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# Library workers on the front lines of conspiracy theories in the US: one nationwide survey

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## **Abstract**

**Purpose** – The purpose of this study was to investigate whether and in what ways library workers in the United States encountered patrons espousing beliefs in conspiracy theories and, if so, to explore the effectiveness of the strategies they used to address information disorder during the interactions.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study was designed with an exploratory qualitative approach. Data were collected via an online survey posted to national and state library association listservs, utilizing a self-selected sampling method. Researchers inductively and deductively analyzed results, developing predetermined themes based on the research questions, then iteratively integrating unexpected data during coding.

**Findings** – A total of 334 responses were received over two weeks. Data represent library workers from 43 states and Washington, D.C., including various types of libraries. Library workers interacted with patrons with conspiratorial thinking, and both library workers and patrons evidenced a range of emotions and motivations.

**Originality/value** – This is the first national study to survey library workers and whether they encountered patrons espousing conspiracy theories. While the sample size is small, themes elucidate various strategies that library workers use for interacting with patrons who express some level of conspiracy ideation.

## **Introduction**

In 2020, the authors investigated strategies librarians might employ if they encountered patrons espousing conspiracy theories (Beene and Greer, 2021). They traced the rise of QAnon within the United States (US) and examined how such conspiracy theories proliferate across information systems. Through examining research occurring in fields external to librarianship (e.g. psychology, the sciences, history), they were able to complement the existing guidelines within information literacy. The result was the article “A Call to Action for Librarians: Countering Conspiracies in the Age of QAnon” (Beene and Greer, 2021), which appeared in print shortly before the January 6, 2021, U.S. Capitol insurrection (Beene and Greer, 2021).

Responses to the article were immediate – and while most were favorable, one author challenged the assumption that conspiracy theorists would even use libraries (Blechinger, 2021). Out of curiosity, the authors embarked upon an exploratory qualitative study in 2021 to investigate whether library workers in the US encountered conspiracy theorists during their work. To date, no national study has surveyed library workers and whether they interact with patrons exhibiting conspiracy ideation. This article explores the findings of this research, which indicated that library workers were fielding questions from patrons who fit this description.

While the results are not generalizable given the small sample size, they provide a snapshot of a particular time in American history, with library workers across various states and institutional settings responding with fascinating and sometimes difficult stories of the challenges they encountered. The narratives from the survey elucidate various strategies library workers were using for interacting with conspiratorial thinkers and support the authors’ previous research (Beene and Greer, 2021). Therefore, the purpose of the authors’ empirical research was threefold: to ascertain whether library workers were encountering patrons with conspiracy ideation; to gather data on the strategies used by library workers during these encounters and to begin to understand why some of these strategies worked and others did not. While the results support the authors’ earlier theoretical findings, which examined the library literature alongside other disciplines (Beene and Greer, 2021), their research is ongoing, particularly in providing concrete strategies for library workers to counteract conspiracism.

### *Conspiracy theories and conspiracy ideation defined*

Through their initial research in 2020, the authors operationalized the terms “conspiracy theory” and “conspiracy

ideation” based on a broad review of fields external to librarianship. Here, the authors present a brief synopsis that draws upon their earlier publication (Beene and Greer, 2021).

There can be some confusion surrounding the term “conspiracy” and “conspiracy theory.” A conspiracy involves a “secret plan on the part of a group to influence events, partly by covert action” (Pidgen, 1995, p. 5). While many conspiracies contain some truth or have been proven true later (Uscinski, 2018), what makes a “conspiracy” a “conspiracy theory” is that it is a highly sensationalistic narrative with low standards of evidence, which exploits in-group, out-group, good versus evil, us versus them argumentation (Brotherton, 2013, pp. 9–14). Conspiracy theories provide their followers with insider knowledge that contributes to a feeling of belonging to a unique group (Lantian *et al.*, 2017).

Conspiratorial thinking, or “conspiracy ideation,” thrives in times of great uncertainty, social unrest or ambiguity; conspiracy theories exploit gaps in knowledge, providing closure or somewhere/someone to blame (Marchlewska *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, humans are biologically wired for conspiratorial thinking, and some scholars have shown that marginalized communities with a warranted distrust of authorities may be particularly prone to conspiracy ideation (Fredericks *et al.*, 2022; Bilewicz, 2022; Cortina and Rottinghaus, 2022; Stein *et al.*, 2021). There is a human tendency to see a connection between disparate, random occurrences and to attribute these to hidden, often grand, motives and causes (Wagner-Egger *et al.*, 2018; Leman and Cinderella, 2013). Conspiracy adherents often assign moral (or amoral) proclivities to strangers or events (Douglas and Sutton, 2011) and demonstrate a suspicious mindset (i.e. those who fall prey to one conspiracy theory tend to believe in others) (Brotherton, 2015; Goertzel, 1994). Additionally, those who fall prey to conspiracies are often motivated by reasoning and biases that lead them to search for information that confirms their preconceptions, beliefs and values; thus, conspiracies may seem more trustworthy because they confirm a particular worldview (Brotherton and French, 2015). Adding to this conundrum, adherents tend to self-insulate against information that contradicts their beliefs (Sullivan *et al.*, 2010).

### *Information disorder*

In this era of “do your own research”, the threat of bad information is everywhere, especially online (Birchall and Knight, 2022). Indeed, the sheer amount of information available today has led some scholars to declare the current era an “information dark age” (Hannah, 2021), while others have described it as an “infodemic” (Cinelli *et al.*, 2020). Describing the “information dark age”, Hannah states, “Whereas early Internet advocates predicted a utopian age of information access and literacy, the twenty-first century has [led to] the growth and spread of bizarre, vast, complex conspiracies” (Hannah, 2021, Abstract). The term “infodemic” blends the words “Information” and “epidemic” and was coined in 2003 by Washington Post journalist David Rothkopf to describe the spread of flawed information during the SARS public health outbreak (Merriam-Webster, 2022).

At the roots of these portrayals of the modern information society is the notion of information disorder, a term coined by Wardle and Derakhshan in their 2017 Council of Europe Report (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017, pp. 5–6). Information disorder comprises misinformation, disinformation, and mal-information, terms widely discussed in the library literature (Cooke, 2021a, 2021b; Head, 2021; Fister, 2017). Information disorder is worsened by biased algorithms designed to keep users engaged (Houli *et al.*, 2021; O’Neil, 2016; Noble, 2018), which may lead to echo chambers and rabbit holes (Ahmed, 2022; Pierre, 2020). Internet users, sheltered by a browser or app that feeds them targeted and ranked search results and advertising, may not think to turn off tracking or switch to a different one (Zuboff, 2019; Wachter-Boettcher, 2017). In addition, familiar social media and websites provide epistemic closure, where the feeds are recognizable, the tools to share and like content feel comfortable and usable, and nothing is unknown or ambiguous.

This type of information landscape, where bad information is challenging to distinguish from good information, and systems are designed to enrage and engage users, has been described as a catalyst for the kind of information behavior where future and possible threats are always imminent. As Massumi describes it, “If the threat does not materialize, it still always would have if it could have. If [it] does, then it . . . shows that the future potential for what happened had really been there in the past” (2010, p. 57). Threat reaching forward and backward in time and space works to proliferate conspiracy theories like QAnon (Lim, 2022; Leal, 2020; LaFrance, 2020), aiding in its mainstreaming (Uscinski, 2022; Bloom and Moskalenko, 2022; Garry *et al.*, 2021; Beene and Greer, 2021).

### **Literature review**

Information professionals have been investigating misinformation and disinformation since at least the 1990s; however, the scholarship on information disorder and conspiracy theories within the library literature is still relatively new. As early as 1995, librarians were contemplating the shift to an information society (Martin, 1995) introduced in part by burgeoning

online information systems and formats. Alongside opportunities for greater information access, library workers were predicting that “the concept of truth [would] do some shifting” (Barnes, 1995, Abstract). By the early 2000s, librarians sought to dismantle online disinformation (Harris, 2003). The CRAAP test was created shortly thereafter as one library’s solution to evaluate a plethora of online information sources (Meriam Library, 2010). The CRAAP test became a widely popular tool for many libraries (i.e. academic, public, K-12) to teach students and patrons to look for particular indicators when encountering information online. However useful as a mnemonic, the tool began to outgrow its usefulness as social media exploded throughout the 2000s and online information became more multimodal (Meola, 2004). Indeed, its simplified heuristic flattened complex information formats that defied easy categorization and evaluation (Russo *et al.*, 2019).

With the U.S. election in 2016 and the mainstreaming of concepts like “alternative facts”, “fake news”, and “post-truth”, there began a simultaneous uptick in publications within the library literature. Librarians began offering tips and techniques for countering “fake news” in a “post-truth” world (LaPierre, 2019; Sullivan, 2019; Agosto, 2018; Batchelor, 2017; Anderson, 2017). Around the same time, librarians became concerned with the adverse effects of algorithms in everyday search spaces such as Google (Noble, 2018). Instruction librarians began to ponder the gaps in existing professional frameworks and guidelines, finding that teaching in a “post-truth world” presented entirely different challenges (Fister, 2017). It was not until 2020, however, that the prestigious Project Information Literacy released a study and report entitled *Information literacy in the age of algorithms: Student experiences with news and information* (Head *et al.*, 2020). One year later, Project Information Literacy released another report entitled *Reading in the Age of Distrust* (Head *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, in 2021, Nicole Cooke began speaking to her fellow academic librarians about the intersectional effects of misinformation, mal-information, and disinformation, their outsized impacts on communities of color, and how librarians might begin to counteract this type of information disorder (Cooke, 2021a,b).

Yet, others have argued that information disorder is far too big a problem for library workers to fight on their own (Revez and Corujo, 2022; Aspen Institute, 2021; Sullivan, 2018). Sullivan was one of the first library scholars to call for seeking input from fields external to the library and information science profession (Sullivan, 2018, 2019). In their meta-analysis of publications related to libraries’ efforts to fight “fake news” from October 2020 to September 2021, Revez and Corujo (2022) found that “libraries’ efforts to counteract fake news are only beginning” (p. 35), as the information ecosystem tests the boundaries and traditional practices of information literacy. Indeed, the authors concluded that “the role of libraries in a post-truth society is still an open debate, yet there is almost a consensus that libraries should engage in partnerships and be part of a multidisciplinary approach” (Revez and Corujo, 2022, p. 50). In their final report, the Aspen Institute calls for several actions from the federal government, the media, technology companies and corporations, public officials, and civic society in order to “activate or re-establish norms and expectations—be it ethical professional behavior, online community standards, or the responsibility to present facts in context” (Aspen Institute, 2021, p. 57).

Much of what has been written relevant to libraries and conspiracy theorists hints at a growing frustration with the inadequacies of traditional information literacy to counter what Fister described as a growing epistemological divide:

We are experiencing a moment that exposes a schism between two groups: those who have faith there is a way to arrive at truth using practices based on epistemology that originated in the Enlightenment, and those who believe events and experiences are portents to be interpreted in ways that align with their personal values. (Fister, 2021, “The Search for Truth”, para. 2)

Fister’s concerns are echoed in other literature. The intersection of prophecy and conspiracism is not new (Weiskott, 2016) and is one example of a practice that cannot be averted through traditional information literacy education. For example, Hartman-Caverly (2019) analyzed the information behaviors of QAnon adherents and found that an authoritative approach to information evaluation could not work because theirs was not a problem of broken epistemology but rather of flawed hermeneutics. Hartman-Caverly also called out libraries for being part of the problem, for adhering to ethics and modes of understanding information that rely on outdated heuristics and subverts critical introspection (Hartman-Caverly, 2019).

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic and the concomitant rise in conspiracy theories related to public health measures led to a similar rise in publications about conspiracy behaviors (Bodner *et al.*, 2021; Lor *et al.*, 2021). Unsurprisingly, social media drove significant amounts of false information about the coronavirus, with websites and other media accounting for the rest (Lee *et al.*, 2022; Lim, 2022; Baker and Maddox, 2022; Houli *et al.*, 2021; Cinelli *et al.*, 2020). Indeed, Donald Trump often merited his own category (Naeem *et al.*, 2021; Wang *et al.*, 2022). Several authors utilized Twitter data to analyze patterns of misinformation spread (Alsaid and Madali, 2022; Romer and Jamieson, 2021; Shah *et al.*, 2022). An *et al.* (2021) found evidence that higher levels of health literacy were associated with reduced beliefs in conspiracy theories but noted that lower educational attainment and minority status were less likely to have high health literacy scores, both significant findings for targeted educational and policy interventions that have been built upon in further studies (Silva and Santos, 2021; Tran *et al.*, 2022; Kim *et al.*, 2023). The literature continues to demonstrate that, among other social ills, the

pandemic highlighted the real-life consequences of conspiracy ideation.

## Methods

Researchers used Qualtrics for an exploratory online survey surrounding the question, “Are librarians encountering patrons with conspiracy ideation?” comprised of primarily open-ended questions (Appendix 1).

The following section describes the participants and the procedures for data collection and analysis.

### *Participants and data collection*

A link to the survey with a brief explanation and consent was posted on national and special library association listservs (Table 1), as well as 43 states and Washington, D.C., library association listservs [1]. The intent in choosing national, special, and state library association listservs was to cast as wide a net as possible, reaching academic, public, and special libraries, as well as special interest library groups.

A self-selected sampling method was used; participants chose to opt-in based on experiences they deemed to be interactions with conspiracy theorists. Participants could opt out of any query or quit the survey anytime. The authors intended to leave the survey open for a month, but after two weeks, it experienced heavy spamming and was closed early. The survey received 334 valid responses over two weeks from library workers across the U.S.

Association of College and Research Libraries  
Association of College and Research Libraries Instruction Section Association of College and Research Libraries University Libraries  
Association of College and Research Libraries Community and Junior College Libraries Association of College and Research Libraries Science and Technology Section Association of College and Research Libraries Anthropology and Sociology Section Association of College and Research Libraries College Libraries Section  
Association of College and Research Libraries Distance and Online Learning Discussion Group Association of College and Research Libraries Health Sciences Group  
Association of College and Research Libraries Librarians from Very Small Academic Institutions Discussion Group  
Association of College and Research Libraries Librarians in For-Profit Educational Institutions Discussion Group  
Association of College and Research Libraries Politics, Policy, and International Relations Section Association of College and Research Libraries Religion and Theology Section  
American Library Association  
Ethnic Caucuses of the American Library Association  
American Indian Library Association, Chinese American Librarians Association, Asian Pacific American Library Association, Black Caucus of ALA, REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latino and the Spanish Speaking  
American Library Association, Reference and User Services Lifelong Information Literacy Listserv  
Committee on Archives, Libraries, Museums Association for Small and Rural Libraries Mountain Plains Library Association American Association of Law Libraries Medical Library Association  
Association of Jewish Libraries

**Source(s): Table by authors**

**Table 1. National, special interest and special library association listserv distribution**

76% of respondents were working in public libraries; 18.5% were working in academic libraries; 3% were working in K-12 libraries, state, law, medical, and government libraries. Participants also varied in the units within which they worked in their library (Table 2). Participants were able to choose all units that applied to their roles.

Respondents included library workers from Washington D.C. and every state to which the email was distributed. Figure 2 displays the number of responses from each state. The higher responses from some states, such as Michigan, reflect the length of time the survey was available (some listservs posted immediately, others had a delay) and not necessarily a higher number of conspiracy theorists interacting with library workers during that time.

### *Data analysis*

The authors anonymized the data collected. Qualtrics de-identifies I.P. addresses, and the researchers did not collect demographic data beyond professional information (Table 2) or geographic location (Figure 2). The authors analyzed responses in aggregate by question, allowing them to identify themes without tracking individual replies across answers. There were seven open-ended qualitative questions, which the authors analyzed through iterative coding, separately

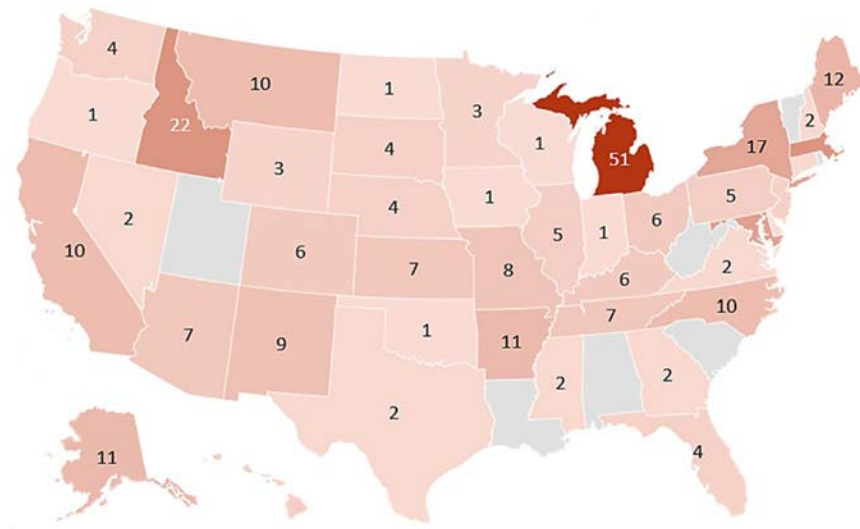
coding each question, then meeting to discuss coding decisions.

**Table 2: Library Units of Participants (respondents could select more than one)**

Library Unit	Number of Participants who Selected this Unit
Access/Circulation Services	99
Archives	26
Instruction	77
Information Technology	27
Programming/Exhibits Planning	87
Public Services	213
Not Listed	69

Source(s): Table by authors

**Figure 1. Map illustrating the geographical distribution of survey responses**



Source(s): Figures by author

Integrating inductive and deductive coding allowed researchers the flexibility to develop a codebook based on their research questions, with themes identified prior to analysis, while iteratively integrating unexpected data based on participant responses into the codebook (see Appendix 2; Russell Bernard and Wayne Ryan, 2010).

To ascertain what conspiracy theories, if any, were encountered by library workers, the authors used two taxonomies to deductively analyze participant responses. The first was Barkun’s 2003 organizing typology of American conspiracies, which outlines three types: event, systemic, and super. Event conspiracies are those limited to a discrete event or set of events, with one of the most famous examples being the Kennedy assassination (Barkun, 2003, p. 6). Systemic conspiracies, on the other hand, are those conspiracies with “broad goals usually conceived as securing control over a country, a region, or even the entire world” and “while the goals are sweeping, the conspiratorial machinery is generally simple: a single, evil organization implements a plan to infiltrate and subvert existing institutions” (Barkun, 2003, p. 6). According to Barkun, famous systemic conspiracies surround the alleged machinations of Jews, Free Masons, the Catholic Church, international capitalists, and communism (Barkun, 2003, p. 6). Superconspiracies, then, are “conspiratorial constructs” in which “event and systemic conspiracies are joined in complex ways so that conspiracies come to be nested within one another” (Barkun, 2003, p. 6). These are complex, evolving, and amorphous belief systems in which a “distant but all-powerful evil force” manipulates “lesser conspiratorial actors ... invisible and operating in secrecy” (Barkun, 2003, p. 6). The authors also classified conspiracies according to Wikipedia’s categorization of conspiracy theories (e.g., aviation, deaths/disappearances, etc.) (“List of Conspiracy Theories”, 2023). This classification complemented the broader categories of event conspiracies, systemic conspiracies, and superconspiracies. For example, if a participant discussed interacting with a patron who sought information to prove that an event like 9/11 was a government conspiracy, that conspiracy would be classified under “government, politics, and conflict”, under Wikipedia’s “List of Conspiracy Theories” (2023), as well as an event conspiracy. If, however, that patron went further and believed that 9/11 was linked to a vast worldwide conspiracy linking the

illuminati, the U.S., oil money, banking, several other world governments, etc., then it would be coded as a systemic conspiracy as well.

Additionally, the researchers developed deductive codebooks for affect and motivation based on two taxonomies: Talevich *et al.*'s "Towards a comprehensive taxonomy of human motives" (2017, pp. 15–18, Appendix 2) and Robinson's 2008 taxonomy of positive and negative emotions (pp. 155–159). These were used to code both library workers' and patrons' emotions, motivations, and strategies during interactions. For example, when one participant described an interaction with a patron that "began to explain to [them] ... That the vaccine was some sort of conspiracy" for population control by keeping people sick, several emotions and motivations were coded: fear and anxiety (which are included in both Talevich *et al.*'s 2017 taxonomy of human motivations as well as Robinson's 2008 taxonomy of emotions), suspicion, and health (Talevich *et al.*, 2017, pp. 15–18). Inductive coding fleshed out the analysis for affect and motivation, allowing the researchers to respond to themes that emerged in the data not present in the taxonomies, such as library workers responding in a "neutral way".

Similarly, the authors created codebooks reflecting the libraries' operations, surrounding programming, collection development, and reference interviews. In creating the codebooks, the authors drew upon their expertise as librarians and hewed closely to the questions' phrasing (see Appendixes 1 and 2, survey questions 10, 11, 12). When analyzing the data, the authors accounted for other behaviors and strategies evident in participants' responses, such as those librarians who agreed with the patron's worldview or those workers who challenged or attempted to educate the patron. Also present were those who claimed neutrality in their answer, as well as those who disengaged during the interaction. As with coding all survey questions, the authors accounted for those who did not respond (i.e., "no response") and for those answers which did not fit into any category (i.e. "other"), as well as for memorable interactions (i.e. "good quote").

A hybrid approach to analysis also allowed the researchers to respond to any question that referred to context (e.g., survey question 9) because the COVID-19 pandemic and the January 6th insurrection played such an outsized role in the data. While researchers began with social, political, and cultural contexts, they added the pandemic as a context once the data demonstrated its overwhelming importance. They also added the code "library" for those respondents that answered "in the library" for the context that spurred the interaction but gave no other contextual clues, "legal" for those citing legal contexts, and "policy" to capture the many responses that cited mandates and other policies as the instigation behind the interaction.

Finally, the last question of the survey was only answered by 95 of the 334 participants (asking whether they had any "other information" they would like to share). The data varied widely in the type and variety of answers; thus, the authors only coded memorable quotes for this question based on the intensity of the interaction, the participant's self-reflection, or some other element that the researchers found illuminating. Any quote that either researcher flagged was saved to a separate spreadsheet for final analysis.

## **Limitations**

The welcome and consent message participants received stated that the survey was "about interactions with patrons concerning conspiracy theories" and would "provide information on the needs of librarians and other library staff when interacting with patrons who exhibit conspiracy ideation" (Appendix 1). While the researchers provided a link to their previous article for reference, the likelihood of participants' familiarity with it and/or the chance they would reference it was slim. In hindsight, the researchers should have defined "conspiracy theory" and "conspiracy ideation" at the outset of the survey to avoid confusion about those terms; for example, non-Christian religious practices or pseudoscience such as cryptozoology were occasionally mentioned by participants as conspiracy theories they had encountered.

## **Results**

The survey responses indicate that library workers from many states and types of libraries encountered patrons who demonstrated various levels of conspiracy thinking during 2021. The data skewed heavily to COVID-19 conspiracy theories and QAnon-related ideas, which were the main concerns during the data collection period, illustrating that conspiracy theories shift and change over time due to external influences. Because affective states for both patrons and workers factor so strongly into these interactions, those are explored in detail below.

### ***Conspiracy theories***

Most survey participants (208 of 334) chose to respond to questions that asked them to describe the conspiracies they had encountered, as well as their interactions with patrons who sought information on conspiracy theories. The authors

accounted for systemic conspiracies in the answers to these questions. The type of conspiracy theories encountered are displayed in Table 3.

The prevalence of systemic theories derives from the timing of the survey. The top theme was the COVID-19 pandemic, its origins and spread, the vaccines, and mitigation measures, with over half of the respondents describing something to do with health, diseases, or pandemics. The authors associated pandemic-related conspiracies with systemic conspiracies (e.g. vaccines used as tracking devices) (Barkun, 2003, p. 6). At the time of the survey, in late 2021, the U.S. was enduring the second year of COVID-19, with new vaccine mandates and recommendations, a patchwork of openings and closures of buildings and services depending on locations and COVID protocols, and a confusing amalgamation of remaining masking guidelines. Participants described reactions to these phenomena in their communities, and the questionable information patrons were finding through personalized information ecosystems. The categories that emerged from the data are displayed in Table 4. Following responses surrounding the pandemic, the next most likely participant response described government or political conspiracies, including things like the U.S. presidential election, the January 6th insurrection, particular politicians, 9/11, and ongoing partisan machinations (72 of 208). If they referenced discrete events, they were coded as event conspiracies. If the conspiracy blossomed beyond the event to indicate a national cover-up, they were also coded as a systemic conspiracy.

Notably, 30 participants described conspiracies explicitly linked to QAnon, a superconspiracy that continues to rapidly evolve. For this data analysis, the authors coded QAnon whenever it was explicitly mentioned or elements of it were easily recognized from their research. At times, “superconspiracy” was double-coded with other categories of conspiracies, for example, when respondents remembered patrons voicing belief in conspiracies related to the death or disappearance of certain QAnon-related celebrities or members of the Kennedy family. As noted by one participant, these beliefs have become increasingly affiliated with QAnon: “All of their Qanon [sic] friends know all about it and have proof. Also, J.F.K., Jr is still alive and getting tired of all this and going to do something about it soon”. Another example of conspiracies now absorbed into QAnon were those surrounding some science and technologies, such as those related to Bill Gates, 5G and satellite technologies, and computer hacking/viruses (Bodner *et al.*, 2021).

**Table 3: Conspiracy Type Mentioned by Respondent (derived from Barkun, 2003)**

Conspiracy Type Mentioned by Respondent	Times Coded (Out of 207 Total Responses)
Systemic	117
Superconspiracy	111
All Types	30
Event	26
None	6
Other	13

Source(s): Table by authors

**Table 4: Conspiracy Theory Themes (Categories based on “List of Conspiracies”, 2023)**

Conspiracy Theme	Times Coded (Out of 208 Total Responses)
Health, Diseases & Pandemics	121
Government, Politics & Conflict	72
QAnon	30
Science & Technology	25
Espionage	20
Ethnicity, Race & Religion	16
Aliens & UFOs	16
Deaths & Disappearances	15
Economics & Society	8
Other	8
None	6
Aviation	3
Business & Industry	2
Sports	0

Source(s): Table by authors

When these conspiracies were not recognized as affiliated with or absorbed by QAnon, either by the participant or the researchers, they were coded as discrete categories (e.g. deaths and disappearances, science and technologies) and most often as systemic conspiracies due to their national or global scale. Discrete occurrences were in the minority, with 15 responses describing celebrity disappearances and 25 describing some other scientific conspiracy, such as the faked moon landing, the weather being controlled by satellites, chemtrails, flat earth conspiracies, and so on (Al-Rawi *et al.*, 2022;



Thursby, 2019; Lewandowsky *et al.*, 2013a, b). Additionally, the authors coded espionage conspiracies 20 times, mostly related to patrons assuming that the government was using technology to spy on them.

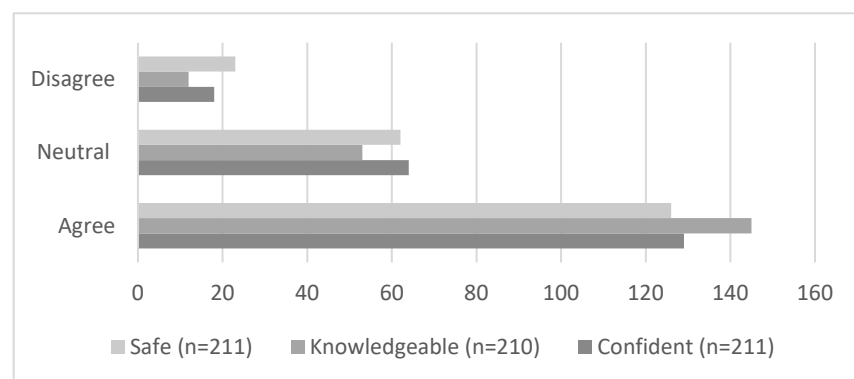
Notably, while only 16 respondents mentioned conspiracies concerning ethnicity, race, or religion, the examples were potent and usually tied to Barkun's discussion of conspiracy theories involving Jews or other marginalized groups (Barkun, 2003). Most common in the data were conspiracies describing Holocaust denial, but there were also several conspiracies describing plots by the Chinese, usually involving the pandemic. There was one mention of the murder of George Floyd, one of the Black Lives Matter movement, one of the NAACP, and one that pertained to "illegal aliens". Several respondents noted disturbing encounters with White Supremacy ideology and affiliated conspiracies. Another participant mentioned that they had "a woman claiming that the California wildfires were started by Native Americans and space lasers". Unfortunately, these racist and bigoted conspiratorial beliefs have been a part of America since its founding (Hirschbein and Afari, 2023; Cooke, 2021b; Uscinski and Parent, 2014; Walker, 2013; Barkun, 2003). While often coded as systemic conspiracies, these also tend to evolve into superconspiracies and harm the targeted communities.

### **Affect and motivation**

Participants reported interactions with conspiracy theorists triggered by social, political, and/or cultural contexts, past, current, or forthcoming institutional collections, programming, exhibits, and/or local, regional, or national events. In response to questions asking about such contexts, the authors were able to gain a fuller picture of what circumstances may have led to the interaction. Respondents described various emotions during these interactions as library workers observing themselves and their patrons. The authors coded for these emotions and any evident motivations underlying the interactions. Because the participants were all self-identified library workers, the data was purely from their perspectives; therefore, the researchers kept this positionality in mind during their analysis.

Participants' responses evidenced mixed results. For instance, when survey participants were asked whether they felt safe, confident, and knowledgeable during the interaction, a majority of respondents indicated feeling safe (60%), confident (69%), and knowledgeable (61%) (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Patron affective states during interactions**



Source(s): Figure by authors

However, the data presented more nuanced results in the researchers' analysis of respondents' answers to the open-ended question describing their interactions with the patrons. Of the 193 participants who chose to answer this question, the majority referenced intense emotions during the interaction, sometimes describing their own, often describing their patrons', and sometimes both. Over two-thirds of participants referenced interactions that surfaced anger or frustration, as well as feelings of anxiety and fear. One mentioned, "The patrons can get angry and lash out (so far, it's been verbal)."

Participants described encounters as "terrifying" or "scary" about as often as they used phrasing like "overwhelming", "exhausting", or "heartbreaking". The toll such encounters take on library workers was evident. For example, one participant reflected they had "totally lost ... compassion for these people". Another respondent opined, "It's exhausting to be in public service right now". Others mentioned feelings of failure, using the phrasing, "I failed". The authors could not discern emotion in many responses and thus coded responses with "unknown".

The pandemic likely contributed to the emotions experienced by both library workers and patrons, as did the ongoing

repercussions of the January 6th insurrection, mentioned in many responses. Panic and alarm accounted for around fourteen percent of the codes describing patrons' affective states and motivations, while habituation (the decline in responsiveness to a stimulus due to repeated exposure) was nearly equal for library workers. For example, "[this] happens often by many patrons. It just seems like it's their default to assign blame." One participant noted, "[conspiracy theories] are very common in our community and are driven more by an emotional experience and sense of identity than any intellectual processes". Emotions far less common were discontentment and grief, though these feelings appeared in a few instances, usually surrounding the death or hospitalization of loved ones. Patrons' motivations and emotions driving their engagement with conspiracy theories were both positive and negative. For example, participants described patrons as motivated by curiosity as well as a commitment to their conspiracy. Curiosity often manifests in the early stages of diving into the proverbial rabbit hole. Conversely, the researchers coded for "commitment" to address interactions in which the patron espoused deeply held beliefs. Conspiracism often provides a community and a sense of belonging that is missing elsewhere, both coded in the data.

Unsurprisingly, health was a primary motivation for the patron to have embraced a conspiracy theory, with patrons discussing health-related subjects such as the pandemic or vaccines during their interactions. Following health, patrons were motivated by a general suspicion, also unsurprising given the nature of the survey (i.e., conspiracy theories). This suspicion, along with panic, anger, and anxiety, were the more negative motivating factors coded in the data. Strong emotions such as anger, frustration, panic, and alarm (see Table 5) presented as potential motivations for patrons escalating during interactions and were coded as "other" by researchers, such as in the following: "I told [the] patron that masks were required ... They proceeded to go off ... Pretty sure I was called a 'sheep' at one point. I tried to disengage as fast as I could so I wouldn't have to hear the crazy". Participants like this one described patrons as "agitated" or "adamant". As with the authors' coding for affect, whenever it was unclear what the motivations were, they coded "unknown", which accounted for 45 of the responses (Table 5).

At times, further reflecting how conspiracy communities provide belonging and a sense of community, it was also clear that patrons were seeking a connection in an often fragmented world. For example, responses surfaced economic pressures and mental illness in patrons seeking libraries as places of safety and refuge. Participants described currently unhoused patrons espousing conspiracy theories. For example, one respondent noted a patron who "believes that there are cameras in the sprinklers of the library", and another described a patron who was "adamant" that an "alien had stolen her jacket ... right around the time the local police cleared out a homeless camp somewhat nearby". Library workers reflected on whether they were just a "captive audience", while another considered "the possibility that the conspiracy theories were a source of comfort for the person".

While, at times, the library served as that communal bond, others referenced online communities or networks, where flawed information was often shared. Respondents described patrons accepting flawed second-hand information or recommendations from friends, family, clergy, social media influencers, podcasters, and alternative experts (Baker and Maddox, 2022; Okdie *et al.*, 2022; Baker, 2022), often leading to conspiratorial thinking. For example, one participant recalled a patron requesting a book recommended by the popular QAnon podcaster "The Praying Medic" (Rothschild, 2019). In another response, a patron was "citing false information ... [referring] to rogue doctors who are anti-vax". In both examples, patrons followed mis- and disinformation from niche online communities. These responses suggest that patrons' well-being became entangled in conspiracy ideation.

Hence, most respondents leveraged their time with patrons to promote critical thinking, even if the encounter was brief (Table 5). For example, one respondent taught basic evaluation skills to a patron when they inquired about a disputed website, highlighting its "appeal to emotions, not facts" and its ulterior motives, explaining how current online information sometimes exploits gaps in knowledge.

**Table 5: Patron Motivations and Affect driving conspiracism**

Positive Motivations & Affect	Times Coded (Out of 193 Total Responses)
Belonging	14
Commitment	50
Curiosity/Interest	72
No response	3
Enthusiasm/Triumph	23
Humility/Modesty	6
Other	8
Recommendation	21
Safety/Health	25
Unknown	45

Negative Motivations & Affect	Times Coded (Out of 193 Total Responses)
Anger/rage	26
Aversion/Disgust	36
Anxiety/Fear	43
Frustration/Discontentment	35
Panic/alarm	28
Pride/Arrogance	59
Sorrow/Grief	3
Suspicion	63

Source(s): Table by authors

A plurality of respondents described directing patrons to resources or services, with many opting to attempt to challenge or educate the patron. Unsurprisingly, library workers reported directing patrons to various resources (e.g. databases, scholarly articles, books, etc.) or relying on their training to perform a reference interview during the interaction. Notably, virtually equal numbers of participants chose an empathic approach as those who chose a service orientation were motivated to be helpful or respond neutrally. In some cases, the participants discussed something else, like agreeing with the patron, using humor to diffuse a tense situation, actively dismissing a patron, or not answering the question. Finally, where the authors could not discern a strategy, they coded “unknown”, a total of 68 responses.

### Discussion: Library workers’ Strategies for Countering Conspiracies

The results from this survey largely support the authors’ previous research (Beene and Greer, 2021). In the few minutes library workers spent with patrons at a service desk or elsewhere, many quickly assessed where the patron was situated on the spectrum of conspiracy ideation, sometimes because they had already established a relationship with the patron (Table 5). These techniques are firmly established in the literature as strategies to counteract conspiracy ideation (Beene and Greer, 2021; Pierre, 2020; Thaler and Sunstein, 2009).

Table 6: Library worker responses and strategies

Responses and Strategies	Times Coded (Out of 193 Total Responses)
Anger/rage	6
Anxiety/Fear	21
Aversion/Disgust	25
Active Dismissal	1
Affirm/Agree with patron	5
Challenge/Educate patron	48
Conduct reference interview	13
Convey neutrality	18
Disengage to avoid conflict	36
Enforce policy	11
Express empathy	17
Frustration/Discontentment	52
Habituation	27
Helpfulness	16
No response	3
Other	21
Provide resources & services	53
Technological education or assistance	16
Unknown	68
Use humor to defuse situation	4

Source(s): Table by authors

During analysis, the authors accounted for this spectrum of conspiracy ideation described by participants (Table 5). At

the one end, the researchers coded for a “commitment to a cause”, described by the participants through a patron’s conspiracy evangelism. They also coded for a suspicious mindset (Brotherton, 2015), also noted by participants. Together, these traits account for one end of the conspiracy ideation spectrum, where a patron may be considered a “true believer”. At the other end of the spectrum, however, was exploration and curiosity, where patrons were motivated to seek information for coursework or some other project (Table 5). While a suspicious mindset was slightly more prevalent in the data, the good news is that curious patrons were relatively equal to those committed to their conspiracy theory. For library workers looking for a silver lining, this means they might expect a relatively equal chance of encountering a curious patron as one with conspiracy ideation. One participant explained the spectrum in their response: “There were 2 interactions with the same question about if the United States was a corporation. [In] The first ... The patron wanted information and was satisfied when I explained that it was referring to the incorporation of Washington DC and not the U.S. as a corporation. The 2nd person was a bit more into the [conspiracy] theory, but I shared the same info”. In this case, fact-checking worked with a curious patron but not with another who was more invested in the conspiracy theory.

When library workers used fact-checking, it only worked when the patron was receptive to it, either because a patron was more curious than ideological or because some relationship had been established (Thaler and Sunstein, 2009). While some participants reported having longstanding relationships with patrons, others described small, iterative interactions over time that seemed to make a difference. For example, one respondent commented, “He seemed to take my suggestions with seriousness, partly, I think, because we already knew each other, and he’s asked me for help finding information many times before”. Another participant noted that “a lot of conspiracy theories thrive in [this] small rural community”, so “everyone knows everyone”; thus, most of their responses “consist of a gently delivered educated counter for [patrons] to consider”.

After building trust with a patron, a library worker might find it easier to insert logic, fact-checking, verification techniques, or critical information literacy skills into their interactions with the patron. Debunking might also be used as a technique. The free *Debunking Handbook* (Lewandowsky *et al.*, 2020) provides lessons from cognitive science to assist the effectiveness of fact-checking. The library worker begins and ends with a memorable fact (e.g., the earth is round), a discussion and deconstruction of a conspiracy in between (e.g., the earth is flat), especially why it is problematic (e.g., fake experts, logical fallacies, cherry-picking, etc.) (Lewandowsky *et al.*, 2020). Although the “debunking formula” was developed in response to science and climate change denial, it can also be adapted for other contexts. Lewandowsky and his co-researcher, van der Linden, have since proposed pre-bunking, or information inoculation, as a useful method (Lewandowsky and van der Linden, 2021) as supported by the literature on inoculation theory (Maertens *et al.*, 2021; Barbati *et al.*, 2021; Banas and Rains, 2010; Table 6).

During these interactions, library workers used methods honed through their training as library workers, such as Socratic questioning (Robinson, 2017) and active and empathetic listening (Table 6). They also employed innovative techniques, displaying humor and active bystander techniques, such as distraction, refocusing, and interrupting escalating circumstances (Table 5). For instance, one respondent described testing a magnet on their nametag to fact-check a patron’s claim that COVID vaccines embed magnets. Library workers described patrons who needed assistance with understanding various systems of information production and dissemination, as in the example of the patron who believed a “picture of Katy Perry with cat eyes” to be evidence of her being Illuminati (Illuminati, 2023). This lack of information literacy is also evident in patrons’ expressions of pandemic anxiety: “Covid is a computer virus sent from China through the Internet”. Unsurprisingly, lacking information and affiliated literacies (e.g., visual, media, digital, etc.) can lead to greater gullibility when faced with bad information (Mercier, 2021).

When fact-checking does not work, there are several potential reasons. One is the “backfire effect”, which describes a person becoming even more entrenched in their original position when confronted with facts, especially when emotionally or ideologically invested (Swire-Thompson *et al.*, 2022; Brotherton, 2015, p. 233). Another is known as the “continued influence effect”, which describes a continued reliance on inaccurate information and reasoning, even after a credible correction has been offered (Lewandowski *et al.*, 2020, p. 5; Lewandowsky *et al.*, 2012). Thus, strict fact-checking may not be strong enough.

While many library workers leveraged the moments they had with patrons, others disengaged for various reasons; still others leaned on notions of neutrality (Table 6). As one participant opined, “Librarians are supposed to be free of bias and personal beliefs”. Neutrality was a tenet adopted by several participants, despite its problematic philosophical and ethical stance. One participant chose not to correct a high schooler who cited disinformation, while another stated it was “not [their] business to straighten them out”. Yet another participant indicated that they do not correct bad information because “it’s not a librarian’s place to”. By choosing not to engage with or challenge a patron’s conspiracies, library workers disengaged from the situation, leaving patrons to spread bad information. In other instances, participants

mentioned buying problematic books upon request because “these are the books that circulate”, while several tried to appease patrons by representing “both sides”.

Alongside this reluctance to correct problematic behavior were those respondents who described patron requests for books or events by Holocaust deniers and White Nationalists, as well as those espousing conspiracies related to these ideologies (Uscinski and Parent, 2014). The authors recognize the enormous implications of these ideologies and how they are currently affecting libraries, including record-breaking book bans and infringements on human rights (ALA News, 2022). They are investigating these strands in an upcoming book with Rowman and Littlefield.

## Conclusion

People who delve into conspiracy theories often do so because they feel threatened, angry or fearful (Brotherton, 2015). When patrons exhibit these traits, library workers may become equally reactive. Over time, the cumulative effect on library workers is exhaustion, burnout, anxiety and frustration (see Table 5). Both are concerning: angry patrons in an angry society can pose safety concerns; exhausted and frustrated library workers can lead to professional workers fleeing libraries at a time when they are needed the most. These emerging themes support the literature on information disorder and how quickly mis-, dis- and mal-information proliferate. At the time of this survey, the COVID-19 pandemic was in its second year, and the changing science and related policies and regulations were causing widespread confusion, fear and frustration, including those surrounding the vaccine, its effects, the origin of the pandemic and various public figures’ roles in perpetuating it. These discussions are ongoing; some have entered mainstream discourses (e.g. the pandemic’s origins). Still, other facets of the pandemic conspiracies have been absorbed into the larger QAnon worldview (e.g. Bill Gates). In 2020, Americans’ awareness of QAnon doubled, from 23% to 47% (Pew Research Center, 2020). By 2022, roughly 25% believed in one of the core tenets of QAnon: the coming “Storm” that would restore leaders such as former President Trump to power; 19% believed “that violence may be necessary to save the country”; 17% believed that “the government, media, and financial worlds are controlled by Satan-worshipping pedophiles” (PRRI, 2022, para. 205). Perhaps these beliefs are a snapshot in time, and QAnon will eventually fade; however, new superconspiracies will undoubtedly take its place as conspiracies have been a feature of American society since its founding (Uscinski and Parent, 2014; Walker, 2013). Libraries will need to be prepared.

The results from this study demonstrate a greater need to understand how the conspiracy theory ecosystem functions within the larger information landscape and how library workers are addressing it, especially with the advent of artificial intelligence and newer technologies entering the mainstream. The data here highlight techniques and strategies that library workers can expand upon: namely, building upon relationships with patrons by establishing trust over time, quickly assessing where a patron is on the spectrum of conspiracy ideation before making the next move and providing a range of resources to guide the patron in the best decision. One of the challenges identified during this research is the discourse of neutrality within librarianship, despite book bans, problematic behavior and hate speech. Another challenge is supporting library workers as they deal with conspiracy ideation amid austerity measures and political division. While the future is unknown, the authors optimistically believe that libraries will continue to be hubs of their communities and therefore continue to play an active role in countering conspiracy ideation. Thus, the authors hope that the strategies and experiences described here will inspire library workers to continue to counter information disorder.

## Note

1. The survey was distributed to all state library association listservs and Washington D.C. with the exception of Alabama, Louisiana, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah, Vermont and West Virginia.

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## Appendix A

### Survey

#### *Librarian interactions with patrons seeking information on conspiracies or related phenomena*

Thank you for your interest in our survey!

You are invited to participate in a research survey about interactions with patrons concerning conspiracy theories and related phenomena. Should you choose to participate, we expect the survey to take 15-20 minutes to complete. Unless you choose to self-identify, your response will be completely anonymous. You may request a summary of the survey results after participating. Your involvement in the survey is voluntary, and you may exit at any time. The findings from this project will provide information on the needs of librarians and other library staff when interacting with patrons who exhibit conspiracy ideation. This research has been approved by Oakland University's Office of IRB (IRB-FY2021-410). If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, please feel free to contact CoPI's Katie Greer (greer@oakland.edu) and Stephanie Beene (sbeene@unm.edu).

1. Your library is:

- Academic
- Public
- Tribal
- Museum
- School
- Not listed (please describe):

2. Where is your library located? (Please give city and state)

3. What unit do you work in? (select all that apply)

- Public services
- Access/Circulation Services
- IT
- Programming/Exhibits Planning
- Archives
- Instruction
- Not listed (please describe)

4. How long have you been an information professional?

- 0-2 years
- 3-4 years
- 5-7 years
- 8-10 years

- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21+ years
- Not listed (please describe)

5. What conspiracy theory or related phenomenon did the patron reference (e.g., UFOs, murder of JFK, QAnon, vaccines, moon landing, 9/11)?

6. In what context did this interaction occur (select all that apply)

- Instruction – in person
- Instruction—online
- Reference – in person
- Reference – online
- Reference – over the phone
- Collection Development
- Archives
- Exhibits or other programming
- Not listed (please describe)

7. Was this interaction related to a **current** institutional collection, exhibit, or programming? If yes, please describe. If no, please skip to the next question.

8. Was this interaction about a **potential** institutional collection, exhibit, or programming (e.g., donated collection, traveling exhibition)? If yes, please describe. If no, please skip to the next question.

9. What was the length of your interaction with the patron?

- 2-5 mins
- 6-10 mins
- 11-15 mins
- 16-30 mins
- 31-60 mins
- Not listed (please describe)

10. During your interaction with the patron or student, did you feel:

	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Safe	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Knowledgeable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Confident	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Briefly summarize the interaction with the patron or student and your response.

12. What resources, if any, did you refer the patron or student to (e.g., scholarly resources, open web resources, colleagues)?

13. When did this interaction occur? Were there any social, cultural, or political events that would add context to why the patron or student might have been interested in this particular conspiracy or related phenomenon?

14. Is there any other information regarding this interaction that you'd like to share?

## APPENDIX B

### Codebook for Open-Ended Questions

#### What conspiracy theory or related phenomenon did the patron reference?

- Use [Michael Barkun](#)'s three classifications of conspiracy theory:
  - *Event conspiracy theories*: This refers to limited and well-defined events (e.g., the Kennedy assassination or 9/11)
  - *Systemic conspiracy theories*: A conspiracy theory believed to have broad goals, usually conceived as securing control of a country, a region, or even the entire world. The goals are sweeping, while the conspiratorial machinery is generally simple: a single, evil organization implements a plan to infiltrate and subvert existing institutions. Common conspiracies involve the Jews, Illuminati, Freemasons, Catholics, etc.
  - *Superconspiracy theories*: Conspiracy theories that link multiple alleged conspiracies together hierarchically with an all-powerful evil force. These conspiracies evolve to stay relevant to their followers. Examples are the Satanic Panics and Qanon, and he cites the work of [David Icke](#) and [Milton William Cooper](#).
  - *All*: Use for when the participant describes multiple conspiracies encountered and the conspiracies bracket all types
  - *None*: Use for when the participant indicates that no conspiracies were encountered
- Also classify based on this list of conspiracy theories from Wikipedia - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_conspiracy\\_theories](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_conspiracy_theories)
  - Aviation (including plane crashes)
  - Aliens & UFOS (including the government cover-up of such sightings)
  - Business & Industry (including banking)
  - Deaths & Disappearances (including of celebrities and 411)
  - Economics & Society (including Big Pharma)
  - Espionage (including surveillance)
  - Ethnicity, Race, & Religion
  - Government, Politics & Conflict (including 9/11)
  - Health, Diseases, & Pandemics (including COVID-19, but also alternative health and anti-vax movements)
  - QAnon
  - Science & Technology (including 5g, satellites, etc.)
  - Sports
  - Other (does not fit into any of these categories, but is something else listed)
  - None

#### When did this interaction occur? Were there any social, cultural, or political events that would add context to why the patron might have been interested in this particular conspiracy or related phenomenon?

- Admin good quote – flag anything that we might want to remember later for a paper or presentation as a particularly memorable or striking instance, encounter, or typical or atypical for this study

- Social: (adjective) Of or relating to human society and its modes of organization; Of or relating to rank and status in society; Of, relating to, or occupied with matters affecting human welfare; Interacting with other people and living in communities.
- Political: (adjective) Of, relating to, or dealing with the structure or affairs of government, politics, or the state; Relating to, involving, or characteristic of political parties or politicians; Influenced by, based on, or stemming from partisan interests or political ideology.
- Temporal – temporary; having limited existence; of short duration; enduring for a time: opposed to *eternal*.
- COVID-19 pandemic – of or relating specifically to the COVID-19 Pandemic
- Legal: Pertaining or relating to law; connected with the law
- Policy (for mandates- vaccine or mask)
- Library (for no context, e.g., “It happened in the library”)
- Other (does not fit into any of these categories, but is something else listed)
- No response (for No or N/A)

**Was this interaction related to a current institutional collection, exhibit, or programming? If yes, please describe. If no, please skip to the next question.**

- Admin good quote
- Display/exhibit: static displays or exhibits
- Event: programming, events, etc.
- Collections (e.g., book, archival, materials, etc.)
- COVID-19 pandemic– of or relating specifically to the COVID-19 Pandemic
- Other
- Social:( adjective) Of or relating to human society and its modes of organization; Of or relating to rank and status in society; Of, relating to, or occupied with matters affecting human welfare; Interacting with other people and living in communities.
- Political: (adjective) Of, relating to, or dealing with the structure or affairs of government, politics, or the state; Relating to, involving, or characteristic of political parties or politicians; Influenced by, based on, or stemming from partisan interests or political ideology.
- Temporal – temporary; having limited existence; of short duration; enduring for a time: opposed to *eternal*.
- Legal: Pertaining or relating to law; connected with the law
- Policy (for mandates- vaccine or mask)
- Library (for no context, e.g., “It happened in the library”)
- Other (does not fit into any of these categories, but is something else listed)
- No (but no other context or explanation was given)
- Yes (but no explanation given)
- No response (for No or N/A)

**Was this interaction about a potential institutional collection, exhibit, or programming? If yes, please describe. If no, please skip to the next question.**

- Admin good quote
- Display/exhibit: static displays or exhibits
- Event: programming, events, etc.
- Collections (e.g., book, archival, materials, etc.)
- COVID-19 pandemic– of or relating specifically to the COVID-19 Pandemic
- Other (does not fit into any of these categories, but is something else listed)

- No (but no other context or explanation was given)
- Yes (but no explanation given)
- No response (for No or N/A)

**What resources, if any, did you refer the patron to?**

- Provide resources (deductive codebook developed):
  - Acquisitions/Purchase (either they acquired because of the patron asking or it was a new acquisition)
  - Archives/Special Collections (mentions primary research or documents, archives, special collections)
  - Books
  - Colleagues (when they refer to their colleagues or another dept or library)
  - Databases (subscription only)
  - Directory websites (directories of local resources - things you would find in an old-fashioned phone book)
  - Government Resources (including all the mentions of CDC, WHO, NIH, etc., and state and local gov websites)
  - News & Media Resources
  - Open web (any open web resources, or Google, if they say open web databases, code under open web)
  - Personal (referral to a pastor, minister, or family physician)
  - Scholarly resources (participant should use the word scholarly)
  - Other (does not fit into any of these categories, but is something else listed)
  - No response (did not provide any resources)

**Briefly summarize the interaction with the patron and your response.**

Codes for library workers’ and patrons’ emotions based on Robinson’s 2008 article, “Brain function, emotional experience, and personality,” in the *Netherlands Journal of Psychology* 64, 152–167, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03076418> in which he reviews, identifies, and contrasts fundamental emotions according to three critical criteria for mental experiences that:

- have a strongly motivating subjective quality like pleasure or pain;
- are a response to some event or object that is either real or imagined;
- motivate particular kinds of behavior.

Kind of emotion	Positive emotions	Negative emotions
Related to object properties	<i>Interest, curiosity, enthusiasm</i>	<i>Indifference, habituation, boredom</i>
	<i>Attraction, desire, admiration</i>	<i>Aversion, disgust, revulsion</i>
	<i>Surprise, amusement</i>	<i>Alarm, panic</i>

Future appraisal	<i>Hope, excitement</i>	<i>Fear, anxiety, dread</i>
Event-related	<i>Gratitude, thankfulness</i>	<i>Anger, rage</i>
	<i>Joy, elation, triumph, jubilation</i>	<i>Sorrow, grief</i>
	<i>Patience</i>	<i>Frustration, restlessness</i>
	<i>Contentment</i>	<i>Discontentment, disappointment</i>
Self-appraisal	<i>Humility, modesty</i>	<i>Pride, arrogance</i>
Social	<i>Charity</i>	<i>Avarice, greed, miserliness, envy, jealousy</i>
	<i>Sympathy</i>	<i>Cruelty</i>
<a href="#">Cathected</a>	<i>Love</i>	<i>Hate</i>

Code for motivations leading to and during the interaction for BOTH library workers and patrons based upon Jennifer R. Talevich, Stephen J. Read, David A. Walsh, Ravi Iyer, and Gurveen Chopra’s 2017 article, “Toward a Comprehensive Taxonomy for Human Motives” (from 2017 article, “Toward a comprehensive taxonomy of human motives” in the *Public Library of Science (PLOS) One* doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0172279.t002, specifically Table 2:

<b>Motive</b>	<b>Motive—Full description</b>	<b>V-level (44 clusters)</b>
<b>Peace</b>	<b>A world at peace.</b>	<b>Social Values V1</b>
<b>Equality</b>	<b>Equality.</b>	
<b>Justice</b>	<b>Justice and Fairness</b>	



<b>CommitCause</b>	<b>Being Committed to a Cause</b>	
<b>Ethical</b>	<b>Being an ethical person.</b>	<b>Personal Morals V2</b>
<b>Honest</b>	<b>Being honest.</b>	
<b>Humble</b>	<b>Being humble.</b>	
<b>FrmVals</b>	<b>Having firm values.</b>	
<b>Loyal</b>	<b>Being loyal.</b>	
<b>Charitable</b>	<b>Being charitable, helping the needy.</b>	<b>Social Giving V3</b>
<b>HelpOthrs</b>	<b>Helping others.</b>	
<b>Selfless</b>	<b>To be selfless, to put others first.</b>	
<b>Empathy</b>	<b>To have empathy for what others are feeling.</b>	<b>Interpersonal Care V4</b>
<b>ListenOthrs</b>	<b>To listen to others.</b>	
<b>PlsOthrs</b>	<b>To make others happy or to please others.</b>	
<b>Respected</b>	<b>Being respected by others.</b>	<b>Respected V5</b>
<b>OthrsTrustU</b>	<b>Having other people trust you.</b>	
<b>InspirOthrs</b>	<b>Inspiring others.</b>	<b>Inspiring V6</b>

<b>TchOthrs</b>	<b>Teaching others.</b>	
<b>SetGoodEx</b>	<b>Setting good examples for others.</b>	
<b>Salvation</b>	<b>Achieving salvation.</b>	<b>Religion &amp; Spirituality V7</b>
<b>ReligFaith</b>	<b>Maintaining religious faith.</b>	
<b>PlsGod</b>	<b>Pleasing God.</b>	
<b>PracReligTrad</b>	<b>Practicing religious traditions.</b>	
<b>GrwingSpirit</b>	<b>Growing spiritually.</b>	
<b>AvImpure</b>	<b>Avoiding impure acts.</b>	
<b>Harmony</b>	<b>Achieving harmony and oneness (with self and the universe).</b>	<b>Wisdom &amp; Serenity V8</b>
<b>HigherMeaning</b>	<b>Finding higher meaning in life.</b>	
<b>Wisdom</b>	<b>Having wisdom, a mature understanding of life.</b>	
<b>PersGrwth</b>	<b>Achieving personal growth.</b>	<b>Self-knowledge V9</b>
<b>KnowSelf</b>	<b>Knowing myself.</b>	
<b>Motive</b>	<b>Motive—Full description</b>	<b>V-level (44 clusters)</b>
<b>TrueToSelf</b>	<b>To be true to myself, (not follow the crowd).</b>	
<b>InTuneEmot</b>	<b>To get in tune with my emotions.</b>	

<b>AcceptSelf</b>	<b>To accept myself, other people, or things as they are.</b>	
<b>Happy</b>	<b>Being happy and content.</b>	<b>Happiness V10</b>
<b>FeelSatisfact</b>	<b>Feeling satisfied with one's life.</b>	
<b>FeelGoodSelf</b>	<b>Feeling good about myself.</b>	
<b>FineDesign</b>	<b>Appreciating fine design.</b>	<b>Appreciating Beauty V11</b>
<b>LearnArts</b>	<b>Learning and appreciating the arts.</b>	
<b>Creative</b>	<b>Being creative (e.g., artistically, scientifically, intellectually).</b>	
<b>NatBeauty</b>	<b>Experiencing natural beauty.</b>	
<b>TakeRisks</b>	<b>Being able to take risks.</b>	<b>Exploration V12</b>
<b>Curious</b>	<b>Being curious.</b>	
<b>Unique</b>	<b>Being unique or different.</b>	
<b>FlxbleVue</b>	<b>Having flexibility of viewpoint.</b>	
<b>PassionAbSmthing</b>	<b>Being really passionate about something.</b>	<b>Pursue Ideals &amp; Passions V13</b>
<b>PursueIdeals</b>	<b>Pursuing my ideals.</b>	
<b>Playful</b>	<b>Being playful, carefree, lighthearted, enjoying life.</b>	<b>Enjoy Life V14</b>
<b>Spontaneous</b>	<b>Being spontaneous.</b>	
<b>Adventurous</b>	<b>Exploring, being adventurous.</b>	

<b>ExcitngLife</b>	<b>Having an exciting, stimulating life.</b>	
<b>Live4Today</b>	<b>To live for today.</b>	
<b>Recreation</b>	<b>Devoting time to amusements, recreation, entertainment, hobbies.</b>	
<b>AvAnx</b>	<b>Avoiding anxiety.</b>	<b>Avoid Stress &amp; Anxiety V15</b>
<b>AvStress</b>	<b>Avoiding stress.</b>	
<b>AvGuilt</b>	<b>Avoiding feelings of guilt.</b>	<b>Avoid Harm V16</b>
<b>AvRegrets</b>	<b>Avoiding regrets.</b>	
<b>AvPhysHrm</b>	<b>Avoiding physical harm.</b>	
<b>AvCrit</b>	<b>Avoiding criticisms from others.</b>	<b>Avoid Rejections V17</b>
<b>AvReject</b>	<b>Avoiding rejection by others.</b>	
<b>AvConflict</b>	<b>To avoid conflict with others.</b>	<b>Avoid Conflict V18</b>
<b>AvHrtOthr</b>	<b>To avoid hurting (annoying, upsetting, etc.) others.</b>	
<b>KeepToSelf</b>	<b>Keeping to myself, being private.</b>	<b>Avoid Socializing V19</b>
<b>AvNotice</b>	<b>To avoid being noticed.</b>	
<b>AvOthrs</b>	<b>To avoid other people.</b>	
<b>AvEffort</b>	<b>To avoid effort or work.</b>	<b>Avoid Effort V20</b>

<b>AvRespons</b>	<b>To avoid responsibility.</b>	
<b>Procrast</b>	<b>To procrastinate.</b>	
<b>MoreAssert</b>	<b>Be less shy or more assertive.</b>	<b>Interpersonally Effective V21</b>
<b>ShareFeelings</b>	<b>Sharing my feelings with others.</b>	
<b>Communicate</b>	<b>To communicate or express myself.</b>	
<b>PartSocGrp</b>	<b>Being part of a social group.</b>	<b>Social Life &amp; Friendship V22</b>
<b>PpleToDoThingsWth</b>	<b>Having people to do things with.</b>	
<b>ClsFriends</b>	<b>Having close friends.</b>	
<b>MakeFrnds</b>	<b>Making friends, drawing others near.</b>	
<b>Othrs2RelyOn</b>	<b>Having others to rely on.</b>	
<b>EntertainOthrs</b>	<b>Entertaining, amusing others.</b>	<b>Liked V23</b>
<b>Motive</b>	<b>Motive—Full description</b>	<b>V-level (44 clusters)</b>
<b>Popular</b>	<b>Being popular, being in the center of things.</b>	
<b>AttractSexPart</b>	<b>Being able to attract a sexual partner.</b>	<b>Sexual Intimacy V24</b>
<b>Sex</b>	<b>Having sexual experiences.</b>	
<b>EmoClosePart</b>	<b>Being emotionally intimate (close) with a romantic partner.</b>	<b>Emotional Intimacy V25</b>

<b>InLove</b>	<b>Being in love.</b>	
<b>Clean&amp;Neat</b>	<b>Being clean and neat (personal care).</b>	<b>Fastidious V26</b>
<b>Active</b>	<b>To be busy or active.</b>	
<b>ContPhysEnv</b>	<b>Controlling my physical environment.</b>	
<b>AsLongAsNecess</b>	<b>To take as long as necessary and not hurry.</b>	
<b>Fashionable</b>	<b>Being fashionable.</b>	
<b>Attractive</b>	<b>Being good-looking, attractive.</b>	
<b>Conventional</b>	<b>Being conventional or traditional.</b>	<b>Stability &amp; Safety V27</b>
<b>FeelSafe</b>	<b>Feeling safe and secure.</b>	
<b>Stability</b>	<b>Having stability in life, avoiding change.</b>	
<b>TknCareOf</b>	<b>Being taken care of.</b>	
<b>HaveMentor</b>	<b>Having a mentor, someone to guide me.</b>	
<b>BeatCompete</b>	<b>Beat people in a competition.</b>	<b>Better than Others V28</b>
<b>BtrThnOthrs</b>	<b>Being better than others.</b>	
<b>ControlOthrs</b>	<b>Controlling others.</b>	<b>Control of Others V29</b>
<b>Decide4Othrs</b>	<b>Making decisions for others.</b>	

<b>GetRevenge</b>	To get revenge (get even, get back, etc.).	
<b>HvOthrsGiveMe</b>	To have others give me what I want.	
<b>Leader</b>	Being a leader, being in charge.	<b>Leadership V30</b>
<b>InflOthrs</b>	Influencing, persuading others.	
<b>EnforceAccount</b>	To enforce accountability.	
<b>PhysAct</b>	Being physically active.	<b>Health V31</b>
<b>PhysFit</b>	Being physically fit.	
<b>PhysHlth</b>	Being physically healthy, e.g., maintaining a healthy weight, eating nutritious foods.	
<b>PhysAble</b>	To be physically able to do my daily/routine activities.	
<b>AthAbility</b>	Having athletic ability.	
<b>GoodParent</b>	Being a good parent (teaching, transmitting values).	<b>Good Family Life V32</b>
<b>EmoCloseChild</b>	Being emotionally close to my children.	
<b>StabFamLife</b>	Having a stable, secure family life (with my spouse or children, or both).	
<b>GoodMarry</b>	Having a good marriage.	
<b>Cls2Fam</b>	Living close to my parents, siblings, grandparents.	<b>Close to Parents' Family V33</b>
<b>RecHelpFmly</b>	Receiving help from my parents, siblings, grandparents.	

<b>ObeyParents</b>	<b>Obeying my parents.</b>	
<b>RespectEld</b>	<b>Respecting my elders.</b>	
<b>DiffThings</b>	<b>Accomplishing difficult things, overcoming challenges.</b>	<b>Mastery &amp; Perseverance V34</b>
<b>OvercomeFail</b>	<b>Overcoming failure.</b>	
<b>Mastery</b>	<b>Mastering what I set out to do.</b>	
<b>Ambitious</b>	<b>Being ambitious, hard-working.</b>	
<b>Competent</b>	<b>Being highly competent.</b>	
<b>AvFail</b>	<b>Avoiding failure.</b>	<b>Avoid Failure V35</b>
<b>Perfection</b>	<b>To strive for perfection.</b>	
<b>Confident</b>	<b>Being confident and assured.</b>	<b>Confidence &amp; Autonomy V36</b>
<b>Motive</b>	<b>Motive—Full description</b>	<b>V-level (44 clusters)</b>
<b>ConfJudge</b>	<b>Being confident in my own judgment.</b>	
<b>InControl</b>	<b>Being in full control of ones life.</b>	
<b>Independent</b>	<b>Being self-sufficient, independent.</b>	
<b>OwnGuidelines</b>	<b>Setting and following my own guidelines.</b>	



<b>Disciplined</b>	<b>Being disciplined, following my intentions with behavior.</b>	<b>Self-Regulated V37</b>
<b>SelfControl</b>	<b>To be self-controlled.</b>	
<b>Responsible</b>	<b>Being responsible, dependable.</b>	
<b>Rational</b>	<b>Being logical, rational.</b>	<b>Smart &amp; Rational V38</b>
<b>Practical</b>	<b>Being practical, having common sense.</b>	
<b>CarefulThink</b>	<b>To carefully think through decisions.</b>	
<b>Alert</b>	<b>To be alert or attentive.</b>	
<b>ThngsInOrdr</b>	<b>Keeping things in order (my desk, office, house, etc.).</b>	<b>Organized &amp; Efficient V39</b>
<b>Manageable</b>	<b>To keep things manageable.</b>	
<b>Plan</b>	<b>To make plans.</b>	
<b>AttendToDetails</b>	<b>To attend to details.</b>	
<b>BeCorrect</b>	<b>To get things right (accurate, correct).</b>	
<b>Efficient</b>	<b>To be efficient, not waste time.</b>	
<b>OnTime</b>	<b>To be on time.</b>	
<b>DoQuickly</b>	<b>To do things quickly.</b>	
<b>AnalyzeInfo</b>	<b>Being able to analyze and synthesize information.</b>	<b>Analysis &amp; Technical Know-How V40</b>

<b>Good_w/Tech</b>	<b>Being good at working with mechanical objects and technology.</b>	
<b>UndrstndPhysObj</b>	<b>Understanding how physical objects/systems work.</b>	
<b>Smart</b>	<b>Being intelligent or smart.</b>	<b>Intellectual Growth V41</b>
<b>IntellectExper</b>	<b>Having intellectual experiences and conversations.</b>	
<b>Education</b>	<b>Getting an education.</b>	
<b>AdvanDegree</b>	<b>Obtaining an advanced educational degree.</b>	
<b>FinanSec</b>	<b>Achieving lifetime financial security.</b>	<b>Money &amp; Wealth V42</b>
<b>MeetFinanNeeds</b>	<b>Being able to meet my financial needs.</b>	
<b>Make\$ \$ \$</b>	<b>Making a lot of money.</b>	
<b>\$ \$Descend</b>	<b>Having enough money to leave for my descendants.</b>	
<b>ProvideFamily</b>	<b>Providing for one's family.</b>	
<b>BuyThngs</b>	<b>Buying things I want.</b>	<b>Financial Freedom V43</b>
<b>EasyLife</b>	<b>Having an easy and comfortable life.</b>	
<b>SuccInOccup</b>	<b>Being successful in my occupation.</b>	<b>Occupational Success V44</b>
<b>HavGdJob</b>	<b>Having a good job.</b>	
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Having an occupation.</b>	

<b>UpToDate</b>	<b>Keeping up to date with career-related knowledge.</b>	
<b>WorkLike</b>	<b>Having work I really like.</b>	

- To code Patron Motivations and Affective States:
  - Deductive coding, based on Human Motivations Taxonomy:
    - Belonging to a community/social group (e.g., Qanon, Sovereign Citizens, Flat Earthers) – Code as “Belonging”
    - Commitment to a cause (a.k.a. “Commitment”)- use whenever participants discuss patrons “lecturing”, “proselytizing”, “ranting”, “adamant”, etc.
    - Curiosity/Interest – use whenever the participant describes a patron’s curiosity, seeking information for educational purposes or intellectual growth, and/or for keeping up-to-date or for career purposes
    - Safety & Health– use for health/medicine/vaccines, COVID-related concerns, overt references to safety/security, lockdowns, etc.
    - Avoiding Stress & Anxiety – Code as “Anxiety”
  - Deductive coding, based on Robinson’s contrasting basic human emotions:
    - Anger/rage – code as “anger”
    - Aversion/Disgust – code when it’s evident – usually about COVID-related policies or mandates
    - Anxiety/Fear – may be double coded with Avoiding Stress & Anxiety if the patron seems to be trying to avoid these emotions
    - Enthusiasm/Triumph – may be double coded with “commitment to a cause”, but not always. When a patron is particularly enthusiastic about their interests
    - Frustration/Discontentment – code if the patron voices these feelings
    - Humility/Modesty – code when a participant describes a patron as likable and humble about their theory
    - Panic/alarm – code for episodes of panic or alarm in patrons, usually around technology but not always
    - Pride/arrogance – may be double-coded with “commitment to a cause”
    - Sorrow/grief – code if the patron is described as grieving or in a situation that calls for such codes (e.g., mourning a loss)
  - Inductive coding, based on participants’ responses:
    - Suspicious mindset – based upon Brotherton R., 2015. *Suspicious Minds: Why We Believe Conspiracy Theories*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
    - Recommendation – code whenever the participant mentions that the patron sought information from an authority in their life, whether from an influencer, family member, friend, pastor, etc.
    - Unknown – whenever the motivations or emotions cannot be deciphered
    - Other (does not fit into any of these categories, but is something else listed)
    - No response – no response given
- To code Library Worker Motivation and Affective States:
  - Deductive coding, based on Human Motivations Taxonomy:
    - Empathy
    - Help Others – code as “Helpfulness”
    - Good with Technology – code for whenever the library worker refers to helping with technology (copiers, printers, smartphones, etc.)
  - Deductive coding, based on Robinson’s Contrasting Basic Emotions:

- Anger/rage – only code when it’s absolutely clear that the library worker is very angry (example: “I wish they would just take their ivermectin and die”)
    - Anxiety/Fear – whenever the participant expresses their own fear or anxiety through words like “it’s scary” or “I’m afraid”
    - Aversion/Disgust – code whenever it is clearly expressed by the participant
    - Frustration/Discontentment – whenever the participant voices frustration with their situation or the patron overtly
  - Inductive coding based on participants’ responses:
    - Active Dismissal (“it/they have to be shut down”)
    - Affirm/Agree (agreeing with the patron)
    - Challenge/Educate (engaging them in any way)
    - Conduct Reference Interview
    - Convey Neutrality (“I was neutral,” any description of neutrality)
    - Disengage to Avoid Conflict (“no point”)
    - Enforce Policy
    - Habituation- The decline in responsiveness to a stimulus due to repeated exposure – code for participants’ expressions of “another day, another crazy patron” or “this happens all the time, I’m used to it by now”
    - Provide resources & services
  - Unknown
  - No response indicated
  - Other (does not fit into any of these categories, but is something else listed)
- Number of interactions
  - Single
  - Multiple
  - Unknown
  - No response
- Admin good quote
- No response

**Is there any other information regarding this interaction that you would like to share?**

- Admin good quote
- No response