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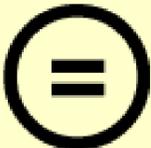
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**A History of Women Workers
in English Libraries, 1871-1974**

By

Evelyn Kerlake

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Abstract

This thesis proposes that library work, like other occupations, is a cultural practice: that is, it is an activity pursued within contemporary social conventions and power relations. It also proposes that a useful way of exploring the women-dominated cultural practice of library work is through a consideration of gender and of further interconnecting factors. There are two aims: to outline the positioning of women workers in English libraries between 1871-1974; and, to consider the impacts of that positioning on men and women workers in the sector.

The theoretical framework is indebted to work by feminist, library and post-structuralist historians and labour market theorists. These theoretical approaches have been used as a resource to inform an historical account of a labour market sector. This thesis demonstrates the extent of women's participation in English libraries between 1871-1974 and explores attempts to constrain that participation. It identifies when those constraints were challenged or complied with and the function of that constraint or compliance. The impact of such developments on men workers in the sector is also discussed. Understandings of femininity and masculinity are critical in an exploration of gender in the labour market and this thesis explores how accepted constructions were variously used to prohibit, discourage or privilege access to parts of the library labour market. In doing so, it discusses how understandings of femininity were questioned in these processes. Thus, this thesis illustrates ways in which paid work in libraries was a site for the establishment, consolidation and negotiation of gendered discourses of employment.

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Abbreviations

ALA	Associate of the Library Association
FLA	Fellow of the Library Association
LA	Library Association of the UK
LAA	Library Assistants' Association

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Context

Stereotypically speaking, library workers are women: unremarkable women with spectacles and a bun, a sensible skirt and twinset less the pearls. From Katherine Lind,¹ Ellie Chappel,² and Molly Hilton³ to Imogen Brocklehurst⁴ and Carolyn Lyle⁵ - these are women waiting for something better, for a life beyond the library, like the library worker-turned-actress in the Smirnoff advertisement.⁶ They might be termed “excellent women”⁷ but they do not often attract a great deal of interest. This thesis, however, takes such women working in English libraries between 1871-1974 as its point of interest. They are not the only focus, however. Their significance is considered in constructions of gender, ethnicity, sexuality and class. Drawing on texts from a variety of media, this thesis considers different and competing accounts of women library workers produced by librarians and paraprofessional library workers, politicians, media commentators and, occasionally, novelists. The texts referred to include letters, press cuttings, oral history narratives, historiographical accounts and library reports.

No full-length historical study of women workers in English libraries has been produced. A few short articles have focused on this time period, and some writers have briefly noted women’s involvement in libraries before the 1870s.⁸ There is, however, a substantial international literature exploring women’s participation in libraries since the late 19th century. Much of this work has focused on US library history,⁹ however, there have also been studies in Australia,¹⁰ New Zealand¹¹ and France.¹² Such discussions accompany studies of other occupations, such as insurance¹³ and teaching,¹⁴ and these indicate that gender was a significant power relation in the development of these occupations. Gendering processes have not been considered in relation to the English library labour market, yet such a consideration is timely. During the period under review, as in the contemporary situation, the library profession faced fundamental changes and challenges. In the 1870s, the legitimacy of librarianship’s claim to be a profession at all was in doubt, and today, the impacts of the ‘information society’ are, once again, forcing a focus on the rationale of the

profession.¹⁵ Additionally, there has been some consideration of women's roles in the contemporary library workforce,¹⁶ and such studies would benefit from in-depth historical contextualisation. Finally, recent developments in library history have begun to shift the theoretical focus of the field towards a consideration of the wider social context within which library work and the profession were established. Such work has begun to articulate the idea of librarianship as a cultural practice, however, gender, a central cultural marker particularly in a women-dominated occupation, has not been afforded much discussion.

The paucity of discussion on library workers may be because they, like libraries themselves, are often thought of as politically neutral, as pursuing an agenda which is 'objective'. Alistair Black remarks that, in particular, the public library's "social neutrality and impartiality are almost mythical"¹⁷ and his work challenges this supposed impartiality. In similar fashion, this thesis challenges the political neutrality of library workers, taking as its starting point the perspective that library work is a cultural practice,¹⁸ and, as such, it and its practitioners are enmeshed in the socio-political power relations of the time. *Library work and workers have been rarely acknowledged in UK library history as culturally situated.*¹⁹ This thesis, then, considers the composition of the library labour market in England from the mid-Victorian period to 1970s and notes that, over this period, numbers of women workers increased significantly, both absolutely and proportionally. Yet this increase does not necessarily indicate a liberal social progression, which sees long-established barriers to women's employment falling away. Such a view is suggested by John L. Thornton:

First recruited as cheap labour, cultivated because of their contributions both as attractions and their ability to do the work, they [women] were eventually encouraged to educate themselves for librarianship, and gradually given positions of authority, although often at a cheaper rate than that offered to men. Today, librarianship is becoming a profession mainly for women, and they should look back to their predecessors who initiated this development and particularly to those who ensured the success of the venture.²⁰

Thornton depicts a deliberate movement towards a profession dominated by women. There is progression from a time of crude economic exploitation of women, followed by a period of realisation of women's worth, culminating in librarianship becoming a profession for women. There is, however, no evidence that either men or women library workers aimed to create a profession for women. Opportunities for women in librarianship certainly increased from 1871, however, this could not have been a causal factor gradually leading to women being given positions of authority because some women had already achieved senior posts in public libraries by 1880 (such as Hannah Eteson at Blackpool), in academic libraries by 1885 (such as Fanny Passavant at Leeds) and in special libraries by 1887 (such as Frances Low and Constance Black at the People's Palace, London). It seems unlikely that the employment of women in libraries can be understood as part of a liberal democracy's inevitable march of progress. Yet how else to explain the increase? The scarcity of historical work in this area provides few analyses of the employment of women in English libraries, nor of the significance of gender to this labour market. The following chapters turn to contemporaneous texts to develop this question considering how, if at all, women were treated differently in the workplace in comparison to men and why this might have been so. These chapters elaborate on Thomas Kelly's provocative, yet unexplained, comment that at the turn of the 20th century, "The prejudice against women staff died hard."²¹ The rest of this chapter outlines the aims and scope of this study, defines the major terms used and sketches the subsequent chapters.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

This thesis has two aims: firstly, to consider the omission of women workers from library historiography about English libraries and secondly, to explore the impacts of gender and interconnecting social processes on the development of the library sector in the years 1871-1974. These aims are pursued by considering the positioning of women in English libraries, and the impacts of this on men in this sector of the labour market. Comparisons with other occupations dominated by women are occasionally discussed. This is not a comparative study, however, and the exemplars highlighted only indicate broad comparisons, rather than exhaustively discuss them. It was felt that a history focused on women library workers needed to be

explored before a comparative history could be thoroughly considered. This might be the subject of further work in this area, and such a study might replicate Barbara Brand's comparative study of nursing, teaching, social work and librarianship in the US.²² Rather than being a comparative study, this work investigates the extent to which different types of library work and different levels of work in the library sector were predominantly staffed by one sex, and considers how, if at all, and why this changed over the period in question.

1.3 Scope

This study is influenced by developments in the fields of feminist, historical and critical theory, both for its methodology and the types of texts to which it refers.²³ Such approaches emphasise the links between leisure, work, family or political activities or products sometimes understood as unconnected. Hence a wide-ranging selection of texts are consulted, from career guides to the professional press and oral history interviews. Use of such texts aims to explore the employment of women in public (county and municipal), special and academic libraries. This range of texts produced a great deal of data, much of which had not been used for academic or historical study. The volume of data necessitated some restrictions on the scope of the study. Whilst originally it was intended to explore the history of women in British libraries between 1871 and 1990, two restrictions were implemented. Firstly, the scope was limited to only English libraries. This acknowledged a number of factors, including the differences in library legislation for different countries, for example, Scottish legislation was somewhat different to that in England and Wales; other legislation was also differently enacted throughout Britain. It allowed greater consideration of the specific historical and social context against which the events occurred and permitted in-depth fieldwork in archives for different types of library. Secondly, the time period was revised, to include the years 1871-1974. The start date was selected because existing literature identifies 1871 as the year when women's employment in public libraries was first debated. It also allows a focus on the development of the profession of librarianship. The concluding date, 1974, was chosen because of the English local government reorganisation of that year which changed public library authority boundaries. It also brings the study to a close before

the implementation of legislative changes regarding sex discrimination in the labour market.

1.4 Definitions

This section provides a broad outline of four major terms used in this study: history; women; libraries; and, library workers.

1.4.1 *History*

In brief, history is understood to refer to both ‘the past’ and writing about ‘the past’, which is sometimes called ‘historiography’.²⁴ This definition is developed in Chapter 2. Explicating this definition allows this study to explore what historians writing about ‘the past’ have said about women library workers, and also to identify and analyse those traces of ‘the past’ that still exist, for example, in the form of documents in archives and contemporaneously published books and articles.

1.4.2 *Women*

Difficulties in using the term ‘woman’ have been debated. Common-sense definitions of gender have been problematised by deconstructing the term ‘woman’ to fundamentally challenge understandings of sexual difference. Gender is often used to suggest a social understanding of sex, and is opposed to biological or genetic understandings. Sex refers to a dichotomous category of male and female which is ahistorical as these categories are assumed to be unchanging. Post-structuralist gender theorists, such as Judith Butler,²⁵ have disrupted these understandings of ‘women’, however. Butler argues that not all women ‘count’ as women according to definitional requirements of biology or experience as they may not have the presumed female genitals, chromosomes, internal organs (such as womb), nor the apparently ‘universal’ female experiences, such as heterosexual relationships or bearing children. These differences in the category woman, Butler argues, make it unworkable.

Butler's work highlights the differences between women and ways that the term may exclude groups of women from the category 'women'. For example, many Black feminist theorists have noted that early second wave feminists' use of the terms 'women' and 'women's concerns' tended to refer to concerns most pressing for white women, whilst claiming to represent all women's concerns.²⁶ Similarly, Denise Riley has discussed Black abolitionist and freed slave Sojourner Truth's famous question and inherent claim made in 1851:²⁷ "Ain't I a woman?" In doing so, Sojourner Truth emphasised that the definition of 'woman' offered by white feminists did not include her. Riley argues that because 'women' is a "volatile collectivity in which female persons can be very differently positioned ... the continuity of the subject 'women' isn't to be relied on".²⁸ Those belonging to the category women, then, cannot be assumed as self-evident. Drag queen, male-to-female transsexual and butch lesbian identities have been explored by queer theorists to develop this point.²⁹

Despite these comments, as Sara Mills notes, many feminists "still retain a common-sense belief in the existence of 'women'".³⁰ However, this belief does not understand 'women' as a taken-for-granted category, but instead as a term which must be modified by further definitional and contextualising statements. Whilst this study will draw on the common-sense belief in the term 'woman', it also recognises the significant differences between those included within the term and attempts to explore how these differences operate in the particular context of library employment.

1.4.3 Libraries

Libraries are categorised in the following ways. The term 'public library' is used to refer to those libraries which were rate-funded and open to everyone, such as municipal free public libraries and county library services. This excludes other libraries which might have been included here such as co-operative libraries, miners' welfare libraries and libraries attached to mechanics' institutes. 'Academic libraries' are understood as those attached to educational institutions, such as university, college and school libraries, which were often publicly funded but also had some level of access restrictions. Services not falling into either academic or public categories are

defined as 'special libraries', and include industrial, government and commercial libraries.

1.4.4 Library Workers

The term 'library workers' is used to refer to those paid workers who are involved in some way with the bibliographic organisation of information or as part of the process which puts users in touch with texts that contain desired information. This ranges from professionally unqualified assistants, working on issue desks, in binderies or at shelving duties, to professionally qualified librarians, cataloguing information or managing financial resources. This definition attempts to delimit those included in the category 'library workers' by excluding two significant groups of workers connected with libraries. Firstly, it does not include those paid workers primarily involved with cleaning or maintenance work, such as caretakers. It also does not include those people, often women, who performed library work on a voluntary basis, such as the volunteers who contributed to the establishment of early public and county libraries.³¹

1.5 Outline

This thesis comprises of four parts which consider various aspects of writing a history of library employment. The first part is concerned with the theoretical framework of the study. It discusses the methodological issues pertinent to a historical survey of a sector of the labour market. It is suggested that the methodology selected should be able to accommodate a focus on gender and differences between apparently similarly positioned social groups. It should also offer a theoretical account of historical work. Drawing on these theoretical and methodological considerations, the following parts of the thesis discuss three questions:

- i) What is library work and who are library workers?
- ii) How do individuals negotiate entry to library employment?
- iii) How do individual workers fare once in the sector?

The second part, then, begins the discussion of library workers and attempts to define library work in quantitative and qualitative terms. Chapter 3 provides a statistical overview of the position of women library workers during the period in question. It focuses on the numbers of women in the sector, their terms and conditions of employment. This chapter is flawed by significant gaps in the available statistical data, yet it represents the most comprehensive attempt at data collection on this subject. This statistical definition of library work and workers is developed in Chapter 4 which provides a qualitative approach to this question, examining how women workers were understood in relation to library work, and the gendered impacts of this positioning. It considers constructions of the mutual suitability of library work and women, and explores the extent of this suitability.

Following these qualitative and quantitative accounts of library work and workers, the third part focuses on negotiating entry to the sector. Access to library work and professional status is first considered in relation to professional education. It is argued that as librarianship became established as a profession, professional education played an increasingly significant gate-keeper role, prohibiting or granting access to the sector. Furthermore, it is argued that gender signified in these training and educational processes, and was a significant factor in constructing the values attached to various forms of training and education. Access issues are developed in Chapter 6 which discusses ways that workers understood themselves in relation to the profession. Occupational identities are not simply created by the acquisition of professional qualifications, and this chapter considers other processes involved. It argues that the continuation of sex differentiated pay in some parts of the sector throughout the period in question was a key factor in differently gendered access to professional identities. Having considered access to the sector, the final part of the thesis explores issues of equality within library work. Chapter 7 considers the formulation of equality issues in terms of the 'equality or difference' debate. It discusses inequity in the sector by reference to the marriage bar and gendered constructions of those workers most suited to low paid, low status positions. Chapter 8 develops issues of equality by discussing how signs of femininity were physically manifested and the implications of this signification. It considers the function of dress codes, mandatory overalls, beauty contests and the material impact of library work on

women. The concluding chapter draws together the issues raised in the four parts. It uses the arguments presented there to construct a periodisation of women's employment in English libraries and considers implications of the finding that three significant discourses - of feminism, anti-racism and trade unionism - are rarely used in debates about the library labour market.

¹ Larkin, P. (1975) *Girl in Winter: A Novel*, London, Faber.

² Summerhayes, P. (1949) *Girls in Green. A Story of Library Life between the Wars*, London, Hutchinson.

³ Lonsdale, B. (1954) *Molly Hilton: Library Assistant*, London, Bodley Head; and, Lonsdale, B. (1958) *Molly Qualifies as a Librarian*, London, Bodley Head.

⁴ Cooper, J. (1979) *Imogen*, London, Book Club Associates.

⁵ Peake, L. (1980) *The Library Tree*, London, Mills and Boon.

⁶ No Author. (1972) In Search of a Miracle, *Assistant Librarian*, 65(12), p.188. The Smirnoff advertisement is reproduced on the front cover of this issue of *Assistant Librarian*.

⁷ Pym, B. (1976) *Excellent Women*, Bath, Chivers. Many of Barbara Pym's novels feature women librarians see, for example, Pym, B. (1993) *Some Tame Gazelle*, London, Pan. See: Taylor, H.C. (1999) Barbara Pym and the Bodelian, *Library History Newsletter*, Summer, pp.3-6.

⁸ For example, see: Anderson, B.S. and Zinsser, J.P. (1990) *A History of Their Own. Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present. Volume 1*, London, Penguin, p.186 and p.201; and Davidoff, L. and Hall, C. (1987) *Family Fortunes. Men and Women of the English Middle-Class, 1780-1850*, London, Hutchinson, p.306.

⁹ Examples include: Grotzinger, L.A. (1966) *The Power and the Dignity: Librarianship and Katharine Sharp*, New York, Scarecrow; Garrison, D. (1979) *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920*, New York, Free Press; Heim, K.M. (ed) (1983) *The Status of Women in Librarianship: Historical, Sociological and Economic Issues*, New York, Neal-Schuman; Carmichael, J. V. (1986) Atlanta's Female Librarians, 1883-1915, *Journal of Library History*, 21(2), pp.378-399; Passet, J.E. (1994) *Cultural Crusaders: Women Librarians in the American West, 1900-1917*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico; Hildenbrand, S. (ed) (1997) *Reclaiming the American Library Past: Writing the Women In*, Ablex, Norwood.

¹⁰ For example: Simon, J. (1994) The Construction of Femininity in Discourses of the Woman Librarian: 1890s-1940s, *Australian Library Journal*, 43(4), pp.257-271.

¹¹ For example: Northey, G. (1995) The New Zealand Library Association 1910-1970: Its Role in the Demise of a Feminised Profession, *New Zealand Libraries*, 48(2), pp.25-30.

¹² For example: Maack, M.N. (1983) Women Librarians in France: The First Generation, *Journal of Library History*, 18(4), pp.407-463.

¹³ For example: Jordan, E. (1996) The Lady Clerks at the Prudential: The Beginning of Vertical Segregation by Sex in Clerical Work in Nineteenth-century Britain, *Gender and History*, 8(1) pp.65-81.

¹⁴ For example: Oram, A. (1996) *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics*, Manchester, Manchester.

¹⁵ See: Feather, J. (1998) *The Information Society: A Study of Continuity and Change*, London, Library Association; and, Kerlake, E. and Kinnell, M. (1998) Public Libraries, Public Interest and the Information Society: Theoretical Issues in the Social Impact of Public Libraries, *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 30(3), pp.159-67.

¹⁶ For example: Burrington, G. (1993) *Equally Good: Women in British Librarianship*, London, AAL; Goulding, A. and Kerlake, E. (1996) *Developing the Flexible Library and Information Workforce: A Quality and Equal Opportunities Perspective*, British Library Research and Innovation Report 25, Boston Spa, British Library Research and Innovation Centre; and, Poland, F. and Curran, M. (1996) *Women and Senior Management. A Research Study of Career Barriers and Progression in the Library and Information Sector*, London, Library Association.

¹⁷ Black, A. (1996) *A New History of the English Public Library. Social and Intellectual Contexts, 1850-1914*, London, Leicester University, p.1.

¹⁸ Thanks to Nickianne Moody for discussions on this point.

- ¹⁹ Examples include: Layzell Ward, P. (1966) **Women and Librarianship**, London, Library Association, 1966; Ritchie, S. (1979) 2000 to 1: A Sex Oddity?, *Assistant Librarian*, 72(3), pp.38-41; and, Burrington, G. (1987) **Equal Opportunities in Librarianship? Gender and Career Aspirations**, London, Library Association.
- ²⁰ Thornton, J.L. (1941) **The Chronology of Librarianship**, London, Grafton, p.243.
- ²¹ Kelly, T. (1977) **A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain 1845-1975**, London, Library Association, p.204.
- ²² Brand, B.E. (1983) Librarianship and Other Female-intensive Professions, *Journal of Library History*, 18(4), pp.391-406.
- ²³ See Chapter 2.
- ²⁴ See Jenkins, K. (1991) **Re-thinking History**, London, Routledge.
- ²⁵ Butler, J. (1997) Performative Acts and Gender Constitution. An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory, in Conboy, K., Medina, N. and Stanbury, S. (eds) **Writing on the Body. Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory**, New York, Columbia University.
- ²⁶ hooks, b. (1984) **Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center**, Boston, South End.
- ²⁷ Riley, D. (1988) **Am I that Name? Feminism and the Category of Woman in History**, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota.
- ²⁸ Ibid., p.2.
- ²⁹ See: Butler, ref. 22.
- ³⁰ Mills, S. (ed) (1994) **Gendering the Reader**, New York, Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- ³¹ See Chapter 7.

PART I. THEORISING GENDER, HISTORY AND LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION

Chapter 2. Doing History Now: Methodological and Theoretical Issues in Library History

2.1 Introduction

The roles played by women in establishing, using or working in English libraries have scarcely been explored by library, or other, historians. Until the late 1960s, such an omission was scarcely cause for comment. However, the revival of the Women's Liberation Movement and development of women's history, accompanied by civil rights' movements among Black, lesbian and gay communities and these associated histories, critically challenged the traditional understanding of history as the complete truth about the past. The 'new histories',¹ such as social history and Black history, suggested that traditional history explored only some aspects of the past and that this partiality should be acknowledged and could be redressed. More recently, historical developments using post-structural theory have challenged both the traditional and new histories by disrupting the link between 'history' and the 'truth about the past' and suggesting that partial histories are the only type that it is possible to write.² Such theorists argue that history is not about the past but rather:

History is something we perform. History is not the past. History is the past transformed into words or paint or dance or play.³

In other words, history is as much about the present-minded concerns of the historian writing the 'history' as it is about the 'past' s/he is discussing. History is not a reconstruction of the past, but a contemporary construction about the past. Most British library history has been untouched by these broad movements within the discipline of history instead remaining within the positivist tradition. The methodology outlined below suggests one way in which library history might engage with ideas and practices associated with current methodological concerns about 'doing history'.

'Methodology' is used here following Sandra Harding's exploration of the term.⁴ She argues that it concerns not only *how* a study is conducted, but rather involves three factors: a *theoretical* framework which informs the *methods* employed and the *analytical* approach adopted. The framework theorises the aims and objectives of the study which then inform the practice of the study, its analysis and purpose. Where a study is informed, as here, by a post-structural feminist methodology, then the practice and purpose of research must pursue post-structural understandings of feminist aims. It is at this structural level of methodology that feminist, or other philosophical, principles are to be found. The theoretical approach used in this study draws on frameworks from women's history, library history and post-structural history, and, as this is also the study of a profession, it also refers to theories of the labour market: these frameworks are outlined below. Following this, the data collection methods and approach to the texts are discussed.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The aim of this study is to explore a sector of the labour market in the past. More specifically, it explores a history of women library workers in England. Explanatory frameworks relating to historical analysis and labour market activity are therefore useful. The historical frameworks were initially developed by the 'new histories' which validated studies, such as this one, which fall short of the traditional terms of historical significance, whereby only 'great' events or people were considered worthy of historical attention.⁵ Within the 'new histories' two discrete approaches to historical work on women are relevant - women's history and feminist history - and these are explored below. More recently, post-structural theory has been considered by feminist historians and this is also discussed. The section concludes by considering explanatory frameworks concerning labour market participation.

2.2.1 *Women's History: Compensation and Contribution*

Much historical work on women in the late 1960s and 1970s has been described as "compensatory history"⁶ or as following the tradition of "women worthies"⁷ by exploring the lives of individual women to demonstrate women's participation in past events. Such work compensates for the omission of women in

historiography. Whilst the recognition that women are missing from historiography is a vital shift in consciousness,⁸ the search for “exceptional, even deviant women does not describe the experience and history of the mass of women”.⁹ A compensatory history framed within accepted criteria of historical significance might focus on the very few women who were queens but not on the huge numbers of women employed as servants. By focusing on women who meet traditional criteria of historical significance, this approach tends to privilege men and marginalise women as it attributes significance within established value systems which tend to have denigrated women or activities characterised as feminine.¹⁰ This approach was developed by studies which outlined the contribution women made to various, already acknowledged, political and social movements and such work might feature author and Fabian Beatrix Webb, trades unionist Arabella Shore and penal reformer Mary Carpenter. Gerda Lerner terms this “contribution history”¹¹ and emphasises that while this, like compensatory history, recognises that women were ‘also there’ it accepts traditional criteria of historical significance. Within contribution history, the development of ‘separate spheres’ or women’s culture history is significant because it challenges these criteria by foregrounding and re-valuing activities mainly pursued by women and understood as feminine.¹² However, this approach, too, often avoids critically addressing historical norms instead adopting a celebratory approach.¹³ Re-valuing activities performed by women in the past, such as domestic work or embroidery, is insufficient if there is no explication of the reasons why women came to pursue these activities rather than others, such as oil painting or architecture, which carried more prestige within dominant value systems. Such approaches to history also fail to explain those women who did not pursue stereotypical feminine activities but achieved success in mainstream terms, such as scientist Hertha Ayrton. Furthermore, Joan Scott argues that such work is “an almost naive endorsement of positivism” which uncritically accepts “pluralism’s promise of equality”.¹⁴ Scott’s scepticism centres on the ease with which such histories may be marginalised in the historical canon thus allowing the continuation of traditional historical approaches.¹⁵

Despite such critiques, compensation and contribution models are used uncritically in existing histories of women library workers in England,¹⁶ although there are instances of more critical approach in UK library history.¹⁷ Kathleen Weibel

and Kathleen Heim's anthology of writings by and about women library workers includes UK writers, and may be understood as illustrating the contributions women made to the developing profession.¹⁸ A similarly 'additive' approach is apparent in an article by Julia Taylor which discusses women's employment in English libraries from the late 19th century to the 1950's.¹⁹ The paper is based on data and texts infrequently used and provides much new historical data. As such, it points out an omission from the library history canon. However, while Taylor sketches ways that women library workers were oppressed and the context in which this occurs, she does not address the problematic interpretative 'why' question: why were women library workers oppressed and why has this not been discussed by library historians?²⁰

US historian Suzanne Hildenbrand is not dismissive of compensatory work but argues that, although it can be useful this usefulness is limited because whilst it:

...has introduced us to many interesting women in our past and their varied work ... it has not retold the story of American library development in a way that fully illuminates women's roles. We must understand what shaped the library systems and who ran them to understand women's place in them.²¹

Hildenbrand insists on the need for compensatory history but argues that it should be accompanied by "an investigation of how the gendered structure of librarianship came about". She argues that this shifts the debate from a focus on the "politics of library history" and towards one exploring the "history of library politics".²² To date, in relation to women workers, studies focused on libraries in England have only used the compensatory model.²³ Yet compensatory, contributions and separate spheres models are flawed and, whilst this study is indebted to the insights they provide, they are not a satisfactory framework. The next section explores ways of extending a compensatory approach to develop a framework which not only fills in the historiographical gaps about women library workers in England, but also provides a way of theorising this data.

2.2.2 *Feminist and Post-structural History*

Compensatory and contribution histories may offer inspirational narratives, however, as Anna Davin points out, they often provide little in-depth analysis.²⁴ Feminist history, however, is predicated on feminism as an explanatory framework. The terms ‘women’s history’ and ‘feminist history’ are not interchangeable. Both have their recent origins in the Women’s Liberation Movement of the late 1960s where a focus on sexist language led to the (much ridiculed and politically charged) substitution of history with “herstory”²⁵ or “hystery (origin: womb)”.²⁶ June Purvis clarifies the distinction between the two approaches:

Generally, women’s history takes women as its subject matter and may be written by men (who cannot be feminists) and women, alike. Women’s history is not, therefore, necessarily feminist. ... Feminist history, on the other hand, unlike women’s history, is not defined by its subject matter but by the ideas and theories that inform a feminist analysis.²⁷

Purvis highlights the danger of conflating women’s and feminist history by citing examples of men and women writing women’s history who are anti-feminist. This may be illustrated by considering Peter Morrish’s work on librarian *Fanny Passavant*. His compensatory historical study includes a discussion of *Fanny Passavant’s* pay and pension arrangements and concludes that she was well treated by her employer, Leeds University. Yet a feminist analysis would emphasise that *Fanny Passavant*, unlike her male successor, only accrued a pension by agreeing to a pay freeze for the last eight years of her employment. Simply having a pension does not mean she was well treated when, to accrue that pension, she had to agree to a form of economic exploitation.²⁸ A further example of the danger of conflating women’s and feminist history is provided by Suzanne Hildenbrand’s critique of Dee Garrison’s²⁹ history of women library workers in the US which Hildenbrand argues is based on “a firmly rooted ... prejudice against women”.³⁰ This prejudice, Hildenbrand argues, is evident in the way that Garrison scapegoats women library workers, not only blaming them for the low pay they received and the long hours they worked, but also accusing these low paid workers of impeding the development of public libraries.³¹ To prevent the

conflation of women's and feminist historians, Purvis suggests that it would be useful to distinguish between women's history and feminist women's history, as feminist historians may also investigate other historical areas.

Feminist historians have adopted many approaches to women's history. Theorising the structural oppression of women by patriarchy was a key moment in second wave feminism.³² The systemic nature of patriarchy, however, has been challenged and more recently historians, such as Judith Bennett, have been careful to offer a definition of the oppression of women as relational and dependent on particular contexts, rather than absolute:

Some women have more capital or status than some men; some women wield more political power than some men; some women enjoy racial or sexual privileges denied to some men. But within each group of men and women - whether the group is structured by commonalities of race, class, sexuality or whatever - women as a group are disempowered compared to *men of their group*.³³

By stressing the relational context of oppression and privilege, Bennett avoids using essentialist concepts to describe the oppression of women. Elizabeth Grosz suggests that essences are understood to be "given, universal, and ... usually, though not necessarily, identified with women's biology and 'natural' characteristics".³⁴ These characteristics include: physiological essences, connected with reproduction and also occasionally linked to brain size; experiential essences, linked to birthing and child rearing; and, psychological essences, connected with women's supposed "nurturance, empathy, supportiveness, non-competitiveness".³⁵ Furthermore, essentialist models:

...portray gender in terms of fundamental attributes which are conceived as internal, persistent, and generally separate from the ongoing experience of interaction with the daily socio-political context of one's life.³⁶

Grosz emphasises the constancy and universalism of an essentialist approach which:

... entails that those characteristics defined as women's essence are shared in common by all women at all times: it implies a limit on the variations and possibilities of change.³⁷

Feminist critiques of essentialism have been important in shifting feminist theory towards a recognition and embrace of differences between women, rather than assumed commonalities. Many of these differences focus on the impacts of various oppressive practices - ethnicity, sexuality, class, physical ability and so on.³⁸ A feminist historical analysis engages with the ways historically specific ideas, practices and meanings about gender, sexuality, ethnicity and so on existed, were sustained and changed. Exploring how racist, capitalist, heterosexist, patriarchal understandings are open to change insists that such practices are socially constructed, rather than natural and inevitable. Undermining this constancy is a fundamental challenge to the continued legitimacy of such practices.

Understandings of power relations in a feminist history may be based on various feminist theories. Many early feminist historians were socialists (such as Sheila Rowbotham, Anna Davin and Jill Norris). Socialist historians often focused on the need, identified by E.P. Thompson,³⁹ for 'a history from below' and some socialist feminist investigations of women's history centre on women's role within capitalism. Radical feminist historians, (such as Dale Spender and Sheila Jeffreys) however, have focused on the role of patriarchy in women's oppression and considered issues, such as sexuality, the control of women's bodies and relationships between men and women. A further group of feminist historians (such as Olive Banks and Barbara Caine), working within a broadly liberal framework, have explored the history of feminism, women and the family. Differences between radical and socialist feminists, for example, are significant, however, there is no discrete division between such groupings and socialist feminist may investigate issues, such as control of the body, which were identified by radical feminists.

Black feminists have critiqued feminist theory's and feminist history's failure to acknowledge racism. This failure perpetuates racist practices both by ignoring racism and by failing to denaturalise the ethnicity of white people.⁴⁰ Black feminist

theorists have deconstructed the category women to illustrate that it may be used to refer to only white women.⁴¹ The deconstruction of the category woman is central to debates about post-structuralism which have attracted increasing interest among feminists since the 1980s. Important developments have been made by Joan Scott⁴² and Denise Riley.⁴³ Post-structuralism:

... addresses questions of epistemology, relativizes the status of all knowledge, links knowledge and power, and theorizes these in terms of the operation of difference ...⁴⁴

Scott argues that post-structuralism emphasises processes of constructing and legitimating hierarchies by focusing attention on meaning. However, as meaning is understood as a shifting, unstable concept which is open to challenge and re-definition, post-structuralist theory:

... calls for attention to the conflictual processes that establish meanings, to the ways in which such concepts of gender acquire the appearance of fixity, to the challenges posed for normative social definitions, and to the ways these challenges are met - in other words, to the play of force involved in any society's construction and implementation of meanings: to politics.⁴⁵

Such understandings encourage feminists to move from an exclusive focus on women to an examination of the construction of gender, and questions of 'interest', of benefit, of power. This shift has been contested.⁴⁶ Firstly, some feminists argue that post-structuralists' focus on gender decentres women as a political category, promoting a more neutral, deradicalised stance.⁴⁷ Responses have emphasised the highly political nature of de-naturalising the concepts of 'masculine' and 'feminine'.⁴⁸ Secondly, Purvis argues that "the emphasis ... on how knowledge is produced plays down key concerns of feminist historians, namely to explain what the world was like for women and why it was that way".⁴⁹ This, too, has been rejected by feminists who argue that post-structural analysis does not preclude explorations of the material impact of knowledge production and mean.⁵⁰ Yet other writers question whether post-structuralism offers anything new to feminist historians.⁵¹ Feminist historians working

in the 1970s had already rejected essentialism as an explanation for women's oppression,⁵² and it has been argued that feminism is necessarily post-structural because of its scepticism about accepted knowledge, truth, language and the self.⁵³

Mindful of these debates, it is argued here that post-structuralism offers useful concepts for feminist historians, particularly its insistence on uncertain social constructions, rather than constant universalisms. Furthermore, post-structural concerns about "what history is" have articulated a new understanding of the ethics of history. Within traditional frameworks, history was understood to be morally good because it was 'true', and:

Truth defined what history was: it was the truth about the past. Work that was not the 'truth' was failed history or historical fiction. Any other ethical benefits this position argued for in relation to history (that, for example, understanding past problems helps solve present ones) stemmed from the truth of history.⁵⁴

Post-structuralists, however, argue that we cannot know the 'truth' about the past because the past is no more and can never be present to historians in anything other but disparate texts. Texts are understood as any cultural product which provides some form of communication and might include: advertisements, works of art, architecture, knitting patterns as well as books, letters and reports. Texts do not represent 'truth' about the past. They offer an account of the past constructed by the author in their particular social context. There is no overarching coherence between texts. An account of the past based on incoherently connected texts will not allow the production of a total history. Even in 'official' archives, which have been characterised as containing a 'complete' record of central government activities, the volume of texts created necessitates that only a selection are included in the archive, whilst others are excluded.⁵⁵ Incomplete as this record of the past is, it does allow an account of the past to be constructed. Yet this account must acknowledge that it is a history based only on fragments and as such it is an incomplete account of the past, open to question. This openness is, Robert Eaglestone suggests, a dynamic, if risky, step:

History has lost its certainty: but this very loss is the good [the ethics] of history ... The good of history is not how history persuades us to virtue or compels us to truth: it is how it makes us question.⁵⁶

The loss of certainty has been understood as dangerous - how are we to know the truth, to select the correct facts, to judge what is authentic etc. - yet many theorists, among them feminists, have argued that this loss is helpful. For example, Mary Baker argues that she does not fear a “loss” of certainty because, “I have experienced loss every time I read historical texts, or attended history lectures.”⁵⁷ Embracing a lack of certainty problematises the perceived naturalness of situations and understandings, much as refusing essentialist explanations of masculinity and femininity troubles concepts of gender. Doing so is useful for feminist theorists aiming to destabilise the naturalness and constancy, and thus legitimacy, of women’s social positioning.

Post-structuralist conceptualisations of power also emphasise a lack of certainty. Michel Foucault’s work is key in re-framing understandings of power. He insists on the connections between power, resistance and negotiation which mean that power is not only repressive but also productive.⁵⁸ Sara Mills summarises this approach as one which proposes that, “no power relation is simply one of total domination. Entailed within that relation is the force which may challenge or overthrow it.”⁵⁹ The application of power is productive in that it causes a reaction. This reaction is not bound to be one of submission but may be one which contests the initial move. For example, I may attempt to physically restrain someone and they, depending on their physical abilities and the social context, may submit or resist my efforts. Power relations, however, are not structural and they do not impact on everyone in the same way because people are differently located within those power relations. For example, women tend to be marginalised within the labour market, however, women barristers are differently and more advantageously positioned in comparison to women working as secretaries on temporary employment contracts. These concepts of power and negotiation are helpful in understanding women’s agency, that is women’s ability to act of their own will when there are pressures to conform to dominant or other discourses of femininity.

In summary, a post-structural approach to history proposes that the past is never present to the historian in anything but texts between which there is no coherence. Instead, the historian works with texts created in particular social contexts and the job of work is to consider the texts themselves, rather than attempting “to read through the texts towards something else”, that is, ‘the truth’.⁶⁰

2.2.3 *Theorising Labour Market Activity*

Whilst this is a historical study, it also considers labour market activity. Early theories of labour market participation and activity focus on Marxist theory, which argues that capitalist systems of production benefit from segregating the labour force. Marxist theory has been criticised for marginalising the role of women in productive work by insufficiently accounting for domestic work, reproduction and caring for future workers.⁶¹ Feminist theories of labour market activity, meanwhile, have argued that women are marginalised in the labour force. Catherine Hakim’s work is helpful here. She suggests that the gendered differential in access to the labour market may be understood as “occupational segregation”.⁶² The processes constituting occupational segregation allow women entry to the labour market, but simultaneously make this access restricted or conditional.

Occupational segregation functions in two ways: firstly, *horizontally*, where men and women work in different occupations; and, secondly, *vertically*, where the senior levels of an occupation or sector are generally occupied by men and the lower, less influential and less well-paid, reaches are generally occupied by women. Jane Lewis has illustrated that horizontal occupational segregation functions to contain the labour market opportunities open to women: for example, in 1881, four occupational areas - domestic service, textile goods, textile workers and professional/ technical - accounted for 76 per cent of the female labour force.⁶³ From the end of the 19th century until 1951 there was a decline in horizontal occupational segregation and women gained access to more areas of the labour market. This was temporarily advanced during both World Wars.⁶⁴ Despite its overall decline, significant horizontal occupational segregation persisted. Between 1881 and 1951, the percentage of women

working in domestic service declined from 36 to 11 per cent of women workers; that in textile industries also declined significantly; however, the proportions of clerical workers and commercial and financial workers rose from negligible numbers to represent respectively 20 and 12 per cent of all women workers.⁶⁵ This pattern was affected by regional differences and, whilst, in general, there was a significant move by both men and women away from domestic work and agriculture, these remained major options for women in rural communities until the 1940s. Horizontal occupational segregation decreased in general terms between 1871 and 1974, yet vertical occupational segregation was more obdurate. Barbara Bagilhole argues that it becomes more entrenched as horizontal barriers are dismantled.⁶⁶ Between 1899-1938, for example, women constituted over 70 per cent of all elementary teachers, so that by 1938, there were 134,000 women teachers in local authority schools yet few women teachers were appointed to senior posts.⁶⁷ Whilst horizontal occupational segregation diminished during both World Wars, vertical segregation was unaffected as few women were employed in higher occupational grades.⁶⁸

Occupational segregation by sex has been criticised for over-simplifying gendered labour market access and understanding it as operating in an oppositional way for men and women. Post-structuralist labour market theorists have cited women successfully entering male dominated employment areas and men taking paternity leave to illustrate that structuralist understandings of occupational segregation are inadequate.⁶⁹ This, in turn, has been criticised as denying the continuing prevalence of women workers in low paid and insecure employment. Post-structural theory has, however, been used to apply the concepts of 'belonging' and 'otherness' to paid employment to argue that workers are differently positioned in relation to the labour market, and that this encourages or discourages access. Such positioning is based around changing characterisations of the 'ideal worker' who 'belongs' to privileged employment sectors, and 'others' who do not. Constructions of the 'ideal worker' privilege some groups - such as men, white people, heterosexuals, able-bodied people and the middle classes - as suitable workers and marginalise those who do not meet this definition.⁷⁰ This understanding of labour market participation overcomes the lack of complexity in Hakim's formulation of occupational segregation, whilst not denying the tendency for women to be disadvantageously situated in the labour market.

2.2.4 *Section Summary*

The theoretical approach adopted here is indebted to feminist, library, women's and post-structuralist historians and labour market theorists. As little work has explored the history of women library workers in England to some extent this study is a compensatory account, concerned with writing women into library history. The explanatory framework adopted is informed by post-structural feminist theory. This emphasises the importance of gendered power relations, which tend to, but do not always, negatively impact on women. This approach focuses on gender but does not preclude other interconnecting social practices, such as the impact of ethnicity, sexuality and class. Furthermore, this approach does not suggest that gender operates in a consistent way, but rather that its operation is dependent on other factors, including the specific context, the individual's agency and access to social privilege. Articulations of post-structural theory by historians emphasise that writing about the past is necessarily only a partial rather than a complete account of what happened. This loss of certainty is useful to a feminist project aimed at destabilising gender norms. It is also evident in post-structural labour market theories which suggest that oppositional understandings of gender in the library sector may be unworkable because not all women were marginalised; throughout this period, some women became chief librarians and some men occupied low status posts.

2.3 **Data Collection**

This section of the methodological framework outlines methods of data collection. It begins with a consideration of the nature of historical 'sources' and then discusses archive and oral history data collection methods.

2.3.1 *Historical Evidence?*

The new areas of research identified by feminist and women's historians have led to the use of new historical 'sources'. For example, separate spheres historians have used texts which were previously ignored, such as advertisements, embroidery

and films.⁷¹ The newly identified texts have led to a re-assessment of aspects of historiography, such as periodisation. Joan Kelly's work on the Renaissance showed that, far from being a universally progressive age as it is usually understood, this was a period when opportunities for women were increasingly restricted.⁷² A feminist library history, Mary Niles Maack suggests, might draw on records, correspondence and diaries as well as professional literature in order to pay particular attention to areas where women have predominated.⁷³ The 'new histories' legitimise the use of 'new' texts, although, of course, such texts are not 'new' as they were created in the past and were extant although they were not used by historiographers.

Post-structuralist historians have questioned not only the type of historical text used but also the nature of historical sources and the uses to which these are put, in particular their use as 'evidence'. The tendency, particularly within much UK library history has been to use 'sources' as unproblematic, passive 'evidence' which provides direct, unmediated (and therefore truthful) references to the past. The 'sources', created in the past, are used as 'transparent' providers of evidence reflecting 'the past' forward into the present. Many writers have critiqued this understanding of texts.⁷⁴ In relation to historical work, it has been suggested that rather than using the term "source" or "evidence", it is more helpful use the term "trace". Keith Jenkins has argued that:

... if you use the word 'source' instead of 'trace'; if you refer to some of these sources as primary and if you sometimes replace primary by original (original and thus underlying/fundamental source), this suggests that if you go to the originals, then because the originals seem genuine (as opposed to secondary/second-hand traces) genuine (true/deep) knowledge can be gained. This prioritises the original source, fetishises documents and distorts the whole working process of making history.⁷⁵

In identifying and using texts from the past, the historian has only partial traces of an earlier time/situation/person and, so, accounts based around these traces are constructed by the historian's understanding of connections between the traces and not by the past (which, of course, is no more). Jenkins suggests that the processes of

selection at play in both the survival of traces from the past and in the historian's use of those traces undermine the argument that 'sources' constitute unproblematic evidence able to prove or disprove a point. Rather, he argues that historians should consider all texts as partial remnants from or about the past which may be used to create an account of what happened. Jenkins argues that 'secondary sources', that is discussions by historians of 'primary sources', are also partial. 'Secondary sources' select parts of other texts to reinforce the historians argument, and their selection and use illustrates the writer's concerns as much as the past's. Due to these considerations, it is argued that partial traces replace complete historical evidence.

This understanding of historical 'evidence' is aligned with post-structuralist conceptions of partial history, outlined above. The fragmentary nature of historical traces is perhaps more visually evident in cuttings books than other types of archive texts.⁷⁶ These are constructed by a number of individuals or groups: the selection of cuttings from newspapers and magazines, written and produced by one group of individuals, are collected together in a cuttings book by another group or individual. The selection of texts for inclusion in the cuttings book may have been carried out according to guidelines. Various collections of press cuttings were used including those housed at the LA. These include cuttings labelled 'British Library'; others labelled 'Birmingham Public Library Reference Section'; and yet others from individual donors, such as John Willmer. Some cuttings appear to have used policies for including texts in the cuttings book, whilst others do not. The Birmingham cuttings, for example, are extensive and appear to have been based on a daily scan of national newspapers for items connected to library work and library workers and more irregular scanning of various regional newspapers and periodicals for similar items. These cuttings often run to two or more large books for the year covered: for example, the 1935 cuttings are found in four books. In contrast, the British Library cuttings are sparse, sometimes containing several years in one thin volume: for example, one volume covers the years 1961 to 1963. The partial nature of the cuttings books is demonstrated by the variations in the material collected on the same subject by different organisations. For example, cuttings books on libraries at Kettering public library archive covering the same year as those at the LA contain dissimilar texts. This appears to confirm the suspicions of those historians who pejoratively define

newspaper cuttings as “secondary” and biased texts.⁷⁷ However, these types of texts are invaluable in exploring the heterogeneous constructions of women library workers which were simultaneously at play in contemporary texts, which have been largely overlooked by existing library history.

Further traces from the past were also considered. These include ‘official’ texts, such as: library committee minutes; reports to professional associations; and, reports to Government departments. Also used were published commentary and reporting, such as: professional journals; archives of professional associations; and, career guides. Finally, personal texts were used: such as diaries and personal correspondence, both that found in archives and that sent by people who were aware of this study. The archives were identified by reference to the existing literature which suggested, for example, that Manchester Public Library Archive might be relevant. The archives listed in Table 2.1 are those to which the study referred. Some archives were referred to because of their connection with a particular librarian and this is also noted in the table.

Table 2.1: Archives

Type of Archive	Location	Librarian
Academic library	Manchester Harris College, Oxford Brotherton Library Special Collections, Leeds University Library Girton College, Cambridge	Lucy Toulmin Smith Fanny Passavant Ethel Fegan
Public (municipal and county) library	Derbyshire County Record Office Essex County Record Office Kettering Public Library Local Studies Unit, Manchester Central Library Islington Central Reference Library Finsbury Public Library Southport Public Library Derby Local Studies Library Nottingham Central Library	Winifred Rait Kate Pierce
Special library	BBC Written Archives Centre	Florence Milnes
Professional association	Library Association	

2.3.2 Oral History

The other major texts used in this study were transcripts of oral history interviews. This interviews included two focus groups and eleven individual interviews with library workers. Before the interviews and discussions, the

nature of the study was discussed with all participants who were asked to complete an informed consent form (see Appendix 1). Individual and group interviews were based around discussion schedules (see Appendix 2). The schedules were intended as a guide and prompt for the interviewer rather than as a proscriptive outline for the discussion. The individual interview schedules were tailored to the participant: for example, schedules for the older participants included questions about the World Wars, whilst this was not relevant for younger participants.

The focus groups consisted of one group of women library workers (retired and still working) and one group of retired men library workers. Participants were recruited through a letter published in a newsletter issued by a branch of the LA's Retired Members Guild. The groups were organised as unstructured focus groups. This method is recommended by a number of writers for work which is exploratory and aims to identify issues.⁷⁸ Jenny Kitzinger's definition of focus groups differentiates this method from group interviews:

Focus groups are group discussions organised to explore a specific set of issues ... The group is 'focused' in the sense that it involves some kind of collective activity - such as viewing a film, examining a single health education message or simply debating a particular set of questions. Crucially, focus groups are distinguished from the broader category of group interviews by 'the explicit use of the group interaction' as research data ...⁷⁹

Unstructured groups involve little explicit moderator involvement and have been developed so that they are "self-managed". David Morgan suggests that "self-managed groups" are appropriate if, "... the goal is to learn something new from participants, then it is best to let them speak for themselves ..."⁸⁰ As the two groups in this study were intended to be exploratory, this approach was judged suitable.

Further oral history work is based on individual interviews with one man and ten women who work or had worked in a variety of libraries (see Appendix 3 for a biography of interviewees). Participants were recruited by writing to individual librarians and by word of mouth. Participants could elect to have the interview

attributed to them by name or it could be used anonymously. One interviewee, referred to as 'Rita Keegan', chose to use a pseudonym. Oral history has been lauded within library history by David Gerard.⁸¹ Within feminist history, Joan Sangster provides an overview of debates around the use of oral history. She argues that the revival of women's history in the early 1970s used oral history as a way of "integrating women into historical scholarship" by providing data on previously overlooked subjects.⁸² Furthermore, Sangster suggests that this approach is useful for feminist historians because it allows the interviewee to articulate matters of importance to her. Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy has argued that oppressed groups, such as lesbian women, may be particularly interesting interviewees because, unlike heterosexual women, "they have no guidelines and no patterns for creating a homosexual life. They, therefore, are constantly, creating their lives, developing a biomythography ..."⁸³ For similar reasons, as women have been marginalised in the labour market, and, therefore, probably also within the library labour market, women library workers may be interesting oral history interviewees. Interviewee participation should not, however, imply that individual interviews offer an equal relationship between researcher and interviewee. Sangster notes that the researcher is privileged in a number of ways in the interview process, and particularly in writing up the study, when accounts favoured by the researcher, rather than the interviewee, assume precedence.⁸⁴

Challenges have been made to oral history by those who see such data as suspect because it is not 'objective'. 'Objectivity', however, is not problematic within a post-structuralist concept of history. Aside from the historical chronicle (which agrees, say, that the first Public Library Act was passed in 1850), post-structuralist historians understand all texts - both those from the past and those created by historians - as readings which are positioned, or biased, in certain ways and that there are no unpositioned, or unbiased, texts. Historical readings of texts are, however, subject to certain checking mechanisms, such as footnotes and appendices.⁸⁵ In this way, history is different from literary creative work. The debate about historical objectivity has been aired so frequently that some oral historians have declared that it is no longer necessary to debate the objectivity of texts.⁸⁶ Sangster argues against construing oral history data as either objective or biased. Instead, she suggests, a more

productive approach might be to ask how interviewees explain, rationalise and make sense of their past in the way they do, and why this particular account is offered.

This, she suggests:

... offers insight into the social and material framework within which they operated, the perceived choices and cultural patterns they faced, and the cultural relationship between individual consciousness and culture.⁸⁷

Sangster thus avoids understanding oral history data “only as a panacea designed to fill in the blanks” which is “essentially unmediated” or transparent data. She suggests that interview narratives actively construct an account of past events, which may be contradictory and ambiguous, reflecting acquiescence or resistance to dominant power structures.⁸⁸ Kennedy outlines how the contradictions or mistakes in oral history narratives may be useful ways of exploring how people make sense of their lives.⁸⁹ This understanding of oral history narratives is facilitated by the use of a discursive approach to textual analysis.

2.4 Data Analysis: Texts and Discourse

Alistair Black’s discursive account of English public libraries asserts that most British library history, rather than interrogating accepted views of the library, reinforces them. In place of offering explanations about the library, Black suggests that library history illustrates and chronicles, and as such:

... misses the central purpose of library history, which should not be pursued for its own sake, or for the glorification of individuals and institutions, but for the comprehension of social process, historical and contemporary.⁹⁰

The emphasis on social processes prompts Black to adopt a thematic approach to his data. Similarly, the following chapters use the archive and interview data thematically rather than chronologically. The need to interrogate social processes and themes also leads Black to use a discursive analysis.⁹¹ This study, too, investigates social processes, in particular gender, and also employs a discursive approach.

Discursive approaches have been extensively outlined elsewhere,⁹² and the following is a summary. Joan Scott defines discourse as, “not a language or a text but a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs.”⁹³ A discourse may be identified when groups of statements appear to be regulated and have a coherence and force.⁹⁴ Scott suggests that:

... the elaboration of meaning involves conflict and power, that meanings are locally contested within discursive “fields of force,” that (at least since the Enlightenment) the power to control a particular field resides in claims to (scientific) knowledge embodied not only in writing but also in disciplinary and professional organisations, in institutions ... and in social relationships ...⁹⁵

This approach understands meaning not as something which is objectively defined, but rather is produced by conflicting interests. Meaning is relative and not absolute, and definitions are formed by negating or repressing an aspect of the object, practice or individual by representing a further object, practice or individual as antithetical.⁹⁶ In this way, relatively constructed meaning contributes to the creation of Others. The Other is negatively positioned as lesser or in conflict with the centrally located Self and whilst the Self is normal, the Other is abnormal, the Self is superior and the Other inferior.⁹⁷ Dominant understandings characterise femininity as the Other to a centrally located masculinity; further polarised attributes build on this oppositional positioning. However, being positioned as an Other may be contested because, as Scott notes, discourses are not discrete, but rather:

... overlap, influence and compete with one another; they appeal to one another’s “truths” for authority and legitimation. These truths are assumed to be outside human invention, either already known and self-evident or discoverable through scientific inquiry. Precisely because they are assigned the status of objective knowledge, they seem to be beyond dispute and thus serve a powerful legitimating function.⁹⁸

Discourses of femininity and employment are central to this study and these not only co-exist but also may reinforce and/or challenge each other. For example, dominant discourses of femininity associate women with children and this may be used in a labour market context to argue that work with children is particularly suited to women. Despite this, however, certain professions, such as paediatric consultants, may draw on their claim to scientific knowledge and expertise to argue that, although paediatrics work, by definition, with children, this is 'masculine' work. Although discourses are powerful, individuals are not passive recipients of discourse and may, depending on their positioning, be able to reject or negotiate discursive constructions. For example, women are encouraged by dominant discourses of femininity to dress in certain ways, however, they may use competing discourses, such as feminism, to reject those dress codes or to modify them. Furthermore, it is important to note that while individuals may be able to negotiate discursive positionings, the extent to which they are able to pursue that negotiation is variable as individuals are not uniformly positioned and are effected not only by gender, but also by class, ethnicity, ability, sexuality and further localised issues, such as accent.

Keith Jenkins argues that a discursive approach to history is particularly useful because:

... if 'doing history' is about how you can read and make sense of the past and the present, then it seems important to me to use discourses that have 'readings' and the construction of meanings as major concerns.⁹⁹

A discursive approach enables historians to interrogate discourses rather than presenting them as an "always, already"¹⁰⁰ transparent truth. However, discourses may be contested and cannot be imposed, and thus space for negotiation within those discourses is maintained. The analytical model used in this study, therefore, is in keeping with the theoretical model of post-structural feminist approach to history outlined above. Texts, like history and gender, lack certainty and are dependent on context, rather than absolute. The partiality of texts and the interpretative role of the historian were emphasised by Joy Gough, a librarian who wrote about working at Manchester public library:

I have never been very good at making notes and hope that you will find time to read through this screed, extracting what you need, putting it in a more logical order, remembering that there has been great social change and technical development in my lifetime. This is my interpretation of events, other people's will differ.¹⁰¹

This thesis is one interpretation of events and texts relating to library workers in the past and accompanying arguments attempt to legitimate the reading offered; however, this is not the only understanding and, to use Joy Gough's words, "other people's will differ".

2.5 Chapter Summary

Despite a danger of being labelled "sour and immature" and at the mercy of "feminist hysterics" by some contemporary historians,¹⁰² this study is informed by feminist theory. Judith Bennett argues that this is vital because while:

We might argue about whether this disempowerment of women *vis-à-vis* comparable men has always been the case, ... certainly it has *usually* been the case. Indeed, it has been the case so usually and so often that it is, I would argue, a continuous problem worthy of hard historical study and worthy of careful historical generalization.¹⁰³

Whilst the marginalisation of women in library work is "a continuous problem worthy of hard historical study", this study does not set out to write a complete history of women library workers. Following post-structuralist historians, this is a necessarily partial history which aims to disrupt the "glorification of the individual and institution", the "shallowness" and the "simplistic factual approaches" which, on the whole, are accepted in library history.¹⁰⁴ Liz Stanley has argued that:

... rather than seeing feminist history as the recovery of all of the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, such that we finally gain a single, complete, and unseamed

picture of the whole, we need to confront something more challenging and certainly far more interesting and intellectually exciting. That is that there is no 'whole' to piece together, but rather contiguous though clashing, and certainly not seamlessly meshing, *competing histories*.¹⁰⁵

The rationale for this work is based on the hope that, in articulating arguments and concerns about the impact of gender on library employment, it will contribute to the shape of questions asked of library history and encourage those questions to include a consideration of gender and other power relations. Thus, this work gambles that the 'fine risk' of offering a history constructed from fragmentary traces of the past is worth taking because such history without certainty promotes a questioning approach to library history and contemporary and past information workforces.

¹ For an overview of the 'new histories' see: Burke, P. (1991) Overture: The New History, its Past and its Future, in Burke, P. (ed) *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, Cambridge, Polity.

² See: Jenkins, K. (1997) Introduction: On Being Open About Our Closures, in Jenkins, K. (ed) *The Post-Modern History Reader*, London, Routledge.

³ Denning, G. (1998) Writing, Rewriting the Beach. An Essay, *Re-thinking History*, 2(2), pp.143-172.

⁴ Harding, S. (1987) Introduction: Is There a Feminist Method? in Harding, S. (ed) *Feminism and Methodology*, Bloomington/Milton Keynes, Indiana/Open University.

⁵ See Hildenbrand, S. (1996) Women in Library History: From the Politics of Library History to the History of Library Politics, in Hildenbrand, S. (ed) *Reclaiming the American Library Past: Writing the Women In*, Norwood NJ, Ablex.

⁶ Lerner, G. (1979) *The Majority Finds its Past: Placing Women in History*, New York, Oxford University, p.145.

⁷ Purvis, J. (1995) From "Women Worthies" to Poststructuralism? Debate and Controversy in Women's History in Britain, in Purvis, J. (ed) *Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945. An Introduction*, London, UCL, p.2.

⁸ Lerner, ref. 6, p.159.

⁹ Ibid. p.146.

¹⁰ See Hildenbrand, S. (1983) Some Theoretical Considerations on Women in Library History, *Journal of Library History*, 18 (4) pp.382-390; Purvis, J. (1989) *Hard Lessons. The Lives and Education of Working-Class Women in Nineteenth Century England*, Cambridge, Polity.

¹¹ Lerner, ref. 6, p.146.

¹² Hannam, J. (1993) Women, History and Protest, in Richardson, D. and Robinson, V., (eds) *Introducing Women's Studies. Feminist Theory and Practice*, London, Macmillan, p.306.

¹³ Hildenbrand, ref. 10.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Purvis, ref. 7, p.5.

¹⁶ For example: Clarke, A. (1977) Few and Far Between: Women Librarians in the 19th Century, in Wise, M. (ed), *One Hundred Years. A Collection to Celebrate the Library Association Centenary*, Aberystwyth, College of Librarianship; Webber, N. (1984) Prospect and Prejudice, or Women and Librarianship 1880-1914, *Library History*, 6(5), pp.153-162; Burrington, G., (1987) *Equal Opportunities in Librarianship? Gender and Career Aspirations*, London, Library Association; Morrish, P. (1996) Fanny Juliet Passavant (1849-1944): A Leeds Librarian, *Library History*, 12, pp.126-144.

- ¹⁷ For example, Black, A. (1996) **A New History of the English Public Library. Social and Intellectual Contexts, 1850-1914**, London, Leicester University.
- ¹⁸ Weibel, K. and Heim, K. (1979) **The Role of Women in Librarianship 1876-1976: The Entry, Advancement and Struggle for Equalization in One Profession**, Mansell, Oryx.
- ¹⁹ Taylor, J., (1995) Left on the Shelf? The Issues and Challenges Facing Women Employed in Libraries from the Late 19th Century to the 1950s, *Library History*, 2, pp.96-107.
- ²⁰ Kerslake, E. (1999) Constructing Women in Library History: Responding to Julia Taylor's 'Left on the shelf?', *Libraries & Culture*, 34(1), pp.52-63.
- ²¹ Hildenbrand, ref. 5, p.16.
- ²² Ibid., p.18.
- ²³ For an interdisciplinary exploration of women library workers which is not framed by compensatory history see: Kerslake, E. and Liladhar, J. (forthcoming) "Jolly Good Reading" For Girls: Discourses of Library Work and Femininity in Career Novels, *Women's History Review*.
- ²⁴ Davin, A. (1988) Redressing the Balance or Transforming the Art? The British Experience', in Kleinberg, S.J. (ed) **Retrieving Women's History. Changing Perceptions of the Role of Women in Politics and Society**, Oxford, Berg/Unesco, p.62.
- ²⁵ Cited in Kramarae, C. and Treichler, P.A. (1985) **A Feminist Dictionary**, Boston, Pandora, p.190.
- ²⁶ Cited in *ibid*.
- ²⁷ Purvis, J. (1995) Women's History in Britain: An Overview, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 2, p.10.
- ²⁸ Morrish, ref. 16.
- ²⁹ Garrison, D. (1979) **Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920**, New York, Free Press.
- ³⁰ Hildenbrand, S. (1983) Revision versus Reality: Women in the History of the Public Library Movement, 1876-1920, in Heim, K.M. (ed) **The Status of Women in Librarianship. Historical, Sociological and Economic Issues**, New York, Neal-Schuman. For another critique of Garrison see: Maack, M.N. (1982) Toward a History of Women in Librarianship: A Critical Analysis with Suggestions for Further Research, *Journal of Library History*, 17(2), pp.164-185.
- ³¹ Hildenbrand, ref. 30, p.10.
- ³² For example: Rich, A. (1977) **Of Woman Born**, London, Virago; Firestone, S. (1979) **The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution**, London, Women's Press.
- ³³ Bennett, J.M. (1993) Women's History: A Study in Continuity and Change, *Women's History Review*, 2(2), p.177.
- ³⁴ Grosz, E. (1990) Conclusion. A Note on Essentialism and Difference, in Gunew, S. (ed) **Feminist Knowledge. Critique and Construct**, London, Routledge, p.334.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Bohan cited in Crawford, M. (1995) **Talking Difference: On Gender and Language**, London, Sage, p.9.
- ³⁷ Grosz, ref. 34, p.334.
- ³⁸ For example, hooks, b. (1984) **Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center**, Boston, South End; Kitzinger, C. (1987) **The Social Construction of Lesbianism**, London, Sage; Kaplan, D. (1994) Disability Rights Perspectives on Reproductive Technologies and Public Policy, in Jaggar, A.M. (ed) **Living With Contradictions. Controversies in Feminist Social Ethics**, Boulder, Westview.
- ³⁹ E.P. Thompson (1975) **The Making of the English Working Class**, Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- ⁴⁰ See: Carby, H. (1982) White Women Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood, in, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (eds) **The Empire Strikes Back. Race and Racism in 70s Britain**, London, Hutchinson; Amos, V. and Parmar, P. (1984) Challenging Imperial Feminism, *Feminist Review*, 17 pp.3-20.
- ⁴¹ For example, hooks, ref. 38.
- ⁴² Scott, J.W. (1988) **Gender and the Politics of History**, New York, Columbia.
- ⁴³ Riley, D. (1988) **Am I that Name? Feminism and the Category of Woman in History**, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota.
- ⁴⁴ Scott, ref. 42, p.4.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., p.5.
- ⁴⁶ See: Pitt, S. (1998) Representing Otherness. Feminism, Logocentrism and the Discipline of History, *Re-thinking History*, 2(3), pp.397-404.
- ⁴⁷ See: Purvis, ref.27; Hoff, J. (1994) Gender as a Post-modern Category of Paralysis, *Women's History Review*, 3, pp.149-168.
- ⁴⁸ Pitt, ref.46.

- ⁴⁹ Purvis, ref. 7, p.13.
- ⁵⁰ Mills, S. (1997) **Discourse**, London, Routledge, p.108; Liladhar, J. and Kerslake, E. (1999) No More Library Classes for Catherine: Marital Status, Career Progression and Library Employment in 1950s England, *Women's Studies International Forum*, 22(2), pp.215-224.
- ⁵¹ Ibid.; Stanley, L. (1990) Recovering *Women* in History from Feminist Deconstructionism, *Women's Studies International Forum*, 13(1/2) pp.151-157.
- ⁵² For example see Vicinus, M. (ed.) (1980) **Suffer and Be Still. Women in the Victorian Age**, London, Methuen.
- ⁵³ See Jackson, S. (1992/3) The Amazing Deconstructing Woman, *Trouble & Strife*, 25, pp.25-31.
- ⁵⁴ Eaglestone, R. (1998) The 'Fine Risk' of History. Post-structuralism, the Past and the Work of Emmanuel Levinas, *Re-thinking History*, 2(3), pp.313-320.
- ⁵⁵ Cox, N. (1996) National British Archives: Public Records, in Brivati, B., Buxton, J. and Seldon, A. (eds) **The Contemporary History Handbook**, Manchester, Manchester University Press, p.253. This is further debated in Kerslake, E., *Constructing Texts and Managing Identities: Press Cuttings, Bundles of Papers and Histories of Library Workers*, unpublished paper.
- ⁵⁶ Eaglestone, ref. 54, p.319.
- ⁵⁷ Baker, M. (1998) Feminist Post-Structuralist Engagements with History, *Re-thinking History*, 2(3), pp.371-8.
- ⁵⁸ Foucault, M. (1979) **Discipline and Punish**, New York, Vintage.
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- ⁶⁰ Kelly, C. (1997) History and Postmodernism, in Jenkins, K. (ed) **The Post-Modern History Reader**, London, Routledge.
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- ⁶³ Lewis, J. (1984) **Women in England 1870-1950: Sexual Division and Social Change**, Brighton, Wheatsheaf, Table 10.
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- ⁶⁷ Summerfield, P. (1987) Women and the Professional Labour Market: The Case of the Secondary Schoolmistress, in Summerfield, P. (ed) **Women, Education and the Professions**, Leicester, History of Education Society, p.39. See Chapter 3 for further discussion.
- ⁶⁸ Hooks and Inman cited in Summerfield, ref. 64, p.321.
- ⁶⁹ For example, Collinson, D.L. and Hearn, J. (1996) **Men as Managers, Managers as Men: Critical Perspectives on Men, Masculinities and Management**, London, Sage.
- ⁷⁰ Özbilgin, M.F. (1998) 'Belonging' and 'Otherness' by Sex in Employment. Paper given at the Sexing the Nation conference, Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education, 3rd July 1998.
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- ⁷² Kelly, J. (1984) **Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly**, Chicago, University of Chicago.
- ⁷³ Maack, ref. 30.
- ⁷⁴ For historical considerations see Jenkins, K. (1991) **Re-thinking History**, London, Routledge; and Scott, ref. 42. For considerations from other disciplines see: Mills, ref. 50; Wilkinson, S. and Kitzinger, C. (1995) (eds) **Feminism and Discourse. Psychological Perspectives**, London, Sage; Potter, J. and Wetherell, M. (1987) **Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour**, London, Sage.
- ⁷⁵ Jenkins, ref. 74, pp.47-8.
- ⁷⁶ Kerslake, ref.55.
- ⁷⁷ Cox, ref. 55.
- ⁷⁸ See: Morgan, D.L. (1988) **Focus Groups as Qualitative Research**, Newbury Park, CA, Sage; Kreuger, R.A. (1988) **Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research**, Newbury Park, CA, Sage; Stewart, D. and Shamdasani, P.N. (1990) **Focus Groups: Theory and Practice**, Newbury Park,

CA, Sage; Kitzinger, J. (1994) The Methodology of Focus Groups: The Importance of Interaction Between Research Participants, *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 16(1), pp.103-121.

⁷⁹ Kitzinger, ref. 78, p.103.

⁸⁰ Morgan, ref. 78, p.49.

⁸¹ Gerard, D. (1992) The Word Made Flesh: Some Reflections on Oral History, *Library History*, 9(3/4), pp.122-6.

⁸² Sangster, J. (1994) Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History, *Women's History Review*, 3(1), p.5.

⁸³ Kennedy, E.L. (1995) Telling Tales: Oral History and the Construction of pre-Stonewall Lesbian History, *Radical History Review*, 62, pp.58-79. Kennedy explains that the term 'biomythography' is used by Audre Lorde to describe a life narrative.

⁸⁴ Sangster, ref. 82, p.12.

⁸⁵ Jenkins, ref. 74.

⁸⁶ For example, Kennedy, ref. 83.

⁸⁷ Sangster, ref. 82, p.12.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.23

⁸⁹ Kennedy, ref. 83, p.71.

⁹⁰ Black, ref 17, p.17.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.220.

⁹² For example, Jenkins, ref. 74; Mills, ref. 50; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, ref. 74. Thanks to Janine Liladhar for many discussions relating to these points.

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⁹⁴ Mills, ref. 50, p.7.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.136.

⁹⁶ Scott, ref. 93.

⁹⁷ Mills, ref. 50.

⁹⁸ Scott, ref. 42, p.7.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.3.

¹⁰⁰ Jenkins, ref. 74, p.33.

¹⁰¹ Joy Gough, per comm. 20th July 1998.

¹⁰² Hyman cited in Purvis, ref. 7, p.6.

¹⁰³ Bennett, ref. 33, pp.177-8.

¹⁰⁴ Black, ref. 17, pp.6-7 and p.17.

¹⁰⁵ Stanley, ref. 51, p.156.

PART II. DEFINING LIBRARY WORK

Chapter 3. Terms and Conditions of Employment. Attempting a Quantitative Approach to the History of Women Library Workers.

3.1 Introduction

During the preparatory work for this chapter, it became clear that there was insufficient data to satisfactorily draw up a quantitative account of the library labour market by sex. A broad quantitative picture provides invaluable information for any historical account and is particularly useful for contextualisation, hence, it was intended to establish such a picture. However, reliably collected data on library *workers* was scarce and data broken down to show English public, academic and special library workers by sex was more elusive still. Statistical data showing the ethnic composition of library workforces were not identified for any period, however, it appears to be overwhelmingly white.¹ Due to the nature of the available data, a pragmatic approach has been adopted which, whilst acknowledging the benefits of a wide-ranging quantitative account, has accepted that some data do not appear to exist. In these cases, which are frequent, case study data has been used: for example, the exploration of pay in academic libraries is mainly focused on developments in one particular library. Within the confines of the available data, there are quantitative explorations of four aspects of the library workforce: the numbers and proportion of women in the sector; women workers' salaries; their pensions; and, hours of work and holiday entitlements.

3.2 Women's Participation in the Library Labour Market, 1871-1974

I have no exact figures, but I imagine the proportions are of the order of 15 to 20 per cent men to 80 to 85 per cent women - I refer to juniors in training as well as to qualified librarians.²

Establishing accurate estimates for women's participation rates over the period 1871-1974 in the English library labour market is confounded by a number of factors, most important of which is the lack of contemporaneous data collection. Most existing data

refers to public library workers, however, even here there is no systematic and regular data collection before 1972. This section, therefore, only sketches participation rates in the library labour market. Before outlining participation rates, concerns about labour market statistics will be briefly considered.

3.2.1 Labour Market Participation Rates

Statistics relating to the labour market aim to be objective measures of activity. The more problematic nature of these statistics has been noted in surveys of the entire labour market where changing definitions of key terms, such as those included in or excluded from the category 'worker', make longitudinal comparisons problematic.³ This study draws on census data for comparison with other occupations, however, national census figures do not always enumerate library workers throughout the period in question and so these data are developed by other information. Surveys of participation rates provide useful overarching information about labour market activity. Guy Routh's work, for example, illustrates the numbers of women participating in different occupations (see Table 3.1). Four characteristics of women's labour market activity have been identified which suggest that: between 1861-71 and 1881-91 there were two "quite sharp" retreats from the labour market by women workers;⁴ between 1881-1931, women's labour market activity rates stagnated at around one-third of all women;⁵ women's participation rates throughout the 20th century have gradually risen from a low of 34 % in 1901; and, by the mid-20th century, and particularly after the Second World War,⁶ women's participation in the labour market had climbed back to similar levels as in the 19th century.⁷

While this characterisation is useful as a generalisation, broad outlines obscure regional differences which impacted variously on women of different marital and class status and from different ethnic groups. In broad terms, however, over the period 1871-1974, the types of labour market activities undertaken by women workers have increased and horizontal occupational segregation (where women tend to do different jobs to men) has somewhat decreased. The development of women's employment in libraries, outlined below, is one example of this trend. Although the picture is complicated by the few women appointed to senior posts in the labour market, most

women's participation tends, over the years 1871-1974, to be confined to the lower reaches of those occupations, indicating the persistence of vertical occupational segregation.

Table 3.1: Selected Occupations, by Sex, 1921-71, (Thousands)⁸

Occupation	1921		1931		1951		1971	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Teachers	77	210	89	206	133	207	307	381
Nurses	2	113	4	141	29	237	38	401
Clerical workers	697	560	758	646	932	1409	959	2453

3.2.2 *Women in the Library Labour Market*

Establishing reliable estimates of the numbers of women library workers in England over the period 1871-1974 is problematic. Data have been collected, on an occasional basis, by professional bodies, and these can be useful sources. Also, throughout most of this period, the Library Association conferred professional qualifications and membership was obligatory in order to remain on its Register; this data then provides useful estimates of professionally qualified librarians. There are difficulties with using this source, however. Firstly, not all library workers were members of a professional organisation and would, therefore, be excluded from any data collected by them. Also, not all library workers employed in professional posts were professionally qualified, and therefore, Library Association data cannot account for all professional librarians. Thirdly, many surveys were focused exclusively on public librarianship and disregarded library work in other sectors. Finally, data from the surveys carried out over the period in question by professional bodies is infrequently categorised by sex and never by ethnicity,⁹ thus limiting their utility for this study. In short, data from professional bodies may be useful, however, they should not be assumed to represent the entire sector.

A more general picture is provided in some census surveys, however, these often use statistics for the United Kingdom, or Great Britain, or England and Wales together, and do not provide discrete statistics for England, the focus of this study. Furthermore, Routh notes that librarians have only been distinguished as a separate occupational classification since 1921 when they became sufficiently numerous to warrant census attention.¹⁰ Unfortunately, his valuable work does not specify if the

data refer to professional librarians, paraprofessionals or both. However, it does provide a reliable, if general, estimate of the development of the profession. It demonstrates, for the UK, both a general increase in the numbers of librarians between the years 1921 and 1951 (data is not available for 1971, however, see below) and the gradual numerical predominance of women in the sector (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Librarians in UK Labour Market, 1921-51, by Sex (Thousands)¹¹

	1921		1931		1951	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Librarians	1	1	3	4	5	11

With these shortcomings in mind, the rest of this section refers to statistical reports and more informal ‘snapshot’ surveys by individual librarians, usually carried out to ‘prove’ to library committees the need for further assistants.¹² Whilst this section offers a far from complete quantitative account of the development of women’s employment in the library sector over the years 1871-1974, it does offer a geographically and sectorally diverse portrayal.

3.2.3 *Women’s Employment in Public Libraries*

The claim that the employment of women in public libraries began with three women assistants in Manchester in 1871 is explored elsewhere.¹³ It misleadingly suggests that the numbers of women working in public libraries rose from zero to three at this time. Even so, despite the 20 year history of free public libraries, in 1871 the numbers of women employed in public libraries were very few. One of the earliest estimates of women assistants is found in the proceedings of the second Library Association Annual Meeting.¹⁴ The survey canvassed opinion from UK public free libraries, however, the findings are reported by town and data relating only to English public libraries has been extracted (see Table 3.3). Of the 87 UK public library authorities in 1880, 86 responded to this survey.¹⁵ Of these, ten English authorities reported employing women assistants. This survey shows that around 1880 there were only 51 women working in public libraries in England. Two of these - Manchester and Bristol - account for more than 80 % of all women employed in the sector. It should be noted, however, that by focusing on assistants and not including chief librarians, some women library workers, such as Hannah Etson at Blackpool, were omitted.

Table 3.3: English Public Libraries Employing Women Assistants, circa 1880¹⁶

Name of library	Assistants
Birmingham Free Libraries	1
Bradford Free Library	3
Bridgwater Free Library	1
Bristol City Library	11
Derby Free Library	Exact number unstated
Notting Hill	1
Manchester Free Public Libraries	31
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	1
Smethwick Free Library	1
Tynemouth	1
Total number of assistants	51

Further information about the extent of women's employment in the library sector appears in an informal, snapshot survey carried out by Manchester public libraries, circa 1890 (see Table 3.4).¹⁷ This survey, like the findings noted in Table 3.3, reports on Scottish and English public libraries by name, and data relating to English libraries have been extracted. This survey indicates that the employment of women in public libraries was introduced earlier by libraries in large towns and cities. Only four of the library authorities mentioned in Table 3.3 are also included in the later survey - Bradford, Bristol, Derby and Manchester. Bradford, Bristol and Manchester have significantly increased the numbers of women workers; comparison is not possible for Derby as exact figures were not stated earlier. More extensive figures relating to the numbers of women working in public libraries were produced in 1899 (see Table 3.5).¹⁸ This survey, too, notes the paucity of statistics relating to the employment of women library workers. Acknowledgements to individual librarians suggest that the survey did not rely on Library Association data or members alone. Only the figures relating to English libraries are noted here. This survey suggests that women were employed by library authorities throughout England, with concentrations in cities such as Manchester, although few women appear to work in London libraries. There are two references to unpaid women librarians at Botolph Claydon and Middle Claydon. These figures are similar to those in the *British Library Yearbook for 1900-1901* which noted 242 assistants in 47 towns.¹⁹

Table 3.4: Manchester Public Library Informal Survey of Women Library Workers in Public Libraries, circa 1890²⁰

Library	Women assistants, unless otherwise stated
Blackpool	2
Bradford	7
Bristol	25 assistants; unspecified number of branch librarians
Doncaster	1
Derby	1
London, People's Palace ²¹	2
London, Kensington Public Library	1
Manchester Free Public Libraries	52 ²²
Northwich	1 librarian
Nottingham	2
Oldham	2
St Helens	2
Salford	1
Sheffield	1
Westminster	1 branch librarian
Widnes	1
Total of assistants	100

Table 3.5: English Public Libraries with Women Librarians or Women Assistants, circa 1899²³

Library of	Woman librarian	Assistants	
		Women	Men
Altrincham	Miss F. Beckett	2	-
Battersea	-	4	13
Birmingham	-	2	56
Blackburn	-	2	3
Blackpool	Miss F. Lewtas	4	-
Botolph Claydon	Miss Gray (Hon.)	-	-
Bradford	-	10	18
Bridgewater	Mrs Baker	-	-
Bristol	-	33	3
Bury	Miss Greenhalgh	1	1
Chelsea	-	1	3
Clerkenwell	-	4	2
Darlaston	Miss A. Simkin	-	-
Derby	-	3	4
Doncaster	Miss Scott	-	2
Fleetwood	Miss Mason	1	-
Folkestone	-	1	1
Glossop	Miss H. Warhurst	-	-
Gosport	-	1	1
Grays Thurrock	Miss George	-	-
Hampstead	-	1	11
Heywood	-	1	-
Kensington	-	1	14
Kettering	Miss Pierce	1	1
Leeds	-	18	47
Manchester	-	87	26
Middle Claydon	Miss Verney (Hon.)	-	1
Middleton	Miss M. E. Harrop	-	-
Moss-Side	-	2	0
Nantwich	Miss A. Jackson	1	1
Nottingham	-	2	9
Oldham	-	3	5
Portsmouth	-	12	11
Rothwell	Miss E. Tebbutt	-	-
St. George, Hanover Sq.	-	1	12
St. Helens	-	6	2
Salford	-	2	17
Shoreditch	-	2	6
Sittingbourne	Mrs George	-	-
Wallasey	-	3	1
Walsall	-	1	-
Warrington	-	1	5
Waterloo-with Seaforth	Miss G. E. Taylor	1	1
West Ham	-	1	18
Westminster	-	1	4
Widnes	Miss Proctor	2	-
Worcester	-	2	3
Worthing	Miss M. Frost	1	-
Totals	19 women librarians	222	302

Alec Ellis suggests that between the turn of the century and the outbreak of the First World War the numbers of women employed in public libraries in England and

Wales increased significantly and that by 1914 they represented 30% of those employed in the sector.²⁴ Figures from James Duff Brown's 1909 *Guide to Librarianship* suggest that this may be an underestimate. Brown cites a total of 2,741 librarians and assistants in British municipal libraries, of whom 798 (41%) were women.²⁵ This estimate is more in keeping with figures from the *Libraries, Museums and Art Galleries Yearbook*, which in 1923-4, found 1,450 (52%) women workers in a workforce totalling 2,800.²⁶ These proportions are far higher than those in an informal survey carried out around 1932/3 by Kettering librarian Kate Pierce which estimates that women assistants represented 43 assistants from a total of 200, suggesting around one woman in every four workers.²⁷ However, the 1931 Report by the Association of Assistant Librarians suggests that this may underestimate the proportion of women. Its survey of 243 British municipal libraries found 1,502 (41.7%) men and 2,104 (58.3%) women.²⁸ Despite a lack of clarity about collection criteria, these data indicate that women in the sector were increasingly significant. Table 3.6 demonstrates that since the turn of the century the composition of the public library labour market had dramatically altered in south east England in the mid-1950s as the numbers of women continued to increase absolutely and proportionately in comparison to men, even in the previously hostile London region. The Mallaby Report of 1967 notes comments from the Library Association that approximately 70% of all library workers were women.²⁹

Table 3.6: Public Library Workers in Full-time, Permanent Posts in the London and Home Counties Area at Specified Years, by Sex³⁰

Year	Women	Men	Total
1949	1,409 (57%)	1,038 (43%)	2,447
1954	1,722 (61%)	1,107 (39%)	2,829
1959	3,043 (69%)	1,381 (31%)	4,424

The public library services discussed above co-existed, until 1974, with the county library system. Again, no extensive or longitudinal statistical reports exist from which to verify actual numbers of women employees, however, reports from the Library Association's county library section provide statistical data which occasionally focused on staffing. This is, however, of limited value as, for example, the 1930-31 report, shows 190 staff employed in English county library headquarters, but gives no figures for workers in branch libraries.³¹ The following year's report, again does not show workers by sex, but it does note that there were 215 assistants

working at county library headquarters and a further 214 in branch libraries.³² The 1934-5 report provides further details and notes that many assistants worked on a part-time basis.³³ Ken Stockham notes that the statistical reports were only produced until 1931;³⁴ beyond this there appears to be little statistical data relating to county library workers. However, data from oral history interviews suggests that in the 1940s workers in the county library system were predominantly women.³⁵

3.2.3.1 Chief Public Librarians

The numbers of women in chief librarian posts in public libraries vary considerably over the period in question. Thomas Greenwood's *British Library Yearbook* for 1900-1901 noted women chief librarians in 19 English towns.³⁶ Peter Cowell suggests that women tended to be appointed chief librarian in smaller public libraries.³⁷ Many libraries employing women around the turn of the century as librarians had few other library workers. This does not necessarily mean that women were only being employed by small libraries as Alec Ellis notes that most public libraries were small establishments until the First World War. He writes that there were fewer than four members of staff employed in 54% of all English and Welsh public libraries and fewer than ten employed in 75% of libraries.³⁸ The number of women chiefs dwindled so that in 1974, Helen Farnworth noted only 12 women chief librarians in the UK.³⁹ This decrease in the number of women chiefs is, however, complicated during the 1930s by the substantial numbers of women engaged as chief county librarians. The 1930-31 county libraries report illustrates that of the 45 English county library chiefs, 19 were women;⁴⁰ similarly, data in the 1938-9 report illustrates that in the 46 English county authorities, 21 chief librarians were women.⁴¹ Paucity of data makes it impossible to develop these figures.

3.2.4 *Special Libraries*

Data relating to special library staffing is still more incomplete than the data outlined above on public library staffing. An 1899 survey⁴² reported that some 'non-rate-supported' libraries employed women librarians and assistants (see Table 3.7). The survey also included Co-operative libraries in Lancashire and Yorkshire,

however, no figures of women workers are noted against these libraries and the reason for their inclusion is unclear; these libraries are omitted from Table 3.7. The report noted that it was believed women were also employed in Mudie's subscription library and in other commercial libraries. This survey of women workers employed in non-rate supported libraries does not attempt to be exhaustive and additional libraries which might have been included are Dr. Williams' Library in London, the Education Department,⁴³ and the British Museum, where, for a short time, "a lady was engaged to assist in the delicate work of arranging and cataloguing" the Tapling postage stamp collection.⁴⁴

Table 3.7: Special Libraries with Women Librarians and Assistants⁴⁵

Town	Library	Librarian	Assistants	
			Women	Men
Bradford	Literary Society	Miss Rhodes	-	-
Lincoln	Literary Institute	Miss Flanders	-	-
Lincoln	Stock Library	Miss Marfleet	-	-
London	Bishopsgate Institute	-	1	-
London	Hampstead Literary Institute	-	1	-
London	Ostretrical Society	Miss Hannam	-	-

There was little sector wide collection of staffing data over most of this period. The Aslib conferences, however, indicate that significant numbers of women workers were employed in this sector. Proceedings of the first Aslib conference, held in 1924, include a list of 84 delegates, among whom were 15 women who gave an organisational, rather than personal, address.⁴⁶ An exception to the general paucity of data is a small scale survey also carried out by Aslib in the late 1950s. This provides a brief statistical picture of employment in special libraries which also offers details by sex. The survey found that in 20 (38%) of the 52 responding organisations, the head of the unit was a woman and that among the other 246 employees in these special libraries, 184 (75%) were women.⁴⁷

3.2.5 *Academic Libraries*

There is little statistical data relating to the employment of women in academic libraries. A number of writers commented on the scarcity of these openings around the turn of the century: "There is as yet no serious question - such is male arrogance - of employing women in the more scholarly libraries ..."⁴⁸ Lucy Toulmin

Smith, librarian at Manchester College, Oxford, augmented existing surveys (see Table 3.8) with only three further academic libraries where women were employed: Yorkshire College in Leeds, Holloway College and Somerville College, Oxford. Whilst some colleges, particularly women’s colleges such as Somerville at Oxford and Girton at Cambridge,⁴⁹ employed their students and alumni as librarians, other universities refused to employ women. When Ethel Fegan, former librarian at Cheltenham Ladies College and Girton College, Cambridge, joined the staff at University Library, Cambridge in 1942, she attributed her admission to the lack of men workers. She commented in a letter, “they have had to come down to women for help!”⁵⁰ However, the employment of women in the sector increased and in the 1950s Reading University was completely staffed by women.⁵¹

Table 3.8: Academic Libraries with Women Librarians and Assistants, 1899⁵²

Town	Library	Librarian	Assistants	
			Women	Men
Barnet	Hyde Institute	-	2	-
Egham	Holloway College	Miss Guinness (?) ⁵³	-	-
London	Goldsmith’s Institute	Miss Easty (?)	-	-
Manchester	Owen’s College	-	1	-
Nottingham	Mechanics’ Institute	-	1	2
Oxford	Manchester College	Miss Toulmin-Smith	-	-

3.2.6 *The 1972 Library Staff Census*

Cross-sectoral statistics of library workers by sex were first collected in 1972 (see Table 3.9).⁵⁴ This staffing census reports in detail the numbers of workers employed throughout the library sector, the levels at which they were employed and types of qualifications they possessed. The census found a total of 34,830 workers in libraries in the UK, of whom 9,900 were men and 24,930 (71.6%) were women. The majority of these workers (20,045) were employed in public libraries, where an even higher percentage (76.3%) were women. Most men (66%)working in public libraries were in professional posts, however, most women (65%) in public libraries worked in paraprofessional posts.

A similarly sexed distribution is found in academic libraries, when women represent 70.1% of the total 3,444 workers in university and university college libraries. Again, men are disproportionately represented in the professional posts; 81% of all men working in this type of library were employed in professional posts. The

proportion of men working in industrial libraries is higher than those in public libraries, but far lower than the percentage of men working in national libraries, where they were 48% of all workers. Only in library schools do men outnumber women workers, almost reversing the ratio found in public libraries (68% men).

Although the staffing census offers a broad and detailed picture of employment in the library sector and remedies some of the deficiencies in the available data, it does not analyse the data by seniority of post. This makes it impossible to assess the levels of vertical occupational segregation across the sector. Furthermore, as the first of a short series of staffing surveys, which were carried out beyond the scope of this study, longitudinal comparison is still not possible.

3.2.7 Section Summary

This section has outlined the numbers of women library workers over the period 1871-1974. Despite drawing on a number of sources there is insufficient original data to provide a satisfactory account. It is tempting to tabulate the data that have been identified, however, this would not be helpful as the information is partial. However, the data which does exist indicates that the proportion of women in the sector increased over the period in comparison to men, whilst women remained, on the whole, in the lower reaches of the library labour market.

Table 3.9: Comparison of Numbers of Library Workers, by Sector, by Sex, 1972⁵⁵

Type of staff	Staff in posts for trained librarians or information scientists		Qualified staff in paraprofessional posts		Staff in posts prior to professional training		Other non-manual staff		Total of staff		Percentage of staff type by sex		Total of all staff
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	
Public library	3129	4660	36	134	220	592	1363	9911	4748	15297	23.7	76.3	20045
Other local government	30	27	-	3	-	4	34	50	64	84	43.2	56.8	148
National library	209	168	2	1	11	26	419	500	641	695	48.0	52.0	1336
University or university College	834	998	10	49	44	100	143	1266	1031	2413	29.9	70.1	3444
Polytechnic	151	212	4	20	11	24	13	202	179	458	28.1	71.9	637
College of Education	119	301	-	7	-	12	8	234	127	554	18.7	81.4	681
Other Colleges of FE	318	453	2	6	10	43	31	346	361	848	29.9	70.1	1209
Library school	203	74	1	3	-	-	2	20	206	97	68.0	32.0	303
Govt. dept., station or agency	430	486	2	4	7	14	294	833	733	1337	35.4	64.6	2070
Public corporation	119	127	3	2	3	6	140	261	265	396	40.1	59.9	661
Industry or commerce	902	971	9	8	2	17	167	984	1080	1980	35.3	64.7	3060
Learned or professional society	159	208	1	7	11	12	19	124	190	351	35.1	64.9	541
Research or trade association	167	170	1	1	1	7	41	135	210	313	40.2	59.8	523
Other	50	70	-	1	1	-	14	36	65	107	37.8	62.2	172
Total	6820	8925	71	246	321	857	2688	14902	9900	24930	28.4	71.6	34830
Percentage male/female	43.3	56.7	22.4	77.6	27.2	72.8	15.3	84.7	28.4	71.6	-	-	-
Total	15745		317		1178		17590		34830				
Percent in each type of staff	19.6	25.6	0.2	0.7	0.9	2.5	7.7	42.8	-	-	-	-	-

3.3 Rates of Pay in the Labour Market

Guy Routh provides an extensive analysis of labour market employment and pay in Great Britain.⁵⁶ Using his work, it is possible to summarise the rates of pay received for much of period 1871-1974 by women working in occupations often compared with library work (see Table 3.10). In the early part of this period, which is not considered by Routh, data is less complete than after the turn of the century, partly due to the small numbers of women involved and the developing nature of the professions. Alison Oram's extensive study of women in the teaching profession, 1900-39, argues that between these years, teachers received a "reasonable and steadily increasing" salary, which women teachers considered compared well with other occupations.⁵⁷ Teachers' pay was higher than that received in other occupations in the same class, as identified by census surveys (see Table 3.11). Teaching also offered some opportunities for progression and associated salary increases. However, in the Civil Service, where all jobs were ostensibly open to women workers, even by 1930s few women reached the higher posts, thus restricting pay to the lower salary scales.⁵⁸ For women clerical workers in the private sector, although a reasonable salary might initially be possible, this was, in the longer term, limited as there were few opportunities for progression.

Table 3.10: Women's Pay in Selected Occupations, 1913-1970, (£, p. a.)⁵⁹

Occupation	1913	1924	1935	1955	1960	1970
Qualified teacher	104.5	272	265**	524	813	1503
Nurses	55	106	133**	362	424	978
Clerical workers	45*	106	99	317	427	839
Civil Service: Clerical officers	-	206	190	396	586	-
Civil Service: Clerical assistants	-	143	130	327	481	-

* Data given for the period 1911-13.

** Data given for 1936.

Table 3.11: Average Pay for Occupational Class 1B, Lower Professional Earnings, 1913-70 (£, p.a.)⁶⁰

Year	Men		Women	
	£	% of previous year	£	% of previous year
1913	155		89	
1924	320	206	214	240
1936	308	96	211	99
1955	610	198	438	208
1960	847	139	606	138
1970	1855	219	1224	202

3.3.1 *Rates of Pay in the Library Sector*

As to salaries, little can be said that will be reliable as a general guide.⁶¹

I do not know where you can obtain this information, other than by writing round to the various libraries.⁶²

Attempts to estimate rates of pay among women library workers are hampered by the lack of any systematic data collection in the UK library sector between 1871-1974.⁶³ Much of the following is based on informal surveys, carried out by libraries, or on occasional surveys, carried out by professional bodies. This section draws mainly on public library data because these were the salaries which were publicly noted and compared; little data on academic and special library salaries has been identified. This illustrates the individual nature of pay negotiation which predominated until the 1930s, when the professional associations and unions began to attempt to collectively influence pay in the sector.

3.3.2 *Public Library Salaries*

When Manchester public library began employing women assistants in 1871, they were paid “trial wages” of 6/- weekly; after this their wages ranged from 10/- to a maximum of 18/- weekly.⁶⁴ An informal survey carried out at Manchester public library around 1890⁶⁵ details rates of pay for women workers in 10 English libraries, mostly municipal public libraries, but also at the People’s Palace library in London (see Table 3.12). Full-time women assistants, as shown in Table 3.12, were being paid between 8/- and 25/- weekly, while full-time women branch librarians were receiving weekly wages of between 18/- and 23/-. An informal survey of men assistants resigning from their posts at Manchester public library⁶⁶ affords some sex-based comparison within a library authority: a 21 year old left in 1889, when he was earning 17/- to become a clerk at Sheffield Town Council; a 19-year-old left in 1890, when he was earning 10/-, because he was emigrating having married “a widow of wealth”; a 27-year-old left in 1894, when he was earning 30/- to take up a sub-librarian post. Although the ages of the women workers are not given and so a direct comparison is

not possible, it appears that women library workers were prepared to continue in post for lower wages than men.⁶⁷

Table 3.12: Manchester Public Library Informal Survey of Women Library Workers in Public Libraries, circa 1890⁶⁸

Library	Weekly pay rates (shillings) for women workers	Full-time ⁶⁹ post?
Blackpool	Assistants: 8/- to 15/-	Yes
Bradford	Assistants: 5/- to 25/-	Yes
Bristol	Assistants: 10/- to 15/- Branch librarians: 18/- to 29/-	Yes
Doncaster	Assistants: 9/-	Yes
Derby	Assistants: 25/-	Yes
London, People's Palace	Position unstated: 23/- to 29/-	No
London, Kensington Public Library	Librarian: 20/-	Yes
Manchester Free Public Libraries	Position unstated: 10/- to 18/-	Yes
Northwich	Librarian: 8/-	No
Nottingham	Assistant in children's library: 12/6 Assistant in charge of ladies reading room: 12/6	No Yes
Oldham	Position unstated: 12/- to 17/-	Yes
St Helens	Position unstated: 10/- to 13/-	Yes
Salford	Position unstated: 20/-	Yes
Sheffield	Position unstated: 15/-	Yes
Westminster	Branch librarian: 23/-, plus residence	Yes
Widnes	Assistant: 20/-	Yes

The first systematic survey of salaries in municipal libraries was carried in 1911 by the LAA.⁷⁰ In Appendix II, the survey reports the actual highest and lowest salaries of chief librarians (£70 to £700), sub-librarians (£40 to £300), branch librarians (£70 to £160) and chief assistants (£35 to £170) noting the differential by the income of the library authority. The reported salaries of senior and junior assistants, unlike the more senior posts are reported by sex (see Table 3.13). This might suggest that there was either little difference between salary scales for men and women at senior levels or, more probably, that there were so few women in these posts that they were considered insignificant (see above). Clearly, however, Berwick Sayers and Henry Coutts considered the numbers of women assistants significant. The report shows that whereas men senior assistants received between £20 and £130 p.a., women senior assistants received between £13 and £104 p.a. In considering junior assistants, the report shows men being paid between £13 and £80 p.a., and women, £12 to £78. Although some variations in salary may be explained by the size of the employing library authority, this is clearly not always the case. George Roebuck and

William Thorne's⁷¹ brief commentary on salaries in 1914, which does not give sex-differentiated rates, is broadly in line with Berwick Sayers and Coutts' 1911 survey. This later report estimated the highest salaries in state libraries to be £1,500 and the highest in municipal libraries to be between £700 and £800, however, it cautioned that there were few such salaries. The salary of the chief librarian is significant because often the salaries of all other library workers were calculated proportionately, so, for example, "the second on the staff receives about half what is paid to the chief librarian"⁷² (see Table 3.14).

Table 3.13: Salaries of Senior and Junior Assistants in British Municipal Libraries in 1911, by Sex, (£, p.a.)⁷³

Income of Library Authority	Senior Assistants (Men)		Senior Assistants (Women)		Junior Assistants (Men)		Junior Assistants (Women)	
	Lowest	Highest	Lowest	Highest	Lowest	Highest	Lowest	Highest
£500 - 1,000	20	80	13	78	13	52	12	36
£1,500 - 2,000	26	125	26	52	13	65	20	45
£3,000 - 4,000	26	120	20	80	13	80	20	45
£5,000 - 10,000	39	130	52	104	13	78	13	78
£10,000 and over	52	130	30	90	20	50	15	56

Table 3.14: Maximum and Minimum Pay Rates for Workers in British Municipal Libraries, 1914 (£)⁷⁴

Library type	Post	Minimum salary	Average salary	Maximum salary
State	Chief/responsible librarian	80 p.a.	-	1,500 p.a.
Municipal	Chief librarian	80 p.a.	200-£250 p.a.	700 - 800 p.a.
	Assistant in charge of branch	80 p.a.	-	200 p.a.
	Senior assistant	75 p.a.	-	150 p.a.
	Junior assistant	8/- to 10/- weekly	-	-

There appear to have been no pay surveys in the 1920s, however the findings survive of an informal survey carried out in 1924 by W.H. Walton, librarian at Derby City Library, whose committee wanted to know "the general rate of pay throughout the country for women assistants."⁷⁵ There is no indication about the number of inquiries made by Walton. There are, however, three responses and data from Walton's authority. Derby City library paid its adult women assistants salaries of between £125 and £168 and Walton said, "... I think my women-assistants well paid (as things go) ..."⁷⁶ Kate Pierce, librarian at Kettering, reported that women assistants were paid from £31 (at 16 years) to a discretionary maximum of £130, dependent on age. In comparison, men at Kettering were paid £45 (at 16 years) rising to £145 (aged 23).⁷⁷ As librarian Kate Pierce received £250 p.a.⁷⁸ E.E. Lowe, librarian at Leicester

public library reported that women assistants were paid £125 to £170, and junior assistants were paid 12/- weekly (approximately £31 p.a.) at 16, rising to 34/- (approximately £88 p.a.) at 20.⁷⁹ Walter Briscoe, librarian at Nottingham public library, noted that women juniors received from £50 to £110, while those over 21 received between £120 and £160.⁸⁰ All of these workers, except the most senior officer, Kate Pierce, were earning below the average wages for their professional class (see Table 3.11 above).

3.3.2.1 1930s: Regulating Incomes

Although many of the above pay rates were individually negotiated, much also depended on the worker's age. Many public library salaries were calculated according to local authority salary scales which used age to calculate progression through incremental scales. Attempts to introduce formal, sector-wide pay scales were discussed in the 1920s,⁸¹ and, for example, some regulation was introduced at Southport when women library assistants were put on council salary scales for clerical assistants.⁸² This formalisation continued throughout the 1930s, which may explain the more open nature of debate on pay in this period, and the increased surviving data. The 1931 update of the 1911 salary report noted that whilst there had been a general improvement in salaries, "the salaries of librarians of all grades are still lamentably low".⁸³ This report contains detailed information about pay rates (see Table 3.15). It illustrates, more clearly than before, that pay was linked to the size of the employing library authority and that in these high paying authorities, women were less likely to be appointed to senior posts. For example, there is just one woman branch librarian and senior assistant in all the largest authorities (see Table 3.13). However, the report is incomplete as, for example, it reports that no women held the post of chief librarian, thereby omitting, among others, Kate Pierce at Kettering public library and Maud Griffiths at Luton. It does not appear to be the case that the report has omitted the figures because there was insufficient data to compute an 'average', as the column 'Branch librarian' reports an average in the population group of over 500,000 based on only one return. The column for chief librarians is, therefore, incomplete.

Table 3.15: Average Salaries Paid in British Municipal Libraries, by Sex, by Population Groups (£, p.a.)⁸⁴

Population groups	Chief Librarian		Branch Librarian		Head of Department		Senior Assistant		Junior Assistant	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
over 500,000	875	-	353	350*	322	-	368	180*	134	130
200,000 - 300,000	710	-	289	195	285	256	271	198	133	117
100,000 - 150,00	570	-	330	149	302	268	240	178	153	111
50,000 - 75,000	442	-	153	-	-	-	201	128	132	94
30,000 - 40,000	330	-	150	-	-	-	138	120	75	73
25,000 - 30,000	297	-	-	-	-	-	-	114	-	78
20,000 - 25,000	300	-	-	-	-	-	200	84	70	70
10,000 - 20,000	203	-	-	-	-	-	65	80	63	-

* The report notes only one return in this category

In 1934, the LA attempted to regulate pay within the sector with the publication of recommendations for salary scales.⁸⁵ These did not involve sex differentials, but continued to base salaries on library size. The recommendations aimed to generally increase salaries and to allocate library qualifications to particular grades. The scales were largely based on those advocated by NALGO. The need for an increase in salary levels is illustrated by a survey, carried out circa 1932/3 by Kate Pierce at Kettering public library.⁸⁶ The survey found generally low levels of pay: for example, a woman chief assistant at Batley public library was paid just £91 p.a. and the woman acting librarian at Chelmsford public library received £156 p.a. Both examples are well below the average pay for this occupational class (see Table 3.11). This use of recommended scales to attempt to implement pay regulation was continued in the 1942 McColvin Report⁸⁷ and again in the 1946 salary recommendations,⁸⁸ which updated the scales in the 1934 report, increasing rates by approximately one-third. This approach continued in 1951⁸⁹ and again in 1961.⁹⁰ However, the attempt was not wholly successful as, throughout this period, the low levels of pay in public libraries were frequently noted.⁹¹ In 1962, it was noted that the library sector had still not achieved parity with the teaching profession⁹² and five years later there was an unsuccessful attempt to establish a minimum salary for chartered librarians.⁹³ However, in the more senior posts, at newly qualified librarian and at principal officer level, there were significant signs of improvement: between 1965 and 1975, salaries of the former increased by between 153% and 180% and those of the latter increased by between 134% and 126%.⁹⁴

3.3.3 County Libraries

Around the time of the 1919 Act which provided the legislative basis for county libraries, the Carnegie Trust, which funded many early county schemes, made its grants conditional upon the payment of a minimum annual salary of £300 to the chief librarian where a county library served 100 or more centres.⁹⁵ This was the salary received by the newly appointed Essex county librarian Winifred Rait in 1926.⁹⁶ However, Edith Carnell describes many salaries in the sector as “ludicrously small”.⁹⁷ Duncan Gray notes that in 1922, salaries of chief librarians varied from between £250 to £400 and that assistants in county libraries were paid on county council salary scales.⁹⁸ Carnell estimates that, in 1924, few assistants earned more than £150.⁹⁹ Carnell also reports recommendations in 1927 from county librarians that clerks should be paid £1/10/0 a week (£78 p.a.) and that assistant (qualified) librarians should be paid £160-£200 p.a.¹⁰⁰ However, Thomas Kelly reports that in 1927 30 men assistants in county libraries were paid less than £150 p.a., whilst 14 women assistants received £100.¹⁰¹ Although the recommendations are still below the average earnings for the occupational class (see Table 3.11) actual salaries were lower still.

By the 1930s, salaries for deputy librarians had risen to £250-£300.¹⁰² Nancy Cooke’s 1935 manual of county library practice cautiously advises placing staff on county council clerical scales, which she says would mean junior assistants entering the profession at 16 on annual salaries of around £60, rising incrementally to around £220.¹⁰³ The 1931-2 county library report was more forthright in advocating the adoption of county council grading schemes as “the solution to the problem”.¹⁰⁴ The same report notes that most (32 of the total 44) English county librarians were paid between £300-£450 p.a., however, five received between £450-£500 and a further five between £500 and £600. The report also notes that deputy librarians were paid not more than £300, senior assistants, £250, and junior assistants received a maximum of £150.¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately, the report does not give further details about the recipients of these salaries. On starting her library career in a professional post at Kent in 1936, Lorna Paulin was paid £120 p.a.¹⁰⁶ Similar salary levels continued throughout the decade after which the county library statistical reports, which have provided most of the above data, cease and no other publication appears to have reported salary data.

However, by the mid-1950s, county library staff were being paid on the nationally agreed local authority salary scales.¹⁰⁷

3.3.4 *Special Libraries*

Pay rates in special libraries are difficult to establish as no systematic collection of data exists before 1971. Interview data suggest that some special libraries used salary scales of associated institutions. For example, Winifred Thorne, working in the India High Commission library between 1930-1968, was paid on Civil Service salary scales.¹⁰⁸ Due to the lack of data collection in this area, this section relies on detailed data from case study libraries. The first focuses on an early librarian at the BBC, Florence Milnes (see Table 3.16). Her personnel files show that she began work for the BBC in 1925 as an assistant in the information unit on a weekly salary of £3/10/0 (£182 p.a.). Two years later on being appointed librarian, her salary increased to £280 p.a. and it continued to rise until, by the time of her retirement in 1958, she was paid £1,915 p.a. This compares well with other library workers and others within this occupational class (see Table 3.10 above). However, special libraries also contain exemplars of the other extreme of pay rates such as Barbara Banner, the librarian of the Royal College of Music, who, in 1939, gave up her PhD research to work in the library on an unpaid basis.¹⁰⁹ The first systematic survey of pay in special libraries was carried out in 1971 and illustrates significant variations between rates of pay in different types of special library (see Table 3.17). Despite these variations, even the lowest average salary for women (£1,375 in research associations) is higher than the average salary for this occupational group (see Table 3.11).

Table 3.16: Salary of BBC Librarian, 1925-1958 (£)¹¹⁰

Date	Designated post	Salary
26.1.25	Assistant, Information Unit, Press Records and Library	3/10/- weekly
1.4.27	Librarian, Information Unit, Press Records and Library	280 p.a.
1.10.34	Librarian, Administration Unit	400 p.a.
1.4.40	Librarian, Administration Unit	550 p.a.
Sept. 1942	Librarian, Library	698 p.a.
1.5.50	Librarian, Library	1,075 p.a.
1.3.58	Librarian, Library	1,915 p.a.

Table 3.17: Comparison of Average Pay in 1971, by Type of Special Library, by Sex (£, p.a.)¹¹¹

Type of special library	Men's pay	Women's pay (as a % of men's pay)
International organisation (not a company)	1950	1440 (74)
Public corporation	1963	1532 (78)
Research association	2200	1375 (63)
Professional association or learned society	2275	1593 (70)
Company or firm	2100	1450 (69)
Other	2100	1500 (71)

3.3.5 Academic Libraries

No systematic salary surveys for academic library workers have been identified. Instead a case study of salaries at Leeds University over the period 1885-1950 is presented. The years 1950 to 1974 are represented by data from the professional press and further case study data.

The years 1885-1950 were a time of expansion at the Yorkshire College, later Leeds University, library. Fanny Passavant was appointed librarian at the Yorkshire College in 1885 and paid £45 per annum; by 1910 this had risen to £125 p.a. and it remained at this level.¹¹² Fanny Passavant's assistant, Miss F.M. Ekins (full name not known) was appointed in 1896 and paid £26 p.a.; three years later this increased to £40. In 1909, her salary had risen to £75 p.a. and in 1918 to £100. By 1923, when Miss Ekins resigned, her salary had increased to £170.¹¹³ Another assistant, Miss Wright (first name not known) was appointed library assistant in 1914 on a salary of £80 per annum.¹¹⁴ In 1918, a temporary 'useful assistant', Miss Meeson, was employed on a months' trial at a weekly wage of 10s (£26 p.a.).¹¹⁵ By 1925 there had been a substantial change of staff, both at the level of librarian and throughout the other posts. New librarian Richard Offor launched a campaign to increase wages throughout the library: at this time both men and women assistant librarians were paid £225 p.a, and library assistants received between £175 and £105 p.a.¹¹⁶ Voluntary or student labour was still used. For example, Margaret Cohen worked for two months in the library to get the requisite experience for the Diploma in Librarianship; she was paid an honorarium of £10 after she informed the library that paid work only would count towards her Diploma.¹¹⁷

In a draft Report of the Librarian for the session 1926-7, Richard Offor commented that salaries at Leeds were low, and that the salaries of two assistants, Miss Robinson and Mr Beckwith, were remarkably poor:

Salaries. Existing salaries throughout too low certainly in relation to those in public libraries; and often in relation to other universities. Here again want to recognise efforts made by this university. Salaries until 1919 negligible in amount ... Librns. salary shld. be at any rate minimum professorial one, if he has proved his worth. Already so in one or two universities ...¹¹⁸

As his aim was to increase both his and the library staff's pay, it is hardly surprising that Richard Offor should argue that Leeds staff were comparatively poorly paid. However, comparing the salaries at Leeds with those in public libraries (see above) confirms his claim.

During the 1930s, in academic as in public libraries, there were attempts to regulate pay rates and there is a corresponding increase in public discussion of the issues.¹¹⁹ The discussions at Leeds generated notes which show that library workers were paid within salary bands, which did not differentiate between men and women (see Table 3.18). The attempt to regulate academic library salaries was backed the LA's University and Research Section. A 1938 report¹²⁰ gave recommendations for pay in the sector (see Table 3.19). It is difficult to estimate how widely these recommendations were implemented; at Leeds, the salary scales were set at just below these recommendations. Throughout this period, Richard Offor campaigned for higher salaries and maintained that Leeds library workers received poor salaries. A 1943 Memorandum on Library Staff shows similar salary banding scales.¹²¹ In the later 1940s at Leeds, there were proposals for salary increases beyond the existing increments which would have increased salaries by around 10% for both library assistants and senior library assistants. These would have taken the pay for senior assistant librarians to at least £520 p.a. and for junior assistant librarians to £420 p.a. by 1951/2.

Table 3.18: Salary Bands in the 1930s at Leeds University, by Job Title (£, p.a.)¹²²

Job title	Salary band	Annual increment
Sub-librarian	300-500	
Assistant Librarian Grade I	200-300	25
Assistant Librarian Grade II	150-200	25
Library Assistant Grad I	100-180	10
Library Assistant Grad II	80-130	10
Junior Assistant	39-65	

Table 3.19: LA Recommended Scales for Academic Library Workers, 1938 (£, p.a.)¹²³

Grade	Qualifications	Salary band	Annual increment
A	University graduates/FLA/ALA	200 to 400	25
B	Special responsibility, e.g. head of cataloguing	400 to 500	25
C	Sub-Librarian or Deputy librarian, except in small libraries	500 to 650	25

Low levels of pay continued in the sector until the 1970s: in 1971, a UK-wide survey by the Association of Teachers in Technical Institutions found a “wide variation in salaries and conditions of college librarians”. The Association was committed to establishing common conditions of service and salaries, arguing that it was unacceptable that salaries for college librarians ranged from top of the teaching scale to the clerical levels of the non-teaching scales.¹²⁴ However for professional librarians at least, there were significant improvements. Between 1965 and 1975, Haslam illustrates a minimum salary increase of 60% for newly qualified assistant librarians, whilst sub-librarians saw an increase of between 87 and 100%.¹²⁵

3.3.6 Section Summary

A tabulated comparison of library salaries in different sectors across the period 1871-1974 with salaries from other occupations is problematic as no systematic data collection has been carried out. However, it is possible to offer some comparisons between paraprofessional and professional public library salaries, and clerical workers and qualified teachers (see Table 3.20). Qualified librarians appear to have been consistently less well paid than qualified teachers until the 1970s, and paraprofessionals have been fared similarly in comparison with clerical workers. The data for library workers is, however, unreliable and should only be used to suggest general levels of pay. Beyond these specific comparisons, it would appear that academic library workers received lower than average salaries within the occupational

group. There were wide variations in special libraries and no attempt is made here to generalise about this situation.

Table 3.20: Salaries of Women Workers in Various Sectors, at Selected Years (£, p.a.)

Post	1910-15	1920-30	1955	1970
Qualified teacher ¹²⁶	104.5	272	524	1503
Clerical worker ¹²⁷	45	106	317	839
Qualified public library worker	90	170*	150*	1515
Paraprofessional public library worker	56	31**	150**	.*

Notes: 1910-15 library data.¹²⁸

1920-30 library data: *from Leicester¹²⁹ and Nottingham¹³⁰ public libraries; **from Leicester¹³¹ and Kettering¹³² public libraries.

1955 library data:¹³³ *By age 25; average starting salary at 16, £36pa; **for newly qualified workers.

1970 library data:¹³⁴ *No data available.

3.4 Superannuation

A third aspect of the terms and conditions of women's employment in libraries considered here is superannuation. A basic level of state pension was established by legislation enacted in 1908, however, this set pensions at only 22% of average earnings making further provision desirable.¹³⁵ This was increasingly available throughout the period as legislative frameworks for occupational pensions and superannuation were established. Superannuation was of great importance to women workers, however, they rarely had the same access to it as men workers as it depended on sustained labour market participation, rather than the interrupted attachment common to many women workers.¹³⁶

Superannuation schemes for library workers varied across different sectors, yet when they did exist they appear to have been open to both men and women workers. The lack of a national scheme for public librarians, framed by legislation, is noted with concern by James Duff Brown in 1903.¹³⁷ He wrote that those towns which had made some type of pension arrangements were "far from common." The small pension received in 1904 by Miss Thomas (first name not known) is an example of one of these rare schemes. Until her retirement aged 75, Miss Thomas had been assistant librarian at Kensington northern branch library between 1887 and 1904 and had previously worked at Heywood public library at Nottinghill Gate,¹³⁸ Similar concerns to those noted by Brown appear in a 1911 report, which said that just 14 British town library authorities operated schemes. The 1922 Local Government and

Other Officers' Superannuation Act went some way towards meeting these concerns by enabling local authorities to institute superannuation schemes if they wished. The scheme allowed employees to move their contributions to other participating authorities. Prior to the 1922 Act, some local authorities, including London County Council and Manchester, had established schemes by private acts of Parliament.¹³⁹

The 1922 Act extended the opportunity to have an occupational pension to local authority workers. However, the extent to which it offered women workers some protection from long term poverty¹⁴⁰ was curtailed in certain authorities. At Kettering Urban District Council, for example, the scheme was open only to certain "designated" posts, and access to these posts had been restricted when the council:

... passed a Resolution .. to the effect that no member of the Staff should be placed in a designated post until they had attained the age of 23 years ...¹⁴¹

This restriction would have affected women more than men, as women tended to leave the labour market on marriage,¹⁴² and women's average age of marriage in the 1930s was 25.5 years.¹⁴³ According to this average, most women workers at Kettering would be eligible to contribute to the superannuation scheme for only 2.5 years, despite possibly working there since they were 16. The importance of superannuation schemes is affirmed by women who retired in the 1980s and 1990s. One woman said that without her superannuation she:

... would be completely sunk now. If I hadn't - I remember, I retired - I got a lump sum of £6,000 and - and I've got £190 a month coming in - and without that I don't know what I would have done.¹⁴⁴

The superannuation scheme at Leeds University pre-dates many of those in public libraries. In 1918, when the librarian Fanny Passavant retired, she received an annual pension of £100.¹⁴⁵ Her long-term assistant Miss Ekins worked at Leeds for 27 years before resigning, however, she had no superannuation arrangements. The Library Committee noted in its minutes that:

...in view of the long and devoted service rendered by Miss F.M. Ekins to the University Library since her appointment in 1896, and of the fact that for many years, her salary precluded her from making any provision of superannuation, she should be granted a lump sum upon her retirement.¹⁴⁶

The lump sum awarded was £100, 60% of her annual salary at the time of retirement. Fanny Passavant's successor, Richard Offor, was appointed to a post whose remuneration package included a contributory superannuation scheme,¹⁴⁷ indicating that this type of scheme was becoming common practice for certain academic library workers.

Some special libraries provided superannuation schemes. Florence Milnes, a BBC librarian between 1925 and 1958, participated in a contributory pension scheme.¹⁴⁸ Winifred Thorne joined the civil service pension scheme, which operated at the India High Commission.¹⁴⁹ It has not been possible to develop the investigation of pension provision in special libraries.

The LA made cross-sectoral recommendations about superannuation in its 1934 recommendations on salaries.¹⁵⁰ It attempted to establish the 1922 Local Government and other Officers' Superannuation Act as the baseline for superannuation schemes and suggested that schemes "not less favourable" than the 1922 Act should apply to all library workers. It is impossible to say how widely available schemes such as those offered at the BBC and the India High Commission were. However, the LA recommendations suggest that by the mid-1930s, library workers in all sectors might hope for some pension arrangements.

3.5 Hours of Work

This section outlines women library workers' hours of work and holiday entitlements. Hours of work were greatly discussed throughout this period and this was of particular importance to women workers, who often combined labour market activities with other forms of unpaid labour, such as caring.¹⁵¹ This section will focus

on the hours of work in public libraries as it was here that most discussion of the subject arose.

Hours of work were problematic in two respects: the number of hours worked and the pattern of work. Many library workers and library managers agreed that they were expected to work too many hours, however, library authorities and committees were keen to avoid decreasing hours as this would create a need for additional staff. An early example of this occurred at Manchester public library. In 1890, librarian Charles Sutton reported to his committee that "... whilst the wages paid in Manchester were on the whole higher than those of other towns, the hours of duty compared favourably."¹⁵² He reported that the library's lending departments were open 8.30am to 9pm, Monday to Friday and 8.30am to 5pm Saturday and the newsrooms and small reading rooms were open weekdays 8.30 am to 10pm, and 2am to 9pm on Sundays. Assistants worked eight to nine hours for four days each week, with two and a half hours for meals. Hours were variable on Saturdays, which assistants worked every third week. Sunday duties were also worked every third week, and on one Sunday assistants worked 2pm-9pm, the following Sunday duty, they worked 5-9pm. Assistants had one full day off per week, and Sutton said that the average working week totalled 52 hours. This is seen in reports from the branch libraries which show that: at the Ancoats branch, the librarian Emily Casserly and her five assistants, in the week 22nd March 1890, worked between 50 hours and 26 minutes and 52 hours. At another Manchester branch, Rochdale Road, assistants worked between 52 hours and 30 minutes and 53 hours and 22 minutes in the same week.¹⁵³

The working week at Manchester in 1893 was longer than that at Leeds and Liverpool, where 47 hours was more usual.¹⁵⁴ Although Peter Cowell draws attention to the need to restrict the hours of work to eight or nine daily, the *British Library Year Book 1900-1901* reported three English libraries where the staff worked more than 60 hours weekly.¹⁵⁵ By 1908 the average number of hours worked had fallen to 48, and in 1911, it was 45 hours.¹⁵⁶ Berwick Sayers and Henry Coutts' 1911 Report also noted that there was "a decided tendency" towards reducing working hours to 42 per week. By the time of the next report in 1931, the 42-hour working week had "become so

general in practice that all libraries wherein more than this total is worked may justly be termed backward in this respect.”¹⁵⁷ However, this report also noted that there were still 60 British municipal libraries where this was the case, despite an average working work of 41.2 hours. The weekly hours worked in county libraries was somewhat shorter: in 1931, Nancy Cooke noted an average of 38.75 hours and a maximum of 43.5 hours.¹⁵⁸

Disquiet with the length of the library week was voiced until the 1950s with various attempts at regulation. For example, LA’s Recommendations of 1934 suggested that the hours of work should be no more than 38 per week.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, the pattern of work was as much a concern as the number of hours worked. As early as 1903, James Duff Brown railed against both the length and “broken hours of duty” imposed on library workers.¹⁶⁰ Throughout the period in question, the structure of the library working week often included ‘split shifts’. The 1931 *Library Assistants Association Report* described the system as “almost universal”.¹⁶¹ Bertie M. Headicar protested about this system in 1935, saying:

The very prevalent arrangement whereby an assistant goes off at 1 p.m., returning at 5 p.m., and having to consume two meals within the period is bad enough when the individual lives near by, but it is an absolute hardship in the case of the person whose home is a train journey away, and who in bad weather has either to haunt the library or walk the streets all the time.¹⁶²

Split shifts were still in use in public libraries in London and the Home Counties in the mid-1950s.¹⁶³ Some library authorities used part-time workers to work part of a shift. For example, Manchester used three women part-time workers in 1871.¹⁶⁴ Part time workers were employed in the early years of Essex county library system,¹⁶⁵ and in 1958, there were 93 part-time staff.¹⁶⁶

Split shifts, long hours, weekend and evening work characterise library work throughout the period in question, potentially making full-time employment unappealing to those women who also performed unpaid work, such as caring. However, paid holiday entitlement was established, to some extent, within the library

sector by the turn of the century. Sue Joynes notes that when Miss Manlove (full name not given) was employed at the Sheffield Library (1877-1901), the library closed for three days at Christmas, two days over New Year, on Bank Holidays and on other public holidays, such as for Queen Victoria's jubilee and royal visits to Sheffield. Furthermore, Miss Manlove was allowed to take a two week holiday in the summer by right, and not by special permission, as had previously been the case.¹⁶⁷ James Duff Brown notes the average annual holiday granted in 1903 as two weeks.¹⁶⁸

Like Brown, Berwick Sayers and Henry Coutts's 1911 Report noted that the length of holiday depended on seniority: junior assistants might be allowed from one week to three weeks while chief librarians were entitled to between one month and 36 working days.¹⁶⁹ At Kettering Urban District Council, length of service was used to calculate holiday allowance. In 1929, those with up to seven years service were allowed 14 working days holiday, increasing to 17 days for those with between seven and 12 years service, and those with more than 12 years service received 21 working days. Holiday entitlement was in addition to bank holidays.¹⁷⁰ Similar holiday allowances were given in the county library systems.¹⁷¹ The 1934 Library Association Recommendations suggested that, for staff over 21, the minimum holidays allowed should be 18 working days, plus other holidays.¹⁷² Similar holiday allowances, increasing slightly, continued throughout the rest of the period.

3.6 Chapter Summary

The limited data make it unsafe to draw many conclusions from the above outline. It is possible to substantiate that around the turn of the century there were few women library workers, and these were mostly employed in public libraries. Noticeably few were found in academic libraries. Women library workers began to equal the numbers of men in the sector before the First World War, and were outnumbering men by the 1930s. By the 1950s there were twice as many women as men. These women were not proportionately represented throughout the professional hierarchy and few were appointed to senior posts. Connected to this point, throughout this period, women library workers received low salaries, both in comparison to men and in comparison to the occupational class as a whole. However, all workers in the

sector gradually accrued holiday rights and occupational pension schemes, and the length of their working week decreased.

Historians have argued that regional differences are critical to any historical analysis¹⁷³ and this is an important factor here. Some large library authorities in cities, such as Manchester and Birmingham (although not London), were before the 1950s, more likely to employ women workers than smaller municipal authorities in towns. This is not the only significant variable in the composition of the library labour market, however. The type of library in which the library worker was employed is also a critical determinant of potential career opportunities and salaries. For example, in the period in question, few women were appointed to chief librarian posts in academic libraries, whilst there was, particularly in the 1930s, a much greater likelihood of this happening in county library systems. Much of the quantitative data outlined here is unreliable or sketchy, and this analysis is not developed. Instead, this account of library work and workers is developed in discussions of qualitative data in the next chapters.

¹ See: Alexander, Z. (1982) **Library Service and Afro-Caribbean Communities**, London, Association of Assistant Librarians; Totterdell, B. (1981) *British Services to Ethnic Minorities*, in Whitehead, D., Rasmussen, R. and Holmes, A. (eds) **Multiculturalism and Libraries**, Melbourne, Conference Committee of the National Conference on Multiculturalism and Libraries. See also Chapter 4 of this study for a consideration of institutional racism.

² Haugh, W.S. (1962) Recruitment and Training of Librarians, *Library Association Record*, 64(7), pp.240-6.

³ Humphries, J. (1995) Women and Paid Work, in Purvis, J. (ed) **Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945**, London, UCL, p.90.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.95.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Hakim, C. (1979) **Occupational Segregation**, Research paper No. 9, Department of Employment, London.

⁷ Hakim, C. (1985) *Social Monitors: Population Censuses as Social Surveys*, in Bulmer, M. (ed) **Essays on the History of British Sociological Research**, Cambridge, Cambridge.

⁸ Sources: Routh, G. (1980) **Occupation and Pay in Great Britain 1906-79**, London, Macmillan, Tables 1.5 and 1.9.

⁹ To date, there still has been no analysis of the ethnic composition of the information labour market.

¹⁰ Routh, ref. 8, p.16.

¹¹ Source: *Ibid.*, Table 1.5.

¹² For example see: No Author. (Circa 1932/3) *Summary of Library Salaries of Library Staff*. In: Staffing 1930-45, Kettering Public Library Archive.

¹³ See Chapter 4.

¹⁴ Tedder, H.R. and Thomas, E.C. (eds) (1880) **Transactions and Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Library Association of the United Kingdom**, London, Library Association, Appendix II.

- ¹⁵ For the development of public library authorities see Kelly, T. (1977) **A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain 1845-1975**, London, Library Association, Appendix IV.
- ¹⁶ Source: Tedder and Thomas, ref. 14, Appendix II. No date given for the data collection.
- ¹⁷ No Author. (Circa 1890) *Women Librarians and Assistants*. In: Hours of work, Staff 1894-1915, Local Studies Unit, Manchester Central Library. There is no explanatory information accompanying this table.
- ¹⁸ Dyer, B.L. and Lloyd, J. (1899) *Women Librarians in England*, *Library Assistant*, 1, pp.219-222. This article title misleadingly refers only to England, however, as the named library authorities clearly indicate, it draws upon data from libraries throughout England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.
- ¹⁹ Greenwood, T. (ed) (1900) **British Library Yearbook 1900-1901. A Record of Library Progress and Work**, London, Scott, Greenwood. Data referring to English towns has been extracted. Greenwood's reference to the one women assistant working at Wick has been omitted, as it is impossible to verify if this is one of the English towns of this name or the Welsh town.
- ²⁰ Source: *Women Librarians and Assistants*, ref. 17.
- ²¹ The People's Palace was not a rate-funded public library, however, it was included in the survey and so is reported here.
- ²² The figure given in the report is cited as the "average" number of women employed; the report notes that this figures has been as low as 44 and as high as 59.
- ²³ Source: Dyer and Lloyd, ref. 18, Tables I and II.
- ²⁴ Ellis, A. (1979) **Public Libraries at the Time of the Adams Report**, Stevenage, Clover, p.58.
- ²⁵ Brown, J.D. (ed) (1909) **Guide to Librarianship. A Series of Reading Lists, Methods of Study and Tables of Factors and Percentages Required in Connexion with Library Economy**, London, Libraco.
- ²⁶ Ellis, ref. 24, p.70.
- ²⁷ *Summary of Library Salaries of Library Staff*, ref. 12.
- ²⁸ Seymour Smith, F. (ed) (1932) **Report on the Hours, Salaries, Training and Conditions of Service in British Municipal Libraries. 1931**, London, Association of Assistant Librarians, p.10.
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- ¹²⁷ Ibid.
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Chapter 4. “Gorgeous Opportunities”,¹ Constructing a Gendered Library Workforce.

4.1 Introduction

Women’s roles in the library workforce were widely debated between 1871-1974. Often these debates proposed that library work required stereotypically feminine skills and hence was appropriate for women workers. Further contemporaneous accounts, however, asserted that women were unsuitable for certain aspects of work in libraries. Both debates not only impacted on women workers, by offering qualified access to library employment, but also produced understandings of library work as occasionally requiring stereotypically masculine qualities. The heightened interest in the position of women workers throughout this period is illustrated by the various debates which took place. Previously, these have been understood as simply reflecting what was happening in the library labour market, however, it is argued that there was also a productive process at play in which the debates contributed to the establishment of a library workforce where gender was a critical factor for individual workers and the composition of the sector.

This chapter discusses gendered constructions of library work. It considers ways that certain work in libraries was understood as suitable for women workers, whilst other aspects of library work were not. This qualified suitability was challenged and an exemplar is discussed in exchanges between two librarians in the professional press. The chapter then explores the claim, often repeated in the debates and in historiographical accounts of the debates, that women library workers overcame an employment barrier in the 1870s. The chapter begins with a consideration of the debates about women library workers which were aired between 1871-1974 in the library press, the news media and library manuals. Further material is drawn from case study interviews. The debates are categorised as either constructing library work as requiring stereotypically feminine skills, and therefore being suitable for women, or as being unsuitable for women because it required stereotypically male qualities. This categorisation is useful for this discussion, however, it is not absolute. This is evident

because some texts explore both sides of the debate and there are conflicting assessments of the impact of similar events.

4.2 Femininity and Library Work

The work of a librarian has always seemed to us as especially congenial to women.²

By 1900, the mutual suitability of women and library work was, to some extent, an “always, already”³ truth which was self-evident or normalised. Tensions in the claim that library work was “always” regarded as suitable for women were evident, for example, in references to this as a ‘new’ type of employment for women: these are discussed in Section 4. Here, the association of library work with feminine qualities is explored. This was summarised in 1925 by Miss W.M. Thorne of the St Bride Institute, London who wrote that women library workers:

... should be studious, or interest in books and their classification and cataloguing would soon flag. She should be patient to explain the methods of procedure and catalogues to simple people. She should be understanding, to be able to gather from a few broken sentences the needs of the person, and sympathetic to help them in difficulties. A good memory saves much time ... while common sense is absolutely invaluable. The faculty for doing neat, tidy and accurate work is one well worth developing ... The Libraries are for the benefit of the people, and the Librarian must willingly and cheerfully help people to find any information that is wanted.⁴

A more punning article about the characteristics required of women workers appeared first in the US *Wilson Bulletin* and later in the *Manchester Librarian*. It concluded that this feminine library paragon “doth not exist outside her library”.⁵ The debates about femininity and library work emphasise that these discourses are interconnected with issues around class, as other studies have noted,⁶ and ethnicity. These are considered in relation to three factors: domesticity; service work; and, orderliness or routine work.

4.2.1 “A Housekeeper to the Library”⁷: Domesticity and Women Library Workers

Domestic work is normalised as work for women. Patricia Hollis describes it as “the yardstick against which other female occupations were measured for their suitability”.⁸ It may be performed in a domestic setting, your own or someone else’s home, or in an institutional setting, as a cook or cleaner working in a school or company. Whilst this may not be attractive paid employment in itself, a domestic aspect to paid work legitimates it as suitable for women. Library work, as noted by Gillian Burrington⁹ and Julia Taylor,¹⁰ is sometimes constructed as involving domestic work and it, too, is marked as suitable for women. When H.A. Tillie argued that women’s “innate domestic tastes”¹¹ were vital in the library, she also argued that women, too, are needed among the library workforce. In 1956, Marion Wilden-Hart connected women workers and domesticity. She wrote:

[Women] may become library conscious - not for the contents of the books, or the little use made of the library facilities by the public, but conscious of whether the books are perfectly straight on the shelves, whether the borrower’s register is up to date, or enough stationery is stamped in the cupboard ready for use. She will in fact become a housekeeper to the library and should she ever rise to being appointed Branch Librarian through her years of service in the one system, she will take as much pride in the appearance of the library as she would her home. Some of this domesticity is an excellent thing for the profession and many of our library buildings and the comfort of our staff rooms have been improved by a female hand.¹²

Domestic work in the library is given qualified approval, “*some* of this domesticity is an excellent thing”, but this is accompanied by a warning that if there is too much domesticity then the worker concedes the title of librarian and becomes a housekeeper.¹³ Wilden-Hart constructs women’s concern with the domestic as a concern with superficial matters: of being “conscious of whether the books are perfectly straight” rather than the quality or quantity of books available. By connecting women library workers and domestic work, and then giving domestic

work in libraries only a qualified approval, Wilden-Hart also extends a similarly qualified approval to these workers. Neither domestic work nor the workers performing that work are attributed much value, despite the acknowledgement that this work is necessary to allow effective library use.

Further aspects of domestic work are evident. A letter from the director W.H. Walton of Derby City library in 1929 noted that Derby employed two women “sewers”¹⁴ [sic. i.e. someone who sews] working in the library’s bindery. Needlework and sewing are traditional occupations for women.¹⁵ Minnie Stewart Rhodes James constructed binding and repairing work as “peculiarly suited to women’s fingers”,¹⁶ which supposedly had a more delicate touch than men’s. Nursing, on a paid or unpaid basis, is also traditionally performed by women.¹⁷ In 1904, the *Nottingham Library Bulletin* reported that an inmate of Aylesbury prison performed the duties of prison librarian and referred to herself as a “literary nurse whose duties are to attend upon worn out books, binding up their wounds and prolonging their days of usefulness.”¹⁸ Perhaps this was encouraged by reports of the libraries that the nationally lauded Florence Nightingale had established in hospitals.¹⁹

There is a greater emphasis on library work involving cleaning. James Birkett’s history of Blackpool libraries notes that Hannah Eteson, who became Blackpool’s first public librarian in 1880, “was appointed at 18/- a week, with a little extra for cleaning”.²⁰ Similarly, cleaning and dusting the library at the Yorkshire College, Leeds, took up a great deal of librarian Fanny Passavant’s time. In 1885, the year that she began work there, she dusted and re-arranged books from 9.15 to 1.30 in the morning and 2.30 to 5.15 in the afternoon from 23rd September until 6th October.²¹ In the mid-1920s, Eileen Colwell’s employment at Bolton public library brought her into contact with:

... two women who were dusters - they were know as dusters and they started at one end of the non-fiction department say at the beginning of the year and they dusted all the books in that department and by the time they got to the end it was time to start again ... they dusted - all day long.²²

The “dusters” were not employed simply as library cleaners to ensure the cleanliness of the building and furniture; as such they would have been excluded from the scope of this study.²³ Yet they were not properly library assistants either. Also during the 1920s, there was national newspaper coverage of a specially adapted vacuum cleaner in Wolverhampton Free Library. The reports boast that, “Ten thousand books a day can be dusted by a girl with an ingenious apparatus ...”²⁴ The association of work in the library with activities expected to be performed in the home by women is again emphasised.

The legitimisation offered to women by a domestic aspect to their paid work was challenged, however. Domestic work could mark library work as compatible with dominant discourses of femininity, yet if this was heavy manual work then it was marked as unfeminine. In a letter to *The Young Woman* the writer argued that she, “... cannot understand how there is anything more ladylike in being a library attendant than in being a housemaid”.²⁵ Whilst being a housemaid complied with working in the home, it also involved heavy lifting and physical labour which were incompatible with the classed discourse of femininity. This positioned women as physically weak,²⁶ and able to undertake ‘light’ work only. The construction of library work as “light”²⁷ employment was ridiculed by a group of retired women library workers:

... the image of working - a girl working in a library in war time and [indistinct] it was very much a suitable place for carefully nurtured, slightly delicate girls for some time in between leaving school and getting married. [laughs] And I’m sure you’ve all known one or two of these carefully nurtured girls. [laughs]²⁸

The construction of library work as light employment is contrasted with accounts of library work involving hard, physical labour and enduring hours working on mobile libraries in winter. Yet accounts of library workers as robust and not “slightly delicate” were accompanied by others which considered it, “a bit out of the ordinary, different from being in a shop” and as employment which had “a little more status” than, for example, shopwork.²⁹ The classed construction of library work is further complicated by accounts of it as work performed because it is enjoyable, rather than

because the worker is obliged to do it. An anonymous woman writing in 1927 questioned, "... should I call it "work" since Barrie holds that term to be applicable only to an occupation one doesn't enjoy!"³⁰ Library work as non-work is reinforced by accounts which emphasise its inherent social opportunities: "my library has brought me many interesting friends, and greatly enlivened a rather uneventful life";³¹ and, "... not only have I enjoyed many books, but I have made some interesting and lasting friendships with all sorts and conditions of men and women."³² In such ways, tensions were resolved in the construction of library work as suitable within the classed discourse of femininity, where the "phrase 'working ladies' was, in fact, a contradiction in terms".³³

Frequently, however, classed domestic work was normalised as part of library work. Evelyn Evans said that in the 1930s one of the duties:

... when you were in the branch libraries, you often found yourself on duty at 9.30 [p.m.] in the winter time and you had to go into the bowels of the earth and stoke up the boiler and dampen it down so that it didn't go out in the night. ... I just accepted it. After all if you wanted to go back into a warm library the next day and there was no janitor or anyone to stoke up, you've just jolly well got to do it.³⁴

Stoking the boiler, a dirty and heavy job, is proposed by Evelyn Evans as a reasonable action, even though it involves leaving the library and venturing "into the bowels of the earth". Had she not done so, there would have been a cold library the following day. Other types of manual work were undertaken by women workers and these were also understood as acceptable:

... you shelved books. No trolleys - we used to take them in our arms about 30 books at a time, I'm surprised my left arm isn't longer than my right because we used to pile them up like this ...³⁵

Talking about hard work, the reference library was on the first floor, stacks were in the basement, you had bound copies of *The Times* and you carried

them up - you know, it really was hard work but you were expected to do things like this.³⁶

Although physical labour in library work was disparaged in the press using a class discourse,³⁷ both interviewees cited position it as an essential part of the job and, therefore, a legitimate activity.

In summary, then, library work was often associated with domestic work and this, to some extent, legitimised women's work in the sector. Potentially negative accounts of domestic work were resolved by identifying this as an essential, if disagreeable, part of the job. Domestic work, within dominant discursive frameworks, is not highly valued as productive labour,³⁸ and this was also the case in library work where it was positioned as an inevitable, if disagreeable, sideline to 'real' library work.

4.2.2 *"They Know YOUR Taste in Books":³⁹ Women and Service Work*

[Women workers] are regular in their attendance, courteous to borrowers ... for attendance on readers and applicants for books, [librarians] prefer the girls.⁴⁰

A women is instinctively quick, tactful and patient ...⁴¹

Service work is a form of assisting other people; as work for others rather than work for pleasure or the self, to a certain extent, it is compatible with dominant discourses of femininity.⁴² Similarly, the service aspect of library work was also compatible with femininity.⁴³ Thomas Baker, chairman of Manchester public libraries, left the 1879 annual meeting of the LA in no doubt that Manchester found it advantageous to employ women workers, and he particularly emphasised their beneficial effect on the quality of service. Manchester's recruitment advertisement read:

Manchester Public Free Libraries. - Wanted, a respectable, intelligent young woman as assistant ...⁴⁴

Respectability, as Beverley Skeggs has discussed, is a gendered marker of class, contrasting positively against degeneration and disorder.⁴⁵ In advertising for a “respectable” woman, Manchester public libraries were discouraging applications from working class women and encouraging middle class applicants. Two central connections between class, femininity and service are considered. The classed discourse of femininity is invoked in discussions of service work which refer to the civilising impact of women on library users and library staff. A further aspect of femininity is foregrounded in constructions of service work which attribute innate, rather than learnt, service skills to women.

Women workers, it was claimed, calmed library users and encouraged more civil behaviour.⁴⁶ At St. Philip’s library, a branch of Bristol public library which was one of the first to employ extensive numbers of women workers, the library management claimed that when men were employed, they also needed “the presence of two burly men ... to assist in the exit of its more violent patrons”.⁴⁷ When women were employed, however, they claimed that:

... there is not only a complete absence of any friction with the public, but the annual report shows a considerable increase in the use made of the library ...⁴⁸

The calming, enervating influence of women library workers was also said to encourage “better behaviour” on a “mixed staff” of men and women workers.⁴⁹ Class is used to make sense of women workers as cultivated, respectable women who, despite these middle-class markers, also performed service work. This tension meant that they could be positioned as performing service work *and* exerting a calming influence on readers and men workers alike. An 1899 article in a women’s magazine constructed library work as “decidedly congenial” to educated women, stressing that it involved “advising readers”, rather than simply providing a service for them.⁵⁰ Library work is formulated as helping others. Social work, nursing, teaching and, earlier in the 19th century, philanthropic work similarly invoked middle-class concerns about helping ‘the poor’ to legitimise women’s involvement in these areas, often initially on an unpaid basis.⁵¹ The career of Ellin Verney, who was the unpaid librarian at Middle

Claydon in the 1890s,⁵² and of other voluntary librarians working, for example in county library systems,⁵³ further associates library employment with unpaid, middle or upper class philanthropic activity.

The classed discourse of service overlapped with the discourse of femininity. In 1956, Marion Wilden-Hart argued that the feminine “desire to serve” was motivated by “intuitive sympathy, unselfishness in personal service and a keen sense of duty.”⁵⁴ Similarly, in 1910 Miss M.L. Coatsworth told a meeting of the North Eastern Branch of the LA that women workers “had more patience and tact than men” and were thus better at dealing with readers.⁵⁵ Women’s service skills are understood by both Wilden-Hart and Coatsworth as innate, rather than learnt, characteristics.⁵⁶ This supposedly intuitive knowledge of library users was used to construct women as competent front of house staff with interpersonal skills that had value in the labour market. Many newspaper items comment on library workers ability to match books with readers⁵⁷ and their role in responding to reference enquiries.⁵⁸ By identifying this knowledge as intuitive, rather than learnt, these accounts construct it as natural and therefore as something which does not need to be valued.⁵⁹ This was, however, challenged. One woman librarian stressed that the length of time she had worked in libraries enabled her to “judge quite accurately”⁶⁰ the type of books certain readers might enjoy.

Readers’ preferences were often assumed to be influenced by the sex of the reader, who, it was further assumed, might best be helped to make their selection by a worker of the same sex:

Many of the borrowers, especially ladies, prefer to be attended to by girl and women assistants, and in like manner, boy readers show a decided preference to have their wants supplied by the young male assistants.⁶¹

In 1894, almost a decade earlier, Miss Richardson, an assistant librarian at St Helens public library, argued that not only were women the only appropriate staff for ladies’ reading rooms, but also there should be at least one woman assistant in the main library “as many of the lady borrowers prefer to be attended to by one of their own

sex.”⁶² These accounts construct a *need* rather than a *tolerance* for women library workers. This need was enhanced by the assumption that same sex reader advisors were necessary and also by the gradual implementation of less discriminatory access policies.⁶³

When it is borne in mind that visitors to the library embrace all sorts and conditions of men, women, and children, it only seems fair, nay, to be highly desirable, that part of the work at least shall be performed by females.⁶⁴

Providing library services to children combined two important aspects of femininity: work for others and work with children. Many explorations of library work from around 1900 onwards emphasise that children’s librarianship is particularly suited to women library workers.⁶⁵ The need for the separate ladies’ reading rooms was questioned by those who proposed that if general library facilities were staffed by men and women then the need for, and expense of, ladies’ rooms was removed, yet women were still encouraged to use the library.⁶⁶ A further account of the impact of workers’ gender on library services was ridiculed by Maud Storr Best. She wrote that it had been suggested that women workers might deter men from using libraries, however, she countered this by arguing that, for men, such “training in bravery is clear gain”.⁶⁷

The construction of library work as service for others was sometimes formulated as a “mission”. In an 1877 letter to the *Times*, US librarian Justin Windsor described libraries as, “in the highest sense public charities; that they are missionary enterprises ...”⁶⁸ In a women’s magazine in 1902, librarian of Manchester public libraries Charles Sutton used similar language to describe library work as “self-sacrifice for the good of one’s fellow-creatures”, but he also warned that “as a vocation for women ... it was an employment full of drudgery”.⁶⁹ Minnie Stewart Rhodes James gave library work religious connotations. She quoted Richard Le Gallienne’s concept of library work as work properly carried out in the manner of priests dispensing the sacrament, and suggested that “the next step to this ideal ministry is to have them [the books] issued by women”.⁷⁰ A.R. Hutchinson also cited Le Gallienne in his entry on librarianship in a career guide in 1906.⁷¹ Understood thus, library work is far more than mere employment: it is part of the discourse which

positions women (and libraries) as a progressive “civilizing force”, connected with spiritual, rather than materialistic, values.⁷²

Service work in the public gaze is an integral part of library work and this might explain the small proportion of library workers from minority ethnic communities throughout this period.⁷³ Wendy Webster suggests that, from the 1950s, Black and Asian women workers were rarely offered employment in the service sector where their presence would have been highly visible.⁷⁴ Many library workers were employed in the public sector and similar processes of institutional racism may have been taking place. Furthermore, Black and Asian women workers may have been adversely affected by employment opportunities negotiated by the dominant discourse of femininity which legitimised space for white women. It has been argued that the dominant discourse of femininity privileges middle class whiteness as the ‘real’ femininity and negatively positions Black and Asian femininity.⁷⁵ Thus the rationale enhancing white, middle class women access to the library workforce is not similarly extended to Black and Asian women.

In summary, library work for women often involved service work for others. As such, it was compatible with the classed, raced discourse of femininity which normalised white, middle-class women. These women were positioned as having the natural qualities of tact, patience and sensitivity to the needs of others which were required to carry out the service aspects of library work. An extreme formulation of the service aspect of library work is seen in accounts which identify it as a form of missionary work, where the reward was not in the work itself, nor in remuneration, but in the satisfaction of being of service to others.

4.2.3 *"A Tidy Mind":⁷⁶ Women and Routine Work*

As a class they are intelligent, painstaking to a degree, and reliable; and if the result 'of taking infinite pains' has sometimes been overrated, I can truly say that the female librarian will never fail from an underestimate of the value of detail.⁷⁷

A further aspect of the interconnecting discourses of femininity and class in accounts of library work is concerned with the performance of orderly or routine work. Many aspects of library work involve maintaining the stated order of texts, from shelving books and filing, to using a Browne card system and maintaining a card catalogue. The need to maintain order whilst the library is in constant use is met by a number of workers dedicated to routine tasks. In the debates about women library workers, women were often described as "very efficient assistants"⁷⁸ and as having the "greater conscientiousness, patience and accuracy in details"⁷⁹ required for this work. Women were constructed as more able than boys to work "neatly and quickly",⁸⁰ although occasionally "nimbleness and activity" were attributed to boys to argue that they were better assistants than adults.⁸¹

Generally, however, the construction of women as efficient, accurate workers positioned them as the workers most fitted to perform routine work. Nigel Webber suggests that some women's skills in these tasks may have been the result of previous work experience and training in similar working environments, such as booksellers and stationery shops, where they dealt with administrative systems and the public.⁸² Most accounts, however, suggest that women had innate qualities which equipped them to work successfully on repetitive tasks demanding close attention to detail. The successful performance of routine work also required dependable labour. It was assumed that because women were "generally abstainers and non-smokers", unlike men, they were therefore more reliable workers - and would also be less likely to burn down the library!⁸³

The connection between assumed feminine characteristics and satisfactory performance of library duties was outlined by Maud Storr Best:

Of all the virtues allowed to us [women], I should say the two most valuable for our profession are accuracy and conscientiousness. Slipshod work in a Library is more intolerable there than in most places for it may cause confusion and loss, years after the thought of it has completely passed away from the sinner's consciousness. You collate carelessly and the Library stocks an imperfect book; you arrange your slips or cards inaccurately and lose track of important volumes ... However, brilliant a brain may be, if it is inaccurate it is not wanted in Library work - let it devote itself to higher mathematics where the weakness may be corrected, or to philosophy where it may never be observed, but let it not come nigh us. And on the other hand, give me a girl with an accurate mind and a conscientious spirit, and I will show you the beginnings of a first-class librarian.⁸⁴

Accuracy, conscientiousness and careful, considered work are, Best argues, of more value in library work than a "brilliant" brain. Not only were brilliant brains constructed as possibly being "inaccurate", they are also seen, by being inaccurate, as "intolerable" within the library workplace. While Best explicitly attributes accuracy and conscientiousness to women, she implicitly genders "the brilliant brains" as masculine, by an association with non-vocational learning. When the comments were made in 1921, many universities were fully open to women. Oxford and Cambridge, however, home to the most brilliant, scholarly brains working on higher mathematics and philosophy, were only partly open to women, who could not be awarded full degrees.⁸⁵ The phrase "brilliant brains" would, then, have been associated with men rather than women. Furthermore, compliance with existing rules and standards is compatible with a construction of feminine women as unambitious. If, on the other hand, masculinity is constructed as ambitious and containing a laudable, if inconvenient, need to make its mark,⁸⁶ then masculine men, possessing "brilliant brains" are positioned not to adhere to rules but to innovate. In this way, masculinity is incompatible with those aspects of library work which require accuracy, conscientiousness and obedience to rules.

Not only were women library workers assumed to be suited to routine work, but they were also workers who could take and follow orders. This interpretation of conscientious accuracy was often seen as a limitation. Conscientiously accurate women workers were understood as able *only* to follow rules and as unable to develop new ideas and practices. Winifred Thorne described when in the 1930s, "... another girl was employed ... She came in to do the donkey work, stamping, labelling and that kind of thing ..."⁸⁷ The combination of their innate characteristics accuracy and conscientiousness suited women for routine "donkey" work. Furthermore, constructed as lacking the desire to innovate, these workers were also positioned as able to do little more than "mere routine work".⁸⁸ Hence H.A. Tillie claimed, "Women are notoriously conscientious."⁸⁹ The routine nature of library work was emphasised by Evelyn Evans during her training at Coventry public library:

But that [shelving] was practically all we did in the first year - and on the charging counter and processing books. All the stamping of books, you know that's done by the library supplier now aren't they? - but we used to stamp the books. I can always remember we stamped on page 1, 21, 71, 101, 201 and 301 and then at the end. So that we always knew where to look for the library stamp. So we used to do that when the charging desk was full and there were no books to put away.⁹⁰

The important, but tedious and time-consuming, task of stamping of books is a necessary security system; similarly, accurate shelving and issuing are vital to the function of the library. However, these routine tasks provide few opportunities for workers to demonstrate innovative qualities, that is their ability to work beyond, not just to, the rules and, by implication, to illustrate their ability to lead and manage. The positioning of women as the workers most suited to routine duties had the further effect of contributing to vertical segregation, or the concentration of women workers in junior posts, in the sector.

Women's assumed suitability for routine work was not limited to paraprofessional work, such as shelving. Miss Richardson, in 1894, noted that

cataloguing was a professional specialism thought particularly suitable for women.

Writing about the situation in US libraries, she noted that:

Some [women] go in for cataloguing as a speciality: this is suited to the quiet shy women, who, though fully qualified for the work, prefer to do that part of it which may be accomplished away from public view.⁹¹

Cataloguing, as something which can be performed away from the public gaze, is compatible with the early Victorian association of the private, domestic realm as the proper sphere for women's activities.⁹² This also invokes the raced and classed discourse of femininity: remaining out of public view was not an option for the thousands of women earning their living in shops and factories. Minnie Stewart Rhodes James identified the qualities necessary for cataloguing as "care, thoroughness, patience and research",⁹³ which, again, were compatible with educated femininity. In 1927, an unnamed woman librarian affirmed that cataloguing was enjoyable employment because as:

... the sheet-anchor of all library work, [it] requires care, thoroughness, patience, and research to ensure that a book and its contents shall be accurately placed at the disposal of the reader.⁹⁴

Cataloguing combines many assumed innate feminine skills, such as patience and care, in tasks which the writer suggests are ultimately, if not directly, part of the service work of the library, which, as noted above, was appropriate for women within the discourse of femininity. This is more strongly stated later in the same article when the author wrote that:

Playing the part of pathfinder to every inquirer is one of the special joys of the librarian's life and the sufficient reward for years of unwearying search for detail and monotonous marshalling of facts.⁹⁵

The 'reward' for cataloguing is not the satisfaction in doing the task, applying professional knowledge or being able to earn a salary, but rather in selflessly helping

the inquirer to find their answer. This same type of selflessness was used in constructions of the Victorian ideal of womanhood, the archetype of femininity.

In summary, orderly and routine work were part of various essential library tasks and women were constructed as having the innate qualities which made them most suitable to carry out these tasks. Whilst this opened up library work for women, it did not put them in a position to negotiate for promotion to more senior and better paid posts. Entry predicated on an aptitude for routine work was constructed, to a large extent, as precluding movement beyond that type of work.

4.2.4 Section Summary

Many of the debates outlined above construct library work as predicated on essentialist feminine characteristics.⁹⁶ Physiological essential qualities assumed that all women were naturally equipped with nimble fingers, which suited them for filing and indexing work; and experiential and psychological essences assume that all women are caring, empathetic and supportive and therefore suited to service work. Essentialism positions femininity, and women, in one location and assigns a different positioning for men. In the labour market, men were assumed to be ‘naturally’ equipped for different types of work to women, such as that involving intellectual or physical tasks, or that offering high levels of responsibility, for example, for financial and staffing resources. The gendered construction of library work positions men as appropriate for senior posts, whilst also legitimising women as those most suited for the less senior reaches of the workforce.

4.3 Censuring the Compatibility of Library Employment and Femininity

The section above illustrates some significant ways in which library work was being constructed as requiring stereotypical feminine skills and was thus attractive work for women workers through discourses of femininity, class and ethnicity. In contrast, this section explores co-existing accounts which censure that suitability. The simultaneous appearance of both accounts, often within the same article, suggests that

whilst women were welcomed into the library sector, there were also attempts to contain their opportunities.

An early account of the difficulties of employing women appears in an unattributed 1871 report to Manchester Public Library committee entitled 'Women Assistants'. The report, written two months after the public library had first employed women assistants, briefly noted that women workers were "very willing and industrious" workers, but concluded by listing six shortcomings:

1st they cannot attend to the borrowers and readers as promptly and expeditiously as the boys and candidly admit that they are not able to do so. The effect of this is most felt during the busy time in the evening when Borrowers and Readers in great numbers are kept waiting longer than they would do with an equal number of boys. This disadvantage is much aggravated when one of the male assistants is taking, in his turn, his half holiday and possibly another happens to be absent from illness.

2^{ndly}. They do not enter books as accurately and quickly as the youths.

3^{rdly}. They are not so useful - if at all adapted - in getting in outstanding books which are due in great number and which can only be recoured by being sent after at all times and seasons regardless of weather.

4^{thly}. They have no control over unruly lads who frequent the newsroom in the evening and cannot keep the lobby and porch clear of loungers and mischievous young men.

5^{thly} They are unwilling to use ladders and quite object to do so where the shelves are very high as at the Campfield, Hulme and Rochdale Road branches.

6^{thly} They object to take their turn in attending to the heating apparatus which they look upon as manual work.

7^{thly}. They do not appear to have the same power of endurance that they boys have and on busy nights show signs of fatigue at a time when their services and activity are most required.⁹⁷

Women workers are constructed as different and deficient in comparison to men. The various shortcomings argued that women are: physically unable to do library work, as they cannot climb ladders, work effectively or quickly for long periods, or perform manual labour; socially ill-equipped to perform library work as they cannot manage library users and are unwilling to reclaim overdue books; and, underskilled for library work as their ledger work is of a lower standard than men's. These shortcomings led the un-named writer of the report (possibly Manchester chief librarian, Andrea Crestadoro) to argue that in order to:

... maintain the necessary efficiency it is highly desirable, if not indispensable, that together with any number of women assistants the staff of each Lending Library should include at least two boys in addition to the Branch Librarian to do the work that cannot be obtained from females ...⁹⁸

This report's enthusiasm for boy assistants is in marked contrast to a report before the same committee earlier in June of the same year which describes the high levels of turnover among boy assistants.⁹⁹ The arguments positioning women as different to men workers and broadly deficient in comparison to them are reiterated and re-formulated throughout the period 1871-1974.

Doubts were voiced about women's physical strength to carry out such work. There were generally held assumptions about women's physical frailty:

... [women library workers] have been objected to on the grounds that their delicate physique is unable to bear the strain of long hours and short wages ...¹⁰⁰

These classed assumptions ignore the onerous tasks working class women in paid employment performed as domestic servants, in factories, in agricultural work and earlier in the century in mining, as well as the heavy work most women undertook as part of their domestic, unpaid employment.¹⁰¹ Despite this, women library workers were seen as being incapable of doing "rough work ... such as opening and shutting windows or reaching books from higher shelves."¹⁰² A letter to *Work and Leisure* in

1890 described the physical demands of library work, saying that library employment is:

... not work for any woman to do; the lifting and straining may easily be a risk, save to very tall and strong young women.¹⁰³

This account of work in closed access libraries emphasises the manual aspects of the work and mitigates against constructions, noted earlier, of library work as light, domestic work. The need for physical strength in library work was also constructed in relation to the need to control readers. Elsewhere, the involvement of women with different social groups was seen as a beneficial, however, some accounts warn of the dangers facing “lady librarians” who are expected to deal with unruly readers, particularly those using newsrooms.¹⁰⁴ Concerns about women’s ability to perform physical tasks, though widely cited, were not unchallenged: H.A.Tillie argued that women “can and do perform these duties very creditably”.¹⁰⁵ The connection of heavy physical labour and library work, and associated concerns about women’s physical capacity to do that work, changed as library work developed. In the 1950s, Ernest A. Baker claimed that library work is “an occupation that makes no heavy demands upon physique”.¹⁰⁶

Fears about women’s physical frailty were augmented by accounts of their emotional and intellectual frailty, in comparison to men’s apparently more robust capacity. These constructed women workers as:

...subject to petty jealousies, more easily upset, and easily demoralized by little things. They need praise more often than men and are easily hurt when they make a mistake. They are more impulsive and emotional than men ...¹⁰⁷

Psychological discourses are invoked to construct women as controlled by their emotions and thus less able to perform as a worker.¹⁰⁸ Maud Storr Best made a similar point, without the use of psychological language, when she suggested that women were “rather limited too in our judgement of people ... apt to take likes and dislikes too strongly” and “just a little snobbish? a little too prone to take the clothes for the

woman, the position for the man”,¹⁰⁹ Emotional vulnerability was seen to accompany intellectual limitation:

Girls are successful enough as devoted slaves of routine, but the moment they are given novel and more difficult duties, they inevitably break down and seem unable to grasp the chief points in any variation from their everyday work.¹¹⁰

The inevitability of women’s collapse if they attempt non-routine work is yet another attempt to warn that certain aspects of library work are unsuitable for women. This was disputed, however.¹¹¹ Some accounts of library workers seemed to doubt women’s ability to do even routine work. A sketch, entitled “Overheard” begins with a note that, “In the Music Library additional copies of part-songs, cantatas, etc. are available for choral, glee and other Societies”, and continues:

Gentleman - “May I have *A parting kiss*, please?

Assistant (lady) - “Yes. How many do you want?

Gentleman - “About 30, please.

Collapse of assistant.¹¹²

This may be intended as a joke based on misunderstanding, however, to understand it as such, the reader has to accept, and find comic, the woman assistant’s lack of knowledge. An assistant in a music library might well expect to have requests for texts with romantic titles, yet the sketch does not allow for such a possibility.

A further impact of positioning women as different to men workers is illustrated in accounts focused on marital status. These propose that women are less effective workers because they remained in employment only until they married.¹¹³ Thomas Baker notes that few of the women employed in Manchester public libraries left “except from such causes as bad health or being about to marry”.¹¹⁴ Miss Richardson admonished women for undertaking library employment as “a mere pastime”, a “means to an end” and urged them instead to make it “a life-work”.¹¹⁵

Most commentators constructed women's resignation on marriage as a negative factor, however, W.L. Selby, from Bristol public libraries, questioned this:

It has been urged against women as librarians that the unstable tenure of their position, due to the demands of marriage, leads to such frequent changes in a library staff as to render then undesirable. But is this altogether an evil to be dreaded, or is it a blessing in disguise? Where there is an inefficient male staff there is scarcely any possibility of change ... but with women, who are occasionally leaving to be married, the difficulty is overcome; the staff is also kept comparatively young, and consequently energetic and up-to-date.¹¹⁶

Regular staff turnover is constructed by Selby as useful to the library manager as a method of ensuring that workers are kept informed of new developments.

In summary, then, women workers were sometimes constructed as lacking some qualities needed to be a satisfactory library worker. These qualities, of physical strength, social and vocational skills, were often assumed to be possessed by men. Women were also constructed as likely to work only for a limited time before resigning on marriage; this was often, but not always, understood as a negative factor. These accounts, which co-existed with accounts of women's suitability for library employment, outline various attempts to qualify that suitability. The dichotomous relationship of these accounts was significantly challenged, however.

4.4 Breaking the Binary: Kate Pierce and Frank Chennell

A debate challenging the gendered parameters of library work took place in the professional library press in 1902. The journal *Library World*, published three articles by Frank Chennell,¹¹⁷ a public librarian at Willsden Green, and replies to the first two of these from Kate Pierce,¹¹⁸ librarian at Kettering municipal library. The tone of Frank Chennell's comments has been characterised as "cheery bombasticism".¹¹⁹ In his initial article, Frank Chennell expressed his concern that the increasing employment of women as junior assistants in public libraries would deplete numbers of adequately experienced and skilled professional librarians needed to carry

forward the profession and staff the senior posts. He based this concern on the assumption that:

A few years and a newer and better profession opens out the girl, one in which she knows she is secure. In which she can be neither assailed nor excelled, and in which no male competition can enter. The erstwhile lady assistant in the library, then becomes, perhaps, in a truer sense a librarian's assistant.¹²⁰

Kate Pierce's response opens heavy with sarcasm - she describes herself as being hesitant in making the reply "being but a 'lady help'".¹²¹ Her deconstruction of Frank Chennell's arguments begins with a challenge to the assumption that "men and boys ... have earned a proscriptive or traditional right" to positions in public libraries.¹²² She then attacks the lack of evidence offered about women's limited abilities and claims that women lowered public library workers' salaries. Whilst attacking Frank Chennell's use of essentialist arguments, Kate Pierce herself deployed essentialist constructions in assertions that women are more honest and reliable workers than men.¹²³ Kate Pierce goes beyond the terms provided by Frank Chennell and highlights other concerns, such as the difficulty public library committees encountered in obtaining men workers. She counters arguments about staff turnover among women workers by arguing that levels of turnover among men workers looking to move to better paid posts were higher still. Although men and women had different reasons for leaving, she argued, the impact on the library was the same. Finally, Kate Pierce raised a feminist concern by emphasising the 'surplus women' debate, which focused on the higher proportion of women than men in the population. She referred to the increasing acceptance of economically independent women as a moral and political argument to legitimise women's employment in libraries. In her second article, Kate Pierce shifted her argument from the right of women to library employment and towards Frank Chennell's argument that, in the long term, women harm the profession. She responded by stating her commitment to public librarianship:

If I were once convinced that the employment of women would cause deterioration in the general efficiency of public libraries or librarians, I should be one of the first to deplore their employment in the capacity of either

assistants or librarians; but until such conviction is forthcoming I must still cling to the belief that they are just as well suited, mentally and physically, for their positions as men or lads, and until something more definite is produced than fears I shall advocate the claims of girl assistants.¹²⁴

Having averred her professional commitment, she constructed Frank Chennell's arguments as based on "fears" and arising from an emotional discourse, rather than as based on a rational "conviction". This move positions Chennell's argument beyond the discourse of scientific rationality, which is frequently used to legitimise arguments, and attempts to marginalise his claims.¹²⁵ This strategy appears to have met with some success, as Chennell later offered a limited retraction.¹²⁶

In the *Library World* exchanges, Kate Pierce used two main forms of argumentation. Firstly, her response makes explicit some of the assumptions in his article, such as the right of men to public library work and the lack of any sort of evidence for his claims. The capricious nature of the claim made by Frank Chennell was described in the feminist *Englishwoman's Review* a decade earlier. This article noted that there are:

Some amusingly opposite reasons given in America and England for employing women [library workers]. *America*. - They stay better. The woman if paid a salary of 900 dollars as assistant "does not think of marrying, while the man would, and then being fussing about his salary being inadequate to support a family". *England*. - They do *not* stay. "Where there is an inefficient staff there is scarcely any possibility of change ... but with women, who are occasionally leaving to be married, the difficulty is overcome; the staff is also kept comparatively young and consequently energetic and up to date." Thus we see both countries find it convenient to employ women, and find exactly opposite reasons for so doing.¹²⁷

Secondly, Kate Pierce's argument demands a consideration of women's library employment set against the wider social context. She broadens the scope of the argument to insist that the library sector exists within society, and that it is affected by

socio-political issues, such as the male/female ratio in the population. In countering Frank Chennell's arguments in these complimentary ways, Kate Pierce attempted to shift the debate away from a polarised argument about the right of women to library employment based on assumed essentialist characteristics. Instead, her argument focused on contextualised concerns: of library committees needing reliable labour; of women needing legitimate employment; of library workers' fears about salary reductions; and, about the status of the profession. As a woman librarian in charge of a municipal library - not 'merely' a 'lady help' - these arguments legitimised both her own employment position and her stance on employing mainly women assistants at Kettering.¹²⁸

Her debate with Frank Chennell is the first of Kate Pierce's public championing of women library workers.¹²⁹ Despite her able defence of women workers, polarised constructions of library workers continued to have currency throughout the period, suggesting that competing discourses had only limited effectiveness and remained marginalised.

4.5 Discussion

The debates outlined above suggest that from 1871 library work was being constructed as a suitable new area of employment for women, whilst simultaneously constructing women as unsuitable for certain aspects of the library work. This section develops two concerns about the debates: firstly, it contests the accepted chronology that in 1871 librarianship was a new professional opening for women; and secondly, it explores how the debates did not reflect but, rather, instituted and perpetuated gendered demarcations in the library labour market.

4.5.1 *1871 and All That: Historical Periodisation and Library History*

Debates about women's employment in libraries begin quite suddenly in the 1870s. Why was this and why did they continued to be aired and developed? An implicit rationale for the sudden appearance in various publications of debates about women library workers is contained in the formulation of this as a new professional

opening for women. Those few library history texts which have considered the role of women workers routinely assert that in 1871 women library workers broke through a professional, male-staffed employment frontier to claim a place among public library workers. However, following Joan Kelly's discussion of historical periodisation,¹³⁰ a different reading is suggested. This argues that texts constructing women as overcoming an employment bar were accepted because they were useful to both historiographers and those creating contemporaneous texts.

Although most discussions about the entry of women into the sector are careful to note that women worked in various subscription and private libraries before 1871, they also reiterate the '1871-public-librarianship-is-a-new-profession-for-women' mantra.¹³¹ For example, Thomas Kelly's exhaustive study of English public libraries notes that, "The employment of women assistants seems to have begun in 1871 at Manchester ..."¹³² This uncharacteristically cautious statement also informs the reader that women were employed at junior 'assistant' levels of the library workforce. Contemporary commentators made similar claims. The most frequently cited is Thomas Baker, chair of the Manchester public libraries committee. In 1879, at the second annual meeting of the LA, he emphasised both the newness of women's employment and the junior nature of their posts:

The employment of young women as assistants in public free libraries in this country is a recent experiment which I believe was first tried in Manchester.¹³³

He later notes the year this "experiment" began as 1871. There is little here to indicate that the periodisation of 1871 as the year when women entered public library work is anything but a fact and a truth. Yet contemporaneous challenges to the novelty of librarianship as career for women were made by Minnie Stewart Rhodes James,¹³⁴ however, these have not been noted by historians. There are two concerns with this accepted periodisation. Firstly, and very simply, the date-claim is wrong. Thomas Kelly, noted above citing the 1871 claim, observes, in the same book, that women had worked in public libraries before 1871. In a footnote, he notes that "girl" assistants were used for fetching and carrying duties at Birkenhead public library in 1862.¹³⁵ Secondly, some of the 1871 statements conflate women's entry to the profession of

librarianship with the idea that women's work in libraries began then.¹³⁶ This, perhaps, is because the history of librarianship is often told through the history of *public* librarianship, and an orthodoxy here (however erroneous) about women's employment is accepted as the gloss for women's employment within the sector. However, library and women's historians have noted that women have worked in libraries since at least medieval times. For example, Judith Anderson and Bonnie Zinsser¹³⁷ note that from the 10th century there were records of libraries in convents throughout Europe: presumably Europe includes England and, again presumably, workers in convents were often women. The chronological point at issue, then, is not that women began to work in libraries in 1871: so might it focus on the admission of women to the profession of librarianship? The year usually given when librarianship was established as a profession is 1882.¹³⁸ If the profession was established in 1882, and some library historians assume that in 1871 women had not long worked in the *profession* of librarianship, then surely this is because the profession of librarianship was itself in the process of being established. So, of course, it was a new profession for women in the 1870s - but it was also a new profession for men. Lucy Toulmin Smith, librarian at Manchester College, Oxford made a similar point in her 1899 paper on women librarians, commenting first on the recent development of the library profession and then optimistically venturing that:

If men therefore have so recently entered into their inheritance, women may bide their time in patience, confident of success before long.¹³⁹

There are, then, some difficulties with the 1871 periodisation. So why has it been generally accepted? This periodisation claim is beneficial for both historians and contemporary commentators. The usefulness hinges on two factors: firstly, the absence of women from the profession until 1871 and secondly, the positioning of women after that date as junior assistants. These factors permit historians to write an account of the origins of public libraries in the 'great men' style of history.¹⁴⁰ Examples of this type of history include writing about the 'great men' who led the development of librarianship such as Edward Edwards, Stanley Jast and Ernest A. Savage.¹⁴¹ The 'great men' type of history is particularly useful if the aim of the work is to legitimise librarianship as a 'real' profession, instead of 'lower' profession, as the

census usually classifies it. A history based on the actions of 'great men', showing them steering the profession towards the gradual acquisition of professional 'traits'¹⁴² until it acquired the 'inherent' value of profession, legitimises librarianship as fully-fledged professional occupation. This type of work has been described as historiographical "profession building".¹⁴³ Furthermore, validation of librarianship's claim to the status of 'real' profession may involve library historians' self-interest as many - for example, William Munford and James Ollé - were librarians or library educators.

The 1871 periodisation is also useful from the perspective of contemporary commentators. If public librarianship is said to be a 'new' profession for women, then it is novel. Thomas Baker described it as an "experiment", and, of course, experiments need testing. The construction of women library workers as 'novelty' or 'experimental' workers with unknown qualities is one of the key processes which locate them as Other to men library workers, who are positioned as 'traditional' workers, with known attributes.¹⁴⁴ The novelty of women library workers was emphasised in debates about the identity of the first woman chief librarian.¹⁴⁵ The Other is relegated to a position of being lesser than or being in conflict with the central Self, and a hierarchical structure is established with one pole, the Self, positioned as superior or normative, and the Other, as inferior or abnormal. Processes of Othering are effective in contributing to hierarchical power relations, such as those informing gender positionings.¹⁴⁶ Over the period 1871-1974, there were various essentialist arguments which positioned women as Other: examples include Sigmund Freud's¹⁴⁷ psychoanalytic arguments, which resonate throughout the 20th century, and John Ruskin's¹⁴⁸ writings, which were influential from the mid-19th century.

This positioning of women as experimental and men as traditional library workers locates women library workers as 'Other' in comparison to normative men workers. Being Othered is significant in many ways: it offers justification for the different, and often pejorative, treatment of women workers, in terms of present and future opportunities and remuneration. As Chapter 3 has demonstrated, women library workers were paid lower wages than men library workers for much of the period 1871-1974. However, the positioning of women library workers as Other is mitigated

by contemporary commentators' backing for the right of women to employment in the library sector. With this support, the commentators position themselves as politically liberal, if not radical. From a radical or liberal perspective, the 1871 claim is advantageous because it allows them to construct public librarianship as a profession which, by their actions, they were opening to women workers. Thus, they are able to take a pro-women, even pro-feminist, position. This, according to Thomas Baker's address to the LA, was a progressive move because he suggested that, in 1871, "The subject of woman, her rights, duties, and employment - particularly her exclusion from certain trades and professions - was engaging the attention of thoughtful people."¹⁴⁹ A pro-woman, pro-feminist position was more than simply progressive: it might also have been a vote-winner. It may have been advantageous for councillors to identify themselves as a "thoughtful" person and as politically liberal because in 1870 the first women's suffrage bill had been unsuccessfully debated in the House of Commons, bringing feminist demands about suffrage and other issues to national attention. Furthermore, this may have been important for local government councillors because the 1867 Municipal Franchise Act allowed certain women to vote in local government elections. For councillors in Manchester, such as those on the library committee,¹⁵⁰ this may have been particularly important as around 1871 there was a significant and vocal feminist community in Manchester,¹⁵¹ some of whom were enfranchised by the 1867 Act.

In summary, there were a number of different advantages for historians and contemporary commentators to the assertion that in 1871 library employment was a new professional opening for women. Periodisation, as Joan Kelly has argued, is not objective, but rather is implicated in wider power relationships.¹⁵² This section has argued that the existing periodisation legitimises 1871 as the time when women entered library work because this claim is advantageous in different ways to library historians and contemporary commentators. The accepted periodisation, then, accounts for the sudden appearance of debates about the role of women library workers in various publications by constructing them as a novelty or experiment in the library workforce. There was, on this basis, a newly created need to articulate the potentialities for women in the sector. The next section explores how that articulation

actively contributed to the construction of library work in which women were differently positioned to men workers.

4.5.2 *Constructing Women Library Workers and Processes of Othering*

... the only way we have to apprehend reality is through discourse and discursive structures. In the process of apprehending, we categorise and interpret experience and events according to the structures available to us and, in the process of interpretation, we lend these structures a solidity and normality which it is often difficult to think outside of.¹⁵³

The 'reality' in the library sector in the late 19th century was that women workers had begun to participate in significant numbers in this particular labour market, a trend which increased between 1871-1974. Women's participation was understood by speakers and authors according to the available discursive structures, especially the classed, raced dominant discourse of femininity. Their texts were accepted as 'truth', particularly when the speaker had some form of institutional position, such as Chair of the Manchester Public Libraries Committee, Secretary of the LA, official of an LA committee, library educator or senior librarian. This section explores the apprehension of this reality.

Sara Mills notes that discursive practices often invoke exclusionary Othering processes.¹⁵⁴ An instance when these were invoked in relation to library workers occurred when discourses of femininity were used both in support of and to limit the employment of women. Furthermore, as the dominant discourse of femininity normalised heterosexuality, whiteness and middle-class values, it marginalised Black and Asian women, lesbian and working class women. Hence, femininity simultaneously performed a 'moment of opening' for some women workers, in legitimising certain aspects of library work as appropriate work for them, and a 'moment of closure'.¹⁵⁵ This closure both delegitimised women's access to certain posts, such as management positions, and positioned some women as unsuitable for library work. In apprehending and articulating an account of women in library work, the speakers or writers were "lend[ing] these structures a solidity and normality"

which was difficult, although not impossible, to challenge. They were thus constructing a 'real' or 'true' account of what was happening. When the debates begin in 1871, they also initiate processes of apprehension, truth-categorisation and normalisation. Margaret Wetherell argues that:

To ignore the constitutive role of discourse is to ignore a central social force. How social objects (relationships, marriages, individuals, practices) are constituted in talk [or text] is pivotal to the nature of those objects. Talk about these things does not play a reflective or after-the-event role; it is the medium of the formation of social objects and social practices.¹⁵⁶

In Wetherell's terms, women library workers are "social objects". She emphasises that talk and other texts do not simply describe their subject, but also constitute the subject. Therefore, texts which claim that women were appropriately and naturally equipped to perform certain types of library work and that other work was less suitable for them did not only offer an "after-the-event" description of women library workers. Rather, these texts contributed to how women library workers were understood: that is, as patient, accurate, good at service work and so on. In this way, debates about women library workers may be understood not only as a reflection of what was happening, as others have argued, but also as actively contributing to the formation of a labour market in which gendered mattered.

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored two arguments within debates about women's participation in the library labour market: one which constructs library work as partly based on stereotypically feminine qualities and another which positions women workers as unsuitable for certain types of library work. It has argued that within these arguments processes of Othering and essentialist theories fostered the positioning of women as marginal in this labour market. It has further argued that the debates did not reflect intrinsic truths, but rather were socially constructed accounts which were accepted as truth. The reiteration and reformulation of these truths over the period 1871-1974 was considered. The following chapters further explore the impacts for

women workers of being located as Other in relation to access to education and training for library work and the differently gendered availability of professional identities.

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- ¹ James, M.S.R. (1892) Women Librarians, *The Library*, 4, pp.217-224. The same paper was also published under the same title in *Library Journal*, 18(5), 1894, pp.146-8. A précised version of this paper appeared under the same title in *Review of Reviews*, 6, December 1892, p.579.
- ² No Author. (1900) Women and Public Libraries, *Ladies Review*, 22nd December. In: Press Cuttings 1900-02, Library Association Archive.
- ³ Jenkins, K. (1991) **Re-thinking History**, London, Routledge, p.33.
- ⁴ Thorne, W.M. (1925) Librarianship as a Career for Women, *Library Assistant*, 18(314), pp.21-22, 33-35.
- ⁵ No Author. (1934) A Layman's View, *Manchester Librarian*, 7(4), p.41.
- ⁶ For example, Taylor, J., (1995) Left on the Shelf? The Issues and Challenges Facing Women Employed in Libraries from the Late 19th Century to the 1950s, *Library History*, 2, pp.96-107; Black, A. (1996) **A New History of the English Public Library. Social and Intellectual Contexts, 1850-1914**, London, Leicester University; and, Kerslake, E. and Liladhar, J. (forthcoming) "Jolly Good Reading" For Girls: Discourses of Library Work and Femininity in Career Novels, *Women's History Review*.
- ⁷ Wilden-Hart, M. (1956) Women in Librarianship, *Assistant Librarian*, 49(5), pp.78-80.
- ⁸ Hollis, P. (1979) **Women in Public. The Women's Movement 1850-1900**, London, Allen and Unwin, p.45.
- ⁹ Burrington, G., **Equal Opportunities in Librarianship? Gender and Career Aspirations**, London, Library Association, 1987.
- ¹⁰ Taylor, J. ref. 6.
- ¹¹ Tillie, H.A. (1928-9) Woman in Librarianship, *Library World*, 31, pp.144-5.
- ¹² Wilden-Hart, ref. 7, p.79.
- ¹³ The term 'housekeeping' continues to be used in library work, particularly in work related to preservation issues. For example, Harvey, R. (1993) **Preservation in Libraries: Principles, Strategies and Practices for Librarians**, London, Bowker Saur, p.16 and p.76.
- ¹⁴ Letter from W.H.Walton, Derby City Libraries, to W.J. Salter, librarian of Swansea Central library, dated 26th September 1929. In: Library letters to 31st March 1930, Derby Local Studies Library.
- ¹⁵ Hollis, ref. 8, Section 3.
- ¹⁶ James, ref. 1, p.221.
- ¹⁷ Hollis, ref. 8, Section 8.
- ¹⁸ No Author. (1904) A "Book Nurse", *Nottingham Library Bulletin*, January. In Press Cuttings 1904-13, Library Association Archive.
- ¹⁹ Calabria, M.D. (1994) Florence Nightingale and the Libraries of the British Army, *Libraries and Culture*, 29(4), pp.367-388.
- ²⁰ Birkett, J. (1980) **Blackpool Libraries 1880-1980**, [no place of publication], Lancashire Library.
- ²¹ Fanny Passavant's work diary, April 1885 to December 1887. In: Brotherton Library Special Collections, Leeds University Library.
- ²² Interview with Eileen Colwell, 21st April 1997.
- ²³ See Chapter 1.
- ²⁴ No Author. (1927) Vacuum Cleaner for Books, *Express and Star*, 3rd February; No Author. (1927) Dusting 10,000 Books in a Day, *Daily Express*, 7th February, 1927. Both items in: Press Cuttings 8th January 1927 to 2nd April 1927, Library Association Archive. See Chapter 8 for further discussion of technology and library work.
- ²⁵ Cited in Webber, N. (1984) Prospect and Prejudice, or Women and Librarianship 1880-1914, *Library History*, 6(5), pp.153-162.
- ²⁶ This has also been noted in: Maack, M.N. (1983) Women Librarians in France: The First Generation, *Journal of Library History*, 18(4), pp.407-463.
- ²⁷ H.L. (1908) Women as Librarians, *Co-operative News*, 22nd August. Thanks to Jean Everitt for this reference.

- ²⁸ Speaker F, interview with women members of the Library Association Retired Members Guild, 12th January 1998.
- ²⁹ Interview with Eileen Colwell, 22nd April 1997.
- ³⁰ A Woman Librarian. (1927) Why I Like My Work, *Manchester Guardian*, 21st February. In: Press Cuttings 8th January 1927 to 2nd April 1927, Library Association Archive.
- ³¹ No Author. (1933) Running a Library for Profit, *Woman's Life*, 4th February. In: Press Cuttings September 1932 to March 1933, Library Association Archive.
- ³² T.H. (1923) The Woman Librarian, *The Lady*, 19th July. In: Press Cuttings 29th June 1923 to 13th December 1923, Library Association Archive.
- ³³ Holcombe, L. (1973) **Victorian Ladies at Work: The Middle Class Working Woman**, Newton Abbott, Charles and David, p.4.
- ³⁴ Interview with Evelyn Evans, 27th May 1998.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Interview with Jean Plaister, 23rd January 1998.
- ³⁷ Lamb, J.P. (1925) Library Labourers? *Daily Dispatch*, 23rd February. In: Press Cuttings 6th February 1925 to 23rd May 1925, Library Association Archive.
- ³⁸ For a discussion of domestic labour as productive labour see McDowell, L. and Pringle, R. (eds) (1992) **Defining Women. Social Institutions and Gender Divisions**, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- ³⁹ No Author. (1957) They Know YOUR Tastes in Books, *EEG*, 8th November. In: Press Cuttings 1957-8, Library Association Archive.
- ⁴⁰ Baker, T. (1880) The Employment of Young Women as Assistants in Public Free Libraries, in Tedder, H.R. and Thomas, E.C. (eds) **Transactions and Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Library Association of the United Kingdom**, London, Library Association.
- ⁴¹ James, M.S.R. (1900) Women Librarians and their Future Prospects, *Library Association Record*, 2, pp.291-304.
- ⁴² For example, see Showalter, E. (1991) The Female Tradition, in Warhol, R.R. and Price Herndl, D. (eds) **Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism**, New Brunswick, Rutgers.
- ⁴³ Taylor, ref. 6.
- ⁴⁴ Baker, ref. 40.
- ⁴⁵ Skeggs, B. (1997) **Formations of Class and Gender. Becoming Respectable**, London, Sage, Chapter 3.
- ⁴⁶ For example, see James, ref. 1; Rawson, H. (1898) The Duties of Library Committees, in Brown, J.D. Garnett, R., MacAllister, J.Y.W., and Tedder, H.R. (eds) **Transactions and Proceedings of the Second International Library Conference**, London, Library Association. For a discussion of the civilising discourse of librarianship which is not focused on gender see Black, ref. 6, Chapter 9.
- ⁴⁷ Selby, W.R. (1899) Women as Librarians in Bristol, *Library Assistant*, 1, p.217.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ No Author. (1902) Women Librarians and Assistants, *Library World*, 5, pp.7-14.
- ⁵⁰ Cited in No Author. (1899) Hearth and Home! *Library Assistant*, 1, p103.
- ⁵¹ See Hollis, ref. 8, Section 8.
- ⁵² Verney, E. (1898) Village Libraries, *The Library*, 10, pp.25-8.
- ⁵³ Stockham, K.A. (1969) **British County Libraries: 1919-1969**, London, Andre Deutsch, p.18.
- ⁵⁴ Wilden-Hart, ref. 7, p.79.
- ⁵⁵ No Author. (1910) North Eastern Branch, *Library Assistant*, 8(151-2), pp.215-8.
- ⁵⁶ Beverley Skeggs has argued that supposedly intuitive knowledge of others' needs is an important part of caring for other people, work often carried out by women and not highly valued. See Skeggs, ref. 45, Chapter 5.
- ⁵⁷ For example, They Know YOUR Tastes in Books, ref. 39. See also: No Author. (1932) Remarkable Women of Lytham St Annes, *Lancashire Daily Post*, 30th June. In: Press Cuttings January 1932 to September 1932, Library Association Archive. No Author. (1936) Do You Choose Your Own Books? *Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Evening Telegraph*, 8th October. In: Press Cuttings 19th June 1936 to 31st October 1936, Library Association Archive.
- ⁵⁸ For example, No Author. (1953) It's This Girl's Job to Know - Or Find - All the Answers, *Evening Telegraph*, 3rd September. In Kettering Public Library Press Cuttings 1st April 1951 to 31st March 1954 Kettering Public Library Archive. No Author. (1955) Girl With (Nearly) All the Answers, *Kettering Leader and Guardian*, 20th January. In Kettering Public Library Press Cuttings 1st April 1954 to [no end-date], Kettering Public Library Archive.
- ⁵⁹ Humm, M. (1989) **The Dictionary of Feminist Theory**, London, Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf. Second edition, p.131. See Chapter 3 for a discussion of women workers' remuneration.

- ⁶⁰ Remarkable Women of Lytham St Annes, ref. 57.
- ⁶¹ Alfred Lancaster, Librarian of St Helens in Women Librarians and Assistants, ref. 49.
- ⁶² Richardson, Miss. (1894) Librarianship as a Profession for Women, *The Library*, 6, pp.137-142. See Moore, L. (1993) The Provision of Women's Reading Rooms in Public Libraries, *Library History*, (5 and 6), pp.190-202.
- ⁶³ Public libraries were not always assumed to be open to women users. In 1855, Cambridge Library Committee instigated an investigation exploring admission policies and four years later provided a separate reading room for women readers. See Munford, W. (1951) **Penny Rate**, London, Library Association. Academic libraries were particularly restrictive in the early part of this period and, for example, women did not have full access to some Cambridge libraries until 1948. McKitterick, D. (1986) **Cambridge University Library**, Cambridge, Cambridge.
- ⁶⁴ Thomas Duckworth, librarian of Worcester in Women Librarians and Assistants, ref. 49, p.3.
- ⁶⁵ For example see: No Author. (1916) Head Librarian. Interesting Work for a Woman, *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 16th November. In: Kettering Public Library Press Cuttings 1914-19, Kettering Public Library Archive; No Author. (1913) Women as Librarians. An Ideal Employment, *Daily Chronicle*, 1st April. Thanks to Avril Rolph for this reference. Developments in children's librarianship are explored in greater detail in Chapter 7.
- ⁶⁶ Richardson, ref. 62.
- ⁶⁷ Best, M.S. (1921) Women and Librarianship, *Library Association Record*, 23 (December), pp.399-409. This paper was delivered to the Scottish Library Association by Maud Storr Best, a librarian at Aberdeen University. It is used here, in this study of workers in English libraries because it was published by the *Record* which was widely disseminated throughout the UK.
- ⁶⁸ Windsor, J. (1877) Letter, *The Times*, 9th October, p.10. See also: J. Potter Briscoe's description of librarians having a "mission to fulfil" in: No Author. (1914) Librarians. North Midland Association at Kettering, *Kettering Leader*, 12th June. In: Library Archive, Kettering Public Library.
- ⁶⁹ No Author. (1902) [No title], *Ladies Review*, 2nd August. In: Press Cuttings 1900-02, Library Association Archive.
- ⁷⁰ James, ref. 1, p.224. See also: Lucas, J.E. (1900) Communications. High Priests of Literature, *Library Association Record*, 2 (September), p.505.
- ⁷¹ Hutchinson, A.R. (1906) Librarians, in No Author. **The Fingerpost. A Guide to the Professions and Occupations of Educated Women. With Information as the Necessary Training**, London, Central Bureau for the Employment for Women.
- ⁷² Skeggs, ref. 45, p.42.
- ⁷³ There has been no statistical analysis of the ethnic composition of the library workforce, however, it appears to be overwhelmingly white. See Chapter 3.
- ⁷⁴ Webster, W. (1998) **Imagining Home. Gender, 'Race' and National Identity, 1945-64**, London, UCL.
- ⁷⁵ Skeggs, ref. 45; Webster, ref. 74; hooks, b. (1989) **Talking Back. Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black**, Boston, South End.
- ⁷⁶ Girl With (Nearly) All the Answers, ref. 58.
- ⁷⁷ Norris Matthews, in Women Librarians and Assistants, ref. 49, p.11.
- ⁷⁸ Greenwood, T. (1891) **A History of the Movement and a Manual for the Organization and Management of Rate-Supported Libraries**, London, Cassell, p.360.
- ⁷⁹ Wilden-Hart, ref. 7.
- ⁸⁰ Richardson, ref. 62.
- ⁸¹ Cowell, P. (1893) **Public Library Staffs**, London, Library Association, p.14.
- ⁸² Webber, ref. 25, p.157.
- ⁸³ Selby, ref. 47, p.218.
- ⁸⁴ Best, ref. 67.
- ⁸⁵ McWilliams-Tullberg, R. (1980) Women and Degrees at Cambridge University, 1862-1897, in Vicinus, M. (ed) **A Widening Sphere. Changing Roles of Victorian Women**, London, Methuen.
- ⁸⁶ James Duff Brown in Women Librarians and Assistants, ref. 49, p.11.
- ⁸⁷ Interview with Winifred Thorne, 20th May 1998.
- ⁸⁸ Richardson, ref. 62.
- ⁸⁹ Tillie, ref. 11.
- ⁹⁰ Interview with Evelyn Evans, 27th May 1998.
- ⁹¹ Richardson, ref. 62.
- ⁹² Vicinus, M. (ed.) (1980) **Suffer and Be Still. Women in the Victorian Age**, London, Methuen.
- ⁹³ James, ref. 41, p.299.

- ⁹⁴ No Author. (1927) Why I Like My Work, *Manchester Guardian*, 21st February. In: Press Cuttings 8th January 1927 to 2nd April 1927, Library Association Archive.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid.
- ⁹⁶ Essentialism is discussed in Chapter 2.
- ⁹⁷ No Author. *Report on Women Assistants*, Manchester Free Public Library Committee Minutes, 20th December 1871. In: Minutes of the Manchester Public Library Committee 1869, Volume 6, Local Studies Unit, Manchester Central Library.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹⁹ Crestadoro, A. (1871) *Junior Assistants in Lending Libraries*, Manchester Public Libraries Committee Minutes, 28th June 1871. In: Minutes of the Manchester Public Library Committee 1869, Volume 6, Local Studies Unit, Manchester Central Library.
- ¹⁰⁰ 'Omega' (1897) Female Assistants, *The Library*, 9, pp.78-9.
- ¹⁰¹ See Hollis, ref. 8; Stanley, L. (1984) *The Diaries of Hannah Culwick. Victorian Maidservant*, London, Virago.
- ¹⁰² Baker, ref. 40, p.33.
- ¹⁰³ Ellen cited in Webber, ref. 25, p.158.
- ¹⁰⁴ Women as Librarians. An Ideal Employment, ref. 65; Baker, ref. 40, p.33.
- ¹⁰⁵ Tillie, ref. 11, p.144.
- ¹⁰⁶ Day, A. (1974) Those Library Ladies, *New Library World*, 74(871), pp.5-6.
- ¹⁰⁷ Wilden-Hart, ref. 7, p.79.
- ¹⁰⁸ Many writers have emphasised the extent to which discourses legitimated by psychology have attempted to control women. For example, Firestone, S. (1970) *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, New York, Morrow; Chesler, P. (1972) *Women and Madness*, New York, Doubleday.
- ¹⁰⁹ Best, ref. 67, p.401.
- ¹¹⁰ Omega. (1897) Female Assistants, *The Library*, 9, pp.78-9. See also: No Author. (1910) North Eastern Branch, *Library Assistant*, 8(151-2), pp.215-217.
- ¹¹¹ 'P.' (1897) Female Assistants, *The Library*, 9, pp.208. A similar debate took place later in the same year, see: 'Iconoclast' (1897) Female Assistants. *The Library*, 9, p.357 and *The Library*, 10, pp.228-9.
- ¹¹² No Author. (1921) Overheard, *Manchester Librarian*, 2, April.
- ¹¹³ See Chapter 6 for a more detailed exploration of the impact of marital status on library employment.
- ¹¹⁴ Baker, ref. 40.
- ¹¹⁵ Richardson, ref. 62, pp.20-1.
- ¹¹⁶ Selby, ref. 47, p.218. Similar comments were made in: No Author. (1899) Women in Libraries, *Englishwomen's Review*, 30, pp.240-5.
- ¹¹⁷ Chennell, F.E. (1902) Lady Assistants in Public Libraries, *Library World*, 4, pp.245-8; Chennell, F.E. (1902) That Woman Assistant Again, *Library World*, 5, pp.40-3; Chennell, F.E. (1902) The Lady Assistant: A Rejoinder, *Library World*, 5, pp.319-322.
- ¹¹⁸ Pierce, K.E. (1902) Women in Public Libraries, *Library World*, 5, pp.14-15; Pierce, K.E. (1902) Women in Public Libraries, *Library World*, 5, pp.286-288.
- ¹¹⁹ Taylor, ref. 6, p.104.
- ¹²⁰ Chennell, Lady Assistants in Public Libraries, ref. 117, p.248.
- ¹²¹ Pierce, Women in Public Libraries, ref. 118, p.286.
- ¹²² Ibid.
- ¹²³ Ibid., p.287.
- ¹²⁴ Pierce, Women in Public Libraries, ref. 118, p.15.
- ¹²⁵ See Scott, J.W. (1990) Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Post-Structuralist Theory for Feminism, in Hirsch, M. and Fox Keller, E., (eds) *Conflicts in Feminism*, London, Routledge.
- ¹²⁶ Chennell, That Woman Assistant Again, ref. 117.
- ¹²⁷ Women in Libraries, ref. 116.
- ¹²⁸ The lists of Kettering public library staff in the front cover of the annual report illustrate the predominance of women workers at Kettering whilst Kate Pierce was in charge.
- ¹²⁹ A subsequent printed debate began in response to Hartham, D. (1907) Lovely Woman in the Library, *Library World*, 9, pp.360-3. An unsigned letter protested against Hartham's comments in the next issue, and the following month's issue contained further letters and Kate Pierce's response, 'Women in Libraries', *Library World*, 9, pp.440-1.

- ¹³⁰ Kelly, J. (1984) **Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly**, Chicago, University of Chicago.
- ¹³¹ For example, see Clarke, A. (1977) *Few and Far Between: Women Librarians in the 19th Century*, in Wise, M. (ed.), **One Hundred Years. A Collection to Celebrate the Library Association Centenary**, Aberystwyth, College of Librarianship; Taylor, ref. 6; Webber, ref. 25.
- ¹³² Kelly, T. (1977) **A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain, 1845-1975**, London, Library Association, p.103.
- ¹³³ Baker, ref. 40.
- ¹³⁴ James, ref. 1.
- ¹³⁵ Kelly, ref. 132, p.103, footnote 1.
- ¹³⁶ Neither Burrington, ref. 9, nor Taylor, ref. 6, differentiate between the history of women's entry to the profession and their work in libraries.
- ¹³⁷ Anderson, B.S. and Zinsser, J.P. (1990) **A History of Their Own. Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present**, Volume 1, London, Penguin.
- ¹³⁸ Tedder, H.R. (1884) *Librarianship as a Profession*, in Thomas, E.C. (ed) **Transactions and Proceedings of the Fourth and Fifth Annual Meetings of the Library Association**, London, Library Association.
- ¹³⁹ Toulmin Smith, L. (1899) *On Openings for Women in Library Work*, *Library Association Record*, 1, pp.719-24.
- ¹⁴⁰ Hildenbrand, S. (1996) *Women in Library History: From the Politics of Library History to the History of Library Politics*, in Hildenbrand, S. (ed) **Reclaiming the American Library Past: Writing the Women In**, Norwood, NJ, Ablex.
- ¹⁴¹ See for example, Fry, W.G. and Munford, W.A. (1966) **Louis Stanley Jast. A Biographical Sketch**, London, Library Association; Munford, W.A. (1963) **Edward Edwards 1812-1886: Portrait of a Librarian**, London, Library Association; Ollé, J.G. (1978) **Ernest A. Savage. Librarian Extraordinary**, London, Library Association; Miller, E. (1967) **Prince of Librarians. The Life and Times of Antonio Panizzi of the British Museum**, London, Andre Deutsch.
- ¹⁴² For a critique of this theoretical concept of the professions, see Winter, M.F. (1988) **The Culture and Control of Expertise. Towards a Sociological Understanding of Librarianship**, Westport, Greenwood. See Chapter 6 for further discussion of professionalism.
- ¹⁴³ Hildenbrand, ref. 140.
- ¹⁴⁴ For an overview see Kitzinger, C. and Wilkinson, S. (1996) *Theorizing Representing the Other*, in Wilkinson, S. and Kitzinger, C. (eds) **Representing the Other**, London, Sage. See also Chapter 2 above.
- ¹⁴⁵ A debate took place in the *Observer* August and September 1919. See letters from G.H. Brierly and 'H.W.' published on 24th August 1919; replies from 'Certain' and G.P. Munary published on 31st August 1919; further responses from A.L. Humphries and L.L. Hall on 7th September 1919; and 'H.W.' published on 14th September 1919. The *Library Association Record* joined the debate authoritatively stating that Hannah Eteson, librarian at Blackpool, was the first woman public librarian in England, predated in Scotland by Mrs Elliott at Hawick. Other women librarians mentioned in the *Observer* correspondence worked in subscription libraries. During the course of this research, I have been asked to name the first woman librarian more than any other question.
- ¹⁴⁶ Mills. S. (1997) **Discourse**, London, Sage.
- ¹⁴⁷ See especially, Freud, S. (1984) *Femininity*, in Jaggar, A.M. and Rothenberg, P.S. (eds) **Feminist Frameworks. Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relationships Between Women and Men**, New York, McGraw Hill. Freud's article was first published in 1933.
- ¹⁴⁸ Ruskin, J. (1979) *Of Queens' Gardens*, in Hollis, ref. 8. Ruskin's article was first published in 1865.
- ¹⁴⁹ Baker, ref. 40.
- ¹⁵⁰ Thomas Baker was an alderman and not an elected councillor.
- ¹⁵¹ Banks, O. (1981) **Faces of Feminism**, Oxford, Martin Robertson.
- ¹⁵² Kelly, ref. 130.
- ¹⁵³ Mills, ref. 146, p.54.
- ¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, Chapter 5.
- ¹⁵⁵ See Wetherell, M. (1995) *Romantic Discourse and Feminist Analysis: Interrogating Investment, Power and Desire*, in Wilkinson, S. and Kitzinger, C. (eds) **Feminism and Discourse**, London, Sage.
- ¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p.140.

PART III. ACCESS TO LIBRARY WORK

Chapter 5. A Gendered Obstacle Race: Training, Education and Library Workers

5.1 Introduction

Professional education plays an important role in permitting access to the library sector and there have been a number of in-depth histories of library education. Yet these rarely consider the relationship between the associated terms ‘training’ and ‘education’,¹ however, it is argued here that both terms are gendered and as such are in a binary, oppositional relationship to one another. This relationship implies not only that each term contributes to the meaning of the other, but also that there is a hierarchical relationship between ‘training’ and ‘education’. As noted above,² binary terms negatively position the Other as lesser or marginal in comparison to the central Self. This framework may be applied to ‘education’ and ‘training’. Dominant understandings characterise training as being of less value (or as Other) in contrast to library education: whilst training may be quickly acquired but often only provides skills for a specific, limited task, in contrast education takes longer to acquire and is more wide-ranging. It is argued below that on-going discursive constructions, throughout the late 19th and 20th centuries, of women library workers as Other to men library workers,³ associate women with the less valued form of skilling for librarianship, that is, with training, and men with education. In turn, it is argued, this gendered association contributes to the perpetuation of horizontal occupational segregation by sex.⁴

Ronald Edwards distinguishes between the terms ‘training’ and ‘education’ suggesting that in-service training is:

... oriented toward the library, the individual job and the present and future needs of the staff in that order. Thus it may make provision for the development of the staff in terms of their possible promotion within (and occasionally beyond) the library, but this development will always be subservient to the needs of the library. Training will normally be carried out

within the confines of the library, and will be organised and supervised by the staff of the library.⁵

In contrast, Edwards suggests that education includes library school education, externally organised professional courses, conferences “and other activities more properly regarded as educational or primarily devoted to the professional advancement of the individual.”⁶ Training and education are clearly differentiated in their central aims: training primarily aims to equip workers with skills needed by particular organisations and is most concerned with producing immediate or short term organisational results, whilst education is primarily aimed at equipping individual workers to pursue a long term career in the labour market. Four significant debates are discussed below in which women library workers were predominantly understood as requiring and benefiting from training, whilst men library workers were associated with education.

5.2 Examining Fitness for Library Work

Unlike men, women applicants for library vacancies attracted special attention from library managers in the early part of the period. There was widespread use in public libraries of entrance examinations for women applicants and this was often justified by reference to the huge response to vacancies. The LAA’s 1911 report on conditions of service in UK municipal libraries, based on questionnaire replies from “practically all the principal librarians”,⁷ found that 58 per cent of libraries “require a preliminary examination or some form of qualifying test”.⁸ This ‘test’ took various forms: it might be a general knowledge examination set by the library; the requirement that candidates hold a recognised educational certificate, such as those awarded for the Cambridge or Oxford local examinations; in two cases, libraries demanded that candidates had a knowledge of languages other than English; and, in others the “school career of the candidate is the deciding factor”.⁹ The 1911 report does not say whether entrance examinations applied only to women, however, it strongly suggests that this was the case as it comments that: “The practice of differentiating between the qualifications required from the boy and girl candidate is ... strongly deprecated.”¹⁰

A widely discussed system of pre-employment examination was that at Bristol public libraries. This was advocated by E.R. Norris Mathews, city librarian at Bristol, at the Second International Librarians' Conference in 1897 as a way of examining women applicants' "possible fitness for library work",¹¹ and in doing so, he argued, entrance examinations were successful methods of controlling both the quality and quantity of applicants for library posts:

The adoption of the examination scheme at Bristol has, moreover, considerably relieved the pressure of candidates who formerly were constantly reapplying for employment in overwhelming numbers ...¹²

Norris Mathews suggests that even women who were only potential library workers were problematic for library managers. The quality of candidates was important in two ways, Mathews said: to ensure they could satisfactorily perform their work, and that they could pursue professional training. He described the examinations as:

... of a purely elementary character, as the following subjects that were then taken will show: Handwriting and dictation (orthography), arithmetic, geography, history, and English literature.¹³

Such skills would, of course, have been vital in much library work at the time, and the establishment of pre-employment examinations is reasonable enough. Yet why did they only apply to women applicants, when surely library managers needed to know men applicants' abilities in these areas too? The establishment of entrance examinations for women applicants and not men may have been based on the assumption that library managers would not have been able to assess women's abilities in these areas in the informal manner which they would use with men applicants. Women, as noted above,¹⁴ were constructed as novelty or experimental workers with unknown qualities, whilst men were a known quantity. Entrance examinations were one way that experimental workers' suitability was tested. Similar subject areas to those examined in Bristol were used in the entrance examinations in public libraries such as Leeds,¹⁵ Finsbury¹⁶ and Manchester Public Libraries (see

Figure 5.1).¹⁷ The Manchester examination paper of 1910 gives no indication that it was used only for women applicants, however, chief librarian Charles Sutton's copies of staff conditions of service for that time note that, "There is a competitive examination for females only."¹⁸ Entrance examinations were sufficiently newsworthy in 1898 to be noted by *Library Assistant* when an advertisement in "a London daily" for a "young lady assistant" stated that "Candidates will be expected to pass an examination in elementary arithmetic, geography and history."¹⁹

By the time of the publication of the Association of Assistant Librarians' 1931 report on staffing conditions only 30 library authorities continued to set their own entrance examinations.²⁰ However, 156 authorities (68 per cent of respondents) instead required matriculation "or other similar educational test", whilst 74 did not require any prior examination. Formalised education systems were, to some extent, replacing informal examinations set by individual libraries, yet these, too, disadvantaged women and girls. For example, Jane McDermid notes that after the 1944 Education Act, girls were performing better than boys at the 11-plus examination and this was perceived by the education authorities as a problem. It was resolved by weighting girls' results differentially from those of boys, limiting the numbers of girls eligible for grammar, rather than secondary, school education with a greater emphasis on academic examinations.²¹ Although some libraries, such as Tottenham,²² had different pre-entry requirements for men and women, the 1931 report does not report if, in general, requirements were differentiated by sex. By this time, however, the LA examinations and eligibility criteria for those examinations were more accepted by librarians and library committees as a measure of a candidate's suitability. Before this, entrance examinations performed this function, weeding out suitable women candidates from the unsuitable. This process ensured that the successful candidates were, to some extent, already suited to library work and would be productive workers shortly after joining the library.

MANCHESTER PUBLIC LIBRARIES.

ASSISTANTS IN BRANCH LIBRARIES.—EXAMINATION OF CANDIDATES.

August 4th, 1910.

Two hours allowed. Write your name, address, and age at the top of your paper.

A. Handwriting and Orthography. (Write passage from dictation.)

B. Work the sum given on separate paper.

- (1.) Explain what a percentage is, and give two or three examples, including money.
- (2.) Explain what is a verb, an adjective, and a preposition, and give an example of their use.
- (3.) What is the population of Manchester? Name the districts that have been incorporated in the City since 1884.
- (4.) Mention five great events in English history since 1800.
- (5.) Name ten novelists in the 19th century, and give the title of one book of each.
- (6.) Mention four periodicals you have read, and briefly describe their character.
- (7.) Name ten of the principal English authors, including historians, dramatists, scientists, and poets.
- (8.) What novels do you think good, and why?

Figure 5.1 Manchester Public Library Entrance Examination.

5.3 Special Training for Women Workers

Throughout the period in question, many debates about training in the library press highlight the specific needs of women librarians, and suggest that they have different requirements to men. From the mid-19th century, there were arguments that education had a detrimental affect on women, suggesting that they were intellectually frail, physically and mentally threatened by education, and would endanger their femininity if they were too highly educated.²³ Similar concerns were not expressed about men. These educational discourses are articulated in debates about library education. For example, in 1944, an article on training for library assistants in war-time used the idea of feminine intellectual frailty to warn that there was “certainly a risk” that women undergoing intense training could suffer “a very acute attack of mental indigestion”.²⁴ Women’s deficient basic education was referred to by Miss Richardson, writing in 1894, who argued that women particularly needed training because they:

... have acquired rather a bad reputation for being slow in coming to a decision, and when asked to given an opinion on a disputed point or to recommend the best book on a certain subject, they hesitate, are not quite sure and so on.²⁵

Although Miss Richardson did not deny the charge, she suggested that it was “not so much deserved as it was some years ago” because of the general improvement in girls’ education which was teaching them to have “business habits ... and use their own judgement” rather than to be “*fine ladies*”.²⁶ She suggested that to be a successful librarian, women should not only have a broad general education but should also undergo “practical training ... [as] an assistant to some librarian, who will teach her the technicalities of his craft,”²⁷ thus remedying the deficiencies in earlier education.

The need for remedial training for women library workers is differently expressed in a number of articles in the 1920s and 1930s when the never-ending nature of training is emphasised. An article in the *Daily Telegraph* in 1925 stated:

The more highly qualified she is from the point of view of culture and general knowledge the better is she able to assess the value of the literature in the library, and this involves constant and careful reading. Obviously, a knowledge of even half the books in a library would be impossible, and it is usually found desirable to specialise ...²⁸

The article simultaneously asserts the need for “constant and careful” reading and the impossibility of being acquainted with “even half the books in a library”. It urges constant reading, yet acknowledges this to be in pursuit of an “impossible” task. This type of training, which is particularly required by women who are likely to have had a poor basic education, is also impossible to complete. Similarly, Mizpah Gilbert, wrote that, “A girl who enters a library as an assistant ... must neglect no opportunity of learning as much as possible of the technical part of librarianship, and at the same time improve herself by general knowledge.”²⁹ The on-going nature of training for librarianship is seen as bringing about an improvement in the worker. This is further illustrated in an article about two women workers at Luton public library. In 1936, Jane Anderson Downton was elected FLA, and Mollie Mason, ALA. The local newspaper report of the presentation ceremony commented that:

In making the presentation, Councillor Burgoyne [Chairman of the Public Libraries Committee] said the ambition which had fired Miss Downton and Miss Mason was a glorious road towards increased self-esteem and personal efficiency, and towards the development of a nobler personality ... he said he was glad to be associated with young people who were willing to give up a little spare time to make sacrifices of their leisure for self-improvement.³⁰

Success in professional examinations is described as having psychological and spiritual values. In gaining the examinations, the two women are fundamentally changed: they are travelling towards “increased self-esteem and personal efficiency” and have begun “the development of a nobler personality” by their “sacrifices” made for “self-improvement”. Women’s special training, then, not only encompasses attempts to remedy deficient basic education, but also to improve their personality, their self. Even success in professional education, however, only begins these women

along “a glorious road” of self-improvement, and does not mean that they have indeed bettered themselves.

The idea that women workers needed special training was again voiced in the 1960s. W.S. Haugh, City Librarian of Bristol, argued that, as women left librarianship on marriage, a level of professional qualification was needed which could be achieved by the age of 21, thus allowing some years of professional practice before ‘retirement on marriage’.³¹ He cited the teaching profession - “the major competitor to librarianship”³² - as having this type of qualification system. The current librarianship system, he suggested, produced qualified ALA’s elected to the Register at a median age of 26. This situation was useful to neither the profession nor women trainees, he argued, as by the time they reached this age around 75 per cent of women library workers had married, and therefore retired. Failure to take account of this, Haugh argued, exacerbated a situation where unqualified assistants were appointed to posts requiring qualified workers. The predominance of women in the library workforce created, he suggested, circumstances where professional excellence could not be the only standard for professional education, as it could if the majority of candidates were men. Men, he assumed, had long term career plans, which made professional education over several years worthwhile; women, however, were not assumed to have this career plan and so the return on their professional education decreased.

On these grounds, Haugh argued that the feminisation of librarianship created a need for an amended educational framework, for which he outlined two basic steps. Firstly, Haugh suggested lowering the pre-entry requirements:

If girls are going to stay in library work only until they are 23, I would, in areas where it is necessary, accept as a minimum pre-entry qualification four “O” level passes and let those appointed at the lower level compete for admission to library schools if they so wish ...³³

Secondly, he suggested re-thinking professional qualifications to introduce a two year course at library school, after some practical experience in a library. This would allow librarians to qualify at around the age of 21. However, he added that, this “should not

be the end of library training. I would look upon it as a qualification appropriate to junior professional posts.”³⁴ The shortened training would allow women to qualify at “junior professional” level and thus prevent appointment of unqualified assistants to professional posts. Haugh’s education suggestions reinforce the positioning of women library workers as Other to men in a number of ways. Firstly, lowering the pre-entry requirement for women would have allowed them entry to the profession on different, lesser terms to men. Additionally, the sex differentiated pre-entry qualifications would mean that some women would not have the basic qualifications to ensure they were eligible for library school, and would thus have to compete for the right to attend. In contrast, men, who had been appointed on the basis that they already had these pre-entry qualifications, would have an automatic right to attend library school. Furthermore, the shorter courses, set up for the benefit of women, were not of the same level or value as existing courses, and full professional status was not to be associated with them, but rather with further qualifications. These, if Haugh were correct, would be mainly associated with men as they would be gained after further training by older candidates. Whilst these points suggest that Haugh’s proposals would have negatively affected women trainees, shortened professional education might, however, have been useful, for both employers and employees, in more quickly producing a worker with a “marketable” qualification.³⁵

Haugh’s sex-differentiated professional education and those training and examination systems aimed solely at women contribute to the positioning of women as Other and may be identified as part of a process of Othering women workers. Men’s training needs are established as the normal or commonsense needs of new workers, whilst women are understood as having special or additional needs. This positions men trainees as superior to women, as they require only ‘normal’ training and not further or remedial training. In being different from men, women are also seen as lesser than men or deficient in comparison to men.³⁶ The idea that women needed special training was sometimes challenged, however. Mizpah Gilbert, Librarian-in-Charge at North Branch, Fulham, in her contribution to a discussion of education for library assistants, wrote:

I should like to preface this brief paper by saying that I was asked to treat my portion of the discussion ... from the standpoint of the woman, but as I do not recognise any difference between library work whether it is done by a man or a woman, my remarks will apply equally to the one as to the other. The woman assistant has to do precisely the same work as the man assistant, and she therefore needs the same education.³⁷

The Othering suggested by the separate treatment of training for women is rejected by Mizpah Gilbert who argues that the same work is required whoever the worker. She does, however, tentatively suggest that perhaps training for women “should be a little better, for as the man assistant has his position assured in the library profession, the woman assistant has yet to demonstrate by her work her equality on an intellectual basis ...”³⁸ Yet this formulation of women’s special training needs does not suggest an intrinsic or essential³⁹ difference between men and women, but rather a distinction brought about by differences in educational opportunities for women and men.

In summary, there were a number of ways in which women workers were understood to require special training, that is training which was different from that which men might be expected to need. This special training involved making good unsatisfactory basic education, improving feminine psychological and personality traits and adapting library education to the need of women trainees who were in the workforce for a limited duration. Particularly in regard to this latter point, there was an emphasis on training and education producing, in the short to medium term, ready-to-work results. The need for trainees to be ready-to-work was particularly significant during both World Wars and is discussed below.

5.4 Training for Emergency Workers

High levels of staff turnover and associated levels of new, inexperienced entrants during both World Wars exacerbated the need for women to be productive library workers as soon after joining the library staff as possible. As men library workers were enlisted during the First World War, many libraries were run by a minimal staff, often consisting of women working on temporary contracts who were

contracted to work until the permanent post-holder returned. Luton public library, for example, was kept open largely by the efforts of the librarian Thomas Maw (who, aged 41, was too old to be enlisted) and the first assistant, and subsequent librarian, Maud Griffiths. Throughout 1916, one assistant after another left until by the end of the year a total of six juniors, the cleaner and caretaker had all left the library. Accompanying these changes, however, was an increased demand for library services created by the influx of soldiers and war workers. The staff was made up of untrained young women who had to be quickly equipped to carry out work essential to the running of the library.⁴⁰ 'H.E.L.A' outlined the training programme that an un-named library had begun for its temporary assistants, however, the writer also noted that it was "generally agreed" that this training should be limited for "fairly obvious", but unstated, reasons.⁴¹ Similarly, Ernest A. Savage warned of the dangers of offering training which might enable women assistants to sit for professional examinations. He argued that this would lead to an oversupply of qualified librarians:

If the L.A. trains and encourages the temporary hands to read for examinations, they will bring together a body of labour doomed to unemployment after the war, but constantly seeking to re-enter a service for which they have been partly trained; thus competing with the men who have returned. Plainly our duty as librarians is to make it clear to temporary employees that they will be dismissed at the end of the war and that our service has no future for them. Unless we do so we shall betray the future of the soldier-librarians by cheapening the price of labour in libraries. ... the Association must surely realise that the war has thrown wide the doors of librarianship to all and sundry, who may be allowed a lodging for the night, but must depart at dawn.⁴²

Although earlier in his letter he had clearly identified "female workers" as the temporary labourers in question, in this extract Savage depersonalises the workers by referring to them as "temporary hands". He censures them for their anticipated competition for work against former servicemen, predicts that they will be "doomed to unemployment" and warns that they will degrade "the price of labour in libraries". Thus, in two ways, he positions training which will encourage the "temporary hands"

to pursue professional qualifications as illegitimate training. Firstly, he suggests that this is damaging from the perspective of professional librarians and the profession in terms of lowering salary levels. Furthermore, he argues that such training is iniquitous because it is unpatriotic as it will “betray the future of the soldier-librarians”.

Many of the difficulties libraries faced throughout 1914-18 returned in the Second World War. Rapid staff turnover, a lack of trained replacements and attempting to comply with calls to extend its service⁴³ prompted Tottenham public library in London to devise a special training programme.⁴⁴ On-going staff turnover was a significant difficulty as one group of junior assistants after another was called up after a short time in library employment. Furthermore, there were few qualified or experienced workers as most of the senior positions had been held by young men who were enlisted early in the War. Initially, the library managers decided they would be able to meet the staff shortages by training the existing women junior assistants, who were experienced library workers. Rather than relying on pre-war training methods, which were delivered “in an informal manner over a long period”,⁴⁵ F.H. Fenton and an un-named colleague drew up a training course which “covered as far as possible all those matters with which a senior assistant would have to deal” and whose:

... intention was primarily practical, but always enough background theory was included to enable the juniors to carry out new jobs intelligently rather than by rule of thumb.⁴⁶

The training of experienced but unqualified junior assistants in this way was successful. Staff depletion, however, continued through call-up and promotion, and Fenton was then faced with training inexperienced women assistants. The course was adapted and, before it began, a period of informal practical instruction was arranged to introduce the new workers to different areas in the library to “give them as quickly as possible a superficial knowledge of a large part of the service”.⁴⁷ It still aimed to be “as realistic as possible”.⁴⁸

The training scheme at Tottenham contributed, Fenton suggested, to the library service’s usefulness during the war. However, the course was of limited value

to the women themselves. Although Fenton estimates that the course standard was, with some exceptions, set at the LA's Intermediate examination level, it is unlikely that the women trainees could have translated their participation on the course into professional qualifications because few had matriculated from school and matriculation was a pre-entry requirement for LA examinations.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the description of the course repeatedly emphasises that it was "practical" and "realistic", and, as befits a response to "emergency training needs" of temporary assistants,⁵⁰ contained only limited theoretical considerations. There is no claim that the course, was equivalent to professional education or that it might count towards LA qualifications. This is notable because the training was the basis, after all, for the women's work in the more senior positions, which Fenton says were satisfactorily staffed. The course is discursively constructed as a quick response to an emergency situation: it is not understood as legitimate, worthwhile, fully rounded library education, but instead is "condensed" training, sufficient only to get the job done. Furthermore, neither are the women trainees understood as properly educated, they are trained only to do the job in hand. Understanding war-time training as special training for women facilitated post-war attempts to re-construct the labour market in the shape of the pre-war labour market (i.e. one framed by vertical and horizontal occupational segregation by sex). This labour market valued and rewarded educationally qualified library workers more greatly than it did those who had undergone training.

5.5 Training for Women, Education for Men

The section above has suggested that the terms 'training' and 'education' are in an oppositional relationship to one another with training associated with practical skills and education with theoretical knowledge. It is further suggested that this relationship has gendered meanings and implications. In the focus group with women library workers, training was discussed as something which facilitated effective working practices, whilst education was described as having little practical value:

- E And the ones - the ladies who had been put in charge of branches during the war because there weren't any men - weren't qualified, but they were in charge of branches and they jealously - they were - they've got to be

got rid of, so we can get somebody who's a graduate in charge of the branches and the bad feeling at the way they were shifted sideways or - never down, it was never down - something had got to be invented for them or they were encouraged to leave altogether, it was a problem wasn't it - unqualified staff

F Because very often something like running a branch library, they would be much more efficient and -

E Umm because they knew - [inaudible]

B Well some of the graduates weren't actually very good because if you were a good graduate you weren't looking towards libraries at that time. Particularly male graduates who went into librarianship -

? The dregs

F They were seen as [inaudible; laughs] But unfortunately some of them were - and we had to train these and - one had a very strong feeling that not only had they no interest in libraries whatsoever, but they had never used the public library because they were so completely clueless and I found it very sad. I remember one failed BA Nottingham that I had to try and see if he was trainable, and he was so patronising I could have hit him and after a while - a month or two, he was so slow - he said to me, has it ever occurred to you to start getting yourself qualifications, and I said well in your eyes they may not be qualifications, but at least I know what I'm doing.⁵¹

The extract begins by generating a sense of antagonism between trained as opposed to educated workers with, on the one hand, "ladies" who managed branch libraries in the war, and, on the other, the "graduates" brought in after the war to do this work. The "ladies" were understood as "a problem". This may be speaker E's understanding, however, when the next speaker asserts that these "ladies" were "more efficient" than the men, E agrees.

When Speaker B enters the discussion she does not comment on women workers, but shifts the focus onto graduate workers. She suggests that graduates were problematic because they "weren't actually very good", and another speaker develops

this by calling them “the dregs”. Speaker B argues that good, male graduates “weren’t looking towards libraries at that time” and in doing so, she differentiates between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ graduates. This move puts her in a position to condemn graduates working in librarianship in the 1940s without condemning all graduates. There are several benefits to this position. As a professional librarian, who has been professionally educated, she may well not want to condemn education outright. Furthermore, when she said this, she was taking part in a discussion conducted as part of an academic study and which was taking place in a university. Condemning education *per se* could risk belittling her profession, her professional standing, and offending the researcher. By making her attack on education more specific these risks are mitigated, yet the point is still made. Speaker F picks up this position and describes the male graduates as “completely clueless”, who might or might not be “trainable” by an assistant. The workplace evaluation of the graduate by the trained assistant sets up a confrontation in which the graduate is described as “so patronising I could have hit him”. He is also described as being “so slow” that his training took “a month or two”, which infers some shared knowledge on behalf of the listeners (which was not shared by the researcher) that this would have been a long time for this type of training. Having both denigrated the graduate and positioned him as the villain of the piece, Speaker F delivers her assessment of the value of training versus the value of education with the triumphant punchline to her narrative about the graduate: “in your eyes they may not be qualifications, but at least I know what I’m doing.” Qualifications and theoretical education are constructed as having little practical value.

A similar construction of well qualified, but ineffective, men library workers was given by Rita Keegan. She said:

... but I mean over the years the most incompetent person I worked with for a long time was a nice man, but incompetent in the sense that I never really found out what he knew about librarianship - was a Fellow of the Library Association, you know and yet I worked with some - in fact on the same staff there was somebody with no qualifications at all who really was excellent - and I am not against theoretical knowledge and I am all for it and I am certainly all for

degrees and professional qualifications, but I think it has to be considered with other things.⁵²

The qualified man is “the most incompetent person” with whom Rita Keegan has worked. Unlike the construction in the focus group, however, this man is not a graduate or a newcomer to librarianship. Instead, he has “theoretical knowledge” gained through his FLA. Rita Keegan, an ALA, states that she is “certainly all for degrees and professional qualifications”, yet also asserts that this knowledge has to “be considered with other things” and that this joint consideration creates an identifiable and applicable body of knowledge about librarianship. Although holding an FLA means that the recipient has worked in libraries for a minimum period, Rita Keegan omits any practical skills he may have acquired. Her extreme formulation of his abilities is continued when she contrasts the incompetent FLA with their colleague, “somebody with no qualifications at all who really was excellent”. This professionally uneducated person has “no qualifications at all”, however, they are described as not just good at their job, but “really ... excellent”. Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell have argued that extreme case formulations are effective justificatory mechanisms within talk.⁵³ The extreme case formulations here are used to justify Rita Keegan’s disparagement of the senior level professional education, whilst allowing her to voice her general approval of higher and professional education.

The extracts above distinguish between training and education, associating women with training, and men with education. Furthermore, both extracts invert the labour market values attached to training and education, when training and education are applied in the workplace. Neither extract precludes women’s participation in professional education, indeed, all of the speakers were at least ALA qualified and some of the speakers explicitly advocated professional education, “theoretical knowledge”⁵⁴ and higher education. However, the speakers talk of themselves as having experiential knowledge of librarianship, which is constructed as the most valuable knowledge in the work of running a library. In contrast, they talk of certain men as having theoretical knowledge of library work, which is worthless in the workplace. Valerie Walkerdine’s work has explored how understanding and ability are evaluated. She illustrates, in her school-based study, that what was construed as

“real understanding” was more likely to be attributed to boys, whilst girls were more likely to be credited with “rule-following” and “rote-learning”, which was dissimilar to the “real understanding” shown by boys.⁵⁵ If this framework is applied to qualifications and measurements of ability in librarianship, it may be argued that women trainees based in libraries were “rule-following”. As such, they worked hard, pursued qualifications and complied to the standards set out in the library manual,⁵⁶ yet this was not evaluated as “real understanding”. Instead, “real understanding” was more likely to be attributed to the male graduate newcomers, who were rewarded with senior posts and more substantial financial remuneration.

The association of education with men is clearly articulated in a 1933 letter discussing library staffing by Richard Offor, librarian at Leeds University:

I do not wish again to appoint a male assistant towards whom I feel any obligation to give facilities for attending degree lectures. I accordingly recommend the appointment of a girl from a secondary school whose salary would be from £52-£80 a year, and who would be told that there was no further prospect of an increase in salary, unless a vacancy occurred in another grade, and who would be encouraged to go in for the diploma in librarianship so that she might be competent to obtain a post elsewhere.⁵⁷

Offor describes a two-track staff development scheme based on gender: towards men, he felt an “obligation” to allow them to study on a part-time basis for a degree, however, this advantage was not extended to women, who were appointed to a non-promotion post with a limited salary. Although such women would be allowed to pursue professional qualifications, these are clearly not of the same value, to Offor at least, as a degree. By refusing to appoint a woman as a “student assistant”, Offor also prevented her from being placed on a more generous pay scale which ran to a higher maximum salary and was increased by more substantial annual increments.⁵⁸

The association of library education and qualifications with men workers was occasionally driven by organisational imperatives. In an account of working as an

assistant in a municipal library during and after the Second World War, Ken Stockham said:

... I was going say at one time, they didn't do it with women, but they did it with men - if you were a man and you worked in the library service, if you hadn't become a chartered librarian - an ALA by the time you were a certain age you got transferred to the water department, or else somewhere else. The pressure on you to pass your exams was terrific. I can't remember anybody who didn't pass.⁵⁹

Men workers were compelled to obtain professional status, or be "transferred to the water department". Organisational expectations in establishing this as a requirement for men, but not for women, are clearly that men will obtain professional posts and possibly become senior librarians, and women may not.

The development of library education after the Second World War furthered the association of education with men workers in a number of ways. The late 1940s, post-McColvin Report and in the midst of significant library school expansion, saw a great deal of debate about library education. Some of these debates emphasised that men's obligation to undertake 12 months' National Service would remove them from professional education at a critical moment - and that women would not be similarly disadvantaged.⁶⁰ R.A. Dippie, chair of Croydon public libraries committee, noted that there had been suggestions that an age eligibility criterion might be attached to professional qualifications so that men and women candidates would "keep more on level terms", however, these had not been accepted. Instead, Dippie put forward his own suggestions for the organisation of library education. Initially, he proposed that men and women should have a period of full-time study and examinations before National Service age so that when men returned to library work they "will have left the grind of examinations behind ... and will recommence as a journeyman and not as a mere apprentice". He continued, however, after pointing out that women would have a shorter time away from the library work than men, by suggesting:

...would it be better, from the point of view of equity and convenience of the libraries, for the men only to take the whole-time course as some compensation for their loss of time on National Service, and to give them intensive training after their absence; and for the girls to continue to study and to take their examinations, as they normally do now, concurrently, with their everyday work in the libraries?⁶¹

His suggestion would establish library schools and academic library education as the preserve of men trainees, and would leave women with the former system. The two-track training schemes are differently valued by Dippie: women's concurrent training is constructed as ordinary as it accompanies "their everyday work", whilst the library school education is both "intensive training" and legitimate "compensation" for men performing their patriotic duty on National Service. Dippie does not make take into account the patriotic war work carried out by women. This had been suggested by S.H. Horrocks, librarian at Reading, that library schools should be open to women who had worked in libraries during the war:

A further current problem which smoulders beneath the surface is the question of assistants, mostly women, who did such yeoman service in libraries while we were away. They were the women who were left behind. They were in the front line almost as much as the soldier or sailor, they worked arduously under appalling conditions, they had night duties added to their normal daily routine, and they worked with skill and a will. Conditions were as unsettling for them as for anyone, and the mental strain was such that few of them were able to concentrate sufficiently to be able to get on with the task of examination taking. They seem now to have been forgotten. No library schools for them, no grants, little encouragement. It is time that some small piece of the cake of training was offered to them, not out of pity, but as a right for the excellent work they put in during six long years.⁶²

Horrocks re-states the role women played in libraries during the Second World War and in doing so is able to stake a claim for women to participate, "as a right", at library school.

Library education was not always, then, understood as something which only men pursued. Evelyn Evans described her library training and acquisition of professional qualifications during her early years at Coventry public library:

EE It was quite well known as a good training ground and I will say this about Charles Nowell - he was keen on us getting qualified. In other words he gave us the impetus - I mean he could easily have thought 'oh well those girls they'll just go off and get married' - but no, we were stuck right into exams almost from the day we started.

EK Would you have had that in another library?

EE I don't think we'd have been pushed so much somewhere else. But, of course, they varied - Birmingham was a good library for that. Some of the libraries just didn't bother to do it - to get their assistants trained.

Although Evelyn Evans did not attend library school, she describes "getting qualified" as an integral part of being a junior assistant at Coventry. This type of organisational "impetus" encouraging the pursuit of professional qualifications was not, however, found everywhere as some libraries "just didn't bother". Women also participated in the University College, London library school.⁶³ Eileen Colwell was an early student, attending between 1921-24, funded by a scholarship from West Riding county council.⁶⁴ Lorna Paulin was a student at UCL in the mid-1930s, studying first for an English honours degree, and then an MA in English combined with part-time study in the school of librarianship.⁶⁵ In holding the diploma and a Masters qualification, Lorna Paulin said she had "fulfilled what my headmistress had told me and I was better qualified than the men."⁶⁶

In summary, this section has outlined ways in which the term 'training' was contrasted with the term 'education', and illustrated how training was mainly associated with women workers and education with men. The impact of these gendered meanings are explored below.

5.6 Discussion: The Impacts of Library Education and Training

Training and education have widespread impacts on individual workers and the profession. Some are immediate and straightforward: often libraries would reward the successful completion of a professional certificate with a bonus payment or promotion, and, for example, when, in 1949, Hilary Beecham passed her Registration Examination her employer, Derbyshire county library, awarded her a £15 annual salary increase.⁶⁷ The advantages to individual women workers of gaining professional education were outlined in a statement by Derby City Library:

... an assistant has a better chance of getting a better-paid job in another town if she is qualified, and all promotions both in Derby and elsewhere are likely to be made from qualified persons in the future. ... in the near future assistants will be divided into two classes: Technical Assistant and Service Assistants, or those who have passed the L.A. examinations and those who haven't. The qualified assistants will be paid at a higher rate.⁶⁸

Higher pay, promotion opportunities and job mobility were clearly understood to be dependent on achieving professional status. Libraries, too, benefited organisationally from having a certain proportion of trained and professionally educated staff.⁶⁹ The failure to provide adequate training was briefly discussed by the group of women workers:

- E But did you find when they [graduate men colleagues] were in a position of authority and were giving you jobs and they had no idea how long a particular job would take because they had never done it?
- B No exactly - no
- A Because they had never done it themselves ...

Men workers' lack of experiential knowledge is understood here as not being rectified even by the time they are in senior positions, and this lack is presented as compromising their ability to effectively manage the workforce. The lack of experiential knowledge, did not, however, prevent men from obtaining senior posts.

The broader impacts of professional education were discussed in a number of articles in the professional press in the late 1940s and 1950s, and more extensively in a report in 1966. A.G.S Enser sparked considerable debate when he discussed the qualification statistics by sex in terms of the “overfeminization” of the profession.⁷⁰ In suggesting that too many women were qualifying in the sector, Enser pathologises their presence. Critiques of ‘over-masculinisation’ were not forthcoming when men were numerically dominant, yet when women predominate in certain examinations Enser identifies this as a problem. Extensive work on women’s acquisition of professional qualifications and subsequent careers was carried out by Patricia Layzell Ward in the mid-1960s. Her report suggests that in 1952/3 women made up two thirds of the new entrants to the profession, that is students working for initial professional qualification, the Registration Examination.⁷¹ However, the majority of those qualifying for the more senior professional qualification were men. The number of men FLAs was disproportionate both to their numbers in the profession as a whole and to the numbers qualifying at Associate level. Table 5.1 (below) illustrates that, throughout the 1950s, whilst three women qualified at ALA level for every one man who did so, this ratio was reversed at FLA level.

Table 5.1: Qualified Librarians, By Sex and Women’s Marital Status⁷²

	ALA		FLA	
	1951	1959	1951	1959
Married Women	7 (3%)	49 (11%)	-	1 (2%)
Unmarried Women	132 (54%)	163 (47%)	11 (16%)*	12 (25%)
Men	105 (43%)	134 (39%)	59 (84%)	36 (73%)

* Figure appears to be incorrect in the original table and is amended here.

The award, in the 1950s, of senior library qualifications to men rather than women is also notable for the difference made by women’s marital status. Of the few women who did qualify at the senior level, a significant majority were unmarried. The importance of marital status to senior posts is emphasised by considering the proportion of single women qualifying at FLA level in conjunction with numbers removed from the register, for reasons other than death. Table 5.2 illustrates that around twice the number of women of ALA status were removed from the Register in both 1957 and 1959 in comparison to men. It also shows that very similar numbers of men and women of FLA status leave the profession. Thus, there were significantly

less women than men holding the senior professional qualification and hence in competition for senior posts in the labour market at any time. This is illustrated by comparing those holding the FLA qualification in tables 5.1 and 5.2. Here, the total number of women qualifying as FLA in 1959 was 13 and those already holding their FLA but leaving the profession was 12. Thus, the net gain result of this turnover was just one woman who was qualified at the most senior level. The failure to produce a year on year increase prevented the establishment of a pool of highly qualified women librarians who could compete for senior posts.⁷³ A survey carried out by Aslib in the mid-1950s found that Heads of Information/Library units were four times more likely to have a professional library qualification if they were men than if they were women.⁷⁴

Table 5.2: Removal from the Register of Chartered Librarians, By Qualification, Sex and Women's Marital Status⁷⁵

	ALA		FLA	
	1957	1959	1957	1959
Married Women	86	47	7	4
Unmarried Women	77	40	11	8
Men	69	38	21	13

As senior posts were more likely to be awarded to those with the most senior qualifications, the paucity of women holding those qualifications is significant in explaining the sexed composition of the library workforce: as noted above, few women held senior positions.⁷⁶ In this way, practices within professional education contributed to horizontal occupational segregation by sex in the library sector. This was explored in one of the focus groups:

- E But the qualification business was such that, as you say, there were a lot who came in from school and were very efficient at filing and putting books away but because they weren't doing exams, weren't doing Entrance or wanting to go to college they stuck -
- ? Yes true
- E - and very few of them started taking exams - you know they had gone too far as they were and stayed stuck. So it became stratified very early on.⁷⁷

The value of experiential training, noted above, is mitigated here by an awareness that failing to pursue professional education meant that women "stuck" in a post and

“stayed stuck” there, with little chance of promotion, thus ‘stratifying’ the profession. This stratification was encouraged by the acquisition of qualifications, and those who tended to pursue qualifications were disproportionately men.

Examinations also functioned to assert the claim that librarianship was a ‘real profession’. They did so in a number of ways, such as by delimiting suitable candidates for work in the sector. In the late 1890s, E.R. Norris Mathews discussed the gatekeeping function of entrance examinations for women candidates, as discussed above in Section 5.2. Such examinations both contained the amount of work for library staff in replying to the candidates, and established criteria on which to judge applications from “young women from various grades of the community” who included:

... ladies of uncertain age, desiring a genteel occupation and “thinking how much they would like to be in a library”; a few suffering from disappointment or bereavement; numberless letters, requiring an answer, from the clergy and Nonconformist ministers and others, requesting a position for their friends or relatives; daughters of parents “who had been ratepayers for upwards of so many years,” etc. One application was received from a young woman armed with credentials from a lady of title, in whose service *she had been employed as cook*, the young person being very highly recommended on account of her “fondness for reading”.⁷⁸

In a bid to establish itself as a profession, librarianship needed to be selective about its intake. It could not afford to jeopardise its claim to expert knowledge by recruiting people deemed unsuitable, such as former cooks. Minnie Stewart Rhodes James also suggested that examinations and training helped to dispel “the popular idea that anyone can be a librarian”,⁷⁹ and thus contributed to establishing the status of librarianship as a profession. Mizpah Gilbert, too, blamed “the employment of ignorant assistants” for the failure, in 1908, of public libraries to hold “the high position in the public mind that they ought to take.”⁸⁰ Similar ideas were discussed in the 1960s, when W.S. Haugh suggested that training should be used to create a labour market with sufficient numbers of qualified workers to prevent the appointment of

unqualified workers to qualified posts. In turn, this would preserve “the standard of librarianship” which was necessary if librarians were to persuade “library authorities, education authorities and the public that librarianship really is a profession.”⁸¹

The significance of examinations for the status of the profession was one of the factors which fuelled changes to the qualification route. Winifred Thorne explained:

WT Well I was a Fellow in 1929

EK Right - you were

WT I was one of the people who made the council realise that it wasn't any good having Fellows of the Library Association aged 22 or they wouldn't think much of us as a profession. You couldn't have a fully qualified person in a profession aged 22 it was much too young and so instead of being able to be FLA (Hons) if you wrote a thesis after you'd got your six exams, you had to - what was it - you had to do your six exams and your thesis before you could be a fully qualified librarian - that's why you don't see so many now.

EK I've been looking over the numbers of women and men who got the ALA and FLA [inaudible]

WT I don't know who the other people were who qualified young and caused the council to think, ah this is not going to work, if we are going to be a real profession we've got to have people who are really qualified and they can't be really qualified at 22, that type of age.

EK Right, so did you get any communication from the LA about this?

WT Oh no, I just heard that through father.⁸²

Winifred Thorne had successfully completed the six sectional certificates and thesis required by the LA to qualify for election as a Fellow, and she was duly elected. However, she suggests that the FLA “wasn't any good” in demonstrating the professional standing of librarianship, that it was “a real profession”, if it could be achieved by someone as young as 22. Her source of information for this analysis of the changes made to the qualifying route was informal. Her father, William B. Thorne,

was librarian of Poplar, president of the LAA (1906-9) and an Honorary Fellow of the LA. From this position he was party to privileged information. By increasing the minimum length of time in which it was possible to complete the FLA in order to protect the claim that librarianship was a “real profession”, the LA also made it less likely that women would successfully complete the qualification, which, in turn, encouraged horizontal occupational segregation.

In summary, training and education could have beneficial impacts for both workers, in increasing pay and opportunities, and libraries, by enhancing organisational effectiveness. However, the gatekeeping function of professional examinations in relation to senior posts meant that women, who were less likely than men to obtain their FLA, were also less likely to be in a position to compete for senior posts. In this way, professional education contributes to horizontal occupational segregation by sex. Professional examinations were also significant in establishing librarianship as a “real” profession. However, in ensuring that they fulfilled this function, the qualification route further disadvantaged women candidates.

5.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has illustrated that the binary relationship between the terms ‘training’ and ‘education’ is fundamentally gendered. It has been argued that four aspects - entrance examinations; special training for women workers; training for women working in temporary posts; and, the construction of education for men and training for women - played a significant part in gendering the two terms. Professional education is often associated with theoretical knowledge and men library workers, whilst vocational training is associated with the acquisition of practical skills and women workers. Whilst both types of knowledge are required in different aspects of library work, education was more highly rewarded in terms of pay and opportunities. Women’s limited success in obtaining professional qualifications, in comparison to men, contributed to the perpetuation of horizontal occupational segregation by sex within the sector. Professional education and training are key elements in the construction of a professional identity, and this is explored in the next chapter.

¹ An exception is Edwards who briefly acknowledges the impact of gender on training during the Second World War. See: Edwards, R.J. (1977) **In-Service Training in British Libraries: Its Development and Present Practice**, London, Library Association.

² See Chapter 2.

³ See Chapter 4.

⁴ Horizontal occupation segregation by sex is defined as a situation in which senior library posts are staffed, predominantly but not exclusively, by men, and the lower reaches are staffed disproportionately by women workers. See Chapter 2.

⁵ Edwards, ref. 1, p.2.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Berwick Sayers, W.C. and Coutts, H.T. (1911) Report on the Hours, Salaries, Training and Conditions of Service in British Municipal Libraries, *Library Assistant*, 8(161), p.122.

⁸ Ibid., p.130.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.131.

¹¹ Mathews, E. R. Norris. (1898) Female Library Assistants and Competitive Examination, in Brown, J.B., Garnett, R., MacAllister, J.Y.W. and Tedder, H.R. (eds) **Transactions and Proceedings of the Second International Librarians' Conference**, London, Library Association, p.41. Mathews paper was widely reported in the library press and in the regional press. Examples from the Western Daily Press, and the Clifton and Redland Free Press are included in: Library Cuttings, 1896-99, Bristol Public Library Archive.

¹² Mathews, Female Library Assistants, p.42.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ See Chapter 4.

¹⁵ McKenna, G. (ed) (1970) **Growth of Leeds City Libraries 1870-1970**, Leeds, Leeds City Libraries, p.27.

¹⁶ No Author. (1902) Women Librarians and Assistants, *Library World*, 5, p.10. See also: Manuscript Applications for Library Posts, Testimonials, Aptitude Tests etc. In: Library Archive, Islington Central Reference Library.

¹⁷ Manchester Public Libraries. Assistants in Branch Libraries - Examination of Candidates. In: Staff 1894-1915: Staff Examinations, Local Studies Unit, Manchester Central Library.

¹⁸ Memorandum from C.W. Sutton to Manchester Public Library Committee meeting 31st January 1907, Officials - Conditions of Service. In: Staff Grades, Conditions of Service, Chief Librarian. Foolsap Files, Staff 1894-1915, Local Studies Unit, Manchester Central Library.

¹⁹ No Author. (1898) A Library Examination, *Library Assistant* 4(1), p.44.

²⁰ Seymour Smith, F. (ed) (1932) **Report on the Hours, Salaries, Training and Conditions of Service in British Municipal Libraries. 1931**, London, Association of Assistant Librarians, p.17

²¹ McDermid, J. (1995) Women and Education, in Purvis, J. (ed) **Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945. An Introduction**, London, UCL, p.123.

²² Fenton, F.H. (1944) Training War-time Staff, *Library World*, 46(528), p.106.

²³ See: Hollis, P. (1979) **Women in Public. The Women's Movement 1850-1900**, London, Allen and Unwin; and, McDermid, ref. 21.

²⁴ Fenton, F.H. (1944) Training War-time Staff, *Library World*, 46(529), p.123.

²⁵ Richardson, Miss. (1894) Librarianship as a Profession for Women, *The Library*, 6, pp.137-42.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ No Author. (1925) Women Librarians. Educational Standards, *Daily Telegraph*, 8th August. In Press Cuttings 23rd May to 18th September 1925, Library Association Archive.

²⁹ Gilbert, M. (1908) The Education of the Library Assistant, *Library Assistant*, 6(121), p.53.

³⁰ No Author. Fellow and Associate, *Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Evening Telegraph*, 23rd October. See also: No Author. (1936) Keen Library Assistants, *Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Evening Telegraph*, 23rd October. Both items in: Press Cuttings 19th June to 31st October 1936, Library Association Archive.

³¹ Haugh, W.S. (1962) Recruitment and Training of Librarians, *Library Association Record*, 64(7), pp.240-6. Marital status is discussed further in Chapter 6.

³² Ibid., p.242.

- ³³ Ibid., p.245.
- ³⁴ Ibid., p.246.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Equality and difference are discussed further in Chapter 7.
- ³⁷ Gilbert, ref. 29, p.52.
- ³⁸ Ibid., pp.52-3.
- ³⁹ Essentialism is defined in Chapter 2.
- ⁴⁰ Baker, L. (1983) **The Story of Luton and its Public Libraries**, Luton, Bedfordshire County Library, p.41.
- ⁴¹ H.E.L.A. (1917) Our Small Difficulties: A Note on the Training of the Temporary Assistant, *Library World*, 19(228), pp.320-1.
- ⁴² Savage, E.A. (1916) Examinations in War Time, *Library World*, 18(211), pp.223-4.
- ⁴³ See Russell, D.C. (1997) 'Our Special Province': Providing a Library Service for London's Public Shelters, 1940-42, *Library History*, 13, pp.3-15.
- ⁴⁴ Fenton, ref. 22, pp.106-8, and, Fenton, ref. 24, pp.122-5.
- ⁴⁵ Fenton, ref. 22, p.107.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Fenton, ref. 24, p.123.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ Fenton, ref. 22, p.106.
- ⁵⁰ Fenton, ref. 24, p.124.
- ⁵¹ Interview with women members of the Library Association Retired Members Guild, 12th January 1998.
- ⁵² Interview with Rita Keegan, 6th February 1998.
- ⁵³ Potter, J. and Wetherell, M. (1987) **Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour**, London, Sage, pp.47-8.
- ⁵⁴ Interview with Rita Keegan, 6th February 1998.
- ⁵⁵ Walkerdine, V. (1990) **The Mastery of Reason. Cognitive Development and the Production of Rationality**, London, Routledge, pp.208-9.
- ⁵⁶ Many libraries described set procedures in their library manual. For example, Fenton, refs. 22 and 24, bemoans the lack of a library manual when faced with large numbers of new members of staff.
- ⁵⁷ Letter from R. Offor to A.E. Wheeler, dated 16th September 1933. In: Documents Volume 3, Brotherton Library Special Collections, Leeds University Library.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ⁵⁹ Interview with Ken Stockham, 25th February 1998.
- ⁶⁰ Dippie, R.A. (1947) The Education of Future Entrants to the Library Profession: The Chairman of a Libraries Committee Point of View. In Library Association, **Papers and Summaries of Discussions at the Brighton Conference of the Library Association**, London, Library Association.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., p.77.
- ⁶² Horrocks, S.H. (1947) The Education of Future Entrants to the Library Profession: The Assistant's Point of View, in Library Association. **Papers and Summaries of Discussions at the Brighton Conference of the Library Association**, London, Library Association, p.78. Library schools initially privileged applications from ex-service men and women, rather than war work on the 'home front', such as that carried out by women in libraries.
- ⁶³ The establishment of library schools is discussed further in Chapter 6.
- ⁶⁴ Interview with Eileen Colwell, 22nd April 1997.
- ⁶⁵ Interview with Lorna Paulin, 9th October 1997.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid.
- ⁶⁷ No Author. Note: HQ Staff, attached to papers in the County Librarian's Report for the meeting on 11th February 1949 of the Derbyshire County Library Minor Committee. In Minute Book 1949, Derbyshire County Council, Derbyshire Record Office.
- ⁶⁸ No Author. (No date.) The L.A. Examinations. In: Library Letters, 1st April 1930 to December 1932, Derby Local Studies Library.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid.
- ⁷⁰ Enser, A.G.S. (1948) Shall the Misses be the Masters, *Library Association Record*, 5(50), pp.124-5. 'Overfeminization' is discussed further in Chapter 6.
- ⁷¹ Layzell Ward, P. (1966) **Women and Librarianship**, London, Library Association, Table 2.
- ⁷² Ibid., Table 7.

⁷³ Marital status and professional qualifications are discussed further in Chapter 6 and in Liladhar, J. and Kerslake, E. (1999) No More Library Classes for Catherine: Marital Status, Career Progression and Library Employment in 1950s England, *Women's Studies International Forum*, 22(2), pp.215-224.

⁷⁴ Aslib. (1960) **Survey of Information/Library Units in Industrial and Commercial Organisations**, London, Aslib.

⁷⁵ Source: Layzell Ward, ref. 71, Table 9.

⁷⁶ See Chapter 3.

⁷⁷ Interview with women members of the Library Association Retired Members Guild, 12th January 1998.

⁷⁸ Mathews, ref. 11, p.42. Original emphasis.

⁷⁹ James, M.S.R. (1892) A Plan for Providing Technical Instruction for Library Students and Assistants, *The Library*, 4, pp.313-8.

⁸⁰ Gilbert, ref. 29.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Interview with Winifred Thorne 20th May 1998.

Chapter 6. Bookish Workers? Gender, Professionalism, Identity and Pay

6.1 Introduction

Throughout the 20th century, professional education has been the key factor enabling library workers to move through the occupational ranks from junior unqualified positions to professional posts. It has been argued that professional education, such as library education, not only equips individuals with the skills to gain entry to an occupation but also has a significant impact on identity. Beverley Skeggs suggests, in relation to caring work, that formal education is able to do this because the curriculum establishes hierarchical relations between different types of knowledge.¹ This structuring differently (and negatively) values knowledge seen as 'practical', in comparison with that understood as 'academic'. From this starting point, those students associated with the 'academic' curricula are differently positioned in comparison to those associated with the 'practical'. In Skeggs' example, as well as in the previous chapter, those students associated with 'practical' knowledge were predominantly women. In this way, Skeggs argues, formal education is one of the gendered processes contributing to ways that individuals understand themselves in relation to paid employment. Further interconnected factors impacting on understandings of what it meant to be a professional librarian and what professionalism entailed are discussed here. Access to these understandings was significant because workers who could legitimise themselves as 'professional' workers stood to benefit most, particularly in economic terms, from their paid employment.

This chapter outlines concepts that have been used to understand a sense of self. Trait and role model theories of identity are considered and exemplars of their usage in librarianship are discussed. It has been argued that such theoretical concepts of the self are flawed and that the contradictory aspects of identity are more fully accommodated by a discursive theory of the self. This is considered in a discussion of the connections between professionalism and identity and it is further argued that these are differently gendered for men and women workers. Access to professional identities is discussed in relation to the historiographical omission of women

educators from accounts of the development of library education. The intersection of gender and professionalism is further considered in relation to the construction of women workers as deficient in comparison to men workers and injurious to the sector: in various ways, therefore, women workers, unlike men, were understood as problematic. The chapter concludes by considering the impact of gendered understandings of professional identity on salaries by outlining debates about sex differentiated pay and the gradual implementation from the 1950s of equal pay.

6.2 Professionalism and Identity

Alison Oram's work on women teachers suggests that an individual's identity or understanding of their self as a professional worker is enhanced by membership of a professional association. Often this is because membership is open only to professionally qualified workers.² Professional associations are concerned with the establishment and maintenance of the professional standing of their members. They are, Oram suggests, centrally concerned both with protecting their members' interests and further professionalising the occupation. They are interested in the professionals' own status, as indicated by pay, conditions of work, autonomy in work and entry to the profession, and also, often in the name of the clients' interests, professional associations are concerned with promoting on-going upgrading of skills and professional knowledge which contributes to further professionalisation. Membership of professional associations, therefore, plays a number of key roles in understanding oneself as a professional worker and member of a professional group.

In performing these roles, professional associations also develop the concept of professionalism. This has been understood as a status achieved by an occupation's gradual acquisition of professional traits, such as professional education and autonomy in one's work. More recently, however, it has been argued that professionalism is a "process rather than an all-or-nothing category".³ This process involves controlling access to the occupation via professional education and membership of professional associations. At the end of the 19th century, such control mechanisms functioned as exclusionary processes framed around gender. This is seen, for example, in the struggle by women to participate in the medical and legal

professions.⁴ Education for these professions was based in academia which explicitly excluded and discriminated against women until 1948.⁵ Although it was sometimes argued that women *per se* should not be allowed to become doctors, it was also argued that women lacked the requisite education to permit membership of the profession, thus minimising the necessity to justify access to the professions in gendered terms. Concepts of professionalism might construct it either as a status achieved through, amongst other facts, successful completion of professional education, or as a process which privileged some individuals rather than others. Both concepts contributed to understandings of being a professional worker, in this case a librarian, and what might constitute that professional identity.

6.3 Identity, Gender and Professional Library Workers

Identity has been understood as the way in which people define themselves and their place in the world, either individually or as members of particular groups. A number of explanatory frameworks have been suggested by psychologists for understanding identity and these include trait theory, role model theory and language-based constructions of the self. These are explored in relation to library workers.

6.3.1 “The Librarian as a ‘Type’”⁶

... I have had to ... face the solid fact that librarianship has produced a “type” of person as surely as have the teaching, medical and begging professions, country house, stock exchange, theatre or tea-shop.⁷

Dora McLardy’s reluctance to face “the solid fact” of the librarian type was based on traits outlined in a light-hearted article for *Manchester Librarian*. Firstly, she suggests that “the most pronounced” trait in library workers is “dignity”. This characteristic is inherent in senior library workers but junior workers (men and women) only emulate this characteristic, until “with advancing years” they, too, become “dignity personified”.⁸ McLardy suggests that such dignity is achieved despite the type of work juniors perform and she highlights the “severe test” to preserving dignity when answering borrower’s requests whilst dusting “with dust-grimed face and often, alas, a

smudgy face”.⁹ The second “important recognisable” trait in library workers, she suggests, is superiority based on the library worker’s function as mediator between library resources and users.¹⁰ McLardy concludes that she is “appalled by the figure this enquiry has brought to light”, but suggests that the librarian should:

... infuse both these qualities, excellent in themselves, with the most effective of all - the one which is his by natural inheritance - personality. A fine personality will transform dignity into a telling force ... will mark the superiority as something not altogether ‘show’, but an attitude amply justified by solid worth.¹¹

McLardy’s ‘librarianly’ characteristics draw on both trait and role model theories of identity. These widely used explanations of identity formation processes are based on psychological work. Trait theory:

... sees the person as consisting of measurable personality traits, abilities and attributes. Traits may be either superficial or deeply rooted, constitutionally inherent or the result of child rearing ...¹²

This approach has been criticised because it assumes a fixed personality with characteristics which remain constant over time. In their overview of psychological approaches to the self, Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell suggest that trait theory is a highly individualistic way of thinking about the self which does not explore ways that individuals are also social beings.¹³ A further approach - role theory - does engage with the social aspects of the individual. It suggests that individuals, who have their own personalities, are also social beings who have different parts to play in society, such as librarians, mothers, film-stars etc. Role theory suggests a tension between the individual and the social which is reconciled by the individual taking on social roles, behind which lies their ‘real’ personality. Roles and individuals exist independently of each other, and are brought together when roles are performed by the social individual.¹⁴ McLardy’s construction of the librarian “type” suggests that being a librarian is simultaneously based on inherent traits and acquired social roles. It is, she writes, something that is learnt, as dignity is acquired with age or experience.

Yet dignity is also connected with inherent traits as it is the individual's personality which "will transform" dignity and "will mark the superiority as something not altogether 'show'". Blends of trait and role model theories can be found in constructions of library workers in career guides and career advice columns in popular girls' and women's magazines.

6.3.2 "Scope For Her Personality and Organising Powers":¹⁵ Career Guidance About Library Work

Many career guides between 1871 and 1974 were aimed specifically at women and girls.¹⁶ Additionally there were career advice columns in women's and girls' magazines. Whilst there were some texts offering career information to boys,¹⁷ there were far less than were available to girls and one's advocating library work for boys and men have not been identified. Both career guides and advice columns aimed at women and girl readers construct similar types of women as those best suited to library work. In an 1895 anthology of articles based on career advice given in the women's magazine *Queen*, Margaret Bateson suggested that "a few young women of the right sort" might usefully be employed in the library sector. Bateson's article on librarianship featured an interview with Minnie Stewart Rhodes James, librarian at the People's Palace, London, in which James stressed that librarianship might be an interesting career for "suitable women", by whom she meant women who were "highly educated", had "literary tastes" and had "in some degree, the kind of capacity that is wanted in running a business successfully."¹⁸ Women's and girls' access to education had significantly improved since the mid-19th century, however, access to higher education remained available only to a few economically privileged women.¹⁹ In this way, class identities contributed to understandings of what it was to be a library worker. Similar markers of class are found in *The Fingerpost*, a long-running career guide for women and girls. In 1919, it advised that, "The library profession is eminently suited to girls and women of good education and a literary inclination."²⁰ The 1914 edition of *The Fingerpost* elaborated on the type of education needed saying that involved:

... a good general education with a sound knowledge, if possible, of French, German and Latin. The more extensive and accurate her knowledge of History and Literature, Ancient and Modern, the more efficient she will be in her work ... in general we may say that the highest qualifications are not too high for really good Librarians.²¹

The range of the curriculum and duration of education outlined here is a further indication that a “good general education” is one involving study beyond minimum schooling requirements, which until 1918 only included elementary school. Other schooling was usually fee-based and mainly available to middle class women and girls.²² The encouragement of ‘suitable’ women workers with a ‘good general education’ into the library workforce may be understood as attempts to construct a class-specific identity for library workers. A similar class-based identity underlies references to the positive “influence” women library workers might be able to exert over “a public whose taste in literature is non-existent”.²³

The class-specific identity was, however, modified by claims that “the ordinary middle-class girl with nothing more than the average high school education” was fit only to “scrub the floors or dust the shelves in the capacity of charwoman” unless she also possessed certain “personal characteristics”.²⁴ Career guides articulated these qualities, emphasising the need for them to be developed by professional training and education. These articles answer Lionel McColvin’s question: “For what type of girl is public library work suitable?”²⁵ Responses stressed the need for certain ‘personal’ traits and particular ways of working. The suitable feminine personality for library work, according to career guide writers, was remarkably consistent over the century from 1871. In 1903, this worker was described as needing, “A quick intelligence, methodical habits, punctuality, accuracy ...”²⁶ Around 1910, A.R. Hutchinson made similar suggestions, writing that the “inherent qualities of neatness and orderliness, legible handwriting” were particularly important for women library workers.²⁷ A ‘quick intelligence’ was again stressed in career guides published in 1935, 1951 and throughout the 1960s.²⁸ Allied qualities of attention to detail, concentration, patience and a good memory were also repeatedly emphasised.²⁹

The 'suitable' feminine personality for library work is constructed through a meshing of trait and role model theories of identity as a woman in control of herself: she is neat, orderly, punctual, has an ordered mind, is clear-headed and writes legibly. This controlled woman is the antithesis of understandings of women as physiologically and sexually disordered and disorderly and who promotes chaos and disorder.³⁰ Connected to this controlled feminine identity, the woman library worker was also expected to be able to control others. In 1927, Kate Pierce noted that a woman assistant "must have tact and sympathy" to qualify her to work with a variety of people (once she had been professionally trained, of course).³¹ Similar qualities - tact, curiosity about others, sympathy for children, and a willingness to serve others - were highlighted in career guides over the period in question.³² The control that woman library workers were expected to exert was based not on any authoritative or physical control over users, but rather on their understanding of others' needs and empathy for other people's situation. The type of women deemed by these writers as most appropriate for library work corresponds, in many ways, with the constructions of library work discussed in Chapter 4. The library sector was understood as requiring workers who had domestic skills, were good service workers, capable of pursuing mainly routine tasks. The personal traits associated with women which were valorised to a great extent mirrored these demands, so that those women who were 'suitable' for library work were intelligent, neat, orderly, patient and had high powers of concentration and a good memory. These traits had preferably been embellished by a middle-class education, yet even this combination of natural traits and educational nurture did not preclude the need for professional education.

There was, then, some consensus between 1900 and 1970 about many of the traits required in women library workers, and the need for further professional training to transform these traits into professional skills. One characteristic was contested, however. Many of the earlier writers emphasise that women library workers needed to have "a genuine love of books",³³ that they should be "bookish"³⁴ and "very fond of books",³⁵ and, that "a ready sympathy with books and reading were essential."³⁶ Yet this quality was sometimes played down. One entry in a careers guide read:

A love of books is necessary, but it has become almost a truism now to say to aspiring librarians that an interest in books for their own sakes is one of the least important qualifications for the profession; the devotion required is not so much for books in themselves - that is more the characteristic of the scholar - but a fondness for books ... as a means of satisfying the human need for information, education or recreation.³⁷

Lionel McColvin, then chief of Hampstead public libraries and Honorary Secretary of the LA, made the same point more forcefully in this³⁸ and later editions of the same career guide, writing that librarianship, "... is not in any way a suitable career for the "bookish" quiet, self-centred person ..."³⁹ Bookish-ness, which had been posited as a key trait for library workers, is dismissed in these comments. This suggests that at least some of the personality traits required for library work were arbitrary, thus mitigating against the conception of identity proposed by trait theory.

Harriette Marshall and Margaret Wetherell on gender, identity and the legal profession argue, however, that identity is better understood by focusing, not on traits or roles, but on discourses used when talking or writing about the self. This approach to identity argues that writing about being a librarian, for example, does not reflect what a librarian is really like, but rather brings a version of what it is to be a librarian into being.⁴⁰ This account of identity is not the only possible version and it may be challenged, even by the same person. Identity is understood in this framework as ambivalent, changing, contradictory and fragmented. There is no 'real' self, but rather multiple accounts of one's identity. In constructing this self, speakers or authors may draw on existing psychological approaches to identity. Discursive identity theory considers, for example, trait and role model constructions of identity as "interpretative resources"⁴¹ which speakers and authors use to produce an account of their self. This model, therefore, accommodates change and contradiction in the traits required in library workers. Furthermore, it accommodates the use of traits without insisting that traits are absolute and unchanging. Being a professional library worker is not, then, confined to individuals with 'librarianly' traits, but rather is associated with the ability to produce legitimate accounts of the self as a library worker. This ability is facilitated

or confined by the extent to which individual workers understood themselves as members of the profession, or occupational group, of librarianship.

6.4 Doing Professionalism

Women library workers were active in many aspects of librarianship which were valued as professional activities, and as such, they could construct identities as professional workers. For example, as noted above, women successfully pursued professional qualifications so that they might be elected to the LA's Register of qualified librarians.⁴² Women workers also joined the LA in significant numbers (see Table 6.1).⁴³ This section outlines women workers' participation in professional activities.

Table 6.1: Personal Membership of the UK LA by Sex⁴⁴

Year	Women	Men	Total personal membership
1937	2,205 (51%)	2,141 (49%)	4,346
1948	4,047* (61%)	2,719 (39%)	6,766
1953	6,107 (61%)	3,935 (39%)	10,042
1958	6,367 (59%)	4,434 (41%)	10,801
1963	7,781 (60%)	5,153 (40%)	12,934

* The figure which appears in Layzell Ward's report (6,766) would appear to be incorrect in the original table and has been amended here according to her commentary on the figures.

Women were active throughout the professional associations during the 20th century, including in some senior and highly visible capacities.⁴⁵ For example, Kate Pierce was president of the North Midland Branch of the LA, first in 1914, and again in 1934 and 1935,⁴⁶ and Edith Ditmas was Secretary and Director of Aslib between 1933-49. Lorna Paulin outlined her wide ranging activities within the LA:

I was much involved in it from quite an early stage. First of all through the County Library Section, as we had then, and then I became a representative of that on the LA Council and I was on the LA Council certainly in 1950 because that was when the Duke of Edinburgh was President of the LA, and I was on various committees ... I was on the [county libraries'] committee, I was Secretary for a while ... and it was rather good. Then at one time I was put on the Executive Committee and I became chairman of that. I was never chairman

of the council ... for years I was on the Education Committee of the LA, and then became chairman of that ...⁴⁷

Only rarely did the paucity of women in senior library posts draw media comment,⁴⁸ yet the professional press avidly announced the 'first woman' to occupy certain positions. The media attention to the first woman president of the LA, elected in 1966, followed this trend.⁴⁹ Lorna Paulin's presidential address, printed in the *Record* in 1966, begins by acknowledging the debt she and the profession owe to women workers, and her personal debt to the founder of both Kent and Gloucestershire county systems, Nancy Cooke.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, the *Record* offered reassurance, as if it were needed, that the LA was "in capable hands" under Lorna Paulin's leadership.⁵¹ In comparison, the election of Ethel Gerard as the first woman president of the LAA in 1918, was scarcely commented upon, except briefly by Gerard in her presidential address.⁵² However, contemporaneously there is a further example of the scrutiny of women in the sector. A dispute lasting some weeks occurred on the letters' page of the *Observer* newspaper over a claim that a recent appointment at Chertsey heralded the first woman chief public librarian.⁵³ The *Record* stepped in to authoritatively denounce this as a "quaint claim" indeed.⁵⁴ It identified Hannah Eteson, appointed librarian at Blackpool in 1880, as the first woman to be appointed chief public librarian in England. The 'first woman' texts perform two functions: they simultaneously acknowledge that women are active in the profession and they emphasise the novelty of women's presence, thereby contributing to understandings of women as novelty, rather than 'real', workers. In doing so, women are positioned as Other to normative men workers.⁵⁵

Women workers also participated in professional development activities such as conferences and day schools. For example, Winifred Thorne said that when she first attended conferences in the late 1920s, she was given "special leave with pay" to attend, but paid her own expenses.⁵⁶ She explained the benefits of attending:

Well, fellowship with other librarians which in a way was important to me because I had to have contact with other librarians who needed information about India which they - which they hadn't got in their own libraries and came

to me to get it or to lend them the books that their students wanted. And generally to keep myself abreast about what was happening in the library world. Although being in a highly specialised library like that [at the India High Commission] I was cut off from the ordinary everyday events of librarianship which after all during most of my time were mainly public libraries.⁵⁷

Conference attendance fulfilled two important roles for Winifred Thorne: it provided her with a rare opportunity for “fellowship with other librarians” and allowed her to “keep ... abreast” of current library affairs. Participation in this type of event was, however, more available to some library workers, as the discussion with men librarians illustrates:

EK Did people here go to conferences?

? o yes [inaudible]

A There were conferences and there were lots and lots of day schools and that was one of the great things in the [Region] which had lots of these things going on and that - we'd be trolling off here and there, [inaudible] but it was all part of our learning process. [inaudible]

? If you didn't profess any desire to become professional you didn't go on the day trips and so on⁵⁸

As discussed elsewhere,⁵⁹ proportionately more men than women were likely to attempt “to become professional” - perhaps because women recruits did not have the basic entry requirements to study for library qualifications or because it was compulsory, in some services, for men workers to pursue qualifications. Given this, attendance at day schools and conferences and an associated understanding of the self as a professional were more available to men than women.

Librarians who participated in worker exchanges were in a position to develop their professional skills and experience. For example, during the time that she worked in Coventry public libraries, Evelyn Evans participated in an exchange with a US library:

Well I worked in the cataloguing department for quite a long time and as I had never been in the cataloguing department in England it was quite useful, but eventually I said, 'Can I work with the public?' which was my forte really, and they put me up in the reference library which was quite good and I went to the America Library Association conference which was in Denver and met people. But I was quite appalled because this was in 1935 and they had had this terrible depression and some of the libraries hadn't had books for some time and the staff had more or less not been paid and I was quite amazed at the state of things there. But it was very useful and I talked about British libraries and regional library systems and when I came back I gave one or two talks about American libraries here. Was it useful? Well anything that extends your range of vision is useful, isn't it?⁶⁰

Jennifer Shepherd similarly described her "internship" in Toronto as "a terrific opportunity".⁶¹ Work exchanges were popularly promoted as suitable for women workers by, for example, the career novel *Molly Qualifies as a Librarian* which discusses the possibility that Molly might work in a US library.⁶² Not all exchanges went smoothly, however. For example, Joy Gough worked in Rochester City Library in the US in 1949 with the agreement of her boss, Charles Nowell, chief librarian at Manchester public libraries. Whilst there, however, "the Establishment committee ... over-ruled Charles Nowell & the Libraries Committee and I was forced to resign."⁶³ Although she was re-appointed by Nowell on her return to Manchester, her employment position was, for a while, uncertain.

Women library workers were involved in various ways in the professional associations and in professional activities. They were members of professional associations and were represented at all levels of these organisational hierarchies; and, they participated in professional education, exchange programmes, conferences and day schools. One further marker of professionalism - being library educators - is explored below.

6.4.1 *Library Educators*

If participation in professional associations and professional education was a key marker of professionalism, then those workers teaching within professional education must be understood as notable professionals. For this reason, the paucity of women library educators, particularly within historical accounts of the development of library education, is significant as it detracts from the claim that women were fully-rounded professionals, active in all aspects of professional life. This section does not attempt to trace exhaustively the part women have played as library educators; this is a subject requiring thorough research in its own right.⁶⁴ Rather, it highlights three examples of women who were instrumental in developing innovative educational practices.

Many historians of library education⁶⁵ have noted that Minnie Stewart Rhodes James⁶⁶ participated in debates about library education in the late 19th century.⁶⁷ Her work, however, is not represented as a significant contribution to the subject and is only fleetingly discussed, despite the impact of her suggestions. Alan Clarke's exploration of James' life, does recognise her work on education, describing her as "a pioneer spokesman [sic] for the training of library assistants".⁶⁸ Her suggestions, first made in the early 1890s, that the way forward for librarianship had to include formalised education accompanied by practical experience, justify this claim. In *The Library* in 1892 she impressed on her readers that, "The matter of training of is great moment."⁶⁹ Her critique of the existing library education was accompanied by a number of remedies which included correspondence courses, coaching in special subjects in various libraries, and, of course, preparing for and taking the LA examinations. She also stressed the importance of non-curricula activities such as reading profession journals and visiting libraries.⁷⁰ James' most extensive articulation of the difficulties and remedies in library education was published later in the same volume of *The Library*.⁷¹ Having suggested that there was widespread agreement that "training is not only a good thing, but essential",⁷² she made ten detailed proposals.⁷³ These included the establishment of "a course or courses of theoretical and practical lectures in the winter session on technical and intellectual matters bearing on library management"; and a greater role for the LA in negotiating, for student members,

discounted tuition fees and access to academic libraries to study these library systems and their stock. James also emphasised that students needed access to technical books and “specimens of appliances, books, forms, model catalogues in all stages of compilation, with a collection of Reports, Acts, and By Laws ...” In contributing to the debates about training and education, highlighting difficulties and resolutions decades before they were enacted, James contributed significantly in shaping library education.

A sometime colleague of Minnie James was Mary Petherbridge.⁷⁴ Her major contribution to library education appears in early proposals for a UK library school.⁷⁵ Petherbridge’s enthusiasm for this project may have arisen because she herself was well-educated, having attended the North London Collegiate School and read natural sciences at Newnham College, Cambridge. Furthermore, by the time of her article, she had been able to compare the *ad hoc* apprentice system of training in the UK with the more formalised US system because she had been an unpaid pupil in Liverpool public libraries and attended library school at New York State University.⁷⁶ Her ideas about the need for a UK school were discussed at the 1894 LA conference. After outlining the benefits of Melvil Dewey’s school, she suggested that the UK profession would benefit from a similar institution. She argued that the apprentice system was outmoded and the expected expansion of public libraries demanded a general re-appraisal of the system of training librarians. She noted the disadvantages of the apprentice system, primarily the time required “to get even the groundings of a good librarian”,⁷⁷ and that training based in one library “is but a limited school” and “affords comparatively little scope”. She suggested that the US library students benefited from exposure to a range of methods of working and discussion of new ideas. Petherbridge concluded by discussing the location for a UK library school and briefly considered Newnham College, but then rejected it as, “this suggests ‘women only’”.⁷⁸ Instead, Petherbridge suggested that University College, London (UCL) might be a suitable venue. Her discussions of the viability of and need for a library school, not only in her published papers, but also elsewhere,⁷⁹ are important contributions to the eventual establishment, in 1902, of the classes at the London School for Economics and, later the library school at UCL.⁸⁰

The final contributor to library education considered here is Ethel Fegan. Whilst the consternation about the need for a non-gender specific library school had been resolved by the time she obtained her first paid post as a librarian in 1908 at Cheltenham Ladies College, one year later Fegan began the school's Library Training Class⁸¹ - and as the school was for girls only, so was the Training Class. Fegan later described the class to the Mistress of Girton College, Katherine Jex-Blake:

Part of my work at Cheltenham was the training of girls in Library work and for the 8 or 9 years that the course lasted, I had about 50 girls through my hands and we were singularly fortunate in finding posts for all of those - the majority of them - who wanted work.⁸²

The one year course included lectures on library administration, routine cataloguing and classification and elements of bibliography, with further subjects, such as languages, taught by other members of staff.⁸³ Furthermore, library students helped with the practical work of running the College library and visited libraries, printing mills and binding establishments. The library classes were a success, with students obtaining posts in academic and public libraries throughout the UK, and, more notably, with requests from libraries for students to fill vacancies.⁸⁴

Whilst still at Cheltenham, Fegan was appointed "conductor" of the LA's correspondence class in cataloguing,⁸⁵ and it was in this capacity that she commented on professional training in the *Library Association Record* in 1911.⁸⁶ Her paper echoes many of the points raised by Minnie James and Mary Petherbridge: the need for "theoretical training", the difficulty of effectively pursuing professional education whilst working, the lack of resources for students, the need for degree level education in librarianship and for library classes throughout the UK. After the First World War, whilst librarian at Girton, Fegan began discussions with Katherine Jex-Blake about the possibility of establishing a library class, similar to the one at Cheltenham. She outlined a "little scheme for a short course in library work" which would last for four weeks and involve four lectures each week - one general introductory lecture on library routine, furniture, fittings, bibliography, one on classification and two on cataloguing. It would also involve practical work at Girton, at the Cambridge

Antiquarian Society Library (where Fegan also worked) and at Newnham College. Students would be expected to produce two papers each week and to pursue private reading using the Librarian's library. There would also be visits to places such as Cambridge University Library and Press. The cost of the courses was set at 35/- week for accommodation and 30/- for tuition, and, as at Cheltenham, some of the money generated would benefit the library. Fegan enthused about the course:

I think I could make the course worth coming for, and it occurred to me that besides using the class here and at the Cambridge Antiquarian Society Library, I might let Miss Fletcher [librarian at Newnham College] know that they were available for further practice, in case she might be glad of their services. The more practical work of various kinds they could get, the better for them.⁸⁷

Despite the enthusiasm, the lack of further records indicates that the plans were not implemented.

The contributions to library education by Minnie James, Mary Petherbridge and Ethel Fegan were, in their various ways, significant if judged by the criteria that they added to the professional status of librarianship. Library educators are in a position to define, within the constraints of the LA and their colleagues, the requirements and standards of the profession and are involved in defining the nature of librarianship. Library historians, as noted above,⁸⁸ have attempted to use historical work to establish librarianship as a 'real' profession. One way in which this project is furthered is by focusing on the actions of 'great' men library educators, who have steered the development of librarianship towards the acquisition of the requisite occupational traits for acceptance as a profession. One such trait is the establishment of higher education apparatus for the delivery of professional education, i.e. the establishment of a library school. Existing historical work has explored in detail the establishment of the first library school at the London School of Economics in 1902. Yet, despite noting Mary Petherbridge's suggestion that a women's college could have housed such a school,⁸⁹ there has been no exploration of the women-only courses which were established just seven years later at Cheltenham Ladies College. Ethel Fegan's courses have been, not so much 'hidden from history',⁹⁰ as erased from it.

The above account of women librarians' contribution to library education, like the accounts of participation in professional associations, conferences and exchange programmes noted above, not only re-positions these women as central to this professionalising narrative, but also claims that women were pursuing professional activities at all levels, not only in junior or less valued posts. As such, women might understand themselves as true professionals within librarianship. Yet despite this women were frequently understood as only imperfect professionals.

6.5 Unprofessional Professionals

Throughout the period, two significant factors mitigated against understandings of women as professional library workers: they were constructed as problematic workers and, furthermore, they were charged with not playing a full part in professional activities. Both aspects are interconnected, however, they are explored separately here.

6.5.1 *Problem Workers*

Women were constructed as problematic workers in two central ways. Firstly, they were understood as problematic *in themselves* as they were constructed as workers who required special managerial control; this was connected with the conception of women as 'different' workers to men. Additionally, women were understood as problematic *for the sector* because of 'over-feminisation'.

An early indication that women workers were problematic in ways that did not apply to men is exemplified in entry requirements at Bristol public libraries. The employment opportunities for women at Bristol in the late 19th century⁹¹ might indicate that it welcomed women workers, however, the library managers and committee also felt it necessary to implement both entrance examinations⁹² and graduated staff posts for women employees. In 1896, the library committee minutes record that:

In future the staff [of women employees] will be graduated according to the following scale: - Junior Assistants, Senior Assistants, Branch Sub-Librarians, Branch Librarians.⁹³

E.R.N. Mathews, Bristol librarian, explained this to the second International Library Conference in 1897 saying that:

It was felt that for the better regulation of the staff at Bristol it would be well that every assistant employed in the libraries should have her relative position on the staff assigned. That in fact a distinction should be made between the grade of a "junior assistant" entering the library service as a beginner to place herself in training for the work; and that of a senior, who may have acquired experience and some degree of proficiency in librarianship, beyond the mere initiative routine of giving out books.⁹⁴

Mathews does not explain why it was felt necessary to regulate or manage the staff positions of women and not to apply similar regulations to men workers. Even during the late 19th century when 'boy assistants' were regularly understood as problematic workers, similar regulatory mechanisms were not suggested.⁹⁵ It is clear, however, that in implementing entrance examinations to control women's admission to employment and in establishing staffing regulations to define their position once employed both the librarian and the library committee felt it necessary to regulate women workers to a significant extent. Women workers are constructed as requiring managerial attention: they become yet another task for library managers, adding to problems about stock control, budgets and correct classification, rather than being a solution to the 'problem' of effectively and efficiently operating a library. The need to manage women may be partly explained by considering ways in which women were understood as performing different roles in the library sector, in comparison to men. For example, as noted above,⁹⁶ particularly during wartime women were understood to be temporary library workers, there for the duration of the emergency, rather than permanent workers. The concept of women as temporary workers was on-going throughout the period because of the widespread expectation that women resigned on marriage.⁹⁷ A further example is those women who, throughout the period, performed

library work on a voluntary basis. Women volunteers were instrumental to the establishment of the county library services.⁹⁸ Similarly, the establishment of hospital library services in Kettering benefited from the voluntary work of women who had, before their respective marriages, worked with Kate Pierce in the municipal library.⁹⁹ The different employment status of voluntary or temporary women workers legitimised their construction as ‘different’ workers and the different treatment they received from library employers in comparison to the ways that permanently employed library workers were treated.¹⁰⁰

It is not possible, however, to apply such clear cut gender distinctions to “The Problem of the Junior Assistant”¹⁰¹ - a subject debated in earnest in 1913. Junior assistants consisted of men and women in permanent posts and so were not marked as ‘different’ by their employment status. Yet, like women workers, junior assistants were repeatedly constructed by library managers as problematic for two central reasons. Firstly, there was no agreed definition of who or what constituted junior assistants: it was unclear whether a post was designated “junior” because of the age and inexperience of the post-holder, or because of the “mechanical, unintellectual” tasks the post-holder performed for a low salary.¹⁰² Additionally, there was understood to be a “congestion of labour”¹⁰³ among the ranks of junior assistants where opportunities for promotion and financial increases were slim. This lack of prospects was posited as a principal factor deterring men from entering librarianship. Furthermore, in 1913 an increasing proportion of those holding junior assistant posts were women and the problematic junior assistant represented a convergence of two managerial ‘problems’.

Despite this convergence, neither women nor juniors were always understood as problematic. In a reply to the debate over the summer of 1913, Arthur Webb of Brighton public library suggested two “practicable remedies”. Firstly, anticipating calls for a professional/paraprofessional divide in the sector, he suggested that it was “absurd to insist on juniors qualifying themselves” when only few went on to professional posts. Webb also linked this point with the sector’s need for routine workers and suggested that women workers might resolve the difficulty:

With regard to the entrance of girls into the profession, this is a factor which, to some appreciable extent, reduces the acuteness of the “problem”, in that many girls enter libraries ... simply as a means of obtaining a living until the time when they shall enter the bonds of matrimony.¹⁰⁴

Webb’s analysis is echoed in recent work on the feminisation of professions which has suggested that feminisation was necessary to maintain existing class and gender power relations as the routine work which accompanied expansion proliferated. Ellen Jordan’s work on women insurance clerks illustrates that the expansion of routine work jeopardised the promotion opportunities of men appointed through patronage, and so devalued patronage. Preserving the patronage system necessitated the creation of an “unpromotable category of clerk.”¹⁰⁵ Far from being problematic, Jordan suggests the introduction of women clerks in the insurance sector was an ‘answer’ to this male-defined problem. Webb’s letter indicates that a similar understanding of the function of women workers was also available in the library sector.

Women workers were problematic for the library profession not only because they were constructed as a managerial difficulty, but also because of the impact they were said to have on the sector. A.G.S. Enser argued in the professional press that the numerical dominance of women in the sector was not merely feminisation but meant that librarianship was “over-feminized”.¹⁰⁶ He cited an apparently worrying ratio of six women to every one man entering the profession and warned that “the writing is on the wall” and women may occupy “the chiefships of such “plums” as Manchester, Sheffield, Birmingham, Liverpool and even Westminster itself.” The charge of ‘over-feminisation’ was understood by many as an outright attack on women, and high profile librarians, such as Lancashire county chief Florence Cooke, publicly denounced Enser’s claim.¹⁰⁷

The concept of ‘over-feminisation’ is articulated in different forms throughout the period 1871 to 1974. In 1872, a year after they had begun employing women library assistants, Manchester public libraries’ Women Assistants Sub-Committee decided “not to engage any more girls as assistants until this Sub-Committee shall have further considered the question.”¹⁰⁸ Whilst women assistants were publicly

lauded as the answer to Manchester's staffing difficulties,¹⁰⁹ clearly there could be too much of a good thing for the sector as a whole. A letter to the *St. James' Gazette* in 1896 from "B.A." bemoaned the "daily encroachment" of women on librarianship.¹¹⁰ In 1967, discussions about the House of Commons library, it was argued that men should be the preferred recruits because a man was "more likely to make the Library his permanent career than any of the female staff".¹¹¹ In the 1920s and 1930s, 'over-feminisation' was couched in terms of sex antagonism with references to the "Sex Battle",¹¹² or "Boys or Girls?"¹¹³ This debate produced, on the one hand, the view that there should be "equal opportunity" for women in employment and, on the other, that this would mean "displacing male by female labour".¹¹⁴

A well-documented example of sex antagonism in the sector is found in press reports of a heated debate lasting several months during 1933 at Wolverhampton public library over the decision to appoint a woman to run a branch library.¹¹⁵ The tenor of the debate is conveyed in the newspaper headlines: "Eleven Resign over Woman"; "Library Committee Members Resign"; "No Woman Librarian"; and, "Man or Woman as Librarian?"¹¹⁶ In early 1933, the Library Committee of Wolverhampton Borough Council decided to appoint a Miss Matthews,¹¹⁷ who was qualified and had 12 years' experience, as librarian at Heath Town branch library. This would have promoted her from her existing job as library assistant at Wolverhampton Central Library. The Library Committee's decision was overturned by the council's General Purposes Committee, which had the power to ratify or refuse Library Committee decisions. The General Purposes Committee argued that, "The question in dispute was not over Miss Matthews' qualifications, but whether they were to give a man a man's job".¹¹⁸ It was also argued that the Library Committee were bound by an earlier agreement to appoint men to library posts, which had reversed a previous policy encouraging the employment of women in libraries. Finally, it was suggested that Miss Matthews' appointment should be rejected because, "It was wrong for a girl to be all alone in the library".¹¹⁹

Miss Matthews' appointment was refused by the General Purposes committee three times despite a range of Library Committee arguments in her favour. They maintained that library work was "suited" to women and that it was far cheaper to

employ a woman in the post than a man.¹²⁰ Councillor Kendrick, a member of the Library Committee, rejected the idea that Miss Matthews would be taking ‘a man’s job’ and connected this to issues of local unemployment:

It was a mistake to think of taking someone out of the street, because he was unemployed, to do this work. ... They would have to look outside the town for a qualified male librarian, but if Miss Matthews were appointed her present post would be filled by a junior male in Wolverhampton itself. If she were not appointed they would be retarding, not helping, employment in the town.¹²¹

Finally, and most briefly, the cuttings note that Councillor Kendrick said that, “Miss Matthews had earned her promotion”.¹²² The rejection of these arguments led to the resignation of the chair of the Library Committee and ten of its members. In their explanations, the committee argued that they “had been treated like a lot of schoolchildren”¹²³ and that the General Purposes Committee had no right to “interfere” with their decisions.¹²⁴ The explanations shift the focus from a debate about ‘over-feminisation’ to one about the *autonomy of council committees*. *The Library Committee do not defend their wish to appoint Miss Matthews per se, but instead defend their right to do as they see fit. Approximately six weeks later, there were reports that the General Purposes Committee had withdrawn its opposition to Miss Matthews’ appointment and most of the resignations were withdrawn. A resolution was agreed, but not reported in detail, which allowed the Library Committee to appoint Miss Matthews but which obliged them, in future, to recruit only men library assistants.*¹²⁵

The politics of library employment, particularly in rate-funded libraries such as Wolverhampton, were situated within wider employment discourses which, particularly in times of economic recession, attempted to position men as “deserving” of employment because it was assumed that they had financial dependants. In contrast, women were positioned as less deserving of employment, because they were assumed to be already economically provided for.¹²⁶ The ‘problem’ of ‘over-feminisation’, then, is linked to understandings about who has a right to particular types of paid work. However, whilst Wolverhampton’s General Purposes Committee

used this discourse to argue that Miss Matthews was undeserving of the job of branch librarian, the Library Committee, instead, invoked a meritocratic discourse of employment rights to argue that Miss Matthews deserved the post because she was qualified and experienced. Furthermore, they argued that “appoint[ing] a man without the necessary qualifications, merely because he was out of work was entirely wrong”.¹²⁷

A discourse of ‘over-feminisation’ continued to be used in the library sector until the 1970s. In the late 1940s, for example, Derbyshire County Council operated a sex quota system. This is implied in a lightly crossed through note from 1947 attached to library committee minutes which states that, “... in no case may a woman be appointed to a male vacancy on the Clerical Division,” but also notes that the “sex ban” did not apply to professional posts.¹²⁸ Despite the crossing-out, the note is clearly legible, however, there is no comment in the minutes to indicate if this was accepted as policy. A 1949 note reinforces this possibility as it expresses a wish to recruit men assistants and notes that women were appointed only “in lieu” of men.¹²⁹ The sex composition in the sector was again referred to as a “problem” in 1968,¹³⁰ although like Michael Ramsden, in his AAL presidential address a year later,¹³¹ a lack of men workers was emphasised rather than ‘over-feminisation’.¹³²

‘Over-feminisation’ was a widely discussed concept from the 1930s to the 1970s. Often the proportion of women was constructed as problematic for the library sector but this was not unchallenged. Similarly, whilst there were constructions of women as ‘different’ workers who needed more managerial input than men workers of similar status, these were also contested by liberal equal employment rights and meritocratic discourses. Whilst the prevailing discourse positioned women as problematic and unprofessional, this was disrupted by other understandings which supported women’s claim to professional status. Women’s participation in professional activities illustrates a further aspect of the prevailing understanding of women as imperfect professionals.

6.5.2 *Imperfectly Pursuing Professional Activities*

The pursuit of professional activities is, as noted above, a marker of professional status. The gendered constructions of library professionalism are emphasised in two debates: first, doubt was cast on women's ability to successfully attain professional qualifications; and, second, whilst men were understood as fulfilling significant roles in professional associations, women were seen, by contrast, as deficient.

The education of girls and women was debated at length in the 19th century with concerns that it would ruin their mental and physical health, marriage prospects and desire for marriage and childbearing.¹³³ In education for librarianship, the fraught relationship between women and education was expressed in several ways. There were long-running discussions of women's difficulties in sitting examinations. Bristol public libraries' use of entrance examinations¹³⁴ simultaneously praised the examinations for assisting in selection of staff, whilst also ridiculing some of the applicants. A public discussion of these examinations noted that:

The results on the whole were satisfactory. A few exceptions, however, were remarkable: - Question: Name the first of the Tudor kings? - Answer: "George the First." Question: Mention in your opinion the best complete history of England for students. - Answer: "That written by Goldsmith."¹³⁵

The list concludes by mockingly citing a response to a classification question by an untrained, inexperienced applicant.¹³⁶ Whilst submitting to entrance examinations and being judged by potential employers, women applicants were also held up to ridicule. In 1908, the mental health of women workers at Islington libraries was seen as negatively affected by examinations:

Some people may have noticed a rather anxious expression lately on the faces of the young lady assistants at the Manor-gardens Library. It was not, however, down to any love affairs - the Manor-gardens Library girls wouldn't be guilty of any such frivolity - but simply natural anxiety as to whether they

had passed or failed at their recent examination in Library Administration. Now, happily the serious looks have given place to smiles, and their normal courteous behaviour; for the ladies have been informed ... that they have all passed ...¹³⁷

Unable to take examinations in their stride, the women workers are made “rather anxious” by the examinations. Women at Manchester public libraries were understood to be similarly affected. A poem, narrated by a woman about to enter for the LA examinations declared that as the examinations approached in “awful” May the women were “seldom gay” as they were “shadowed with an awful fear”. Their “cataloguing rules are gone”, and, “We cannot give a pro or con”, instead they are “haunted” by the thought of writing a thesis. The narrator laments, “We know *lots* more than we can say” but the “only” thing she knows for sure is that “we’re frightened girls”.¹³⁸ This is undoubtedly a light-hearted poem, yet, once again, it emphasises a problematic relationship between women and professional education which is not apparent for men workers. One aspect of women’s relationship with library education went mainly unremarked. The relatively few women librarians who took their FLA, as discussed above in Chapter 5, were not debated. Although this might well have been understood as contributing to a dearth of librarians qualified at the most senior level, it was not seen as problematic.

Like the relationship between women and education, women library workers’ connection with professional associations was also complex. A preliminary meeting of the LAA debated even allowing women to become members:¹³⁹

A discussion arose as to the exclusion of female assistants and Mr John F. Hogg of the Battersea Public Libraries moved

“That it be an instruction to the Committee to consider the advisability of inserting the word ‘male’ in the constitution of the Association.”¹⁴⁰

The ensuing debate rejected the move, allowing those women already members of the LAA - such as Alice E. Smith of Kensal Town Library, elected in 1895 as the first woman ordinary member, and Minnie James and Mary Petherbridge, who were

honorary members - to remain. Sonya O. Rose has argued that such exclusionary strategies “were responses to a complex mixture of class conflict and gender antagonism.”¹⁴¹ Whilst women sought employment, men workers saw “multiple threats” to their incomes, employment and masculine identity. Attempts to exclude women from certain occupations or professional associations, which acted as gatekeepers into occupations, were one response to these threats.

Although women were permitted to join the professional associations, they were sometimes seen as failing to take up membership. An article in the *Library Assistant* used the terms of the ‘over-feminisation’ debate, noted above, to argue that:

... where feminine labour has displaced male the result has been far from satisfactory from the point of view of our Association. Where under the old regime of men assistants ... the L.A.A. has been invariably represented ... the advent of women assistants has resulted in its total disappearance.¹⁴²

The article also claimed that “the Association has not received that support from the gentler sex which it has a right to expect.” Islington library worker Olive Clarke told a meeting in 1913 that the lack of women members was due to the fact that “women as assistants were not so old as men and therefore did not realise what they had to gain by membership”.¹⁴³ Yet many women library workers did join the professional associations and early members included: Christiana White, of the Free Library, Reading, who joined in 1878; Elizabeth Frost from Derby, who joined in 1882; and, Hannah Eteson, Blackpool librarian, who joined in 1883.¹⁴⁴ Despite this, Glaucon, writing in *Library World* in 1943, complained that women were failing to “take their share of the work” in running the professional associations and “could get representation if they wanted it” because men “were willing to play fair”.¹⁴⁵ The sceptical responses this article generated¹⁴⁶ were partly explained by comments from Lorna Paulin who said that, “one or two of the died-in-the-wool elderly municipal librarians used to make snide remarks” at the women LA councillors, such as Kate Pierce and Nancy Cooke. Furthermore, she said, “In a way, they [women] didn’t seem to be expected to be on it.”¹⁴⁷ Despite such discouragement, many women played

significant roles in the development of the professional associations and their sub-groups, as noted above.

Concerns that the increasing numbers of women in the sector were slow to participate in professional associations were addressed by the Propaganda Committee of the LAA. This decided, in 1913, to establish a Women's Sub-Committee "for furthering propaganda work among women non-members."¹⁴⁸ With this move, the LAA's failure to attract women members is constructed not as a problem for the Association, but as the result of women workers' lack of awareness of the LAA. Few details about the committee appear to have survived, however, LAA minutes note that the sub-committee sent out a circular letter to 628 women library workers in early 1914, resulting in 20 new members.¹⁴⁹ The sub-committee, which elsewhere is referred to as the Association of Women Librarians¹⁵⁰ and the Committee of Women Librarians and Assistants¹⁵¹, held a "conversazione" for women to discuss matters further.¹⁵² It is not known if it carried out further work. A similar sub-committee was formed around the same time to take forward the idea that there should be a woman candidate for the LA council elections. This resulted in the election, in 1915, of Kate Pierce.¹⁵³ A single attempt in 1919 to revive the women's committees did not, it appears, meet with enthusiasm.¹⁵⁴

Whilst the establishment of a separate committee for women might have addressed issues faced by women workers, instead, in the main, it marginalised women in the LAA. Similarly to the construction of women as problematic library workers, they were also seen as problematic members of the professional associations. In being problematic, women were different from men workers, and in being different, women were lesser than men.¹⁵⁵ In the particular context of establishing a professional identity as a library worker, one of the penalties faced by women for being different from men workers was that they were not seen as professional in the same way as men.

6.6 Gender, Pay and Professionalism

A significant impact of positioning women workers as imperfect professionals was the justification this lent to sex differentiated rates of pay. Examples of the differences between men's and women's rates of pay have been outlined in Chapter 3 illustrating the pervasive nature of this remuneration structure throughout the period 1871-1974. Many workers - men and women - accepted the structure and "didn't quibble"¹⁵⁶ about pay. A 1936 newspaper report argued that women earned "good salaries" in libraries.¹⁵⁷ Acceptance of sex differentiated pay was implicit in the 1913 struggle for wage increases by women workers in Bristol public libraries. The library committee minutes note a dispute between women workers and the committee about women's pay, yet the conflict is framed within the sex differentiated pay system and does not argue for equal pay for women.¹⁵⁸

Lionel McColvin adopted a similar approach in his 1942 report.¹⁵⁹ The report is lauded for its "great vision and courage" and being "wholly uncompromising". McColvin himself is hailed as "dedicated to the highest ideals of public library service".¹⁶⁰ Yet McColvin's Report asserts that "we must adopt such sex differentiation" as implied by the Burnham scales, the pay scales used for teachers.¹⁶¹ McColvin's lack of compromise did not, it seems, extend to women workers. Although he asserted, "wisely or unwisely ... the basic principle of equal pay for equal work", he did so, not through a sense of social justice, but because failure to make this claim would encourage librarianship "to become a woman's profession simply because women are paid substantially less" than men.¹⁶² Although he asserted "the basic principle of equal pay", yet he still failed to enact it - even in a report which was a *proposal* for re-organisation after the war, rather than a concrete action plan. McColvin repeatedly committed himself to the conflicting principles of equal pay for women and higher wages for men than women, whilst doing little to end the sex differentiated pay system. In a 1934 article, he even claimed that "It is the men who suffer" from this system.¹⁶³

Envisioning a future library workforce without sex differentiated pay was not, according to the 1942 report, possible, however desirable it might be. The ballast

shoring up sex differentiated pay included discourses of the family wage. This proposed that a man's wage should be sufficient to economically provide for his family, which was assumed to be composed of a married, heterosexual couple and their children.¹⁶⁴ This led to salary scales, such as those at Birmingham public libraries which, in 1896, stated that there was a minimum wage of 25/- for men over 21, but not women.¹⁶⁵ It also justified considering the "marital condition" of men workers at Bristol public libraries as a positive determining factor in wages in 1917.¹⁶⁶ The discourse of the family wage further assumed that women workers did not have financial responsibilities and might, therefore, be paid a lower 'woman's' rate. The idea of a rate for the *worker* rather than a rate for the *job* opposes the discourse of meritocracy and individualism inherent in professionalism. The concept of men's family wage could, however, be useful for women. After noting the low pay library workers usually received, the *Young Ladies Journal* noted that:

This difficulty indicates an opening of which ladies might reasonably take advantage, for there are many considerations, too easy and natural of suggestion to require them to be stated, which make it possible for women to do equal duty with men for a smaller scale of remuneration. (To most women, for instance, the emoluments of a librarianship would not absolutely require to be more than adequate to her own personal comfort and competency, and would not, as a rule, be bound to represent the aggregate demands of a family or an establishment.)¹⁶⁷

The male breadwinner's female counterpart is understood as working only for "her own personal comfort and competency", or for pinmoney, rather than to support a family and home. The concept of the male breadwinner/female pinmoney worker was problematic in many ways. It does not allow for the many women, such as unmarried women or women with unemployed husbands, who fall outside its narrowly defined limits.¹⁶⁸ It also fails to take into account women, such as Ethel Fegan, librarian at Girton, who contributed £100 annually towards the education of two nieces.¹⁶⁹ The discourse of the family wage justifies both the lower pay received by women workers and the higher pay awarded to men, regardless of their actual circumstances:

... how many bachelors are retained on the financial basis of female employees, because they do not choose to marry? Or how many women with dependants are put on a male standing because of home expenses.¹⁷⁰

Sex differentiated pay also erected a new obstacle in the path of men library workers. If women were prepared to do the same work for less pay, men's positions were in danger:

Of course, the great objection which men do raise to the employment of women in libraries is that they are employed at salaries very much smaller than a man can afford to work for, while they are physically unfitted for some of the work of a library. A man entering on a profession takes it up seriously as a life work, as a means of livelihood and as a permanent thing: he looks forward to obtaining from it sufficient to afford him a decent livelihood and a fair provision for his family - a woman obviously does not look forward to marrying and settling down on the proceeds of librarianship - hence she can discount the future. There will always be a dislike of the woman librarian by men until the woman librarian frankly accepts the position that she will not work for less wages than a man ...¹⁷¹

Sex differentiated pay and the competitive advantage to women workers helped to fuel sex antagonism in the sector, particularly, as Alistair Black notes, because women's access to senior posts was enhanced by their lower wages. Sidney Webb argued that London University's library committee should employ a woman because:

You will get a far better woman for £150 than a man. For this sum you could get a good university educated, practically competent woman who would regard the job as a valuable prize and who would be more easily 'absorbed' or dispensed with in a year's time if need be. A man at that price would be either a callow youth who would leave us at the first chance; or a half-educated clerk; or a 'failure' without energy or grit.¹⁷²

The concept of higher wages for the ‘male breadwinner’ could be beneficial to women in the competition for jobs, even if those jobs were comparatively low paid. This antagonism towards women library workers was also expressed when women, rather than those controlling library finances and setting salary levels, were blamed for bringing about general low salaries within the profession.¹⁷³ The scapegoating of women for the plight of the sector has been more thoroughly rehearsed in US literature about salaries,¹⁷⁴ than by UK historians.¹⁷⁵ The argument is rejected by Black who argues that:

Women ... compounded the low status of library work not because of their effect on standards, which was positive, but because of the economic exploitation imposed on them by a male library establishment.¹⁷⁶

The system of sex differentiated pay was not unchallenged, however. In 1901, Hull Public Libraries were told that, “they could not get girl assistants as cheap as male assistants” because whereas boys began work aged 14, girls would not start work until they were 14 or 16 years old.¹⁷⁷ In contrast, in 1910, age was used by Manchester public libraries to increase men’s salaries. Men assistants over 21 and those in senior posts were appointed as Grade 2 assistants on the associated pay scales. Women were only appointed to Grade 2 if they were Assistant Librarians.¹⁷⁸ Sex differentiated pay was an issue when Eileen Colwell began work in Bolton public libraries in 1924, after qualifying at UCL. She found that:

- EC The thing was - the galling thing was that my junior who was a boy got more than I did. And I was a senior with three years at a university. ...
 It was just accepted. ...
- EK But you obviously noticed it.
- EC Oh I did. [laughs]¹⁷⁹

However “galling” the knowledge of being paid less than her junior, the opportunity for Eileen Colwell and most individual women workers, to remedy the situation was slight. The most significant challenge to sex differentiated pay came in the form of the long-running struggles for equal pay.

Table 6.2: Implementation of Equal Pay at Islington Central Library¹⁸⁰

Name	Date of Birth	Date Appointed	Grade and Salary	Date of Increment	Annual Salary
Maisie Florence Day. On marriage becomes Mrs King.	21.11.00	7.4.19	Junior Assistant, £70-100	1919 1920 1921 1929 1936 1942	£85 £92/10 £100 £110/- £130/ £165
Retired 4.6.61			Includes various cost of living rises. "Miss Day possess neither General School nor the preliminary certificate of the LA which she was entitled to take before the present scheme was put into operation. She is not therefore entitled to proceed beyond £150." Cost of living etc Council adopt revised NJC scale of salaries from 1.4.51; £120 x various increments to £340 plus £30 LW* at age 26 <i>Equal Pay</i> . 1 st instalment = £414 plus £30 LW Equal pay. 2 nd - remains the same 2 nd years Equal Pay instalment, scale = £201 - £556 + LW actual £502 + £30LW 3 rd instalment: £529/10/3 + £30LW 4 th instalment: £572 + £30LW 5 th instalment: £588 + £30LW 6 th instalment: £638 + £30LW Final instalment: £672 + £40LW	1946 1951 1.7.55 1.1.56 1.4.56 1.1.57 1.1.58 1.1.59 1.1.60 1.9.60	£278/7/- £370 £444 £532 £559/10/3 £602 £618 £668 £712

* LW = London Weighting

6.7 Discussion: Unequal Pay and Professional Identity

Equal pay was implemented at various times in different library sectors. Whilst library workers in special libraries received equal pay protection only after the 1970 Equal Pay Act was implemented in 1975,¹⁸¹ public library workers had, since 1952, begun to benefit from similar legislation which applied only to selected areas of employment (see Table 6.2).¹⁸² The implementation of equal pay had long been advocated within the library sector. James Duff Brown's *Manual* recommended in 1903 that women:

... should be paid at the same rate as men or lads performing similar duties. There is no reason why a woman should be paid less than a man for doing exactly the same work.¹⁸³

W.C. Berwick Sayers' 1920 version of the *Manual* similarly advocated equal pay.¹⁸⁴ Despite such influential support, in 1919 Marjorie Peacock still complained about the "old reluctance" of the profession in general to agree to equal pay.¹⁸⁵ The years after 1918 were not "opportune for a crusade on behalf of women as librarians", Ernest Baker, director of the UCL school of librarianship, told a LAA meeting.¹⁸⁶ Regardless of continued institutional backing for equal pay, for example from the 1931 *Report on the Hours, Salaries, Training and Conditions of Service in British Municipal Libraries*,¹⁸⁷ Rena Cowper once again argued in 1940 that the "time is more than ripe" for equal pay in libraries.¹⁸⁸ Despite this, and LA council backing for equal pay,¹⁸⁹ in 1946 the LA, passed up a prime opportunity to align itself with the campaign for equal pay. Its statement to the Royal Commission on Equal Pay, published in the *Record*, perpetuated stereotypical constructions of women as "most suitable" for work with children, and it argued that men should be encouraged into the profession because they were more likely than women to be "capable of assuming effectively" the responsibilities of senior posts. After setting out a vision of the library sector vertically and horizontally segregated by gender, a luke warm endorsement of equal pay followed:

We fear that unless the cost of employing men and women is the same, the employing authorities may tend to employ the cheaper labour, with most prejudicial consequences. Moreover, though equal pay for men and women should avoid over feminization it is not likely to effect the reverse ...¹⁹⁰

Motivated by “fear” that women might continue to undercut men in the library labour market which would have the “most prejudicial consequences” of further feminising the sector, the LA backed equal pay. It did so because this “should avoid over feminisation” although it might not bring about a decline in the numbers of women employed. No comments in response to the statement were published. The statement prioritises the concerns of men workers who it attempts to protect from competition from cheaper women workers. As a published statement from a professional association, presumably committed to working on behalf of *all* of its members, these comments indicate the extent to which the argument propounding the evils of ‘over-feminisation’ for the whole of the sector - not just men library workers - had been accepted.

Occasionally, the debate about equal pay hinged not on social justice or the protection of the sector but on meritocracy. Bertie M. Headicar wrote:

One assumes that salaries are paid in return for certain qualifications possessed and for certain duties required to be undertaken. Whether a man or a woman, these requirements are surely the same in the respective appointments and pay should be based on these requirements and not the economic position of the individuals concerned.¹⁹¹

Headicar questions the underlying principles used in setting salaries and suggests that the merits of the post-holder and the post should be fundamental considerations, rather than the assumed economic position of the worker. More usually, however, equal pay was valued because of its ability to erase the threat of women’s low cost labour, which might disadvantage men workers. Less frequently, equal pay was valued in arguments about social justice for women which argued that sex antagonism would be quelled by equal pay. The debates seldom consider that the application of equal pay, by

militating against the idea of a rate for the worker with discourses of meritocracy and individualism, might enhance librarianship's claim to professional status, particularly as the sector was numerically dominated by women.

Women library workers' relationship to pay was complex. In calling for equal pay, women constructed existing pay scales as unacceptable, reinforcing their positioning as problematic workers. But not challenging unequal pay indicated acceptance of an economic system which was exploitative. Pay structures impact on understandings of the self as a worker: how can women really be senior to their male assistants, if, as in Eileen Colwell's example, those assistants are paid more than the senior women workers? Similarly, how can men and women workers really be understood as doing equally valuable work, if men are paid more? If the discourse of economic value is used to make sense of this situation, then women are found lacking.

Harriette Marshall's and Margaret Wetherell's work on gender, identity and occupation outlines a tension between women's gender identity and their occupational identities. They suggest that women's stereotypical feminine traits and the association of their "base or standard identity concerned with ... a lack of a career" combines poorly with professional identities which are constructed as masculine.¹⁹² This tension is illustrated by the co-existence of conflicting discourses of women and librarianship. These simultaneously construct women as professional workers, engaged in professional education and holding senior posts on professional associations, and as imperfect professionals, as problematic workers. In relation to pay, the tension is illustrated by claims that women worked just for pinmoney because they were supported by a male breadwinner, and other texts which asserted women's claim, as professional workers performing the same work as men, to equal pay. The tension between the two identities often positioned women as inauthentic, problematic professionals, different from the normative men professionals. Discourses of gender were fundamental to invoking reified professional identities which tended to benefit men at the expense, financial and otherwise, of women workers.

6.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed constructions of gendered identities of professional librarians which were current in the library sector over the period 1871-1974. It has argued that women's access to professional identities was lesser than that available to men workers. This gendering of professional identities positioned women as problematic workers - both as individuals and for the sector - who were understood as failing to participate sufficiently in the professional associations and professional activities. These dominant understandings were contested by counter discourses which illustrate women's participation at all hierarchical levels in professional associations, at conferences and in professional education, both as students and as library educators. The existence of dominant and counter discourses emphasises the tension between women's occupational and gender identities which some women workers attempted to evade by constructing aspects of the sector as feminine, such as children's librarianship, and these are explored in the next chapter.

¹ Skeggs, B. (1997) **Formations of Class and Gender. Becoming Respectable**, London, Sage, Chapter 4.

² Oram, A. (1996) **Women Teachers and Feminist Politics**, Manchester, Manchester University, Chapter 4.

³ Crompton, R. and Jones, G. (1984) **White Collar Proletariat. Deskillling and Gender in Clerical Work**, London, Macmillan, p.232. For further discussions of professionalisation see: Winter, M.F. (1988) **The Culture and Control of Expertise. Towards a Sociological Understanding of Librarianship**, Westport, Greenwood; Abbott, A. (1998) Professionalism and the Future of Librarianship, *Library Trends*, 46(3), pp.430-443; and, Witz, A. (1992) **Professions and Patriarchy**, London, Routledge.

⁴ See: Blake, C. (1990) **The Charge of the Parasols. Women's Entry to the Medical Profession**, London, Women's Press; Lacey, C.A. (1987) **Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and the Langham Place Group**, New York, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

⁵ Dyehouse, C. (1995) **No Distinction of Sex? Women in British Universities 1870-1939**, London, UCL. Cambridge University first awarded full degrees to women students in 1948.

⁶ McLardy, D. (1928) The Librarian as a 'Type', *Manchester Librarian*, 4(6), pp.60-63.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.60.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.61.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.62.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.63.

¹² Potter, J. and Wetherell, M. (1987) **Discourse and Social Psychology. Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour**, London, Sage, p.96.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Chapter 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.98.

¹⁵ No Author. (1920) **Librarianship, Careers and Vocational Training. A Guide to the Professions of Educated Women and Girls**, 6th Edition, London, Central Bureau for the Employment of Women.

¹⁶ For a general discussion of careers advice in women's and girls magazines see: Tinkler, P. (1995) **Constructing Girlhood: Popular Magazines for Girls Growing Up in England, 1920-1950**,

London, Taylor and Francis.

¹⁷ Examples of career novels for boys include: Anderson, J. (1954) **Adventures in Work: Series 1**, Oxford, Oxford; Doherty, C.H. (1960) **Brian Decides on Building**, London, Chatto and Windus; Summers, D.O. (1959) **Ken Jones: Electrical Engineer**, London, Chatto and Windus.

¹⁸ Bateson, M. (1895) **Professional Women upon Their Professions. Conversations Recorded by Margaret Bateson**, London, Horace Cox, p.115.

¹⁹ McDermid, J. (1995) **Women and Education in Purvis, J. (ed) Women's History. Britain 1850-1945. An Introduction**, London, UCL. See also: Dyehouse, ref. 5.

²⁰ Frost, M. (1919) **Library Work**, in **Careers. A Guide to the Professions and Occupations of Educated Women and Girls**, 5th Edition, London, Central Bureau for the Employment of Women, p.140. See also: Hutchinson, A.R. (1910) **Librarianship**, in **The Fingerpost. A Guide to the Professions and Occupations of Educated Women**, 3rd Edition, London, Central Bureau for the Employment of Women; No Author (1933) **Librarianship**, *Queen*, 22nd February. In: **Press Cuttings September 1932 to March 1933**, Library Association Archive; M.C. (1912) **The Girl Librarian**, *The Lady*, 30th May, p.1067.

²¹ May, E.G. (1914) **Librarians**, in **Careers. Fourth Edition of the Fingerpost. A guide to the Professions and Occupations of Educated Girls and Women**, London, Careers Association and Central Bureau for the Employment of Women, p.22.

²² McDermid, ref. 18, p.121.

²³ Countess of Rosebery. (1943) **The Ambitious Girl**, London, Nelson, p.138.

²⁴ Hutchinson, A.R. (1906) **Librarianship**, in **The Fingerpost. A Guide to the Professions and Occupations of Educated Women**, London, Central Bureau for the Employment of Women, p.201. The term "charwoman" is marked as a working class occupation.

²⁵ McColvin, L.R. (no date) **Women in Public Libraries, Careers and Vocational Training. A Guide to the Professions and Occupations of Educated Women and Girls**, 9th Edition, London, Central Employment Bureau for Women and Students Careers Association, p.176. McColvin also outlined "the right type of personality" in his (1939) **Library Staffs**, London, George Allen and Unwin, p.24.

²⁶ **A Woman Librarian**. (1903) **The Work of Women in Libraries**, *Queen*, 10th January. In: **Press Cuttings, 1891-1904**, Library Association Archive.

²⁷ Hutchinson, ref. 19, p.154. Similar qualities were emphasised contemporaneously in Mostyn Bird, M. (1911) **Women at Work**, London, Chapman and Hall, pp.233-4.

²⁸ Hudson, M. (1935) **The Girl in the Library**, *Home Notes*, 7th December. In: **Press Cuttings 24th October 1935 to 14th February 1936**, Library Association Archive. Exley, E.M. (1951) **Public Libraries**, in Fuge, M (ed) **Careers and Vocational Training. A Guide to the Professions and Occupations of Educated Girls and Women**, 12th Edition, London, Women's Employment Publishing; Palmer, B.I. (1961) **Work in Libraries**, in Fuge, M. (ed) **Careers and Vocational Training. A Guide to the Professions**, 14th Edition, London, Women's Employment Publishing; Palmer, B.I. (1967) **Work in Libraries**, in Fuge, M. (ed) **Careers and Vocational Training. A Guide to the Professions**, 15th Edition, London, Women's Employment Publishing; and, Palmer, B.I. (1969) **Work in Libraries**, in Fuge, M. (ed) **Careers and Vocational Training. A Guide to the Professions**, 16th Edition, London, Arlington.

²⁹ May, ref. 20; Exley, ref. 27; Miller, M. (1966) **The Peacock Book of Careers for Girls**, Harmondsworth, Penguin, pp.189-92.

³⁰ This has been explored in a number of contexts. For an discussion around 17th century festive rights and popular unrest see Davis, N.Z. (1998) **Women on Top** in Shoemaker, R. and Vincent, M. (eds) **Gender and History in Western Europe**, London, Arnold. For an exploration around motherhood and sexuality, see Smart, C. (1992) **Disruptive Bodies and Unruly Sex. The Regulation of Reproduction and Sexuality in the 19th Century**, in Smart, C. (ed) **Regulating Womanhood: Historical Essays on Marriage, Motherhood and Sexuality**, London, Routledge. Other aspects of the controlling function of librarianship are explored in: Black, A. (1996) **A New History of the English Public Library. Social and Intellectual Contexts, 1850-1914**, London, Leicester University. Embodiment is discussed further in Chapter 8.

³¹ Pierce, K.E. (1927) **Librarianship, Careers and Vocational Training. A Guide to the Professions of Educated Women and Girls**, London, Central Bureau for the Employment of Women/Students Career Association, p.146. Pierce's insistence on education and training may have arisen from her membership for many years of the LA's Education committee.

³² May, ref. 20; Exley, ref. 27; Palmer, ref. 27; Miller, ref. 28.

³³ Hutchinson, ref. 19, p.154.

- ³⁴ N.D.F. (1925) The Library as a "Career", *Daily Dispatch*, 25th February. In: Press Cuttings 6th February 1925 to 23rd May 1925, Library Association Archive.
- ³⁵ Bird, ref. 26, p.234.
- ³⁶ A Woman Librarian, ref. 25. See also: No Author. (1932) What a Girl Can Do. No 20. The Librarian, *Daily Mirror*, 4th August. In: Press Cuttings January 1932 to September 1932, Library Association Archive.
- ³⁷ Cowley, J.D. (no date) *Librarianship, Careers and Vocational Training. A Guide to the Professions and Occupations of Educated Women and Girls*, 9th Edition, London, Central Employment Bureau for Women and Students Careers Association.
- ³⁸ McColvin, ref. 24.
- ³⁹ McColvin, L.R. (no date; circa 1940) *Librarianship, Careers and Vocational Training. A Guide to the Professions and Occupations of Educated Women and Girls*, 10th Edition, London, Central Employment Bureau for Women and Students Careers Association, p.187.
- ⁴⁰ The constitutive feature of talk and texts is discussed in Chapters 2 and 4.
- ⁴¹ Marshall, H. and Wetherell, M. (1989) Talking about Career and Gender Identities: A Discourse Analysis Perspective in Skevington, S. and Baker, D. (eds) *The Social Identity of Women*, London, Sage, p.110.
- ⁴² See Chapter 5.
- ⁴³ See Chapter 3 for reservations about the utility of LA membership as an indication of either women workers in the sector, or of the value women attributed to the LA.
- ⁴⁴ Source: Layzell Ward, P. (1966) *Women and Librarianship*, London, Library Association, Table 5.
- ⁴⁵ See McNeill, E. (1973) Women and their Associations, *New Library World*, 74(880), pp.220-1.
- ⁴⁶ Untitled manuscript by Kate Pierce about her career. In: Kettering Public Library Archive.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ For example, No Author. (1954) Here's News... *Librarian*, 43(3) p.56.
- ⁴⁹ For example, Davies, G.R. (1966) First Lady, *Library Journal*, 91(16), pp.4052-3; No Author. (1966) Madam President, *Liaison*, February, p.9.
- ⁵⁰ Paulin, L.V. (1966) Presidential Address, *Library Association Record*, 68(6) pp.201-6.
- ⁵¹ No Author. (1966) Our New President, *Library Association Record*, 68(1), p.1.
- ⁵² Gerard, E. (1918) Presidential Address, *Library Assistant*, 14(244), pp.207-215.
- ⁵³ A debate took place in the *Observer* August and September 1919. See letters from G.H. Brierly and 'H.W.' published on 24th August 1919; replies from 'Certain' and G.P. Munary published on 31st August 1919; further responses from A.L. Humphries and L.L. Hall on 7th September 1919; and 'H.W.' published on 14th September 1919. See: Kerlake, E. (1999) 'Not Only Suitable But Specially Attractive', *Library Association Record*, 101(1), pp.32-4.
- ⁵⁴ No Author. (1919) The First Lady Librarian, *Library Association Record*, 21, p.287.
- ⁵⁵ See Chapter 4.
- ⁵⁶ Interview with Winifred Thorne, 20th May 1998.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ⁵⁸ Interview with men members of the Library Association Retired Members Guild, 12th February 1998.
- ⁵⁹ See Chapter 5
- ⁶⁰ Interview with Evelyn Evans 27th May 1998. See also: Haslam, D.D. (1975) The Library Association, in Kent, A., Lancour, H., Daily, J.E. and Nasri, W.Z. (eds) *Encyclopaedia of Library and Information Science*, Volume 14, New York, Marcel Dekker, p.331.
- ⁶¹ Interview with Jennifer Shepherd, 27th July 1997.
- ⁶² Lonsdale, B. (1958) *Molly Qualifies as a Librarian*, London, Bodley Head, p.179.
- ⁶³ Joy Gough, per comm. 20th July 1998.
- ⁶⁴ Such studies have been produced in relation to the history of US library education. For example, Brand, B. (1996) Pratt Institute Library School: The Perils of Professionalism in Hildenbrand, S. (ed) *Reclaiming the American Library Past: Writing the Women In*, Norwood, Ablex.
- ⁶⁵ Such as: Munford, W.A. (1977) *A History of the Library Association 1877-1977*, London, Library Association; Kelly, T. (1977) *A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain, 1845-1975*, London, Library Association; Webber, N. (1984) Prospect and Prejudice, or Women and Librarianship 1880-1914, *Library History*, 6(5) pp.153-162; Bramley, G. (1981) *Apprentice to Graduate: A History of Library Education in the UK*, London, Clive Bingley.
- ⁶⁶ For further work on Minnie James see: Brading, P.M. (1976) *A Brief History of the People's Palace Library, East London 1882-1902*, Unpublished Masters dissertation, University of Sheffield; Clarke, A. (1977) *Few and Far Between: Women Librarians in the 19th Century*, in Wise, M. (ed), *One*

Hundred Years. A Collection to Celebrate the Library Association Centenary, Aberystwyth, College of Librarianship; and Joyce, S. (1996) Castles in the Air: The People's Palace, Cultural Reformism and the East End Working Class, *Victorian Studies*, Summer, pp.513-538.

⁶⁷ James, M.S.R. (1892) A Plan for Providing Technical Instruction for Library Students and Assistants, *The Library*, 4, pp.312-8. James's paper was complemented by one given by J.J. Ogle, (1892) A Summer School of Library Science, *The Library*, 4, pp.319-323.

⁶⁸ Clarke, ref. 65, p.30.

⁶⁹ James, M.S.R. (1892) Women Librarians, *The Library*, Series I, 4, p.221.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ James, ref. 66.

⁷² Ibid., p.315.

⁷³ Ibid., pp.316-8.

⁷⁴ Munford, W.A. (1984) Prospect and Prejudice, or Women and Librarianship 1880-1914: Three Footnotes, *Library History*, 5(6) p.181.

⁷⁵ Petherbridge, M. (1895) The American Library School, *The Library*, Series I, 7, pp.65-74.

⁷⁶ Munford, ref. 73, p.181.

⁷⁷ Petherbridge, ref. 74, p.72.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p73. A library school for women was established in Berlin in 1900: No Author. (1900) [Untitled report], *The Athenaeum*, 3rd March. In: Press Cuttings 1890-1900, Library Association Archive.

⁷⁹ There are further instances of Mary Petherbridge participation in debates about library education. See, for example, *Library Association Minute Book for 1895-8*, 18th September 1895, Library Association Archive.

⁸⁰ See Webber, N. (1996) The First Library School in the United Kingdom: The London School of Economics, 1900-19, *Library History*, 12, pp.142-54.

⁸¹ Fitzgerald, J. (1994) Ethal [sic] Fegan. Paper read before the Friends of Girton Library, 18th June. In: Girton College Archive. See also Fegan, E.S. (1910) Women Librarians, *Library Association Record*, 12, pp.224-6.

⁸² Letter dated 18th March 1918 from Ethel Fegan to Katherine Jex-Blake. In: Ethel Fegan's personnel file, Girton College Archive.

⁸³ Fitzgerald, ref. 80. The Cheltenham School is noted in one of the career book entries on librarianship: see, May, ref. 20, p.22.

⁸⁴ Fitzgerald, ref. 80, p.6

⁸⁵ Undated Correspondence Class information sheet, published by the Library Association. In: Ethel Fegan, Box 2, Girton College Archive.

⁸⁶ Fegan, E.S. (1911) Some Thoughts on Professional Training, *Library Association Record*, 13, pp.237-242.

⁸⁷ Letter dated 6th March 1918 from Ethel Fegan to Katherine Jex-Blake. In: Ethel Fegan's personnel file, Girton College Archive.

⁸⁸ See Chapter 5.

⁸⁹ Webber, ref. 79; Munford, ref. 73.

⁹⁰ The phrase was used by many second wave feminist historians to explain the omission of women from historiography, for example, Rowbotham, S. (1983) **Hidden from History. 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It**, London, Pluto. First published 1973.

⁹¹ See Chapter 3.

⁹² See Chapter 5.

⁹³ *Bristol Public Libraries Annual Report*, 30th June 1896, p.11. In: Bristol Public Library Archive.

⁹⁴ No Author. (1897) International Library Conference, *Western Daily Press*, 14th July. In: Bristol Library Cuttings, 1896-99, Bristol Public Library Archive.

⁹⁵ See Chapter 4.

⁹⁶ See Chapter 5 for more on emergency workers. Working patterns and employment status are discussed further in Chapter 7.

⁹⁷ See Chapter 8.

⁹⁸ Stockham, K.A. (1969) **British County Libraries: 1919-1969**, London, Andre Deutsch, p.18.

⁹⁹ Kettering Urban District Council, *The 38th Annual Report of the Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery. 1933-34*. See also Phillips, M. (1970) *Kettering Public Library. 1896-1939*, Unpublished ALA Dissertation, p.22. Both in: Kettering Public Library Archive.

¹⁰⁰ A discussion of the construction of 'different' as 'lesser' is offered in Chapter 7.

¹⁰¹ Various authors. (1913) The Problem of the Junior Assistant, *Library Assistant*, 10(185), pp.104-9.

- ¹⁰² A Discouraged Junior. (1913) Letter. The Problem of the Junior Assistant, *Library Assistant*, 10(189), pp.199-200.
- ¹⁰³ Cooper, E.J. (1913) Letter. The Problem of the Junior Assistant, *Library Assistant*, 10(189) pp.200-1.
- ¹⁰⁴ Webb, A. (1913) Correspondence. The Problem of the Junior Assistant, *Library Assistant*, 10(191), pp.236-7. Marital status is discussed in Chapter 8.
- ¹⁰⁵ Jordan, E. (1996) The Lady Clerks at the Prudential: The Beginning of Vertical Segregation by Sex in Clerical Work in Nineteenth-Century Britain, *Gender and History*, 8(1), pp.65-81.
- ¹⁰⁶ Enser, A.G.S. (1948) Shall the Misses be the Masters? *Library Association Record*, 50(5), pp.124-5.
- ¹⁰⁷ Cooke, F.E. (1948) Correspondence. Shall the Misses be the Masters? *Library Association Record*, 50(7), p.195.
- ¹⁰⁸ Manchester Public Libraries Committee. Proceedings of the Women Assistants Sub-Committee, 18th January 1872. In Local Studies Unit, Manchester Central Library.
- ¹⁰⁹ See Chapter 4.
- ¹¹⁰ B.A. (1896) Women as Librarians, *St. James' Gazette*, 3rd July. In: Press Cuttings 1890-1900, Library Association Archive.
- ¹¹¹ No Author. (1967) Sex at the Desk, *Liaison*, March, p.20.
- ¹¹² No Author. (1935) Sex Battle, *North Eastern Daily Gazette*, 10th September. In: Press Cuttings 27th July to 24th October 1935, Library Association Archive.
- ¹¹³ No Author. (1923) Boys or Girls? *South London Press*, 25th May. In Press Cuttings 3rd March 1923 to 29th June 1923, Library Association Archive. No Author. (1935) Boys or Girls? *Northern Despatch*, 6th September. In: Press Cuttings 27th July to 24th October 1935, Library Association Archive.
- ¹¹⁴ No Author, Boys or Girls? *South London Press*, ref. 112. Issues of equality are discussed further in Chapter 7.
- ¹¹⁵ Kerslake, E., Constructing Texts and Managing Identities: Press Cuttings, Bundles of Papers and Histories of Library Workers, unpublished paper.
- ¹¹⁶ No Author. (1933) Eleven Resign over Woman, *Daily Herald*, 10th February. No Author. (1933) Library Committee Members Resign, *Manchester Guardian*, 11th February. No Author. (1933) No Woman Librarian, *Daily Mirror*, 13th February. No Author. (1933) Man or Woman as Librarian? *Manchester Guardian*, 14th February. All articles in: Press Cuttings September 1932 to March 1933, Library Association Archive. The media coverage of the incident also included: No Author. (1933) Books and the Woman, *News Chronicle*, 10th February; No Author. (1933) Eleven Resign, *Birmingham Gazette*, 10th February; No Author. (1933) Proposed Appointment of Librarian, *Birmingham Post*, 10th February; No Author. (1933) Library Committee Members Resign, *Manchester Guardian*, 11th February; No Author. (1933) Woman Appointed Librarian, *Sunday Times*, 12th February; No Author. (1933) Chat of the Week, *Bolton Evening News*, 13th February; No Author. (1933) Dispute over a Librarian's Post, *Wolverhampton Express and Star*, 13th February; No Author. (1933) Library Dispute, *Birmingham Gazette*, 14th February; No Author. (1933) Resignations Withdrawn, *Express and Star*, 9th March; No Author. (1933) Wolverhampton, *Birmingham Post*, 14th March. All articles in: Press Cuttings September 1932 to March 1933, Library Association Archive.
- ¹¹⁷ Miss Matthews first name is not given in any of the reports.
- ¹¹⁸ Dispute over a Librarian's Post, ref. 115.
- ¹¹⁹ Ibid.
- ¹²⁰ Ibid.
- ¹²¹ Ibid.
- ¹²² Ibid.
- ¹²³ Ibid.
- ¹²⁴ Library Dispute, ref. 115.
- ¹²⁵ Wolverhampton, ref. 115.
- ¹²⁶ Oram, A.M. (1983) Serving Two Masters? The Introduction of a Marriage Bar in Teaching in the 1920s in London Feminist History Group (eds), *The Sexual Dynamics of History. Men's Power, Women's Resistance*, London, Pluto.
- ¹²⁷ Library Dispute, ref. 115.
- ¹²⁸ Note attached to item, 'Staff - Promotion of Senior Assistant to APT 1', in minutes of the meeting of 31st December 1947, Derbyshire County Library Minor Committee, Derbyshire County Council Minute Book 1947, Derbyshire County Record Office.
- ¹²⁹ Note attached to item, 'Staff', in the Chief Librarian's Report to the meeting of 11th November 1949, Derbyshire County Library Minor Committee, Derbyshire County Council Minute Book 1947,

Derbyshire County Record Office.

¹³⁰ Guy, L.C. (1968) Your Letters: All Those Lovely Girls, *Assistant Librarian*, 61(9), pp.204-5.

¹³¹ Ramsden, M. (1969) Hanging Together. 1969 Presidential Address, *Assistant Librarian*, 62(11), pp.158-164.

¹³² There is a similar emphasis in: Haslam, D.D. (1959) Why More Men Librarians in Britain? *Library Journal*, 84(18), pp.3084-5.

¹³³ See: Summerfield, P. (1987) **Women Education and the Professions**, Leicester, History of Education Society; Hollis, P. (1979) **Women in Public. The Women's Movement 1850-1900**, London, George Allen and Unwin; McDermid, ref. 18; McWilliams-Tullberg, R. (1980) Women and degrees at Cambridge University, 1862-1897, in Vicinus, M. (ed) **A Widening Sphere. Changing Roles of Victorian Women**, London, Methuen.

¹³⁴ This is discussed further in Chapter 5.

¹³⁵ International Library Conference, ref. 93.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ No Author. (Undated, circa January 1908) Library Girls' Success, No publication. In: Press Cuttings, Islington Central Reference Library.

¹³⁸ V.D.R. (1921) A Mournful LA(Y), *Manchester Librarian*, 1(2), p.22.

¹³⁹ Ramsden, M.J. (1973) **A History of the Association of Assistant Librarians 1895-1945**, London, Association of Assistant Librarians, p.4.

¹⁴⁰ Library Assistants' Association. Minute Book 1895-8, pp.2-3.

¹⁴¹ Rose, S.O. (1988) Gender Antagonism and Class Conflict: Exclusionary Strategies of Male Trade Unionists in Nineteenth Century Britain, *Social History*, 13(2), p.207.

¹⁴² No Author. (1913) Women Assistants and the L.A.A., *Library Assistant*, 10(191), p.228.

¹⁴³ No Author. (1913) Proceedings, *Library Assistant*, 10(181) p.36.

¹⁴⁴ Library Association of the UK. *Register of Subscribing Members*, p.189, p.77 and p.71. Lists of members were also published in the early professional journal *Monthly Notes* and the names included here are Christiana White and Isabella Stamp, of the Free Library, Notting Hill, London. See: *Monthly Notes*, Volume 3, 16th January 1882.

¹⁴⁵ Glaucon. (1943-4) Letters on our Affairs. My Sister, My Dove!, *Library World*, p. 46.

¹⁴⁶ See Various authors. (1943-4) Correspondence, *Library World*, Vol.46, p.68 and Correspondence, *Library World* p.84.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Lorna Paulin, 9th October 1997.

¹⁴⁸ Library Assistants' Association, Minutes of Council Meeting, 22nd October 1913. In: Minute Book 1913-14, Library Association Archive.

¹⁴⁹ Library Assistants' Association, Minutes of Council Meeting, 18th March 1914. In: Minute Book 1913-14, Library Association Archive.

¹⁵⁰ No Author. (1916) Editorial, *Library World*, 19(219), pp.58-9.

¹⁵¹ No Author. (1914) The Women's Committee, *Library Assistant*, 11(195), p.63.

¹⁵² No Author. (1914) The Women's Committee, *Library Assistant*, 11(195), pp.61-2. No Author.

(1914) The Women's Committee, *Library Assistant*, 11(195), pp.63-4.

¹⁵³ Zenodotus. (1914-15) Women and the LA Council, *Library World*, 17, pp.269-270. Fearnside, K. and Pierce, K.E. (1914-15) Correspondence. Woman Candidate for the Library Association Council Election, 1915, *Library World*, 17, pp.299-300. Fearnside, K. and Pierce, K.E. (1915) Correspondence. Woman Candidate for the Library Association Council Election, 1915, *Library Association Record*, 17(5), pp.220-221.

¹⁵⁴ Fellow Worker. (1919) An Open Letter to Women Library Assistants, *Library World*, 22(258), p.323; Fellow Worker. (1919) Correspondence. An Open Letter to Women Library Assistants, *Library Assistant*, 14(256), p.292.

¹⁵⁵ Jaggar, A.M. (1994) Equality. Introduction, in Jaggar, A.M. (ed) **Living with Contradictions. Controversies in Feminist Social Ethics**, Boulder, Westview.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Evelyn Evans, 27th May 1998.

¹⁵⁷ Stollard, M.L. (1936) £60 to £500 a Year for Girls in Libraries, *Evening Chronicle*, 2nd April. In: Press Cuttings February to June 1936, Library Association Archive.

¹⁵⁸ Bristol Public Libraries. Minutes of Sub-Committees 1908-1922. In: Finance Sub-Committee Minutes, 14th November 1913, Bristol Public Library Archive. See also: No Author. (1914) Salaries and Prospects of Women Librarians, *Evening Standard and St James's Gazette*, 4th February, p.15.

¹⁵⁹ McColvin, L.R. (1942) **The Public Library System of Great Britain. A Report on its Present Condition with Proposals for Post-War Reorganization**, London, Library Association.

¹⁶⁰ Whiteman, P. (1986) **Public Libraries since 1945**, London, Clive Bingley, p.1.

- ¹⁶¹ McColvin, ref. 159, p.179.
- ¹⁶² Ibid. McColvin also pledged himself, on similar grounds, to equal pay in McColvin, ref. 24, p.113.
- ¹⁶³ McColvin, L.R. (1934) Salaries and Conditions of Service, *Library Association Record*, 36(9), pp.302-7.
- ¹⁶⁴ Oram, ref. 125. In the 1942 report, McColvin attempted to refer in gender-neutral terms to the family wage, writing that: "... it should be affirmed that every adult person should receive sufficient upon which to maintain a reasonable adult life and perhaps provide for a wife and children." In McColvin, ref. 158, p.175.
- ¹⁶⁵ Cited in Edwards, R.J. (1977) **In-Service Training in British Libraries: Its Development and Present Practice**, London, Library Association, p.13.
- ¹⁶⁶ Bristol Public Libraries. Minutes of Sub-Committees 1908-1922. In: Libraries (Accounts) Sub-Committee Minutes, 16th November 1917, Bristol Public Library Archive.
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PART IV. EQUALITY AND CORPOREALITY

Chapter 7. “A Profession for Men and an Occupation for Women”: Gender, Equality and Difference in the Library Sector.

7.1 Introduction

English libraries were producing gendered labour markets from at least 1871, as illustrated in the preceding chapters. In such labour markets, discourses of sex difference were key factors influencing the composition of the workforce and the implications of this are considered here and in the next chapter. Firstly, in this chapter, discourses of sex difference are considered in a discussion of equality and, in Chapter 8, the material manifestations of these practices are explored.

A significant feature of the library labour market from 1871 was that women’s roles were contested - by charges such as ‘over-feminisation’ of the sector, constructions of women as problematic workers, disputes about women’s participation in professional associations and their abilities regarding professional education. These challenges were, however, met by counter-arguments which claimed women’s right to participate in that labour market. This right was established around two main arguments: one based on equality and the other on difference. Firstly, it was argued that women were equal to men, and, as such, they had the same rights to library employment. On the other hand, it was argued that women were fundamentally different from men, and these feminine traits and qualities equipped women, as opposed to men, for certain types of work and certain roles in the library sector. Women workers attempted to legitimate participation in the library workforce around these two claims and the arguments of equality and difference are explored here. Concepts of women workers as equal to men and as different from men both had currency from the early 20th century to the end of the period in question. From 1871 to 1900, as women began to be employed in libraries in significant numbers, the debate was more often focused on women’s ‘suitability’ for library employment,¹ rather than ways in which women might be considered as equal to men library workers. The shift in the argument is indicated by Richard Garnett, former Keeper of the Printed Books at the British Museum. He commented at the International

Congress of Women in 1900, that “the general fitness of women for employment in libraries”² was widely accepted, but noted also that the terms of women’s employment were generally lesser than those offered to men especially in relation to salaries.

The chapter begins with an outline of an early articulation of the equality and difference debate. Equality is explored in three ways: firstly, in relation to discourses of merit; secondly, in direct comparisons of men’s and women’s work in municipal libraries and the professional associations; and, finally, indirect comparisons, focused on new county and special libraries, are discussed. The next section explores the use of difference as a concept of equality, and argues that in some types of library work, specifically children’s librarianship, women’s assumed differences from men might enable them to claim equality based on ‘feminine’ skills. Whilst some children’s librarians achieved national and international professional recognition, this chapter argues that difference might backfire as a strategy for pursuing equality. Constructions of women as different types of worker to men could be problematic as they position women as Other to normative men workers. Difference is further problematised in two ways: firstly, by reference to the prohibition of married women’s employment in parts of the library sector by use of the marriage bar; and secondly, in a discussion of the construction of women as those most suited to paraprofessional library work. Having argued that the concepts of equality and difference were widely used in justifications of women’s library employment, the chapter concludes by arguing that framing equality debates in terms of sameness or difference is problematic and a re-formulation of the debate is outlined.

7.2 Defending the Right to Library Employment

Use of the concepts of equality and difference in the library labour market dates from the turn of the century through to the 1970s. This section examines the articulation of these concepts in a journal article by Margaret Reed. Little is known about Margaret Reed,³ except that she wrote for *Librarian and Book World* between 1911 and 1921. Initially, her articles were published under the title “Women’s Work in Libraries” and appeared as a fairly regular column. Articles appeared in each issue between 1911 and 1912, and occasionally in 1913.⁴ Her publications in *Librarian and*

Book World after this date were increasingly sporadic and appeared under different titles.⁵ In 1911, Margaret Reed introduced the column with a report of her instructions from the journal:

The Editor has placed this section in my hands with the remark that I can deal with anything of interest to women librarians and assistants, from high politics to dress. He does not want it to be “sloppy,” or, on the other hand, dull - the expressions are his.⁶

Whether or not the column was “sloppy” (see below), it was certainly not dull. Subjects discussed between 1911-12 included equal pay, superannuation, the management of men workers by women librarians, ethnicity, media representations of women library workers and library education.

Margaret Reed’s column is notable as the first regular feature in a UK library journal to discuss library matters in terms of gender. The title of the column and the continued use of the word ‘woman’ in the subsequent article titles, implies both that the issues discussed were of primary interest to women and that these were different issues, or different aspects of issues, to those of interest to men. As such, the column could be either charged with ‘ghettoising’ women’s concerns (by suggesting that sex differentiated pay was a concern for women only) or lauded for negotiating a space for debates of special interest to women workers (as in the debates about overalls⁷).⁸ Margaret Reed’s approach to the debates aired in the column does not help in clarifying her aims as she sometimes voices conflicting statements. An apparent contradiction is her use of both equality and difference concepts, in the same article, when justifying women’s employment.

In her first ‘Women’s Work in Libraries’ article, Margaret Reed introduces the column by sketching gender based inequity in the sector. She writes that, “in most cases the women assistants are labouring under considerable disadvantages”, and highlights unequal pay and the limited types of work usually offered to women as significant examples of these disadvantages. Having made this succinct assessment of

the position of women library workers, the article makes the case for equal pay arguing that:

If women librarians and assistants do as much work as men, and do it as well, they should get as much salary; if they do not work as well, then they should not be employed as they are.⁹

A comparison is made between the work done by men and that done by women. Margaret Reed argues that if the work required is the same, regardless of the sex of the worker, *and* if it is carried out as well by women as by men, then there should be equal pay; and if this is not the case, then women should not be employed “as they are”. The persuasive force of her argument for equal treatment is achieved by focusing on the work rather than the worker, and by the sweeping approach to the subject. It presents a workforce in which men and women occupy similar posts which afford direct comparisons. This argument is achieved by ignoring the widespread vertical segregation¹⁰ in the library sector and the different types of work required at a time when such differences were critical as the open access debate was in full swing. A minority of libraries had adopted James Duff Brown’s system, whilst most continued to use indicators and other forms of restricted access.¹¹ Ignoring the lack of opportunity for direct comparison within the sector allows Margaret Reed to claim that men and women were performing the same work and so should receive the same pay. Later in the same article, however, Margaret Reed confounds her suggestion for equality based on comparable work by arguing that widespread differences in types of work make attempts at comparison “such a jumble” that it is impossible. Her argument for equality is yet more strongly qualified by the sentence which follows the claim for equal pay:

Of course, I do not mean they [women] can do all the work a man can do, but I do think they do the work they can do as well.¹²

Having put forward the equality claim by arguing that women engaged in the same work as men should receive the same pay, Margaret Reed then suggests that there are fundamental differences between the types of work that men and women are able to

perform and men are constructed as more able than women. The claim for equality is significantly modified as women are understood as lesser workers than men. Yet a qualified equality claim is still made as Margaret Reed argues that, within this limited area, women “do the work they can do as well” as men.

The concluding paragraph of the article illustrates Margaret Reed’s use of the difference concept. She discusses the claim that, “girls assistants flirt at the counter with borrowers” and that they keep aside new books for their men friends.¹³

It is quite true that a girl may keep a book for her special friend, but every girl is the friend of the young man behind the counter, with the result that *all* the new and best books would be hidden away for girl friends if it were not that the opportunities are limited.¹⁴

Whereas men are portrayed as socially, and possibly sexually, promiscuous, by contrast women are seen as having only one “special friend”. Margaret Reed does not suggest that flirting and putting aside books “is never done [by girls], but I do say it is done much less often by girl or women assistants than by youths.”¹⁵ The difference between men and women is used here to argue that women are more appropriate workers for this type of work.

Margaret Reed’s use of both equality and difference concepts in the same article appears contradictory: she advocates women’s library employment both because women are equivalent to men workers and because they are different to men workers. The style of her articles is often informal¹⁶ and occasionally even nonchalant - for example, she declines to continue discussing sex differentiated pay, a subject of enormous significance to women workers, because she writes, “I am tired of the subject”¹⁷ - so, it might be argued that this contradiction is simply the result of ill-considered argument. The use of both concepts, however, might also indicate the circulation of a number of discourses of equality in contemporaneous debates about women’s library employment. This has been illustrated in relation to other sectors, and, for example, Alison Oram notes that, just before the First World War, many women teachers “endorsed the idea of a different sphere for women’s efforts *at the*

same time as asserting equal rights with men.”¹⁸ Given this, the use of particular equality concepts in specific contexts may have been strategic. Thus, when arguing for equal, or the *same* pay for men and women, Margaret Reed emphasises the same-ness of men’s and women’s work. However, the occasional hostility from men colleagues towards women library workers,¹⁹ might be more effectively countered by attempting to define elements of library employment as appropriate for women, rather than men. Such attempts were endorsed by dominant discourses of masculinity and femininity which claimed that there were innate differences between men and women. In this case, difference rather than same-ness might be more strategically effective. Margaret Reed may not, of course, have written her articles with the strategic deployment of concepts of equality in mind, however, her articles may be read in this way and the interpretative resources needed to make that reading were available to her contemporaries,²⁰ as Oram’s work illustrates.

The rest of this chapter uses the equality and difference frameworks to explore ways in which the employment of women library workers may be constructed as equal to or different from work performed by men.

7.3 Being Equal

This section focuses on women workers in county and special libraries to explore ways in which they may be understood as equal to men library workers. It is argued that this equivalence is constructed around three factors. Firstly, it is associated with discourses of professional merit; secondly, it is evident when women carried out the same or similar jobs as those performed by men workers; and, thirdly, an indirect comparison may be made when women performed jobs which attracted few men workers. A further significant aspect of the equality debate in librarianship, as in other professions, was sex differentiated pay. This has been discussed in Chapter 6 and is not a focus here.

7.3.1 *Equal Through Merit*

Meritocracy as a factor in the construction of professional identities has been discussed in Chapter 6. A discourse of objective merit, as distinct from subjective patronage, was also used to justify or define those workers who might be eligible for a post and, by implication, those who were not eligible. Eligibility was based, not on personal contacts or family connections, but on professional ability as demonstrated by experience and library qualifications. As discussed in Chapter 5, gender played a significant part in obtaining professional qualifications and therefore in accruing merit, yet professional merit was constructed as objectively measurable, and therefore gender-free. By understanding professional qualifications as unimplicated in power and gender systems, derivatives of qualifications, such as merit, might also be understood as similarly unimplicated. Cynthia Cockburn's work on the printing industries, however, has forcefully argued that skill, like merit, is fundamentally connected to gender.²¹ Yet the apparent gender-blindness of arguments based on merit made them available, to some extent, to women as well as men workers and such arguments could position women as equal to men, and therefore as legitimate competitors for jobs.

Merit as a gender-free legitimization of women library workers was particularly significant in periods when 'sex antagonism' was a widely invoked understanding of gender in the library workforce. For example, in 1925 the Salop Education Committee considered its first appointment to the Carnegie-supported post of county librarian, and eventually selected Rosalie Mackenzie. Under the cross-heading "Men Not Good Enough", a local newspaper reported a debate about the appointment.²² A councillor, Mr E. Latham, asked, "if the committee thought it wise to appoint a woman librarian when there were so many men out of work". The chair of the Libraries Committee Mrs P.V. Williams replied that:

... the Committee had considered this point, but the qualifications of the men who applied were not so good as those of the lady selected. ... The Committee felt that they needed someone who was not only well qualified, but

also possessed of tact and a pleasant way of dealing with the people they hoped to get to co-operate with them in this scheme.²³

Mr Latham challenges the committee to make the case for Rosalie Mackenzie's appointment using the terms of a discourse of gender difference. Mrs Williams, however, responds by referring to a discourse of professional merit and cites the professional and personal qualifications needed to satisfactorily do the job. Her use of merit is reinforced by Mr A.R. Clegg, chair of the Education Committee, who said that the Committee was "tied down by the conditions of the Carnegie Trust to appoint a person of experience and qualifications."²⁴ Mr Clegg advocates neither the appointment nor the use of merit as a deciding factor in the selection, but highlights the use of merit as a requirement of the Carnegie Trust. The use of 'gender-free' merit is thus positioned as originating outside the Library Committee, rather than arising from political perspectives of councillors.

The appointment of Florence E. Cook to the post of Lancashire county librarian in 1945 was also described in terms which emphasise her suitability and professional merit. Her appointment was widely reported in the regional press,²⁵ and many of these reports read like an abbreviated *curriculum vitae*, giving details of her education, previous posts and work experience. They also note that in competing for the post, she stood against three men and three women. Whilst not explicitly making the case for her selection, as seen in the Salop example above, these reports function in a similar way by constructing Florence Cook as having sufficient professional merit to be worthy of the job, regardless of the sex of other applicants. Despite the use of a discourse of merit, however, doubt was cast on the efficacy of ability-based systems to improve the position of women library workers. Having named a number of influential proponents of equal treatment for women workers, Rena Cowper asked, in 1941:

... how can we women shut our eyes to the unpleasant truth that despite the vote, improved legal status and actually having demonstrated our worth in professions, there still remains against us a barrier of sex discrimination

clearly indicating that the freedom of women is far from being as complete as many imagine it to be?²⁶

Rena Cowper argues that women's professional abilities have been demonstrated and yet unequal treatment persisted in relation to access to the more senior posts, sex differentiated pay and the marriage bar.²⁷ She responds to this analysis by calling on women to take action and oppose inequity, because demonstrations of merit, she argues, are insufficient to eradicate gender-based discrimination. Much of Rena Cowper's argument draws on feminist politics, yet she, like most women library workers fighting to improve working conditions, does not identify herself as a feminist.²⁸

Connections between a gender-blind discourse of merit and the position of women library workers were also highlighted in the *Municipal Journal*. This argued, again in 1941, that "ability, irrespective of sex, must be the sole test for recruitment for the higher positions".²⁹ The article linked the development of women workers with the extension of library services. It argued that as women's ability to manage large county schemes had already been demonstrated, there is "no vital reason why the borough systems should not be equally open to them". However, this claim is modified by the statement that women, "will have to assert their claims, and show by their competent and conscientious work that, under equal conditions, they are the equals of men." The comparison of men and women library workers afforded by women in county libraries and the male dominated borough services is not positioned as a direct comparison but only as a near-comparison because the employing organisations were different types of library service. This near-comparison is used to advance an argument for equality based on merit. Yet this argument is not completely convincing and is hedged by additional calls for a direct comparison of men and women "under equal conditions" to eliminate remaining doubts about women's abilities. Merit, it seems, needed to be proven by demonstrations of equal performance.

7.3.2 *Demonstrably the Same*

There are many examples of women library workers working in the same jobs as men and performing similar roles in professional life. Comparability was necessary as it could not be taken for granted, despite Mizpah Gilbert's assertion in 1915 that it was, "given that woman's work is as good as the man's."³⁰ Direct comparisons between men and women working in the smaller and mid-sized municipal libraries might be made. Whilst most chiefs in this system were men, some were women. For example, when, in 1925, Maud Griffiths succeeded Thomas Maw at Luton public library, she took control of an important municipal library.³¹ Unlike many women chiefs who were in charge of smaller municipal services,³² Maud Griffiths managed a sizeable and growing service, which included a children's library, branch libraries and a hospital library, and the associated staff. As well as managing the type of library service often run by men, Maud Griffiths' work history shared similar characteristics to that of many men workers. Often women workers were accused of treating library work as a temporary employment, yet Maud Griffiths worked at Luton for 15 years before being appointed chief and was in charge for another 10 years.³³ Her work pattern was, in terms of longevity, more like that usually associated with men.

Yet Maud Griffiths differed from many career-minded library workers in that she remained for many years in the same library authority, although moving between authorities was often necessary to secure promotion. Florence Cook, for example, had worked at Leicester, Durham, Kent and Carlisle before being appointed chief at Lancashire.³⁴ Developing a library career, throughout most of the period in question, often depended on being geographically mobile. This was a gendered consideration as participants in the women's discussion group elaborate:

- C Well you moved around - I was in I think seven different authorities - yes I think that probably has got a lot in it. ...
- A You are lucky sometimes if you can move to get on - I think with a lot of people when - the point where you are left with relatives, mothers to look after - at a point where you know for your career you've got to move - and

because society expects you to be the carer, you can't. And that affects women. [inaudible]

C Librarians have always moved, the ones that wanted to get on.³⁵

On the one hand, women are seen, and understand themselves, as workers, yet on the other, they acknowledge that social expectations assume that they will take on primary responsibility for caring for relatives. These constructions are in competition: to advance their careers women need to be mobile, but expectations that they will shoulder caring responsibilities, keep them geographically close to their families and deter them applying for jobs other than in the locality. Speaker A clearly identifies this as affecting women differently to men. In this respect, women, such as Florence Cook and Speaker C, who moved around the country to advance their careers, pursued a career development route often associated with men workers.

A further factor establishing women as equal workers to men is the public recognition they received. The development of county library services, which were initially dominated both hierarchically and numerically by women workers, occurred in response to huge financial support from the Carnegie Trust and the 1919 library legislation. The value of county library work was thus validated by social and legislative institutions. Furthermore, a number of women workers from various types of library have received awards such as the MBE, including Esme Green,³⁶ Maud Griffiths,³⁷ and Florence Milnes.³⁸ Additionally, some women were appointed, often on 'retirement', to advisory posts in high profile organisations. For example, Dr Marjorie Plant, on her retirement as Deputy Librarian of the British Library of Political and Economic Science, was appointed Honorary Consultant to the History of Book Production and Ethel Wigmore, formerly Librarian with the National Institute for Medical Research, carried out special assignments for the World Health Organisation after her retirement.³⁹ Women library workers were also involved in publishing in their professional field. For example, Edith Ditmas, of ASLIB, was editor of the *Journal of Documentation* during the 1940s; a later editor was Barbara Kyle, librarian of the Royal Institute of International Affairs; and, Marjorie Plant wrote the influential book, *The English Book Trade* which was first published in 1939 and went to a revised third edition published in 1974. As discussed in Chapter 6,

women also held positions of authority in professional associations, such as Ethel Gerard's presidency of the LAA in 1918, and Edith Ditmas' appointment as Director of Aslib in 1933.

The recognition by society, colleagues, organisations and professional associations of women library workers' achievements validates their endeavours. It constructs their work and their careers as worthwhile and lends social approval. These women, therefore, may be understood as doing work which was valued as highly as that work performed by men. The above arguments illustrating equity based on direct comparisons between women and men workers are, however, limited to a discussion of equivalence between workers in senior posts, and comparison is omitted between workers further down the hierarchical ladder where proportionally most women library workers were situated. Widespread vertical occupational segregation by sex in the library sector throughout the period 1871-1974 meant that proportionately few women were appointed to the most senior posts.⁴⁰ Accompanying this, there was also widespread horizontal segregation by sex, which segregated men and women into different types of library work, with women, for example, far more likely than men to work in children's or school libraries. Thus only limited opportunities were available to make direct comparisons between men and women workers which might then be used to advance equality claims. As women worked in different types of libraries to those employing men and achieved higher status here than in the male dominated types of library, the next section explores how women workers might be understood as equal to men when no direct comparison was available.

7.3.3 Arguably Equal

Equality based on near, rather than direct, comparisons between men and women workers employed in different types of library service is particularly relevant between 1920 and 1950 when county and special libraries were undergoing extensive development. This section explores how county and special libraries were different to libraries which employed mainly men workers and ways in which they can be seen as valued.

There were, of course, county and special libraries employing men, yet many of these were staffed predominantly by women. County libraries have been described as having a different, more welcoming approach than municipal libraries to the employment of women. For example, a participant in the men's discussion group said that he worked at:

... Kent headquarters and apart from the chief cataloguer, who was there because he had had a serious accident and was steadily going blind, and there was a chap in before that who went to Oxford and then myself, and 40 to 50 ladies ... held up as shining examples to me as a lad of 17 - and Miss Davies was the chief and Miss Paulin was the deputy and as far as I was concerned I was almost the wrong sex.⁴¹

The three men workers here are marginalised within the discourse of masculinity: one is ailing, another a student and the speaker, "a lad of 17". None are marked as a mature man, centrally positioned in dominant discourses of masculinity. Furthermore, their identities as library workers are decentred by other identities or characteristics. In contrast, the speaker has little doubt that the county library is the proper provenance of the "40 to 50" women workers and the women chief and deputy librarians. Shortly after this extract, the speaker emphatically described himself as being "the wrong sex in the county libraries", still more clearly identifying these libraries with women workers.

This identification was developed by Lorna Paulin, formerly deputy at Kent and chief of both Nottinghamshire and Hertfordshire county libraries, who said:

... when I started and got my first job in 1936, ages ago, and at that point the county libraries were still developing and the counties, on the whole, had a different approach to employing women from the long established cities. And you hardly even found, I think never, a women librarian chief of a large city, a chief librarian of a large city, but you did find women county librarians ...⁴²

Lorna Paulin attributes the more amenable attitude of the counties to women library workers to two factors. Firstly, the counties were more welcoming because of the lack of an established tradition of excluding women in the new library systems. This is explained by reference to the social changes women had experienced during the First World War when “women were beginning to make their way”. Lorna Paulin also emphasises that county library development often took place in the context of county education departments. She argues that as education chiefs employed women as heads of large secondary and grammar schools, they were “quite used to women having a lot of responsibility”, unlike library committees and chiefs in smaller municipal boroughs. Hence, education chiefs and committees did not need proof that women could manage large organisations as they already had experience of women running comparable institutions.

Differences between ways the new county systems and established municipal systems operated extended beyond the predominance of women on the county staffs, as a brief consideration of one county librarian’s career illustrates. The work of A.S. (Nancy) Cooke in both the Gloucestershire and Kent county systems has been explored in depth by Joseph Kennedy, whose work is extensively referred to here.⁴³ Nancy Cooke established the Gloucestershire county system before the 1919 public libraries legislation was enacted. The Carnegie UK Trust’s scheme for county library development was based on recommendations in the 1914 Adams Report and Gloucestershire was one of the first authorities to secure funding for an experimental county scheme.⁴⁴ Nancy Cooke, untrained and inexperienced in librarianship and then working as a requisitions clerk in the county education department, was appointed librarian. She built up the system, extending the number of school-based distribution centres from 59, with 1,100 books in 1918 to 340 centres with 18,000 books in 1921.⁴⁵ In 1921, the Kent scheme was established and Nancy Cooke applied for this far better paid post. After the interviews, she was runner-up - however, the first choice declined the offer and Nancy Cooke was appointed.⁴⁶ The scale of development was similar to that at Gloucestershire, starting with “an empty room, a table and a chair, and proceeding to obtain book No. 1 and then to build up a whole county-wide service.”⁴⁷

The practice of librarianship in the new county libraries was different in many respects to practice in municipal libraries.⁴⁸ A participant in the men's discussion group drew a contrast between the two, saying that the county libraries were:

Spreading outwards, building new branches, no hard and fast method of how you did a thing - whereas there was a book of rules in the cities, and there certainly was a lot of them and the first day you sat and read it and the first page, in case of a black out you must know where the candles are, that sort of thing.⁴⁹

The geographical separation of the rural counties from the urban municipal libraries was echoed in their different approaches to the same occupation. The counties' innovatory or distinct practices included: the introduction of bookvans, initially to deliver books to village centres and later as mobile libraries; the introduction of regionalised administrative centres; the establishment of hospital libraries; and the widespread use of voluntary untrained librarians, particularly in Kent, long after most municipal libraries refused to work on this basis.⁵⁰

Yet despite these differences, there were many common characteristics between the two types of library and these could position county libraries as similarly valued to municipal libraries. Both, for example, were established by legislation. Both county and municipal libraries were recognised by the LA: in 1927, the County Libraries Section was established and two county librarians sat on the LA Council with the municipal librarians. Furthermore, county librarians published extensively,⁵¹ managed sizeable numbers of workers and a growing and changing library service. Importantly, however, particularly early in their development, county libraries lacked financial strength which meant that their workers were poorly paid, in contrast to municipal libraries. The significance of women librarians in the rags-to-riches stories of many early county authorities is acknowledged in some county librarian obituaries. These emphasise the achievements of the individual worker and offer a final professional recognition of that worker's career. Some obituaries of women county librarians have a recurrent emphasis on the development of county libraries from humble beginnings in a single room with one book to thriving full-scale library

authorities fuelling “the thrust and drive of the library movement”⁵² in the 1950s. Such narratives of transformation appear most notably in obituaries in the professional press of early women county librarians. For example, an obituary of Sarah Fergusson, county librarian of Worcestershire between 1923-54, reads:

Miss Fergusson started work in one room with one assistant, a donated copy of a *Life of Lord Granville*, a grant of £500 from the Carnegie UK Trust for purchase of books, a bicycle her only means of transport and a list of village school headmasters to ask whether they would take on the job of Honorary Local Librarian. By 1928, 168 village centres had been established ...⁵³

This obituary tells how from humble beginnings, the county library is transformed into a thriving establishment. Yet there is a tension between women workers’ ability to transform the library and construction of such workers as able, in the main, to perform only low level, routine tasks, as discussed in Chapter 4. Literary theorists have explored narratives of transformation and argued that they are a key element in romance narratives.⁵⁴ Here, the woman protagonist is magically yet completely transformed, despite her passivity, through her connection with the male protagonist: she is not transformed due to her own volition or desires. If county libraries are transformed in the developmental narratives in obituaries, a point to consider is the question of agency: how does the transformation of county libraries occur? The huge changes in county libraries, like those happening to the woman protagonist in the romance, can be read as magical, rather than as developments resulting from socio-political negotiations by county librarians in library committees and other organisations. In reading the development narrative in obituaries as a transformation, an emphasis is placed on the ways that the agency driving that transformation, the woman chief librarian, is sidelined. The positioning of the librarian as passive in the development process is indicated in Sarah Fergusson’s obituary by the use of the passive, rather active, sentence structure: for example, “By 1928, 168 village centres had been established ...” The transformation of county libraries is so complete that, much in the same way as the romance renders the woman protagonist passive, the agency and labour of the librarian is minimised. This reading does not deny the historiographical and contemporaneous acknowledgement of the work performed by

these women in establishing county systems. It does, however, argue that some obituaries are framed as transformation narratives, rather than as narratives emphasising an individual's achievements in the socio-political context of development. Other considerations of county library history, however, do offer contextualised developmental narratives.⁵⁵ The use of transformation rather than developmental narratives substantially diminishes the agency of the women county librarians, like that of the woman protagonist in the romance. In the romance, this reading has, for many feminist critics, prejudicial consequences for the protagonist; in county library history, a similar feminist reading is available. In positioning the active force driving county library transformation beyond the women chief librarian, the obituaries modify these women's claims to equality with men. Of course, other readings - possibly readings preferred⁵⁶ within the romance text itself - are available, emphasising that women's transformation is for the better. Similarly, the preferred historical reading of county libraries' transformation is one of progress, not of the marginalisation of women librarians. It is, however, noticeable that similar magical, transformation narratives are far less commonly associated with men library workers who tend instead to be discussed in terms of their contribution to existing developments or to on-going debates in librarianship.⁵⁷

Similar features are also apparent in some special libraries which might also become associated with women workers. For example, in 1951 under Florence Milne's management, the BBC library was staffed almost exclusively by women workers, even when this staff amounted to 43 workers.⁵⁸ Furthermore, narratives about the establishment and development of some special libraries also draw on a transformation narrative. The increasing number of women working in special libraries was noted in a 1925 article in the *Daily Telegraph*, which cited as examples Miss Beck, indexer at ICI, and Miss K. Barraclough, librarian to the British Cotton Industry Research Association.⁵⁹ One of the new special libraries run by women was at the three-year old BBC where, in 1926, Florence Milnes took charge of the reference library and persuaded her managers that it should be developed. As in the county library development narratives, the modest beginnings of the BBC library and the transformed later version are noted.

Certainly, Miss Milnes must be weary of the phrase 'one Bible and one encyclopaedia' but these were, in fact, the sole foundation of the Central Reference Library in Broadcasting House which today holds something like 47,000 books.⁶⁰

Florence Milnes' work in developing the BBC library was acknowledged with the award of the MBE in 1943. The library which resulted after the major period of development is one comparable to the type of library which attracted men library workers. Yet the emphasis on the transformational nature of her work,⁶¹ like the work of the county librarians above, constructs Florence Milnes' career as one pursued under exceptional, even experimental, circumstances.⁶² The abnormal circumstances and the experimental libraries perpetuate the positioning of women library workers as Other.⁶³ Associating women workers with experimental or newly established county and special libraries, and contrastingly associating men workers with established libraries, makes possible the location of men in a central position and women in an inferior Other position. As noted above, being Othered can provide justification for different, and often pejorative, treatment. However, it may also be argued that these women were performing similar work to men that was recognised by social and professional bodies. As such, these women can be understood as equal to men workers, despite their differences with normative men library workers.

7.3.4 Section Summary

In summary, this section has explored how women library workers might be considered equal to men. Three aspects of this argument - merit, direct and indirect comparison - have been discussed. It has been argued that all are problematic. Arguments proposing equality based on merit flounder due to lack of results; direct comparison falters in the face of horizontal segregation; and, indirect comparison can produce Othering and be seen as insufficiently persuasive. Women library workers equality is difficult to justify on the grounds of same-ness. Perhaps because of this, constructions of equality based around sexual difference were formulated by women involved in types of library work seen as dependent on women's assumed innate feminine skills.

7.4 Being Different

A further construction of equality focuses on the type of *worker*, rather than the type of *work*. This model draws upon essentialist understandings of masculinity and femininity as they have been applied in the labour market.⁶⁴ An essential difference between men and women is women's ability to bear and suckle children, and the physiological trait is understood as forming the basis of a naturally distinct female personality. Thus, physiology is used in accounts of psychological sex differences to create a natural link between child-bearing and child-rearing. Women's physiological capacity, child-bearing, is extrapolated into determining their social role, child rearing.⁶⁵ This social role is often associated with bearing and rearing one's own children, however, it has also been argued that these feminine qualities are required in some aspects of labour market activity.⁶⁶ Women, defined by essentialism as those with feminine characteristics, were able to negotiate access to activities in the labour market which were seen as needing supposedly innate feminine skills. If women have the natural characteristics which equip them to care for children in the domestic sphere, the essentialist argument runs, then, when similar work is required in the labour market, this, too, might be done by women. Thus, as Beverley Skeggs has argued, stereotypical feminine characteristics have value as a form of "cultural capital", or "long-lasting dispositions of the mind and the body", which might be traded in the labour market for certain types of employment.⁶⁷ Patricia Hollis writes that, "the mother's traditional care of children ... devolved to professional teachers ..."⁶⁸ Arguably, it also devolved to children's librarians; both teachers and librarians were constructed as taking on a nurturing maternal function for their child-clients, as well as having professional responsibility for education or access to information.⁶⁹ This section does not explore the history of children's librarianship which has been considered in detail elsewhere,⁷⁰ but rather it examines how children's librarianship was constructed primarily as a role for women.⁷¹

7.4.1 “A Real Sphere for Women”:⁷² Children’s Librarianship

Women were proposed as ‘natural’ children’s librarians from the turn of the century, as children’s reading rooms and libraries became more commonly found in public libraries. In 1912, W.C. Berwick Sayers, in one of the first manuals on children’s libraries, suggested that:

In public libraries in Great Britain ... the tendency is to employ women for this work. This seems to us perfectly right as tact, sympathy, intuition, and the faculty of giving pleasure, no mean matter in a children’s room, can scarcely be said to be possessed by men in equal degree. ... the average children’s librarian will be a woman in possession of the qualities of sound culture, tact and good temper.⁷³

This perception was forcefully articulated in the 1920s as children’s librarianship was becoming established as a professional specialism.⁷⁴ Berwick Sayers wrote that, “Patience, training, sympathy and disciplinary powers are essential qualities in a children’s librarian ...”⁷⁵ These are all qualities which essentialism attributes to women. Berwick Sayers, however, acknowledges that “every woman does not possess all” these qualities, yet he still prefers women for this post.⁷⁶ Miss W.M. Thorne, of the St. Bride Institute, wrote in 1925 that the “Children’s Section”:

... is the natural place for women Librarians, although some are much more fitted for the position than others. The mother of a child almost always understands its mind better than the father and something of the same intuition is present in every woman to a greater or smaller degree.⁷⁷

Miss Thorne connects child-bearing with an understanding of children, and finds that this ability equips women “to a greater or smaller degree” for work with children. An article in the *Daily Telegraph* in the same year explained that:

Not only does a woman manage youthful clients better than a man, but a child can express itself with greater confidence in a woman’s presence.⁷⁸

Women's supposedly natural suitability for children's librarianship usually needed, however, to be enhanced by professional education, as discussed above.⁷⁹ Between the 1920s and 1960s, the connection between the children's librarian and women library workers became accepted as 'common-sense' and this is indicated with the erosion of explanatory details about the connection. For example, Miss Thorne, writing in 1925, goes to some lengths to justify the reasons why women make good children's librarians. By 1939, however, Lionel McColvin felt able to make the unsupported assertion that women are "much more suitable than men" for "work with children".⁸⁰ Similarly, Bertie M. Headicar baldly stated in 1935 that, in regard to children's work, "Women undoubtedly can lay claim to special qualifications for this work."⁸¹ In the 1950s, Elsie M. Exley, deputy librarian at St. Marylebone public library, did not feel it necessary to articulate reasons for the predominance of women in children's librarianship, but merely noted that, "Children's Librarians are nearly always women".⁸² In the 1960s, the sex of the library worker might not be explicitly addressed, yet gendered understandings of the library workforce continued. For example, the Chief Librarian is repeatedly referred to by the pronouns "him" and "his",⁸³ which might be read as the use of the masculine form to refer to either sex. This understanding may be contested, however, because in discussions of children's librarianship the pronoun changes to "her".⁸⁴ Additionally, some texts in the 1960s continued to explicitly associate women workers with children's librarianship.⁸⁵

There has been, then, a strong association of children's librarianship with women library workers, rather than with men, throughout this century. These assumptions were occasionally disrupted, however. In a discussion hosted by the North Eastern Branch of the LA in 1910, a Mr Briggs disagreed with claims that women were most suited as children's librarians and argued that as it was accepted that "the best interpretations of childhood were written by men" then men had a claim to this type of library work.⁸⁶ In 1935, Eric Leyland's exploration of libraries for teenagers attempted to contain the special suitability of women workers in relation to children. Instead of advocating women for all posts with non-adults, he limited the need for women's special qualities:

There is as much justification for the employment of a man as a woman [as Intermediate Librarian], for not only are the sexes more or less equally divided, but there are no tiny children to require the special qualities of a woman.⁸⁷

Elsewhere, there were other challenges to women's privileged access to the specialism. The 1942 McColvin Report, for example, argued that "this interesting work should be open equally to men and women"⁸⁸ and in 1961, R. Northwood Lock echoed these sentiments in his *Manual of Library Economy*.⁸⁹

The right of men to be children's librarians was debated by Mr P.C. Clements in 1958 in a letter which highlighted a number of national advertisements for children's librarians. These specified that "only female applicants were to be considered", and Mr Clements asked "[i]s there any reason why a female librarian should be more fitted to specialise in children's work than a male librarian?"⁹⁰ Although his comments attracted a brief commentary in the media,⁹¹ they raised little debate within the profession. However, one reply was published from a librarian-in-charge of Work with Young People, Mr R.P.A. Edwards, who noted that children's librarianship was often regarded as a low paid "dead-end" job which meant that men, unlike women, were reluctant to enter the specialism rather than were barred from doing so.⁹² Despite such challenges, children's librarianship was more frequently understood as 'woman's work'.

Throughout the period 1900-74, the specialism increased in stature within the profession. Doris Aubrey's survey of children's librarianship notes various markers of professional status accrued between 1930 and the 1970s. She cites the establishment of, first, the Circle of Library Workers with Children in 1932, and in 1937 the creation of the Association of Children's Librarians (ACL) as important steps towards securing professional recognition. This was enhanced when the ACL became a section of the LA in 1945.⁹³ The development of specialist professional education and examinations in children's work, of children's librarians participation in international library organisations, such as IFLA, and the Section's involvement with the award of the Carnegie Medal for children's literature were all factors which advanced children's

librarians' claim that this was a legitimate library specialism. Recognition was also conferred by social, professional and educational awards to children's librarians. For example, Eileen Colwell, an early children's librarian,⁹⁴ was awarded the MBE in 1965, became an Honorary Fellow of Manchester Polytechnic in 1974 and an honorary Doctor of Loughborough University in 1975.⁹⁵ Similarly, Jennifer Shepherd, who worked for many years at Leicestershire, was made an Honorary FLA in 1996.⁹⁶ As participants in a variety of acknowledged professional activities, children's librarians had the opportunity to establish a professional identity.⁹⁷ It was suggested in 1940 that children's librarianship in particular offered women the possibility of professional recognition for equal work.⁹⁸ On this basis, children's librarians may be understood as equal to other library workers. The assumed essential feminine differences from men workers can, therefore, function to privilege women's access to posts as children's librarians and from this position a claim to equality with other library workers can be made.

The understanding of children's librarianship as an aspect of the profession where "the woman must reign supreme"⁹⁹ inverts, but does not challenge, dominant understandings of gender which privilege men workers and problematise women. By virtue of their femininity, women were considered to have essential qualities which made them suitable for work with children and thus they could capitalise on femininity to obtain certain types of employment.¹⁰⁰ However, as suggested by Mr Edwards above, there were penalties attached to this association: children's librarianship was valued, but it was rarely a shrewd career move to make this your specialism.¹⁰¹ Employment based on an inversion of the values associated with dominant understandings of gender might be problematic. Children's librarianship was understood as based on innate feminine skills rather than on skills and knowledge resulting from professional education,¹⁰² and the 'feminine professional' might not, therefore, be highly valued in discourses of professionalism.¹⁰³ Access based on femininity provided only limited access to parts of the labour market and jobs marked as 'feminine'. These might not be valued as highly as jobs performed by men workers, encouraging lesser remuneration and opportunities. The different-but-equal argument which enabled children's librarians to access parts of the library labour market could also position them as Other. The potential strategic difficulties of this argument are

explored in relation to another numerically significant group of women library workers, and the risk involved in being positioned as different is discussed further.

7.5 Problematising Difference

Discourses of femininity were not only assumed to equip women workers with particular skills, but they also attempted to define women as particular types of worker. Whilst feminine skills might be traded for employment, in other contexts femininity worked to contain opportunities available to women workers. Being feminine was assumed to mean, for most young women, imminent marriage and motherhood, factors which were used to discriminate against women workers. Although men workers, too, were expected to marry and have children, they were not similarly penalised. The marriage bar, in particular, curtailed women's employment opportunities as most women married at some point.¹⁰⁴ The impact of the marriage bar in the library sector is illustrated in Patricia Layzell Ward's work which found that, in the 1950s, most women library school students married within five years of completing their course.¹⁰⁵ This might explain why, in the late 1960s, *Assistant Librarian* carried advertisements for engagement rings amongst others for more predictable library resources (see Figure 7.1).

7.5.1 *The Marriage Bar in the Library Sector*

The marriage bar has not been widely discussed by historians and an overview is offered here which emphasises developments in the library sector.¹⁰⁶ Like many occupations, librarianship used various forms of marriage bar throughout the period in question. For example, in the UK in the early part of this century, there was widespread prohibition of the employment of married women teachers.¹⁰⁷ Occasionally marriage bars applied to men, for example, to Catholic priests and, until the early 19th century, to the librarian of the Bodleian Library.¹⁰⁸ Marriage bars have been most extensively used against women workers in English libraries in the twentieth century, however. They were manifested in four ways. Firstly, there was the hire ban which prohibited the appointment of married women.¹⁰⁹ Secondly, there was the retain ban which prevented the employment of existing women workers after

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Figure 7.1 Advertisement for Engagement Rings¹¹⁰

marriage.¹¹¹ Thirdly, there was the promotion ban, which disallowed the promotion of married women workers to more senior posts, although still allowing them to remain in their existing jobs.¹¹² Finally, and infrequently, there were marriage bars which applied only to selected groups of staff. For example, Rita Keegan noted that at Plymouth public libraries in the mid-1950s, “non-professional [women] staff had to leave on marriage”, however, professional women workers were not similarly required to resign.¹¹³

Marriage bars were not applied uniformly to all professions and occupations, nor consistently throughout any one occupation, and there was no national legislation establishing them.¹¹⁴ Whilst some early women librarians, such as Hannah Eteson, appointed at Blackpool in 1880, were married, married women were increasingly infrequently appointed after 1900 until the late 1950s, after which the strength of the marriage bar began to wane. This was due to labour shortages in the library sector and, later, to legislation prohibiting sex discrimination in employment. Although marriage bars were inconsistently applied, they were commonly structured in two ways. Firstly, local and national legislation sometimes existed.¹¹⁵ A major piece of national legislation banning the marriage bar was introduced in the 1944 Education Act. Whilst this primarily affected teachers, it also affected county library workers as many county authorities were governed by education committees. Secondly, there were informal strictures¹¹⁶ which, by the mid-20th century, were particularly significant and these were informed by two main discourses. Firstly, they were influenced by the idea of the ‘family wage’ which positioned single adults and men with economic dependants as “deserving” of employment,¹¹⁷ whilst people perceived as already economically provided for, such as wives whose husbands were employed, were seen as not “deserving” of employment.¹¹⁸ Secondly, the informal strictures included the concept of marriage as “a job in itself” for women but not for men and this job required all a housewife's time and energy.¹¹⁹ These two discourses combined to create a climate in which a woman's resignation on marriage was often expected, both by the employer and the woman herself.

There appears to have been an informal marriage bar in operation when Manchester public libraries began employing women workers in 1871. Thomas Baker

said, in 1879, that marriage was one of the few reasons that women left - but he does not say if they left because they wanted to, were expected to or because they had to.¹²⁰ This, then, may not be an example of a formal marriage bar, however, it does indicate the impact that being married had on women workers. Margaret Reed mentions the resignation of women on marriage in a column in 1912.¹²¹ A more clearly defined marriage bar, based around the retain bar, was in operation against women workers at Islington public libraries in the mid-late 1920s. The *Staff Memorandum and Instruction Book* begins with a list of conduct rules and one reads:

Any women assistant who married must resign her position on the staff of the libraries.¹²²

Marriage bars in the library sector were particularly evident between 1940 and 1960, when they were frequently referred to in discussions about staffing.¹²³ An example of the impact of the marriage bar in the 1940s was provided by Winifred Thorne and occurred when she worked at the India High Commission:

One of the girls that was working in the library she was naughty and went off one weekend and got married. She came in on the Monday morning and said something to me, 'what do you think I did over the weekend?' And I had somehow been suspicious of her and I said, 'you got married,' and took the wind out of her sails completely. And she was given the sack on the spot.¹²⁴

Contemporaneously, the *Library Assistant* published a "much cited"¹²⁵ article about the marriage bar. Honor Liddle problematised the ban on the employment of married women. She argued that the terminology used to describe it was disingenuous:

... those notices in the *Library association record* so ironically worded "resigned on marriage" ... would be so much less hypocritical if they read "dismissed on marriage".¹²⁶

She also suggested that, despite its widespread acceptance, the marriage bar was "a very real disability" which nevertheless "has seldom been discussed" and "it is,

indeed, revolutionary to suggest that it is a grievance and that something might be done about it".¹²⁷ She posed two fundamental challenges:

... in the first place, is it so certain that every woman will marry? and in the second, is there anything in the state of being married which makes a woman unfit to be a librarian?¹²⁸

The article argues that the assumptions behind the marriage bar - that women would be economically provided for by men - introduced "personal considerations where they are not concerned"¹²⁹ and instead, Honor Liddle demanded equal treatment in relation to opportunities and pay for men and women, regardless of marital status.

The responses generated by Honor Liddle's article converged with an existing strand of correspondence about women junior assistants.¹³⁰ Notable amongst these was a letter from Mr J. le Vierge Hall who argued that:

... the true reason why few female assistants attain senior appointments is .. the fault ... of the women themselves, simply because they are women.

The majority of male assistants ... make it [librarianship] their particular vocation for life. For most female assistants (I venture to suggest as large a proportion as 90 per cent) this is not the case. Librarianship is merely a method, at once honest and congenial of passing the time between leaving school and commencing married life. The question of it being their career never arises, and any cry for senior appointments from them is avaricious and unjustified.¹³¹

Mr Hall's assumptions that library work was a temporary employment for all women which was suitably rewarded by limited opportunities and lower pay were denounced as "utterly preposterous". Miss E.H. Watson from Gillingham, argued that most women entered librarianship wanting to make it a career and yet, as most women married, most were also "forced to resign".¹³² Thus she connected Mr Hall's complaint that women are temporary workers with the institutional use of the marriage bar.

Analysis of impact of the marriage bar was heated. There were charges that the view that women should do only domestic and child-rearing work was “not a far step from ... the Nazi and Fascist pronouncements that women need not be educated except for the kitchen and nursery.”¹³³ Honor Liddle wrote to the *Library Assistant* to complain that, following her article, she had been sent “anonymous letters of abuse” from library workers.¹³⁴ Despite these critiques in the professional library press, the marriage bar continued in some services. Some women attempted to negotiate with their employers for a relaxation of the ban, thus indicating that characterisations of the marriage bar simply as a “stark choice” women had to make are incomplete.¹³⁵ At Derbyshire county libraries, for example, it was common for married women workers to leave on marriage, but to immediately return to library work on a temporary basis.¹³⁶ A loose note in the 1949 county library minutes, presumably from a senior library manager, reads:

Miss J. Graham, ALA, branch librarian, Dronfield ... wished to know whether the committee are willing to allow her to continue as Librarian after her marriage.

Miss Graham has proved a good Librarian, but I am doubtful whether it is advisable to agree to her suggestion. Past experience has proved that members of staff who divide their attention between library work and the running of a house are not able to give the type of service to the public which the library demands.

The committee might consider agreeing to a temporary appointment until such a time as some of the younger members of the staff .. are qualified for promotion.¹³⁷

The Committee did not agree to Miss Graham’s application. Other women workers did not attempt to negotiate the marriage bar, but accepted it and found ways around it. A participant in the men’s discussion group said that in the 1950s:

... the branch librarians were women and one of them I suppose was a prototype feminist because she refused to get married but lived with a partner and had a

baby and to cover up the fact that she was having a baby she got the doctor to give her convalescent leave in Ireland for three months and when she came back she was with daughter and she was still employed and everyone thought, “Oh how outrageous, how has she got away with it?”¹³⁸

This woman evades the penalties of the marriage bar by flouting dominant social conventions to live with her partner and bear a child. Her ability to do so is attributed by the speaker to her “prototype feminist” politics, yet the censure she received is indicated by the construction of her actions as “outrageous”. A further example appeared in 1973, when Muriel Fransella wrote publicly about the way that she evaded the marriage bar during the early 1940s by concealing her marriage.¹³⁹ That being married did not always entail penalty for women workers is further indicated by the practice, during the Second World War, of allowing married women privileged status when booking leave to ensure their holidays coincided with their husbands’ leave.¹⁴⁰ It is unlikely that this privilege was extended to lesbian and gay couples.

The marriage bar, then, was widely used by public libraries, however, it was not always successfully implemented. Yet it continued until the 1960s, using much the same rationale as at the turn of the century.¹⁴¹ By the 1960s, however, the justification of the marriage bar in terms of the limited supply of jobs was becoming untenable. Although there had been brief challenges to the legitimacy of the marriage bar as early as 1913,¹⁴² the shortage of qualified librarians in the mid-1960s signalled the end of the ban on the employment of married women. In evidence cited in the 1967 Mallaby Report, the LA said that, “many local authorities would not employ qualified married women or would not pay them full professional salaries ...”¹⁴³ The Report’s analysis of the continued use of the marriage bar in a period of labour shortage is concise. It recommends that public libraries:

...should employ married women who are qualified in order to alleviate the shortage of librarians ...¹⁴⁴

The previously seemingly unassailable economic and social considerations which had upheld the marriage bar for so long were breezily dismissed in the face of labour

shortage. Despite this recommendation, a Library Advisory Council report the following year continued to assume some kind of marriage bar when it noted “the shorter professional life which can be expected of a female librarian” and the difficulty of attracting sufficient numbers of mature married women.¹⁴⁵ This Report continues to work with the concept of men library workers who make librarianship a long term career and women workers who do not. As such, it continues to assert the legitimacy of the claim made by Mr Hall in 1941 that, “... the vast majority of them [women] ... are not justified in claiming equality of recognition in a profession they intend to cast aside at their pleasure ...”¹⁴⁶

In summary, this section has outlined the marriage bar in relation to library work. Whilst the marriage bar was not uniformly applied, it was widespread, especially between 1910 and 1960. The expectation that all women would marry and would, under the terms of the marriage bar, then resign or be dismissed was used to justify women’s limited promotion opportunities and pay. Women’s assumed social roles as wives and mothers which elsewhere opened up areas of labour market activity to women, could also severely contain opportunities and rewards for women workers.

7.5.2 *Naturally Non-Professional?*

The expectation that most women workers would marry and resign their jobs meant that they might be considered as different types of worker to men. Whereas men were envisaged pursuing a permanent, long term library career,¹⁴⁷ women were often seen as short-term, or even temporary, workers. This gendered construction can be identified throughout the period in question. In 1898 some implications of this positioning were noted in the *Library Assistant*.

‘S.L.’, a London assistant, writes a letter unfortunately too long to print, advocating the employment of women temporarily in lending libraries for less hours than men at relatively smaller wages, as a professional expedient against the army of boys now employed, to whom but little prospect of ever obtaining posts in the higher walks of librarianship is open. He ... would have a body of

women assistants definitely engaged for short hours at poor pay, who shall look forward to marriage as a escape from daily drudgery.¹⁴⁸

S.L.'s comments, which were not endorsed by the journal, argue that women should be employed on a temporary basis and, if so, they would therefore be suited to lower status work to that carried out by men. As temporary workers, there would be little reason for the library to invest in training for women, and so women would not be equipped for promotion. This was seen as acceptable because it encouraged women to escape from this "daily drudgery" into marriage which often meant the cessation of women's paid employment. Not only did the marriage bar dismiss women from their jobs and restrict their opportunities to earn, but it also contributed to understandings of women as those most suited to low status work, with low pay and little opportunity to develop.

A slightly modified version of this argument was put forward 40 years later by Lionel McColvin. In *Library Staffs*, he used essentialist concepts of masculinity and femininity to argue for sex-based roles for men and women in the library sector. He argued that "as our world is constituted, most activities are on the whole "run" by men, and consequently those which are not are at some disadvantage". Although there were exceptional women librarians, acknowledging this status quo, he claimed, made it imperative that:

... if librarianship is to take its just place as a profession, if the librarian is to claim equality of status with other chief officers, and if he is to represent the needs of the service to committees and councils which are predominantly male, the senior executive and administrative library posts should be held by men.¹⁴⁹

In order to advance the claim of librarianship to professional status, Lionel McColvin is prepared to sacrifice the rights of women workers. Furthermore, he proposed that, as women resigned on marriage, they should occupy different posts to men:

... it would be a good thing if librarianship were to become predominantly a profession for men and an occupation for women. ... Let us, therefore, as a general practice recruit women for non-professional work and men for professional work.¹⁵⁰

Constructions of women which identified them as suitable for service work¹⁵¹ also encouraged the association of paraprofessional posts with women, as much paraprofessional work involves the direct service aspect of library work. A similar yet less explicitly argued case was made in his 1942 Report.¹⁵² Lionel McColvin finds the answer to the need for a pool of skilled, yet undemanding, paraprofessionals to staff the expanding public library system in the continued exploitation of women. The marriage bar, once again, is used as a primary justification of this treatment.

In the 1930s and 1940s, McColvin argued that women should be considered as different workers to men for the sake of the library sector. Yet in the 1960s and 1970s the argument was reversed by women arguing that they wanted part-time posts because this would enable them to perform paid work and accommodate the social roles expected of women. Sylva Simsova, for example, argued optimistically in 1961 that, "No librarian can lose her job though marriage" but noted that this changed on the birth of a child.¹⁵³ She suggested that if adequate maternity arrangements existed and part-time professional posts were more available, women could return to work soon after the birth of their child if they wished. Sylva Simsova's promotion of maternity leave and part-time posts was deplored in subsequent correspondence. Noel Chambers, for example, argued that the sector could not afford maternity leave and that if the profession were "geared to the 'part-time professional' mentality" or the "quasi-amateur" then it would lose status.¹⁵⁴ This association of part-time work with "quasi-amateur" work emphasises the risk involved in attempting to deviate from the normative construction of full-time professional worker. Women workers were particularly vulnerable to this risk as for much of the period unpaid library work was often performed by women. There are many examples of women working on a voluntary basis in children's libraries,¹⁵⁵ in special libraries¹⁵⁶ and in the early county libraries,¹⁵⁷ often recruited by the newly established Women's Institutes.¹⁵⁸

The legitimacy of part-time library work was forcefully advocated in Patricia Layzell Ward's 1966 report on women and library work.¹⁵⁹ The report investigated ways that labour shortages in the sector might be resolved by encouraging the employment of married women. Despite the report's findings and recommendations for the development of part-time posts and re-entry courses for returners, little changed in the labour market and in 1968 part-time workers' difficulties in obtaining professional qualifications and posts were again discussed.¹⁶⁰ Further debates were aired in the *Library Association Record* in 1968,¹⁶¹ and then again in 1969.¹⁶² Clearly, the women advocating part-time work in these discussions understood it to offer them opportunities not available elsewhere. Acknowledgement of the tendency of women to act as carers is used in these debates to argue for the creation of patterns of paid work which might accommodate, rather than ignore, that caring. Yet for other women, part-time work meant worse terms and conditions than those offered to full-time workers. Rita Keegan, for example, said that when she worked on a part-time basis, the library authority refused to pay her a professional rate, excluded her from the superannuation scheme and professional meetings.¹⁶³ Accepting jobs categorised as 'different' from normative permanent, full-time posts might offer women with caring responsibilities access into the labour market which otherwise was not available, however, such jobs, could also result in economic and professional exploitation of the worker.

In summary, this section has explored how women's assumed different social roles from men may be used to justify the positioning of women in the library hierarchy. Assumptions that all women marry and therefore work only for a short time legitimise the construction of women as those most suited to carrying out low status, low paid paraprofessional work. In the 1960s, however, it was argued that part-time posts could be useful to women attempting to perform domestic and paid work. The accommodation of domestic and paid work might be achieved at the cost of receiving less pay or being employed on lesser terms than those enjoyed by full-time workers. Whilst the construction of women as different types of worker in comparison to men often restricted the opportunities open to women, the chance to work on a part-time basis might also acknowledge the social caring roles which many women performed. Being different workers, then, could work for or against women in the labour market.

7.6 Discussion: Equality versus Difference, or Equality with Difference?

Concepts of equality and difference have been used to justify the participation of women in the library labour market. Yet, as illustrated above, both are problematic. A further difficulty is that both concepts imply an unchanging definition of masculinity against which equality or difference may be measured. Men ranged throughout staffing grades, whilst tending proportionately to be more professionally successful than women workers, and it is unclear against which men women workers were compared. Equality and difference, then, are complex yet widely used terms. Joan Scott offers a deconstruction of the 'equality versus difference' approach.¹⁶⁴ She argues that equality (understood as sameness) is often positioned as oppositional to difference. So, if women are not the same as men, they must be different and lesser. However, Scott outlines another understanding which disputes the implication that equality means sameness. She argues that the opposite to equality is not difference but inequality. She further suggests that the concept of equality is predicated on an implicit acknowledgement of difference which results from an acceptance that people are different and yet, for a stated purpose, such as employment, there is a social agreement to treat obviously different people *as though* they were equivalent.

Joan Scott's definition of equality because of difference is echoed by other theorists¹⁶⁵ and may be applied to those aspects of library work which during the period 1871-1974 were strongly associated with women. Women library workers were expected to perform different roles in librarianship to men, such as working with children and working as paraprofessionals. The different types of work do not *necessarily* position women's work as work of lesser value than men's, although this was often the case. With Scott's approach, despite the differences between similarly qualified reference and children's librarians in their practice of librarianship, they would be considered as professional equals. Scott's formulation of equality provides a further approach to the proposal that because women performed different types of work or were seen as different types of worker to men then their lesser treatment was justified. Rather than proposing that women were different to men and treated accordingly, the argument is re-formulated to suggest that men and women were treated equally or unequally. This formulation is based on an agreement that in the

specific context of employment, all library workers, regardless of sex or marital status, would be treated as equals. This could be used to counter, for example, Lionel McColvin's proposal that because women were expected to have different career patterns to men then their employment opportunities should be limited to low status work. Instead, it might be proposed that all paraprofessional staff should be offered the same opportunities, and those who were not would be understood as receiving unequal treatment. Debates about difference in terms of inequality began to be aired in the library sector in the 1970s.¹⁶⁶ Although the construction of women workers as equal or different is found throughout the period 1871-1974 in a number of guises, this is ultimately an unhelpful framework for understanding the positioning of women workers. Deconstructing this framework, along the lines indicated by Joan Scott, exposes the power relations within the formulation and, in turn, permits a development of the argument for equality.

7.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored ways that concepts of equality and difference have been used to justify the participation of women in the library labour market. It has argued that women library workers were sometimes understood as equal to men either through considerations of professional merit, or by direct or indirect comparison. These concepts of equality based on sameness have been shown to be problematic. A further concept of equality is achieved with constructions of women as different types of workers to men. It was illustrated that whilst this may provide women with privileged access to some areas of the labour market, it may also be disadvantageous as it reinforces understandings of women as Other. The sameness and difference concepts of equality were widely used throughout the 20th century, however, it was argued that this formulation of the debate is unhelpful. The chapter concluded by discussing Joan Scott's framework for conceptualising equality which argues that the opposite to equality is not difference but inequality, and that such recognition of difference is critical in developing understandings of equality. The discussion of equality is developed in the next chapter which considers ways that equality and Other-ness were inscribed on the materiality of library workplaces and workers, providing physical manifestations of issues raised in the debates about equality.

¹ See Chapter 4.

² Garnett, R. (1900) [Untitled, opening comments] *Women Librarians*, in Countess of Aberdeen (ed.) **Women in the Professions. Being the Professional Section of the International Congress of Women**, London, Fisher Unwin.

³ Margaret Reed offers no description of herself and she is not included in William Munford's dictionary of librarians: Munford, W.A. (1987) **Who Was Who in Librarianship, 1880-1985: A Dictionary of Dates with Notes**, London, Library Association.

⁴ Reed, M. (1911) Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Book World*, 2(1), pp.32-3; Reed, M. (1911) Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Book World*, 2(2), pp.76-7; Reed, M. (1911) Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Book World*, 2(3), pp.115-116; Reed, M. (1911) Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Book World*, 2(4), pp. 149-150; Reed, M. (1911) Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Book World*, 2(5), pp.185-6; Reed, M. (1912) Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Book World*, 2(6), pp.228-9; Reed, M. (1912) Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Book World*, 2(7), pp.269-70; Reed, M. (1912) Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Book World*, 2(8), pp.307-8; Reed, M. (1912) Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Book World*, 2(9), pp.348-9; Reed, M. (1912) Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Book World*, 2(10), pp.388-9; Reed, M. (1912) Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Book World*, 2(11), pp.426-7; Reed, M. (1912) Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Book World*, 2(12), pp.466-7; Reed, M. (1913) Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Book World*, 3(1), pp.19-20; Reed, M. (1913) Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Book World*, 3(2), pp.64-5; Reed, M. (1913) Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Book World*, 3(6), pp.235-6; and, Reed, M. (1913) Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Book World*, 4(1), pp.9-10.

⁵ Reed, M. (1914) The Status of the Lady Librarian, *Librarian and Book World*, 4(8), pp.278-9; Reed, M. (1914) The Attack on Women, *Librarian and Book World*, 5(1), pp.10-11; Reed, M. (1915) Women's Work, *Librarian and Book World*, 5(6), pp.170-1; Reed, M. (1915) Women Assistants, *Librarian and Book World*, 5(9), pp.254-5; Reed, M. (1919) Women and Libraries in the New Age, *Librarian and Book World*, 9(10), p.133; and, Reed, M. (1921) The Loyalty of Women in the Library Profession, *Librarian and Book World*, 10(9), pp.168-70.

⁶ Reed, Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Book World*, 2(1), ref. 4, p.32.

⁷ Dress is discussed in Chapter 8.

⁸ Similar discussions have focused on women's pages in the press media. See: Creedon, P.J. (1993) **The Challenge of Re-visioning Gender Values**, in Creedon, P.J. (ed) **Women in Mass Communication**, London, Sage.

⁹ Reed, Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Book World*, 2(1), p.33, ref. 4. Reed re-stated this claim, for example, in *Librarian and Book World*, 2(3), p.116.

¹⁰ See Chapter 2.

¹¹ See Black, A. (1996) **A New History of the English Public Library. Social and Intellectual Contexts, 1850-1914**, London, Leicester University, pp.110-2.

¹² Reed, Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Book World*, 2(1), p.33

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Margaret Reed's informal tone led prominent US librarian Mary Ahearn to reprimand her in a private letter which Reed subsequently published in: Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Book World*, 2(5).

¹⁷ Reed, Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Book World*, 2(3), p.116.

¹⁸ See Oram, A. (1996) **Women Teachers and Feminist Politics**, Manchester, Manchester University, p.115.

¹⁹ Hostility, or sex antagonism, between men and women library workers is discussed in Chapter 6.

²⁰ See Chapter 2.

²¹ Cockburn, C. (1987) **Brothers: Male Dominance and Technological Change**. London, Pluto.

²² No Author. (1925) County Libraries Scheme, *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 17th July. In, Press Cuttings 23rd May to 18th September 1925, Library Association Archive.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ For example: No Author. (1945) More Congratulations, *Preston Guardian*, 6th October 1945; No Author. (1945) A County Librarian, *Sunderland Echo*, 30th October; and, No Author. (1945) County

Librarian, *Carlisle Journal*, 30th October. All in: Press Cuttings, September 1945 to June 1946, Library Association Archive.

²⁶ Cowper, R. (1941) Not in Our Stars, *Library Association Record*, 42(6), pp.166-7.

²⁷ The marriage bar is discussed below in this chapter in Section 4.1.

²⁸ Feminist discourses are discussed further in Chapter 9.

²⁹ No Author. (1941) Women in the Library Service, *Municipal Journal*, 4th July. In: Press Cuttings November 1940 to November 1941, Library Association Archive.

³⁰ Gilbert, M. (1915) The Position of Women in Public Libraries, *Library World*, 18, pp.100-105.

³¹ Baker, L. (1983) *The Story of Luton and its Public Libraries*, Luton, Bedfordshire County Libraries, pp.44-45.

³² See Chapter 3. The smaller library services paid their chief librarians substantially less than those in larger authorities.

³³ Baker, ref. 31, p.58.

³⁴ More Congratulations, ref. 25.

³⁵ Interview with women members of the Retired Members Guild, 12th January 1998.

³⁶ Taylor, J.N. (1985) Obituary. Esme Green, *Library Association Record*, 87(2), p.73.

³⁷ Baker, ref. 31, p.58.

³⁸ Collison, R.L. (1966) Obituary. Florence Milnes, *Library Association Record*, 68(3), p.112.

³⁹ Morton, L.T. (1981) Obituary. Ethel Wigmore, *Library Association Record*, 83(6), p.311.

⁴⁰ See Chapter 3.

⁴¹ Speaker E, interview with men members of the Retired Members Guild, 12th February 1998.

⁴² Interview with Lorna Paulin, 9th October 1997.

⁴³ Kennedy, J.C. (1980) *A.S. Cooke. 1895-1971*, Unpublished MA dissertation, Department of Information and Library Studies, Loughborough University. See also: Stockham, K.A. (ed) (1969) *British County Libraries: 1919-1969*, London, Grafton.

⁴⁴ Kennedy, ref. 43, Appendix 1. Transcript of a tape-recorded reminiscence made by Miss A. S. Cooke at Loughborough, July 1958.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.25.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.27.

⁴⁷ Paulin, L.V. (1969) County Libraries: Half a Century's Achievement, *Library Association Record*, 71(12), p.348

⁴⁸ The different practices are further suggested by the publication of specific guidance on county library methods. See: Cooke, A.S. (ed) (1935) *County Library Manual*, London, Library Association; and, MacLeod, R.D. (1923) *County Rural Libraries*, London, Grafton.

⁴⁹ Speaker E, interview with men in the Retired Members Guild 12th February 1998.

⁵⁰ Stockham, ref. 43.

⁵¹ See Stockham, K.A. (1969) Bibliography, in Stockham, ref. 43.

⁵² Speaker E, interview with men in the Retired Members Guild 12th February 1998.

⁵³ Barnes, A.P. (1982) Sarah Faith Fergusson, *Library Association Record*, 84(7/8), p.270. Other examples include: Paulin, L.V. (1971) Obituary. A.S. Cooke, *Library Association Record*, 73(4), p.84; and, Hallworth, F. (1962) Obituary. L.R. Andrews, *Library Association Record*, 64(12) p.501. There are many further examples of this type of obituary.

⁵⁴ See: Voaden, R. (1995) *The Language of Love: Medieval Erotic Vision and Modern Romance Fiction* in Pearce, L. and Stacey, J. (eds), *Romance Revisited*. London, Lawrence and Wishart; and, Pearce, L. and Stacey, J. (1995) *The Heart of the Matter: Feminists Revisit Romance* in Pearce, L. and Stacey, J. (eds), *Romance Revisited*. London, Lawrence and Wishart; and, Kerslake, E. and Liladhar, J. (forthcoming) *Jilly Cooper Versus the Government: Romantic Discourses of Femininity and Women's Library Employment*. Thanks to Janine Liladhar for discussions about romance and library workers.

⁵⁵ The socio-political context is emphasised elsewhere, for example, in Kennedy, ref. 43 and, Stockham, ref. 43.

⁵⁶ It has been argued that although texts contain more than one potential reading, one understanding is preferred above others. The existence of a preferred reading does not preclude different readings, which may be influenced by the reader's cultural background, political allegiance, socio-economic position and so on. See: Christie, C. (1994) *Theories of Textual Determination and Audience Agency: An Empirical Contribution to the Debate*, in Mills, S. (ed) *Gendering the Reader*, New York, Harvester Wheatsheaf.

⁵⁷ For example: Taylor, J.N. (1966) Obituary. B.W. Wray, *Library Association Record*, 68(2), p.64; and, Gillett, J.T. (1966) Richard James Gordon, *Library Association Record*, 68(11), pp.416-7.

- ⁵⁸ No Author. (1951) All the Answers, *Woman*, 20th January. In: BBC Written Archives Centre.
- ⁵⁹ Winter, E.L. (1925) Women in the Library. A Profession of Rapid Progress, *Daily Telegraph*, 28th September. In: Press Cuttings 1913-1933, Library Association Archive.
- ⁶⁰ No Author. (1958) Portrait of the Month. Florence Milnes, *Ariel*, July, p6. See also: Milnes, F.M. (1959) The BBC Reference Library, *Library World*, 60(705), pp.171-4; and BBC Press Service. (1958) Unique Library - Rare Librarian. In: BBC Written Archives Centre.
- ⁶¹ Many other women special librarians were similarly involved in establishing new libraries. For example: Wilson, H.O. (1970) Obituary. I. Darlington. *Library Association Record*, 72(7), p.277; Cochrane, F. (1984) Obituary. K.L. Farquhar, *Library Association Record*, 86(4), p.188. No Author. (1946) No title. *Star*, 8th November. In: Press Cuttings June to November 1946, Library Association Archive.
- ⁶² In transforming two county services, Nancy Cooke made such transformations her usual work. This was exceptional, however, and does not detract from the point made here.
- ⁶³ See Chapter 4.
- ⁶⁴ Essentialism is discussed in Chapter 2.
- ⁶⁵ Lawler, S. (1996) Motherhood and Identity, in Cosslett, T., Easton, A. and Summerfield, P. (eds) **Women, Power and Resistance. An Introduction to Women's Studies**, Buckingham, Open University.
- ⁶⁶ See: Adkins, L. and Lury, C. (1992) Gender and the Labour Market: Old Theory for New? in Hinds, H., Phoenix, A. and Stacey, J. (eds) **Working Out: New Directions in Women's Studies**, London, Falmer; and, Skeggs, B. (1997) **Formations of Class and Gender. Becoming Respectable**, London, Sage.
- ⁶⁷ Skeggs, ref. 66, p.8.
- ⁶⁸ Hollis, P. (1979) **Women in Public. The Women's Movement 1850-1900**, London, George Allen and Unwin, p.45.
- ⁶⁹ For a discussion of teachers see: Oram, ref. 18, Chapter 4.
- ⁷⁰ Studies include: Rees, G. (1924) **Libraries for Children. A History and Bibliography**, London, Grafton; and, Ellis, A. (1971) **Library Services for Young People in England and Wales, 1830-1970**, Oxford, Pergamon.
- ⁷¹ This is discussed in relation to the 1950s in: Kerslake, E. and Liladhar, J. (forthcoming) "Jolly Good Reading" For Girls: Discourses of Library Work and Femininity in Career Novels, *Women's History Review*.
- ⁷² No Author. (1927) Library Services, *Daily Telegraph*, 25th May. In: Press Cuttings 24th April to 17th June 1927, Library Association Archive.
- ⁷³ Berwick Sayers, W.C. (1912) **The Children's Library. A Practical Manual for Public, School and Home Libraries**, Routledge, London, pp.196-7.
- ⁷⁴ For example: No Author. (1924) Post for Story-Teller, *Daily Mail*, 4th January. In: Press Cuttings 3rd January to 12th July 1924, Library Association Archive; No Author. (1923) Libraries for Children, *Westminster Gazette*, 24th August. In: Press Cuttings 29th June 1922 to 13th February 1923, Library Association Archive.
- ⁷⁵ Berwick Sayers, W.C. (1924) Children's Libraries. What is Being Done at Croydon, *Sunday School Chronicle*, 21st February. In: Press Cuttings 3rd January to 12th July 1924, Library Association Archive.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷⁷ Thorne, W.M. (1925) Librarianship as a Career for Women, *Library Assistant*, 18(314), p.22.
- ⁷⁸ No Author. (1925) Women Librarians, *Daily Telegraph*, 8th August. In: Press Cuttings 23rd May to 18th September 1925, Library Association Archive.
- ⁷⁹ See Chapter 5 and Sayers, ref. 72, p.196.
- ⁸⁰ McColvin, L. (1939) **Library Staffs**, London, Allen and Unwin, p.111.
- ⁸¹ Headicar, B.M. (1935) **A Manual of Library Organization**, London, George Allen and Unwin and Library Association, p.61.
- ⁸² E.M. Exley (1951) Public Libraries, in Fuge, M. (ed) **Careers and Vocational Training. A Guide to the Professions and Occupations of Educated Girls and Women**, 12th Edition, London, Women's Employment Publishing.
- ⁸³ Lock, R.N. (1961) **Manual of Library Economy**, Grafton, London, p. 40.
- ⁸⁴ For further discussion of the implications of gender and linguistics see: Brouwer, D. (1995) Language and Gender: Feminist Linguistics, in Buikema R. and Smelik, A. (eds) **Women's Studies and Culture. A Feminist Introduction**, London, Zed.
- ⁸⁵ Miller, R. (1966) **The Peacock Book of Careers for Girls**, Harmondsworth, Penguin, p. 189-92.
- ⁸⁶ No Author. (1910) North Eastern Branch, *Library Assistant*, 7(151-152), pp.216-8.

- ⁸⁷ Leyland, E. (1937) **Public Library and the Adolescent**, London, Grafton, p.97.
- ⁸⁸ McColvin, L.R. (1942) **The Public Library System of Great Britain. A Report on its Present Condition with Proposals for Post-War Reorganization**, London, Library Association, p. 80. See also: McColvin, L.R. (1961) **Libraries for Children**, London, Phoenix, Chapter 8.
- ⁸⁹ Lock, ref. 82, p.40.
- ⁹⁰ Clements, P.C. (1958) Library Work with Children, *Library Association Record*, 60(10), p. 322. See also: No Author. (1946) A Woman's Job? *Isle of Thanet Gazette*, 22nd November. In: Press Cuttings June to November 1946, Library Association Archive.
- ⁹¹ No Author. (1958) A Man or a Woman in the Library? *Evening News*, 29 October. In: Press Cuttings 1957-8, Library Association Archive.
- ⁹² Edwards, R.P.A. (1958) Library Work with Children, *Library Association Record*, 60(12), p.382.
- ⁹³ Aubrey, A. (1977) Enthusiasm has Defeated Apathy, *Library Association Record*, 79(4), pp.191-2. See also: Butler, J. (1977) Changes and Chances, *Library Association Record*, 79(4), p.193.
- ⁹⁴ There are several accounts of Eileen Colwell's career. An interesting example is a career guide in the form of an autobiography: Colwell, E. (1956) **How I Became a Librarian**, London, Thomas Nelson. Thanks to Jennifer Shepherd for a copy of this.
- ⁹⁵ Fearn, M. (1985) Introduction, in Fearn, M. (ed) **'Only the Best is Good Enough'. The Woodfield Lectures on Children's Literature, 1978-1985**, London, Rosendale.
- ⁹⁶ Miller, A. (1997) Honorary Vice-Presidents, Honorary Fellows and Certificates of Merit 1996, in **Library Association Yearbook 1997-8**, London, Library Association.
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- ⁹⁸ Byron, J.F.W. (1940) Born for the Stable, *Library Assistant*, 33, pp.193-5.
- ⁹⁹ Leyland, E. (1937) **Public Library and the Adolescent**, London, Grafton.
- ¹⁰⁰ Skeggs, ref. 66.
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- ¹⁰² See Chapter 5.
- ¹⁰³ See Chapter 6; Zimmeck, M. (1987) We Are All Professionals Now: Professionalisation, Education and Gender in the Civil Service, 1873-1939, in Summerfield, P. (1987) **Women, Education and the Professions**, Leicester, History of Education Society.
- ¹⁰⁴ Leete, R. (1976) Marriage and Divorce, *Population Trends*, 3, pp.3-8.
- ¹⁰⁵ Layzell Ward, P. (1996) **Women and Librarianship**, London, Library Association, p.17.
- ¹⁰⁶ Liladhar, J. and Kerlake, E. (1999) No More Library Classes for Catherine: Marital Status, Career Progression and Library Employment in 1950s England, *Women's Studies International Forum*, 22(2), pp.215-24.
- ¹⁰⁷ Oram, ref. 18.
- ¹⁰⁸ No Author. (1936) How Political Jealousy Led to the Founding of a Famous Library, *Evening Standard*, 28th January. In: Press Cuttings 24th October 1935 to 14th February 1936, Library Association Archive.
- ¹⁰⁹ Goldin, C. (1988) **Marriage Bars: Discrimination Against Married Women Workers, 1920s to 1950s, Working Paper 2747**, Cambridge MA, National Bureau of Economic Research. Oram, ref. 18.
- ¹¹⁰ This advertisement appeared in many issues of *Assistant Librarian*, for example: *Assistant Librarian*, 60(5), p.98.
- ¹¹¹ Goldin, ref. 108; Oram, ref. 18.
- ¹¹² Wildenhart, M. (1956) Women in Librarianship, *Assistant Librarian*, 49 (May), 78-80; and, Simsova, S. (1961) Married Women in Libraries, *Assistant Librarian*, 54(7), pp.130-2. Additional discussions of the marriage bar appear in: Zimmeck, ref. 102; Dyehouse, C. (1989) **Feminism and the Family in England 1880-1939**, Oxford, Blackwell; Lewis, J. (1984) **Women in England, 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change**, Brighton, Wheatsheaf; Zimmeck, M. (1986) Jobs for the Girls: The Expansion of Clerical Work for Women, 1850-1914, in John, A.V. (ed) **Unequal Opportunities. Women's Employment in England 1800-1918**, Oxford, Blackwell; and, Dyehouse, C. (1995) **No Distinction of Sex? Women in British Universities, 1870-1939**, London, UCL.
- ¹¹³ Interview with Rita Keegan, 6th February 1998.
- ¹¹⁴ There were attempts in 1941 in the US to enact legislation in some states which would have formally established the marriage bar. Shallcross Matthews, R. (1941) Married Women Librarians, *Library Journal*, 66(14), pp.650-1.
- ¹¹⁵ See Oram, ref. 18, p.60.
- ¹¹⁶ Martindale, H. (1938) **Women Servants of the State, 1870-1938. A History of Women in the Civil Service**, London, Allen and Unwin.

- ¹¹⁷ Oram, A.M. (1983) *Serving Two Masters? The Introduction of a Marriage Bar in Teaching in the 1920s*, in London Feminist History Group (eds), **The Sexual Dynamics of History. Men's Power, Women's Resistance**, London, Pluto, 1983.
- ¹¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁹ Ibid., p.141.
- ¹²⁰ Baker, T. (1880) *The Employment of Young Women as Assistants in Public Free Libraries*, in Tedder, H.R. and Thomas, E.C. (eds) **Transactions and Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Library Association of the United Kingdom**, London, Library Association.
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- ¹²⁴ Interview with Winfred Thorne, 20th May 1998.
- ¹²⁵ Hall, J.L.V. (1941) Letter, *Library Assistant*, 34, pp.141-2.
- ¹²⁶ Liddle, H. (1941) Resigned on Marriage, *Library Assistant*, 34, p.67-8.
- ¹²⁷ Ibid.
- ¹²⁸ Ibid., p.67.
- ¹²⁹ Ibid., p.68.
- ¹³⁰ This correspondence was in response to Byron, Born for the Stable. See for example, Drake, D. (1941) Letter, *Library Assistant*, 34, p.40-1.
- ¹³¹ Hall, J.L.V. (1941) Letter, *Library Assistant*, 34, pp.74-5.
- ¹³² Watson, E.H. (1941) Letter, *Library Assistant*, 34, p.115.
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Chapter 8. Bodies in the Library: Embodying Practices of Femininity in Library Employment

8.1 Introduction

As an intentionally organized materiality, the body is always an embodying of possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention. In other words, the body *is* a historical situation ...¹

The body as a historically specific social construction as well as a biological entity has been widely debated by theorists writing since the 1980s. Michel Foucault's work is often cited as shifting attention to the body as a site of cultural activity *and* a locus of control.² He focused attention on ways in which the body is regulated by, and contests, historically specific social norms. Whilst his work is seminal, it has been criticised for omitting a consideration of gender and normalising 'the body' as a male body.³ Other scholars, including feminists, have acknowledged Foucault's insights and developed them to illustrate how dominant discourses of femininity and masculinity are embodied. Of central interest here are embodiments of femininity in women's physicality when that physicality is understood not as a fixed biological or essential entity, but rather as a concrete social phenomenon.⁴ This develops earlier feminist arguments which have been wary of explanations of women's social positioning based on physiology. The awareness that physiological conceptions of social roles, such as those elaborated by biological determinism, usually impose limits on women and not on men.⁵ The recent emphasis on the body as a social construct implicates the body in social processes and the operation of power. Women's materiality is, as noted by Judith Butler above, "intentionally organized" and in considering that intention, it is also necessary to consider the nature of power. Again Michel Foucault's work, arguing for an understanding of power as not simply involving oppression and domination, but also containing the notion of resistance, is important.⁶ This concept allows that whilst the body may be organised to the benefit of particular groups, that organisation may be resisted by other groups or individuals. For example, understandings of women as feminine may justify women's frequent social positioning as Other, yet transsexuals or drag queens contest these understandings emphasising that gender categories are not stable entities, but are

subject to change.⁷ In acknowledging the contingent nature of power, the body can be understood as “intentionally organized”, yet that intention cannot be assumed to succeed.

Recent interest in many disciplines in theoretical and applied work on the body, sketched above, has scarcely been noticed in UK library history.⁸ This chapter explores how theories of the body can be helpful to a gendered history of the library labour market by using them to explore how women library workers’ bodies are cultural texts and sites where social control is attempted. Previous chapters have discussed aspects of the embodiment of femininity in library employment, for example, the construction of library work as ‘light’ rather than manual work, assumptions that women workers were not prepared or able to perform certain tasks, such as climbing ladders or stoking boilers, and that they were physically weaker than men workers.⁹ Additionally the importance of marital status and the assumed relationship between women, maternalism and children’s librarianship have been noted.¹⁰ These exemplars of the importance of the biological body in the cultural meanings of library employment are not re-considered here, but they might have been included as they prioritise women workers’ assumed physiological traits when considering their ability to perform library tasks. This chapter, however, engages with the gendered possibilities available to library workers in changing historical contexts. Five areas are explored. Firstly, the perceived need to control certain groups of library workers is discussed in relation to attempts to exclude women from libraries and to impose routines on library work. Secondly, the positioning of women as primarily sexual beings rather than workers is discussed by focusing on appearance and dress codes. Thirdly, an outline of the use of classical women figures to represent the library is considered. Fourthly, the association of women with new technological developments in library practices is explored. The chapter concludes by identifying issues of occupational health in library work and discussing the material impact of library work on the body. The chapter begins with further discussion of feminist understandings of the body.

8.2 Theories of the Body

Theorists have argued that the body is more than a biological entity and that it is also a text inscribed with cultural meanings. In other words, the body is an expression of cultural norms and, as such, is a centre of social control and power.¹¹ Feminist theorists have developed these ideas by insisting that gender is a significant marker constructing the text of the body and that this impacts on attempts to control the body.¹² Before feminists engaged with the theoretical work on the body, the body had already been a focus in feminist politics. ‘Body politics’ were key in the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s and focused on issues connected with reproduction and sexuality, such as access to child birth services, contraception and abortion, menstruation, and heterosexual and lesbian identities.¹³ Some of these issues, such as those focused on lesbian and gay sexualities, are beginning to be considered by library historians.¹⁴ Sexuality is not a focus here, however, it is discussed as a critical element in the nexus of power relations; further work is necessary in this area.

Theoretical understandings of the body, as noted above, have been greatly influenced by Michel Foucault’s work which argues that 19th and 20th century advances in political liberty have been accompanied by a counter-movement which aimed to exercise power at a local level and regulate individuals by disciplining bodily activity.¹⁵ This takes three forms, he argues. Firstly, it aims to control the body’s space. Foucault gives the example of a student in a classroom where the structure of the room is such that the student’s position there indicates their grades and background.¹⁶ Furthermore, the furniture in the class forces the student to sit upright in a particular position. The controlling, reifying aspects of education are being expressed on the body of the student. An example within the library is the control of the body’s space which is central to debates about open access: the doubtful bodies of library users are constructed as potentially damaging to the library and this is prevented by constraining user access.¹⁷ Secondly, Foucault argues that the body is disciplined in relation to its movements, as seen in the prescriptive instructions for soldiers at drill.¹⁸ A library exemplar might be the attempt to censure women library users based on complaints about the noise their dresses made when they moved.¹⁹ Finally, the body is controlled in relation to time, by timetables for school activities or

by the start of the working day indicated by the factory whistle.²⁰ In the library, the variety of opening times for different reading rooms in a library or for branches of a main library might be understood in a similar way. Foucault argues that attempts to control the body are enforced by surveillance. He explains this by referring to Jeremy Bentham's design for the Panopticon, a model prison.²¹ In the centre is a tower from which all the surrounding periphery building can be seen. This latter building is made up of cells into which the person in the tower can see, but which do not allow the inmates contact with other cells. This isolates the prisoners in the periphery and makes them aware that they are constantly under surveillance, and thus, in order to conform and avoid punishment, they regulate their own behaviour. Such control, which Foucault argues is present throughout society, produces "'docile' bodies"²² which embody and re-produce dominant power relations.

Foucault's work, however, treats men's and women's bodies as commensurate and does not address the different relationships of gendered individuals to social institutions. A powerful critique of this point is made by Sandra Lee Bartky who argues that if disciplinary practices produce docile men's bodies, then women's bodies are likely to be yet "more docile".²³ She argues that whilst men and women are born as male or female, they achieve social recognition as masculine or feminine and she identifies three categories of disciplinary practices which produce a body gendered as feminine. Firstly, she notes normative styles of the female figure. Whilst the 17th century women in Peter Rubens' paintings were curvaceous and positioned as desirable, the normative shape for women in the West in late 20th century is "slimness bordering on emaciation".²⁴ As many adult women in contemporary western societies have different bodily dimensions to this norm, they are seen as deficient and are encouraged to attempt to achieve that 'ideal' body by disciplining their own body through diet and exercise. This discipline is taken to its logical, and fatal, extreme by women who become anorexic or bulimic.²⁵ Whilst men are also affected by normative body shapes, Sandra Lee Bartky argues that women are subjected to greater pressure to conform to the current definition of the 'ideal' body, and face more sanction if they do not.

A second disciplinary practice on the body which is differently gendered for men and women concerns movement. Sandra Lee Bartky notes work by Iris Young which found that women tend to be more restricted than men in their manner of movement, and, for example, take shorter strides than a man of a comparable size. Iris Young also found that women tend to restrict their body movements to those close to the body, and tend, for example, to sit with feet together or legs crossed. Most men do not comport themselves similarly. The final practice Sandra Lee Bartky examines is that of appearance. The “ornamented surface” of the body is, perhaps most clearly, an achieved status dependent not only on gender, but also on the intersecting impacts of class, economic privilege, ethnicity and dis/ability.²⁶ Sandra Lee Bartky focuses on the use of cosmetics to ‘enhance’ femininity, and argues that wearing the ‘right’ clothes and acceptable cosmetics is necessary for women to avoid sanction, often in the form of the withholding of heterosexual privilege, in most contemporary social and labour market situations.

To summarise, the dominant discourse of femininity is inscribed on women’s bodies in three significant ways: in attempts to conform to an ideal feminine body shape, to move in a restricted feminine manner and, to dress and present the body and face as appropriately feminine. The rest of this chapter focuses on ways in which women library workers were inscribed as feminine through meanings attached to their bodies, their bodily appearance and movement. The possibilities facilitated and prohibited by these constructions of the body are discussed to explore the ways that the bodies of library workers may be read as a cultural text and a locus of social control. The next section explores three attempts to control the body at work in the library through exclusion, discipline and regulation of appearance.

8.3 Embodying Possibilities: Inconvenient Bodies

Women’s assumed physical differences from men were used to justify attempts to exclude women from library employment from the 1870s until the Second World War. Libraries employing women sometimes faced what was popularly referred to as the “accommodation problem”. This arose in 1901 at Hull public libraries and the regional press reported that:

... owing to the lack of cloakroom accommodation & c., they [the public library committee] could not recommend the employment of female assistants for the present.²⁷

Winifred Thorne explained that Poplar public library, which her father William Benson Thorne managed from the turn of the century to the 1940s, faced a similar difficulty because:

Of course the buildings weren't constructed - there were not facilities for women staff - it would have meant all sorts of alterations for toilets and staff rooms which would have been quite a kerfuffle because they were old buildings you see by then -²⁸

Single sex workforces required only one set of cloakroom facilities and the architecture of libraries built in this fashion reinforces the assumption that library work was a profession for men. The inclusion of women on the staff, however, created the need for a further set of cloakrooms. The cost of remedying the, now erroneous, assumption of a single sex workforce allowed library committees to claim that, although they would have employed women workers, they were unable to do so on economic grounds.²⁹ In cases of the "accommodation problem", the exclusion of women from the library workforce is based on their different physicality from men. Contemporary work on public toilets by Julia Edwards and Linda McKie argues that the provision of sufficient women's toilets in public spaces is a citizenship issue as the failure to do so effectively excludes women from public arenas.³⁰ A similar argument may be made about the provision of workplace toilets, and the failure to accommodate women's basic needs at work, whilst meeting men's similar needs, is discrimination.

Academic libraries, too, expressed the gendered workforce in their architecture. In 1936, the newly opened Brotherton Library at Leeds University provided separate men's and women's staff rooms for its workforce. These survived until the early 1960s when, due to pressure of space, a single staff room was established, however, this was unpopular with some workers who refused to use it.³¹

The establishment of separate staff rooms does not penalise women workers in the same way as the “accommodation problem”. By creating separate spaces for men’s and women’s informal work culture, however, it does exclude women from opportunities to develop social relationships with men workers. This could have been beneficial to women’s immediate working conditions and might have developed into improved career opportunities, as men library workers tended to hold senior positions. Whilst women workers were excluded from such socially-based opportunities, separate staff rooms gave young men workers privileged access to informal work culture and senior workers.

Attempts to exclude women or create sex segregated work facilities were not the only ways in which the body was invoked to regulate library work. Alistair Black notes that “libraries have typically ... been places where order, if not repression, have [sic] reigned supreme.”³² Although frequently this repression was applied to readers and users of public libraries, Black notes that library staff, too, were subjected to “disciplining of the body” by, for example, “backroom duties or for such visible procedures as registering membership, issuing books or logging returns”.³³ The closely detailed instructions provided to workers showing them how to perform routine tasks is illustrated by a 1930s leaflet entitled *Daily Routine in the Library. Instructions for Junior Assistants*. Instructions are given regarding, for example, the reference department, reading rooms and the children’s library. Those regarding “Open Access Routine” declare that:

When replacing books on the shelves, every care must be taken to replace them in their proper order, and to keep the shelves tidy.³⁴

These instructions emphasise, reasonably enough, that workers must endeavour to shelve accurately, however, there is an additional exhortation to shelve tidily, which identifies that there is a correct way to shelve and an incorrect way. This was reinforced in other instructions which drilled workers in the manner in which they should carry out their tasks:

Conversation is to be restricted to matters of public service in the public departments. Assistants are expected to speak quietly ... The Staff should always move about as quietly as possible, and avoid unnecessary noise.³⁵

Much as library notices of the period insisted on 'Silence' from readers,³⁶ library workers were also expected to be restrained verbally and physically. These instructions were aimed at all junior assistants, however, their publication in the 1930s coincides with the time when women were beginning to outnumber men in the library sector, and proportionately more of these women than men would have been in 'junior assistant' posts.³⁷ Whilst these instructions were not explicitly aimed at women workers, the timing of this attempt at regulating workers' bodies indicates that gendering processes in the library workforce may have been a factor. Examples of non-gendered attempts at controlling library workers can be found in the early library manuals which emphasise the utility to managers of timesheets and work books "in which the daily duties of each assistant can be entered". On arrival at the library the worker enters:

... his or her exact time in the spaces reserved, beginning the day with the first column. The assistants who check and tidy *a to d* [i.e. tasks listed] in the mornings write their initials opposite the particular duty, whilst those who attend to the charging system, date stamps, overdues and cash for change also initial the item, the amount of change being stated. Against each assistant's number is written his or her duties for the day. ... In some libraries the assistants have to pencil their numbers against every piece of work performed either in a special book or on a card, but this seems an irksome addition to duties already sufficiently heavy.³⁸

James Duff Brown notes that the work book forms a written check on the day's work in the library. In functioning thus, it enables the manager to carry out indirect surveillance of library employees' work by checking the written record at the end of the day, particularly if workers were obliged to mark off their name against each duty they performed. Duff Brown also notes, however, that the staff work book is useful because it facilitates the distribution of a range of duties throughout the staff and this

might well benefit the workers. Other benefits of manuals-based instructions were outlined by Jan Smith who worked in West Riding public libraries in the 1950s. She describes the West Riding Manual as:

A thick blue-backed instruction book on the loose leaf system. In this book every transaction in a library was written out in very full detail - how to fill in a request card, how to file it a branch level, etc., etc. When I went to Herts. someone asked me with a grin, "Have you brought your manual with you?" This was when I realised that to everyone else the W.R. Manual was an object of fun. BUT W.R. was a very big county and many service points were far flung. It kept the whole thing ticking over very efficiently.³⁹

The West Riding manual might be "an object of fun" to some workers, however, it was also a useful source of information for the often unqualified, usually women, part-time workers based in isolated rural libraries. As a source of reliable instruction and re-assurance that they were performing their jobs accurately and effectively the manual contributed to the worker's sense of well-being.

The exclusion of women, occasional sex segregation in the workplace, the use of manuals, work books and instructions about routines are examples of attempts by library managers and institutions to discipline workers. Occasionally, however, the situation was reversed and individual library workers attempted to control some aspect of the library. In November 1957, for example, the national press covered the story of the attempt by Florence Cockroft, librarian at Mexborough, Yorkshire, to censor the library's stock by removing its copy of *Peyton Place*. This was described in one of the newspapers as an "earthy novel of sex and scandal" and by Florence Cockroft as a "'blue' book".⁴⁰ Her efforts were unsuccessful and the book was reinstated, however, the library committee gave it an "X-certificate" prohibiting children from taking it out of the library.⁴¹ The attempt by an individual worker to influence the bookstock was partially defeated by the more powerful library committee, although the "X-certificate" and prohibition on issuing it to children does suggest there was some agreement on the need for censorship. Furthermore, the narrative functions as a warning to other librarians who might have considered taking

similar action. Florence Cockroft was ridiculed in the press reports, described repeatedly as shocked and constructed as a prudish spinster who was “bespectacled and middle-aged”. This description does not accord with the 1950s ideal of heterosexual femininity. Instead, it is part of the widespread attack in the 1950s on spinsters which was, in part, attributable to psychology and sexology.⁴² This attack was linked to earlier debates about sexuality, which connected sexual repression (from which all spinsters were assumed to suffer) with “pure irritation and hate of life”,⁴³ and together formed an anti-lesbian discourse. Additionally, descriptions of Florence Cockroft as a spectacle-wearing librarian might indicate that she was a ‘bluestocking’ or academic, and thus a member of a group of women often singled out for anti-lesbian attacks.⁴⁴ Attempts by individual workers to control the library stock, then, were possible but might entail social risk for that worker.

In summary, there were attempts to exert control over library workers throughout the period, including efforts to exclude women from the library workforce and to separate men and women at work. Whilst recording work details might function to control workers, they might also benefit library workers by enabling managers to distribute routine work throughout the workforce. Similarly, detailed instructions for routine work might be restrictive, however, they might also provide practical help to isolated workers. Finally, library workers could attempt to regulate the library, however, such attempts might result in social censure.

8.4 Regulating Appearance: Writing Femininity on the Body in the Library

Dress in public libraries is not very important in many cases, but in others it is.⁴⁵

There were various attempts to control the appearance of library workers throughout the period under review. Some of the attempts applied to men as well as women, however, women were targeted more frequently and faced more stated prohibitions regarding their dress than men. For example, many women library workers were not allowed to wear trousers to work until the 1970s. A decade before, some women working on mobile libraries in the winter were given special dispensation to wear

trousers in cold weather.⁴⁶ A member of the women's discussion group was allowed to wear trousers whilst working on the mobile library during the Second World War after telling her manager she suffered from chilblains. On returning to the library, however, she was expected to change into usual her work clothes.⁴⁷ Another member of the women's group said that she had worn trousers in some workplaces in the early 1960s, but on moving to an industrial library found a "very strict dress code ... women weren't allowed to wear trousers at all."⁴⁸ Dress codes were widespread, but scarcely consistent. The need for prohibitions on women's dress may be attributable to the widespread informal dress code of the dark suit for men office workers. By contrast, women's clothing was seen as appropriate for social or domestic contexts which were defined in contrast to the workplace. Women's clothes epitomised non-work contexts and were abnormal when worn at work, and thus required some form of regulation to render them suitable for the workplace. Beverley Skeggs has argued that clothes are a vocabulary and may be read as representations of the self.⁴⁹ In this case, women, like their clothes, are at variance with the normative composition of the library workforce and require a transformation if they are to participate in that labour market. Library workers' appearance is explored below in relation to dress codes, overalls and beauty contests.

8.4.1 *Dress Codes*

Assistants of all grades must come punctually on duty, and must be neatly and plainly dressed, preferably in dark clothes. In library hours, assistants must not wear ornaments or jewellery, such as rings, necklaces, pendants, bangles etc. There is no objection to dress fastenings such as broaches, but in business hours all ornaments should be placed in the lockers.⁵⁰

The discipline exerted over the body in relation to timekeeping was sometimes accompanied, as in the above quotation from Finsbury public libraries in the late 1920s, by attempts to discipline how workers looked. Elizabeth Wilson has argued that dress codes are "a site of struggle for control of the power to define situations and ourselves: to create meaning".⁵¹ Library dress codes, then, might be understood as a struggle to define the gendered hierarchy of library employment. Whilst the Finsbury

dress code does not state that it is aimed at women workers, more of the instructions apply to women than men. Furthermore, the accepted dress code for men office workers of a dark suit makes it almost superfluous to instruct them to wear “dark clothes”. A similar statement containing regulations about appearance and timekeeping appears in the booklet, *Daily Routine in the Library*, however, this additionally emphasises that workers “should cultivate neatness and tidiness”.⁵² Not only should clothes deemed appropriate be worn, which could be difficult enough in times of shortages or if the worker had little money to spend on clothes,⁵³ but also these clothes should be worn in the ‘proper’ way.

Dress codes were exaggerated in critical situations, such as going for job interviews. Conforming to a conventional feminine appearance in the 1960s did not necessarily entail wearing a hat, yet a member of the men’s discussion group said,

I remember appointing a woman senior assistant who would appear in a hat. She told me afterwards that she brought the hat in a paper bag and put in on just when she was called for interview.⁵⁴

Men workers were penalised for failing to conform to dress codes and this was indicated by another speaker in this group:

When I went for a job as deputy cataloguer in [city] - and there were only two candidates and when I saw that the other chap had only a sports jacket and trousers, I thought unless I blot my copy book very seriously [inaudible] then he is going to appoint me [inaudible] and he [the library manager] didn’t think [the other candidate] getting the job was on, just on the grounds of their dress sense. But dress sense did make an awful lot of difference.⁵⁵

Whilst the other candidate may not have been suitable for the post, this speaker locates his unsuitability primarily through the clothes selected for interview. Conforming to dress codes made such “an awful lot of difference” that self-disciplining of the body and surveillance of others was required to avoid penalty.

Men as well as women workers were, then, effected by dress codes, however, those impacting on men appear to have been less formalised, if still uncomfortable. A member of the men's discussion group recalled taking off his detachable collar and tie on a particularly hot summer day in the late 1940s and, shortly afterwards, being told to put it back on.⁵⁶ Jean Plaister described a fairly relaxed dress code in operation when she worked at Oxford public libraries in the 1950s and yet this was strictly enforced:

... they didn't let the staff wear open toed sandals at all and - or t-shirts or anything with a low neck. You see you had to be properly dressed. ... - the chief used to come round and say he didn't approve of something and would send somebody home - but it was difficult ... we had one rather large girl who was rather more casually dressed - she was only a junior assistant and he reduced her to tears and said, "Unsuitable clothes," you know. They were very strict.⁵⁷

Susan Bordo emphasises that achieving a feminine appearance requires that women's bodies match, or attempt to match, the ideal feminine shape. In the 1950s, this ideal shape was not "rather large". Failure to achieve the correct body shape combined with failure to wear the suitable clothes culminates in the junior assistant being "reduced ... to tears" by the library manager. In contrast, to the man worker, above, who had to suffer the discomfort of re-attaching his collar and tie, the junior assistant at Oxford suffers emotionally. Both incidents, recalled several decades later, would have encouraged other workers to ensure that they conformed to the dress code.

Dress codes could, however, be open to some minor negotiation by workers. Lorna Paulin found the dress code at Kent county libraries in the 1940s "very hard" particularly in the summer as wearing stockings was mandatory. Whilst giving the appearance of conforming to the code, she avoided overheating by:

... having some stockings that finished at the knee, you know, and if you wore a dress long enough it didn't matter and I used to wear them sulkily, and take them off at the end of the drive when I left in the evening.⁵⁸

Ruth Blackwell, an assistant at Chelsea public library and active member of the LA who had just been asked by the LA Council to serve on the Committee of Women Librarians,⁵⁹ was more severely penalised for breaking a dress code in 1913. The incident itself is unclear, however, LAA minutes outline the case in correspondence to J. Henry Quinn, librarian at Chelsea. The minutes note that, “Miss Blackwell’s dismissal was connected with a dress she was wearing while on duty which Mr Quinn described as unsuitable.”⁶⁰ The dress was described in the Minutes as “plain dark blue velveteen”, which would conform the dress codes noted above. Although the LAA were prepared to investigate Ruth Blackwell’s dismissal, the initial letter to Henry Quinn indicates they were ready to exonerate him:

I think the report is utterly improbable and that you are quite incapable of doing such an outrageous thing. Would you care to tell me what are the actual facts of the situation?⁶¹

When no reply arrived, a further, more strongly worded letter was sent which argued that, “Librarianship is a profession, and that it is too late in the day for any individual librarian to dismiss summarily a member of his staff without some more adequate reason than the dress she wears.”⁶² Neither letter produced any explanation and Mr Quinn wrote only to deny the accusation and threaten legal action if the claims were made public.⁶³ The LAA took no further action.⁶⁴ At this time, then, conforming to workplace dress codes could be a matter of keeping your job.

8.4.2 *The Tyranny of Overalls, or A “Topic of No Importance to Any Serious Student of Library Economy”.*⁶⁵

The introduction of overalls for women library workers was explained in 1908 in the professional press by Marion Frost, librarian at Worthing public library. After noting that in many respects women were “eminently suited” to library work, she wrote:

The woman librarian is, however, often lacking in that sense of the fitness in dress which is essential in a position where neatness and smartness are necessary. The need for a professional dress for the woman librarian has been long felt by all who come in contact with her. At her best, even when “well-dressed” in the ordinary sense, she appears inappropriate behind the counter of a library, but at her worst she is unspeakable. Open-work blouses, trailing skirts, and imitation jewellery are appallingly unsuitable.

Efforts to alter this state of things have meant continuous pressure, even to repress the more glaring errors of dress. ... A complete reform is the only solution ...⁶⁶

The justification for the introduction of overalls is not constructed in the form of a need to protect workers' clothes, but as a way of remedying the unsuitability of women's ordinary dress for the workplace. If the woman library worker is “well-dressed”, this is “inappropriate” in the library and if she is not “well-dressed”, she is “unspeakable”. Even accepted forms of feminine appearance, which appear normal and suitable outside the workplace, are defective when worn to work. Whilst a feminine appearance has cultural value in terms of gaining heterosexual privilege and winning social approval,⁶⁷ Marion Frost suggests that this must be regulated to achieve acceptable status in the labour market. Her proposal is drastic: women's personal clothes should be disallowed in the workplace, replaced by, “wearing an overall, or some kind of uniform-dress”.⁶⁸ The Worthing overall was dark green with buff coloured braid and a fixed belt and buttoned down the front (see Figure 8.1). Initial objections from workers that the overall was “an extra expense”, “unbecoming” and “a uniform” were “easily removed” by Marion Frost who asserted:

1. That the initial expense need only be a few shillings.
2. That one can be artistically as well as suitably dressed.
3. That a uniform is not synonymous with servility.⁶⁹

Marion Frost's article began the public debate about overalls which ran until the 1950s. Whilst some workers and commentators agreed that overalls fulfilled a useful function, others did not. A meeting in 1925 of the Eastern Branch of the AAL



WORTHING LIBRARY STAFF OVERALL

Figure 8.1 The Worthing overall, 1908⁷⁰

had an “animated” debate about overalls which “revealed considerable differences of opinion.”⁷¹ In 1912, Maud Griffiths, then sub-librarian at Luton municipal library, had a frank exchange of views with *Librarian and Bookworld* columnist Margaret Reed about the suitability of overalls. Maud Griffiths argued that overalls were useful to library managers, as they improved the appearance of workers, and to library workers, as they might be paid for by the library authority and prevented expense in pursuit of “rivalry in personal adornment amongst girls not too well paid”.⁷² Margaret Reed retorted that “one rigid design would not suit every girl” and that “girls do resent being obliged to wear certain styles of dress”.⁷³

The regional press in 1936 heaped praise on the all-women Luton library workforce and their overalls:

Their appearance in their new dark red poplin overalls is as pleasant as their manner. Those overalls by the way were their own choice as regards colour, and apart from a maintaining uniform appearance are a practical necessity.⁷⁴

Some libraries introduced overalls due the pressure from workers. A 1953 report recommended that, “Protective clothing (overalls or dust jackets)” should be available but should not be compulsory.⁷⁵ A speaker in the women’s discussion group said, “ ... we had overalls but that was a result of us nagging because we got out clothes so dirty ...”⁷⁶ Overalls worn by boy junior assistants in a city library in the 1940s were described as “a thing like milkmen wear, you know a khaki thing” and because only boy assistants had overalls they were expected to do “all the sorting out and the girls used to avoid that because we’d got proper overalls to do it.”⁷⁷ Perhaps because junior workers were more likely to get dirty in the course of their work and thus benefited from some protection for their clothes, this group of library workers were sometimes “keen to wear overalls”⁷⁸ and some continued to wear them even when it was not compulsory to do so.⁷⁹ Professional workers, on the other hand, “objected strongly”.⁸⁰

Dissent about overalls is apparent in most discussions of the subject. A response to Marion Frost objected to her proposal “to uniform her women assistants in the same way that we usually uniform our porters” because, “Surely attempts of this

kind ... bring women assistants down to the level of domestic servants and shop girls ...”⁸¹ Uniforms and overalls are clearly positioned here as markers of feminised working-class occupations, which the writer, W.G. Chambers, objects to associating with librarianship which he implicitly identifies as a professional, middle-class occupation. The down-classing of librarianship is associated in his letter with “the tyranny which may be expected if, or when, women become dominating factors in library work” and this “tyranny” is physically expressed on the restrained bodies of women library workers. Another response, written under a pseudonym, argued that forcing assistants to wear overalls was like reprimanding “naughty children” rather than working with adult colleagues. The “tyranny of Worthing” and “compulsory” overalls should be resisted, the writer argued.⁸² A further objection to overalls, given in the men’s discussion group, was that wearing uniforms was negatively associated with military service.⁸³ Finally, one male speaker connected issues of accessibility to the appearance of library workers:

I remember talking to Lorna Paulin about this at one stage because there were such a lot of objections to lads who turned up to work in sweaters looking scruffy and her view was that if the people behind the library counter or wandering around in the library looked like the sort of people you could get on with - then folks would come into the library. But if they looked like people who wore grey suits, then they wouldn’t come in. Very liberal.⁸⁴

The control of library workers’ appearance might be understood as a barrier to potential library users.

The lack of consensus about the propriety of overalls for library workers is emphasised by the instructions workers in a large town were given about when and when not to wear them:

Had overalls in [name of town] to work in the stores and the basement, but if they were called to do duty on the counter or in the library area they had to take it off. If you walked in with it on, you had to go back and take it off.⁸⁵

Overalls were not acceptable as the public face of the library because they mitigated against the professional status of library worker by associating it with feminised working class occupations and domestic work. Yet overalls were seen as necessary for some types of work by some county and municipal libraries. Librarianship's slippery hold on the claim to be a 'true' profession is re-worked in the dilemmas about how its workers should be dressed, and this is most evident in relation to women workers.

8.4.3 *Sexuality, Appearance and Women Library Workers*

The 1931 AAL report into conditions in municipal libraries found that approximately one-fifth of the libraries surveyed required women to wear overalls.⁸⁶ Yet the impact of overalls was felt more widely than in just these libraries. Susan Bordo identifies the body as an "intelligible *symbolic form*" and discusses the nineteenth century hourglass figure as an exemplar.

The sharp cultural contrast between the female and the male form, made possible by the use of corsets and bustles, reflected, in symbolic terms, the dualistic division of social and economic life into clearly defined male and female spheres.⁸⁷

In the library workforce, the use of overalls, overwhelmingly for women workers, also reflected the extensive occupational segregation by sex, or a dualistic division of posts into men's and women's positions, much as Lionel McColvin had so forcefully argued was necessary.⁸⁸ The position of a worker might thus be inscribed on their body and as such, the use of overalls for women workers was a physical manifestation of the gendering processes in the library labour market. This manifestation was developed at West Riding county libraries where there were different coloured overalls for women workers depending on their post:

Now the colour for those with an ALA and working in a 'qualified' job was pale grey ... very unflattering. ... The turquoise one was worn by 'juniors' not yet qualified. ... A female head of department wore a grey overall, a male head of department wore his suit.⁸⁹

The colour of overalls was significant in other ways. At a small independent library the workers had two overalls:

... you wore one, one week and the other was in the wash, and you wore one the next week. And I turned up one morning in pink week with my blue overall on ... - and - I mean [the librarian] didn't come in until about three in the afternoon anyway and her priority was my overall. "Oh my dear, my dear, it's blue week," or whatever week it was. ... Oh yes. It was pink week, or it was blue week.⁹⁰

Overalls might be useful to women workers in decreasing the effort required in creating an acceptable labour market appearance, however, the insistence on "pink week or blue week" diminished this benefit as these women had to keep track of which colour week it was and conform to that colour.

At Coventry library, too, women workers had different coloured overalls: red for the winter and green for the summer.⁹¹ The red overalls were disliked by workers and there were complaints from the library managers that the women added embroidery to their overalls. This might have been an effort to personalise the library uniform or to make them more attractive. When Evelyn Evans worked at Coventry public library in the 1940s she tried to improve her working appearance:

We were given enough material to make two overalls and we made our own. And most of them just had overalls, but I had mine made as dresses. It looked much smarter, instead of having something that went on top of everything else I would change and put on this dress.⁹²

By having the overall material made into dresses, Evelyn Evans was able to achieve a "much smarter" appearance than the women who wore overalls. Beverley Skeggs argues that the "surface of the body is the site upon which distinctions can be drawn."⁹³ By looking "smarter" Evelyn Evans is able to distinguish between her desire to pursue a professional career as a librarian and other connotations of work performed by overall-wearing women. The concern to look "smarter" may be seen as

a disidentification with working class occupations through the construction of a middle class appearance. Earlier in the interview, Evelyn Evans disassociated the work of a library professional from cleaning tasks:

... you know we didn't dust the books in Coventry, there was a cleaner and they did those. But when I went up to York every assistant had a duster and as they tidied the shelves they dusted them, but we didn't in Coventry. And I remember our central library had got alcoves and there were shelves in front of the alcoves so the alcove looked like a private room which you could get into and I remember Miss Sidderell who was deputy asked me to dust some books in one and I was furious. That wasn't my job, dusting books, that wasn't what I was a librarian for.⁹⁴

Looking "smarter" may also be understood as a concern with constructing a conventionally pleasing feminine appearance. Overalls, too, could contribute to such an appearance by being styled after contemporary fashions. Marion Frost's overalls at Worthing are in keeping with the style of the day, using the leg of mutton sleeve, and the 1950s West Riding overalls bear some resemblance to the 'New Look' silhouette, which had a small waist, tight bodice and full skirt (see Figure 8.2).

Conforming with contemporaneous fashions is an aspect of constructing a heterosexually attractive appearance.⁹⁵ A concern with being heterosexy⁹⁶ is evident in objections raised to the colour of overalls. Speaker B in the women's discussion group, for example, did not like the overalls because, "The pale grey was the worst possible colour for me because I was so pale. Not the least bit flattering."⁹⁷ A "flattering" colour would have been one which contributed to a sense of heterosexiness. Overalls might be designed in accordance with heterosexual attractiveness, yet they did not necessarily enhance one's heterosexiness. Being heterosexy was a way that the "intelligible body"⁹⁸ of the woman library worker might attempt disidentification with lesbian sexual identities and this was significant in positioning the self within normative discourses of sexuality.

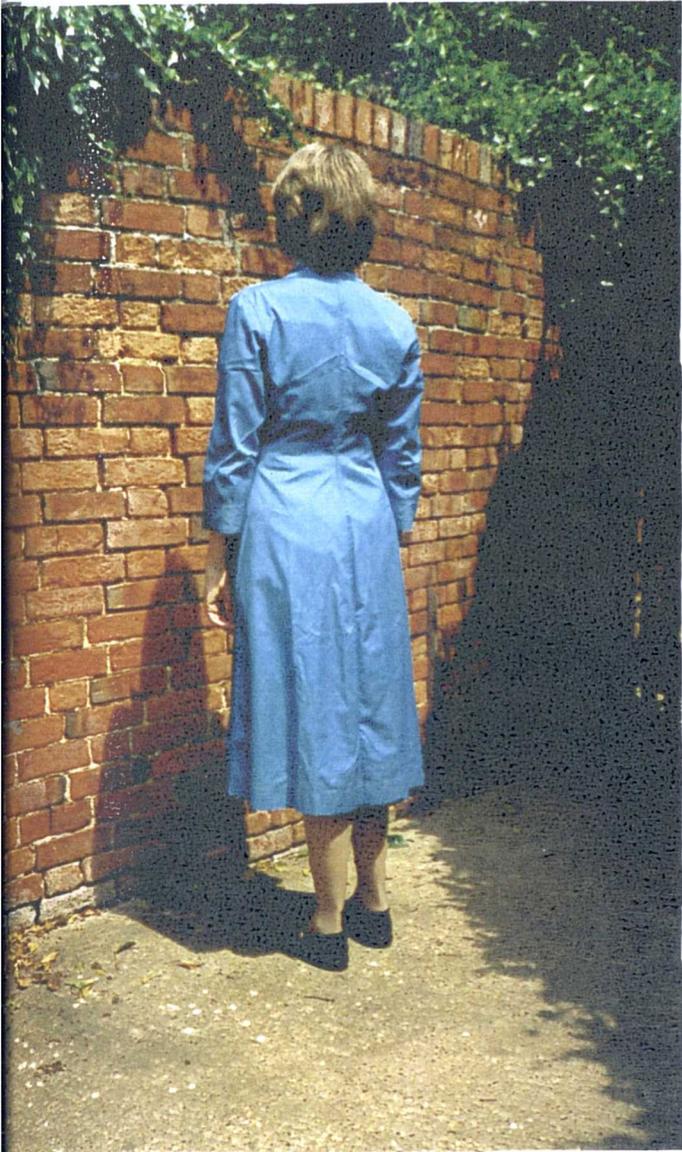


Figure 8.2 The West Riding overall, circa 1950s

Disidentification with lesbian women, who were frequently described in negative terms, was significant because aspects of caricatures of lesbian women were shared by women librarians and other groups of independent women.⁹⁹ Many of the most senior and visible women librarians were single, partly due to the marriage bar, and spinsters' sexuality was suspect.¹⁰⁰ Women librarians were sometimes pejoratively referred to as "bluestockings",¹⁰¹ a term which had acquired anti-marriage and anti-men connotations by the 1920s.¹⁰² Furthermore, Havelock Ellis, writing in 1897, claimed that with women who were "sexual inverts", that is lesbian:

... there is nearly always a disdain for the petty feminine artifices of the toilet. Even when this is not obvious, there are all sorts of instinctive gestures and habits which may suggest to female acquaintances the remark that such a person 'ought to have been a man'. The brusque energetic movements, the attitude of the arms, the direct speech, the inflexions of the voice, the masculine straightforwardness and sense of honour, and especially the attitude towards men, free from any suggestion either of shyness or audacity, will often suggest the underlying psychic abnormality to a keen observer.¹⁰³

These points, which were made throughout the period under review,¹⁰⁴ may be applied to women library workers. According to Ellis, wearing overalls or clothes acceptable in the workplace might be read as a rejection of conventional feminine dress codes. The fashion in the 1930s for women workers to wear a tie and cut their hair short reinforces this impression (see Figure 8.3). A description of Ethel Fegan, librarian of Girton College Cambridge, also accords with Ellis's description of lesbian women:

Fegan was the sort who wore a shirt, collar and tie and a tweed suit like those of Clos and Tommy (her father was a doctor and an Irishman); she filled us with awe ... Late one evening, as I was sitting on a step ladder reading, Fegs who was perhaps preparing to close up, gave me a resounding thwack on the back with the words, 'Well, jackass, what are you doing here?'¹⁰⁵

'Fegs' not only wore clothes more usually associated with men, but she also did not comply with supposedly feminine forms of address, vocabulary or motility. Yet this type of straightforward speech was something that women library workers were

A TELLER OF TALES



AND THEY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER

LISTENING TO EVERY WORD. Miss L. Hurd telling a story to young folk in the children's room at Haslingden, Lancashire, Public Library. They are to have a party to celebrate the second anniversary of the opening of the room.

Figure 8.3 Lillian Hurd¹⁰⁶

criticised for lacking and encouraged to develop, along with general business habits.¹⁰⁷ Being “free from any suggestion either of shyness or audacity” is necessary in service work and in effective communication. Like ‘Fegs’, some women librarians did not refer to themselves or certain other women librarians using traditional feminine names. Florence Milnes, for example, was also known as Bill,¹⁰⁸ whilst some women referred to each other by their surnames.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, some women librarians might also have been marked as sexually abnormal because they were cyclists. Ellen Garvey describes “a flood of medical articles” published in the 1890s which attacked the propriety of cycling for women as a threat to sexual purity and femininity. Articles warned that “the bicycle saddle could be sexually stimulating”. Garvey argues that, “The link between masturbation and riding was a compelling metaphor of the times, because women who rode and women who masturbated were both beyond male control ...”¹¹⁰ County librarians, many of whom were women, used bicycles until the 1930s to visit their branches.¹¹¹ Not only might such women be beyond male control geographically and sexually, but they also had independent economic incomes. Given such factors, a “keen observer” might wonder about the “psychic” tendencies of women library workers. Disidentification from such understandings might position women library workers positively in relation to heterosexuality. Yet this, too, was not without penalty: heterosexy women were those who would marry and, for women throughout much of this period, marriage might signal to end of her employment.¹¹²

Stella Browne’s work in the 1920s on “sexual inversion” re-emphasised many of Ellis’s points and also offered an alternative reading of the meaning of work with children. She argued that women who were “professionally associated with children and young girls” might show their “innate homosexual tendency by excess of petting” and “intense jealousy” of other people’s contact with these children.¹¹³ Sheila Jeffreys notes that this type of work might have been interpreted as maternalistic and therefore as demonstrating heterosexuality, but she points out that Browne appears to confuse “lesbians with child molesters”.¹¹⁴ Browne’s comments can be applied to many groups of women workers because assumed innate caring abilities were an important route into the labour market for women. These qualities, in this instance providing women with privileged access to children’s librarianship, are undermined by Browne’s assertion.

A number of the characteristics of lesbian women depicted by writers like Ellis and Browne could be applied to women library workers. Many were single, capable of direct speech, worked with children and showed limited interest in their work clothes, or wore masculinised clothes. This does not mean that such women were involved in lesbian relationships, but rather that they might be positioned as such. Sheila Jeffreys notes the identification of independent women within anti-lesbian discourses and argues that this uses “the accusation of lesbianism to subvert women’s attempts at emancipation”.¹¹⁵ The first half of the 19th century, which saw a multifaceted attack on lesbian women in the UK, was also the period when, to date, there was the highest proportion of women in the most senior library posts, particularly in the county library sector. Positioning these women as lesbian may be seen as an attempt to discourage their labour market activity. A further sexuality-focused attempt to undermine women’s labour market activities is outlined by Alison Oram. She suggests that, just before the First World War, the threat of women teachers’ professionalism was undermined at union conferences. Activities, such as the presentation of purses, described by one commentator as establishing a ‘ladies day’ at conference, positioned women teachers as “women first, and teachers second”, Oram argues.¹¹⁶ In other words, women’s biological/sexual identity is prioritised before their professional identity. If that biological/sexual identity is lesbian that is problematic within normative discourses of sexuality, however, it is also problematic for heterosexual women. According to west European tradition, women’s sexuality is naturally ‘unruly’, in contrast to men’s sexuality which is seen as constrained by rational thought.¹¹⁷ Constructions of women library workers in sexual terms, then, reinforced their deficient Otherness to men.

8.4.4 Beauty Contests and the Sexualisation of Women Library Workers

Overalls may be seen as an attempt to cover up women’s Otherness from men, whilst simultaneously displaying the overall-wearing bodies as feminine. A more explicit display of women’s bodies is apparent with the advent of beauty contests for women library workers. Beauty contests were accused by radical feminists in the late 1960s of demeaning women by judging them by their appearance and evaluating them

in sexual terms.¹¹⁸ Almost simultaneous with these accusations, members of the library establishment instituted beauty contests for women library workers. In 1966, the AAL decided that its contribution to the 1967 National Library Week would be to stage a beauty contest to “promote a brighter image of librarianship”.¹¹⁹ The contest was organised regionally with the final round held during a Miss Library World ball in London; a similar contest was held the following year.¹²⁰ Jean Plaister, one of the organisers, explained that:

... we had this National Library Week and the AAL was asked to do something you see ... and we said, ‘why don’t we have a beauty contest?’ you know, and nobody batted a hair. ... They didn’t have to wear bathing costumes but they could wear dresses and things like this and you know ... it was a whale of a time.¹²¹

A number of women entered the event which was publicised in the national media by short articles and photographs of some of the competitors,¹²² perhaps justifying the claim that it aimed to promote a “brighter image” of library work. In the context of the late 1960s, Jean Plaister suggests that “nobody batted a hair” at the idea of the competition and that, although “we couldn’t possibly do it now”, at the time it was a reasonable suggestion. The men’s discussion group, however, did recall some dissent:

- D It was a funny time because there was a lot of opposition to it.
- B Yes
- ? O yes, yes
- A ... they were quite a nice string of girls - not nice - but nice in that they had come along in spite of the fact that it had got some pretty bad publicity.
- EK So what was the opposition to it?
- A Well it was setting up the girls as something to be looked at and ogled -
- B Yes, yes
- C Same sort of objections as the Miss World thing that used to happen on the telly.

The opposition outlined here, which does not appear to have been published, echoes the objections of radical feminist groups: beauty contests set women up “as something to be looked at and ogled”, positioning them primarily as sexual objects rather than workers in a professional occupation. This sexualisation is reinforced by depictions of the competitors in newspaper articles. One article noted that library work “is good for the figure” and conjectures that the finalist pictured, Barbara Barker, is “unlikely to be left on the shelf”.¹²³ Although initial plans that competitors should parade in swimsuits were overturned,¹²⁴ the opportunity still existed for the media as well as the competition judges to assess and value women by their appearance. A different objection appeared in a letter to *Assistant Librarian* which criticised the beauty contests for increasing “anxieties about the status of our profession” by promoting an type of activity deemed, by the writer, unbecoming to “true Professionals”.¹²⁵

The objectification and sexualisation of women was also apparent in the early 1970s. In one issue of *Assistant Librarian*, the editor Bob Usherwood included pictures of ‘Bookweek girl’ Valerie Metcalfe “improving the L.A.’s image” by lying on the sign outside the LA’s head office. There was also a close up of the National Book Week logo on the chest of her t-shirt. The same issue included a picture of “Bookbird Rachel Ringrose” wearing tights and a National Book Week t-shirt and a short article, laden with sexual innuendo entitled, “Bookbird Rachel will perform for all”.¹²⁶ Unlike the Miss Library World contests, it is not clear if these women are library workers, however, the articles clearly depict both women primarily in sexual terms. In a profession numerically dominated by women for the previous 50 years, this sexualisation mitigates against the discourse of merit and professionalism by valuing women for their conformity to a conventional heterosexuality appearance, rather than for their occupational abilities. The value system based around conventionally attractive forms of sexuality did not only impact during beauty contests themselves. A member of the women’s discussion group recalled a chief county librarian telling a national library conference:

... that when in doubt appoint for glamour. He said if he had two women in front of him with roughly the same qualifications, he would go for the glamorous one and that was accepted quite happily at the time.¹²⁷

The sexualisation of women workers in a female dominated occupation diminishes efforts to position that occupation as a profession. In sexualising the absolute majority of workers in the sector and also the majority of professionally qualified workers, librarianship itself was positioned as a sexualised, feminine profession and thus was located as Other to the 'true' masculinised professions. Utilising dominant discourses of heterosexualised femininity to construct women workers and their occupational and socio-professional roles reinscribed not only women's positioning as feminine/Other, but also aligned librarianship with this positioning.

8.4.5 Section Summary

This section has explored two major factors impacting on the bodies of library workers. It has discussed how dress codes and overalls functioned as control mechanisms primarily for women workers, although overalls might also be useful as they afforded some protection to the workers' own clothes. The sexualisation of women's appearance and the construction of a heterosexy appearance was also considered and it was argued that a primary function of conforming to a conventional heterosexually attractive appearance was to allow disidentification with lesbian women. Sexualisation was also discussed in relation to beauty contests for women library workers, and it was suggested that such contests mitigated against attempts to position librarianship as a professional occupation.

8.5 Representing the Library

The intelligible feminine body was evident not only on the material bodies of women workers but also in allegorised form. The late 19th and early 20th century enthusiasm for classical figures or scenes to represent contemporary situations also appeared in the library sector, and often these figures were women. The benevolent civilising influence of the figure of Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom and patron of learning and the arts,¹²⁸ appears on many LA publications (see Figures 8.4 and 8.5). A similar figure appears on the cover of early issues of *Library Assistant* (see Figure 8.6). Both women are dressed in classical robes and some are drawn on a heroic scale

THE LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
YEAR BOOK

FOR

1900



EDITED BY
THE HON. SECRETARY

LONDON

PUBLISHED FOR THE LIBRARY ASSOCIATION BY
HORACE MARSHALL & SON, 125, FLEET STREET, E.C.

1900

PRICE ONE SHILLING, NET.

Figure 8.4 Library Association Yearbook, 1900

101

THE LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
ANNUAL CONFERENCE

BRIGHTON

1958



020

CHAUCER HOUSE, MALET PLACE
LONDON WC1

LIB

Figure 8.5 Library Association Annual Conference, 1956



ENTERED AT STATIONERS HALL.

Figure 8.6 *Library Assistant*, 1899

compared to other figures. Dominic Alessio suggests that empire building and colonialisation projects made widespread use of classical female personifications because of two particular associations. Firstly, female figures were useful because of the established tradition “of associating the female form with land as a resource to be penetrated and exploited.”¹²⁹ By depicting the library profession in this way, such personifications are also open to this type of reading and librarianship might be considered a new occupational resource, ready to be similarly penetrated and exploited. Arguably, the cover of early issues of *The Library* showing instead of figures an open classical doorway functions in a similar way (see Figure 8.7). Classical female figures, however, Alessio argues were additionally considered:

... agents of civilisation, education and equilibrium ... The use of Classical devices proved an ideal tool by which to convey a sense of cultural achievement since the Greco-Roman world at that time [1886-1940] was perceived of [sic] as the epitome of sophistication.¹³⁰

Classical references might also be understood as a “levelling device”. Whilst, on the one hand, female personifications were aggrandising, classical dress was distant from contemporary society and so might have a broad appeal. The choice of Athena to represent the LA draws on these associations, while the Athena legend also promotes the civilising discourse of librarianship, aligning it with advancement and social improvement.¹³¹ Classical references also denote a timeless purpose and certainty which was particularly important when the personification was first used at the turn of the century as the profession of librarianship was still being established and the development of public libraries was in its early stages.

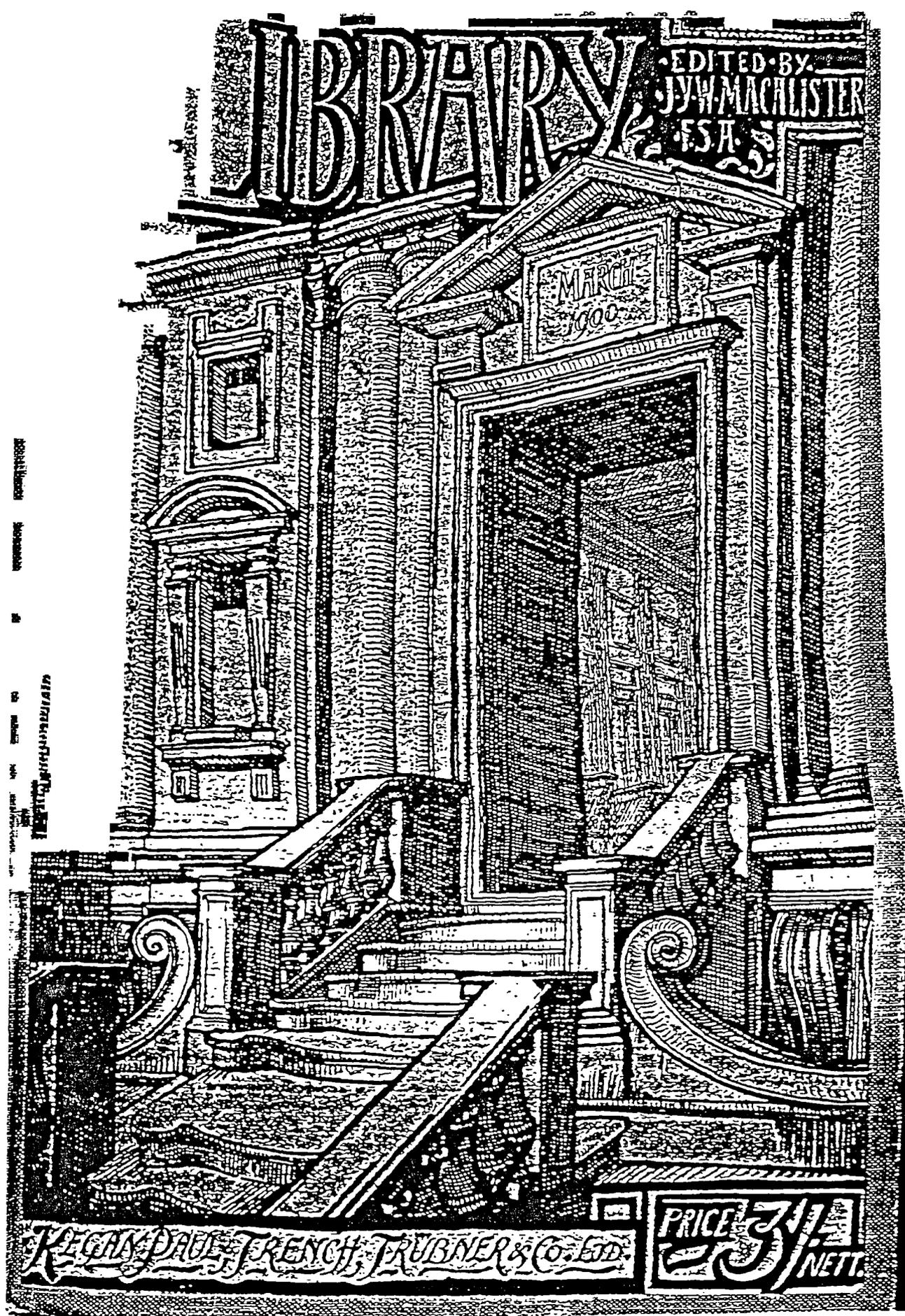


Figure 8.7 *The Library*, 1900

8.6 New Library Technology

Progress is often associated with the introduction of new technology in library work. In their time, the introduction of catalogues, electric lighting, the telephone, card indexes, photocopiers and computers have represented progress for library services. Technological developments have been used to accentuate gendered distinctions in the library workforce. This was possible because the concept of technology is gendered. Arnold Pacey describes two 'spheres of technology': the expert sphere concerned with various high investment industrial-economic activities including research, design, new discoveries and professional culture; and, the user sphere concerned with user experiences and maintenance activity.¹³² Pacey argues that most discussions of technology focus on the expert sphere and omit the user sphere, hence the expert sphere attracts prestige, whilst the user sphere is little considered. This dualistic division is reinforced by the way that access to technology education has tended to privilege men students and disadvantage women students. Men have then predominated in the expert sphere, positioning it as masculine, whilst the forgotten, less prestigious user sphere is positioned as feminine. Advertisements for library technology frequently position women library workers in the 'user sphere' in contrast to male-identified library managers. This positioning is reinforced by the depiction of women library workers, or models portraying women library workers, in sexualised terms. Two examples are discussed: an advertisement for the Warwick Production Company's book trolleys, published in *Library Association Record* in 1972 (see Figure 8.8); and, an advertisement for Kodak Verifax Copiers published in *Library Association Record* in 1957 (see Figure 8.9).

The 1972 advertisement features a picture of a young woman at work in a library, shelving items from a book trolley. The woman pictured is young, slim and wearing fashionable clothing: she is heterosexy. Whilst the picture does not explicitly sexualise the woman, the text at the top of the advertisement, 'Distributing books is a push-over', does. By the punning use of the phrase 'push-over', the woman is positioned as sexually available and the job she is doing is belittled. The sexualisation of the woman directs the address of the advertisement to a heterosexual male reader, the library manager.¹³³ He, on reading the smaller, more detailed and technically



Distributing books is a push-over.

Warwick think it's about time library staff had life a little easier. So we've produced a range of trolleys that's geared to meet your requirements exactly.

The book carriers are detachable for easy loading and unloading on to shelves. They're made in aluminium, with a steel frame, to make the trolley strong yet light. So light it glides over the floor at the touch of a finger.

There are two trolleys in the range. Single and double bank versions.

There's a place for them in your library.

To Warwick Production Co. Ltd., Birmingham Road, Warwick.
I'm fed up with pushing. Tell me about Warwick book trolleys.

Name _____

Library _____

Position _____

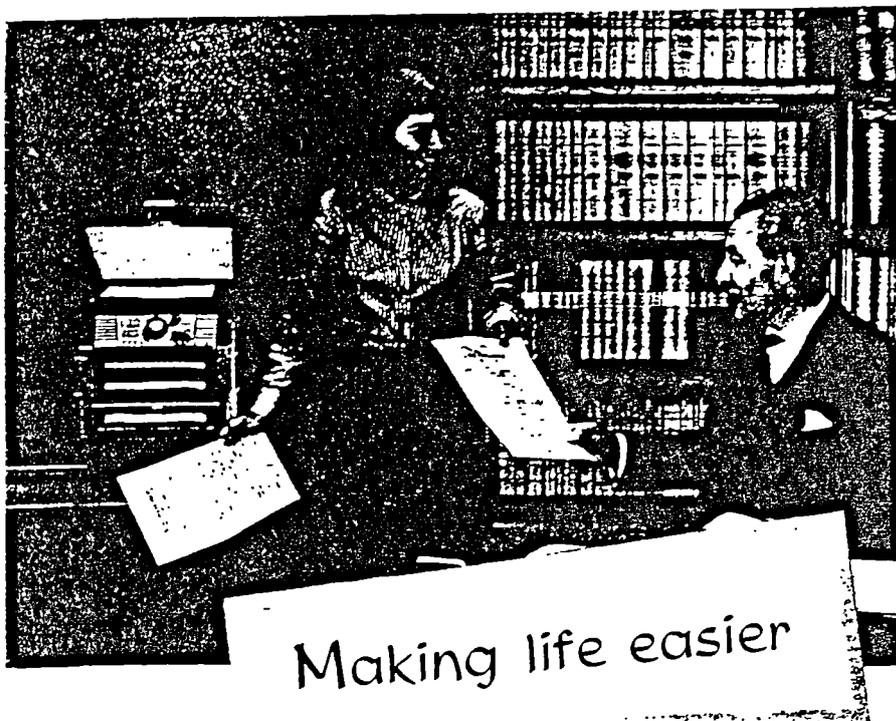
Address _____

NO

Warwick

Leaders in modern aluminium design

Figure 8.8 Advertisement for the Warwick Production Company, 1972¹³⁴



By making document copying simpler and quicker, the Kodak 'Verifax' Copier makes life much easier for librarians. Accurate copies of the most complicated lists and extracts can now be made in a few seconds.

'Verifax' copies are ready for immediate use, and the image is permanent. An inexpensive paper is used, and six or more clear copies can be made from one intermediate. In normal use the 'Verifax' Copier can save its cost in less than two months.

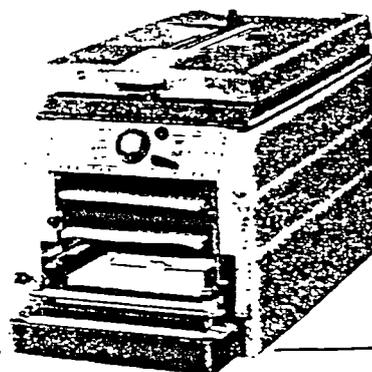
Write for details.

KODAK

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1-4, Beech Street, London, E.C.1



'Verifax' is a registered trade-mark.

Figure 8.9 Advertisement for the Kodak Verifax Copier, 1957¹³⁵

descriptive text about the qualities of the book-trolley, is assumed to be in a position to decide on purchase of the book trolley and to engage in economic exchange with the manufacturer. Read in conjunction with the image, the text aligns the library manager within the 'expert sphere', sharing in the professional culture Pacey identifies as associated with that sphere, and reinforcing the alignment of woman workers within the 'user sphere' of technology.¹³⁶

The second advertisement (Figure 8.9) uses similar devices and interpretative resources. The picture shows the copier, the woman user and a man sitting in front of some bookshelves. The woman is heterosexy and she is shown handing a piece of paper to the man; the inference is that she has made the copy for him, presumably in her role as library assistant or secretary. The man could be a library user, however, connections between the body of text and the legend at the bottom of the picture suggest that he is a library manager. The legend reads, 'Making life easier', but just what 'makes life easier' is left unstated, allowing the reader to make a double reference to the woman and to the machine. The phrase is closely alluded to in the body of the text, but this time the object of the phrase is stated: "... the Kodak 'Verifax' Copier makes life much easier for librarians." As the man is the recipient of the copy it is his life which has been made easier by the copier, and therefore he may be understood as the librarian. Read like this the advertisement is directed at the male library manager who is associated with the technological 'expert sphere', and the woman worker is positioned within the 'user sphere' of technology. The addressee of the advertisement may be open to debate and it is possible to read the male recipient as a library user and the woman as librarian. Even in this reading, however, the woman remains positioned in the user sphere of library technology, whilst also being associated with the professional culture of the expert sphere. This dual positioning complicates her claim to expert status.

Comments about the development of library technology also invoke in a similar framework, associating men with the invention and control of technological aids (i.e. positioned within the expert sphere) which are then used by women library workers. In 1927, William Beeston, librarian at Wolverhampton invented "an ingenious apparatus" for dusting library books:

It is a vacuum cleaner, similar in all respects to those used in the home, except for the nozzle, in which lies the secret.

The nozzle is like a spade, less than foot long, with the 'sucker' on the underside. This 'sucker' is passed along the tops of the books as they stand on the shelves, and removes every particle of dust.¹³⁷

The book cleaner was useful not only because it cleans books quickly but also because it allowed books to be cleaned on the shelves, so that removing them to another room for cleaning was no longer necessary. The article clearly states that whilst William Beeston had invented the cleaner, the anticipated user was "a girl". The article further feminises the process by alluding the similarity of the book cleaning machine and domestic vacuum cleaners, which, it presumes, women would use. Another example, from 1967, discusses the British firm which won the contract to edit and publish the US Library of Congress catalogue. A masculinised firm of optical and precision engineers are accredited with inventing the "automatic camera abstractor" which allows the task to be undertaken, however, the user work, inputting and checking the data, is performed by "batches" or "gangs of tidy-minded girls".¹³⁸ Whilst the male-associated engineers are accorded expert 'inventor' status, the women users are infantilised and described as non-individuals.

The use and meaning of technology, either in practice in the library environment or in press advertisements, is written on and through the bodies of library workers, and this inscription repeatedly positions the intelligible body of women library workers as lesser than that of men.

8.7 Discussion: Occupation and Health: Material Impacts on Material Bodies

As a sex, few women seem to be able to ride the storms safely and well without damaging their health.¹³⁹

Occupational health or sickness is an outcome of the relationship of the particular occupation with workers' bodies. Rosalee McReynold's historical study has

considered of the impact of library work on the health of US women library workers,¹⁴⁰ and this section considers issues connected to physical and mental occupational health in England.

Despite popular understandings of the library as a healthy working environment, the impact of library work on women and women's physical fitness for this and other types of mental and physical exertion was questioned until at least the 1950s.¹⁴¹ As women began to be employed in libraries in significant numbers in the late 19th century, concerns about their susceptibility to ill-health were debated. A letter published in *The Library* in 1893 noted that:

In one library it has been calculated that the woman assistants are absent three times as much as the men through illness.¹⁴²

A response from US librarian Mary L. Titcombe¹⁴³ and further comments from Minnie Stewart Rhodes James¹⁴⁴ refuted these allegations, the latter stating that "absences on account of ill-health were extremely rare". Similarly, Bristol public libraries found that women assistants, employed only after obtaining a medical certificate of health, were "very rarely" absent due to ill-health, "while at all times and seasons they have proved themselves equal to the strain which is inseparable from the daily routine of a large public library."¹⁴⁵ Despite these comments, in 1936 deputy chief librarian at Manchester public libraries W.R. Fry told annual LA conference that women took more time off sick than men.¹⁴⁶

Even if women were able to withstand the physical demands of library work, they were considered more likely than men to have mental health problems. Rosalee McReynolds has explored instances of "neurasthenia or 'nerves'"¹⁴⁷ among US women library workers. Whilst no data relating specifically to neurasthenia among English women library workers have been identified, there are a number of instances when women suffered nervous breakdowns and few similar examples of men being similarly affected. For example, Mary Thwaite (nee Austin) took early retirement due to ill-health from her post as chief at Hertfordshire county library. Lorna Paulin described her as:

... a very bright person indeed, very nervy, lived on her nerves ... but she got an incredible amount done in Hertfordshire, she re-organised it completely ...
... And she really worked herself, overworked herself and in four short years she just revolutionised the place. ... she was thrilled with the job and realised how much needed to be done and she just went for it ... I shall never forget her telling me long afterwards ... the first time she realised something was up with her health she'd been to a local library committee meeting in Barnet which was then part of Hertfordshire and went out afterwards, about 10.30 at night she had been working since 9, absolutely at full tilt, and then she got in her car and she couldn't remember what she did. And she just sat there for some time, thinking, 'Oh, this is very odd, I don't know what to do now,' and then she said after a time her hands seemed to know what to do and she drove back like that. ... [She] got herself out of the car and she got to the bungalow at the end of the path and she didn't know what she did after that and so she sat on the doorstep and her husband was out and when he came back quite late he found her sitting there. She had just worked herself to that pitch - ... So after that she had to cut right back and she retired early after another year -¹⁴⁸

There are further similar descriptions of overwork leading to eventual mental ill-health among professional women library workers. For example, Maud Griffiths librarian at Luton retired after a nervous breakdown in 1937,¹⁴⁹ and the furore over Nancy Cooke's contribution to the LA's *Survey of Libraries in Great Britain* caused her to suffer from short-term insomnia. This occurred after librarians from the area she had surveyed objected to her report:

... and made the most almighty fuss apparently ... The LA council promptly disowned the report and put a disclaimer at the beginning, so the whole responsibility went onto her, the one woman on the council - that's the sort of support she got. She was very bitter about that and she never really forgot it or forgave because they let her down completely ... I remember her telling me once that she always slept well at nights ... she said, except once and that was when they ratted on me about the report. I couldn't sleep. It must have affected

her so much - it was a shocking thing to do really. ... They let her down when they thought they were going to get into trouble. [inaudible] I don't think - I may be wrong - but I don't think they would have done that to a man.¹⁵⁰

Nancy Cooke did not receive the support she expected from her professional association and colleagues, despite a long and close association with both and this resulted in a short term mental health difficulty. The speaker, Lorna Paulin, attributes both the lack of support and, in turn, the health problems to Nancy Cooke's gender and suggests that this situation would not have arisen if the complaints had been made about a man's work. Men library workers were also affected by mental health problems, as illustrated, for example, by the suicide of Luton librarian Thomas Maw, however, more women workers than men appear have been affected in this respect.

The amount of sick leave taken is one indicator of occupational health and sickness. However, discussions of levels of sick leave were rarely accompanied by analyses of what made workers ill. In 1893, however, Peter Cowell, librarian of Liverpool city libraries, noted that:

It is a matter of no slight difficulty to provide an adequate reading light, maintain a temperature satisfactory to elderly readers, and at the same time prevent the atmosphere of any well attended reading room, after being open from nine or ten o'clock in the morning, from becoming towards evening prejudicial to the health of readers and staff, and I may also say to the bindings of books.¹⁵¹

He suggested that electric lights were helpful in overcoming these difficulties. In 1935, Bertie Headicar re-emphasised the library's "duty to conserve the health of its staff by providing reasonable comfort and hygienic surroundings".¹⁵² This duty extended to allowing workers sufficient time off to recuperate when they were ill, however, he twice states that this is permitted only when the worker is ill and does not extend to allowing the worker time off to care for family members who are ill, a tendency he attributes to women workers.¹⁵³

Occupational health issues noted above are developed by Barbara Harrison's study of supposedly 'safe' occupations. She suggests that there are three main reasons why such employment has a negative impact on workers' health: low pay; long hours; and, the low value attached to the work.¹⁵⁴ Harrison argues that the low pay women workers in non-industrial, 'respectable' jobs received was insufficient to adequately feed and house them if they lived independently, thus indirectly contributing to a situation injurious to health. The long working day had a more direct impact on a worker's health, particularly if this was carried out in a poorly ventilated environment. The impact of long hours was exacerbated by infrequent breaks or breaks which did not allow adequate time for a meal. Finally, Harrison argues that the low value placed on service work, where many women were employed, added to the mental strain of such employment. All three points are pertinent to the working conditions experienced by women library workers who were often poorly paid and worked long hours in undervalued posts, occasionally, as Cowell notes, in ill-ventilated and ill-lit libraries.¹⁵⁵ The economic exploitation of women library workers and the physically wearing hours of such work are materially manifested not only in the organisations' abilities to open more libraries for longer hours, but also on the workers' bodies. The impacts of this exploitation may disable workers in the short term, and possibly the long term too, thus preventing participation in the labour market and further economically disadvantaging them. The impact on the physical body, like that on the intelligible body, is, tangible.

8.8 Chapter Summary

Whilst feminist theories of the body have been seen as an "essential corrective" to masculinist body theory, they have also been criticised for failing to attend to "actual material bodies". Kathy Davis writes:

Bodies are not simply abstractions, however, but are embedded in the immediacies of everyday, lived experience.¹⁵⁶

This chapter has addressed these issues in exploring the "everyday, lived experience" of the body in the library workplace. There were various attempts throughout the

period under review to control the feminine body, for example by excluding it from the library, or prescribing its clothing, marking it as Other and sexualising it. Women, at times, resisted these attempts, by subverting dress codes and embroidering overalls, and at others, actively participated, for example, by organising or entering beauty contests. The long term impact on the body of library employment was considered in relation to occupational health issues and the far from abstract outcomes of economic and physical exploitative practices were outlined. In constructing and marking women's body as feminine, library managers located it in discursive opposition to men workers positioning it as unruly, weak and sexual and therefore in need of discipline and control. The body is usually perceived as 'natural' or 'real', and women's 'natural' bodies were constructed as intrinsically needing control, unlike men's bodies. Written on these feminine bodies, then, are 'natural' signs of Otherness which earlier chapters have illustrated might be used by library institutions to attempt to locate women workers in inferior positions throughout the sector. Such apparently naturally occurring signs of Otherness were an important justification for the inequitable treatment of women in the sector.

¹ Butler, J. (1997) *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution. An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*, in Conboy, K., Medina, N. and Stanbury, S. (eds) *Writing on the Body. Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, New York, Columbia University, p.404.

² Foucault, M. (1979) *Discipline and Punish*, New York, Vintage.

³ See, for example, Butler, ref. 1; Bartky, S.L. (1997) *Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power*, in Conboy, K., Medina, N. and Stanbury, S. (eds) *Writing on the Body. Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, New York, Columbia University.

⁴ For an overview of this area see: McNab, L. (1992) *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self*, Boston, Northeastern. For a more detailed consideration of the social construction of anatomical and social entities see: Laqueur, T. (1998) *Orgasm, Generation and the Politics of Reproductive Biology*, in Shoemaker, R. and Vincent, M. (eds) *Gender and History in Western Europe*, London, Arnold.

⁵ See Chapter 6.

⁶ Foucault, ref. 2. See also: Mills, S. (1997) *Discourse*, London, Routledge, Chapter 2.

⁷ The understanding of gender as a social construction has been significantly developed by two writers. Thomas Laqueur's work on changing medical understandings of gendered bodies illustrates a paradigm shift from the concept of the 'one sex' body, which was played out differently between men and women, to the 'two sex' gender differentiated body. Judith Butler, meanwhile, has argued that gender identity is based, not on biology but on the successful social performance of acts understood as feminine or masculine within a specific historical situation. See: Laqueur, ref. 4; and, Butler, ref. 1.

⁸ Nigel Webber briefly notes the assumed limitations of women's bodies in relation to library employment, but this is not a major theme of his work. See: Webber, N. (1984) *Prospect and Prejudice, or Women and Librarianship 1880-1914*, *Library History*, 6(5), pp. 153-162. See also: Black, A. (1996) *A New History of the English Public Library. Social and Intellectual Contexts, 1850-1914*, London, Leicester University.

⁹ See Chapter 4.

¹⁰ See Chapter 7.

- ¹¹ For an overview of body theory see: Davis, K. (1997) *Embody-ing Theory: Beyond Modernist and Postmodernist Readings of the Body*, in Davis, K. (ed) **Embodied Practices. Feminist Perspectives on the Body**, London, Sage.
- ¹² For a recent overview see: Ras, M. de and Grace, V. (1997) **Bodily Boundaries, Sexualised Genders and Medical Discourses**, Palmerston North, NZ: Dunmore.
- ¹³ For an overview see: Evans, M. (1997) **Introducing Contemporary Feminist Thought**, Cambridge, Polity, Chapter 5.
- ¹⁴ In the UK, Avril Rolph's work is important in this area. Rolph, A. (1999) *The Life and Times of LiL: Lesbians in the Library*. Unpublished paper given at Gendering Library History: An International Conference, Liverpool John Moores University, 15th May. For a US example see: Carmichael, J.V. (ed.) (1998) **Daring to Find Our Names: The Search for Lesbian Library History**, Westport, Greenwood. Webber, Prospect and Prejudice, p.161, notes the impact of concerns about menstruation but does not explore this specifically in relation to library workers.
- ¹⁵ Foucault, ref. 2.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.147.
- ¹⁷ Black, A. (1996) Edward Edwards and Modernity: Personality, Progress and Professionalism, *Library History*, 12, pp.77-92.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.153.
- ¹⁹ Taylor, J. (1995) Left on the Shelf? The Issues and Challenges Facing Women Employed in Libraries from the late 19th Century to the 1950s, *Library History*, 11, pp. 96-107.
- ²⁰ Foucault, ref. 2, p.150.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, pp.200-201.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p.138.
- ²³ Bartky, ref. 3.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.132.
- ²⁵ See also Bordo, S. (1997) *The Body and the Production of Femininity*, in Conboy, K., Medina, N. and Stanbury, S. (eds) **Writing on the Body. Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory**, New York, Columbia University; and, Wolf, N. (1994) *Hunger*, in Jagger, A.M. (ed) **Living with Contradictions. Controversies in Feminist Social Ethics**, Boulder, Westview.
- ²⁶ See: Skeggs, B. (1997) **Formations of Class and Gender. Becoming Respectable**, London, Sage; and, hooks, b. (1997) *Selling Hot Pussy: Representations of Black Female Sexuality in the Cultural Marketplace*, in Conboy, K., Medina, N. and Stanbury, S. (eds) **Writing on the Body. Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory**, New York, Columbia University.
- ²⁷ No Author. (1901) *Employment of Females in the Libraries*, *Eastern Morning News*, 5th November. In: *Press Cuttings 1900-02*, Library Association Archive.
- ²⁸ Interview with Winifred Thorne, 20th May 1998.
- ²⁹ No Author. (1902) *Women Librarians and Assistants*, *Library World*, 5, p.7.
- ³⁰ Edwards, J. and McKie, L. (1997) *Women's Public Toilets. A Serious Issue for the Body Politic*, in Davis, K. (ed) **Embodied Practices. Feminist Perspectives on the Body**, London, Sage.
- ³¹ Interview with Anne Wilson, 20th April 1998.
- ³² Black, ref. 17, p.90.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p.91.
- ³⁴ No Author. (No date, circa 1930s) **Daily Routine in the Library. Instructions for Junior Assistants**, London, Library Association. (No page numbers.) In: *Library Association Archive*.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*
- ³⁶ Black, ref. 17, p.91.
- ³⁷ See Chapter 3, Table 3.2.
- ³⁸ Brown, J.D. (1904) **Manual of Library Economy**, London, Scott, Greenwood, p.77.
- ³⁹ Per com. Jan Smith, 24th February 1998.
- ⁴⁰ No Author. (1957) *Oh What a Shock for the Small Town Librarian*, *Daily Herald*, 29th November. In: *Press Cuttings 1957-8*, Library Association Archive.
- ⁴¹ Daily Sketch Reporter. (1957) *Sex Book Shock in the Library*, *Daily Sketch*, 29th November. In: *Press Cuttings 1957-8*, Library Association Archive.
- ⁴² Jeffreys, S. (1990). **Anticlimax. A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution**, London, Women's Press.
- ⁴³ A.S.Neill cited in Oram, A. (1996) **Women Teachers and Feminist Politics**, Manchester, Manchester, p.189.

- ⁴⁴ See: Jeffreys, S. (1985) *The Spinster and her Enemies. Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930*, London, Pandora; Dyehouse, C. (1995) *No Distinction of Sex? Women in British Universities, 1870-1939*, London, UCL, p.161. Sexuality is discussed further in Section 8.4.3 below.
- ⁴⁵ Reed, M. (1912) Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Bookworld*, 2(11), p.426.
- ⁴⁶ Interview with men in the Retired Members Guild, 12th February 1998.
- ⁴⁷ Speaker F, interview with women in the Retired Members Guild, 12th January 1998.
- ⁴⁸ Speaker D, interview with women in the Retired Members Guild, 12th January 1998.
- ⁴⁹ Skeggs, ref. 26, p.85.
- ⁵⁰ No Author. (Undated; dated entries begin in 1929) *Staff Memorandum and Instruction Book*. In: Islington Central Reference Library.
- ⁵¹ Wilson, E. (1992) Fashion and the Postmodern Body, in Ash, J. and Wilson, E. (eds) *Chic Thrills. A Fashion Reader*, London, Pandora.
- ⁵² *Daily Routine in the Library*, ref. 34.
- ⁵³ Interview with Lorna Paulin, 9th October 1997.
- ⁵⁴ Speaker G, interview with men in the Retired Members Guild, 12th February 1998.
- ⁵⁵ Speaker H, *ibid*.
- ⁵⁶ Speaker E, *ibid*.
- ⁵⁷ Interview with Jean Plaister, 23rd January 1998.
- ⁵⁸ Interview with Lorna Paulin, 9th October 1997.
- ⁵⁹ Meeting of 22nd October 1913, Library Assistants' Association Minutes 1913-14. In: Library Association Archive.
- ⁶⁰ Meeting of 10th December 1913, Library Assistants' Association Minutes 1913-14. In: Library Association Archive.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid*.
- ⁶² *Ibid*.
- ⁶³ *Ibid*.
- ⁶⁴ Notes of meeting of 21st April 1914, Library Assistants' Association Minutes 1913-14. In: Library Association Archive.
- ⁶⁵ Griffiths, M.E. (1912) Correspondence, *Librarian and Bookworld*, 3(1), p.18.
- ⁶⁶ Frost, M. (1908) Dress in the Library, *Library World*, 11, p.183.
- ⁶⁷ Skeggs, ref. 26.
- ⁶⁸ Frost, ref. 66, p.182.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid*.
- ⁷⁰ Frost, ref. 66.
- ⁷¹ Letter from G.A. Stephen, Norwich City Librarian, to Kate Pierce, Kettering Librarian, dated 9th July 1925. In: Letters Miscellaneous 1923-6, Kettering Public Library Archive. Further information about the debate has not been identified.
- ⁷² Griffiths, ref. 65.
- ⁷³ Reed, M. (1912) Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Bookworld*, 3(1), pp.19-20.
- ⁷⁴ No Author. (1936) Keen Library Assistants, *Beds and Herts Evening Telegraph*, 23rd October. In: Press Cuttings 19th June to 31st October 1936, Library Association Archive.
- ⁷⁵ No Author. (1953) The Library Association, *Library Association Record*, 55(7), p.223.
- ⁷⁶ Speaker E, interview with women in the Retired Members Guild, 12th January 1998.
- ⁷⁷ Speaker G, interview with men in the Retired Members Guild, 12th February 1998.
- ⁷⁸ Speaker D, interview with women in the Retired Members Guild, 12th January 1998.
- ⁷⁹ Interview with Jennifer Shepherd 25th July 1997.
- ⁸⁰ Speaker D, interview with women in the Retired Members Guild, 12th January 1998.
- ⁸¹ Chambers, W.G. (1908) Correspondence. Dress in the Library, *Library World*, 11, December, p.242. Speaker C in the women's group objected to her overall because it was "the sort of think you can remember seeing people wear in grocers' shops, really think material."
- ⁸² Erall, O.V. (1909) Correspondence. Dress in the Library, *Library World*, 11, pp.323-4.
- ⁸³ Speaker D interview with men in the Retired Members Guild, 12th February 1998.
- ⁸⁴ Speaker F, *ibid*.
- ⁸⁵ Speaker A, *ibid*.
- ⁸⁶ Seymour Smith, F. (ed) (1932) *Report on the Hours, Salaries, Training and Conditions of Service in British Municipal Libraries. 1931*. London, Association of Assistant Librarians, p. 22.
- ⁸⁷ Bordo, ref. 25, p.103.
- ⁸⁸ See Chapter 6.
- ⁸⁹ Per com. Jan Smith, 24th February 1998.

- ⁹⁰ Interview with Rita Keegan, 6th February 1998.
- ⁹¹ Interview with Ken Stockham, 25th February 1998.
- ⁹² Interview with Evelyn Evans, 27th May 1998.
- ⁹³ Skeggs, ref. 26, p.84.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid.
- ⁹⁵ Liladhar, J. and Kerslake, E. (1999) No More Library Classes for Catherine: Marital Status, Career Progression and Library Employment in 1950s England, *Women's Studies International Forum*, 22(2), pp.215-224.
- ⁹⁶ Liladhar and Kerslake note: "The juxtaposition of 'hetero' with 'sexy' draws attention to the politics of sexuality in the normative usage of the word 'sexy' which specifically implies heterosexually attractive, although this is rarely articulated." Ibid., Footnote 2.
- ⁹⁷ Speaker B, women in the Retired Members Guild, 12th January 1998.
- ⁹⁸ Bordo, ref. 25.
- ⁹⁹ Jeffreys, ref. 44, p.106 and p.170.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid. See also: Liladhar and Kerslake, ref. 94.
- ¹⁰¹ This continued into the 1960s, for example: No Author. (1965) What Librarians are Like, *Assistant Librarian*, 58(3), p.41.
- ¹⁰² Mills, J. (1991) *Womanwords. A Vocabulary of Culture and Patriarchal Society*, London, Virago. p. 32.
- ¹⁰³ Havelock Ellis cited in Jeffreys, ref. 44, p.106.
- ¹⁰⁴ See Jeffreys, ref. 44 and Jeffreys, ref. 42.
- ¹⁰⁵ Bradbrook, M.C. (No date) *Strong Minded Dons*, p.6. Manuscript text in: Girton College Archive.
- ¹⁰⁶ No Author. (1933) A Teller of Tales, *News Chronicle*, 16th March. In: Press Cuttings September 1932 to March 1933, Library Association Archive.
- ¹⁰⁷ See Chapter 4.
- ¹⁰⁸ No Author. (1958) Portrait of the Month. Florence Milnes, *Ariel*, July, p.6. In BBC Written Archive Centre.
- ¹⁰⁹ Interview with Ken Stockham, 25th February 1998.
- ¹¹⁰ Garvey, E. (1996) Saddle Suffragettes, *Bike Culture*, 10, pp.41-2.
- ¹¹¹ For examples of cycling librarians see: Barnes, A.P. (1984) Obituary. Sarah Faith Fergusson, *Library Association Record*, 84(7/8), p.270; J.C.L. (1923) How to Become a Woman Librarian, *Westminster Gazette*, 30th August. In: Press Cuttings 29th June to 13th December 1923, Library Association Archive; and, No Author (1927) Library Services, *Daily Telegraph*, 25th May. In: Press Cutting 24th April to 17th June 1927, Library Association Archive.
- ¹¹² See Chapter 7.
- ¹¹³ Jeffreys, ref. 44, p.118.
- ¹¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.106.
- ¹¹⁶ Oram, ref. 43, p.115.
- ¹¹⁷ See: Smart, C. (1992) Disruptive Bodies and Unruly Sex. The Regulation of Reproduction and Sexuality in the 19th Century, in Smart, C. (ed) *Regulating Womanhood. Historical Essays on Marriage, Motherhood and Sexuality*, London, Routledge; Gatens, M. (1997) Corporeal Representation in/and the Body Politic, in Conboy, K., Medina, N. and Stanbury, S. (eds) *Writing on the Body. Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, New York, Columbia University, pp.80-9.
- ¹¹⁸ Schneir, M. (ed) (1994) *Feminism in Our Time. The Essential Writings, World War II to the Present*, New York, Vintage, p.125. See also: Wolf, N. (1991) *The Beauty Myth. How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*, London, Vintage, pp.68-9.
- ¹¹⁹ No Author. (1966) Miss Library World, *Liaison*, December, p.95.
- ¹²⁰ Interview with Jean Plaister, 23rd January 1998.
- ¹²¹ Ibid.
- ¹²² No Author. (1967) Dishy Bookworms, *Sunday Telegraph*, 19th February. No Author. (1967) The Beauty of Being a Bookworm, [no publication given]. Both items in: Press Cuttings 1966-67, Library Association Archive.
- ¹²³ The Beauty of Being a Bookworm, ref. 120.
- ¹²⁴ Interview with Jean Plaister, 23rd January 1998 and, Dishy Bookworms, ref. 120.
- ¹²⁵ Dewhurst, I. (1967) Letter. Miss Library World, *Assistant Librarian*, 60(2), p.20.
- ¹²⁶ Various Authors. (1972) Letters, *Assistant Librarian*, 65(10), p.167; No Author. (1972) Bookbird Rachel Will Perform for All, *Assistant Librarian*, 65(10), p.162 and p.164.
- ¹²⁷ Speaker B, women in the Retired Members Guild, 12th January 1998.

- ¹²⁸ Hall, J. (1975) *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, London, John Murray, pp.209-210.
- ¹²⁹ Alessio, D.D. (1997) Domesticating 'the Heart of the Wild': Female Personifications of the Colonies, 1886-1940, *Women's History Review*, 6(2) p.241.
- ¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.249.
- ¹³¹ Black, ref. 8, Chapter 9.
- ¹³² Pacey, A. (1983) *The Culture of Technology*, Cambridge, Mass, MIT, Figure 6.
- ¹³³ Of course, women might also experience a sexual response to such sexualisation, however, the assumption is that the addressee is male. See Kerslake, E. and Liladhar, J. (forthcoming) *Jilly Cooper Versus The Government: Romantic Discourses of Femininity and Women's Library Employment*
- ¹³⁴ This advertisement appeared in 1974 in: *Library Association Record*, 74(11), p.220.
- ¹³⁵ This advertisement appeared in 1957 in: *Library Association Record*, 59(11), p.354.
- ¹³⁶ This approach to the advertisements is informed by Mills, S. (1995) *Feminist Stylistics*. London, Routledge.
- ¹³⁷ No Author. (1927) Dusting 10,000 Books in a Day, *Daily Express*, 7th February. In: Press Cuttings 8th January to 2nd April 1927.
- ¹³⁸ Howard, P. (1967) World's Biggest List of Books. Task Will Involve Gangs of Tidy-Minded Girls, *Times*, 13th March. In: Press Cuttings 1966-7, Library Association Archive.
- ¹³⁹ Wilden-Hart, M. (1956) Women in Librarianship, *Assistant Librarian*, 49(5), p.80.
- ¹⁴⁰ McReynolds, R. (1990) The Sexual Politics of Illness in Turn of the Century Libraries, *Libraries and Culture*, 25(2), pp.194-217.
- ¹⁴¹ See Chapter 4.
- ¹⁴² Chief Librarian. (1893) The Health of Female Assistants, *The Library*, 5, p.92.
- ¹⁴³ Titcombe, M.L. (1893) Communication. Women As Library Workers, *Library Journal*, 18(8), p.279.
- ¹⁴⁴ James, M.S.R. (1893) American Women as Librarians, *Library*, 5, p.273.
- ¹⁴⁵ Mathews, E. R. Norris. (1898) Female Library Assistants and Competitive Examination, in Brown, J.B., Garnett, R., MacAllister, J.Y.W. and Tedder, H.R. (eds) *Transactions and Proceedings of the Second International Librarians' Conference*, London, Library Association. Mathews' paper was widely reported in the library press and in the regional press. Examples from the Western Daily Press, and the Clifton and Redland Free Press are included in: *Library Cuttings, 1896-99*, Bristol Public Library Archive.
- ¹⁴⁶ Fry, W.G. (1936) *Library Staffs: With Special Reference to Large Public Library Systems*, in Library Association. *Papers and Discussions at the Margate Conference*, London, Library Association.
- ¹⁴⁷ McReynolds, ref. 136, p.195.
- ¹⁴⁸ Interview with Lorna Paulin, 9th October 1997.
- ¹⁴⁹ Baker, L. (1983) *The Story of Luton and its Public Libraries*, Luton, Bedfordshire County Library, p.58.
- ¹⁵⁰ Interview with Lorna Paulin, 9th October 1997.
- ¹⁵¹ Cowell, P. (1893) *Public Library Staffs*, London, Library Association, p.19.
- ¹⁵² Headicar, B.M. (1935) *A Manual of Library Organization*, London, Allen and Unwin, p.260.
- ¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.66 and p.261. A similar instruction also appeared in: No Author. (undated) *Staff Memorandum and Instruction Book*. In: Islington Central Reference Library.
- ¹⁵⁴ Harrison, B. (1996) *Not 'Only the Dangerous Trades': Women's Work and Health in Britain, 1880-1914*, London, Taylor and Francis, Chapter 1.
- ¹⁵⁵ Cowell, ref. 147. Similar points are made by: Reed, M. (1912) *Women's Work in Libraries*, *Librarian and Book World*, 3(2), pp.64-5; and, McColvin, L.R. (1939) *Library Staffs*, London, Allen and Unwin, p.122-3.
- ¹⁵⁶ Davis, ref. 11, p.15.

Chapter 9. Conclusion: Doing Gender in Library History

9.1 Introduction

This thesis has considered constructions of women in the library labour market and the significance of gender in that workforce between the years 1871-1974. It has focused on ways that women workers were often, but not always, pejoratively positioned in relation to men workers. This chapter aims to bring together the various issues of understandings of library work, access to the sector and conceptions of equality discussed in parts two to four. Firstly, it offers a summary of discussions in preceding chapters. Secondly, it considers the articulation of discourses of feminism, anti-racism and trade unionism which contest many of the normative constructions invoked in the library labour market. Thirdly, drawing on the earlier chapters, a periodisation of the development of women's work in English libraries is outlined. Finally, the chapter concludes by revisiting some of the theoretical issues noted in the methodological discussion above.

9.2 Summary of Chapters

The preceding chapters have discussed issues relating to a gendered history of women workers in English libraries. Methodological issues relating to the writing of history and textual analysis were discussed in Chapter 2 and a post-structuralist approach to history, informed by feminist and discourse theory, was outlined. Despite limited statistical data, the exploration of women's position in the library labour market was begun in Chapter 3 with an quantitative overview of the development of women's employment between 1871 and 1974. This illustrated that around the turn of the century there were few women library workers and these women were mostly likely to work in public libraries and were least likely to be found in academic libraries. Women library workers began to numerically dominate in the sector in the 1930s, yet they remained proportionately and absolutely underrepresented in the more senior posts. Access to such posts was significantly affected by the type of library in which women worked. Academic libraries throughout the period in question, for example, provided few women with opportunities to work in chief librarian posts,

however, county libraries, particularly in the interwar period, were much more likely to do so. Turning to the question of pay, it was argued that between 1871-1974 women library workers received low salaries both in comparison to men colleagues and within the occupational class. Some terms and conditions of employment in the sector did improve, however, and workers gained holiday rights, pension schemes and the length of their working week decreased. A further significant improvement was the gradual introduction of equal pay in the library sector from the 1950s. The gap between men's and women's pay was decreased in some libraries, yet the principle of equal pay was not established throughout the sector until the 1970 Equal Pay Act was implemented in 1975, which is beyond the scope of this study.

A qualitative account of library work was begun in Chapter 4 which explored two arguments about women's participation in the sector. The first proposed that library work was attractive labour market activity for women workers as it was commensurate with certain aspects of the dominant discourse of femininity, however, a further argument emphasised limitations to this suitability. This chapter began an exploration of ways in which women are, throughout the period in question, often located as Other to men library workers. The discussion of professional training and education in Chapter 5 develops this argument by illustrating that the terms 'training' and 'education' are gendered, with education positioned as suitable for men workers and training as most appropriate for women. The impact of professional education and training on the construction of a professional identity was explored in the subsequent chapter where it was argued that such identities also contributed to the positioning of women as Other. There was an exploration of ways that women's access to professional identities was lesser than men's. It was argued that the widespread continuation throughout much of the period of sex differentiated pay was a key factor sustaining the negative positioning of women in the sector. A significant outcome of debates about identity and professionalism was that women were positioned as problematic workers, both as individuals and for the sector. These understandings were, however, challenged by illustrations of women's participation in professional associations, at conferences and in professional education, both as students and as library educators.

This tension in the construction of the term ‘woman worker’ was further discussed in Chapter 7 which considered ways that concepts of equality and difference have been used to justify the participation of women in the library labour market. This chapter argued that there were two main concepts of women’s equality with men in operation: firstly, a concept of equality through same-ness; and, secondly a concept of equality through difference. Both concepts were shown to be problematic, and it was suggested that it is more useful to frame equality as a status which is opposed, not to a lack of equivalence, but to inequity. Further difficulties in eluding the positioning of women as Other were considered in the discussion of the embodiment of difference on the bodies of women library workers. Signs of women’s difference from men, it was argued, appeared in various forms, including the regulation of women’s clothing and practices which sexualised women. The material impact of library employment on women’s physicality was considered in relation to occupational health issues.

In summary, then, before women entered library employment, during training and education, in the work itself and extra-professional activities, and in constructions of the feminine body at work, in all these various ways throughout the period in question women tended to be negatively positioned when compared to similarly qualified and experienced men. Some women, of course, were able to negotiate professional success and rewards, whilst some men were unable to do so. The above comments do not intend to indicate that this was a sector *structured* by gender, but rather one which was significantly informed by it in conjunction with other discursive practices, such as class, ethnicity and sexuality. A sector structured by gender would not accommodate those few women who achieved chief librarian status nor any men who were library assistants or children’s librarians. Rather, acknowledging that some women and some men achieved against dominant pressures allows that gender is not the only power relation in operation and that other factors, including particular context and individual agency, need to be taken into account.

9.3 Periodisation and Women Workers in English Libraries, 1871-1974

Rejecting structure by paying attention to inconsistencies inhibits attempts to periodise the development of women’s employment in English libraries between 1871

and 1974. Yet such attempts can be useful shorthand accounts of movements across time, hence it is necessary to consider periodisation, yet this must be approached cautiously. It could be argued that the years 1871, when women started to be employed in significant numbers in libraries, until 1919 may be characterised as a period of struggle, with men workers rallied against the widespread participation of women in the sector. Some men, for example, adopted a protectionist stance in relation to library work, attempting to exclude women from employment opportunities and, in the case of the Library Assistants' Association, to exclude women from the professional associations. Such men argued that women were generally unfit for library work and were particularly unfit for senior posts. It is not possible to characterise this period simply as one of struggle,¹ however. Other men, notably chief public librarians and the chairs of library committees, in need of cheap labour to staff expanding library services, welcomed women workers to certain posts. Furthermore, women librarians, such as Minnie Stewart Rhodes James (appointed chief librarian at the People's Palace, London in 1889) and Hannah Eteson (appointed chief librarian at Blackpool public libraries in 1880) were already in post, demonstrating that women could manage libraries. Such women might have called for the wider employment of women in the sector, but they were not fighting to enter the profession as they were there already. The characterisation of the period 1871-1919 as one of struggle between women and the library profession is helpful but must be a cautious one.

A second point in this periodisation may be marked between 1919, when county library legislation was enacted and as the numbers of women in the sector began to equal those of men, and the Second World War. The argument that women were not able to perform library work was modified and instead it was more often emphasised that women were best suited to certain aspects of library work which were associated with dominant ideas about femininity. This period might be characterised as a time of 'essentialist librarians', when women librarians were encouraged, more emphatically than in the earlier period, to perform 'feminine' library work, that is, paraprofessional service work, the increasing amount of work in children's libraries and cataloguing. The encouragement of women into certain aspects of library work also positioned men to perform managerial and senior posts in the fast expanding sector. Despite this, however, some women negotiated a respected position as a

'feminine' professional. Eileen Colwell at Hendon and Joan Butler at Hertfordshire both worked as children's librarians and achieved national and international recognition beyond their professional specialism. Furthermore, the development of the county library movement also runs counter to the characterisation of this as the time of 'essentialist librarians'. In county libraries, women frequently performed 'unfeminine' tasks, such as using bicycles to visit outlying branches, and often held 'masculine' posts, such as chief librarian. Whilst there were attempts to allow women only qualified access to library work, that is access limited according to the constraints of the dominant discourse of femininity, these attempts were not necessarily successful. This second characterisation must, like the first, also be circumspect.

The demise of the marriage bar in education and in some library services in 1944 may be used to mark the beginning of a final phase in this periodisation. Along with the gradual implementation of equal pay from 1952, this period may be characterised as one when a liberal equality for women workers, allowing women to participate on the same terms as men, began to be implemented and there was the removal of formal barriers to women's employment. Whilst some library services, such as Islington public libraries, offered equal pay and did not prohibit or limit women's employment according to marital status in the 1950s, this was not the case in other services. The marriage bar continued in some libraries until at least the late 1960s and equal pay was not instituted in some special libraries until there was a legislative requirement in 1975. The gradual implementation of liberal equality in the library sector over 30 years must also make this third periodisation a cautious one.

This periodisation is problematic in various ways. Not only is it impossible to mark discrete points of change, as noted above, but also there are significant omissions. Beginning any account of the development of library work in 1871 is, of course, arbitrary and significant events with far reaching impacts for the sector and labour market have been excluded. Examples include the 1850 Public Libraries Act which enabled town and parish councils² with populations of over 10,000 to levy a half-penny rate which could be used to pay for a library building, fuel, lighting and staff, but not for books.³ Also founded prior to this chronology was the first children's

library service established in 1862 in Manchester public library, which was followed by similar services in Birkenhead in 1865 and Birmingham in 1869.⁴ Occasionally in the 1860s, there were other services for children in the form of school libraries⁵ and prior to this there was library provision by Sunday schools.⁶ Given the strong association of children's librarianship with supposedly innate feminine caring skills outlined in Chapter 7, it is suggested that an investigation informed by gendered considerations of these developments would be useful. Conversely, the frequent dissociation of women workers from academic library work before the Second World War has been noted in the preceding chapters. The development of academic libraries and their workforce practices had begun long before the scope of this study. The two institutions dominating this sector, the Bodelian and Cambridge University Library, were founded around 300 years before this study commences and by the late 19th century were substantial institutions.⁷ This study has illustrated the importance of gender in late 19th and 20th century library labour markets and it would be interesting to explore constructions of masculinity and the extent of women's employment in these earlier services.

A further omission from an account of library work beginning in 1871 is the development of circulating subscription libraries in the second half of the eighteenth century, which accompanied the rise of the novel as the popular literary form. The establishment of Mudie's in 1842 marked the increase in their popularity,⁸ whilst Smith's library, established in 1858, extended subscription libraries to rural areas.⁹ The construction of library work in such libraries predates the formation of the profession of librarianship. This study has argued that project of professionalising librarianship was enhanced by conforming to dominant discourses of gender. It did so by positioning the service and caring aspects of library work as feminine, and thus inferior to 'real' library work, even when certain specialisms required professional qualifications. The feminine aspects were distinguished from 'real' professional activities, which involved managing people, finances and buildings and were associated with men workers. Within the "profession building narrative",¹⁰ some aspects of librarianship are afforded the status of 'real' professional activity, whilst others are marginalised. 'Real' librarianship is positioned at variance with Other aspects of librarianship and Other librarians, and a power relationship is established.

This power relationship has not always precluded women library workers from achieving success in mainstream, professional terms, however, it has pejoratively positioned them in relation to those terms, which has increased the likelihood that women remain in low paid, low valued positions. An exploration of library workers which considers the situation before the professionalisation project began in earnest in the 1870s would, therefore, be interesting. Judith Bowen's work on the development of librarianship in France between 1830-50 indicates that gender might still be a significant factor, yet one which was differently framed. Her work has explored ways that, during the July monarchy, librarianship became associated with constitutional and political history and document preservation and how this association aligned it strongly with masculinised scholarly professions, rather than a feminised service profession.¹¹

This periodisation represents an attempt to gloss disparate arguments which were voiced across a number of years. Yet events are insufficiently discrete to allow the certainty needed to pinpoint dates when changes began or ended. Whilst such concerns do not impede accounts of the library chronicle,¹² listing, for example, when library legislation was enacted, they are significant in considering periodisation, as illustrated in feminist debates about the legitimising function of periodisation.¹³ Why, then, bother with periodisation? Why not refuse to engage with such traditional historical pastimes and assert that only consideration of specific events in particular contexts will suffice? This periodisation, with its hedged and cautious wording, aims to indicate that sweeping accounts, such as 'in a time of struggle' etc, are insufficient, as whilst some women struggled to participate in the library labour market, others struggled only for more senior posts, whilst yet others were already in senior positions. It is critical to focus on the particular, however, it is also necessary to assert a more general argument from the points discussed in the preceding chapters. Periodisation can assist, rather than obfuscate, the construction of arguments about gender in the development of the library sector if it attends to general trends and to particular differences, acknowledging that, for example, whilst certain women workers had well paid, highly esteemed careers in librarianship in the late 19th century, most did not. This periodisation is included in an effort to inform the

development of general arguments which are attentive to points of difference as well as general trends.

9.4 Missing Discourses: Disrupting the Ubiquity of Professionalism

The discussions above illustrate the central importance of the professionalisation project within the English library sector between 1871 and 1974. Various groups were involved in pursuing that project: library workers, the institutional form of the library represented by legislative and social bodies, professional associations and other social groups, such as library committee members. Attempts to establish librarianship as a profession were on-going throughout the period and professional status could not be accepted as given. Such a lack of certainty may explain the marginalisation of discourses which were problematic to professionalisation. This section briefly discusses three such discourses which were available to library workers, but were only rarely invoked in discussions about the sector: feminism; anti-racism; and, trade unionism. Further work is necessary in all three areas, and particularly in relation to ethnicity.

Throughout 1871-1974, feminist politics, in various forms, appear considerably more frequently than discussions of anti-racism and trade unionism. Feminism is understood to refer to:

... the ideology of women's liberation since intrinsic in all its approaches is the belief that women suffer injustice because of our sex.¹⁴

Feminists or feminist politics may be self-identified or may be understood as operating in a way sympathetic with this framework. From the 1870s, as discussed in Chapter 4, feminist discourses impacted on the position of women library workers.¹⁵ Discussions of librarianship appear in early feminist publications, such as *Englishwoman's Review*,¹⁶ *Englishwoman's Year Book*,¹⁷ and *Time and Tide*.¹⁸ The Fabian Society, which included feminists such as Beatrice Webb, briefly discussed librarianship, recommending it as work which was "particularly suited to women".¹⁹ Occasionally feminist politics were raised in the professional press,²⁰ although only

rarely did the writers self-identify as feminist.²¹ Feminist associations are also evident in groups which librarians contacted. Kate Pierce, for example, had connections with the National Women's Citizen's Association²² and accepted the Women's Freedom League's publication, *The Vote*, for Kettering public library.²³ Some women library workers were active in the suffrage campaign. Winifred Parry was reference librarian at Bristol public library between 1906-36. Her contribution to the suffrage campaign involved, amongst other things, challenging anti-suffrage surveys.²⁴ Margaret Reed also voiced feminist arguments, noting the "steadily growing prejudice against girls in libraries," in 1915,²⁵ and the possibility of a "'sex-war' in library work" in 1914.²⁶

Such expressions of feminist politics were often marginalised. For example, the 1899 International Congress of Women provided a showcase for debates about women's roles in society and included discussions about women and library work.²⁷ Two English women librarians, Minnie James and Mary Petherbridge, addressed the meeting. Afterwards, both were strongly criticised, in a variety of publications, by *Library Assistant* editor Bertram Dyer.²⁸ He attacked the Congress as "unrepresentative", as providing a platform for librarians "at present interested in commercial pursuits, and one of whom publicly stated her fee for private pupils".²⁹ The following issue also argued that it was "difficult to reconcile" Minnie James and Mary Petherbridge's honorary membership of the LAA with the criticisms of library assistants made at the Congress.³⁰ Minnie James and Mary Petherbridge replied to the charges, the former defending the programme on the grounds that it had been convened "practically at the eleventh hour"³¹ and the latter arguing that she was misunderstood.³² Both remained honorary members of the LAA, yet the showcase potential of the Congress's discussion of library work was undermined. Rather than focussing on arguments about women's participation in library employment, it becomes instead a debate about appropriate professional behaviour. Dyer lists the aims of the LAA as "to promote the social, intellectual and professional interests" of library assistants and argues that, in particular, Miss Petherbridge's comments about assistants' lack of education were at variance with these aims. Even at an international congress convened to discuss the position of women, the professionalisation project was expected to take priority. Despite the on-going articulation of feminist

politics over the period in question feminism remained a marginalised discourse in library debates.

Like feminism, trade unionism was also discussed throughout the 20th century. William R. Maidment has explored the history of public library workers and trade unions, noting that whilst these workers looked to the LA on professional matters, issues relating to salaries were often dealt with by Nalgo.³³ Trade union membership increased after the Second World War, and women librarians, such as Jane Downton, Miss Gregory and Miss Guest,³⁴ served on Nalgo's National Executive Council. Yet trade unions were disliked by many library workers. For example, E.R. Norris Mathews, Bristol city librarian, and Charles Sutton, chief librarian at Manchester public libraries, discussed the possibility of Bristol women library workers joining the National Union of Clerks. Mathews described the unions as having "some disturbing influence",³⁵ and Sutton talks of unions in terms of not yet having "trouble" with them.³⁶ Mathews and Sutton argue that workers' grievances should be resolved through discussions with the librarian or library committee. Whilst trade unions were available to library workers to facilitate negotiation with employers, they were rarely used. This was the case from the turn of the century. At the Second International Conference in 1898, James Ogle notes that library workers did not complain about their terms and conditions because "the fear of trades-unions has long kept librarians silent."³⁷ Maidment comments that, although library workers were aware of their poor terms and conditions of employment, they "generally preferred to fight for professional recognition and improved libraries rather than better conditions of employment".³⁸ Collective effort on behalf of library workers appears to have been sacrificed in the pursuit of professionalisation.

If trade unionism and feminism were marginalised in relation to the library sector, anti-racist discourses were, until the 1970s, almost invisible. Discussions of ethnicity and library workers in the UK professional press can be dated from 1912, but this article focuses on Black library workers employed in southern US states during racial segregation,³⁹ rather than workers from minority ethnic communities in England. There are references to racist discourses in press reports about libraries. For example, in 1961 Birmingham public libraries received a racist complaint from a

library user, Monica Howard, about West Indian library assistant, Jocelyn King. The response stated that the committee had “no colour bar and do not intend to discriminate on colour grounds when recruiting staff.”⁴⁰ Articulations of racism as a problem for libraries and library workers were more widely raised in the 1970s. At this time, Anne Thompson began working in libraries and talks about library work as a political activity, that is as something which engages with social power relations.

I decided to work in a library ... because I thought of the importance of the library in the community, and the importance of the library in the Black community. And I wanted to be part of that. ... there was so much history that was important to the development and the growth and the self-respect that was needed within the Black community, because you know the press always try to put in that we are spongers and ignorant and illiterate and you know all of that, and when I saw the wealth of information stuck in our libraries ... ⁴¹

Library work is described here as making a contribution to the development of a particular community. It is also in a position to challenge racist media constructions of that community.

Yet existing data suggest that institutional racism underpinned certain core library practices. For example, cataloguing was a professional practice that embodied racism: “ at that time, a hell of a lot of Black books were thrown into 301.45 which is like the class number for social malaise.”⁴² Furthermore, in one library service:

AT ... I remember that the Asian languages were kept hidden in the basement and there was just a signpost at the door saying we have books in the Indian languages [laughs] and I remember this Indian man coming in and er saying you know I'd like some books, and the librarian instead of allowing him to go down, said describe the books.

EK It's closed access all over again.

AT Yes, yes – describe these books. That was 1971, could be 1972. I was absolutely horrified.⁴³

The library service provide for this man was inferior to that provided for white library users; he was marginalised within the physical space of the library and discriminated against by being offered a form of closed access when most library users enjoyed open access. In challenging such professionally institutionalised racism, Anne Thompson constructs library work as “predominantly a struggle”. By the late 1970s, and beyond the scope of this study, this struggle had become formalised with the establishment of the National Committee on Racism in Children’s Books and of the African Caribbean Library Association. Contemporaneously, Section 11 funding offered important financial support for challenging racism in libraries and led to the, often short-lived, establishment of West Indian, and other, community librarian posts. Yet the professional associations did little to help, particularly in the early 1970s: “Matters such as equal opportunities, racial harassment – inequality was really not on their agenda at this time.”⁴⁴ Anne Thompson cites Jean Plaister’s presidency in 1988 as the time when the LA began to seriously address racism.

Anti-racism, trade unionism and feminism were, then, marginalised discourses in debates about library work. This marginalisation was achieved although each offers workers ways of challenging various exploitative and discriminatory employment practices. Yet advocacy of such discourses might have caused workers to be penalised because they did not appear to be professional. Beverley Skeggs has argued that working class women are not usually constructed as respectable. They have to work to achieve that status and, having achieved it, they have to be careful not to lose it.⁴⁵ A similar process is at play in librarianship which throughout this period is not accepted as a profession, but has to work to legitimise itself as such. Hence, appearing not to be a professional is risky and this most dangerous for those who are least well connected to that status: that is, those who are often constructed as Others, people from minority ethnic communities, the working classes and women.

In summary, this section has briefly discussed ways that anti-racist, trade unionist and feminist discourses were marginalised in debates about library work. The need to reinforce the occupation’s claim to professional status was paramount and other concerns, such as workers’ well-being and social justice, were side-lined. Yet whilst these discourses were missing from dominant constructions of library work,

they occasionally disrupt 'common-sense' understandings and, for example, feminist arguments impact on discussions about equal pay and anti-racist discourses were invoked to reject a form of racial segregation in the library labour market. In general, however, discourses focussed on workers' rights were sacrificed, by both workers and employers who gave preference to the professionalisation project.

9.5 Gendering Library History

The summary of previous chapters, periodisation of the years discussed and consideration of marginalised discourses illustrate several points. Firstly, and of primary importance, this study demonstrates that it is possible to write a history of women library workers. There are sufficient fragmentary traces of the past, which constitute historiographical 'evidence', that aspects of the development of the library labour market relating to women can be excavated, discussed and used to construct an account of that past. That this is possible leads to a further point: the existence of these traces today means that they have existed since their creation, but that earlier studies, also focused on this area and time period, have neither selected them, occasionally perhaps because texts were not available, nor chosen to work with them. This point illustrates the partiality of those histories. This study, too, is a partial account in that it has not explored various related debates, such as the intersection of utilitarianism and processes of gender.⁴⁶ Instead, by focusing on women, it has emphasised the importance of constructions of gender in the development of the library sector between 1871-1974. In various ways, women were situated as Other and marginalised throughout the sector by vertical and horizontal occupational segregation: women tended to be located *in relation* to men. Positioning women, typically, in the lower reaches of the professional hierarchy not only affected women workers, but also impacted on men who were, typically, situated in the more senior posts. This study's focus on women does not mean that it is framed only within the theoretical concerns of women's history because it has also been attentive to the impact of that positioning on men workers. It is this attention that justifies both the study's claim to be considered gender history, and the insistence that gender is one of the vital power relations which should be considered in the writing of library history and the construction of labour markets.

Yet a focus on the politics of library historiography must be accompanied by attention to the politics of library development. The operations of power in the establishment of the profession have been discussed and further power relations need exploration in relation to the sector and its users. There needs to be an engagement with the value judgements inherent in contemporary and historical constructions of library work, rather than assertions that library workers are 'objective' or politically neutral. Acting or working within a social context entails making choices and those choices invoke values. Histories of library work which have promoted the construction of the library worker as 'objective' are situated within accepted, common-sense modes of thinking, that is, within the status quo which privileges those positioned as normative. Histories which engage with questions of whose interest and whose benefit is served by the activities of library workers and how such power is legitimised or subverted begin to deconstruct these power relations. This deconstruction challenges the prevailing concept of library work and the library as politically neutral, instead articulating it as a cultural practice situated in and by socio-political power relations. By explicating such arguments, in this instance focused on the impact of gender in library employment, such debates are in a position to assist in framing the questions asked of library history and of the sector. In aiming only to prompt questioning rather than to provide answers, the need for this history to be 'the truth' about all the women who have ever worked in English libraries between 1871-1974 is removed. Any claim to the status of 'truth' would be flawed as only fragmentary pieces of the development of library work have survived, which allow only glimpses at what happened. These glimpses are linked together by contemporary interpretation and the arguments offered here. There is an irrecoverable epistemological and ontological gap between women working in libraries in the past and this analysis of their situations. This study does not pretend to overcome that gap but rather acknowledges its existence. This necessitates an understanding of history as uncertain and partial which entails, as Robert Eaglestone has suggested, risk.⁴⁷ A benefit of history-as-risk is that it problematises the perceived naturalness of situations and understandings, a naturalness which has often propounded the inevitability of women's suitability for low paid, low status employment in the library sector and of the more general tendency to negatively position women. As such, the

risk of destabilising 'certainty' and 'naturalness' might well be worthwhile for feminist historians.

¹ The prohibition forbidding women to enter the medical profession, for example, has led some writers to label the late 19th century as a period of struggle where women fought for admission. See, for example, Blake, C. (1990) *The Charge of the Parasols. Women's Entry to the Medical Profession*, London, Women's Press.

² County councils did not exist at this point.

³ Kelly, T. (1977) *A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain, 1845-1975*, London, Library Association.

⁴ Ellis, A. (1971) *Library Services for Young People in England and Wales. 1830-1970*, Oxford, Pergamon, p.4.

⁵ Heeks, P. (1996) Services to Schools, in Kinnell, M. and Sturges, P. (eds) *Continuity and Innovation in the Public Library. The Development of a Social Institution*, London, Library Association, p.126.

⁶ Ellis, ref. 4, p.9. See also: Laqueur, T.W. (1976) Working Class Demand and the Growth of English Elementary Education, in Stone, L. (ed) *Schooling and Society*, Baltimore, John Hopkins.

⁷ See: Thompson, J. (ed) (1980) *University Library History. An International Review*, London, Clive Bingley.

⁸ Griest, G.L. (1970) *Mudie's Circulating Library and the Victorian Novel*, Newton Abbott, David and Charles.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Hildenbrand, S. (1996) Women in Library History: From the Politics of Library History to the History of Library Politics, in Hildenbrand, S. (ed) *Reclaiming the American Library Past: Writing the Women in*, Norwood NJ, Ablex, p. 3.

¹¹ Bowen J. (1999) Librarians as Guardians of Memory: The Experience of France. Paper given at *Gendering Library History. An International Conference*, Liverpool John Moores University, 15th May 1999.

¹² Such as: Thornton, J.L. (1941) *The Chronology of Librarianship*, London, Grafton.

¹³ See Chapter 4, Section 4.5.1.

¹⁴ Humm, M. (1995) *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*, Hemel Hempstead, Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, p.94.

¹⁵ See Chapter 4, Section 4.5.

¹⁶ No Author. (1899) Women in Libraries, *Englishwoman's Review*, 30, pp.240-245.

¹⁷ For example: Petherbridge, M. (1907) Librarians, in Janes, E. (ed) *Englishwoman's Year Book 1907-08*, London, Adam and Charles, p.64.

¹⁸ There was, for example, a discussion over several issues, about children's librarianship. See: Eyles, L. (1923) Children's Libraries, *Time and Tide*, 21st September; Browning, M. (1923) Children's Libraries, *Time and Tide*, 5th October; and, Green, E. (1923) Children's Libraries, *Time and Tide*, 12th October. All articles in: Press Cuttings 29th June to 13th December 1923, Library Association Archive.

¹⁹ Alexander, S. (ed) (1988) *Women's Fabian Tracts*, London, Routledge, p.292.

²⁰ For example: Cowper, R.S. (1941) Not in Our Stars, *Library Association Record*, 42(6). pp.166-7; and, Clark, J. (1971) Sex Discrimination, *Library Association Record*, 73(3), p.60.

²¹ For example, the undated (circa 1974) issue 5 of the journal published by Librarians for Social Change is edited by their Feminist Group. This contains articles using contemporary feminist vocabulary, such as Chrissy Allott's articles 'Whose Lib?' and 'Consciousness-Raising in a Special Library'.

²² Letter from Kate Pierce to the National Women's Citizen's Association, 24th September 1919. In: Letters 1918 – [no end date], Kettering Public Library Archive.

²³ Letter from G.M.Stewart to Kate Pierce, 3rd June 1919. In: Letters 1918 – [no end date], Kettering Public Library Archive.

²⁴ Parry, W. (1911) The Anti-Suffrage Canvass at Bristol, *Common Cause*, 9th March. In Scrapbook of Miss Winifred L. Parry, Bristol Reference Librarian, 1906-1936, Bristol Public Library Archive.

²⁵ Reed, M. (1915) Women Assistants, *The Librarian and Bookworld*, 5(9), pp.254-6.

²⁶ Reed M. (1914) The Attack on Women, *The Librarian and Bookworld*, 5(1), pp.10-11.

- ²⁷ Countess of Aberdeen. (ed) (1900) **Women in Professions. Being the Professional Section of the International Congress of Women**, London, Fisher Unwin, pp.211-232.
- ²⁸ See: B.L.D. (1899) Women in Librarianship. A Guet Apens, *Library Assistant*, 1, p.237; No Author. (1899) Women in Librarianship. A Guet Apens, *Library Assistant*, 1, p. 246; No Author. (1899/1900) Libraries and Librarains, *Library World*, 2, p.46; and, No Author. (1899) Women Librarians, *Municipal Journal*, 14th July. In: Press Cuttings 1890-1900, Library Association Archive.
- ²⁹ B.L.D., ref. 28, p.238.
- ³⁰ No Author, Women in Librarianship. A Guet Apens, ref. 28, p.246.
- ³¹ James, M.S.R. (1899) Women in Librarianship at the Late Congress, *Library Assistant*, 2, pp.44-5.
- ³² Petherbridge, M. (1899) Miss Petherbridge and the Congress, *Library Assistant*, 2, p.45.
- ³³ Maidment, W.R. (1976) Trade Unionism in Public Libraries, *Journal of Librarianship*, 8(3), pp.143-52.
- ³⁴ Dove, J. (1970) Librarians and Nalgo, *Library Association Record*, 72(843), pp.73-85.
- ³⁵ Letter from E.R. Norris Mathews to Charles Sutton, dated 15th July 1913. In: Staff, Staff Misc., 1894-1915, Local Studies Unit, Manchester Central Library.
- ³⁶ Letter from Chief Librarian [C. Sutton] to E.R. Norris Mathews, dated 16th July 1913. In: *ibid.*
- ³⁷ Ogle, J.J. (1898) Hindrance to the Training of Efficient Librarians, in Brown, J.D., Garnett, R., McAllister, J.Y.W. and Tedder, H.R. (eds) **Transactions and Proceedings of the Second International Librarians' Conference**, London, Library Association, p.45.
- ³⁸ Maidment, ref. 33, p.144.
- ³⁹ Reed, M. (1912) Women's Work in Libraries, *Librarian and Bookworld*, 2(8), pp.307-8.
- ⁴⁰ No Author. (1961) No Colour Bar in Recruiting Library Staff, *Birmingham Post*, 24th January. In: Press Cuttings November 1946 to 1962, Library Association Archive.
- ⁴¹ Interview with Anne Thompson, 5th February 1999.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁵ Skeggs, B. (1997) **Formations of Class and Gender. Becoming Respectable**, London, Sage, Chapter 3.
- ⁴⁶ For a discussion of the impact of utilitarianism on librarianship see: Black, A. (1996) **A New History of the English Public Library. Social and Intellectual Contexts, 1850-1914**, London Leicester, Chapter 3.
- ⁴⁷ See Chapter 2 for a discussion of Robert Eaglestone's understanding of history.

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Appendix 1

Informed Consent Form

Informed consent

I understand the purpose of this study and I am willing to participate in this discussion. I understand that this conversation will be taped and the transcripts may be used in reports or papers arising from this project. Any material which is used will be used anonymously. The material will only be seen by the interview organiser, Evelyn Kerslake, and the project supervisors.

Name: Signed Date

Appendix 2

Interview and Discussion Schedules

Group discussion schedule

[date of interview]

Names of participants

Place of interview

1. In general, were there many women in libraries? Was this a 'bad' thing? Where were they - mainly public libraries, or in special and academic too?
2. Was it seen as a 'nice job for a girl', for example, in magazine articles?
3. Were there women in senior positions in the professional associations?
4. What did you/women wear to work? Uniform/overalls? And you/men?
5. Was the marriage bar in operation? Did most women marry - and leave? Did the marriage bar cease during your time at work - why?
6. Maternity provision? Children rather than marriage the cut off point?
7. Pension schemes: open to women?
8. Did you feel any changes came about in the 1940s in libraries because of the Second World War?
9. What was the most significant period of change for women in libraries over your lifetime? Were the changes of the 1960s/EPA in 1970/SDA 1975 important?

Outline individual interview schedule

[date of interview]

Name of interviewee

Place of interview

1. Working life history: What was your first job? Then? Most senior position? Start and retirement dates. Why did you go into librarianship?
2. Training: initial training? Training throughout your career? Did you plan your career? Why special/public/academic libraries?
3. Were there many women in this type of library? Did you encounter the 'over-feminisation' argument? Did you notice women in other sectors?
4. What did you wear to work? Uniform/overalls? And the men/bosses?
5. Did you join the LA? A special interest group? Were there many women? Why did you join?
6. Was the marriage bar in operation? Did the marriage bar change over time - why? Maternity provision?
7. Pension schemes: open to women?
8. Was the expansion of library schools from 1946 onwards significant for women?
9. What was the most significant period of change for women in libraries over your lifetime? Were the changes of the 1960s and equal pay or/and the 1970s and the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 important? Was it important that Lorna Paulin became President of the LA in 1966?
10. Librarianship is numerically dominated by women: is it, to any extent, a feminist as well as feminised occupation?
11. Use of interview data: anonymous or named? Would you like to see a transcript

Appendix 3

Biographies of Interviewees

Biographies of Interviewees

N.B. The following are biographies of library workers who participated in the individual interviews conducted for this thesis. The details given are not a full record of the employment and professional activities for the individual concerned, but rather attempt to give an overview of their work history.

Eileen Colwell studied librarianship at University College, London in the early 1920s. Her first post was at Bolton municipal library in 1924. Between 1926 and 1966, she worked at Hendon libraries, establishing the children's libraries there. She was a member of various national and international librarianship bodies. Beyond librarianship, she published collections of children's stories and was a BBC *Jackanory* storyteller.

Evelyn Evans began work in Coventry public libraries in 1927, graduating from library assistant to inspector of branch libraries. She moved to York city library in 1940 as deputy librarian. After the war she was appointed librarian with the British Council on the Gold Coast and was later the first director of the Ghana Library Board. In the late 1960s, she was an adviser on libraries for UNESCO.

Rita Keegan (pseudonym) worked at Manchester public libraries in 1940. She moved to Lee municipal library in 1941, and attended Manchester School of Librarianship. Following periods in other public libraries, she also had posts as a school librarian and a prison librarian.

Lorna Paulin holds a BA and MA in English from University College, London. Whilst working for her MA she also studied on the librarianship course run by UCL. Her first post was as deputy county librarian at Kent in 1936, working with Nancy Cooke. After the war, she moved to Nottinghamshire as chief, and then in 1952 to Hertfordshire. She was a member of many LA committees and in 1966 was the first woman to be elected President of the LA.

Jean Plaister worked in a number of public library services, including Swindon, Oxford and Gillingham before being appointed Director of the South Western Regional Library Service (later LASER) in 1962. She was President of the ALA in 1966 and of the LA in 1988.

Avril Rolph began work as a library assistant in 1960 and studied at Ealing library school between 1965-7. She worked at Chelsea School of Art before returning to public libraries. She was one of the founders of Women in Libraries in 1980 and of Lesbians in Libraries in 1984.

Jennifer Shepherd worked in Leicester City Libraries as a library assistant in 1951. In 1957, she moved to Buckinghamshire as children's librarian, then to Aylesbury and Shropshire. In 1968, she returned to Leicestershire, this time with the county library service with responsibility for children's and school libraries. She was awarded an Honorary FLA in 1996.

Ken Stockham began work as a library assistant at Coventry public libraries in the late 1930s. He later held posts in Essex, Derbyshire and Dover library services. During In the 1970s, he was a lecturer in the library school at Loughborough University. He was President of the LA in 1982.

Anne Thompson started working in libraries in 1971 as a library assistant at Hammersmith and Fulham, later studying librarianship at the Polytechnic of North London. Since then she

has worked as a community librarian and in academic libraries. In the late 1970s, she joined the National Committee on Racism in Children's Books and in 1981 was one of the founders of the African Caribbean Library Association.

Winifred Thorne began work as a relief assistant at the central library in Fulham before becoming a junior assistant at the St Bride Institute, London in 1927. She was awarded her FLA in 1929. In 1930, she was appointed as assistant to the library at Indian High Commission and became librarian during the Second World War.

Anne Wilson held various posts at the Brotherton Library, Leeds University between 1961-92, including cataloguer and assistant librarian.