

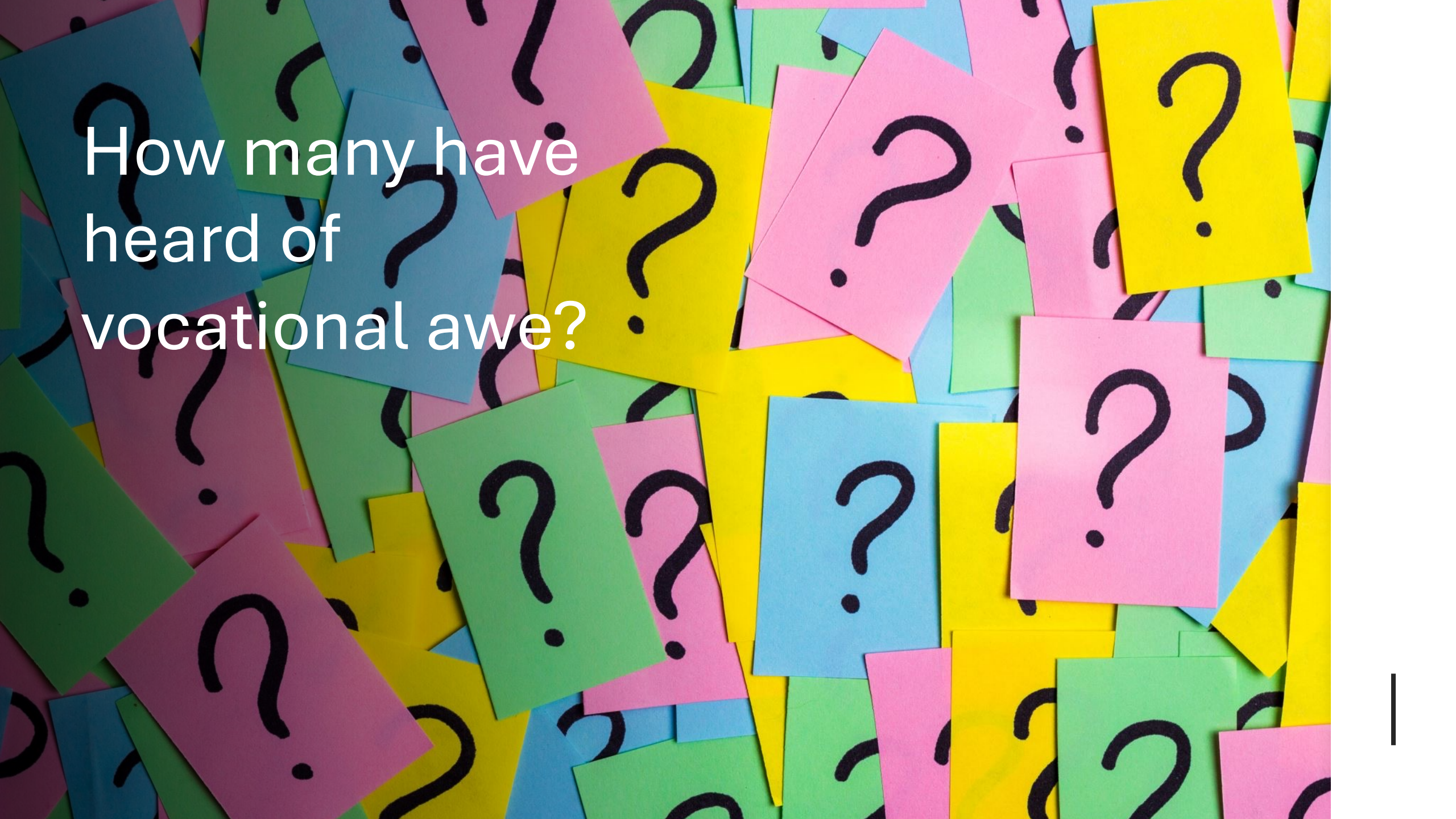


# Vocational awe

A thematic literature review

EAHIL 2023

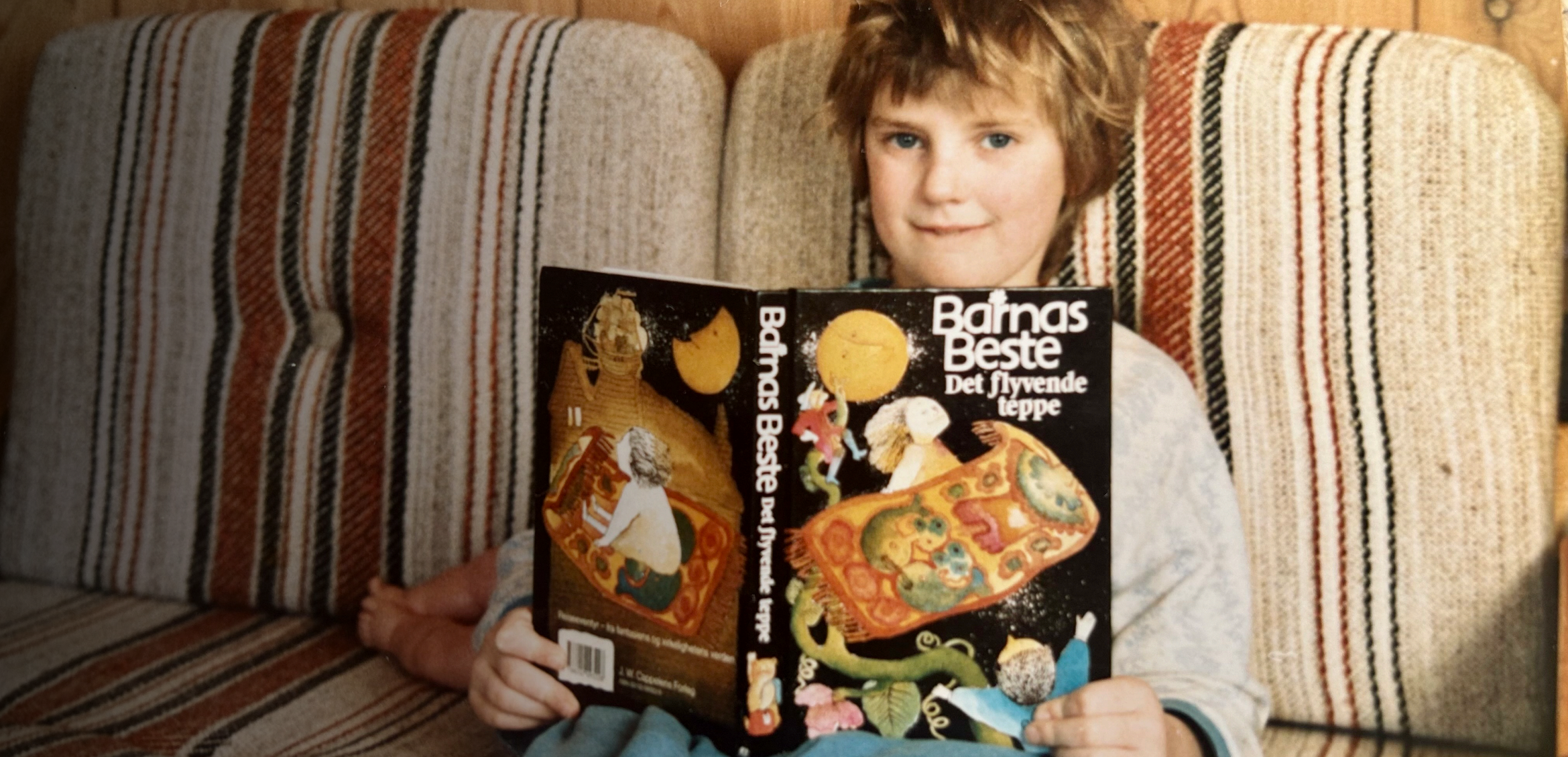
Karen Marie Øvern



How many have  
heard of  
vocational awe?

Let us begin  
with a story





Me, aged 9 or 10

# Why I became a librarian



# Some of the stories we were told

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«Librarians will be more in demand than ever with the rapid rise of the Internet»

«Now that the Internet is the most important source of information for most people, librarians will have to organize it all so that people can find it»

«The false information we are faced with is a challenge, but we can help our patrons know what truth looks like»

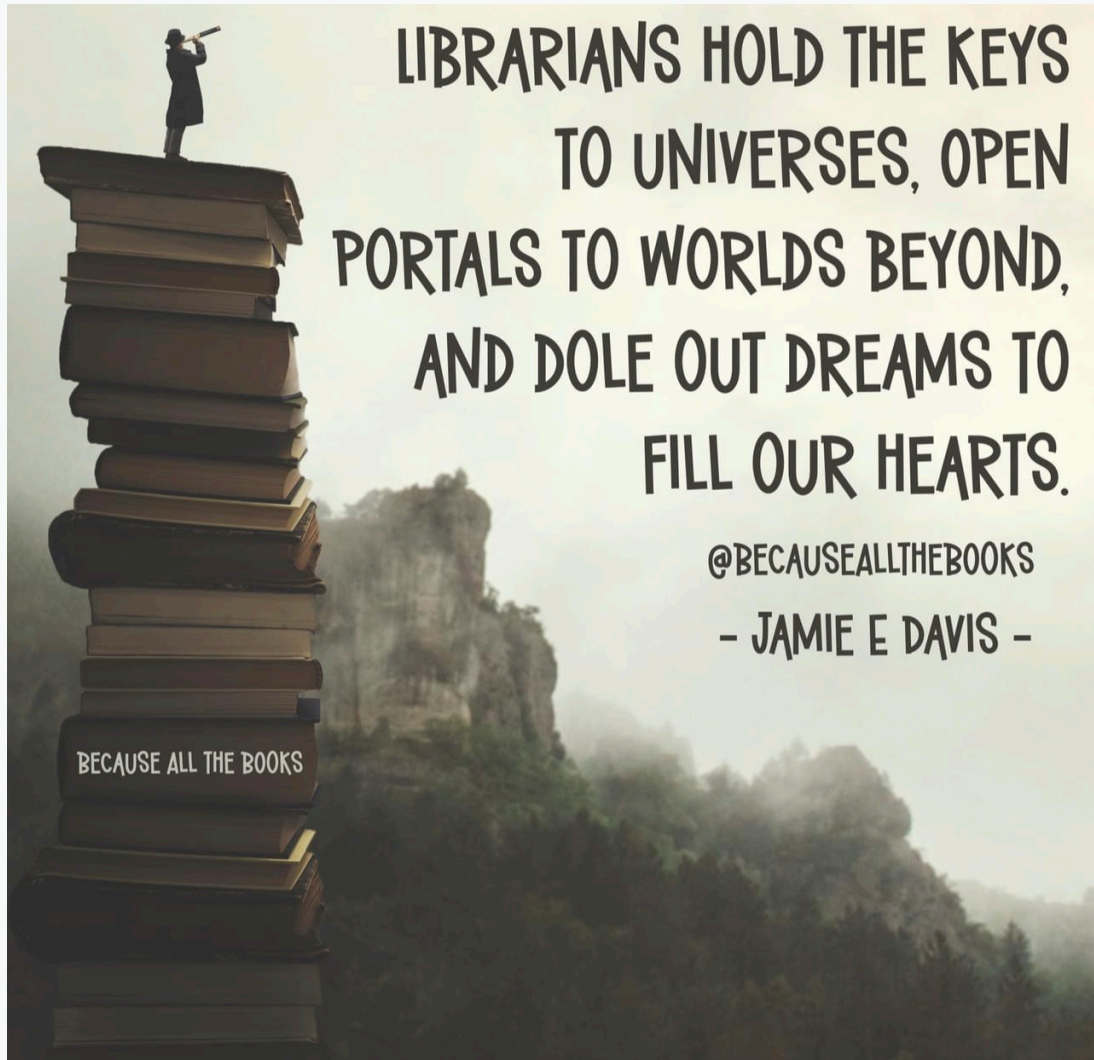


# Hillary Clinton:

[Libraries are]: “guardians of the First Amendment and the freedom to read and to speak. The work you do is at the heart of an open, inclusive, diverse society.”

Eugène Delacroix. July 28: Liberty Leading the People (1830). Oil on canvas, (260 x 325 cm (8'6¼" x 10'8")). Musée du Louvre, Paris





And then there  
are the  
motivational  
posters





# What is vocational awe?

Vocational awe is «the set of ideas, values, and assumptions librarians have about themselves and the profession that result in beliefs that libraries as institutions are inherently good and sacred, and therefore beyond critique.»

(Ettarh, 2018)

A close-up, shallow depth-of-field photograph of a person reading a book. The person's hands and forearms are visible, wearing a tan jacket and a blue and white plaid shirt. The book is open, with its pages fanned out. In the background, a dark mug sits on a white saucer on a table. The overall atmosphere is quiet and focused.

# The literature review

# The method

Source	Number of retrieved articles
Web of Science	5
Emerald Insight	19
Scopus	7
Academic search complete	5
Science Direct	6
Springer Link	4
Library and information abstracts (LISA)	72
Sum:	118

Initial screening left me with 42 articles.

13 were included (so far)



# The themes I chose

Emotional labour

Toxic positivity

Burnout

Low morale

Job creep

The leadership issues



# The (start of my) thematic analysis table

Study	Vocational awe	Low morale	Emotional labour/ toxic positivity	Power relations	Burnout	Leadership role
Dixon (2022)	x		x	x	x	x
Ettarh (2018)	x	x		x	x	
Kendrick (2020)	x	x			x	x
Moran & Nadir (2021)		x	x	x	x	





# Emotional labour and toxic positivity

“My comfort is more important than your reality.” (Dr. Susan David cited in Brown, 2021)

Service with a smile – the flight attendant mode

“... assume the role of their noble profession without complaint” (Meyers et al., 2021, p.6)



# Burnout and job creep

Overworked/ understaffed

Job creep

Undercompensation

Underappreciated

Work-life balance

Shame



# Leadership issues

Leaders in a tight spot

Autonomy, budget, patrons

Job creep issues

«Cycle of exploitation»





# Vocational awe in academic libraries



# What can we do?

## **Slow librarianship**

Educate ourselves

Talk about real issues

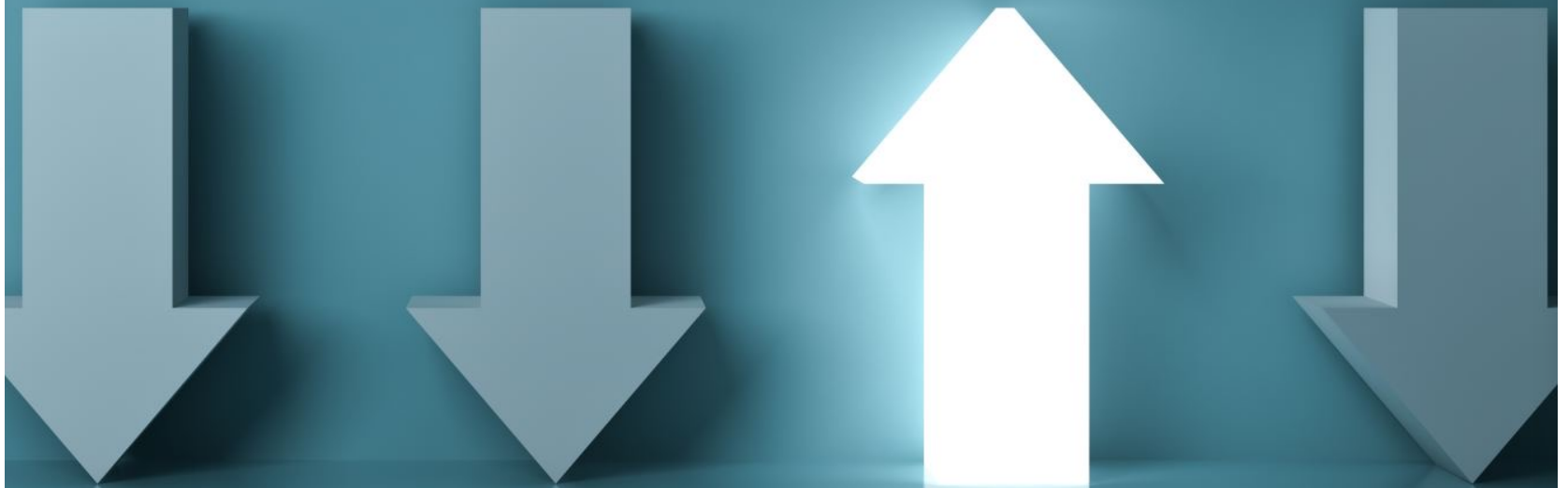
Listen

Believe them/ us

Practice saying «no»

Equity over equality

Up & out



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