
Heat, Humility, and Hubris: The Conundrum of the Fiske Report

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ABSTRACT

The “Fiske Report” is the popular title for a study conducted in the late 1950s under the auspices of the University of California School of Librarianship with the financial support of the Fund for the Republic, a liberal philanthropic organization. The intended focus was the practice of book selection in school and public libraries, but the key concern that emerged from the study was the practice within the field of “self-censorship.” The period of study ranged from 1956 to 1958, with the final report published in 1959. A symposium in 1958 to investigate the social influences on libraries identified the primary cause of the censorious practices as the ubiquitous female gender of the librarians. Issues the research participants raised related to education for and development of professionalism within the field of practice received cursory attention, and the opportunity to engage the question of the social roles of librarianship remained unaddressed.

The librarian is a matchmaker in a continual marriage of diversity and disparity.

—Fiske, 1959, p. 7

Book Selection and Censorship, written by the sociologist Marjorie Fiske, is a study of collection development practices in selected public and school libraries in California in the late 1950s. Commonly referred to in the field of librarianship as “the Fiske Report,” it has achieved iconic stature within the profession as an indictment of the self-censoring practices of librarians. Serebnick (1979), in her study, “A Review of Research Related to Censorship in Libraries,” wrote that “the Fiske study of selection and censorship in California public and school libraries during the McCarthy era of the 1950s is considered the most influential research on censorship

in United States libraries” (p. 97). Jones, writing in 1983, observed that Fiske “directed a landmark study of California school and public librarians” (p. 115). Collier (2010), writing for the blog “In the Library with the Lead Pipe,” suggested that the Fiske report has had “lasting implications,” but Robbins, in her 1996 history of *Censorship and the American Library*, observed that the Fiske report also “raised issues concerning socialization and support that the profession needed to hear” (p. 101).

The analysis presented by Fiske and her team of researchers can be summarized by the following statement, written in 1959:

Nearly half the people interviewed in this study expressed unequivocal freedom-to-read convictions. . . . In practice, nearly two-thirds of our librarians reported instances where they had decided not to buy a book because it or its author was—or might be—considered controversial by someone, somewhere. Nearly one-fifth *habitually* avoid all such material. (Fiske, 1959, p. 68)

These few sentences became a drumbeat that would reverberate throughout the profession for decades following the publication and eventual release of this report. The 1500 pages of single-spaced typed interview transcripts (p. 4) were reduced to these two numbers: 2/3rds might, and 1/5th always does. All the publicity and criticism focused on this statement, and very little explored the meaning of the data beyond the conclusion that librarians censor themselves. Few questioned what the numbers were to be measured against, or even if they measured what they purported to measure. Some scholars, among them notable sociologists, assumed they could readily explain that the cause of this contradiction of behaviors was the gender of the librarians.

The librarians interviewed for the book selection study were largely female. One hundred fifty-six librarians responded to the interview request, and 87 percent—approximately 135 librarians—were female. A total of forty-eight school administrators participated—98 percent were male, which indicates one female administrator. The image of the public librarian painted by the reported Fiske data is of a mature woman with some education who was well established in her job, that is, had been doing it for over ten years. There was a high probability she was affiliated with either a local or national professional organization, and about a 40 percent chance that her education was from outside California.

Feminist theory posits that gender is a valid category of analysis, that it provides a critical perspective on women’s status and prospects, and assumes the rights of women to share equally with men in the exercise of influence in the structuring of events and in the discourse about the relevant processes (Stivers, 2002, p. 12). Feminism grants women, among other “others,” the right of self-determination and challenges as sexist those perspectives that promote an inability on the part of women to function as fully viable members of society because of their sex. The use

of a gendered lens is appropriate in revisiting the Fiske report, not only because of the female-intensive nature of the practice of librarianship and the concentration of women in support roles, but also as a response to the multiple scholarly interpretations of the report delivered at the "Climate of Book Selection" symposium at the University of California, Berkeley, in July of 1958. Fiske herself, in the final report released in 1959, raised the question of discrimination against women as a social cause impacting the image of the librarian, only to be assured by female library directors themselves that women were not as prepared for "community life" as were men (p. 111).

THE BACKGROUND FOR THE STUDY OF BOOK SELECTION AND CENSORSHIP

California had experienced a chain of intellectual freedom challenges, from objections to the *Building America* textbook series and UNESCO publications in public schools, to loyalty oaths and lay censorship boards (Mediavilla, 1997). Concerns about the impact of these activities on the policies and practices of both school and public libraries led members of the Intellectual Freedom Committee of the California Library Association to call for research into potential negative influences. As a result, many interested parties claim a role in the launch of the study of book selection. However, it appears that John D. Henderson, director of the Los Angeles Public Library and a hero of the California loyalty oath battles, took the initial steps. Henderson was also chair of the national American Library Association Intellectual Freedom Committee (ALA IFC). The ALA already enjoyed a positive relationship with the Fund for the Republic (FFTR), a philanthropic arm of the Ford Foundation, as the philanthropy had provided support for the national ALA IFC newsletter from 1954 to 1955. Henderson had spoken with Robert M. Hutchins, Director of the Fund for the Republic, in 1954 about the organization engaging in some "local and regional activities in Southern California" (Fund for the Republic Records, 1954). Activist Paul Jacobs, then working as a consultant with the FFTR, approached the CLA IFC about the possibility of a study of censorship in California libraries (Mosher, 1959, p. 53).

The formal proposal to the Fund for the Republic was written by Frederick J. Mosher, then chair of the California Library Association Intellectual Freedom Committee (CLA IFC) and member of the University of California, Berkeley, School of Librarianship faculty; it was submitted in 1955. Mosher suggested that "an investigation of pressures concerning the selection and retaining of books in libraries would be useful in helping resist attacks upon California libraries and in determining how the courage and will to resist pressure can best be fostered and supported among librarians" (Fund for the Republic Records, 1955). The original proposal addressed issues such as

- pressures on librarians that cause interference with proper book selection;
- failure to select otherwise acceptable books because of fear somebody will object to them;
- removal of books from circulation or from libraries because of fear that there may be objections to them;
- degree of effort to provide books on all sides of controversial issues; and
- use of a board-approved book selection policy.

The proposal hoped to enable an exposé of evidence about “an organized effort to exert pressure on libraries in California to withdraw certain kinds of book and books by certain authors from their shelves” (p. 2). The membership of the CLA IFC was reportedly frustrated by the perceived failure of their attempt to address the problem of book challenges in the state. Their investment in the development of Freedom Kits—copies of book selection policies and support materials that emphasized “library freedom”—received what they considered a lukewarm response; only two hundred of the five hundred printed were purchased. The members of the CLA IFC also wanted to know if there *was* an organized attack on intellectual freedom in the state, what organizations may have been behind it, and why California seemed to be a target. Mosher noted that “without specific knowledge of the enemy” it was difficult to develop strategies of engagement (p. 2).

The Fund for the Republic was established by the Ford Foundation and incorporated in December, 1952. The objective of the organization was to “defend and advance the principles of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution” (“Some problems and projects,” 1957, p. 103). The scope of aid provided by the organization during the 1950s included fellowships and grants that addressed five primary areas of interest: academic freedom, rights of minorities, equal protection, censorship and boycotting, and the application of guilt by association. All of these areas were directly related to the impact of McCarthyism and its influence on the exercise of civil liberties in the United States. The Fund supplied \$36,000 in funding for the Book Selection study, which fell within the scope of its *Study of the Internal Communist Menace* project.

The project did not enjoy broad support when first suggested. According to Mosher, the new president of the California Library Association (CLA) was against the research project,¹ and Dean Perry Danton of the library school at Berkeley had to be publicly prodded to get past his disinterest in being associated with the controversial Fund for the Republic. The faculty of the Library School was willing to sponsor the study if the CLA would also endorse it. Before the CLA could endorse it, an ad hoc committee was configured to investigate the value of pursuing such research. The committee reported to the CLA board that they did find it

valuable, and, once further support was secured from the School Library Association of California, the project began to move forward (Mosher, 1959, pp. 63–64).

However, another major challenge to moving forward came from the University of California Board of Regents. The Fund for the Republic records indicate that the Regents held up the receipt of the grant until an advisory committee, which was planned to be predominantly practitioners, was assembled to advise the library school on the conduct of the study. Once the committee was assembled and the names were submitted to the Regents, Catherine Campbell Hearst, who had reportedly mounted the resistance to the grant, moved for the acceptance of the grant and the project then went forward (Danton, 2000). The sociologist Marjorie Fiske was then hired to be the project coordinator.

VALUES AND DISCIPLINES

In his talk at the symposium addressing the findings of the research project, Mosher observed that librarianship did not have a long history as a profession, nor was the ethical foundation of the practice well established. The ALA Code of Ethics had originally passed in January, 1939; the Library Bill of Rights had been initially passed in June of 1939, amended in 1944, revised in 1948, and then expanded in 1951. Despite this shallow history, Mosher called professional librarians to acts of social heroism by declaring that “the most sacred professional responsibility of the librarian is that of resisting any pressure to remove a book from his library shelves. To the professional librarian a book—any book—once in his library is as sacrosanct as a human life—any life—is to the medical practitioner” (1959, p. 52). The selection of the words “sacred” and “sacrosanct” incorporate identification with the religious professions to parallel those of the elite medical practice; he advocated for a “Justice Holmesian” oath corresponding to the Hippocratic Oath, thereby incorporating an identity with the legal profession. It was an oath that, as an academic, he would not be required to swear.

Mosher’s choice of language attempted to align librarianship with the established professions: clergy, medicine, and law. All of the latter were, at the time, male-intensive professions with minimal female participation. While such an alignment could increase the status of the field, it required the “masculinization” of practice. The call to professional heroics was one strategy for achieving that objective.

The concept of the “heroic public servant” occurred in other discussions of professional development. The feminist scholar Camilla Stivers employed the concept of the “heroic male professional” developed by sociologist J. L. Laws as a means of exploring the roles of women in public administration. According to Laws, the work of the professional is the most important thing in his life, which establishes the ideal standard for

performance. Anyone unable, or unwilling, to meet that standard is “perceived to be less accomplished, less committed, less worthy of advancement” (Stivers, 2002, p. 55). The standards for successful professional function in public service “conform to expectations of male but not female behavior” (p. 23). The male standard, disguised as a cultural norm, eliminates the need to consider any female-identified variance from those norms.

Public administration is an appropriate source for research models to address public library and public school administration as they are themselves public agencies, even with the presence of governance boards: public library board members are commonly appointed and approved by local politicians. Many public libraries emerged from the same progressive women’s reform work that gave rise to government public service agencies. All public agencies also pursue an ideal of neutrality, which serves as a concept of objectivity, a “fundamental tenet of the classical liberalism that undergirds American government” (Stivers, 2002, p. 44). Liberalism further draws clear distinctions between a political public sphere and the private (p. 17), traditionally characterized as male and female spheres. Public and school librarianship reflect many of the gendered elements in play in the broader field of public administration: a female-intensive service class with a preponderance of male administrators serving male “norms” of bureaucracy. Investigating the Fiske report as an object that emerges in the liberal public sphere allows a broader inquiry into the gender roles within practice, as well as the use of intellectual freedom as a liberal disciplining strategy within the field of librarianship.

THE CONDUCT OF THE STUDY

The study was announced in the *California Librarian* early in 1957, and Marjorie Fiske (1914–1992) was introduced as a lecturer at the School of Librarianship at Berkeley and director of the Book Selection Study project. She was a 1935 graduate of Mount Holyoke College and received her master’s degree from Columbia University in 1938. Fiske worked closely with known figures in the emerging field of social psychology, such as Paul Lazarsfeld, C. Wright Mills, and Robert K. Merton with whom she wrote a book on *The Focused Interview*. She conducted research for the Columbia Bureau of Applied Social Research and in 1953 was appointed executive director of the Planning Committee on Media Research at the Bureau. In 1955, Fiske moved to California to accompany her husband, Leo Lowenthal, the literary critic associated with the Franklin School in Germany (Kiefer, 2011, p. 1). She and Lowenthal authored a joint article on “The Debate Over Art and Popular Culture in 18th Century England,” published in 1957, during a period of critical analysis of the book selection study (Lowenthal and Fiske). After the study was completed, Fiske joined the faculty of the University of San Francisco.

The announcement of the study outlined the variety of topics to be addressed through the research. Fiske stated, "Most specifically, [the study] will seek to compare the philosophy of librarians, the degree of autonomy of librarians, the role of the board, or the school administrator and of the interested (or disinterested) public in different kinds of institutions and in different kinds of communities" (Fiske, 1957, p. 27). The study was also announced in the *Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom*, the ALA IFC publication that managed, despite unpredictable funding, to keep publishing. One source of that funding was the Fund for the Republic, which supported the newsletter as one of its first projects ("Some problems and projects," 1957, p. 106).

Fiske was retained on the Berkeley faculty during the length of the project. The actual period of work was from 1956 to 1958. She initially worked with Dean Perry Danton, Mosher, and Professor LeRoy C. Merritt to gain an orientation to the practice of librarianship and the issue of censorship; she identified them as key to the development and analysis phase. This team was joined by Professor Anne C. Markley and Professor Edward [*sic*] A. Wight² for critiques of the manuscript. Katherine G. Thayer, head of the library school library, provided information about the details of professional practice. An advisory committee was chaired by Edwin Castagna, Director of the Long Beach Public Library. He had also chaired the committee to study any issues with CLA affiliation with the Fund for the Republic. He was joined by fellow librarians John D. Henderson, of the Los Angeles County Public Library, and Carma Zimmerman Leigh, California state librarian and wife of Robert Leigh, the sociologist who directed the extensive *Public Library Inquiry* project just a decade earlier (1950). Nolan D. Pulliam, Superintendent of Schools for Stockton, California, and Jessie E. Boyd, Director of School Libraries for Oakland (and also a lecturer at University of California–Berkeley) represented the school librarians. The remaining members of the committee were primarily academics with backgrounds in statistics, psychology, education, and sociology (Fiske, 1959, p. vii).

The study involved twenty-six communities selected based on size, rate of growth, ethnic composition, geographic location, and type of library service. The sponsors of the study wanted as wide a range of these variables as possible to identify the interrelationship of significant factors involved in the development of library collections. If these data were actively collected, they were never incorporated into the formal analysis.³ There were 204 interviews—46 from senior high schools (librarians and school administrators) and 48 from municipal/county libraries. Anyone involved in material selection at each location was interviewed. The field staff conducted 75 preliminary conferences and interviews, two-thirds of which were exploratory and one-third of which were pretest. Fiske did include qualitative data from the preliminary interviews, but not quan-

tative. None of the interviews were taped, and notes were handwritten. When interviewees objected to handwritten notes, the interviewer used memory to reconstruct the data after leaving the interview. The research team produced over 1,500 pages of single-spaced interview transcriptions.

Fiske divided the study into three general areas: the general setting, encounters with and treatment of the controversial, and implications for professional organizations and institutions.

QUALITY VS. DEMAND

Fiske began the report with a review of the history of librarianship in the United States and positioned the professional debate of quality versus demand deep within cultural history: "The writings of Western scholars, theologians, literary critics—even booksellers—beginning at least with those of the Elizabethan era, have been threaded with observations about quality versus demand in reading materials, or, as they more often expressed it, about education versus entertainment" (1959, p. 8). She explained how the profusion of written materials affected the "quality" of the content, and she engaged society in arguments about "moral, spiritual, and educational" uplift. She pointed out the arguments by men like Defoe and Goldsmith, who were concerned about the effects of adventure and romance stories on the minds of youth. This section strongly reflects the work she was doing with her husband at the time on their joint publication. She expanded her explanation into US history, highlighting the impact of new education requirements after the First World War, stating, "Standards, intellectual, literary or moral, it was felt, could no longer be handed down by tradition or imposed authoritatively by an elite, to be assimilated only by the few capable of rising to them. Instead, standards should be adapted to the disparate capacities of the population" (pp. 8–9). Fiske argued that librarians adapted themselves to the new pluralism and "developed a greater tolerance for what they might formerly have rejected as 'mere trash,'" believing that attraction to popular literature may serve to expose users to a better quality of work, incorporating the "uplift" philosophy of public librarianship into the analysis.

The first statistical data she presented were as follows: "Two-thirds of the public librarians who contributed to this study used the words quality and demand as they discussed library objectives, and by far the greatest weight was to be found on the side of demand" (Fiske, 1959, p. 11). Sixty-nine public librarians participated in the study, and more than half believed that their primary commitment was to serve the public and meet their requests; only five of those librarians maintained a commitment to value-driven collections, and the rest maintained a mixed approach. Fiske reported that librarians with restrictive attitudes toward controversial material usually pursued materials based on a demand-driven philosophy (1959, p. 12). The "demand" on the part of the public for more popular

reading materials, and what many characterized as the acquiescence of the librarians to those demands, could be seen, on the one hand, as a negation of intellectual authority, or, on the other, as identification with the local community. It reflected a persistent tension in the concept of the professional role of public and school librarians.

However, the demand-driven philosophy was not as pure as it seemed, or else material selection would involve no intellectual engagement at all. Many librarians on this end of the continuum expressed concern about differentiating between “demands” and “needs” and also expressed organizational values that clearly went beyond the parameters of a demand philosophy. Interestingly by contrast, those few who were purely value-based “feel an implicit antipathy between public library traditions and the standards of contemporary life” (Fiske 1959, p. 14). They were highly critical of the superficiality not only of the general culture but of professional organizations and educational programs. Participants generally believed that while educators clarified the differences between professional and clerical tasks in the field of practice, no one addressed “the freedom to function according to professional prescriptions rather than to public or bureaucratic prescriptions” (p. 109). In short, neither educators nor association leaders addressed the political position of the public library; librarians negotiated that space according to their personal understandings of their communities and their positions in that community.

Fiske found that librarians grew much more explicit about selection criteria when discussing children’s material (1959, pp. 23–24). The main argument concerning children in the Fiske report centered on protecting older children from exposure to “inappropriate” reading material from the adult collection.⁴ According to Fiske, “Few public librarians believe there is any real need for ‘protecting’ children from books. Most are frank to say that their ‘special responsibility’ is designed not to protect children or young people but to protect themselves from parents. Quite a number went out of their way to state their belief that books do not harm people, that the child who is too immature for a book will not understand it and probably will not even read it” (p. 24).

The degree of comfort and authority exercised relative to children’s services and collections reflects the social role allowed women in the mid-twentieth century: that of caretaker. In this area, the private sphere is allowed to influence the public sector, creating a space for what are identified as female values to visibly emerge.

THE CLIMATE OF BOOK SELECTION SYMPOSIUM

The results of the study were first announced at a symposium held at the University of California Berkeley campus July 10–12, 1958, a year before the report itself was released. It was sponsored by the School of Librarianship and the Department of Conferences and Special Activities of the

University of California. According to Danton, the faculty of the library school recommended the symposium as “an informal and effective means of informing the library profession in California of the results of the study in which they had so cordially participated” (Danton, 1959, p. v). Robbins reports that Fiske was concerned about the impact of the study on the librarians and did not want the results reported out of context (Robbins, 1996, p. 96). The symposium was held three days before the American Library Association’s national conference in San Francisco. The speakers were well recognized public and academic scholars: Max Lerner, Harold D. Lasswell, John Albig, Norton Long, and Talcott Parsons buffered the preliminary report Fiske herself delivered. Participants in the discussions of the papers included, among others, such leaders in the field as Richard Krug, of the Milwaukee Public Library; Margaret E. Monroe, of Rutgers University; Edwin Castagna, of Long Beach Public Library; Gladys T. McDowell, from the Los Angeles City Schools; and Eloise Evert, from Oregon State Library.

James D. Hart, vice-chancellor with the University of California, identified the theme of the conference at the very beginning: “The atmosphere has frequently been bad for the free circulation of ideas in print. Apparently this results not only from the intensity of censors but from the humble acquiescence of librarians and school administrators, so that what we have to cope with is not only the heat but the humility” (1959, p. 1). Max Lerner, an established friend of the American Library Association, was the anchor for the symposium. He spoke on the topic of “Our Changing Society.” His concern was identifying the “carriers of promise” and ensuring that they were exposed to the quality that would ensure their dominant influence: “What we need is a new commitment toward revising our whole educational effort so that we will not neglect the carriers of promise but concentrate on them with intensity. This is the problem of the creation of a democratic elite” (1959, p. 6).

Lerner was also concerned about how that could be achieved: “For example, teaching ought not to be restricted to one sex. Having only petticoats among teachers and, perhaps, among librarians, too is not entirely healthy. . . . Men ought to be brought back from some of the pursuits that have lured them with big profits, big money, big social status, back in to the intellectual life they have surrendered to women” (1959, p. 7). For Lerner, the American woman was “a busier creature than any female in history—burdened with more tasks than the Indian squaw—a creature who has won her freedom and equality by an impressive sequence of revolutions. But now that she has achieved them, she doesn’t quite know what to do with them” (p. 4). Lerner encouraged a return of the “egg-head,” a return to intellectualism, an attack on ignorance. Not only did he wish to inject some virility into established learning environments, he was a

strong supporter of the library as a source of adult education. While Lerner deplored what mass communications had become, he was intrigued by what libraries could be as a means of altering the common perceptions of society. This unrepentant elitism set the tone for the symposium and expanded as various commentators took their place at the podium. The only female to speak was the research director, Marjorie Fiske.

John William Albig was professor of sociology at the University of Illinois. He addressed the topic of the library's competition. According to his model, the library equaled reading, and he considered the mass media competition for the library, in that the media and the library competed for an individual's time: "The standardization, the low common denominators of interest and taste, the mass-impressed conformities of this diffusion of communications have wrung from many intellectuals, appalled by the 'revolt of the masses,' the anguished question 'Is the common man too common?'" (1959, p. 14). But he believed libraries could help: "Public libraries should . . . cultivate more intellectuals . . . highbrows, if you will, but highbrows in a broader sense than Edgar Wallace's limited definition that 'A highbrow is a man who has found something more interesting than a woman'" (p. 24).

Despite his wink at sexism, Albig was concerned about who the readers would be. He suggested the industrial worker and the white-collar clerical worker, as they had more leisure time: "Those upper class, professional, and leadership types who, in the past, supported high culture are now too busy, too strained, and too harassed to engage in the book reading which characterized the cultivated classes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (1959, p. 26).

Albig's observations about class and libraries, so much a part of the quality vs. demand debate, provided a segue for political scientist Norton E. Long's analysis of "The Public Librarian's Boss." Noting that all public servants ultimately report to a voting public, he explored the protective relationship of the public library board to the head librarian or library director. Knowingly or unknowingly, he echoed Albig when he said that the public library board "does not represent a strong user interest. In general, the users of the libraries are not on boards. One class uses the library, another runs it" (Long, 1959, p. 29).

Long did present an alternative to the gendered perspective of his colleagues by drawing attention to the constraints on the actions of the head librarian based on class, but he also urged the head librarian to develop a more politic approach to situating the library within the community it serves. His perspective allowed that heroism might not be possible, due to class constraints on any attempted professionalism. Long indicated the need for the library to be involved in the development of partnerships with labor organizations and "the great national job of integration" (1959,

p. 32). This analysis allowed the triad of race, class, and gender to come together, however briefly, in the investigation of professional authority for the public librarian.

It was Talcott Parsons, however, as the pre-eminent sociologist of his day, who offered the official commentary on the findings of the Fiske report. He immediately characterized the report as a “very competent and interesting study” (1959, p. 77). The key to the analysis, for him, was the discrepancy between the professional practice of restrictive selection and the lack of public pressure to restrict.⁵ He typified those public librarians who were “demand oriented” as a “special case of passive ‘compulsive conformity’” and found “the phenomenon of restriction . . . not a case of weakness in the face of realistic pressures, but rather of a non-rational disturbance of the relations between values and behavior,” an *anomie*, as he adopted the phrase from Durkheim (p. 81).

Parsons allowed librarians affiliations with the intellectual class of American society: “Librarians are inevitably associated with the place of the intellectuals in the society, and they cannot avoid connection with the sensitive areas of religion, morality, and politics, unless they are to administer some very restricted collections indeed” (1959, p. 93). However, he made clear that public libraries did not measure up to the “cream of the library profession, namely the staffs of the university libraries,” and, except for the Library of Congress and New York Public Library, the highest position relative to the standards of evaluation and performance of quality work belonged to the academic libraries (p. 93). Having established this layering of the profession, Parsons then identified the reason for the weaknesses within the public librarian:

The broad upshot of this analysis is to suggest that the situation is so structured that . . . in actual practice it has been much easier to follow the more passive path, to be correct, meticulous, inoffensive and “helpful” in a nonassertive way. This general predisposition has probably been reinforced by tendencies to selective recruitment. The most tangible index of this is the sex composition of the profession. The fact of a rather heavy feminine preponderance among librarians remains, and also the general fact that women, in matters of “touchy” social import, are, when other status factors are held constant, more conservative than men.⁶ Sex composition should therefore be considered both a symptom and a partial determinant of the pattern with which we are concerned. (pp. 94–95)

Two studies conducted midcentury had strikingly similar results. *The Public Librarian* by Alice Bryan, undertaken as part of the *Public Library Inquiry*, indicated a “dual career structure” allowing fast-track status to the minority, which was male, and a “basic” library career for the majority, which was female. The study by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in cooperation with the American Library Association, unearthed similar data: women earned about 75 percent of the salary of men (\$3,975) for the

same work. One out of ten male librarians earned \$7,000 or more, while one out of *one thousand* female librarians earned \$7,000 or more (Schiller, 1979, pp. 224–225). The salaries reflected the concentration of men in administrative positions.

The “anomie” of the librarian, according to Parsons, was a function of her sex, and her sex, offered as the reason for the timid and mousy characterizations of the profession, was the “most tangible” cause of the self-censorship presented on such a national stage. Parsons’s biologist essentialism established the broadest foundation for a feminist critique of the validity of the Fiske report (Grosz, 1994). As Sandra Bem has observed, “The problem for women . . . is not simply that they are different from men . . . [but] that they are different from men in a social world that disguises what are really just male standards as norms or gender-neutral principles” (quoted in Stivers, 2002, p. 24). Similarly, as Jenkins noted, “As intellectual freedom advocates, women were forced to deal with the particular difficulties associated with their position in society in addition to the censorship problems they shared with their male colleagues” (1996, p. 226). The male world view became the privileged world view, and the female perspective was driven into subjection, allowed to emerge only in relation to service to children. In organizations that function as tightly structured bureaucracies—efficiently rational—“the apparent neutrality of rules and goals disguises the class and gender interests bureaucracy serves” (Stivers, 2002, p. 25). Fiske herself pointed quietly to the issue of sexism. In her conclusion of the published report, she suggests the librarians had

an almost universal tendency to blame oneself or the profession for even those problems which most clearly have at least some social causation. For example, several women librarians . . . believe that the future of the library rests with men. They did not say that women are discriminated against in professional or community situations, but that women are not as interested in, or as qualified for, participation in community life and in professional organizations as are men. (1959, p. 111)

Fiske indicated that about half the public librarians belonged to the state association, and only 25 percent belonged to ALA; she also demonstrated that association membership was not a variable in determining restrictive or nonrestrictive practices. As Jenkins has demonstrated, women were seriously underrepresented as members of the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee during the 1950s, “comprising only one quarter of the IFC’s membership throughout the decade” (1996, p. 230). Access to professional participation is limited by time and money and domestic responsibilities. Fiske provided data on sex, age, and marital status but did not establish any relationships among them, such as the number of married women of child-bearing age among the pool of respondents. Bryan, in her study of the public librarian for the *Public Library Inquiry* not even a

decade earlier, had noted that women spent 14.2 hours per week attending to household activities in addition to their professional responsibilities (1952, p. 30). Fiske did not pursue salary information.

Stivers argues that the problem for women in organizations is “how to manage their femaleness” (2002, p. 23). Because the standards of professional behavior are based on a male world view, women must learn to conform to that view, while maintaining a separate set of values when away from the organization. “Gender-oriented research”—and the Fiske report is driven by gender, if not focused on it—“has documented perceived differences in men’s and women’s behavior as well as expectations about how each sex will behave in certain situations [but] . . . relatively little thought has been given to . . . what they imply for women’s careers and organizational experiences versus those of men” (Stivers, 2002, p. 24).

This disciplining of practitioners in California was actively promoted by the agents of the discipline, who were predominantly male. There was a significant amount of local publicity for the symposium, and, according to Merritt, the publicity was welcome: “Coverage of the whole Symposium in the local press was excellent, particularly in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which gave front page space in its Sunday edition to a detailed report of Miss Fiske’s finding under the headline “Censoring Blamed on Timid Libraries” (1958, p. 2). The *Library Journal* itself perpetuated the image with a story in December, 1959 (“Books are Censored,” p. 3831).

RESPONSES TO THE PUBLISHED REPORT

But, once the study itself was released, the *Newsletter for Intellectual Freedom* reported librarians slow to buy the book, despite the widespread publicity. Out of a possible market of 7,000 public libraries—13,000 potential customers—669 copies of the book sold. As the ALA OIF Newsletter for Intellectual Freedom observed, “Somebody wasn’t buying” (“Librarians slow to buy,” 1960, p. 9). Reviews of the research were mixed.

David Sabsay, while acknowledging Fiske’s credentials, noted that Fiske herself, a proponent of the quality collection, confused the issue when she claimed that those librarians who did not purchase *Peyton Place*, a racy title for its day, “with little quality to recommend it, are unhesitatingly accused of being restrictive” (1959, p. 223). Morris Cohen, of the Columbia University Law Library, characterized the report as a “short, provocative book [that studied] the effect of political investigation and inflammatory book controversies on library policies” and observed that the librarians participating in the study “derived little aid or comfort from their library school training, professional journals or associations” (1960, pp. 157–158). Leon Carnovsky, of the University of Chicago Library School, recommended the study not only to librarians but also to library board members. He noted that while the profession “has a library bill of rights and policy statements on book selection . . . these are slender reeds

when a librarian, unsupported by a responsible board or school principal, must stand up and be counted" (1960, p. 157). Alfred McClung Lee, of the Brooklyn College of the City of New York, reviewing for the *American Sociological Review*, noted, "Whatever faults these California librarians might have . . . they often do a better job than their communities might prefer" (1960, p. 303).

But Florence Powers, head of the Long Beach Public Library Literature Department, of which Edwin Castagna was director, offered a different perspective at a University of Southern California workshop on "Improving the Book Collection" in 1959: "I would like to say that, the Fiske Report notwithstanding, I don't quite recognize the picture of myself as a timid librarian. Not that the charge has been made against me personally, but the generalization has been made. At least, '80%' represents a generalization to me. Nor do I work for a 'timid' librarian" (pp. 224-225). While we have no official records of how the librarians responded to the Fiske report, Powers certainly indicates that she did not identify with the findings.

CONCLUSION

Nor should we. While Danton, Mosher, and Merritt obviously intended to establish intellectual freedom as a core value in practice, their strategies actually diminished the profession. The California librarians of the Fiske report may have engaged in what we now call self-censorship, if we focus only on the results of decisions. Some of these librarians may have also exercised professional authority based on what they understood to be best practices for their communities. The core question of authority has to date been constrained by a particular perspective defined by the role of men in society: heroic defense of material collections. While further studies would indicate that the perception of self-censorship persisted through the following decades (Serebnick, 1979), the issue of authority in the public sector remains unaddressed.

The CLA IFC and the faculty of the library school missed their opportunity to engage the critical question shaping public library services: the autonomy of the professional in the public sector. When the search for the "enemy" did not produce the anticipated agents organizing against California librarians, they identified a different variable: the gender of the practitioners. In creating an "us vs. them" atmosphere, by denigrating the sex of the practitioner, by expanding the gender divide, the analysis further diminished the profession and confirmed the concerns of the participants that the associations and the library schools would not advocate for them.

To repudiate the Fiske report is to abandon the foundational assumption that public librarianship is of secondary value in American cultural history and contemporary information practice because it is a female-

intensive practice. A refreshed analysis that recognizes the contributions of women in establishing, protecting, and expanding the roles of a ubiquitous institution allows us to create a new narrative about, not public librarianship alone, but also the roles of women in the development of the public sphere and the promotion of intellectual access, not just for children, but for all users. The new narrative, while recognizing lapses in the development of the profession within practice and academia, can reframe the field grounded in the shared convictions of those who developed it.

NOTES

1. It is likely he is referencing Thelma Reid, given Carma Zimmerman's general support of the study. According to the California Library Association presidential history website (<http://www.cla-net.org/?29#hist-pastpres>), Reid would have been the 1956 president.
2. Dr. Edwin Wight conducted an extensive study of California libraries at this same time, and I assume that Edward is probably Edwin.
3. The data set for the research was never discovered. Neither the School of Librarianship nor the Friends for the Republic had the data set.
4. Christine Jenkins believes this is because children's librarians had developed a different strategy for dealing with objections to children's books. However, it may simply be that not that much material was actually challenged, period. In fact, Fiske found that there was actually very little consistent challenge at all—i.e., one book continually popping up on everyone's list—except *Peyton Place*.
5. This makes a certain assumption, which typifies the entire report, that there is a measure of what restrictive behavior is and what it is not. Nowhere in the study is that actually defined, leaving a range of behaviors open to interpretation.
6. Parsons refers the reader to a work by Stouffer, but it is not actually cited previously in his footnotes.

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