ABSTRACT

Gender and outstanding issues – is feminist librarianship possible?

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This paper will explore gendered meanings within the British library, within public libraries and within women's libraries and archives that operate outside official structures and have a different purpose. It will reflect personal and professional reflections and understandings of feminism and librarianship, and includes material from my PhD thesis (University of Glasgow, September 2003 submission). It will take a third-wave feminist position, that moves beyond second-wave feminism to include more recent approaches from cultural and critical theories.

The paper will propose that libraries are gendered, directly resulting from the construction of modernist librarianship, and of the library as a quasi-domestic, female-controlled third-space between the public and domestic worlds, at the end of the nineteenth century. It will argue that this has ensured that the library continues to inhibit women as librarians, to decrease potential feminist-inspired challenges, and ignores the andocentric nature of the organisations of knowledge manifested within library classification schemes.

The paper will propose that women's libraries and archives, developed through twentieth-century British feminism may offer different models of librarianship and new types of feminist space. Reflections will be made on the changing fortunes of three contemporary women's libraries that represent different stages of feminism, and different approaches to librarianship. I will explore whether feminism and librarianship can be explicitly linked and whether feminism can offer opportunities for the development of new types of knowledge and library spaces with wider significance.