

Chapter Twelve

GENDER DIVIDE IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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Abstract

Librarianship has generally been regarded as a female dominated profession. However, the male minority held higher status management positions with higher pay. This paper reviews the efforts and progress made towards bridging this gender divide. The paper concludes with recommendations to enable sustenance of the progress through provision of supportive work conditions that will enable women remain at par with their male counterparts.

Introduction

Influx of women into librarianship: a female dominated workforce

Library and information science (LIS) sometimes referred to as information sciences or library and information studies is a merging of library science and information science. These interchangeable terms are intended as a terminological variation to emphasize the scientific and technical foundations of the subject and its relationship with information science (ALA n.p.). It is a meta discipline spanning what are considered traditional academic research disciplines. Library science is a multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary field that applies the practices, perspectives and tools of management, information technology, education, and other areas to libraries; the collection, organization, preservation and dissemination, of information resources and the political economy of information. The theories and practice in librarianship are applied across disciplines. The discipline strives to train people in the use of a wide range of resources to support teaching and learning in educational institutions and to have a vibrant role in the development of a culture that promotes wider

reading which results in motivated readers and learners for life. Graduates with a LIS degree or an information science degree can pursue a variety of career paths relating to collecting, classifying, storing, retrieving and disseminating recorded knowledge (Schrettinge, n.p.). These include traditional librarianship career tracks as well as a variety of innovative career tracks in user experience, design and information management in the public and private sectors.

Women have significantly contributed to the development of this discipline but their status, position and a wider spectrum of sexual identities have not been reflected adequately in discourse. In fact librarianship is often described as a woman's profession but historical analysis of libraries and library personalities is rarely a woman's history. In United States of America and the UK it has been reported that women have been left out of standard histories of librarianship. According to Nweze(n.p.) available literature has shown a preponderance of female library practitioners in Britain and United States of America but information has remained scanty with regards to the Nigerian gender prevalence situation. However, this deficiency has been made up for by the scholarly assessment of the works done by women written by Hildenbrand which has expanded the historical records. The findings of the study by Nweze(n.d.) reveal that despite some cultural traits that still affect the woman's position, women academic librarians in Nigeria can still advance to any height in the profession. It also shows that they do not experience any form of discrimination from their male counterparts in terms of remuneration or career development. Agatha(n.p.) argues that the history of libraries, professional associations or library schools do bring out the prominence of female librarians in the narratives. Hildenbrand maintains that there is need to establish the gendered history structure of librarianship. This will be the focus of the history and not just a recount of their achievements and contributions to the professions. Gender in librarianship has become a professional issue that calls for extensive review in line with gender studies in other disciplines and professions. Marshall and Rhode (n.d.) noted that the emphasis on gender as an important interdisciplinary lens with which to critically examine information cultures and environments has become critical. This is affirmed by the observation of Meghan's observation when she noted that travelling the world with charitable organizations further opened her eyes to the injustice and discrimination against the women and girls globally (Stephens).

The beginning of professional library training with the first American school of library Economy at Columbia University opened in 1887(Passet 406) by Melvil Dewey, an advocate for training women in librarianship, marked the beginning of an influx of female entry into the profession. Melvil Dewey was forced to leave the college because his class was female dominated which was not acceptable to the university management. Around this time, a new

middle class emerged, characterized by a professionalism that was deeply rooted in service (Hildenbrand). Progressive reform of the period emphasized the role of education in promoting individual opportunity, consequently, the number of libraries tripled between 1876 and 1900 as libraries took on an expanded role in the educational development of society. Women made up the largest pool of qualified candidates for these expanded openings in librarianship and were recruited because they were “cheap and available” (Hildenbrand 23). Phoenix (36) reported that in 1887, Justin Windsor, Harvard librarian and American Library Association (ALA) founder, proclaimed that “women are equal to our work, and for the money they cost –they are infinitely better than equivalent salaries will produce in the other sex”. For more than a century women have numerically dominated the library workforce and this has defined the profession in many ways.

From 1880 to 1920, the number of professional women practicing librarianship increased to 236 percent. Most of them were recruited from the middle class (Hildenbrand n.p.). Women went from a minority (20 percent) of the profession in 1870 to a majority (seventy five percent) of the profession in 1900 (Phoenix) and peaked at ninety percent in 1920 (Landenson as cited in Record & Green 198). However, professionally trained female librarians encountered many obstacles as a result of gender inequality. Women accepted low-paying positions which they often took for reasons other than monetary rewards (Passet 49). According to Golub (209) they set a precedence of low salaries that would define the status of the profession over the century. Many were forced to take on temporary work; acting as itinerant library organizers cataloguing collections, advising and training local women to carry on the work. This temporary work performed by professionally trained female librarians perpetuated the employment of amateur librarians and reinforced the precedence of low salaries and a corresponding inferior professional image of librarianship despite the introduction of formalized education that should have served to bolster the profession's status. Gordon (49) and Wiebe (11) report that librarianship manifests a dual career structure for men and women in the United States. However, while the ratio of female to male librarians remain roughly 4:1, top positions are more often held by men. ALA presents the picture vividly when it recorded that during the first 35 years of the American Library Association (ALA) its presidency was held by men. It was only in 1911 that a woman by name Theresa Elmendorf was elected a president of NLA and this lasted from May 24 1911 to July 2, 1912.

Furthermore, developments in the society led to the shift from service orientation to consumer culture characterized by a sharp rise in the standard of living with women increasingly seeking independence and self-sufficiency. This shift from service orientation caused female librarians to become increasingly aware of their depressed status which manifested in low salaries. By 1920, librarianship had become a less attractive profession for the

ambitious modern women, observed Passet (120). The evolutionary trend towards consumerism as opposed to value for service led the women to begin to value status and titles. Thereafter, female librarians became dissatisfied with the low salaries they had been receiving and realized that the best way to increase their salaries was to change positions. Consequently, female librarians began declining certain positions offered them due to low salaries. However, the low salary and image tradition had been established and all efforts to redefine the status of librarianship proved abortive. The compass moved from the women who had nurtured the emergence of library training, development of libraries and secured their place in the society.

This period which witnessed an influx of women in the profession also made the male librarians to become the minority in librarianship which was an emerging profession. However, strikingly the men still dominated in terms of position and salary remarked Golub. Hildenbrand (20) citing Fairchild indicated that male librarians were more likely to be in better paying and managerial positions than female librarians, and that men received higher pay for the same work. Women were considered unsuitable for administrative work due to their emotional temperaments and lack of business experience. This reflected the stereotyping of women as a weaker sex and a crop who are better prepared to be in the kitchen. The situation heated up the workplace leading to agitations in the workplace by women. In 1919, an ALA resolution promoting equal pay and opportunities for women in librarianship was defeated by a large margin. Also, in 1970 Betty Wilson proposed a resolution that would cause the LA to refrain from employing structures that discriminate against women but it was also defeated by the predominantly male dominated membership (Schuman & Weibel 322).

Emergence of a Male- Dominated Management Workforce and the Formation of a Gender Divide

The existing low status of librarianship was already generating concern in various quarters and the Carnegie Corporation had become worried about poor service in libraries that occupied Carnegie buildings. In 1919 Williamson, C.C. an economist and head of the Municipal Reference Library in New York was appointed to conduct a study of existing programs of library education sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation. He submitted the report of his findings in 1921, stating that "largely because it is looked upon as clerical, library work has come to be known as 'women's work'. Men generally and women to a large extent do not see it as offering a desirable professional career" (Williamson 107). He recommended that that the feminization of librarianship needed to be checked and that "library schools should confine themselves to training of the professional type" (Williamson 136). This implied training of male professionals. Carnegie Corporation adopted the recommendations made by Williamson and formed the first adequately supported library education programs with the aim of attracting men to

improve the status of the profession ,check female dominance and revolutionize the profession .This project had a lasting positive effect on the status and role of women in Librarianship.

By 1983, there was an open preference for men to women and laws were passed that prohibited the employment of married women (Garrison as cited in Hildenbrand 65).The incentives and modalities of recruiting men into the library profession at this stage had profound effects on the number of male library administrators (O'Brien 51).These were reinforced by the Great Depression which had perpetrated an already depressed status of women in librarianship.

The World War II brought about a major recruitment drive in response to the resultant shortage of trained librarians in the 1940's.O'Brien(53) maintained that the ALA predicted a shortfall of 18,000 librarians in the preceding six years but hoped to remedy this by actively and efficiently recruiting men to fill up the profession and attracting men to the field by emphasizing the ease with which they could move into administrative positions with assurances of better pay ,greater prestige, benefits and salaries . The target was on recruiting returning war veteran's. However after all these, it became clear that the image of the librarianship as a women's job was the major obstacle to the recruitment of new librarians .The profession witnessed recruitment of males into the field and their rapid rise to management positions that created a gender divide.

By 1952, it was found that men made up greater proportions of administrative positions than women in public libraries, and top male administrators were five years younger than top female administrator's .According to the U.S. Department of Labour in 1959, men began entering the field in increasing numbers as a result of higher salaries and opportunities for advancement to administrative positions .By this time , the low status of librarianship was considered a result of the continued image of librarianship as a female profession and the influx of men into management positions established gender divide in which librarianship was characterized by a majority of female library workers that were managed by a male minority .The formation of this gender divide impacted the status of librarianship and the suppression of women for decades to come . Mestrovic Deyrup (242) explained that in large academic libraries, there is less of a discrepancy; however overall throughout the profession, men tend to hold higher or leadership positions. However, women have made continuous progress towards equality maintained Weibel, de la Pena McCook &Ellsworth. They made significant scholarly contributions in this respect.

The Gender Divide's Impact on Librarianship: Emerging Trends

Librarianship as a profession suffered continued low status assigned to the majority of librarians which were women. This gave rise to the emergence of

a gender divide which greatly impacted the status of the profession. Sociologists categorize librarianship, nursing, social work and elementary school teaching as semi professions because their membership is mostly female dominated and the women do not hold the most desirable and powerful positions rather the gender specific nature of the work in these professions “makes women second – class citizens in their own professions”(Grimm cited in Golub). In 1973, women made up 82.1% of librarians, the largest female majority of those four female dominated “semi professions”. This is in sharp contrast to the Bureau of Census which classifies these disciplines as professional and technical fields, which have the highest prestige within the white collar occupations.

Consequently, the gender divide continued to widen and men continued to increase their majority positions. From 1950 to 1970 the number of men holding top administrative positions increased in public, academic and state libraries. The gender divide created salary discrepancies between men and women because the large number of women provided great opportunities for advancement, prestige and higher salaries for men who had less competition. Moreover, the lower salary rates employers paid to the predominantly female workers allowed for higher salaries to be paid to the male minority.

The gender divide has far reaching implications for the profession’s poor image. It has resulted in the association of the discipline with lower professional status due to its female dominance. This has also resulted in poor perception and consequent low choice of librarianship as a career. Sukienik cited in Golub(n.p.) argued that though the professional literature had discussed the problems women faced in the field, rarely had the gender divide been linked to the image and status of librarianship despite the cause effect relationship. Sequel to this gender divide, women had a low status which kept their salaries low disconnecting them from traditional male roles that had high status and power. However, he observed that the problems of professional image and status cannot be accurately investigated without addressing the social role of women and acknowledging its impact on the status of the profession. This realisation paved the way for overcoming the gender divide.

The Rise of Professional Discourse on the Gender Divide: Reflections from Literature Review

The rise of the feminist movement in the 1960s, prompted the discourse about gender divide and its role in the status of the librarianship. Many feminist studies have focused on the gender gap in library profession and have increased efforts at drawing attention to the context of the Gender Divide’s role in the status of the profession. The measurements have indicated increased progress in overcoming the gender gap in librarianship as well as changing the views of women in society. The fight for equal pay that raged in the 1960s and 1970s and the present struggle for equal rights to education

,equity and social justice in the face of strong patriarchal assumptions about women served to draw attention to the lack of acknowledgement of the gender divide and its role in the depressed status of librarianship .The feminist aversion to patriarchal – biased gender categorizations and the urging for recognition of female individuality(Ogwude 2) leveraged progress in this respect.

Historically, the first comprehensive career study of librarians for ALA's Committee on the status of women in librarianship Heim and Estabrook cited in Golub found that 78.3% of ALA's members were female and 21.7% were males .Almost half(49.6%) of the men were administrators , while 30.4% of women occupied similar positions. Moreover, the study found that twice as many men were elected or were appointed to office or chair of a committee at the national association level .The study, most importantly revealed that “ being male was significantly associated with receiving a higher salary even when personal ,professional, and organizational variables are comparable to those of females in the sample” (Heim and Estabrook 37 cited in Golub).Nweze, writing about Nigeria on the issue of whether the male counterparts of female librarians earned more for equal work done , revealed that there was no discrimination .95% of the respondents in her study acknowledged that there was no discrimination as 82.5% also stated that their male counterparts saw them as their equals

Though library occupations are predominantly held by women, a wage gap still exists in the profession. In 2017, women working as full time librarians reported mean annual earnings of \$51,715, compared to \$59,795 for men ,representing a pay gap of 86.5% U.S. Department of labour, Bureau of labour Statistics) In another study conducted by Van House in the area of salary determination and occupational segregation in librarianship it was discovered that the earnings associated with library type were related to the proportion of men in that area .Male academic librarians earned the most and were most rewarded for achievement of the job and personal investment while female school librarians benefited the least from those factors .Also, he found a lack of expected differences in personal characteristics such as education and experience as explanation for differences in salaries. In 2017 the ALA-Allied Professional Association published a tool kit with a section on how to determine fair compensation for raises, identifying pay inequities and salary negotiation tips. The toolkit importantly, identifies union organizing and collective bargaining as an effective means to increase librarian and pay increase equity in workplace.

A demographic study by Irvine indicated that the demographic and career patterns of academic library administrators corroborated the stereotype of the male career pattern as a fast- track to management .However, the study registered that there was a corresponding dramatic increase in the

representation of female administrators from 1970-1980. It concluded by attributing the dramatic progress made by women into male dominated sphere of management to the impact of federal laws, regulations, and affirmative action resulting from the feminist movement

In a turn of events, the 1990s recorded appreciable progress by women in bridging the gender divide leading to their entry into management positions in greater numbers. Fisher (cited in Record & Green 198) in a gender study on gender and management trends in librarianship in 1997 revealed that there were three times the number of women in management positions than men and only 19% of men occupied top managerial positions. Nonetheless, they revealed that men still occupied the majority of Director positions in large and medium-large academic libraries and in large public libraries. Secondly men occupied the majority of all management positions in medium large academic libraries, and that men were still disproportionately represented in many other categories despite being in the minority. However, in 1977 the ALA (n.p.) adopted the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) which mandated the boycott of hosting conferences in 1981 in states that did not ratify the amendment. With the set-up of an ERA taskforce in 1997 for unratified states a number of state library associations passed pro-ERA resolutions and formed committees on women in libraries.

Consequently, around the turn of the twenty first century libraries began to witness a major increase in the proportion of leadership positions held by women (Greer, Steven & Coleman as cited in Golub). From 1990 to 2001, the percentage of female Directors of members of Association of Research Libraries (ARL) increased from 37% to 47%. In 2016 Carla Hayden became the first female Librarian of Congress while Ms Victoria Okojie became the first female NLA chairman, and pioneer Chairman AFLIA, Africa section and the Registrar/CEO, librarians' Registration Council in the years 2005 and 2009 respectively (NLA p. 27 & LRCN p.1). Having equitable gender representation in leadership positions in the library is also a perspective of the progress as presented by Graham Goulding and Stephens (202), in the breaking of the glass ceiling for female librarians. Jones and Oppenheimer's (105) study carried out a survey to determine if the UK library suffered from intra-occupational segregation, and domination of men in senior positions and particular attention was drawn to the glass ceiling. This was an unofficial barrier to promotion to an upper management or other prominent positions within a company or other organizations which certain groups, particularly women are perceived to be unable to cross due to discrimination.

In a study on the status of women in librarianship and the motivation to manage, Murgai discussed the significant advances made by women in the last three decades. He noted that since the 1980s more women than men earned their masters and doctorate degrees however, less than 8% of the

women held positions in higher administration. Therefore, women came to occupy 51 out of 111 ARL Director Positions but women still earned 76.5 cents to a dollar by men (Deiss as cited in Murgai). In 2013-2014, 82% of graduates in Master of Library science (MLS) were females. Majority of librarians working in the U.S. are female. A study by ALA from 2009 to 2010 revealed that 98,273 credentialed librarians were females as opposed to 20,393 that were males (Library professionals: facts and figures).

Golub reports that in the fifty years since the rise of feminism, there has been a gradual shift in attitudes towards women and their professional roles as reflected in these studies. Research indicates that women have made a significant, though not complete progress in bridging this gender divide in librarianship in recent years. In 2018, women accounted for 79% of all librarians and 76.5 % of all library technicians and assistants which was above the average of 73.2% of women employed in all education and library professions. This represents a slightly more balanced workforce than in the past. In 1995, women were 83.9% of librarians and in 2003, women were 84.4% of librarians while in 2016-2017 women represented 82.6% of graduates of Master of Library Science (MLS) programs.

In USA strategies adopted in the fight to bridge the gender gap by professional association groups dedicated to librarianship and gender includes the formation of multiple groups within ALA and other professional associations. These groups are dedicated to discussing, critiquing and pursuing gender related and feminist matters within the profession. In 1996 the National women's liberation front for librarians (NWFFL), the first women's rights taskforce. Feminist Task Force reports that in 1970 the American Library Association's social responsibilities Round Table Feminist Task (FTF) was founded by women who wished to address sexism in libraries and librarianship. This was the first ALA group to beam the search light on women's issues. Moreover, in 1976 the Committee on the Status of women (COSWL) in Librarianship of ALA was founded. It considers the rights of the majority (women) in the library field, promotes and initiates the collection, analysis, dissemination and coordination of information on the status of women in librarianship because it represents the diversity of women's interest within ALA.

Conclusion

Presently, women have risen to the challenge and are progressively working up the peak of librarianship in all ramifications and the threatening barrier in terms of position and remuneration is crumbling in the western countries. In Nigeria there is no threat as women are university librarians in academic libraries, Directors of Public Libraries and Heads of Departments of various LIS departments in universities. With regards to Gender equality emerging trends has shown that men and women with the same educational

qualifications compete for job positions without discrimination. However, women need to work hard against the sociological, psychological and biological barriers to sustain their professional advancement and close up the gender divide.

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