind of support should be provided.

Who

Research suggests that support during

The school library media specialist may seek to identify others who have faced challenges in order to compare notes, ventilate fearful emotions, learn that the situation is not unique, and learn or reinforce coping skills. However, persons with similar experiences may not be sought if the challenge creates much stress and the belief that the conditions are irreversible. In such case support from others who faced similar challenges may only exacerbate the library media specialist's feelings of helplessness (Gottlieb 1985).

Other research suggests that the school library media specialist may seek or be influenced by persons believed to have higher status, such as district library supervisors, or representatives of state and national intellectual freedom associations or agencies (Fiske 1959; Gottlieb 1985). In addition, family members and friends outside the school profession might also offer support. Their support may be emotional, rather than informational. Library media specialists are also likely to seek and value support from those with whom they are not close. Such nonintimates can also provide positive benefits, including emotional support (Tardy 1985).

Thus, *who* gives support to the school library media specialist experiencing challenges varies depending on several factors. Supporters may be other librarians including library media specialists who have had challenges themselves. Support providers may be teachers, the principal, or the district library director. Supporters may also be family members or friends. Supporters may be well known to the library media specialist or known by reputation or status.

It is also possible that the library media specialist may not seek the support of others. Several reasons are suggested for why this might occur. The costs of seeking support may outweigh the benefits, or the challenge may not be viewed as a problem. Specialists *do not* always seek support because they believe that stress conditions are irreversible (Gottlieb 1985). It is also possible that the library media specialist may not believe that sufficient support exists (Price and Roberts 1987). In these cases, it seems *important* to communicate fully the benefits to the school library media specialist of receiving support (Fisher and others 1988). Librarians may not seek support because they already have a sense of control and confidence. They may be able to psychologically *draw* upon support strengths based upon previous experience with successful support (Gottlieb 1985).

What

Although there are several possible sources of support, each is not equally effective in dealing with challenges to materials. Interactions between *who* provides the support, the support itself, who receives support, and characteristics of the problem are all important.

The type of support that is provided to the school library media specialist is likely to be one or more of the following: emotional, instrumental, informational, or appraisal. In emotional support, caring is shown through empathy, trust, and love. In instrumental support, helping behaviors are demonstrated by the giving of time, skill, or even money. In informational support, advice is given, and in appraisal, feedback is provided (House 1981).

Neutral statements intended to provide support seem to be less effective than those offering assistance, indicating concern, or giving advice (Tardy 1985). Support may have positive or negative effects on librarians receiving it (Burlison and others 1994). It is influenced by both objective and perceived *context*.

feeling valued may be more important than the kind of support that is offered (Sasson, and Pierce 1990). How support is communicated is also important, for it is only when it is effectively communicated that uncertainty can be reduced (Ray 1987).

Research suggests that the most effective social support is that which most effectively enhances the library media specialist's sense of control and efficacy over her or his life (Albrecht and Adelman 1987). Thus, the best support encourages the library media specialist to be self-reliant and to feel a mastery of the situation. Research also suggests that the earlier support is received, the better. Messages of clarity and information can aid in how library media specialists perceive themselves and how they interpret similar or pertinent future events. Such support can decrease stress (Gottlieb 1985). Library media specialists can gain a sense of reliable alliance with others and they may become conditioned to believe other goals can be accomplished through collective resources. Thus, social support provides resources for coping with stress (Bunge 1987; Caputo 1991; Schuler 1984).

The kinds of communications that are most helpful are those that assist library media specialists with anxiety and uncertainty, and enable them to cope independently with stress and perceive some personal control (Albrecht and Adelman 1987; Bunge 1987). It is likely that where social support is effective, both recipients and providers benefit. It is also possible that, where support has been successfully given, the strategies the library media specialist learns and the sense of worth that she or he receives will undergird responses to future stressful situations (Gottlieb 1985).

The Library Media Specialist Who Experiences the Challenge

Because each school library media specialist is unique, considering the library media specialist who might seek support is complex. Research tells us that library media specialists can be expected to respond in different ways when a challenge to material occurs. Individuals vary in their need for support. Response to stressors is a product of the individual's own perception of the environment as well as the support available to them.

The referent group with whom the library media specialist identifies is important, for the reaction of the referent group to the stressor can augment or diminish confidence in overcoming the stressor (Wilcox and Verneker 1985; Fisher and others 1988). The referent group can also influence whether an event is viewed as a serious problem. In school librarianship, library media specialists have two likely referent groups. One group consists of those within the school itself who are the principal and teachers. The other referent group can be said to be the library profession, which includes both librarians in the individual's life and professional tenets undergirding the profession. The reactions of the school referent group and the professional referent group may differ, and this difference may heighten conflict for the librarian. For

In the path, the school library media specialist exists in a school environment featuring varied professional relationships and levels of work stress. The state of the library media specialist's physical or mental health also varies. A challenge to materials occurs. The library media specialist's response relates to these existing conditions. The library media specialist considers whether the challenge is a problem. If the challenge is not considered a problem, action is taken

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