

Identity, Power, and Hiring in a Feminized Profession

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DEMOGRAPHIC STUDIES OF LIBRARY DIRECTORS in this country show that women are in a minority. In 1981 only 33.2 percent of the public libraries' directors were female.¹ Female academic librarians fare less well. A survey covering fiscal year 1984 indicates that eighteen of the responding ninety-four ARL library directors were female.² While 81.4 percent of all practicing librarians are female,³ only 11.2 percent of the women in the field hold top administrative positions compared with 28.9 percent of the males.⁴

Why do males hold a higher proportion of the top administrative positions in our nation's libraries than would be statistically expected? Are they preferred when hiring directors and supervisors in our libraries?

The Equal Opportunity Act of 1972 and federally mandated affirmative action programs foster the belief that hiring and promotion should be the result of hard work, expertise in a field, and leadership abilities. The intent of the act and programs was to encourage employers to look at underrepresented groups within the population and to encourage the hiring of qualified members of those groups who might be otherwise overlooked. Advancement for protected classes has not resulted in the hiring and promotion of more women managers within the field of library science. There were fewer women directors in 1982 when 26.9 percent of the heads of academic libraries were female⁵ than in 1967 when 51.4 percent were female.⁶

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If women are benefiting from new attitudes brought on by the feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, perhaps it can be argued that they currently are employed in supervisory positions that will prove to be training grounds for future advancement. This does not seem to be the case. When comparing the number of librarians that women supervise and the number that men supervise, men on average supervise three times as many workers as do women.⁷ On the West Coast, the comparison is even more favorable to men; men supervise six workers for every one worker that women supervise.⁸

Many studies have been carried out to see what differences there are between men and women in librarianship and library administration. Studies on personality traits,⁹ backgrounds,¹⁰ mentors,¹¹ and mobility rates¹² have been done to see if any one or a combination of variables might explain the differing rates of hiring and promotion at the top administrative levels. The underlying assumption of these studies is that women are not discriminated against simply because they are females, but because there are other factors at work. So far, no one factor has been discovered that explains the disproportionately higher number of males in library administration.

The question of discrimination is a difficult one to deal with whether it is considered a legal or a social problem. The basis for any one discriminatory act is found in a myriad of learned and accepted assumptions which society has held and encouraged throughout the lifetime of an individual. One currently popular theory is that males and females do not use or view power in the same way.¹³ Studies in business administration show that women's naïveté about power-producing situations and women's inability to take advantage of these situations results in fewer women advancing to top leadership positions.¹⁴ The psychological literature, however, suggests that the ways women develop their sense of personal identity may block their ability to develop and use power in later life. This article will look at the way women traditionally have been trained to establish their identity and their inability to acquire and demonstrate power when applying for a position. The author suggests that these factors play a significant role in the lack of women in top academic library positions.

Librarianship is considered a "feminized profession" characterized as a semiprofessional field which is female-dominated in numbers, but male-dominated in organizational control, having a shallow bureaucratic hierarchy and rigid promotion schemes.¹⁵ Simpson and Simpson state:¹⁶

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It is easy to demonstrate that men get more than their proportionate share of the best jobs in the semi-professional fields, as in other occupations, and it is plain that individual women are often the victims of discrimination in hiring and promotion. But a case can be made that women's lack of occupational success is not always due to discrimination, and that when discrimination does occur, there may be valid grounds from an organization's standpoint.

As Simpson and Simpson point out, discrimination may occur for valid reasons within the organization and not because of the gender of the applicant. One such valid reason may be the apparent competence of a candidate or the predicted ability of the candidate to handle the position.

Kanter,¹⁷ in looking at the corporate structure, found power to be an important factor in achieving managerial success. As she defines it: "Power is the ability to get things done, to mobilize resources, to get and use whatever it is that a person needs for the goals he or she is attempting to meet."¹⁸ In Kanter's theory, power is generated by the individual within the structure of his or her current job and is not a specific personality characteristic.¹⁹ Whereas power itself is specific to one institution, the skills needed to acquire it are in part transferable from position to position. Current power then could be a vital component of a successful candidate's credentials if it were demonstrated to the hiring institution.

Kanter has written extensively on the subject of power within the corporation, and she has found two basic means of developing power. The first route is through using alliances. Powerful sponsors, more than simply being role models, help their protégés achieve results by bypassing the hierarchy, by passing on inside information, and by using their influence to smooth the way.²⁰ Sponsors also provide "reflected power" in that the sponsor's resources are seen as being somewhere behind the protégé which adds credibility to the protégé's attempts to accomplish projects.²¹ Peers provide another source of power through the direct exchange of favors and the maintenance of group solidarity.²² A third alliance for power is with subordinates, since their support is essential for carrying through with plans and policies.²³ If the supervisor is seen as having credibility in his or her relationships with subordinates, he/she will be perceived as having the resources necessary to accomplish the tasks and to promote the subordinate's well being thus encouraging the subordinate to accomplish his or her tasks as effectively as possible.

Kanter's second route to power is through extraordinary, visible, and relevant activities.²⁴ Becoming efficient or even an expert at a task is

not enough to generate power. To gain power, a person must perform activities beyond his/her job description which are visible enough for others to note and which benefit the company or institution. These activities involve risk. The greater the risk, the greater the potential for power. Conversely, taking risks which others have taken loses the impact necessary for creating a powerful image.²⁵

Each of these power-generating behaviors can be demonstrated by activities listed on a résumé. In one's current position, recommendations can demonstrate alliances that have been made. Recommendations from subordinates and peers show the support that a person has had during the current position. Recommendations from superiors—especially those outside the library—such as those from the academic vice-president or the provost, can provide evidence of the power one has generated within the current academic setting. Peers' recommendations within the institution show an ability to work with equals in other areas to generate cooperation in providing resources necessary to fulfill the goals of the organization. Activities, such as election to special committees and task forces, show a level of power beyond the library setting. If the particular assignment is an elected one, it shows support of the individual within the campus community and the respect of members outside the library. The current job title reveals the power that one has held within the organization and provides a means of evaluating how much experience one has had in developing power within the academic community.

Libraries—more than many businesses—are dependent upon the cooperation of other groups. Activities and alliances in professional organizations and national or regional cooperative groups provide a method for changes within the profession as a whole and help to provide support, resources, and personnel within an individual's own library setting. For librarians it is important, therefore, that power be seen not only as activities restricted to the immediate organization, but also as a set of behaviors with regional and national components. Alliances within the professional setting can be demonstrated through recommendations of other librarians outside the current library setting. Activities such as election to offices within professional organizations and published articles in professional journals build a reputation that can be used to demonstrate powerful alliances or the ability to generate a power base within a particular organization and within the profession at large.

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Not all behaviors associated with power actually demonstrate the possession of that power. Certain activities are necessary for the consolidation or building of a power base. Such behaviors would include memberships in professional organizations and attendance at professional meetings and workshops. While these behaviors do not in and of themselves generate power, they are a means of meeting and developing networks of colleagues which can later be used to mobilize power. As such they are necessary to the consideration of the ability to generate power and power bases.

To better understand the importance of power within the career process and its relationship to women in our field, it is necessary to review some of the current business and psychological literature. Hennig and Jardim,²⁶ in their study of managerial women, found three basic ways that women differed from men in their career development. Women tended to make a later commitment to their careers as a lifelong endeavor. They often viewed their careers passively, expecting others to push them up the career ladder, and they usually placed considerable emphasis on self-improvement as the critical factor in their promotions.²⁷

A partial understanding of why these three differences occur can be deduced from the different ways males and females develop their identities. Brooks-Gunn and Matthews²⁸ point out that:

In societal terms, the young man must *earn* his identity, and constantly reestablish it through career success, monetary rewards, and a steady demonstration of leadership and competence. The young woman, on the other hand, *acquires* her identity by becoming a wife, a mother, and a provider of emotional support and nurturance. The young man's identity derives from active pursuit, the young woman's from passive acquiescence.

Put more simply, boys are trained to "do," while girls are trained to "be."

If identity is tied up with becoming a wife and mother, long-term career goals are delayed until one is either a wife and mother or has consciously decided that is not to be her life. If all a woman's training has been directed toward a passive acceptance of self as the chosen rather than as chooser, decisions on career advancements tend to be left to others who recognize worth and encourage or force the advancement. Finally, if identity revolves around who one is rather than on what one does, self-improvement is the most acceptable expression of ambition since it relates only to the individual's and not to other's actions. These attitudes, however, can be counterproductive not only to the accumulation of power but also to the verbalization of power once it is achieved.

While a later career commitment may inhibit early alliances that are necessary for developing a power base, this handicap can be overcome if desired. Women are probably less concerned than men are at reaching a particular administrative goal by a certain time in their lives. Librarianship itself tends to be accepting if not encouraging of people who have made career changes, and the studies of age of directors show that while women tend to be older when they become directors, they are more apt to be successful in becoming directors at a later age than men.²⁹

The sense of passivity with which women view their careers is a more serious problem in developing power and achieving administrative positions. Such passivity discourages a woman from taking risks which disrupt the status quo, and which, therefore, keep her from tackling extraordinary, visible activities. Even if women do extraordinary activities, Hennig and Jardim found that none of the women they worked with saw recognition or reward as part of or important to their careers.³⁰ This lack of desire for recognition can be related to the early identification of sexual norms. When woman is placed in the position of going outside the expected—in this case “doing”—internalizing the reward rather than making it public by expecting or requesting recognition allows her to retain her identity while still performing her job. Visibility and recognition, however, are an important aspect of gaining power. They are also necessary in a male-dominated world that tends to judge behavior on its own standards of action.

Self-improvement is a personal and individually unique goal with which to measure one's career success. As Hennig and Jardim point out:

If one's career priorities are set in a context as necessarily vague and difficult of measurement as that of personal growth, for example, one is inevitably thrown back on exceptional performance in the here and now as an overwhelmingly important fact in developing a sense of achievement, and one zeroes in on every detail of the current job.³¹

While this attitude conflicts with handling extraordinary activities that are beyond the current description and, consequently, with the development of power, it is perfectly consistent with a woman's development of identity. If women are evaluated on who they are, then they will strive to be the best that they can be. However, as Kanter comments: “Excellent performance on tasks where behavior is more or less predictable may be valued, but it will not necessarily add to power.”³² The earlier internalized need to establish identity through being conflicts with the need to develop power.

Women's view of risk is perhaps the most damaging to their accumulation of power. Men see risk both positively and negatively and, therefore, balance decisions against probable end results.³³ Since their

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identity is based on their actions, even wrong choices add to their sense of identity because they have acted. Women, on the other hand, see risk as purely negative, something to avoid at all costs.³⁴ Instead of adding to their identity, wrong choices subtract from who they are. Actions are viewed as extensions of self, not as potential positive or negative results affecting the organization. It is apparent from Kanter's work, however, that without a certain amount of risk taking, there is no gain in power, but from a woman's point of view, such risks can threaten her whole identity.

Over the years, power has developed the connotation of evil. It means, however, to act or to do. Since management is the accomplishment of the goals and objectives of an organization, power in management would be doing those acts necessary to accomplish the goals and objectives of the organization, specifically, mobilizing the resources and personnel to fulfill set objectives and goals.

This definition of power is important when considering library administration and who becomes a library administrator. Most people would have little problem accepting the need for an administrator to have power based on these terms. Few, however, can see how holding power really affects the placement of women or men into top administrative positions since power, defined this way, is used only within the present employer's organization. The problem, they counter, is that women are never given the chance to get to top management positions and, therefore, they never really have a chance to use power.

Articles that look at the performance of male and female executives find little difference in the effectiveness of each in their managerial roles.³⁵ Women seem to know how to acquire and use power, or at least they are as effective at acquiring and using power as men are. This article contends that it is not that women do not know how to acquire and use power, but that for sociological and psychological reasons, they are inhibited from demonstrating this capability when they apply for managerial positions. Since most search committees understand little about the actual functioning of a library and what technical skills might or might not be useful, they review résumés looking for candidates who will most likely succeed in accomplishing the organization's goals and objectives. To do this they look for indications that a person may have developed a power base at his or her previous position. When women do not describe job-related activities demonstrating power on their applications, they are excluded as possible candidates.

A 1984 study³⁶ looked at the importance of power to the hiring process by looking at the relative importance of various activities that could appear on a résumé. In the fall of 1983, questionnaires were

mailed to 363 randomly chosen library directors at schools offering at least a four-year bachelor's degree and accredited by one of the six regional academic accrediting agencies. The questionnaire asked directors to evaluate elements of an applicant's career that might appear on a résumé when applying for a position as library director at a similar institution. It consisted of thirty-six questions grouped into the areas of previous experience, professional activities, recommendations, and personal background. Directors rated each question on a scale from one to five, one being unimportant for consideration and five being essential for consideration. None of the questions were considered as negative factors in hiring. Usable questionnaires were returned by 282 or 77 percent of the library directors queried.

Individual questions were grouped together to evaluate the relative importance of five variables. The study looked at three power variables—power demonstrated through the current position, power demonstrated through alliances and activities within the profession, and power-consolidating activities. To see if these variables were more important than others listed on a résumé, the study also looked at two other variables, one related to the person's education and age, and another related to the institution at which the candidate is currently employed. A mean score of 3.00 indicated that the variable was important for consideration.

Power within the position was evaluated in terms of the importance directors placed on recommendations from within the applicant's current institution, by the importance placed on the candidate's current position title, and by the importance placed on the candidate's institutional assignments outside the library. This variable received the highest mean score of 3.34. *Power within the profession* had a mean score of 3.08 with the question of the importance of recommendations from the influential librarians outside the candidate's current institution showing the highest rating. Other elements considered in this variable were—in decreasing order of importance—elected offices held in professional organizations, publications in professional journals or books, and awards and honors from professional associations. Questions involving the importance of meeting attendance and professional memberships to a person's consideration for a directorship were grouped under the variable *power-consolidating behavior* and received a mean score of 3.02.

The two variables that did not indicate power, the *candidate's background* and the *candidate's institution's demographics* both had mean scores of under 3.00. The candidate's background, which was

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measured with questions about the importance of age and educational attainment, received a mean score of 2.82.

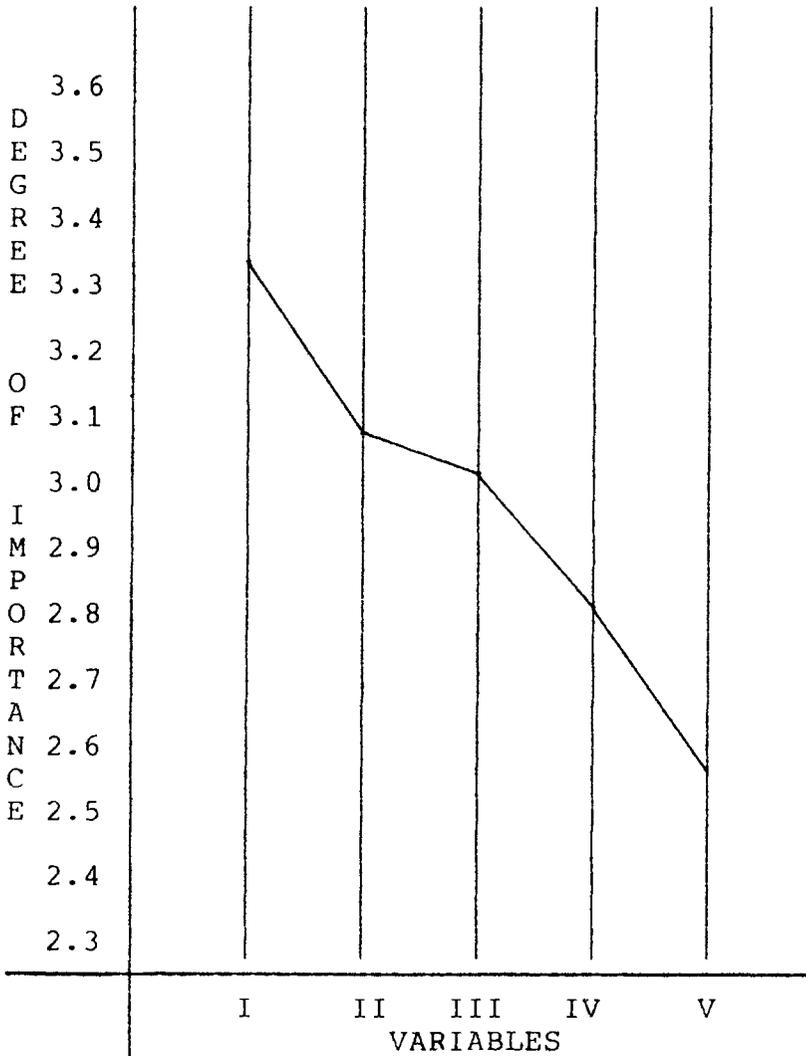
To see what importance the school at which the candidate currently worked had on the hiring decision, questions concerning the importance of the size, the highest degree offered, and the source of funding were asked. These questions were grouped under the candidate's institution's demographics variable and received a mean score of 2.57.

A comparison of the means of the dependent variables provides evidence that power is an important element in the consideration of a director of an academic library.

One hundred seventy or 61.2 percent of the responses were from males and 108 or 38.8 percent were from females. When the responses were partitioned by male and female responses and an ANOVA (analysis of variance) was run on the data, no significant difference was established between the overall responses of males and females. Since only 11.2 percent of the females in the profession hold top administrative positions,³⁷ the sample deals with a unique group of women. These are women who have already succeeded in becoming directors, and their understanding of the importance of power seems closely related to that of males.

The earlier discussion of business and psychological literature suggests that females would place more value on those items relating to their identity (such as position-related questions and on questions reflecting personal growth) over those questions relating to their actions. Although the overall values were not significantly different, a graph of the means for males and females shows that the trends expected for women did appear (see fig. 2). The graph shows that the level of importance that males place on the various dependent variables follows the same order as the sample as a whole followed. When looking at the means of the responses of the females against the mean responses of males, a different picture appears. Females place more emphasis on power within the position than do males. Males place more emphasis on the power-consolidating variables than they do on power within the profession. This trend suggests that, in a sample of librarians who were not library directors, women might differ in their responses even more than women directors did.

While the ANOVA demonstrated that males and females answered similarly, a test on the dependent variables showed that there were no significant differences between means except when comparing power within the profession and power-consolidating behavior. Since females see power-consolidating behavior as more important than power within the profession and males see it as the reverse, it is possible that the



- I = Power Within Position
- II = Power Within Profession
- III = Power-Consolidating Behavior
- IV = Candidate's Demographics
- V = Candidate's Institution

Figure 1. Graph of Mean Responses

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questions making up this variable are interpreted differently by males and females. Males may see memberships and meeting attendance as a way of building a power base within professional organizations, while females see it as a way of providing for professional growth. Belonging to and attending meetings are in many ways passive behaviors in that they do not require much participant action. The importance women place on these behaviors over more action-oriented behaviors—such as holding elected offices and publishing papers—relates to their early identity training. Women gain importance for who they are, not for what they do.

The study also looked at three characteristics of the respondent's institution to see if the characteristics were important in evaluating candidate's credentials. The highest degree that the institution offered and the funding source of the institution, whether public or private, made no difference to the respondent's views of power to the hiring process. There was, however, an interaction between the size of the institution and the value placed on the dependent variables which was significant to beyond the .05 level.

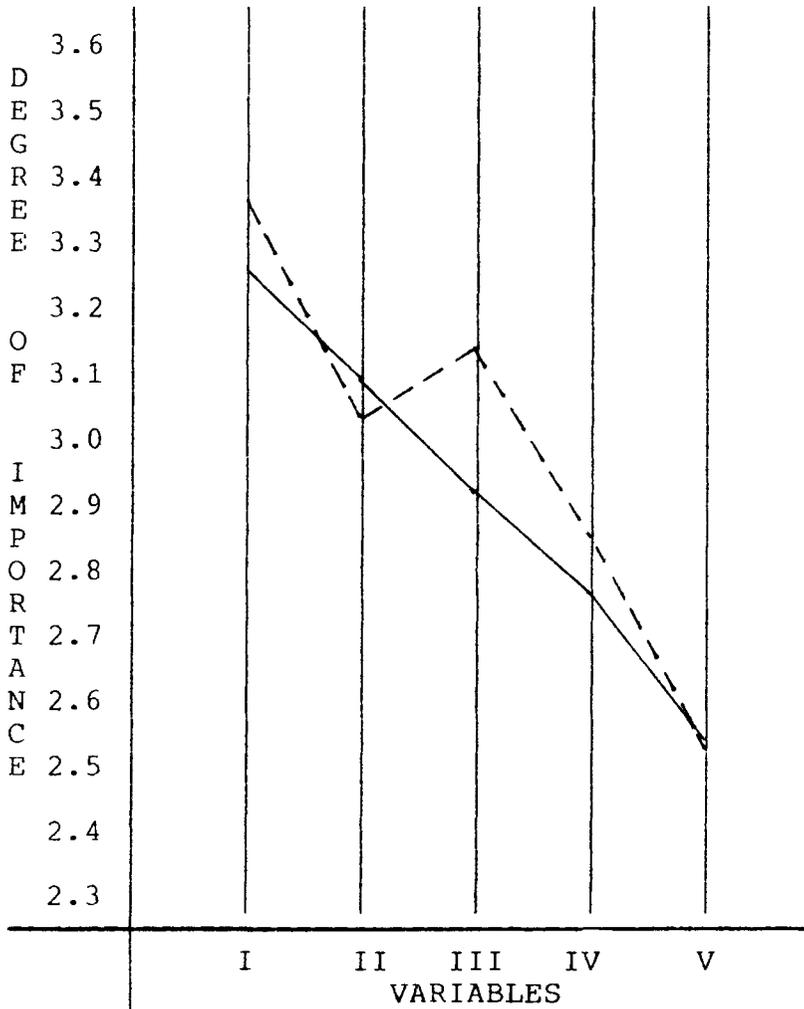
Respondents in institutions with fewer than 1000 students placed the highest value on power within the position, then on power-consolidating behavior, power within the profession, the candidate's background, and the candidate's institution's demographics. The order of importance in which these respondents placed the variables is similar to the order which women placed the variables, and the largest percentage of women who direct academic libraries work at this size institution.³⁸

While respondents in institutions with 1000 to 5000 students place power within the position as most important, they saw no difference in importance between power within the profession and power-consolidating behavior. They also rated the candidate's background and the candidate's institution as less important than the power variables. A more equal number of males and females than the national average direct libraries within this category.³⁹

Respondents in institutions with 5,001 to 10,000 students followed most closely the curve of the population as a whole. They saw power within the position as most important, followed by power within the profession, then power-consolidating behavior, then the candidate's background, and finally the candidate's institution.

Respondents in institutions of over 10,000 students identified the most important variable for hiring an academic library director as power within the profession. The variables that would indicate power within the profession are also the ones that would indicate a national

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— Male
 - - Female

Figure 2. Graph of Mean Responses by Males and Females

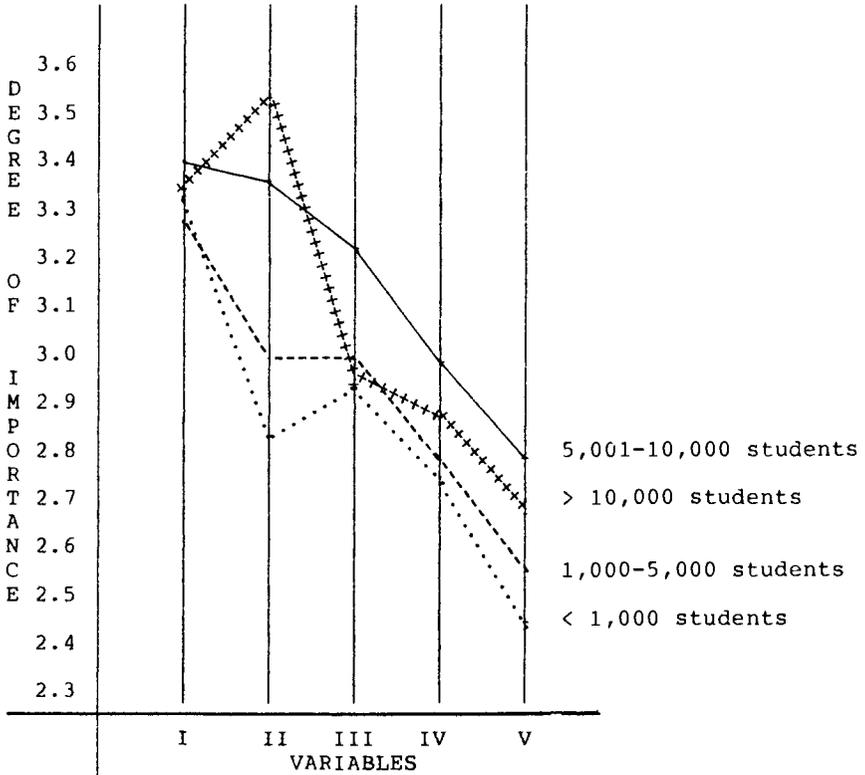
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reputation, and this is clearly of major importance to respondents in institutions of this size. After power within the profession, power within the position comes next, then power-consolidating behavior, followed by the candidate's background, and the candidate's institution. With this group there is no question about the difference between power in the profession and power-consolidating behavior. Power within the profession, or a national recognition, is most important for consideration. When the method for conducting a search for a large library is considered, this is understandable. Often committees ask for nominations as well as applications, and only those people who are well known in the profession receive nominations. The competitive nature of large institutions requires that they have a reputation of being leaders in the academic world and, therefore, they expect that same reputation of their librarians. As the ARL survey indicates, most of the directors in this category are male.

The study has several implications concerning the disproportionate number of males and females in top administrative positions. The first is that women are less likely to be discriminated against because of their gender than because of their early identity training. The emphasis placed on developing a sense of self-worth based on who a person is rather than on what a person does inhibits many of the adult behaviors necessary for accomplishing the goals and objectives of the organization through the use of power. Even women who have learned to use power in managerial situations may hesitate to display such competencies when applying for a position.

Women often do not consider revealing their actions because they see the actions themselves as having little meaning. Women often do not view power-producing actions as important because they have internalized the results and translated them into increased personal status. This misinterprets the value of the activities. The purpose of revealing power-producing activities is to demonstrate competence in developing power within an organization not to reveal the status gained by having power.

The study shows, however, that for candidates to be considered for positions as library directors, they must demonstrate the ability to develop and use power. Women who, because of early training, hesitate or avoid making such activities clear on their applications hinder their chances for consideration. Consequently, they see their lack of advancement as an attack on who they are, not as an evaluation of their potential. Because the employers are unable to interpret expressions of status as the results of competence in achieving and using power, female applicants are passed over in favor of male applicants who demonstrate



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Figure 3. Graph of Mean Responses by Institutional Size

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power-producing behaviors. Employers trying to hire women into top positions may feel frustrated that there are apparently no qualified women to be hired.

Some power-producing behaviors are not valued highly by women. Achieving prominence through holding an elected office in a professional organization is one. Election to an office is the recognition of power granted by others in the organization. Women have been trained to see themselves as helpers—providers of support—not as leaders. Consequently, they work on committees but hesitate to run for elected offices. Many women do not feel the reward of becoming an officer of a regional or national professional organization is worth the time and effort that must be put into winning. Both men and women may not be willing to invest so much time unless they can see how it will help them or their organization. Such a position can bring prestige to the organization where the officer works, it can produce power which can be used to improve library services, and it can provide a method for changing the profession. Settling for membership on a committee rather than running for election as the committee chair satisfies the need to increase status and identity but does not necessarily produce power. Women too often see the results of such elections as only increasing their time commitment to the detriment of their job performance. The connection between holding an elected office and the increased power such actions produce is lost in a sense of self-fulfillment. They can feel good about their contributions on a committee while failing to see that they have not achieved the recognition necessary for power. When their efforts fail to produce increased managerial responsibilities and promotions, women see working within professional organizations of little benefit to their career and place a low priority on it—as did the women surveyed. The problem lies not with the work done for the professional association, but in the failure to see the behaviors necessary to increase power and to demonstrate it to others.

The mistaken idea that holding an elected office does not contribute to career advancement hurts not only the profession by reducing the number of people who might contribute creative ideas and activities, but also leads to a sexually structured hierarchy in the leadership of academic libraries. Having power within the profession, also defined as having performed those activities which lead to national recognition, is a major consideration when hiring a director of a large academic library. Because women do not place an emphasis in their careers on such activities, they are relegated to smaller institutions where such activities are considered less important or are less available in the institution's applicant pool. The larger and possibly more prestigious

library jobs go to those who have developed national prominence. Currently the majority of these positions are held by males.

Human beings have the ability to be adaptable and to change. Early training can be overcome by identifying and compensating for it. Perhaps the most hopeful finding along these lines is in a study by Martin,⁴⁰ who found that one predictor for a woman's success in library management is the job to which she aspires. Women who desire advancement on the managerial ladder become goal-oriented and, as such, perform the activities necessary to obtain their objectives. The success with which they achieve their goal may depend, to a great extent, on how well they can integrate the necessity for action into their own identity patterns. Even with goal-oriented behavior, an inability to translate the results of the activities into power or power-revealing statements on their résumés may keep women from obtaining the highest job for which they are capable.

If women are interested in obtaining an equal voice in the management of academic libraries, they need to take positive action toward reaching that goal. Women need to look seriously at their career goals and take responsibility for implementing them. This means that they must be aware of the activities and behaviors that produce power and consciously strive to accomplish them. They must evaluate their actions in terms of results not in terms of an internalized sense of status or personal worth. They must be ready to accept recognition for their activities and rely less on others to recognize their potential and advance their careers for them.

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