

# Technology and Identity in the Public Library: An Audio Diary Study of Workers with Underrepresented Identities

Darin Freeburg and Katie Klein  
University of South Carolina

## Significance

**Identity** is an internally organized representation of a person’s theories, attitudes, and beliefs about themselves.<sup>1</sup>

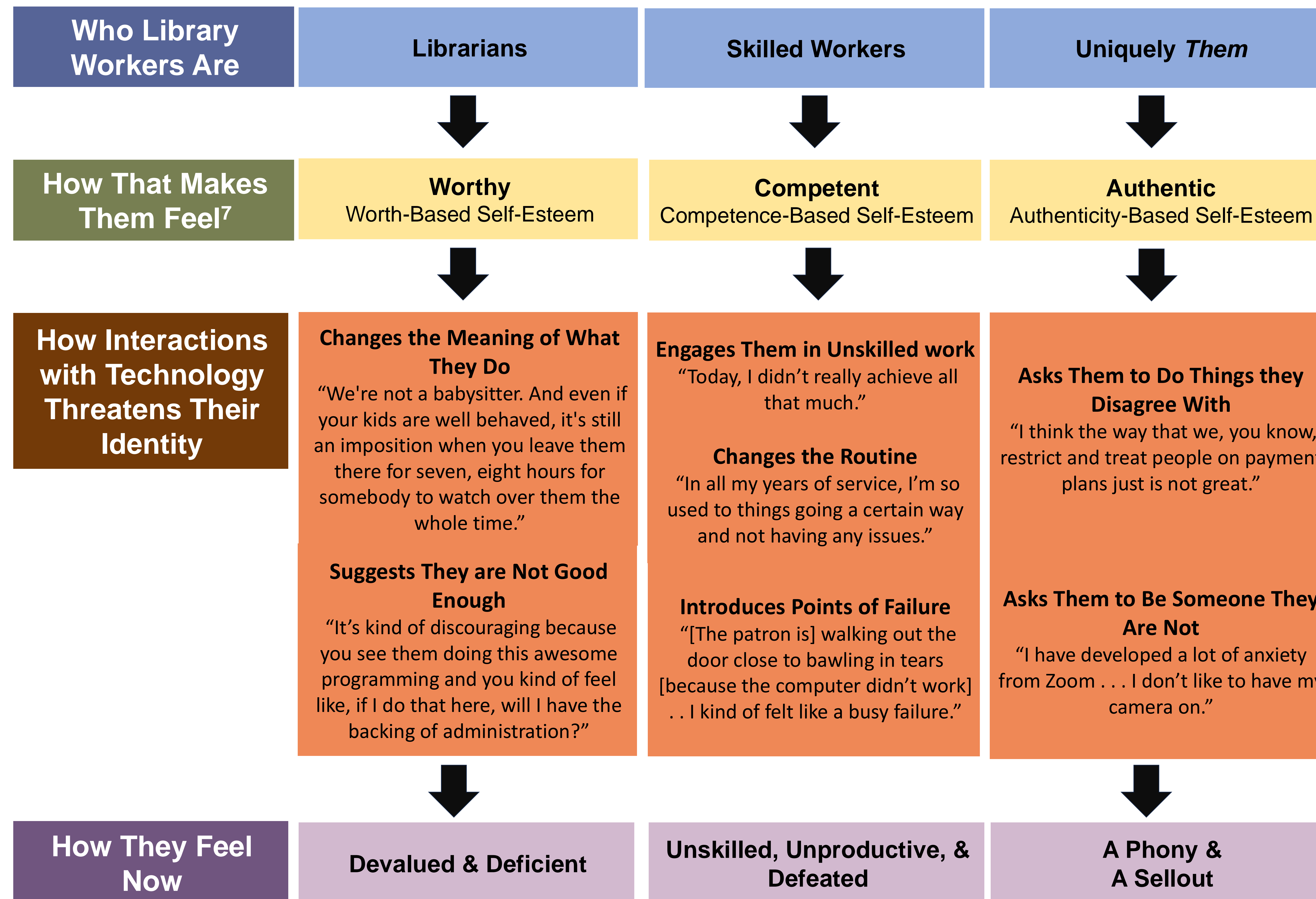
Due to the centrality of work in most people’s lives, their **work identity** is often a focal point for their larger self-concept<sup>2</sup>. For many, this is a source of **self-esteem**.<sup>3</sup>

However, interactions with workplace actors can result in recurrent situations that **threaten** a worker’s self-concept and, thus, **self-esteem**.

Yet, less is known about how interactions with **non-human actors** play a role in a worker’s identity construction.

This study considers how interactions with workplace technology play a role in a worker’s identity construction during routine work tasks.

## Impact of Technological Interactions on Worker Identity



## Implications

Technology does not have **unilateral effects** on worker identity construction, instead making up part of a complex **web of interactions** that includes other actors (human and nonhuman).

Findings suggest the need for public libraries to consider the **socio-technological** contexts within which workplace identity is constructed.

The profession can support workers by:

- Helping them identify and mobilize **alternative identities** in response to threats
- Providing **adequate training** to match technology-induced changes to work routines
- Minimizing** what technology adds to their work
- Providing room for **counterspaces**<sup>4</sup> that validate and legitimize their sense of self.

## Methodology and Theoretical Framework

**Data Collection Methods:** Audio Dairies and Virtual Interviews

**Analysis Method:** Thematic Coding through Template Analysis<sup>5</sup>

**Analytical Framing:** Identity Threat Framework<sup>6</sup>

**Target Population:** Public library workers in the SE United States with identities that are underrepresented in the profession

**Sample:** 22 public library workers [108 audio diaries + 22 interviews]

		Phys. Disability	N
Gender	N	Yes	7
		No	13
		No Answer	1
Race/Nationality		Mental Illness	
		Yes	13
		No	7
Classification		No Answer	1
		Sexual Identity	
		Heterosexual	10
		Queer	4
		Pan/Demisexual	3
		Bisexual	3
		Gay or Lesbian	1

## References

- <sup>1</sup> McCormick, C.B. & Pressley, M. (1997). *Educational psychology: Learning, instruction, assessment*. Longman.
- <sup>2</sup> Caza, B.B. & Creary, S. (2016). The construction of professional identity. In A. Wilkinson, D. Hislop, & C. Coupland (Eds.), *Perspectives on Contemporary Professional Work: Challenges and Experiences* (pp. 259–285). Elgar.
- <sup>3</sup> Stein, M., Galliers, R.D., & Markus, M.L. (2013). Towards an understanding of identity and technology in the workplace. *Journal of Information Technology*, 28, 167-182.
- <sup>4</sup> Ong, M., Smith, J.M., & Ko, L.T. (2018). Counterspaces for Women of Color in STEM Higher Education: Marginal and Central Spaces for Persistence and Success. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 55(2), 206-245.
- <sup>5</sup> King, N. (2012). Doing template analysis. In G. Symon & C. Cassell (Eds.), *Qualitative Organizational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges*. London: Sage.
- <sup>6</sup> Petriglieri, J.L. (2011). Under threat: Responses to and the consequences of threats to individuals' identities. *The Academy of Management Review*, 36(4), 641-662.
- <sup>7</sup> Craig, K., Thatcher, J. B., & Grover, V. (2019). The IT identity threat: A conceptual definition and operational measure. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 36(1), 259–288.