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Women in Libraries the Movement: Its Impact on Women's Career Progression

A Study of Women in Academic Libraries

Emma Hadfield

"They wanted to lift up women in libraries... to improve the position of women, to make hours, access, pay, prospects, access to training, crèches and care for children better."

Interviewee WiL1 talking about WiL

Origin of Idea

Feminist movement that emerged in 1980 called Women in Libraries (WiL)

Focus

Academic libraries. Women in senior management and/or ICT related roles.

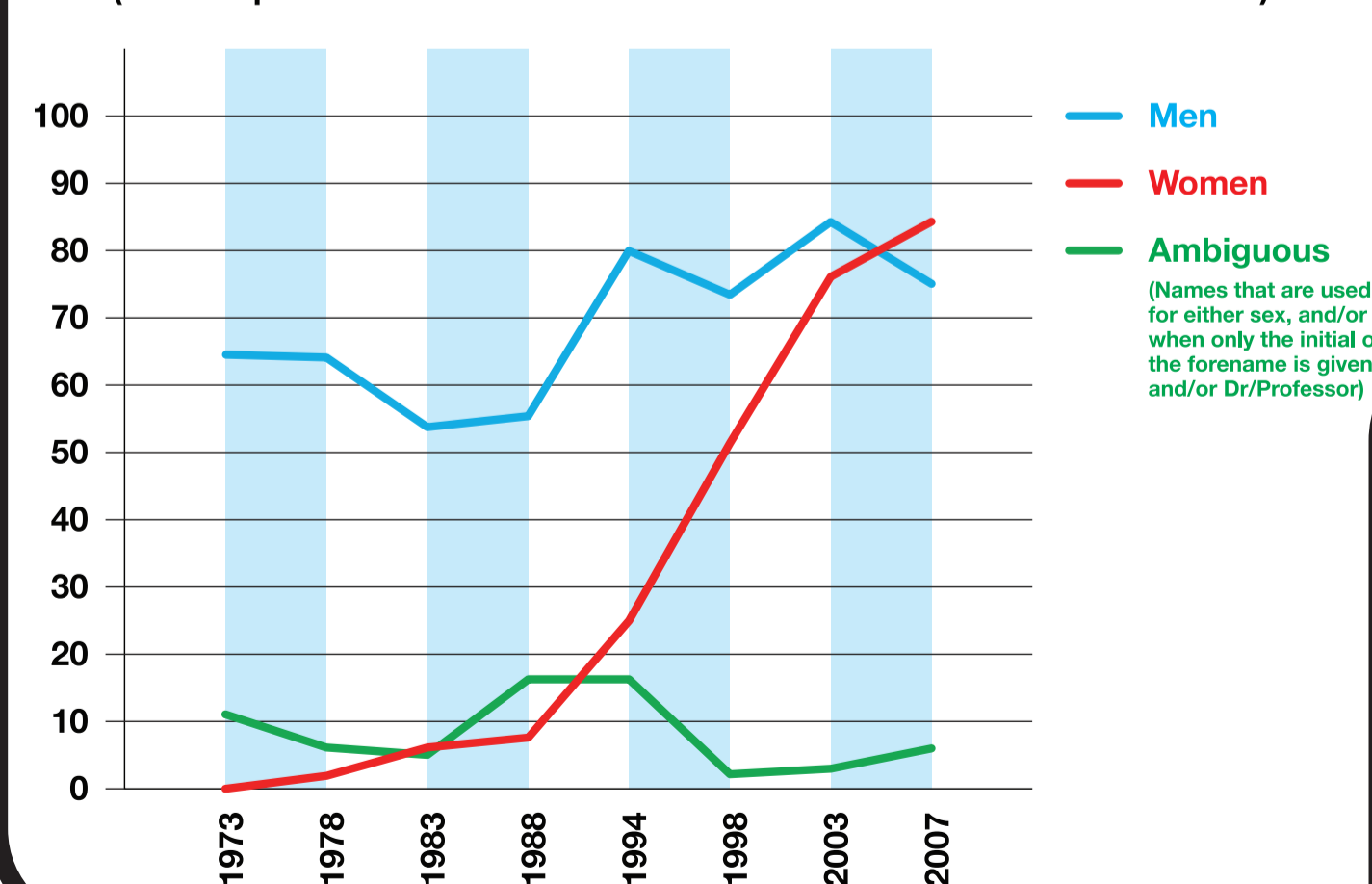
Aims

- To discover the impact of WiL on the profession.
- To discover how successful women are in the library profession today.
- To identify future targets for women in the profession.

Methods

Influenced by a feminist perspective. 18 interviews and a focus group of 5 conducted with previous members of WiL, women holding senior management and/or ICT roles. Qualitative thematic analysis of interviews supported by descriptive quantitative statistics.

Amount of Men and Women Working in Academic Libraries from 1973–2007 (data acquired from SCONUL member institution lists and AGM minutes)

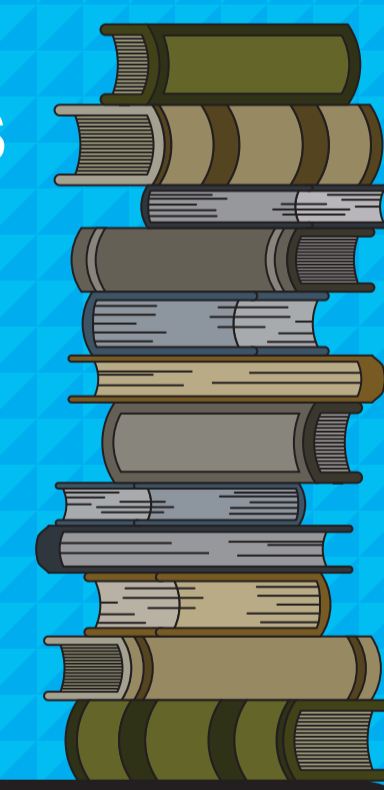


"Listening, multi-skilling are all considered to be feminine traits, but I think as a senior manager you need to be able to multi-skill and if you can't you are not meant to be a senior manager."

Interviewee SM3

"I think I would probably always go out of my way for people trying to make it and I probably do that more for women because I think they sometimes need that boost more."

Interviewee SM9/WiL



"The childcare does end up falling on the women as society doesn't make it easy for men to give up their jobs to look after children."

Interviewee SM10/WiL

"I still think there is a prejudice against flexible working in a management position... It still is not regarded as the right thing for a manager to do."

Interviewee SM11/WiL

"When I look at how we are introducing technology in libraries, we have got some pretty good women who are taking it forward, so it certainly isn't the sole preserve of men."

Interviewee SM2

Results

- Good management is unrelated to gender and a mix of skills is essential.
- The glass ceiling should no longer exist for women in libraries and statistical evidence reinforces this.
- Mentors, role models and networking are important to increase confidence and encourage career progression.
- Women still lack confidence in their ability and aspirations can often be closely linked to family choices.
- Potential barriers for women still exist, including children, mobility and the long hours culture.

Conclusion

Many of the original aims of WiL have been achieved. Women are gaining promotion, with a significant number now holding senior roles. Flexible working, training opportunities, mentoring and support is more prevalent. Work is still required with respect to childcare responsibilities, flexible working at senior levels, confidence levels and further training opportunities.

Despite ICT often being seen as male orientated, ICT is increasing opportunities for women, with many women getting involved with technological advances in libraries. Work is still required in raising awareness of ICT roles in libraries, training opportunities and the provision of role models.

- Flexible working has increased but not at senior levels.
- ICT in libraries is increasing opportunities for women, although the stereotype still exists that it is a male domain.
- Skills associated with ICT are both stereotypical male and female, so a blend is more effective.