The Past, Present, and Future of Special Collections Library Literature

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Overview:
This poster analyzes trends in publication patterns in the RBMS journals RBML and RBM. First, it analyzes trends among the authors publishing in these journals, including contributor demographics such as institution, position, and gender. Second, it analyzes trends in the themes and issues frequently discussed in the journals.

Methods:
The dataset includes all articles in RBML and RBM classified in the journal as “research articles” published between 1986 and 2017.

From these articles, I harvested the following data elements: Name of author for first three named authors, title, author biographic statements, and abstract. I extracted information from these data elements to create variables identifying each author’s institutional affiliation, job title, functional specialty, and gender. I coded each article based on information in the title and abstract to create topic models describing the content of each piece.

The dataset:
- 275 articles analyzed
- 321 authorship attributions

Questions:
What can we learn about special collections librarianship as a profession through an aggregate consideration of our professional literature? What perspectives, both individual and institutional, are responsible for producing and therefore shaping our knowledge of special collections librarianship? What lacunae exist in the current critical conversations around special collections librarianship, and how might future research address these gaps?

About the Authors

- **Collaboration:**
  - 280 unique authors over 321 authorship attributions
  - 164 authors and birds processes
  - 12% of authors with three or more authors

- **Gender:**
  - 72% female
  - 67% male

- **Institution Types:**
  - 72% Academic
  - 7% Bookseller
  - 11% Public
  - 23% Independent Research
  - 3% Nonprofit Organization
  - 3% National Library
  - 3% Academic Consortion
  - 1% Independent Research

- **ARL Representation:**
  - 155 authors used male pronouns
  - 164 authors used female pronouns

- **TOP AFFILIATIONS:**
  - University of California 13
  - Columbia University 8
  - New York University 7
  - University of Texas 6
  - Indiana University 6

- **TOP SPECIALTIES:**
  - Administration 102
  - Cataloging 19
  - Rare Books 13
  - Library Science 14
  - Special Collections 12

Coding Thematic Content

I coded each article using an inductive coding process. Each article received at least two but no more than three codes. Following the first round of inductive coding, I created four second-order codes to collocate articles into four main thematic groups:

- **THEME 1: Stewardship**
  - The curation, care, and user needs related to our collections

- **THEME 2: Workflows/Processes**
  - Best practices for backlogs, interlibrary lending, digitization projects, security, and development

- **THEME 3: State of the Field**
  - The future of special collections librarianship, with a focus on ARL, research-intensive universities, and special collections leadership

- **THEME 4: Administration**
  - Focusing on management practices across professions

Conclusions & Recommendations

- **Existing research largely shares the perspectives of academic librarians at research-intensive, ARL member libraries.**
  - Administrators are the most frequent contributors, and management of special collections librarianship is a frequent topic.
  - Special topics issues after RBMS conferences result in extensive coverage of some topics at the exclusion of others.
  - Non-librarian contributions are limited, typically to professors from research intensive universities or private colleges and to professionals from the rare book trade.

- **Voices**
  - FUTURE DIRECTIONS: MORE...