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Librarianship - The Erosion Of A Womans Profession - Harris,Rm

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ago is now mainstream librarianship." On the other, she doubts that there is any such thing as information science: what, if anything, it is remains, she says, a matter of debate. She is not the only one to be confused about information science, but confusion on this subject is not an advantage when trying to describe LIS education.

Nothing she says suggests any reason for the multiversity to be interested in LIS programs. The picture she draws (apparently based on published documents, accreditation records, and visits to eight schools) is a depressing one, of small isolated units with undistinguished faculty members. The schools are unselective, admitting nearly all who apply. (She mentions Berkeley and UCLA as exceptions to this rule.) On their campuses, she thinks, they are not respected: they are seen as providing training rather than education, and are viewed as intellectually and professionally inadequate. They are expensive, and bring in little outside support for research. They have been attempting to transform themselves into schools for the information professions generally, but librarianship and information science are diverging socially and intellectually, as information scientists assert their intellectual superiority over traditional librarianship. Stieg does not even try to defend the LIS educational programs she describes in such unflattering terms; nor does she make any substantive recommendations for improvement. She thinks the schools fit awkwardly in the multiversity, and expresses no concern about the possibility that LIS education might go elsewhere. (She mentions alternatives such as undergraduate education and intensive workshops but has no recommendations herself.) She does say that it is hard to understand campus disdain for the "knowledge base" of the field, but only suggests vaguely that this may be because that "knowledge base" is essentially humanistic—a weird view of LIS, but she is thinking only of traditional librarianship, not of information science or of the, for her, nonexistent library-and-information science. Her ig-

norance of information science is crippling and dangerous; if others were to take her book as a competent account of the current state of research in LIS, it could be the end of LIS education in research universities.

It has to be said that this is a profoundly reactionary book, showing a strong distaste for the kind of research, development, and professional practice in information work that is gradually growing from deep roots in bibliography and librarianship. It would be deplorable if the fact that the American Library Association published this book were taken to imply corporate endorsement of its reactionary message. Stieg says her book is meant to clarify issues and increase understanding. It does neither. It will make work for deans, having to counteract within the university its regressive and misleading account of the present and possible future of LIS education.—Patrick Wilson, *University of California, Berkeley*.

Harris, Roma M. *Librarianship: The Erosion of a Woman's Profession*. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1992. 186p. alk. paper, \$22.50 (ISBN 0-89391-941-1).

The year 1992 has been called "the year of the woman," and, indeed, some significant events justify that label. It was a year of historic firsts, ranging from the election of four women to the United States Senate, the announcement that an African-American woman would be the "poet laureate" at the new President's inauguration, and a clear indication that the new First "Lady" will have a post that matches her intelligence and accomplishments. Reading *Librarianship: The Erosion of a Woman's Profession* against the backdrop of this supposed woman's year, however, brought a heavy dose of reality, reminding one how far librarians have come and how terribly far we, as individuals and as a profession, have yet to go.

Roma Harris has written a book that will, I expect by design, make some people extremely uneasy. She is unambiguous about her purpose and unapologetic about her theoretical orientation.

This book is far more than simply another examination of the social and professional condition of women who happen to be librarians; it is, instead, a richly textured, intelligently argued, and surprisingly moving analysis of librarianship. Harris has not only made a significant contribution to the literature on librarianship, but more importantly, she has widened the ongoing debate about the nature of female-intensive professions to include a consideration of librarianship.

Harris uses a comparative approach to underscore the value of a gendered analysis of work. In addition to librarianship, she examines two other female-intensive professions, nursing and social work, and draws fascinating parallels among the three. She argues, for example, that each of these occupations suffers from similar status anxiety and that each is unsure of its intrinsic social value and is constantly vigilant about its image. Although none of this is particularly startling (Harris herself points out that a major library journal monitors the representation of librarians in the popular media), she does not limit herself to a tired repetition of anecdotal evidence about negative self-image or low status. Instead, she trains her sights on the reasons for this lamentable situation. Simply stated, the problem is nothing more (and nothing less) than the fact that librarianship is gendered female. Librarianship's status is based far more on who is perceived to be doing the work than on the nature of the work itself.

Harris begins by explaining and then dismantling two theories that have traditionally been used to justify (or excuse) the diminished status of female-intensive occupations. The first, the "trait" theory of professionalism, presents a set of criteria by which "true" professions may be distinguished from all other occupations, creating an explicitly and unapologetically hierarchical system. It should come as no surprise to anyone that occupations which employ larger numbers of women than men fail to fulfill critical criteria; fail, in other words, to pass a rigid, tradition-bound definitional test for "profession."

While social scientists defend trait theory as an objective, gender-neutral set of criteria against which to judge the professional standing of an occupation, the "feminization hypothesis," the second theory Harris analyzes, rests exclusively on identifying gender-specific markers. The feminization hypothesis offers up a brand of occupational biological determinism which holds that "when large numbers of women are employed in an occupation, they leave their stamp on the types of work done and how the occupation is organized." Harris acknowledges that the feminization hypothesis has some value, at least insofar as it recognizes special characteristics of female-intensive professions. But she points out a critical flaw, one that undermines the merit of the theory as a way to explain a sex-segmented work force: the failure to take into account the pervasive and socially sanctioned devaluation of women's work. Harris identifies this as the critical determinant in explaining the low status of occupations such as librarianship and nursing.

Harris devotes a significant portion of her study to the strategies librarians, nurses, and social workers, both women and men, have employed in their individual and collective efforts to redefine their occupations as professions. In addition to analyzing attempts to de-feminize the occupation, a necessary prerequisite to attaining full recognition as a profession, she examines the successes and failures of educational and credentialing initiatives, the struggles between workers' unions and professional associations for the collective soul of practitioners, and the paradoxical role technology plays as both a distinct marker of a profession and as a critical factor in the de-skilling of activities traditionally designated as women's work. In a passage both poignant and humorous, Harris describes the linguistic contortions that gave rise to the appellation *information scientist*, a change designed, apparently, to avoid mistaking some people who work in libraries for librarians. Harris makes it abundantly clear that, external forces notwithstanding, the "erosion" prominently mentioned in

the title has its roots within the field of librarianship itself. Status anxiety, the endless debate over labels, the desire to re-gender (or, perhaps more accurately, de-gender) librarianship all contribute to the steady devaluation and wearing away (i.e. erosion) of attributes traditionally associated with women. Harris makes a compelling argument that it is just these female attributes, under siege and eroding, that set librarianship apart, that give it a unique character.

Harris's most significant contribution to the debate over the meaning of professionalism may well be her call to librarians to understand the value of women's work and female-intensive occupations on their own terms, not as some lesser version of "real" work, i.e., the work done by men. According to Harris, this new understanding would entail, among other things, "a (re)commitment to service (based on a female rather than a male model)" and an explicit commitment to "embrace a feminist analysis" of librarianship. While fully supportive of the demand to apply feminist analyses to female-intensive occupations and having no quarrel with Harris's insistence that we break away from masculinist definitions of value, I find in her argument for a return to some sort of female principle a certain essentialist flavor that some may feel is divisive. In light of the overall persuasiveness of Harris's argument, however, this is a relatively minor point. What a pleasure it is to view librarianship through such a clear feminist lens.—Ellen Brody, *University of California, Irvine*.

Advances in Preservation and Access, vol. 1 (1992). Eds. Barbara Buckner Higginbotham and Mary E. Jackson. Westport, Conn.: Meckler, 1992. 297p. \$55 per year (ISBN 0-88736-787-9, ISSN 1063-2263).

This annual, which complements two others in Meckler's recent *Volumes in Library Administration and Practice*, is an important and useful enterprise. At first glance, however, the prospect of another series, even on so important a topic as preservation, may dismay librarians

with overburdened serials budgets. That a substantial number of contributions to this collection have already appeared elsewhere only heightens skepticism. Seven of the nineteen essays were either published as articles, condensed from reports to the Commission on Preservation and Access (CPA), delivered as papers whose content had already been expanded in a book, or issued as policies by the American Library Association (ALA) or the Society of American Archivists (SAA). They are available from these sources at minimal cost.

That said, the present collection is nonetheless a valuable one. Librarians of all sorts have a great need for information about preservation and access but limited ways of getting it. In their short introduction the editors justify a new annual on the grounds that the enormous preservation challenge facing librarians and archivists in the next decades will be characterized by numerous choices and changes and that the series of volumes will serve to share promising strategies, communicate new ideas, and discuss timely issues.

The first issue brings together useful information about the background, current concerns and future directions of the preservation movement. The quality of the contributions is in general quite high. The focus is broad enough and the information solid and up-to-date enough to enlighten both veterans in and newcomers to the field. Indeed, given the general dearth of adequate education about preservation in library schools, this volume could well function as a basic text, so well does it cover the central issues from history to future technologies, from brittle books to archives.

Most of the contributors to this first collection have long experience and national standing in the field. Their reports fall into six sections, each briefly introduced. Eight essays in two sections review the origins of preservation in the nineteenth century and its development into a coordinated movement in the twentieth. Although the essays in this section overlap quite a bit, together the authors assemble from several organiza-