Examining Gender Issues and Trends in Library Management from the Male Perspective

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While there is much scholarly information-science literature devoted to gender issues in library management, the vast majority of it is written by, and focuses solely on, women in the profession. The intent of many of these studies has been to explain why, if women numerically dominate the profession of librarianship, there are so few of them in top-level management and administrative positions. However, as Piper and Collamer have astutely noted, other than a few exceptions, "there has been a curious and notable silence on gender issues from men in the field."[1] This article aims to approach the problem from the converse perspective; that is, why do men continue to be disproportionately represented in library management positions? Are they being actively recruited into them? Are they seeking these positions out more than women, and if so, why? Although socioeconomic factors and gender differences in management style will be briefly addressed, the point here is to explore current literature that indicates contemporary managerial trends are rooted to a great extent in historical factors, the persistence of male librarian stereotypes, and professional recruitment and expectation levels.

Gender Imbalances Over Time

The historical development of librarianship has substantially influenced the formation, characteristics, trends, and overall appearance of management within the profession today. One of the most prominent and enduring features of American librarianship has been the prevalence of an overwhelming majority of female members. Yet, this has not always been the case. Dickinson has compellingly argued that although the profession was originally the sole domain of men, it has "evolved over the centuries to not just incorporate women, but to embrace and become almost completely associated with them."[2] While librarianship in the United States first emerged in the colonial period with the founding of Harvard College, which appointed its first librarian in 1667, early academic librarianship was a relatively low-status, unglamorous, unskilled, and obscure profession, with exclusively male members.[3] Often, these "library keeper" positions were filled by professors, instructors, or even college presidents, who carried out the relatively minimal duties in a part-time capacity.

However, in response to the "research movement" (which increased the need for larger collections and access) and the "public library movement" (which established the importance of reference work), the role and function of libraries of both types greatly expanded in the late nineteenth century. Consequently, the profession needed new employees, and it began to warmly welcome the boom of female college graduates who would perform low-level duties for minimal pay. Justin Winsor, Harvard University librarian and American Library Association (ALA) founder, tellingly professed in 1877 that women "soften our atmosphere, they lighten our labour, they are equal to our work, and for the money they cost . . . they are infinitely better than equivalent salaries will produce by the other sex."[4] By the turn of the century, 75 percent of librarians in the United States were women, and by 1920, this figure peaked at an astounding 90 percent.[5]

The trend toward female employment in the vocation persisted throughout the twentieth century, ultimately resulting in the widespread perception of librarianship as a so-called feminized profession. Despite modest fluctuations, there is clear statistical evidence that men have continued to remain in the minority in both libraries and library schools. For example, *Statistical Abstracts* indicate that the proportion of men in the field was 16.6 percent in 1998, and 18 percent in 2002.[6] In 1971, only 18.7 percent of LIS graduates were male; in both 1996 and 2002, the figure was still at just 21 percent. ALA confirmed these numbers in its 2007 "Diversity Counts" report, which stated that just 18 percent of credentialed librarians were male as of 2000.[7] All of these figures have been used to substantiate and explain why many people tend to equate the profession of librarian with the gender of a woman.

So, despite the feminization of the profession and recent, substantial advances made by female managers, men have continued to occupy a disproportionate number

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of administrative positions in libraries and library schools. Deyrup pointed out that in 1972, men represented 95.4 percent of directors at the 124 Association of Research Library (ARL) institutions, and that by 2004, men constituted just 43 percent of academic library directors.[8] Yet, because the percentage of male librarians is holding steady at approximately 20 percent, the 43 percent figure is still rather large. Similarly, Vogt cited ALISE statistics to note that although only 25 percent of LIS students were men, they held 60 percent of library school director and dean positions as of 2003.[9] Furthermore, studies show that men advance much more quickly to these elevated positions within the library structure.[10] Voelck has presented an accurate summation by stating:

> It remains the case today that male librarians, who are a minority in the profession, often occupy the highest level decision-making, administrative positions in libraries. In addition, males tend to predominate in the top-level administrative positions in larger public libraries and in large, academic libraries, where salaries are often higher, and the opportunities for visibility and prestige often greater, than in the smaller academic, public, and school libraries.[11]

In a 1997 article, Fisher quite powerfully contested the increasingly "common" notion that men are disproportionately represented at the executive levels of librarianship. He argued that much of the literature on this matter is in fact unsubstantiated because it has relied on small sample populations (obtaining data solely from the larger and more visible public and academic libraries). In response, Fisher conducted a survey using what he described as a "comprehensive census approach."[12] He used standard library directories to gather information about the gender of library directors and branch managers at academic, public, and special libraries nationwide, regardless of size. The overall results indicated that there were actually three times as many women as men in managerial positions, and that only nineteen percent of males in the profession occupied top managerial roles.

Although these results would seem to paint a very different picture of the profession, a more thorough analysis of the study reveals some interesting features. First, the research method used was potentially problematic, as many directory entries were excluded from the study (for example, when a name was not provided or when gender could not be clearly determined). Second, the definition established for "library manager" was relatively constrained; only library directors and managers of branches or "physically separate" units were considered.[13] Associate/assistant directors, department heads, and unit heads of "not easily distinguishable" locations were excluded.[14] Third, Fisher himself conceded that when the statistics were viewed by group, gender differences did begin to appear, particularly

in the academic sector. Most notably, Fisher found that:

1. men occupied the clear majority of director positions in large academic libraries, medium-large academic libraries, and large public libraries;
2. men occupied the majority of overall managerial titles in medium-large academic libraries; and
3. although they were in the minority, men were still disproportionately represented in many of the remaining categories.[15]

Fisher ultimately concluded that gender would continue to remain an issue in library management, especially when considering very real differences in compensation and career progression.

Technology and Trends

Another issue of rising significance is that men in the profession, and perhaps in society at large, are viewed as more technologically capable than women. Wiebe claimed that male librarians are "often assumed to be more 'computer literate or technologically savvy' than women," and they are consequently assigned jobs that require technical skills.[16] Vogt confirmed that "current social attitudes continue to identify men with technology," and that "technology-driven males continue to be favored for the top positions."[17] Vogt has also suggested that the "two-tier workforce" is directly reflected in the courses each gender chooses to emphasize in LIS programs: library-science courses are 30 percent male, while information-science courses are 70 percent male.[18] In her 2002 job placement analysis, Maatta noted that men have continued to dominate the information technology fields within librarianship, and that these men reported an average salary of $50,522 compared to $39,413 for women in the same field.[19] Thus, as librarianship continues to become more technologically driven and oriented, the next generation of men is likely to experience a renewed advantage in hiring, advancement, and compensation.

When exploring the many possible contributing factors to the disproportionate representation of men in library management, scholars frequently and consistently cite socioeconomic factors. Dickinson has contended that throughout the twentieth century there was "little financial incentive for a man to become a librarian," as relatively low salaries acted as a powerful deterrent for male "breadwinners" who often served as primary providers.[20] Indeed, even the most active of recruiting efforts aimed at attracting men to non-administrative positions have been historically ineffective. Instead, men may have chosen to enter the profession largely in response to the higher salaries and increased prestige and security offered by higher-level management opportunities.[21] A treatise on male recruitment, originally published in a 1949 issue of *Library*

Journal, serves as an interesting and early reflection of this historical trend. In this article, Munn argued that the average annual library salary of $4,000 would "bring the necessities and a few of the frills of living" to a single woman without dependents, while a "professional man with a family" would find it "barely enough to clear the poverty line."[22] He concluded that men should consequently not be recruited into librarianship, as these economic conditions would only result in a male domination of the more lucrative administrative and directorial positions.

Recent research indicates that socioeconomic conditions may continue to contribute to gender gaps in library management. In a 2003 study, Voelck conducted semi-structured interviews with twenty-eight library managers at public universities in Michigan. In her analysis of demographic characteristics, Voelck found that only one of the thirteen males (.08 percent) was unmarried, compared to more than half of the female respondents (66.7 percent) who were single.[23] She furthered that these figures have persisted across three decades, as studies of library directors conducted in the 1980s reported similar results. Voelck concluded that female library administrators may continue to find it more difficult to balance the demands of management with those of the family, but indicated that much more research was needed to fully understand these findings.

Several authors have explored and debated the possibility that current trends in librarianship have also been shaped by gender-based differences in management styles. The female management style has often been characterized as *connective*, with value placed on cooperation, teamwork, and consensus building, while the traditional male model has been classified as *directive*, with prominence placed on individualism, power, and competition.[24] Early studies suggested that biological sex differences were directly responsible for differing management styles, while subsequent research emphasized the formative role of socialization and culture.[25] Some have claimed that in recent years women have become more successful at attaining management positions because they have taken on these stereotypically masculine traits, while others have instead argued that libraries have simply come to favor the "feminine" management model.[26] Still, others have increasingly questioned the impact and very existence of gender-based style differences, and have powerfully challenged the perception that men have a more effective leadership style. This controversial debate remains largely unresolved, and continued discussion is likely as more empirical evidence becomes available.

One of the more provocative arguments is that contemporary management patterns might simply be an extension of those established by the historical development of librarianship in the United States. Women first entered the once male-dominated profession in the late nineteenth century, as libraries began to expand in role and scope. Dickinson argued that libraries were eager to hire these women because they were willing to work for lower wages than their male counterparts, and because they were willing to perform "the dull and more routine tasks that once filled the male librarian's day."[27] Carpenter has characterized these positions as being "at the lowest level"; he furthered that women were not even granted management or leadership posts in the smaller libraries, and that essentially, "the first women employees of libraries were hired to do low-level work in institutions headed by men."[28] Thus, a pattern may have been formed very early on in the development of library management. Dickinson concluded that, although it is a contentious argument, it is quite possible that the establishment and acceptance of these low-level positions helped to create a situation in which "men, though in the minority, held most of the higher salaried, administrative positions within America's libraries."[29]

The influence of historical developments on contemporary library management trends cannot be fully understood without an acknowledgment of twentieth century recruitment patterns. Both Fennell and Hildenbrand have shown that 1920 was the height of female involvement in librarianship at all levels; women not only represented 90 percent of the field, but they actually held many of the high-level administrative positions as well.[30] However, in the 1920s and 1930s, men began to be aggressively recruited into the profession, and secured many top spots. This new trend was reflected in the library literature of the era. For example, O'Brien has cited Clara Herbert, the author of *Personnel Administration in Public Libraries* (1939), who "considered men to be the only ones capable of professionalism, and specifically recommended that married women or women with young children not be appointed to library positions."[31] Male recruitment continued throughout the twentieth century, particularly following World War II. Job advertisements in *Library Journal* during the 1950s clearly targeted male readers, and a 1960 ALA recruitment brochure stated: "The best evidence of increased advantages and financial opportunities in the library field is indicated by the number of men entering it."[32]

Socioeconomic factors, gender-based management styles, historical developments, and professional recruitment patterns have all likely played a part in creating and shaping the appearance of modern library management. Yet, many of these factors could be used to explain management gender gaps in a number of U.S. industries. Librarianship, on the other hand, is unique because it is a perceived as a feminized profession. Voelck has confirmed this phenomenon, astutely noting that "while the 'glass ceiling' exists most conspicuously in U.S. corporations, where women occupy less than 5 percent of senior management positions, it is also present in the overwhelmingly female profession of librarianship."[33] As such, this issue deserves further consideration. There are clearly additional contributing factors that have not received as much attention in the literature, such as stereotypes and professional expectations associated with male librarians.

Stereotypical Male Librarians

Numerous stereotypes of male librarians exist, but the primary three emphasized by researchers are:

1. "effeminate, probably gay,"
2. "powerless, socially inept," and
3. "unambitious."[34]

Scholars nearly unanimously agree that they have had a dual effect, as men choose not to enter the profession at all, or they choose to actively seek out more masculine titles and positions perceived to be masculine within the profession. A key 1988 study by Beggs and Doolittle found that the title "head librarian" was considered to be the sixth most feminine out of 129 occupation titles, topped only by overtly female trades such as manicurist and prima ballerina.[35]

Belonging to or choosing to enter a profession that is perceived to be feminine raises significant concerns for men. In his landmark 1991 survey of 482 male librarians, Carmichael directly addressed these complex issues from an exclusively male point of view.[36] One of his most influential findings was that male librarians believed there to be a larger proportion of gay men in librarianship than in society as a whole. More than 81 percent of his respondents checked "effeminate (probably gay)" as the most prominent stereotype of male librarians, which outranked all other stereotypes by more than thirty percentage points. Carmichael's assessment was that, much like male nurses, male heterosexual librarians have a palpable, but potentially unfounded fear of being perceived as gay. He concluded that these (mis)perceptions reflect the insecurities that they feel as a result of marginalization within a feminized profession.

Another major stereotype associated with male librarians is that they select the profession only because they are incapable of thriving in more typically masculine careers. Dickinson found that men choosing to enter female dominated careers are considered "irrational" by outsiders, and are often thought to be "unqualified for a position in a traditionally male occupation."[37] This negative image is so pervasive that even McCook, a notable scholar, LIS professor, and ALA chairperson, stated that "men choosing the LIS probably could not compete in the much more rigorous environments that command the higher salaries . . . but in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king."[38] This "last resort" stereotype lowers the status of male librarians and is unfortunately operating both outside of and within the profession.

What is the significance of these apparently pervasive stereotypes for library management? As noted previously, many men who choose librarianship are likely to actively pursue the duties and titles perceived to be the most masculine within the profession, which lead them to positions of management, leadership, and administration. Piper and Collamer have persuasively argued that it is very common for men to "shy away" from "feminine" areas such as cataloging and children's librarianship, and to instead seek out masculine titles that are "aligned with industries of power."[39] They noted, for example, that studies show that children's librarianship is 95 percent female. In order to boost self and outside image, male librarians have adopted such titles as "information manager," "knowledge manager," "information broker," and "cyberarian."[40] Dickinson discussed how the ramifications of the stereotype are that male librarians are seen as unambitious professional failures. He claimed that men have sought administrative positions not only because of higher salaries, but also because "subordinate positions such as reference librarian were thought to lack the intellectual rigor that characterized male-dominated professions."[41] Hence, stereotypes, even if difficult to quantify, have substantially influenced contemporary trends in library management.

A primary issue is whether or not the stereotypes in question are self-imposed. Numerous authors have implied that, in fact, male librarians are battling images that do not exist.[42] Instead, identity construction may be "self-reflexive," and influenced by the acute awareness of being a "non-traditional employee."[43] Unfortunately, it is difficult to determine precisely how society actually views men in librarianship. One key problem is the inexplicable lack of scientific surveys; the vast majority of studies examining male librarianship have relied on men already employed as librarians, rather than average citizens, as sources of data. A second, rather interesting problem is that appearances of male librarians in American popular culture have been extremely limited. While female librarians are regularly depicted in film and television, researchers of male librarians have had a much smaller set of resources to analyze. However, a number of contemporary characters may elicit some reactions, such as: Giles, the high school librarian in television's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*; Private Joe Bauers, the Army librarian from the 2006 film *Idiocracy*; Flynn Carsen from TNT's *The Librarian* movies; and Kenji, the mysterious librarian from the 2003 Thai film, *Last Life in the Universe*. Possibly, these recent emergences of male librarians in film will serve as a catalyst for further discourse about male librarianship.

There is a wide consensus that these stereotypes would be best challenged by the increased presence of male librarians in all departments and at all levels, and particularly in the often more visible non-administrative positions. Farrelly, a children's librarian in what he refers to as a "pink-collar profession," argued that men should be actively welcomed into these branches of librarianship, as they can offer a different voice and perspective in vital areas such as programming and collection development.[44] He suggested that men could "be invaluable at supercharging young male interest in reading" and may even "inspire the next generation of mischievous boys to enter the profession."[45] Indeed, in her interviews with young male

NextGen librarians, Gordon discovered that stereotypes had prevented many from considering librarianship as a career. One of her subjects proclaimed, "I didn't even know a guy could become a librarian until I saw my first male librarian in college. I didn't know such a species existed!"[46] Gender diversity, which may be stifled by a concentration of men in high-level management and director positions, is clearly vital to promoting the profession, and to ensuring that patrons of all kinds receive the best possible service and assistance.

Finally, there is intriguing scientific evidence that suggests male librarians often face strong expectations and even fierce pressure to advance into managerial and administrative roles. Piper and Collamer have referred to extensive research indicating that men rise quicker, publish more, and earn more than female librarians.[47] As a response, they introduced the work of sociologist Christine Williams, who reconceptualized the idea of a glass ceiling by coining the term "glass escalator" to describe the occurrence of men being pushed into managerial positions against their will or desire.[48] Referring to Carmichael's study, Piper and Collamer noted that "although the majority of male librarians polled by this survey indicated that they believed men have an advantage in terms of promotion, they also indicated they felt pressured into administration."[49] In their own study of 118 male librarians, Piper and Collamer found that almost 50 percent of public librarian respondents responded that higher professional expectations were placed on them occasionally, often, or always. When asked if they felt that they were expected to advance into management, 60.6 percent of public library respondents and 53.4 percent of academic library respondents answered occasionally, often, or always. Furthermore, nearly 60 percent of academic librarians and almost 50 percent of public librarians stated that they had no interest in becoming an administrator.[50] Although studies have not clearly identified the source of these expectations and pressures, it is clear that they do exist, and that they have had an impact on the disproportionate number of men in library managerial roles.

Agenda for Research

Although numerous factors have undoubtedly contributed to the current gender trends in library management, the considerable influences of historical patterns, potent male librarian stereotypes, and professional recruitment and expectation levels should not be underestimated. More recent, extensive studies need to be performed to gain a better understanding of this amazingly significant issue, and many questions remain. For example, what can management do to raise awareness and help alleviate the negative aspects and stereotypes associated with these trends? As the current generation of librarians begins to retire, will the experience of the NextGens prove to be the same? Perhaps most importantly, will men avoid the profession of librarianship in larger numbers if management positions continue to become more elusive? It is very remarkable that so few men have published their thoughts and perspectives on these issues; this tendency should change as the profession evolves. Honest self-reflection on their part, and on the part of the profession as a whole, is important not only for understanding current realities, but also for adapting to future needs and pressures.

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I know of at least one subpoena, but I have never been privy to that information. There is no training for technical services personnel, but I know there is some for access services. I know we do not retain personal checkout records once items have been returned.

Any request from law enforcement that relates to patron records goes through library administration. I am aware of only one instance in the last few years of law enforcement taking a library computer as evidence in a criminal case. I am not aware of any requests under the USA PATRIOT Act, but library administration would have that answer.

Can't answer this, as to do so would be in violation of the USA PATRIOT Act. As an aside, the Wyoming state librarian is the custodian of all library/patron records for the state as we have an integrated database (the first and best in the country!).

Wyoming law is very specific about the privacy of library transactions. This includes everything, from circulation and ILL to use of databases.

There have been general discussions regarding "student" privacy issues according to FURPA and we basically use the same guidelines in regard to the library as we are a sub unit of the college.

It is illegal to confirm whether or not you have been asked for patron records under the USA PATRIOT Act.

In 1995, when we first provided Internet access for our patrons (all text-based), we immediately had issues with the FBI. They confiscated two computers over the years, one where they had proof that someone threatened the president using that IP address (so now we do DHCP) and one where someone bounced information off of our system. Our county attorney has been an excellent ally for us in writing policy that protects our patrons.

I think that probably school libraries would be basically outside the realm of most USA PATRIOT Act requests. But if the NSA came looking for info from a school I would bet that most school districts would not know what to do with the request.