

ACRL Women and Gender Studies Section

Research Agenda for Women and Gender Studies Librarianship

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The original Research Agenda was published in 2004; this is the second edition and has been updated to 2010. It is divided into two major fields: intellectual access, which relates to the creation, access, description, collection, and teaching of women and gender studies information resources, and professional issues, which involves looking at the field of librarianship through a feminist lens. The revised agenda is a collaborative project of Research Committee members Marcia Barrett, Jennifer Gilley, Pamela Salela, and Susan Wood.

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Research Agenda — Database Coverage of Women and Gender Studies Materials

The research up to this point primarily takes the form of reviews and analyses of major multidisciplinary databases like JStor and ArticleFirst for core periodical titles ([Ingold 2007](#)) as well as reviews and analyses of specialized women and gender studies databases for core periodical titles, and historical surveys of the development of specialized databases ([Dickstein 2003](#)). Specific academic areas, such as African American feminist thought have also been studied ([Hankins 2009](#), [Pickett 2009](#)).

Databases

The question of coverage includes how extensively women and gender studies materials are indexed in databases and online collections. Coverage is typically measured along several dimensions: breadth, depth, and database features. Breadth measures the scope of content. For example, how many separate titles does a particular resource include, what genres are included, and how many of the titles are core works? Depth measures how many years of a given title are included, as well as whether the issues are indexed cover-to-cover. The measurement of features includes, but is not limited to, analysis of full-text format, indexing terms, the type of organization and the level of description in bibliographic records, presence of deep-indexing, and type/extent of search options.

Databases that include women and gender studies materials include generalized multidisciplinary databases and specialized databases. Analysis of databases should

be considered an ongoing area of research because databases are dynamic both in content and features. In addition to databases, the question of access vs ownership affects this content. To what extent are preservation services such as Portico handling women and gender studies titles?

Digital Collections

In addition to article databases, other digital collections are also areas for research and analysis. Online reference sources, digitized special collections, and other types of online collections that either include or have as their main focus women and gender studies materials should be examined to determine gaps in coverage. Grey literature, ephemera, multimedia resources, out-of-copyright and orphan works in mass book digitization projects, non-English/non-U.S. serials, newsletters, zines, blogs, websites, and newspapers are all areas that need to be examined. Are these materials being preserved, either by indexing in print or electronic sources or in full-text? In addition to traditional women studies materials, we also need research on the coverage of men's studies, gender studies, queer studies, LGBT studies, and other related areas of scholarship and activism.

Open Web

Search engines and web-indexing projects are also areas of research. Personalization algorithms and the existence of the hidden or deep web may affect the visibility of women and gender studies information and materials. The question of ad-placement and paying for top billing is also an area of research.

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Research Agenda — Discovery & Subject Access

This section addresses the use of language to identify women's studies resources. Language includes indexing terms, name authorities, subject headings, user-generated tags, and physical classification systems, all of which can affect the findability of material, both physically and in catalogs and databases.

The power of naming, labeling, and classifying is an especially critical one in women and gender studies because the works themselves frequently call into question the nature of the knowledge hierarchy that traditional cataloging structures reflect.

[Hope Olson](#) and others point out three major ways in which women's studies challenges cataloging practice:

1. Library of Congress Subject Headings have developed in a sexist society;
2. Women's studies is an interdisciplinary field;
3. Feminist research orientations do not fit into categories designed for traditional research;

Therefore, the act of assigning appropriate labels to women's studies materials is often an act of knowledge creation and interpretation in itself.

Due to the dynamic and interdisciplinary nature of women and gender studies, Olson argues that improving the flexibility of cataloging to encompass these challenges will ultimately be beneficial for all knowledge classification attempts. It is crucial to research how subject access is currently being handled in online

databases and how it can be improved, not just for the benefit of women and gender studies practitioners, but for all researchers.

Although criticism of controlled vocabularies and classification for women and gender studies materials spans 40 years (Berman, Sanford. 1971. *Prejudices and antipathies: A tract on the LC subject heads concerning people*. Scarecrow Press: Netuchen, NJ.), continued analysis is important. Some questions include:

Should materials of interest to women and gender studies researchers be grouped together physically, such as is currently the case in the HQs, or should they be scattered throughout the collection with the disciplinary materials? Integration versus segregation has very important ramifications for the transformation of academic knowledge structures as well as access issues, and this question stems from cataloging and indexing practices. What are the ramifications of the mainstreaming of research on women and gender in regard to segregation versus integration? Studying how these issues are currently playing out is a fundamental exercise for deciding how the future can and should be shaped.

What do current taxonomies of gender-related concepts used in subject cataloging and database indexing look like? Are they different for every database? How and when is gender expressed in indexing/cataloging? How do controlled vocabularies affect the identification of materials about the interconnection of race, sex, gender identity, class, and other identities? [Osmond \(2007\)](#) compared a sample of concepts related to women's studies in two thesauri and found that A Women's Thesaurus focuses more on gender and defines sexual identity much more broadly than the ERIC thesaurus.

[López-Huertas and Torres Ramírez \(2007\)](#) examined vocabulary representing concepts related to the health, image and body of women, comparing related documents published in Spain to gender thesauri (primarily Spanish-language). Their research showed that the thesauri were not constructed on literary warrant, with over 50% of the thesauri terms not found in any of the documents, and 20% of the terms in documents analyzed not represented in thesauri.

Transaction log studies from online catalog could be used to identify and analyze users' vocabulary choices in searching.

[Olson \(2001\)](#) offers a number of techniques for ameliorative change that can partially address issues of gender bias in library catalogs. Redemptive technologies can be applied to make systems more permeable, and tools can be developed to stretch standards such as LCSH and DDC that govern content of legacy data. One such example of a tool is that of [Denda \(2005\)](#), who developed an ontology for women's studies that maps to Library of Congress Subject Headings, allowing for the expression of relationship, context, and other attributes important to an interdisciplinary field, attributes that are not represented in LCSH. This discipline-specific ontology greatly improves the information seeking process for women's studies and offers flexibility, currency, and comprehensiveness. Denda recommends extending the ontology to reflect the historical development of women's studies, to accommodate the older research outputs that are in library collections.

Are indexing terms evolving/emerging in key new areas of scholarly discourse? How does that process happen and is it a flexible enough system (e.g. SACO) to accommodate new knowledge that goes against the grain of traditional knowledge structures? Are new subject headings being created in a timely way, or is there a lag between the introduction of a new idea/term in the literature and the development of appropriate subject headings to describe the new idea? For example, [Wood \(2010\)](#) points out that LC did not create a subject heading for feminist theory until 1992, despite ample literary warrant. [Christensen \(2008\)](#) also points out a lag in the creation of LC headings relating to gay men and lesbians.

How do folksonomies and other forms of tagging affect the findability of content and do user-generated tags empower marginalized users? [Adler \(2009\)](#) seeks to answer this question for a sample of transgender books and concludes that a library catalog which utilizes both a controlled vocabulary and user-generated tags enhances findability. Further research in related subject areas could be of use.

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Research Agenda — Users

A review of the literature in this area since 2001 shows the following distinct subgroupings of research: issues related to gender and technology, women's health information-seeking, gender differences in the use of public libraries, and the information needs and behavior of women internationally, women's studies faculty, battered women, and lesbian and queer women.

Gender and Technology

Four recent studies reveal the currently ambivalent body of evidence on whether or not there are gender differences in the use of technology for information-seeking. [Goeke \(2010\)](#) shows that women were better than men at using the full flexibility of a data warehouse system, while [Kim \(2010\)](#) found that the ease of use of university libraries web resources is more important for women than men due to lower computer self-efficacy. [Moss & Gunn \(2009\)](#) found that there are gender differences in website production and preference aesthetics, and women's preference for websites made by women is even stronger than men's preference for websites made by men. [Urquhart & Yeoman \(2010\)](#) provide a meta-analysis of other studies that concludes that gender differences in attitudes toward technology were not substantial.

[Dresang, Gross, & Holt \(2007\)](#), in a study of youth, found that gender differences in attitudes toward and use of computers no longer exist for the net generation, and that no more research about attitudes is needed. Instead, they advocate for further research in the following areas:

Research on actual use of technology that is based on observation, not self-reporting

Research on the involvement of youth in the production and creation of computer experiences

Research on why the disappearance of gender differences in use of and attitudes toward computers has not resulted in more women going into computer and technology college programs or career fields

[Urquhart & Yeoman \(2010\)](#) also report more broadly that women prefer “approachable” information resources and therefore tend to find information through connections.

How can academic libraries make their online services and resources more approachable and create personal connections to these resources for their target audiences? Presumably efforts in this area would benefit both women and men.

Women’s Health Information-Seeking

It is widely acknowledged in the literature that women are the primary seekers of health information, presumably due to their caregiving roles in society. Many studies have focused on women’s health information-seeking {[Yoo & Robbins \(2008\)](#), [Ankem \(2007\)](#), [Wathen & Harris \(2006\)](#), [Warner & Procaccino \(2004\)](#), [Davies & Bath \(2002\)](#)}, particularly on the part of rural or underprivileged women. [Ankem \(2007\)](#) showed that women with a higher level of education are more assertive about seeking health information. [Warner & Procaccino \(2004\)](#) found that the majority of women in their study look for information using a search engine on the web and are unsure about what they find. Frequently they then turn to family and friends for information. [Davies & Bath \(2002\)](#) discovered that for Somali women living in the UK, verbal information obtained from health professionals in the community was the most valuable source. Information flows most effectively through verbal social networks and through resources located in convenient locations. [Huber et al \(2003\)](#) reports on a project in Houston to equip local women’s non-profit agencies with workstations that clients can use to research health issues, thus putting authoritative resources out in the locations where the women are.

How can librarians or medical personnel provide access to and awareness of quality sources of health information, like WebMd or the National Institute of Health, in

locations and through information channels that are the most accessible?

Gender Differences in the Use of Public Libraries

Studies by [Applegate \(2008\)](#), [Cassell & Weibel \(2007\)](#), and [Fidishun \(2007\)](#) show that women primarily use the public library for books, children's services, and information related to their family functions. [Fidishun \(2007\)](#) found that they are comfortable with the technology and also appreciate the library as a place. [Agosto, Paone & Ipock \(2007\)](#) found no significant gender differences in the use of a public library by adolescents. Fidishun suggests the following questions for further research:

How do women who do not physically visit the library use library websites?

How do women who are non-library users find information?

Information Needs and Behaviors of Specific Populations:

Women Internationally

A burgeoning area of research is that of analyzing the information needs and practices of women around the world, particularly in developing countries. [Jones \(2009\)](#) advocates for community libraries in rural Uganda to be centrally located and engaged in their communities, and to offer literacy instruction, relevant materials, and engaged personnel. [Jiyane & Ocholla \(2004\)](#), and [Ikoja-Odongo \(2002\)](#) argue further that in many parts of rural South Africa and Uganda, there are no libraries and women need for information to be available close to home, and delivered orally by people in the community or via audio-visual means in schools, clinics, and hospitals. [Badawi \(2007\)](#) advocates for an activist role for Nigerian libraries to provide women with information about politics and empower them to reach full political participation. Finally, the 2003 compilation *Women's Issues at IFLA: Equality, Gender and Information on Agenda* brings together status reports on

women and information from all over the world, including developed countries. This is an area of research that will require constant updating.

What is the status of women as information-seekers in all parts of the world? How developed are library systems and how effective are they at reaching those in greatest need?

Women and Gender Studies Faculty

[Westbrook \(2003\)](#) surveyed women's studies faculty to determine their information-seeking needs and obstacles as well as their relationship with their librarians. About a quarter of respondents felt that they should not seek help from librarians because they should be capable of handling their own research. Westbrook provides advice garnered from 42 women's studies librarians on how to overcome this perception through outreach.

How can women and gender studies librarians provide services to help individual faculty with their own research? How can we market those services effectively?

Lesbian and Queer Women

[Rothbauer's 2005](#) study of lesbian and queer young women's information seeking practices showed that these young women read lesbian/queer materials both to provide a vision of the possibilities for their own lives and to provide a sense of community. Reading practices can lead to community by connecting with local queer women writers, sharing books with others and having book discussions. Unfortunately, libraries were not seen by respondents as good places to find these materials because they were too hard to identify in the catalog. Instead lesbian and queer young women primarily found materials by looking for lists on the internet. Also, in addition to books they read fanfiction, web comics, and web zines, which are internet only.

How can libraries facilitate better access to materials with lesbian content?

How can libraries facilitate the creation of community around lesbian reading practices?

How can libraries provide access to and preservation of fanfiction, web comics, and web zines?

Battered Women

[Dunne \(2002\)](#) outlines the progression of information needs of battered women and the obstacles to finding that information. She concludes by arguing for a mutual information flow between libraries and community agencies.

How can libraries be more active in providing information services at the point of need for women in crisis?

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Research Agenda — Collection Development and Evaluation

Policies and Strategies

[McLean \(2002\)](#) has analyzed the usage, usefulness, and content of collection development policies in women's studies.

- What are some examples of forward thinking collection development policies and how can they be useful in envisioning comprehensive but cost-effective hybrid print/electronic collections?

[Lee \(2002\)](#) traced the historical pattern of collection development for women and gender studies materials in the Rutgers University System.

- In what ways are traditional collection development strategies still useful and in what ways do they need to change to reflect an online information environment?

Ideological Diversity

[Searing \(2002\)](#) argues for creating collections with materials representing multiple points of view on issues of women and gender, not just feminist ones, and on preserving transgressive ideas, not just those that are socially-sanctioned within women and gender studies scholarship and mainstream culture.

- Are materials representing all points of view on women and gender, not just feminist ones, currently being collected by women's studies librarians? How can

collection development policies and strategies be altered to include these points of view?

[A 2007 study by Goldthorp](#) illustrates that collections and services for lesbians are still not adequate in Scottish public libraries.

- To what extent are the needs of the LGBTQ community being met by academic libraries, including their needs for leisure reading, services, and outreach? To what extent is lesbian/queer fiction being collected by academic libraries?

[Davis-Kahl \(2008\)](#) advocates for the inclusion of chick lit in academic libraries by defining the genre and bringing out themes related to cultural and literary criticism, demonstrating that the genre has academic value.

- To what extent are academic libraries collecting popular genres relevant to women and gender studies such as chick lit, graphic novels, and third wave feminist titles?

Format Diversity

A 2002 report on the collection of grey literature by [Blomqvist and Nielsen](#) discusses the difficulty of winnowing out women-related material in an environment of mainstreamed gender research and burgeoning electronic publications. In [2009](#), [Magnuson](#) examined the electronic grey literature holdings for four U.S. libraries at institutions with graduate women's studies programs and determined that websites and databases (as opposed to digital special collections and online course guides) were the most popular types of electronic grey literature collected.

- How is online grey literature such as websites and blogs being selected, collected, and maintained by women's studies librarians? How is access to these items being given and how will access be maintained over the long term?

[Dilevko and Dali \(2004\)](#) showed that the book review source Counterpoise has a more concentrated coverage of alternative and small press titles than mainstream

review sources.

- Given the massive amounts of online information available and the push for an online collection, are women's studies librarians still seeking out alternative and small press titles in print?

Some institutions, such as Barnard and Duke, have focused on collecting zines, which would otherwise be lost to history.

- How many institutions are collecting zines and is there an effort underway to digitize those zines for greater access?

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Research Agenda — Archives

Libraries for women's resource centers and women-focused archives have a crucial role to play in recording and preserving records of women's history and activism. Special collections libraries and archival collections, in general, hold immense resources for the documentation, preservation, and study of women's lives; however, the normal painstaking, time-consuming activity of archival research can be made even more challenging when one is searching for subjects outside the traditional white male elite.

Collections

[Gerson \(2001, in Buss\)](#) asserts that archives are not neutral sites of primary research materials but collections developed from specific social assumptions that dictate what documents are valuable. [Tucker \(2008\)](#) asks, how does WHO is archiving affect WHAT gets archived. [Mason and Zanish-Belcher \(2007\)](#) point out that although it's true that groups underrepresented in society tend to be underrepresented in archives, there are other factors that influence the archival record. The authors explain that how we define "underrepresented" depends upon context, and they issue cautionary points for women's archives on the subject of collecting: for example, women's archives of today may have a feminist bias or fail to document groups that do not share, or actively oppose, these values. Finally, a shift from "women" as an exclusive study of historical research to "gender" has created collecting challenges for archivists and librarians ([Sachs, 2008](#)).

- What is the representation of women within the archivist profession?
- What do current institutional priorities dictate about collecting and what are the implications for preserving the historical record of women?

- To what extent are women's archives and special collections engaged in adaptive methods of soliciting collections to reach groups for whom traditional methods of soliciting donations do not work well?
- What groups are currently missing from the historical record? What groups, outside of traditional women's & feminist studies, are missing from women's archives?
- What oral history projects need to be taken up to make the records as complete as possible?
- How is the transformation of libraries into interactive community creations shifting the focus to impact local archives? How is this affecting the collecting of women's studies & feminist materials? Who is overseeing the metadata for accessing this information? IS metadata being attached to this information?

Description and Access

Archival processing is a laborious and costly endeavor and even though few collections are processed to the item level, processing of unique and primary source materials has not kept up with acquisitions for decades. As more emphasis is placed on the rare and unique materials in special collections libraries and archives for their research value and ability to reflect the unique identity of a particular library, there is pressure to expose the hidden collections (backlogs of unprocessed materials). [Greene and Meissner \(2005\)](#) created a stir in the archival world with their article, "More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing," which called for the elimination of some preservation activities and the establishment of acceptable minimums for processing benchmarks in order to make more materials available to users in an adequate, useable form.

[Gerson \(2001, in Buss\)](#) pointed to the fact that women's papers are often found in collections headed by the names of men (archival practice is to list a collection under the creator of a group of records) as one of the challenges associated with researching women in archives. On the other hand, in noting the disparity between archival and academic (in scholarly writing) description of diaries, [Beattie \(2001, in Buss\)](#) offered a number of suggestions for improving archival descriptions to diaries and other personal records.

- With emphasis on “More Product, Less Process,” what are the implications for access to women’s materials in special collections?
- To what extent have special collections and archives opened up archival description, allowing users of records to create archival metadata through tagging digital images, annotating finding aids, or adding their own descriptions and what are the implication for access to women’s papers?
- How is the social web affecting access to women’s studies & feminist materials?

Research Tools

[Gerson \(2001, in Buss\)](#) offered methodologies for locating female subjects in the archive, and [Chmielewski \(2004\)](#) provided an overview of major resources for women’s history archives in the United States. These resources are still immensely useful.

- What major resources for the study of women’s and gender history have been made available since the publication of *Women’s History Archives* (2004)?
- What resources for the study of women’s and gender history are not represented by research tools / are not in public awareness?
- What archives on women exist outside the U.S., Great Britain & Canada for a more global perspective?
- How are new tools (post-2008) affecting researching women’s archives (WorldCat Local, etc)?

Digitization

In many ways the digital revolution has both helped and complicated the task of preserving and making accessible the historical record of women’s lives.

[Chmielewski \(2004\)](#) pointed out that even though archivists and librarians have begun using the web as a tool to disseminate information about the location of archival resources on women, there is still a great deal of work to be done. Few collections are processed to the item level; however, metadata is needed at that level when collections are digitized if they are to be accessible.

- To what extent are women's archives and special collections engaged in digitizing unique holdings? What funding, selection, and workflow models have they adopted?
- Have the digitization of collections and the subsequent creation of item-level metadata improved access to women's papers that are found in collections headed by the names of men?

Archiving electronic materials

Women's lives and, consequently, activism are playing out in the online environment.

Resources that are important to the historical record and the study of women are available only in electronic format.

- What is being done/could be done to archive women's online activism such as the League of Women Voters email Action Alert network?
- What is being done to archive other online feminist and women's studies information (ezines, weblogs, etc.)?

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Research Agenda — Scholarly Communications

Non-western evolution in information creation

[Bennett & Radloff \(2002\)](#) examine information generation within an African context. The advent of the Internet has seen a proliferation of research in the area of gender and ICTs. In an effort to free themselves from the hegemony of western feminists they are sensitizing themselves to the politics of communication. Information creation and generation results from gender & women's studies work emanating from NGOs. Email, listservs and radio are critical modes of information exchange. There are still considerable challenges regarding the collecting, organizing and dissemination of published information that is not as easily visible. Bennett & Radloff include an appendix of websites providing information on gender justice issues in Africa and list of four core women & gender studies journals published in Africa.

[Vyas \(2002\)](#) takes a look at women's information sources from India. The first National Conference on Women's Studies (1981) of the Indian Association of Women's Studies (IAWS) urged the development of information clearinghouses of research and other types of information emanating from governmental, institutional and commercial organizations. This article outlines the types of information sources coming from each of these sources, the core resource providing access to information from each of these sources. The information landscape for women in India is complex, well organized and diverse. She provides an outline of key access points (re: institutional archives & publications). Secondary sources for accessing these materials are well developed in the form of bibliographies, abstracting & indexing services, directories & resource guides. In addition, there has

been a proliferation of Websites developed by government and women's organizations. The commercial sector reflects the keen interest in women's information needs through popular media. Finally, numerous research centers have been established within the university systems for collecting and archiving materials.

- How has WGS knowledge creation and information dissemination evolved in non-Western countries, and how is it still evolving? How is that evolution the same or different from Western knowledge creation and dissemination?

Western evolution of information creation

[Gerhard \(2002\)](#) outlines the historical development of formalizing women's studies and feminist literature starting in 1972 with Ms. Magazine. From here core publications begin to emerge and include reference materials, journals endemic to women's studies (Signs, etc.) and then journals reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the field (e.g., Women & Health, Journal of Women's History, etc.) She points to the development of compendium of resources for locating information about women's studies or feminist serials (e.g., Feminist Periodicals: A Current Listing of Contents (1981-), Women's Periodicals in the United States: Social and Political Issues, etc.), the development of core lists, index & abstract development, TOC & alerts (noting that some of the serials are now available electronically) and finally to the advent of critical institutional repositories which are maintaining archives newsletters, ephemera and other difficult to locate materials from across the past couple centuries. She suggests that the advent of e-zines will likely give rise to new voices (girls?). With the advent of the Internet, access to and dissemination of information will become easier, but women's studies librarians will still be critical.

- Where is women and gender studies as a field in changing scholarly communication?
- How is women and gender studies contributing to the evolution of open access scholarly communication?
- How has WGS knowledge creation and information dissemination evolved?

- How do scholarly communications within women and gender studies differ across countries and cultures?

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Research Agenda — Information Literacy and Women and Gender Studies in Higher Education

The political nature of women's studies and the parallel between some feminist pedagogical objectives and information literacy objectives make the intersection of information literacy and women's studies a provocative area for study. A handful of recent studies have shown how thoroughly the construction of best practices in information literacy instruction have been aligned with the innovations of feminist pedagogy: small group discussions, the use of personal experience as a legitimate way of knowing, a collaborative ethic, and an inversion of the power structure in the classroom so that students feel empowered to create knowledge ([Ladenson 2010](#); [Fields 2001](#); [Wilkinson 2004](#)). In addition, the importance of the affective learning process, or the acknowledgement and processing of the emotions involved in the research process has been emphasized in recent work ([Mortimore and Wall 2009](#); [Wilkinson 2004](#)). These findings lead to some further questions:

- What are some best practices with regard to using personal experience and group work in information literacy instruction for women's studies?
- Does an emphasis on the affective learning process inherent in research improve student outcomes? Can the validation of student emotions be helpful in student motivation for success?
- What are some best practices in the use of research journals to track and validate the affective learning process?

In the previous incarnation of the research agenda, we asked “how integrated is the women's studies librarian into the life of the women's studies department in terms of instruction?” [Caroline Nappo's 2006 study](#), while limited by a small sample size,

showed that in general women's studies librarians do feel integrated into the departments, although they would like to become even more so. The biggest hindrance to faculty-librarian partnerships was the lack of institutional support for women's studies programs. This begs further study:

- What types of women's studies programs/departments are the most conducive to faculty/librarian partnerships?
- Are librarians integrated into women's studies courses most commonly at the lower-division undergraduate level, the upper-division undergraduate level, or the graduate level?

Articles by [Wilkinson \(2006\)](#) and [Broidy \(2007\)](#) indicate a possible trend in librarian integration into women's studies programs: that of librarians teaching credit courses that combine the principles of feminist pedagogy and information literacy with political and theoretical course content. Broidy's course "Gender and the Politics of Information" and Wilkinson's course "Gender and the Research Process" may presage a movement to take the political nature of research instruction in women's studies a step further by combining pedagogy with critical theories of information in semester-long courses.

- To what extent are women's studies librarians beginning to teach credit courses on research methods and/or the politics of information? To whom are these courses targeted? Are they required courses?

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Research Agenda — Feminism & Librarianship

According to [Hur-Li Lee \(2002\)](#), “Since the 1970s, American women’s studies librarianship has exemplified activist professionalism.” This research agenda embraces an activist role by including in our focus not just the information needs of women’s studies as an academic field, but also a feminist analysis of the librarianship profession and its practices.

Gender and Technology

[Ricigliano \(2003\)](#) and [Lamont \(2009\)](#) have illustrated that men are overrepresented in the technology departments within libraries, despite the fact that all librarianship increasingly demands a high level of technological literacy, and that these jobs generally command higher salaries. [Gilley \(2006\)](#) explored the basis of this issue by looking at the gender breakdown in library and information science programs, discovering that ALA-accredited information science programs were 62% women, while non-ALA-accredited information science programs were 62% men.

- Has the merging of library science and information science in newly renamed Schools of Information made a difference in the number of women entering the technology departments of libraries?
- Is the gender segregation between IT and public service departments in academic libraries decreasing?
- Are the salary disparities decreasing?

[Lamont \(2009\)](#) suggested that libraries need to transform the organizational culture of their IT departments by redefining what constitutes technological work and who contributes to it.

- Have any institutions had success in increasing female representation in their IT departments, and if so, have they used structural solutions to achieve this?

[Sierpe \(2001\)](#) showed that on JESSE, the Library/Information Science list-serv, men were overrepresented as contributors compared to their numerical representation on the list, confirming previous studies suggesting that men tend to dominate computer-mediated communication.

- Is it still the case within library-related computer-mediated communication that men are overrepresented?

Librarian Activism

Recent writers have argued that librarians are both uniquely qualified and well-placed to act as “social entrepreneurs” ([Allison 2007](#)), “community action researchers” ([Mehra and Braquet 2007](#)), or “academic activists” ([Conteh-Morgan 2004](#)). These authors argue for using the librarian’s role as information bridge in an activist capacity to bring awareness of under-represented voices and perspectives to the academic community, disciplinary fields, and the public at large.

- How are librarians using their role within the university to advocate for social change?
- To what extent are librarians beginning to influence curriculum and curriculum content in favor of inclusion of diverse voices or cutting edge feminist topics? Does this influence extend beyond women’s studies into traditional disciplines?

Gender and the Profession

According to [Moran, Leonard, and Zellers \(2009\)](#), the gender gap at the administrator level of academic libraries still exists but is rapidly decreasing; however, there is still a salary gap between male and female librarians.

- Why is there still a salary gap between male and female librarians?

[Jones and Oppenheim \(2002\)](#) found that issues like salary gap and gender inequity in leadership positions are no longer an effect of outright discrimination or lack of qualifications. “Instead, the main barrier to women’s promotion in libraries appears to be domestic responsibilities, particularly taking a career break to bring up children.” [Graves, Xiong, and Park \(2008\)](#) confirm the dramatic effect of child-rearing on women’s careers in their finding that the promotion and tenure process affects women academics’ decision to have children more strongly than male academics.

- What initiatives could be/have been put in place in academic libraries to support the careers of librarians of both sexes who have to accommodate child-rearing responsibilities?
- What is the availability and what are the consequences of part-time jobs and flexible work schedules?
- What training could be made available for librarians who have taken time out of the workforce to raise children?

A 2010 citation analysis study by [Reece-Evans](#) shows that men are publishing in LIS journals at a higher rate than women, despite the fact that women outnumber men 3:1 in this field.

- Why are women under-represented in LIS literature?
- Why are women better represented in e-journals than print journals, although still not equal to men? What is it about the scholarly reputation or publishing process of e-journals that is more amenable to women?
- How fast is the gender gap in publication closing?

There have been several studies throughout the past decade analyzing gender and the profession of librarianship around the world, particularly in Nigeria and Ghana

([Ogunrombi, Pisagh, & Udoh, 2002](#); [Gannon-Leary & Parker, 2002](#); [Iwe, 2005](#); [Amekuedee & Adanu, 2006](#); [Nwezeh, 2009](#)).

- What is the gendered landscape of the profession of librarianship internationally?

[Carmichael \(1992\)](#), [Piper and Collamer \(2001\)](#), and [Record and Green \(2008\)](#), have studied the male perspective on gender in the library profession. The three stereotypes of male librarians as “effeminate, probably gay,” “powerless, socially inept,” and “unambitious” are still holding sway today, as is the perception of the profession as low status and low pay.

- How can we counteract a century’s worth of gendered stereotypes about the “feminized” profession of librarianship in a way that would bring all librarians, regardless of gender, status and respect?

Studies by [Thornton \(2001\)](#) and [Epps \(2008\)](#) have analyzed the representation of African-American women in the profession and its leadership positions, showing that they are still vastly under-represented in both.

- Why are minorities still so underrepresented in librarianship? What can be done to recruit and retain minorities?
- What should be done to increase minority representation in leadership positions? What cultural shifts need to occur?

Future of the Profession

- What is the place of women’s studies within academic libraries right now?
- How many universities still have standalone women’s studies collections versus integrating women’s studies materials into the general collection?
- What are the future trends for both collections and librarian responsibilities in women’s studies?

Research Agenda — History of Women in Librarianship

Documenting the pioneering contributions of individual women to the field of librarianship is one of the most popular research topics in women's studies librarianship right now, as evidenced by the two entire issues of *Libraries & the Cultural Record* (2009 and 2010) devoted to this topic.

- How have the contributions of individual women served to shape both national and international librarianship in crucial ways?

Similarly, the history of women as a group within the field of librarianship and the prejudice and pay discrimination they encountered, as well as the opportunities they were afforded for freedom and autonomy continues to generate much research.

[McDowell \(2009\)](#) studies “historical explanations for the feminization of the field,” and [Kerslake \(2007\)](#) looks at the “impact of gender on the development of the profession.”

- How did the field of librarianship get to be feminized and what was the impact on the profession of the large numbers of women in it (both individually and as a group)?

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