Gender and other outstanding issues: Is feminist librarianship possible?

Rosie Ilett
Faculty of Education,
University of Scotland, Glasgow, UK

This paper explores British librarianship from a third wave feminist position. It proposes that contemporary librarianship's nineteenth century re/construction was highly gendered and that this has had a significant impact on its theory and practice. The emergence of the public library as a quasi-domestic, female-controlled 'third space' at the same time through the influence of librarianship architects like Melvil Dewey allows the social construction of librarianship and the librarian to be fully observed. These sites provide an opportunity to focus on a familiar setting, work practice and occupational group that is often stereotyped and taken for granted, and little discussed from a gender-aware perspective. I suggest that this has continued to inhibit librarians and their potential. Challenges made by women librarians inspired by specifically second wave feminism are described to indicate the constraints of librarianship revealed if gendered understandings are applied, as are the efforts of women from other situated contexts.

The paper goes on to suggest that women's libraries and archives, developed through twentieth-century feminisms and often outside mainstream and official librarianship structures, may offer alternative models of librarianship and feminist space. Reflections are made on three British women's libraries that represent subsequent feminist waves to discover whether they offer insights into the gendered nature of librarianship and its status as a female-dominated profession or perhaps herald the potential of new forms derived from feminist understandings. Before further discussion, I briefly reflect on the experiences that led to the development of these ideas and then position librarianship as currently in flux and open to a range of complex internal and external influences.

LIBRARIANS, SILENCE AND CRISIS

Having been an activist within the British second wave feminist movement in the 1970s and then training as a librarian in the 1980s, I was aware that I was potentially entering a profession surrounded by long-standing negative images of repressed, bookish spinsters in sensible shoes and glasses, or men that lived with their mothers. At library school in London, there was no discussion about obvious facts like more women than men were librarians but men seemed to be in charge, and that library classification schemes like the Dewey Decimal seemed to contain bizarre Victorian notions about gender, race, class and sexuality that nobody noticed. That was just how it was, and our mostly male lecturers took strong exception to the identification of these troublesome issues. Since then I have been concerned with trying to understand why such silence exists, how such a situation occurred, and to try and identify where challenge and change has been possible. Although I have only briefly worked as a librarian, I have continued my personal and professional involvement in these areas for fifteen years, and am clear that reasons for these librarianship 'certainties' exist although these and other certainties are fragile and contested, and periodically in crisis.

Librarianship at the start of the twenty-first century is going through 'a period of great transition' (Reed 1996, 1) and negotiating numerous pressures, the impacts of which were previously hard to anticipate. In 1975, one observer commented that 'only a small proportion of tomorrow's librarians will need to know much on this subject' (Maidment 1975, 138). The subject of course was computers, and contrary to Maidment's prophecy, there have been revolutionary changes in how information is organised, how knowledge is made available, how and by whom library and information services are provided, and for what purpose. The commercialisation and commodification of information has also been assisted by, and helped shape the Internet, in which librarians have arguably had limited influence but that is having an immense impact on their work.

Public libraries are also responding to increased expectations of policy makers and funders about delivery of lifelong learning and social inclusion agendas. Many new British public libraries are located alongside swimming pools, leisure centres, supermarkets and 'colleges, galleries, performance space and healthy living advice' (*Library Association Record* 2001). They are now increasingly called 'ideas stores' not libraries (Ezard 2003) and take a hybrid and multi-purpose approach. The remits of librarians are expanding, and other occupational groups are working in information roles, some of which might have previously been perceived as the domain of the librarian. There are fewer librarianship courses in universities and colleges than in the past, and the employment of qualified staff is rarer within the British public library service, due to the increased use of

library assistants and paraprofessionals. It is a challenging time to be a librarian, when traditional roles and identities are arguably under threat. But this is not the first time that librarianship has been in crisis or unstable, and at previous periods of global change it has also changed and metamorphosed.

Historical figures of the monk-librarian and the male scholar in charge of chained books and private libraries were appropriate to the social mores of their times, and conveyed powerful messages of masculine knowledge and learning, and seemingly incontestable gender arrangements. However, this changed. As some middle-class women gained access to university education and to previously male-only professions in the nineteenth century, through early first wave feminist activism but more through the needs of industrial capitalism, libraries needed to allow the possibility of women as independent readers and library users — and as staff. Recorded knowledge within libraries, previously only accessible to those (males) with private or spiritual means, was needed to help educate an urban work force. The rise of public libraries throughout much of the developed world at this time was a direct response to these and other related pressures.

Public libraries in the United Kingdom, many funded by the industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, typically grew from the tradition of working-class subscription libraries and mutual self-help collections of trade associations (Rose 2001). For observers writing about the trajectory of American librarianship, women were crucial to mass education and the expanded public library system (Garrison 1979; Harris 1992). I would argue that the widespread growth of public libraries and the essential development of public librarians also firmly embedded the impact of gender at this point in British librarianship. I will now reflect on shifts in women's public and private lives in this period, and the public library as a space that positioned women within a defined borderland.

VICTORIAN WOMEN IN THE BORDERLANDS

The library as a workplace and space was designed with women in mind. Although late Victorian women were unwelcome in public without male companions as they were uncontrollable and threatened disorder and immorality, within the domestic sphere, particularly that of the growing middle-class professional classes, they were perceived as decorative and appealing (Chase 1996; Wilson 1991). Within the public sphere intermediate zones or borderlands existed where public and private life converged and which women could access. These included the restaurant or hotel lobby that emitted a sense of privacy and incorporated the functions and appearances of domestic space (Wilson 1994). In these zones, women often performed work roles that were stereotypically female and

essentially concerned with service, replicating their private selves in places resonant of home. Interestingly, the department store that came into its own at this time through the increased availability of manufactured and imported goods, and desires for materialism and consumerism, was the one space in which women could move unaccompanied and act independently (Solnit 2000).

One of these borderlands was the public library, situated between the outside and the inside, where women's domestic and public roles could come together and where visitors experienced familiarity at their surroundings, but could move into new areas of exploration and knowledge with women's kindly and supportive help. Such a space complies with Foucault's concept of heterotopias, and also of the 'third space' as defined by the postmodern geographer, Edward Soja, that incorporates more fluid, diverse and gendered elements (Foucault 1984; Soja 1996). I will now explore how the public library became a hybrid of the home and the outside world through the efforts of Melvil Dewey and others, and why women's attributes were felt central in its maintenance. The undoubted financial benefits of women's involvement, and their reliability, will also be highlighted.

THE NEW WOMEN LIBRARIANS AND THE NEW LIBRARIANSHIP
The American Melvil Dewey was unquestionably the key architect of librarianship, its value system of service and order, and its integral gender roles, which has had worldwide influence. Dewey was born in 1851 into a religious, middle-class New York family. From alphabetising his mother's pantry to recommending that his father close down (what the young Dewey perceived to be) his failing store, he was preoccupied with time, efficiency and the metric system from an early age. Dewey trained as a teacher at New York's Amherst College and began to see the function of libraries in educating an increasingly diverse and changing America and in helping newly arrived immigrants understand White Anglo Saxon Protestant culture. Moving into librarianship and becoming a university librarian, Dewey saw his mission as to organise and construct a set of transferable librarianship principles. Libraries needed infrastructures, but these had to be straightforward, standardised and simple so that anyone could use them. The outcome of even this decision is profound, as librarianship was then set up as a quasi-technical practice that involved limited intellectual freedom for the librarian or library user, and that could then be viewed as naturally suitable for women to undertake (Weigand 1996).

Dewey saw public libraries as places of calm where furniture had rubber tips and readers spoke only to library staff. To develop this, and to encourage a cultivated and literate public, staff were needed that could stand 'side by side with the preachers and the teachers' (Dewey 1876, 5).

Dewey established the world's first library school in 1884 to help create a modernised profession that was vigorous and forward thinking and that could redress past notions of the library as inaccessible and elitist. This view, supported by other male library leaders, relied on women to serve the public, whilst the male head librarian engaged with the outside world through his 'private office and spatial control that were symbols of his professionalism' (Van Slyck 1995, 172). Many middle-class women became attracted to this new profession that offered opportunities for independence and work satisfaction. The development of women librarians as 'tender technicians', as Dee Garrison called them, was thus created, with men in charge and women the semi-domestic face of librarianship (Garrison 1979). For another commentator, Dewey by these actions, 'cursed the field of librarianship, like a wicked but smiling stepfather for all time' (Rodgers 1997, 182) and there is no doubt that establishing librarianship as a profession populated by women, has had long-term implications.

Dewey felt that women had desirable characteristics for librarianship, as they were well read, moral, interested in public service and had 'quick minds and deft fingers' (Dewey 1886, 109). They introduced a form of gentle control that maintained boundaries between spaces – between the public and the private, the internal and external world, chaos and harmony, ignorance and knowledge, and falsehood and truth. Many stereotypes about women librarians are unsurprisingly located in these binaries, especially linked to sexuality and repression (Thistlewaite 2003). Although disorderly in the external world, women in the library could restore order and ensure that readers, with 'the capacity to disrupt and ultimately prevent the ideal of the complete library' (Radford 1997, 218) were kept in check. Employing women cost less than men, and although Dewey was sympathetic to the resulting outcomes for women, he suggested that this was inevitable because of women's likely family responsibilities, but clearly there were financial and other benefits of maintaining a lower-paid profession that would be forever associated with women (Dewey 1876).

Dewey's impact on the development of librarianship as a female-dominated profession is crucial, but there were other examples of the deliberate introduction of women in the public library setting, where financial benefits clearly ensued, and where women were felt to be more reliable than male equivalents. Alderman Thomas Baker, from Manchester City Council in England, wrote in 1879 (Baker 1880) about local observations that employing young male assistants in the city library service was not always sustainable as, after training, they were able to achieve greater salaries elsewhere. Advertising for young women in 1871, brought forth a new group of keen female staff who were 'regular in their attendance, attentive to their employment and position, evincing no position to leave'

(Baker 1880). The only ones who left suffered ill-health, or wished to marry and could no longer remain employed. Like Dewey, Baker felt that whereas male staff could be relied upon to undertake 'rough work' such as 'opening and shutting windows, going errands . . . reaching books from the higher shelves' (Baker 1880, 9) and sorting out occasional disturbances in the reading room, for 'attendance on readers and applicants for books' (Baker 1880, 9), 'girls' were preferred.

THE LIBRARY CLASSIFICATION SCHEME AND WOMEN

One of the areas of library work with which all staff needed to be familiar was the library classification scheme. As part of what he eventually called 'library science', Dewey devised the Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme with which he is most associated. A library classification scheme organises the world, or an area of knowledge, where the order of subjects and ideas encompassed correspond to their status in society and to the dominant discourse (Bowker and Star 1999). Dewey's decimal-based scheme proposed that ten main classes could group the world's knowledge and provide scope for future knowledge development. The notions embedded in the scheme reflect the milieu from which Dewey came, a 'mid-nineteenth century male white Western (and largely) Christian view of the world' (Weigand 1996, 33). There is not time to investigate the scheme here, as its shortcomings are widely known, and although numerous revisions since its invention have made it more contemporary, it is still the most popular library classification scheme in the world and many libraries continue to use earlier versions. The impact of schemes like Dewey on the psyche, self-esteem and image of librarians is difficult to assess and highly contestable, and within Britain there has been little comment or criticism in this area. This is likely to be because the gendered nature of librarianship and its constraints on women have been rightly regarded as a priority. During the second wave feminist movement some women in librarianship articulated their experiences as librarians that revealed their increasing awareness of being within a feminised profession.

EARLY SIGNS OF FEMINIST LIBRARIANS

From the late 1960s onwards, some British women librarians became influenced by ideas from the new feminist movement. At that time, significant changes in librarianship were taking place. Early computerisation was beginning that required new skills, and the legislative framework for a co-operative public library service in the United Kingdom was being introduced. Librarianship was starting to see itself as a repositioned profession with much to offer, but women were excluded from many of the opportunities. Post-war, the introduction of women into the British workplace had been contested, and for women who trained in the 1950s in female-dominated areas like nursing, teaching and librarianship, there was often

limited scope to progress or even to get work because of the marriage bar and a lack of occupational flexibility.

British research in the late 1960s found that married women librarians suffered discrimination and could not obtain professional posts, even though shortages existed, especially in public libraries (Ward 1966). Women librarians earned less money and enjoyed fewer opportunities than their male counterparts. It took until 1985 for the *Library Association Record* (the main British librarianship journal) to produce an edition dedicated to women librarians and the inequalities they experienced, and few articles expressing any form of feminist consciousness appeared in the British library press until well into the late 1970s and early 1980s.

However, from 1969 onwards, women began to write letters to the *Record* describing their predicament. One writer, Mrs Coffin, in a letter titled 'Library Work for Housewives', asked if any married female librarians had obtained work. She had tried to find employment that would use her library training and knowledge, but felt that 'selling wigs, beauty products, kitchen-ware and corsets, distributing leaflets, or crocheting bootees' (Coffin 1969, 337) was all that was available to those she termed 'housebound housewives'.

Other women wrote in a similar vein, and a male writer from Australia probably added to their anguish by describing the enlightened approach of Australian public libraries where staff could take their children to work, as 'we cannot afford to waste married women by letting them vegetate at home' (Florey 1970, 74). In his particular branch one librarian took her baby with her to work after returning from paid maternity leave, and play areas were available for children in the library. Until the 1973 Sex Discrimination Act in the United Kingdom, it was still legal for employers to advertise for male or female staff, and many women *Record* readers began to challenge this in the early 1970s. One found it strange that a journal representing a largely female workforce should accept such advertisements (Clark 1971) whilst others thought that it was better not to imply that jobs were actually open to men and women, when they were not (Webster 1971).

In the mid-1970s terminology from the women's movement began to surface for this first time in these communications, with public libraries named as 'one of the last bastions of male chauvinism' (Newiss 1975, 97). Women began to suggest that librarianship, like other female-dominated areas, required them to choose between a career or a family. One commented that the image of female spinster librarians — 'afraid to take on any domestic or emotional ties which will ruin their career prospects' (Ralph 1975, 253) — was perhaps correct and inevitable, given the

exclusion of other women from the library. Such debates were never widely discussed within the mainstream British library press, although small, more progressive publications like the newsletter of the group, Librarians for Social Change, covered feminist issues fairly thoroughly in the 1970s and 1980s.

MOVING ON THROUGH THE SECOND WAVE

As the feminist movement began to take shape, some librarians began to develop active responses to tackle the outcomes of the feminised profession and its gendered practices. The Victorian fathers of modern librarianship had felt that stock within the library, for example, should not threaten 'the hierarchy of the family, the domesticity of women, and the sanctity of monogamous lifelong relationships' (Garrison 1979, 35), and women should enforce this. Librarians inspired by second wave feminism realised that the stock of many public libraries had been feminised through this genteel, sexist history, particularly as women have also been high users of British public libraries. As the Australian library writer, Jennifer Cram, later suggested, the outcome was stock that is women-oriented in the traditional sense, for example, extensive collections of cookery books that are seen as gender-neutral (Cram, 1992).

To counter-balance this, and to make the public library a place where women could find books that they might not have access to otherwise, feminist-inspired librarians wanted to include materials that genuinely reflected women's experience and also to combat misogynist and negative materials. One woman who wrote to the British feminist magazine, *Spare Rib*, typified their hoped-for results — finding by chance Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in her public library was 'a bombshell that blew up my complacency' (Bruce 1981, 4). Not all readers were supportive: one London public librarian in the late 1970s attempted to establish a feminist collection, initially a display about the women's movement, and some users complained. However the interest generated led eventually to the development of a women's studies section in the library (Allen 1981).   An American feminist librarian at that time felt that librarians should have the courage of their 'feminist convictions, and set up a women's browsing collection (West 1982, 109). They should 'break through all the Dewey and LC hardening of the categories and shelve the best women's material in all the subjects together' (West 1982, 109).

Classification is a key site to consider the opportunities for feminist thinking about librarianship, as I now briefly describe. To illustrate this further, I turn to work done by women working in women's libraries and archives. These do not necessarily have any formal links to mainstream librarianship, and their work, generated largely through feminist commitment, would be impossible to replicate within mainstream libraries where

such radical changes to classification schemes could not be introduced. It is of significance though as an alternative and as a critical insight into the gendered underpinnings of librarianship. I also comment briefly on attempts by mainstream feminist librarians to advocate for change through professional librarianship structures.

FEMINIST CHALLENGES TO CLASSIFICATION AND TO INEQUALITIES IN LIBRARIANSHIP

Graves said, 'if women's materials are to be effectively identified and utilized they also require full and impartial access through library catalogues' (Graves 1984, 45) but typically male-biased classifications schemes do not encourage this, and often inhibit it. Second wave feminism heralded two paths of resistance to traditional classification schemes. Firstly, women's studies required thinking about how to counteract Victorian archetypes within Dewey and other schemes, and secondly, women's archives and libraries that developed through the women's movement needed to find ways of classifying material from a more explicit feminist position. Developing separate sections within public libraries as described above was a familiar way to undertake this, but within women's libraries and archives, where usually staff were not trained librarians and librarianship was not the main operating environment, other solutions could be found.

Some women created classification schemes to represent the world from a women's view point. In the 1970s, the Women's Resource and Research Centre in London (now the Feminist Library) developed a classification scheme that could accommodate most subjects in women's library collections. Another London feminist information service, the Women's Health and Information Centre (now Women's Health), developed a scheme based on a gendered social model of health to accommodate a wide range of subject areas, including the social determinants of women's health (Ilett 2002;1998). For some women's libraries, in a later period, grappling with the same challenges, creating their own feminist thesaurus and index terms was the answer.

A group of Italian women extracted keywords from feminist books and documents, and developed specialized feminist search terms which did not exist in 'male-oriented cataloging systems' (Tufani 1995, 212). They felt that not only were they making their information more accessible, they were also introducing into everyday language 'the words and phrases that have emerged from the women's movement and that reflect its history and contributions to many fields of knowledge' (Tufani 1995, 212). For example, instead of 'housewife' and 'domestic labour', they used 'double labour' and 'double presence' which they felt represented women's work more truthfully. These examples of attempts to revisit librarianship from a

feminist perspective have been undertaken by women working outside mainstream librarianship with little influence on the infrastructure or thinking of the profession. And indeed, as their motivation is not librarianship itself, but feminism, it is not their explicit desire to do so.

As these groups of women outside the official librarianship profession attempted to solve their own organisational problems through a mixture of quasi-library skills and feminism, within the profession women continued to try to achieve equality with little time to consider less pressing areas like classification. Within the United Kingdom in the 1980s, liberal feminist librarians tried to incorporate new thinking within the Library Association through a short-lived women's group, and another group of more radical women, Women in Libraries, tried to do it from outside official structures. Much of their work focused on advocating for the recognition of women's contribution to, and marginalisation within librarianship, and although radical themes emerged, especially through Women in Libraries, its voluntary nature inhibited its impact, as did the resistance of many British women librarians in identifying with a women's organisation or with feminism. These groups did not include women in grassroots women's libraries (although aware and supportive of them) and I wish to conclude by briefly considering three British women's libraries that have developed various activities and responses to the challenges of integrating feminist thinking and librarianship.

THREE WOMEN'S LIBRARIES
Women's libraries that derived through different trajectories of feminist activity in the twentieth century in the United Kingdom are located in various settings and some still exist. As summarised below, Kramer suggested that there were overall three identifiable types of such libraries within Europe:

- The women's library that originated in the first wave run by professionals, publicly funded and that hold general collections.
- The women's library that developed through second wave feminism that promotes a more radical form of feminist activism with often little funding and reliance on volunteers.
- The equality-focused library situated within public bodies, sometimes with a national status, that often relate to broader equal opportunities agendas and are run by professional staff
  (Kramer 1995).

Since Kramer developed this schema in 1995, changes in public attitudes towards feminism as a visible social movement, in the funding available to such libraries, and the new challenges faced by a younger, perhaps more diverse group of women, have affected British women's libraries. A num-

ber of specialist equality libraries that could have been seen to comply with her last type have closed, the library of the governmental Equal Opportunities Commission, for example. I recently investigated the work and motivations of three British women's libraries and some of their staff, supporters and observers - two located in England and one in Scotland. During the period of my study all three went through various changes linked to shifts in feminism and gender politics. Table 1 below establishes the main facts about them.

Table 1: *Main features of three British women's libraries*

LIBRARY	ORIGIN	FUNDING	ETHOS	STAFF	CONTEXT
1. England	first wave	national/ regional/ donations	equality	Professional	Academic
2. England	second wave	donations	second wave	Volunteers	Women's organisations
3. Scotland	cultural/ third wave	regional/ donations	third wave	paid/Vols	Women's organisations

The three libraries appear to conform to Kramer's typology. Library 1 is perhaps an amalgam of her first and third examples, Library 2 is true to her second type and Library 3 is a new type that did not arguably exist at the time of her suggested classification. Library 1 recently secured extensive public and charitable funding to refurbish a building and to employ new staff; Library 2 has entered a period of great financial uncertainty that may result in its absorption into an academic institution to ensure its collection's future, and Library 3 recently became more secure through gaining various types of project funding.

Within women's libraries, although some constraints that affect women librarians in mainstream settings do not exist and there can be liberating effects of working in women's organisations, funding has undoubtedly inhibited work that could be undertaken and possible collective and individual outcomes for women users, as well as staff. One of the workers in Library 3 told me, prior to their improved circumstances, that she felt that 'We can't carry on for ever, you know . . . the personal cost is heavy sometimes and you do take the whole burdens of the things home with you' (Alison, Library 3, 2000). A feminist librarian involved with the same

library reiterated the limitations caused by the time and stress of fund-raising :

> It's very hard to provide a good basic service when you're constantly running after the next lot of funding and trying to please this funder or that funder, writing reports and giving feedback, doing feasibility studies . . . it becomes a nightmare really.
> *(Jennifer, Library 3, 2000).*

Despite these difficulties, the modus operandi within these libraries is important to analyse. Table 2 below reviews their articulations of librarianship, including their choice of classification scheme; their staffing arrangements and the level of involvement of women who are trained librarians. The concept of 'library feel' is a subjective impression of respective atmosphere, energy and environment, based on my own experience and those whom I interviewed, in and out of the three settings.

Table 2 : *Librarianship components of three British women's libraries*

	CLASSIFICATION SCHEME	LIBRARIAN INVOLVEMENT	LIBRARY 'FEEL'
1.	Dewey	Paid librarian staff	Academic library / museum hybrid
2.	Own feminist scheme	None, although have had past volunteer input	Failing women's project
3.	Planning Dewey-derived feminist scheme	None as paid staff, although are librarian supporters	Thriving women's centre / multiple space

This appears to indicate that the most secure library, Library 1, that originated in the first wave movement, is the most conventional in how it organises its material, the nature of its staffing and how it appears to others. It also has a traditional hierarchical management structure, with a Director, and an advisory committee that functions effectively as a fund-raising Board of Directors. It appears the least feminist in its presentation, and its location in an academic library setting, although with a semi-independent structure, clearly has an effect.

Library 2, coming through the second wave, is in some senses the most radical in structure, as it has its own feminist classification scheme and runs as a collective management and staff group, yet is the most vulnerable in terms of its current lack of appeal, support and resourcing. Its origins in the second wave feminist movement now seem restrictive for the library that has found it challenging to adapt to new forms of feminist thinking. The lack of younger women who identify with its overall mission (that is to document and make available the writings and memorabilia of second wave feminism) is reducing the numbers using and working within the library. Its tailor-made feminist classification scheme is increasingly out of date and unused, and becoming increasingly invisible to external librarians or anyone interested in the creative application of second wave feminist theory.

Library 3 functions with a mixture of paid and unpaid staff, with a semi-hierarchical structure, but with shared decision-making and a voluntary management committee. It has come through a long period of financial stringency to achieve funding for projects that incorporate both librarianship and feminist concerns as, for example, women's literacy schemes, the development of a women's community garden as a learning centre, the development of feminist bibliotherapy and having a writer in residence. Of the three libraries, this has the most integrated approach to feminism and librarianship and is linked to both communities. It is the sole British women's library that currently appears to be manifesting potential signs of generating a genuine feminist librarianship.

All of these three libraries however have important insights to make into librarianship and what a library can be. Identities and affiliations to both feminism and librarianship within these settings are also of interest, as are those of women who developed their feminist thinking through the second wave as working librarians, although this cannot be developed here. Much of the innovative work generated by women in women's libraries is little known outside small circles in Britain, and certainly within librarianship overall. British feminist activism, originating and remaining in radical feminism, like that of Libraries 2, and to a lesser extent 3, has often found little common cause with liberal feminists in incorporated structures such as manifested within Library 1. This is also a reason why the two groups of women described here — librarians who are interested in feminism and women using librarianship as a vehicle to promote and document feminism — have little shared knowledge. I now conclude by summarising the main themes of my paper and highlighting the reasons for improved dialogue.

CONCLUSION
I have described librarianship as currently in crisis, and suggested that

this be partly predicated on its gendered nature and the effect that this has had on its identity and components. The global changes at the end of the nineteenth century have been identified as having a huge impact on librarianship through the expansion of the public library as a space for women to perform quasi-domestic roles and to undertake tasks that were viewed as easy to learn and non-intellectual. Some of the effects of establishing a female workforce have been touched on, and the role of Mevil Dewey has been considered. I have also reviewed the influence on some British women librarians of the second wave feminist movement, and the actions that they then felt empowered to carry out within the library and in relation to the professional associations. I have reviewed the work of women's libraries that developed through the feminist waves of the twentieth century and considered some of their insights into the gendered constructions of library classification schemes, as well as to imply their efforts in other areas of feminist action.

There are huge opportunities for the convergence of feminist thinking and librarianship, especially when diversity and equality are increasingly areas of concern for British public librarians. These arguably are forever affected by the continued need for many women librarians to still challenge outcomes of the gendered foundations of the profession, that still fails to recognise its own contested state. Librarianship was deliberately created with women in mind, that will always mean that women need to fight against their secondary status as a social group and as a profession, and challenging this from a women-centred perspective may make it even more difficult. For women within women's libraries, the same tensions can apply, as arguing for funding is difficult to obtain the more radical one appears, and the more one moves away from a conventional library infrastructure. Librarianship is changing as a practice, as are libraries where it takes place, but it may always be perceived in the same way unless the gender inequalities within it are recognised and their powerful outcomes understood. The American feminist librarian, Sarah Pritchard, argued that feminism and librarianship are fundamentally connected and I end with her compelling comment :

Librarianship is concerned with the nature of information and recorded expression, the ways people seek and use it, and the processes of selecting, organizing, preserving and retrieving it. Feminist thought calls into question the values and definitions underlying our very concepts of knowledge, thus questioning the institutions and services we build round these concepts.
(Pritchard 1995).

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