

Women as Library Leaders
a Case Study for Malta

by

Sandra Gouder

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ABSTRACT

Although librarianship is a feminine profession and most library workers are women, library directors in general are male. What are the reasons for this? Do men, more than women, obtain higher qualifications allowing them to apply for higher posts? Do women's roles as caregivers prevent them from advancing in their careers?

Furthermore, librarianship values and feminist values are similar, thus it would seem that a feminist library leadership would improve library practices for staff and users. To better understand this category of society, determine the problems women face and find any possible solutions, women's issues in library leadership must be studied. In Malta, there is no such research, a gap in the knowledge, which this dissertation aims to address.

Based on a review of the literature and a study of feminist theory, leadership, and library leadership, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with female library managers in Malta, within academic and public/national libraries.

A qualitative research method was deemed the best way to be able to listen to the voices of these women. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed according to feminist theory and the literature review.

The situation in Malta is encouraging, since practically all library directors and managers are women. Nonetheless, analysis of the transcripts has demonstrated that some women have found an unfavourable work climate, where their strength and tenacity were put to the test to progress and eventually earn the respect of staff members. Others found fewer problems. Their stories and experiences are documented in this dissertation.

Based on this research, it is recommended that society develops a better awareness of the barriers women face when taking on directorship positions. Maltese culture has made strides in accepting women leaders, but more needs to be done. A study into other minorities in Malta and their progression to leadership roles, could also be conducted.

Keywords:

Women library leaders - Malta / Libraries - Malta / Feminist librarianship / Female leadership / Gender issues

DEDICATION

To the two young women that I am most proud of, my daughters Mattea and Petra

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	page 1
Chapter 1 Literature review	page 3
Chapter 2 Theory	
2.1 Feminist Thought	page 11
2.2 Leadership	page 16
2.3 Feminist Leadership	page 17
2.4 Feminist Library Leadership	page 21
Chapter 3 Methodology	page 30
Chapter 4 Results	page 34
Chapter 5 Discussion	page 59
Conclusion and recommendations	page 64
Bibliography	page 68
Appendices	
Appendix 1 Interview Questions	page 74
Appendix 2 Information Letter to Participants	page 76
Appendix 3 Participant Consent Form	page 78
Appendix 4 Data Management Plan	page 81
Appendix 5 Overviews of the ten interviews	page 82

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INTRODUCTION

Women have always been the backbone of library practice. Their progression to library leadership posts, however, has been very slow and not without problems. Perceptions, “double binds”, and family constraints have always worked against them. This notwithstanding the fact that a leadership based on feminist values and female characteristics, would motivate members of staff, adding to their well-being and work satisfaction. As the saying goes: “Women have to work twice as hard as men to be thought of half as good”! How relevant is this in today’s workplace, and especially in today’s libraries? Is working twice as hard referring only to place of employment where women need to prove their worth more than men? Or is it because a woman still takes on the bulk of home and family care, in addition to working full time outside the home?

So what? Why is it important to hear and amplify women’s voices? When women’s perspectives and experiences are brought to the table, in any context, they bring a diverse understanding and thus lead to a more informed decision making. It works towards having a more democratic society. Gender research helps us identify the problems women face and develop strategies to overcome such problems. Furthermore, since feminist and library values overlap, we should strive to have democracy and feminist principles in libraries too.

The existent literature tackles this theme primarily in the context of academic libraries abroad. What is the situation in local libraries? Who are the female library leaders in Malta and what has been their experience? The voices of Maltese women librarians have never been studied, nor placed within a feminist context.

The present study aims to rectify this gap by listening to female library managers and describing their perspective within the Maltese context. To learn the “How?” and “Why?” or indeed, “Why not?”

To keep in line with the available literature, interviewees will mostly be from Academic Libraries. However, since their number is limited in Malta, some library managers from other types of libraries are also invited to participate.

Primary research through qualitative methods will be done by preparing, conducting, and analysing semi-structured, anonymised interviews, where participants may express themselves freely.

The literature review and readings on feminist theory will provide an initial structure for the interview questions. The Methodology chapter will then explain how data is to be collected and analysed. An overview of each interview will be attached to this study in Appendix 5.

A thematic analysis is envisaged. Themes will be identified and explained in the Results chapter. A Discussion will follow where they are reviewed according to feminist theory and the literature review. Finally, the Conclusion will also include recommendations for further research.

The dissertation will be divided into the following sections:

Introduction

Chapter 1 Literature review

Chapter 2 Theory

Chapter 3 Methodology

Chapter 4 Results

Chapter 5 Discussion

Conclusion and Recommendations

Bibliography

Appendices:

1. Interview questions
2. Information letter
3. Participant Consent form
4. Data Management Plan
5. Overviews of the ten interviews.

Chapter 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The aim of my literature review is to provide a framework on which to build an understanding of the professional status of women library leaders. This valuable resource creates a context for further research on the situation in Malta. This chapter will look at theory and practices abroad, mainly in the US and Canada, the countries with the most abundant studies on women librarians in a managerial capacity. A brief reference to the Maltese historical context and the research within the Archives profession is also given.

History

In the late 19th century, when library professions were starting to emerge, Melvil Dewey, who had already created the decimal classification, pressed to employ women librarians. His main reasons being that they were well read, had an eye for detail and were reliable, but also that they need only be paid half as much as their male counterparts! There was a consensus that women would serve the public, while the head male librarian dealt with the “outside world” and had a “private office” to show his professionalism and superior status, (Ilett, 2004, pg. 10). This became the face of librarianship then: men as directors and women in semi-domestic roles. The history of librarianship shows us that although women were attracted to the library profession, it was only men who were pushed towards managerial posts, and women towards basic library work, even throughout most of the 20th century. No one spoke about “obvious facts like more women than men were librarians, but men seemed to be in charge”, (Ilett, 2004, pg. 7).

Gender is a socially constructed concept. A distinct gender identity leads to distinct gender roles which in turn give way to gender inequalities and variations as to how the operation of power is implanted in society, (Robinson & Richardson, 2007). The way the library profession was populated by women had implications that would create binaries and, eventually, stereotypes of women librarians. “They introduced a form of gentle control that maintained boundaries between spaces - between the public and the private, the

internal and external world, chaos and harmony, ignorance and knowledge, and falsehood and truth”, (Ilett, 2004, pg. 10).

Years later, with automation, an occupational segregation would be felt once again when technology was introduced in library practice. It was yet another way of discriminating against women. “The widely held stereotype that women were not capable of handling technology had no effect other than to increase their anxious state and affect their performance”, (Petrocelli, 2022, pg. 100). Women were once again moved aside to watch men work.

Furthermore, as late as the 1970s, male library directors would earn up to 30% more than their few female counterparts in office at the time.

Gender inequality and gender role expectations result in limiting girls’ education aspirations and the types of jobs they are expected to land. To put it simply, society was telling girls they could be librarians but not library managers.

Malta - the Historical context

Although much has been written regarding the historical perspective of libraries and library studies in Malta, to date there is no study linking librarianship with gender studies, or feminism.

This is not to say that there have not been any trained female librarians that made a name for themselves in, and contributed greatly to, librarianship in Malta.

Before 1970, library training was done mainly in the UK, thanks to British or Commonwealth funding. This did not remain sustainable and for around 20 years, “the number of trained staff was marginal”, (Paris, 2004, pg. 107).

1992 saw the engagement of the first full-time academic in Library Studies, at the University of Malta (UoM). And it was a woman. Dr Lillian Sciberras, PhD, former Deputy Directory at the UoM Library, is a prolific academic, commended for her impact and work on Melitensia, National Memory and National Bibliography and Legal Deposit in Malta. Referring to the setting up of a Maltese National Bibliography and to the regularisation of the Diploma in Library and Information Studies (1993) at the UoM, Dr C. Farrugia states: “Lillian Sciberras had a direct and central input in both projects”, (Farrugia, 2014, pg. 27).

The first regular diploma course (1993-1995), saw a majority of male applicants, 32, as opposed to just 20 females, however, the graduates who made it to the end of the course were more gender-balanced: 12 males and 11 females, (Paris, 2004, Table VI). This equilibrium between males and females remained true up to the end of the research quoted here - 2003. By this time, a second full-time lecturer was employed, also female, within the Department of Library Studies. The contribution that they gave to libraries in Malta cannot be stressed enough, both personally or through the research done by their students on various topics revolving around “Maltese libraries, information centres and archives”, (Paris, 2004, pg. 109). The same sentiment is echoed by Dr Sciberras herself: “A number of former students have turned out to be valid researchers in their own right and have contributed handsomely to the literature and to Melitensia and Maltese studies”, (Sciberras, 2022, pg. 9). Eventually, Library Science would be offered at Bachelor’s and Master’s level.

The latest female librarian to have achieved a prominent post in Malta, is Ms Cheryl Falzon, National Librarian and CEO, Malta Libraries. She is the first woman to hold such a prestigious role. She has already achieved significant milestones especially in Inclusion and Technology within the Public Libraries domain.

The present author has had the privilege to interview both Dr Sciberras and Ms Falzon for the purpose of this study.

Women’s issues and society

In 1974, Zimbalist and Lamphere ask whether analysing women’s issues helped society in general. Surely the answer must be in the affirmative. As Robinson and Richardson state, gender research enables us to identify problems faced by women both on a local level and worldwide and, more than that, introduces possible strategies to tackle gender inequalities and bring about social change (Robinson & Richardson, 2007). In fact, the social constructionist approach illustrates how gender is connected to the social, economic, and cultural status, and therefore to power in society. Gender differences simply means gender inequality (Robinson & Richardson 2007).

It is not just the women’s issues that need to be studied, but their view on men’s attitudes towards them at the workplace, whether men hinder or help women to get to the top posts. Often, it is not the attitudes or aspirations of women that hold them back, but the way society and places of work are organised. Changes are needed in both. As Betz and

Fitzgerald suggest (1987), what would help the circumstances of all workers, not just women, is if career breaks were made easily available, for example, in conjunction with part time work and flexible working hours.

The situation did improve over the years, indeed Kathleen DeLong's 2013 literature review on career advancement of women librarians finds that the number of women in senior leadership roles has increased, "despite factors such as mobility, career interruptions, or lack of advanced degrees that were traditionally identified as limitations to career growth" (DeLong, 2013, p.60). However, overall, they are still underrepresented especially in Canadian academic libraries. In 2019, Marta Bladek concludes that today, even though laws in favour of equality are finally in place, we still need to study gender: "What emerges from the literature on differences between men and women library directors, their management styles, and the ways library professionals perceive gender's influence on leadership, is gender's continued relevance", (Bladek, 2019, p.528).

Motherhood

Although much has been written about equity regarding salary and work-life balance, hardly anything has been said about being parents. What research, if any, aims to describe women Librarians that are also mothers? "There is almost no mention of academic librarians and parenthood in the literature," (Eva, Lê, & Sheriff, 2021, pg. 1-2). In fact, Gallin-Parisi speaks of a feeling of "loneliness" when her searches on the subject showed a dearth of literature dealing with "mother-librarians" as she calls them: "Where are the mother-librarians and their narratives?" (Gallin-Parisi, 2018, pg. 1). In another article, she expresses her disbelief: "It is surprising that scholars within librarianship have not more closely examined the phenomenon of librarians balancing work and family, especially considering the historic feminization of the field", (Gallin-Parisi, 2017, pg. 3). This was not the case, for example, for Faculty and Academia mothers on whom the literature was abundant.

Closely linked is the factor of family-friendly policies that may be in place for women librarians who give birth to or adopt a child. Once again not much research is available to study how much these policies are used by women. Benefits, including those related to childbirth and childcare, "can go a long way to improving job satisfaction", (Connell, 2013, pg. 271). A semester of maternity leave can hardly disrupt a lifetime of commitment to the Institution.

Discrimination against all women because some of them take up family friendly measures is illegal. “The fact that some women leave the workforce does not prove that the women who stay there will not do as good a job as any man”, (Williams, 2000, pg. 272).

Why do fathers not take up family-friendly policies?

In the UK, it was as late as 1999 that fathers were being considered as care givers for their children, with paid paternity leave being introduced in 2003. In a bid to increase gender equality at work and encourage especially professional women to remain in the labour market and progress in their careers, Shared Parental Leave (SPL) was introduced in 2014. This was also a way to reduce gender pay gap and increase tax revenues, at the same time giving the father an opportunity to spend more time with his child. Nonetheless, the number of eligible fathers taking up this shared parental leave was only around 0.5% to 2%.

The main obstacles for men not taking up this opportunity are:

- Financial situation - fathers in general earn more, so less income for the family.
- Negative impact on the father’s career - mother’s career takes a backseat to father’s.
- Couple’s unwillingness to share parental leave - “Maternal gatekeeping”: when a mother wants to be the sole caregiver to the child.
- Cultural barriers and societal norms - “Policy change alone is not enough to change the culture around care”, (Birkett and Forbes, 2019): society still puts pressure on mothers to put motherhood before career.

Where the mother was better paid or both partners were professional there was more incidence of taking up SPL. Some fathers felt that since the mother had carried the baby, she deserved to take all the leave, whereas others wanted to be present and fully participant in childcare. Office culture may be such that men who take on their share of childcare are ridiculed by their peers. Again, a culture change is sorely needed.

Sexism

Galbraith, Fry & Garrison (2016) found that females suffered more stress than their male counterparts, disrupting their work-life balance, even when they were not mothers.

Sexism at the workplace leads to stress when females are given leadership roles without the autonomy or support to go with them. Why are female managers' decisions questioned? Is it due to the patriarchal organisation of the firm? Is it cultural? It is not enough to place women on top merely as a token.

Archives – another memory institution – and women

How easy is it to research women's history in archives? What records, if any, exist and how does one find them? According to research quoted by Sara De Jong, there has been a "systematic exclusion of women from society's memory tools and institutions, including archives", (De Jong, 2014, pg. 66).

Similarly to what was previously ascertained for libraries, archives face what is known as the "archival mystique" – a female dominated profession which paradoxically undermines women through gender limitations.

Additionally, archival documents such as letters by women will generally be found under headings for the issues they are fighting for, rather than their authors. There is a huge gap between archives of men and women, even in countries such as Iceland, where women are strong and independent, with a long history of equality. Ironically, women, who are generally the record keepers in their homes, tend to believe that their records are not worth preserving, since they are "trivia" or contain sensitive and personal information.

Still, some women do believe their documents are important. One example is Marie Stopes who left her papers to the British Museum Reading Room in 1958. Unfortunately, only her correspondence with scientists and politicians were deemed significant enough to keep. The rest, mostly letters from women asking about marriage and birth control, were given to another institution. Today they are very much sought out and provide "unique insights into the social history of the interwar years", (Hall, 2005, Retrieved from <https://www.lesleyahall.net/genarchs.htm>).

Hall also criticises archives' cataloguing systems, which give lengthy descriptions of individual documents but lack overviews of collections. One "maddening case" as she calls it, is that of a British interwar feminist. Detailed summaries of the documents were done but "it's practically impossible to get an overview of the collection or any sense of its structure", (Hall, 2005, Retrieved from <https://www.lesleyahall.net/genarchs.htm>).

Nevertheless, Cifor and Wood (2017) believe that feminism has influenced archives in more than just the fight for better representation of women. The traditional archival work around gender has been challenged: “critical and intersectional feminist theory can contribute to existing archival discourse and practice”, (Cifor and Wood, 2017, pg. 3).

Feminist archives came into being post-1950, thanks to the feminist and queer movements of the time. Censorship and harassment towards the minorities they represented led such movements to become providers of information. Much literature was produced regarding laws, harassment, medical information, and support to people who felt alone. “What we learn by thinking through the feminist intervention into archives begins with the recognition that self-representation and self-historicization is a vital element of collective identity, political organization, and structural change”, (Cifor and Wood, 2017, pg. 21).

A 2000-2001 survey, compiled by Cooper (2002), reports that female archivists are highly qualified. More than half the supervisors are women. Still, 96.8% stated that stress on women at the workplace is substantial.

Consistent with librarianship, the archival profession was also lacking in leadership and professional development for women. Advocacy and a better organisation could be key to create a more inclusive profession: "The past is prologue; let us make the future intersectional", (Orchard, 2019, pg. 83).

Possible general solutions

“Mentorship, leadership programs, extended maternity and parental leave, conference-supported childcare, and workplace flexibility will all go a long way in helping women achieve parity with their men colleagues,” (Eva, Lê, & Sheriff, 2021, pg. 8). Gallin-Parisi comes up with four important factors to support mother librarians: starting with knowing the library policies and aiding women to use these policies, to being aware of “flexibility stigma, bias avoidance, and campus culture hurdles,” highlighting the fact that motherhood is “a marathon, not a sprint,” (Gallin-Parisi, 2017, pg.2).

Conclusion

Historically, women were discriminated against at the workplace, even within the Library profession. The concept of gender creates stereotypes, with sexism and motherhood

increasing stress to women librarians. Improved policies to support them are still needed, while gender studies are necessary to bring about social change.

The fight against oppression of women in society, at home and at the workplace, is what led to Feminism and feminist thought, which will be studied in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

THEORY

Introduction

The present study on female library leaders seeks to first explore the theory, then move on to qualitative research by analysing interviews with library managers in Malta.

To research the issues women face, it was important to examine feminist theory. Main feminist concepts and their transition over the years are looked at in detail as are leadership and feminism in managerial posts, to eventually focus on these principles as applied to librarianship and library leadership: how feminist theory can potentially influence library management.

The theoretical part explored in this chapter, is divided into four parts:

2.1 FEMINIST THOUGHT

2.2 LEADERSHIP

2.3 FEMINIST LEADERSHIP

2.4 FEMINIST LIBRARY LEADERSHIP

2.1 FEMINIST THOUGHT

How can feminism be defined? “Any form of opposition to any form of social, personal, or economic discrimination which women suffer because of their sex”, (Bouchier, 1982, as quoted by Dodd, 2008, pg. 37). Why should women be treated any differently because of a socially constructed concept like gender?

Feminism is not about hating men but about uplifting women. “Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression”, (hooks, 2000, pg. viii). Indeed, bell hooks’ definition moves the objective of feminism away from loathing men towards eliminating chauvinism in all aspects of society. Feminists are not anti-male; they are against the exploitation and oppression of women. Men are not the problem, but patriarchy, sexism and male domination are.

According to hooks, patriarchy is also wrong for males. Growing up, boys needed love, not discipline, to develop self-esteem, "...a wise and loving feminist politics can provide the only foundation to save the lives of male children," (hooks, 2000, pg. 41). Youngsters are taught, through feminist thinking, "how to love justice and freedom in ways that foster and affirm life," (hooks, 2000, pg. 41). Incidentally, justice and freedom are also core library values, thus feminist librarianship is important and should be encouraged.

Unfortunately, once equal rights started to gain ground, there was a lack of "sisterhood", of women banding together. It appeared that the women who were making it to the top, finally at par with their male counterparts, did not care anymore about those women who were left behind, those who were still being exploited and oppressed. It seemed that females, not just males, were being sexist, and rather than propping each other up, would compete against each other. This is sad as feminist practice should point towards social justice, equality, mutuality and not create discrimination between women. On the one hand, women were depicted as caring and ethical beings. On the other, women who had acquired positions of power contributed to the subordination of poorer women. No empathy or solidarity was shown, which did little to change the existing social order of the time, (hooks, 2000).

The feminist movement also fought to remove all gender biases in school curricula and suggested feminist theory to be taught in schools and made available to everyone not just those in elite, academic circles. It moved towards the idea of global feminism to help women all over the world in their fight against sexism and oppression. Feminist librarians can indeed support this idea through the collections they make available to all patrons.

In 2000, bell hooks predicted that alternative lifestyles need to be introduced. For work to enhance self-esteem and self-respect, to be able to live well, wages need to be raised and job-sharing programmes introduced.

Both women and men who decide to stay home and raise their children should not just have a salary subsidised by the state but also home-schooling programmes that would enable these parents to work on degrees and other qualifications from home. Back in 1971, London, the four demands made by British feminists pertaining mainly to the Marxist feminism faction, were: "equal pay for equal work, equal opportunities and education, free contraception and abortion on demand, and free 24-hour childcare",

(Dodd, 2018, pg. 37). It is unfortunate that, such requests were still being demanded at the time of bell hooks' writing 30 years later, albeit in the USA.

In the new millennium, and indeed today, feminist thought persists and is still needed. bell hooks' feminist theory is indeed extended to include other forms of suppression, and as Tionloc states, sexism cannot be dissociated from racism, class elitism and imperialism. They all lead to oppression, and all forms of subjugation should be addressed, (Tionloc, 2020).

Robinson & Richardson (2007) defined three types of feminism that were predominant in the 1970s and 1980s: Radical Feminism, Marxist Feminism, and Liberal Feminism, whilst Rusaw (2005) also lists Psychosocial Feminism as well as poststructuralist/postmodernist and third world feminism.

Following is an overview of the history of feminist thought, known as the 4 waves, or movements, of feminism:

1st wave feminism (end of the 19th century-beginning of the 20th century):

This was essentially the women's suffrage movement, concerned mainly with obtaining votes for women, property rights and women's rights within the family.

2nd wave or Radical/Liberal feminism (mid-20th century – 1990s):

Radical feminism is concerned mainly with social and political inequality brought about by "patriarchy" or the domination of men over women. Married women had no independence, being exploited, and oppressed by their husbands, with no way of acquiring recognition or power in society. Becoming mothers made them totally dependent on their husbands, since they had no outside support such as childcare to return to work after having a baby. Family and other social institutions were built on patriarchal echelons of power. "From a radical feminist perspective, women's liberation is only achievable if patriarchy is overthrown", (Robinson & Richardson, 2007, pg. 22).

In her book *The female eunuch* (1970), Germaine Greer shows how women who had ambition, confidence and a strong personality were deemed detrimental to men who had to defeat them. Rather than actively seek and take what they want from the world, they were expected to wait and do as they were told. Women now had the opportunities but were too cautious to take them.

Also known as Liberal feminism, this wave gave rise to organisations which raised consciousness and helped women such as rape-crisis shelters and women's health clinics. Liberal feminists focused on equality, autonomy, and self-fulfilment which can only be achieved gradually through equal opportunities reforms and legislation. Radical feminism eventually brought about legislation that stopped discrimination based on gender, resulting in many women entering the workforce at par with males.

Women's libraries were also a product of the 2nd wave as we shall see.

The world of work is dominated by Capitalism in the West. Since Capitalism contributes to the oppression of women it was also challenged by what is referred to as Marxist feminism. Institutional relationships bring economic and social inequalities, especially when women were only given domestic work, the same as happened in library settings as we have seen. For Marxist feminists, women's freedom can only be achieved when capitalism ceases.

Rusaw (2005) further develops this thought to Psychosocial feminism which looks at relationships embedded in social institutions and reproduced in gender socialisation relationships. She describes how Socialists expand Marxist feminism to include other categories of people that are denied equality, paving the way for 3rd wave feminism.

3rd wave or Identity and Diversity feminism (from 1992)

Poststructuralism and postmodernism feminism questions the very identity of the female, analyses how "gender and sexuality are constructed through language and institutionalised ways of thinking" (Robinson & Richardson, 2007, pg. 23), further pointing out that gender roles are constructed socially and culturally rather than "naturally". Additionally, poststructuralist/postmodernist and third world feminism look at contextualised or particularised viewpoints, (Rusaw, 2005).

The third wave focuses on all human rights not solely gender equality. It is not just women who deserve to be treated equally but all human beings. Nobody should be left behind or marginalised, whether male, female, or belonging to a different sexual orientation, race, ability, and social background: feminism is intersectional.

This latter concept advocates that feminism today goes beyond gender and must include different elements of a person's identity: sexual preference, race, disability, and class. All these aspects influence a person's experience, not solely whether one is male or female.

Intersectional feminism illustrates how feminism has developed from a fight for equality for white, cisgender women to satisfying inclusivity and anti-discrimination needs for every individual. “Cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society. Examples of this include race, gender, class, ability, and ethnicity,” (Ellison, 2015, *University Wire*). Every woman, every individual, should be given a voice regardless of background and experience.

Post-feminism Although sometimes merged with 3rd wave feminism, post-feminism or “girl-power” is not a social movement in the same way. Post-feminism can be seen as the undoing of feminism, as seen in popular culture of the 1990s. At the same time, it focuses on how women are now able to make their own choices freely. “Thus the ‘post’ prefix in post-feminism has been seen to represent the idea that feminism is ‘dead’ but also as an emerging culture and ideology that simultaneously incorporates, revises, and de-politicizes many of the fundamental issues advanced by feminism” (Nash & Moore, 2019, pg. 451).

Reconstructive feminism represents a marked improvement for women in the new millennium. Whereas older feminists had to act like men to succeed at “a man’s job”, younger women have a sense of entitlement that they can do a good job on their own terms. Young people, “men as well as women, want to put limits on work time in order to leave time for family life”, (Williams, 2000, pg 273). Women do not need to choose between work and their other more traditional roles anymore.

4th wave feminism, the current development of feminism (from 2012) is defined by its use of technology to promote feminist goals. Highlighting and fighting against serious issues like sexual harassment and rape, it makes use of social media to raise awareness. The empowerment of women is brought about by giving them a voice, which, thanks to the Internet, can be heard around the world within seconds. The more women spoke out, the more women realised that their problems were shared by others everywhere, leading to “Internet activism”, a key feature of the 4th wave. Tags such as #*metoo* brought victims together in the Hollywood set and beyond and sought to bring perpetrators to justice.

Feminism in 2023 is necessarily intersectional. Any analysis we make needs to also consider the impacts of racialisation, sexual orientation, class, and ability on gender, (Greenshields & Given, 2022).

2.2 LEADERSHIP

The 2nd wave feminism saw more and more women work outside the home. The 3rd and 4th waves are making sure that women are given more leadership roles and enough power and autonomy to be able to take decisions and implement them.

Leadership vs management

Although the terms leader and manager are sometimes used synonymously, there is a distinct difference between them. While a manager has specific tasks to bring to term, a leader is more interested in the mission and goals of an organization, and how these can be fulfilled. Both management and leadership are important for the library. However, leadership goes beyond the day-to-day management of library staff. Leadership requires setting a vision for the library and motivating employees to contribute and help achieve this vision, (Phillips, 2014).

Leadership is about people who make things happen. Tracy (2014) believes that we need leaders to take us into the future: “We need people who have vision and courage, people with the ability to chart new seas and break new ground”, (Tracy, 2014, pg. 1). Such leaders motivate others to follow them because they want to, not because they must.

When it comes to women in leadership positions, what is the reason that although women in the workplace are today a norm, their role as leaders is not? What perception of women leaders vs male leaders do people have?

A particular study has shown that when asked to list male, female and manager characteristics, the male and managerial lists had very much in common, whereas few female qualities overlapped, (Garcia-Retamero & Lopez-Zafra, 2009). Such gender stereotypes will affect the suitability of a person being considered for a leadership post, a discrimination against women in leadership referred to as “glass ceiling”. This metaphor describes the resistance to women, and other marginalised groups, reaching top ranks despite their skills and efforts.

Value-added leadership and growth of a company/institution, or entrepreneurship, is intrinsically tied to emotional intelligence. This consists of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, and relationship management. When applying emotional intelligence to a Masculinity and Femininity Index, one study states that “we find that it

is linked clearly with skills and traits culturally associated with femininity”, (Galloway, Kapasi & Sang, 2020, pg. 686.)

Leadership would therefore thoroughly benefit from adopting an inclusive style of management. This is ironic since masculinity has always been taken to be the rule in leadership studies.

In the end, it is both masculine and feminine skills that are required. The researchers conclude therefore, that the most successful leaders are not “the shrewd, ruthless businessman stereotype”, but rather those who give importance to “their feminine side”, (Galloway, Kapasi & Sang, 2020, pg. 689). Paradoxically, females and alternative masculinities such as those of gay men, are being largely overlooked when it comes to choosing the right person for the job.

2.3 FEMINIST LEADERSHIP

“Managers are leaders who motivate followers to attain performance goals and increase overall productivity”, (Rusaw, 2005, pg. 385). It is a misconception however that there is only one way, or model, for this to happen and that it needs “aggressive use of power, decisiveness and rationality of purpose,” (Rusaw, 2005, pg. 385).

In fact, a recent study quoted by Forbes, showed how empathy was seen to be the most important leadership skill, (Brower, 2019). Far from being an unimportant soft skill, empathy brings about excellent business results and should be practised by both male and female leaders. Research shows that empathy has positive effects on innovation, engagement, retention of personnel, inclusivity, work-life balance, and mental health. “Empathy is the leadership competency to develop and demonstrate now and in the future of work”, (Brower, 2019, forbes.com)

Beyond traditional “masculine” skills, other models based on feminist theory concepts need to be considered. Rusaw (2005), identifies five major ideas as follows:

1. Differences in Interpersonal Relationships and construction of social knowledge: men and women communicate in different ways leading to different styles of interpersonal relationships. The best approach is not necessarily aggressive or

forceful. This idea can be linked to 2nd wave feminism which sought to remove patriarchy and male domination.

2. Commitment to care: compassion, social responsibility towards people and the environment, as well as a balance in social justice. Likewise third wave feminists emphasized equality and fairness for all, whatever their background.
3. Standpoint theory: people's views and opinions are formed on the experience that they have lived through, known as the phenomenological experience. Feminist theory, especially the 3rd/4th wave, highlights the experience of all marginalised individuals.
4. Criticism of dominant power structures in organisations: feminist theory fights gender discrimination brought about by institutional bias which prevents equity and equality of opportunity. The patriarchal work ethos that the 2nd wave sought to combat echoes this.
5. Pluralistic versus singular leadership: collaboration and consensus bring power as opposed to power emanating from an autocratic leadership. Sharing experiences and listening to a variety of ideas will achieve consensus and reach goals, as suggested by 3rd wave feminism.

We have also seen how current research (2021), has placed empathy as the most important leadership skill. Empathy, I believe, can easily be an umbrella term for all the above.

Although there is no set of practices to follow to be deemed feminist, one can say that there are qualities of feminist leadership that are generally accepted. For example, feminist leadership is perforce political since it “seeks to disrupt the status quo and/or intervene in a system supported by and that supports capitalist, heteropatriarchal systems,” (Brook & Hallerduff, 2020, pg. 43). In fact, feminist leadership considers women to be oppressed and concerns itself with the “human experience” of workers. Traditional business practices give importance to efficiency and profit, and can be described as “impersonal”, which is in direct contrast to the feminist value of uplifting each worker whatever their experience.

Feminist leadership does not concur that a person must forget their individuality and change to fit in the rigid, unforgiving environment of the workplace. On the contrary, the agency must be mindful of its employees' well-being.

According to traditional management theories, it is up to the stressed worker to “cope”. Much of the tension experienced by employees results from the lack of work-life balance, care-giving responsibilities that conflict with work time, and low salaries. Sexism, one of many forms of oppression that can happen at the place of work, can also lead to anxiety.

Rather than expecting the employee “deal with it”, feminist leadership looks to revolutionise the place of work so that no individual is swept aside and ignored. In the same way, libraries must change to be more empathetic of women, by emphasising important liberal feminist values such as empowerment, cooperation, peace, and personal autonomy.

Such Liberal feminist principles must come about because of change in social structure and collective action.

Inequality must not be blamed on women’s lack of ambition. One must be careful not to place the onus on the individual woman to “lean in” or make the most of leadership opportunities that arise at the workplace, as suggested by Sheryl Sandberg’s neoliberal bestseller, *Lean In* (2013). By thinking along these lines, in my opinion, we would be regressing back to a time when a woman could not aspire to leadership positions simply because organisations were structured in a way as to impede this. “This neoliberal feminist reading of empowerment places the burden of responsibility for women’s underrepresentation in leadership positions onto individual women rather than organizational inequality regimes,” (Nash & Moore, 2019).

Another criticism is that scholars “have largely neglected the way old age factors in how neoliberalism regulates women's relationship with work”, (Fegitz, 2022, pg. 1826). The feminine concerns of a global aging population cannot be ignored. Feminist concerns can shift “cultural discourses about older femininity away from frailty, vulnerability and dependency and toward autonomy, self-sufficiency and entrepreneurialism”, (Fegitz, 2022, pg. 1826), towards the emancipation and empowerment of women who are no longer in their 30s or 40s but who still have a contribution to make. Feminism can indeed fight ageism in society and at the place of work.

Feminism in leadership will not solve all our problems but will deliver “a way of understanding and redressing power so it is more appropriately and effectively plied,” (Greenshields & Given, 2022,

Retrieved from <http://informationr.net/ir/27SpIssue/CoLIS2022/colis2207.html#Cos21>)

Nowadays we associate power with privilege. People who have all the doors open to them just because of who they are, conveniently overlook others who are oppressed, despite being just as qualified. White males have always had it easier as they find structures in organisations built by people like them for people like them.

“We use the term power to describe the current configuration of structural privilege and structural oppression, in which some groups experience unearned advantages—because various systems have been designed by people like them and work for people like them—and other groups experience systematic disadvantages—because those same systems were not designed by them or with people like them in mind”, (D’Ignazio & Klein, 2020 1. The Power Chapter. In Data Feminism,

Retrieved from <https://data-feminism.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/vi8obxh7>)

In such an environment how can women and other minorities achieve positions of power in organisations? Libraries with a long tradition of male leadership might generate misogynist environments.

D’Ignazio and Klein (2020) list 4 types of domination, identified as the matrix of domination, which continue to put women in an unfavourable position, despite the feminist fight that has been going on for decades now:

Structural domain: laws and policies adding to the oppression of women.

Disciplinary domain: making sure those regulations and procedures are enforced.

Hegemonic domain: using culture and (social) media to disseminate oppressive ideas.

Interpersonal domain: personal experiences of domination and oppression.

All the above would not be possible without the hegemonic domain, today taking the form of animated GIFs on social media, for example. The aim is “to consolidate ideas about who is entitled to exercise power and who is not,” (D’Ignazio & Klein, 2020, Retrieved from <https://data-feminism.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/vi8obxh7>). Therefore the 4th wave remains crucial, and feminist thought current, even in the 21st century.

The matrix of domination helps to uphold the privileged position of the dominant group (e.g. white males) to the detriment of minority groups, or, as D’Ignazio & Klein call them, *minoritized* groups. They use this word to highlight the fact that one social group is “actively devalued and oppressed by a dominant group, one that holds more economic,

social and political power”, (D’Ignazio & Klein, 2020). Also, “Women are not minorities (fewer in number) they are one of many minoritized groups”, (Smith, 2016, Retrieved from: <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/minority-vs-minoritize>). This is especially true in a library setting. It is men who make up the dominant group, while other genders are the minoritized groups. The fact that half of the world population is made up of women does not change anything. This form of oppression is of course, sexism.

Males and females are treated equally until it comes to leadership positions, then it is the male that is favoured. Females view “institutional support for male leadership as 7% higher than for females”, (Lombard, 2018, p.227). This discrimination against females could be unintentional or not. Often, although an organisation may be committed to gender equality on paper, this does not happen as men prefer to work with men, a phenomenon known as “institutional male *homosociality*,” (Nash & Moore, 2019). This is yet another obstacle to women’s advancement in leadership. In any case, the research is not conclusive and needs to keep happening.

Women as leaders face specific obstacles as we have seen. Firstly, their role as care givers in the home limits their employment and career advancement outside of it. Secondly, leadership models are still built on masculine attributes such as ambition, confidence, dominance which reinforce discrimination against women as leaders. Thirdly, it is easier for men to work long hours and prioritize career over family life. A study of leadership cannot therefore be complete without taking gender issues in consideration. “Leadership, then, cannot be adequately studied and understood without accounting for gender”, (Bladek, 2019, p.515). In the end, to be able to say that the gender gap has truly been eradicated, women should be given the opportunity to lead, regardless of race, class, ability or sexual orientation, and any wage gap, however slight, removed.

2.4 FEMINIST LIBRARY LEADERSHIP

Just as women’s history is steeped in feminist social action, so library women’s history is also rooted in library women’s feminist activism. Librarianship being a predominantly female profession, it was erroneously believed that this meant equality in the 1950s, or what is known as “professional egalitarianism” (Hildenbrand, 2000). The reality was that men, often with no librarianship training, were being recruited to fill the library leadership posts, although most librarians were indeed women. The 1960s, a period of protest

marches and demonstrations for justice, equity, and fairness, saw many reforms being put into place. Library feminists noted how, even in the library profession, the history and work of women had largely been ignored and forgotten.

The 70s then saw the forming of the Feminist Task Force within the American Library Association and the independent Women Library Workers among others. It was noted that two elements in librarianship left women behind, creating the “glass ceiling” effect: first, the policy that men would be recruited for the top jobs; secondly, the “unsatisfactory professional climate” (Hildenbrand, 2000), faced by women who had other, domestic, responsibilities as wives and mothers.

Even the low salaries paid to librarians were blamed on women: men can afford to refuse such poorly paid work as they have other opportunities, women do not and thus accept.

Social historian Dee Garrison blamed the inferior status of librarianship on the fact that it was a female profession. Were male library leaders truly needed to bring a higher status to the profession as suggested by sociologist Peter Rossi? Was the solution to problems in the library profession further inequity and discrimination against women? Despite the wave of protests and reforms it was not until the 1980s that blaming library women for the negative elements in librarianship finally subsided.

Library women’s history was finally starting to be written, although more time had to pass before we could also hear the stories of lesbians and women of colour in librarianship. It was clear that a feminist, a “new woman,” faced problems since she had to work within a “bureaucracy run by men who favour the status quo” (Hildenbrand, 2000, pg. 59). Other stories emphasized not the problems, but the satisfaction the career brought to women, hinting that women were happy with their lot regardless of what the feminists were saying.

A 1996 American Library History Round Table (ALHRT) programme once again stressed on women’s special qualities when studying women and leadership. Black women were also being heard more in the 1990s, although their fight for professional status and equal salary, was linked with the “struggle of their people for a life of dignity” (Hildenbrand, 2000, pg. 60). She emphasises that one should move beyond separated studies of women and towards a synthesis which includes all women, from all backgrounds. This is the feminism that moved from the 2nd wave to the 3rd and 4th, indeed to the intersectional feminism of 2023.

What we have previously seen for leadership is also true for library leadership, where alternative types are not used much, and career advancement is rather traditional. Many of the women library leaders arrive at the top posts through “drifting”, simply going up the hierarchy in the organisation over time, gaining skills and experience to eventually take the place of retirees as they leave. Many librarians do preparatory acts such as leadership training, getting higher degree courses in librarianship however only the most ambitious attempt to get a leadership position, most often by “leaning in”.

Those women who do get to managerial level at a relatively young age face other problems, such as colleagues having difficulty accepting them as leaders. This is often worse for women of colour as even patrons question their being in charge. Furthermore, support was lacking when it came to taking difficult decisions or lobbying for the library’s needs. These reasons would certainly make all, but the most ambitious women hesitate before attempting to join leadership ranks. “The topic of ambition has many nuances and challenges, especially in light of the hegemonic representation of who traditionally becomes a leader in librarianship”, (Thomas, Trucks, & Kouns, 2019).

It remains to be seen whether women who are library leaders in Malta managed to get there because of their own capabilities and tenacity to make it in a man’s world, or because their organisations were structured in a liberal feminist way enabling all to succeed.

Phillips (2014) speaks of the “transformational leadership” type, focusing on evolving organisational change, which is normally discussed in librarianship. This is based on collaboration between librarians, deemed as essential for improvement. Nevertheless, Thomas, Trucks, & Kouns, (2019), state that there is disagreement between valuing collaboration and seeing it as a necessary leadership skill. The “servant leadership style,” rather than collaboration, is more currently popular in libraries. “Instruction coordinators do a great deal of feminized “relational” work—supporting, helping, collaborating—and yet they are not given authority or power to make substantial change” (Thomas, Trucks, & Kouns, 2019, Retrieved from <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2019/early-career-leadership-and-management/>).

In their chapter “Feminist praxis in Library leadership”, Hathcock & Vinopal (2017) ask: “How can feminism (...) help us think critically about core library values such as diversity, inclusivity and respect?” (Hathcock & Vinopal, 2017, pg. 148). Are these values upheld even more when we have women in library leadership roles? Does feminism

translate, first and foremost, into being a decent human being? “Across various subfields in information science, a feminist lens would enable researchers and practitioners to identify missed opportunities in our studies of users and information contexts, and to strive for equity and social justice,” (Greenshields & Given, 2022, Retrieved from <http://informationr.net/ir/27-SpIssue/CoLIS2022/colis2207.html#Cos21>).

In the 19th century, “through early first wave feminist activism but more through the needs of industrial capitalism, libraries needed to allow the possibility of women as independent readers and library users - and as staff”, (Ilett, 2004, pg. 8). Women were key to mass education going on at the time, and the opening of public libraries nationwide contributed to this.

The public library was considered a “borderland” (Ilett, 2004, pg. 8), at the time, a place in between inside and outside the home, where women’s roles could progress from domesticity to a more public role. Women’s thoughtful and supportive qualities were deemed to be very useful in a library set-up, where visitors could feel at ease knowing that they would be well cared for in their quest for knowledge and information.

Anita R. Schiller’s 1973 study on women and librarianship, predictably found that the higher the status of a library post the less women found to occupy these posts. This was the same as for other professions and across various types of libraries not just academic.

It was a well-known fact that women had several constraints that worked against them. However, “it took until 1985 for the *Library Association Record* (the main British librarianship journal) to produce an edition dedicated to women librarians and the inequalities they experienced”, (Ilett, 2004, pg. 12). A 2015–2016 Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Salary Survey quoted by Bladek (2019) shows that women have made great strides in the profession, outnumbering the number of males as associate and assistant directors. This reality, however, is far from being uncomplicated.

It is a relatively recent trend to treat feminism in library leadership as distinct from leadership or feminine leadership. In 1992, “standing at the foot of third-wave feminism in North America, (Roma M.) Harris pointed to the necessity of a '*common feminist agenda*' in the field”. Feminism gives importance to “such values as critiquing systems of oppression, valuing whole people, empowering individuals, and sharing information”, (Brook & Hallerduff, 2020, pg. 41). In their research, they wanted to find out in what ways feminist values were being integrated in the day-to-day practices of academic

librarians. The main key themes coming out of this research are advocacy, for both staff and library users, organisational structures, and whether these hinder or help feminist leadership, and decision-making practices. Feminism can be enacted in various ways, from “day-to-day words and actions to larger initiatives and programmes”, (Brook & Hallerduff, 2020, pg. 41).

In their study of library managers, Thomas, Trucks, and Kouns (2019) maintain that although white women are much more represented in leadership, there is some disagreement as to who holds power, since leadership is still linked to characteristics. “Representation is the first step to equity, but more work needs to be done to shift power from those who have historically held it.” Indeed, one of their interviewees had even asked to be demoted as she was not being respected in her post.

In the world of academic librarians, three major obstacles are deemed to stand in the way of women going forward: family, “double binds” and social capital, (Lombard, 2018). Women tend to devote more time and effort to their families than their male counterparts, thus losing out on career and managerial openings. Double binds happens when women’s behaviour is perceived in a negative manner: thus, warmth is taken as weakness, assertiveness as tyrannical rather than decisiveness. Social capital refers to the way organisations are structured in a way that is unfavourable to women and favourable to men. To rectify this, as noted by Lombard’s literature review (2018), leadership structures should move from hierarchical (associated with males) to horizontal where communal traits, (associated with females), are more valued.

From his survey, it emerges that there is a “double standard” as in women’s ideas are more questioned and less easily accepted than males’.

Another aspect to consider, especially with older women managers, is that they are often caregivers to elderly parents. Women are more likely than men to take on this role. In the UK, one in five of women over 50 take care of an elderly or disabled family member. Work-life balance is important not only when women become mothers but also when they take on such roles. Contrary to maternity which today is perceived as a positive aspect of working women’s lives, care for elderly relatives “is represented as an obstacle to women's participation in paid work”, (Fegitz, 2021, pg 1825). How can a woman feel emancipated through full-time work while being responsible for the care of the elderly in her life? The solution would be flexible working hours and subsidized care technologies.

Even when institutions strive to introduce measures to bring equality, it is people's perceptions that need to change, for these measures to be truly effective. "Understanding why we think the way we do is the first step to determining if things need to change", (Lombard, 2018, pg. 228).

Hiring and promotion need to be transparent not subjective or informal. Hierarchical structures within organisations, which include long working hours, can also bring about "intentional and unintentional bias against females due to traditional family roles prevalent in society," (Lombard, 2018, pg. 228). The introduction of family friendly human resources policies would also benefit males. "Gender leadership equity does not solely benefit females – the entire library wins," (Lombard, 2018, p.228). Being the best library leaders does not depend on gender. Everybody needs to be sensitive to gender issues and policies put in to eliminate "double binds", encourage equity and elevate the morale of all personnel regardless of gender.

Advocacy and sharing power: advocacy, or support, for people who are marginalised must be given priority on librarians' agenda, be they part of the library staff, library users or even students. One must be aware of the "unique experiences of people with marginalised identities". (Brook & Hallerduff, 2020, pg. 42). Sharing power is mostly tied to sharing decision making, sharing information, being transparent and always trying to achieve consensus. These practices have one major drawback: they require more time. Traditional management which follows a hierarchical structure, tends to be more efficient.

Bladek (2019) quotes the way Turock (2001) defined Female library leadership as having passed through four phases:

Phase 1: an absence of women at top level administration,

Phase 2: women needing to adopt a masculine leadership model to be accepted,

Phase 3: more women finally making it to leadership posts,

Phase 4: leadership redefined - the most inclusive, "recognizes women's values, such as collaboration and empathy, as necessary to lead", (Bladek, 2019, pg. 523).

Librarians need to be empowered to question assumptions about what it means to be a librarian in the 21st century by having a clear understanding of how their own profession is subject to social relations of power and domination", (Neigel, 2015, pg. 522).

Emotional intelligence is often considered as one of the frameworks within LIS leadership studies. “Echoing subjective listings of leadership qualities, frequent items in the findings include being visionary, communicative, collaborative, and having integrity”, (Wong, 2017, pg. 158). Library leaders need to be trained to value social justice and acknowledge that “library practices frequently contribute to inequity, marginalization, and injustices,” (Morales et al., 2014, p. 448).

Sadly, “Feminine traits of caring, collaboration, and emotional attachment are value-laden and do not comfortably align with more rational systems of leadership that embody traits of emotional neutrality and individual careerism”, (Neigel, 2015, pg. 526). Women, despite the role or position they have, are firstly seen as women. Women leaders are sometimes victims of being “talked over” or of “tokenism”, (Neigel, 2015).

Women's libraries and archives, developed thanks to twentieth-century feminist thought, may offer alternative models of librarianship and feminist space (Ilett, 2004, pg. 6). The author describes three types of libraries, which reflect feminist thought throughout the years. Starting with the original traditional ones, as in the time of Dewey, employing women as their major workforce in a semi-domestic role.

The second type are those libraries whose female librarians were second wave feminists and sought to bring about change into their libraries from within. Challenging the Dewey or other systems, they would have a separate area, a women’s studies section, “shelving the best women’s materials in all the subjects together”, the “feminist-inspired librarians wanted to include materials that genuinely reflected women's experience and also to combat misogynist and negative materials” (Ilett, 2004, pg. 13).

There is a third and interesting model: feminists setting up and working within women’s libraries and archives. They would not necessarily have any librarianship training but being feminists, devised their own classification systems based on feminist keywords, for example. They wanted to represent the world from the women’s point of view, (Ilett, 2004).

Feminism in library and information science creates a dynamic environment, attracting dynamic employees, which provide visionary services, collections, and resources to our communities. The aim of such library leadership is to “improve the field by ensuring that we are energised, responsive, and future oriented,” (Greenshields & Given, 2022, Retrieved from <http://informationr.net/ir/27-SpIssue/CoLIS2022/colis2207.html#Cos21>).

“Allowing for difference in leadership, whether it be from difficult women; women from diverse backgrounds, abilities, or racialised groups; or women from all over the gender spectrum, would be a true mark of third-wave feminism. We are not yet there.” (Greenshields & Given, 2022, Retrieved from <http://informationr.net/ir/27-SpIssue/CoLIS2022/colis2207.html#Cos21>).

In their article “*Gender inclusivity and equity in academic libraries - Insights from around the globe*,” Buhle Mbambo-Thata et al., look at academic libraries from the five continents, and ask librarians to list the issues that impede and enhance gender equity/inclusivity. They chose to look at gender in its three forms: physical, identity (binary and more recently, non-binary) and sociocultural. Gender, they say, has been used in the past to limit or deny opportunities and equal treatment. Although some regions across the globe have advanced greatly in this regard, others are still working towards achieving equality in academic and research libraries.

In Africa, it was found that men had higher qualifications, so were offered higher posts. Furthermore, there is a culture of patriarchy and family responsibilities fall more on females.

In Asia and Oceania, gender inclusivity is advancing with academic library development. Australia, however, maintains a pay gap between men and women. Furthermore, there is lack of equality since few men show interest in library professions.

In Europe, the EU Charter of fundamental rights denounces any form of discrimination. Taking Germany as an example of a European country, the researchers found a gender balance for everybody. Employers are required to implement work-life-learn structures with libraries even having family rooms where children of staff may comfortably stay if an unexpected need arises. Apart from equal pay, the use of gender-neutral language is encouraged, as are job shadowing and leadership programmes to encourage career progression. In Malta, the laws are in place against discrimination. But has our Mediterranean culture also moved with the times to really accept and support women in library leadership roles?

The Middle East has had in the past the influence of “glass ceiling” resulting in loss of opportunities. Today, it is an exciting time, where “strategic plans, policies, decisions, and projects that enhance and support the goal of gender equity/inclusivity,” (Buhle Mbambo-Thata et al, 2019) are being implemented.

In North America, it was found that the hegemony of heterosexuality, “throttle gender diversity, human expression, human dignity, and need to be deconstructed”, (Buhle Mbambo-Thata et al, 2019).

The authors conclude that “gender equity and inclusivity shouldn’t be an option in academic libraries, but one of the main pillars of action” (Buhle Mbambo-Thata et al, 2019). A good leadership must include equity in their vision for the library. Furthermore, academic libraries must speak out against hate even at social and political levels, advocating for nonconforming individuals even beyond the library door. “Academic libraries can serve as strong allies on this road to reinterpret emerging humanism in the 21st century”, (Buhle Mbambo-Thata et al, 2019).

Although much progress has been made, and women’s leadership style is more accepted, gender bias has not been completely eradicated: “women in top administrative positions continue to encounter obstacles and barriers to equality”, (Bladek, 2019, p.523). One must examine the issues that keep holding women back today. Studies have shown that “deprivation behaviours, including the tendency to assign women to positions with responsibilities but without authority, the lack of acknowledgment of women’s input, and double standard in rewarding accomplishments”, (Bladek, 2019, p.525) go a long way in preventing the progression in a woman’s career. As a means of counteracting this effect, women library directors identified the following aspects as key factors in their progress: “Professional activities, educational background, tenacity and perseverance, job mobility, and mentoring experience were on top of the list”, (Bladek, 2019, p.525).

“Tremendous professional gains that women academic librarians have made even as gender equality has remained elusive”, (Bladek, 2019, p.529). Bladek’s concluding remarks hint that more research is needed to find out why this is so.

Conclusion

Feminism has helped women to finally achieve leadership roles, even in librarianship. Power still needs to be shared by moving from a masculine hierarchical type of organisation, to a horizontal, communal, more feminine one. Feminist leadership skills such as empathy, advocacy and emotional intelligence create a professional climate that is mindful of the emancipation of all employees without discrimination. The best library leadership does not depend on whether one is male or female, but on feminist values that uplift individuals and combat oppression of all type, be it gender-based or otherwise.

METHODOLOGY

“Phenomenological research starts with the researcher who has a curiosity or passion that is turned into a research question” (Finlay, 2012). Indeed, the present research came about from the author’s curiosity about the circumstances of female library managers in Malta.

There is no such research about the situation in Malta, and we do not know much about the women occupying posts of library leadership locally.

A Case study of Malta

Introduction

This chapter will describe and discuss how data will be collected. It will address the following points:

- Research method
- Data collection through semi-structured interviews
- Information on the participants
- Ethics
- Transcripts
- Analysis

Research method: This is a qualitative research. It aims to directly study the human complexities of women library managers in Malta and how they shape and create their experience. The qualitative materials, which are narrative and subjective, will be collected and analysed. The findings will be based on real-life experiences of people who have lived this phenomenon first-hand. The researcher enters their “Lifeworld”, through descriptions of experience.

Data collection: By interviewing women who have made it to the top posts we can see what obstacles and trials, if any, they had to face.

Semi-structured interviews will be held, in conversational form between researcher and participants, mainly face-to-face at the participant’s place of work or through online

meetings via Zoom. A video or audio recording will be made of the interview according to each participant's request.

The questions, based on the Literature review and Theory studied above, will be sent to participants ahead of the interview.

The semi-structured interview as a method of data collection was chosen because it allows participants to speak freely, sharing experiences and recounting anecdotes. It opens a window on the interviewee's world described in their own words and expressions, enabling the researcher to gain a richer and more detailed data than other, perhaps less personal, methods. The questions do not intend to collect a rigid list of answers as for a quantitative research method. They are simply a springboard to start off a conversation that gives participants the time and space to look back at their careers, relating their concerns, their greatest achievements, their moments of satisfaction and aspirations for the future.

Participants: 13 female library managers were approached by email, 10 of which, across six organisations, kindly accepted to participate in this study.

Participants are mainly managers in academic libraries, however, since in Malta the numbers are limited, managers within the public library sphere were also included to establish a richer dataset.

Interviewees hold leadership posts of various levels, from Manager to Deputy Director to CEO. Institutions include the University of Malta Library, American University of Malta Library, MCAST Library, libraries in post-secondary institutions (both government and independent), and Malta Libraries.

Out of the ten interviewees, one is retired, but had been Deputy Director in her library for 20 years, the first female to hold this post. Another is nearing retirement after a career spanning 35 years. Three have over 30 years' experience, with managerial roles for 11, 20 and 4 years respectively, having changed institutions throughout their career. Another four participants have over 15 years' experience, holding managerial posts for the past 8, 6, and 1 year respectively: 3 of these participants have progressed within the same institution while the fourth has moved. One participant has been a library manager for the past 2.5 years advancing from her first role of technical officer within the library.

Participants' qualifications range from Diploma to Bachelor's and Master's degrees to PhD in Library Science. Some hold higher degrees in other subjects with a basic degree in librarianship. While a few obtained their qualifications in Malta, others were qualified in other countries, either by living abroad, through distance learning or qualified in their country of origin before coming to work in Malta.

Indeed, it needs to be specified that while 80% of the participants are Maltese, Interviewees 3 and 8 are not. True to Intersectional Feminism, it is also important to hear the story of these individuals, who may or may not have experienced discrimination not only because they are female, but also because they belong to a minority in Malta due to race/nationality.

Ethics: Because the phenomenological research is people-centred, it needs to be ethically sound. Thus, the researcher needs to have proper informed consent by participants. Following permission by FREC of the University of Malta, the first email is sent, to which the Information letter is attached (see Appendix 2), inviting the women to participate.

Once the participant accepts, a second email is sent attaching a Consent form and the Interview questions (see Appendix 3 and Appendix 1).

By signing the Consent form, participants confirm that they know what the research is about, that they would gain no direct benefit from participating, but would help society to gain an insight into women library managers and possibly encourage other women to take up such posts. The form also gives consent for the interview to be audio-recorded or video-recorded.

Two of the participants in fact, preferred to send their reflections via email, rather than be interviewed live. Five participants were interviewed face-to-face at the interviewee's place of work while three were interviewed via Zoom meeting.

The interviewees will remain anonymous and the data confidential. The numbered transcripts will give no indication of name of participant or the organisation in which they work.

The data collected will only be used for the present study and destroyed within two years of completion.

Transcripts: The interviews are transcribed, and transcripts sent to interviewees who can comment or change anything they are not happy with. Overviews of the ten transcripts are attached to this dissertation (see Appendix 5).

Analysis: Each transcript is scrutinised, and coding is done. The next step is to group the codes under specific themes, leading to a thematic analysis.

A total of 10 themes are identified:

1. Getting qualified
2. Career
3. Personal fulfilment
4. Feminist values
5. Leadership qualities
6. Library leadership
7. Dealing with stress
8. Culture issues: Maltese and other
9. Being a woman
10. Being a mother

The Results chapter will show what the participants have said, where they agree or disagree, what experiences they have lived through. Quotes from the interviewees will enable the reader to “hear their voices”.

The Discussion chapter will follow, to indicate how the results fit in within the feminist theory previously examined and whether they prove or contradict said theory.

Finally, the Conclusion will include reflections and recommendations.

Summary

The Methodology chapter outlines the Research aspect of the present study. 10 interviews with women library leaders in Malta, their thematic analysis, a discussion of the results in relation to the theory explored previously, leading to the final thoughts and considerations.

RESULTS

Presentation of Research Results

Introduction: The 10 identified themes are first explained in summarised form within a table. The topics are then explained in more detail, with reference to the theory studied before and quotes from the interviewees enabling the reader to “hear” the participants.

1.	Getting qualified	Is further education as straightforward for women as it is for men? Are women as motivated to train and gain advanced qualifications? What level of support is given by the institution they work at? Participants felt that librarianship in Malta lacks professional status. There is the perception that anyone can be a librarian even with minimal training.
2.	Career	How hard was it for women library managers to progress and attain their present post? Is ambition enough or is encouragement from others also important? Problems that hinder career progression are lack of ambition and a prolonged period before new calls for applications are issued.
3.	Personal fulfilment	How important is being appreciated and respected at the place of work? Does leading a cooperative team add to one’s happiness? Is work-life balance essential or even possible? The masculine managerial structure is not adaptable to a feminist one which supports self-fulfilment.
4.	Feminist values	Do feminist values nowadays represent all minority groups not just women? The laws against discrimination and towards equality are in place: but have attitudes towards women managers advanced at the same pace?
5.	Leadership	What leadership qualities do female managers deem important? To what level are they built on feminist values? What challenges do female leaders face and how do they overcome them?

6.	Feminist Library Leadership	How can feminist values and leadership qualities be combined in library leadership? Women library leaders have increased in later years in Malta, but does this mean that they are accepted by all employees? Would a sisterhood or network of female librarians give support, or would it create even more barriers between men and women?
7.	Dealing with stress	Sexism, harassment, bullying, lack of recognition as professionals: all these can cause stress to women. The way to overcome such challenges is good communication, asking for help, knowing, and fighting for, one's rights.
8.	Culture issues	Female library directors and managers in Malta are increasing. Are there still cultural issues when it comes to acceptance by employees and users, both by Maltese and by foreigners who come from cultures where women still do not have equal rights?
9.	Being a woman	Young women sometimes manifest a submissive nature. With the right encouragement they will become Reconstructive feminists, achieving their work aims and objectives, not as women in a man's world, but on their own terms.
10.	Being a mother	Family friendly policies are taken up mostly by mothers not fathers, and by women who take on caregiver roles to elderly parents. The policies need to be extended to include women undergoing fertility treatment and to be fair with all librarians, whether their job is in the offices or on the Library floors helping users.

Theme 1 GETTING QUALIFIED

<u>Interviewee</u>	<u>Qualifications</u>
1.	City & Guilds, DLIS
2.	DLIS, B.Sc. (LIS), M.A. (Records Management & Digital preservation)
3.	M.Sc. (Psychological Research), PhD (Software Development)
4.	Diploma (Management), M.Sc. (LIS)

5.	Library Asst Cert., ALA (Chartered Librarian), M.Sc., PhD. (LIS)
6.	M.A. (Documentary Heritage & Melitensia Studies)
7.	DLIS, Diploma (Management), Diploma (Higher Educ.), M.Sc. (LIS)
8.	Diploma (Higher Educ.) & (Computing), B.Sc. (Maths), B.Sc. (LIS)
9.	DLIS, B.Sc. (LIS), M.A. (Library Management and Information systems)
10.	Diploma (Archivistica, Paleografia e Diplomatica)

The value of qualifications for any profession is clear. As one interviewee stresses: “The most important thing are qualifications, qualifications. You have to study. You have to have a qualification nowadays to be taken seriously and it's only fair that if you expect to be at managerial level, you are as qualified as your peers”, (Interview 2).

Surprisingly, most of the women I interviewed were already working in libraries when they started to read for diplomas or degrees in Library Science. Once they did so however, the seed to learn more was sown and further advanced studies were embarked upon.

Getting qualified while on the job depends on the support given by the organisation but also on gender and one’s status in life, with mothers of young children finding it very difficult indeed.

For the older librarians, furthering your studies in Library Science in the 70s and 80s meant having to go abroad. There were no such degrees offered in Malta and of course, online learning was yet unheard of. If a woman was single, then it depended simply on her motivation and permission from work to leave her country for the duration of the course: “Yes, I was living [for] two years in London at [College for Higher Education]”, (Interview 5). With the proper support from the library she was working in at the time, she managed to read for and gain important Library Science degrees abroad up to PhD level, unheard of for a Maltese person, let alone a woman, at that time.

For a woman who was married and had a child, sadly the situation was more complex: “I always wanted to further my education, but because I am a woman and because I had a family, I did not want to go abroad and the only courses available were abroad in those days”, (Interview 2).

It was not the motivation or willingness that was lacking, but the circumstances of having a small child. No support was given, and truth be told, thirty or forty years ago, mothers

felt that their first duty was towards their children. Qualifications and careers would have to be left on the back burner, at least until the offspring became more independent.

One wonders whether males also base their decision to continue studying on their marital status or whether they are fathers or not?

As we have seen, at around the same period, the Marxist feminist faction in the UK was fighting for equal opportunities, including education, in conjunction with free 24-hour childcare. Three decades later, bell hooks claimed that parents of both gender who opted to stay home with their children, should be entitled to home schooling and opportunities to get qualified during their parental leave. It does seem therefore that the right to education for young mothers was one worth fighting for.

In Malta, these rights have been achieved and libraries have made it easier for all women to advance, whether young, single, married or mothers.

The UoM today offers Library Science degrees up to Master's level, so technically there is no more the need to leave the country to pursue such degrees. It must be said nonetheless that there is still a lack of young women applying for such courses. This is on the same lines with what we have seen in Buhle Mbambo-Thata's study about the situation in Africa where men have higher qualifications than women, resulting in their being offered higher managerial posts. Certainly, it is not easy to juggle a fulltime job and a young family, while following a Master's degree course part-time.

Still, with enough motivation and at least some support at home, it is not impossible to take up such a challenge. As one interviewee states: "I did find it stressful to combine study and work with having a child. There were times when I thought I wouldn't make it. Because I took it seriously, I suppose... but I loved it. I really enjoyed it", (Interview 2). Truly, the strength and determination of these women is remarkable.

Furthermore, distance learning today is made easier thanks to online degree courses, perhaps an ideal setting for young mothers, since in general they still take on the bulk of parenting duties. In fact, the two interviewees who have young children both obtained their Master's degrees online.

Most of the interviewees became librarians purely by coincidence when placed in the library upon their recruitment with the parent institution. This meant that originally

qualifications were rather basic or not directly related to librarianship, as outlined in the table above.

Some participants have admitted that a library qualification was not a requirement to apply for an entry level library position: “As a library assistant, I didn't need a qualification in librarianship, but I was asked to follow at least the diploma after my employment”, (Interview 7). Once in employment, participants who were motivated to pursue higher degrees, found varying degrees of support, depending on the institutions.

In the larger academic or even non-academic institutions, employees were encouraged to further their studies, with gender playing no part at all as everyone could apply for grants and scholarships with the same conditions. “There's a criterion, and if you fall within the parameters of the criteria, you get it”, (Interview 4). The financial support was especially important where employees had to follow courses abroad: “My early years at the library in contact with the archives of [the organisation] led me to seek a scholarship for archival training in Italy, which I achieved”, (Interview 10). Of course for a scholarship to be granted, “I had to sign a contract that I would return to work for [the organisation]”, (Interview 5).

Support is not only financial, and a word of encouragement is very important: “My own supervisor had suggested that I do it (higher degree) and she was very encouraging and helpful to me”, (Interview 5).

Not all my interviewees were so fortunate, however. One participant's ex-manager completely discouraged her from pursuing a degree, maintaining that the Diploma she had, already made her overqualified for the post she held. Such a statement made her more determined, more “stubborn” to do it: “...that's what pushed me to go for it! I said, “no way!”, so, I'm going to be stuck? And I joined the university”, (Interview 2). The participant has since moved to another institution where her studies are valued as she is given a qualification allowance, at par with educators in the institution.

This strength in the face of adversity, this determination, is a typical viewpoint of many women in general and of my interviewees in particular.

Another point to come out of the interviews was that qualified librarians should indeed share their knowledge with others. “It's not only about having them behind the desk. Reading books, as they say. But teaching. Teaching being in contact with the students and

teaching”, (Interview 3). This is consistent with the feminist library value of empowering individuals and sharing information.

Learning on the job is also deemed important: “I do believe in learning something, even if we do not have a certificate to hold. I do continuously learn. Yeah, either by online education or free education or with [the organisation] itself. So continuously learn something that there's time for. Or listening to, you know, some podcast or lecture ...” (Interview 8). In the case of academic librarians, it was highlighted that ideally one needs to be trained in both librarianship and education. Only two out of the 10 participants hold a further qualification in Management.

Theme 2 CAREER

<u>Interviewee</u>	<u>Library Management Role</u>	<u>Length of time at post</u>
1.	ex-Officer-in-charge (Library Services), Librarian (post-secondary institution)	16+ years
2.	Library Administrator & Information Knowledge Leader (post-secondary institution)	16+ years
3.	Academic Affairs Officer and Librarian (tertiary education institution)	0-6 years
4.	Deputy Director Library services (tertiary education institution)	0-6 years
5.	ex-Deputy Director Library services - Retired (First female to hold this post) (tertiary education institution)	7-15 years
6.	Manager (tertiary education institution)	0-6 years
7.	Manager (tertiary education institution)	0-6 years
8.	Director Library and Learning Resource Centre (tertiary education institution)	0-6 years
9.	Director (non-academic institution)	7-15 years
10.	Deputy Librarian - Retiring in a year's time. (non-academic institution)	0-6 years

As can be seen from the above table, in the last six years, the number of female librarians in a managerial post has risen substantially. It was interesting to discuss with the participants where their interest in the library profession stemmed from and if they ever thought they would reach such a high post in a library.

Some of the interviewees became librarians not by first choice when they were stationed in the library of the parent institution on employment. Others discovered an interest in the profession when frequenting the library at their tertiary education institution during their studies. One such participant recounted how the librarian at the time became her mentor, showing her the Cataloguing and Classification system which she remembers being marvelled at - how all knowledge was divided into categories: “That was my first ‘wow’ moment!” (Interview 8). Advocacy in practice. Once the degree she was reading was done, she decided to change direction and study librarianship.

Similar patterns emerge from Interview 7 and 9. Both participants had embarked on courses which they later decided were not for them. The former, while following a Diploma course, discovered how helpful the Library services were: “I never imagined myself being a librarian before”, (Interview 7). She applied for the post of Library Assistant and during the interview, she felt that this was exactly what she wanted to do. The latter was originally employed by a government Ministry and stationed at the library. “I made it my aim to organise it and started providing a specialised current awareness service to the staff”, (Interview 9). Many years later and with a Master’s in librarianship under their belt, both are now in managerial positions, one having progressed through calls for application within the same institution and the other having changed institutions leading her to the senior management post she now holds. She is the first female and youngest person to be in her position, quite an achievement.

Participant 3 was employed as library technician during the pandemic and since there was no librarian at the time, she was asked to take over. “I had to learn how the system, the online system worked, and I had to create further policies. Because there was not... There was no development plan”, (Interview 3). This was unfair because apart from the lack of training, her salary was not commensurate with this role of greater responsibility. A typical masculine management decision valuing practicality and efficiency over a person’s well-being.

Two further participants first qualified in other information management categories: Archives and Documentary Heritage, having worked in Archival departments or Museums before moving on to a library post. Many years passed before any call for applications was issued but finally, thanks to both qualifications and experience, they managed to go a step further in their career. Indeed, it is not possible to “lean in” when there are no openings for higher posts.

Another interviewee describes how after 18 years of service having gone up the ranks and read for a Diploma in Librarianship, she had to give up a job she loved due to lack of family friendly policies. “I wanted to reduce my hours of work because I had my child. And it was not possible yet”, (Interview 2).

Career progression depends on many factors. In general it is based on meritocracy and none of the participants faced any gender discrimination when applying for a post. A negative aspect, for both men and women, is the lack of calls for applications. Sometimes it takes over 10 years for a call to be issued, with the employees stuck in their post despite years of experience and higher qualifications. When larger organisations have a strict hierarchy, the lack of openings demotivates employees. In Malta, there are not so many libraries, so job mobility is restricted: “But what worries me is that if I think about moving... the possibilities are limited as well, because it is not like abroad where there are numerous academic libraries” (Interview 4).

Does moving forward depend on ambition, “leaning in”, or on support from co-workers and higher authority? “Both, I suppose because you do have to have some ambition in order to get to places”, (Interview 5). Ambition also varies from one individual to another: “That was always there in my mind that I have to run a Library”, (Interview 8) compared to “I was never overly ambitious although when I was reading for my MA, I was doing it in the hope that I will advance in my career”, (Interview 6) or “I never had any ambitions to reach any important role. My only aim has always been to assist our clients”, (Interview 10). Most agree nevertheless that they are where they are today thanks to the encouragement of others: “I’m here because of many people” (Interview 8) and “I am in the role of Deputy Librarian today due to the encouragement of my superiors and colleagues”, (Interview 10).

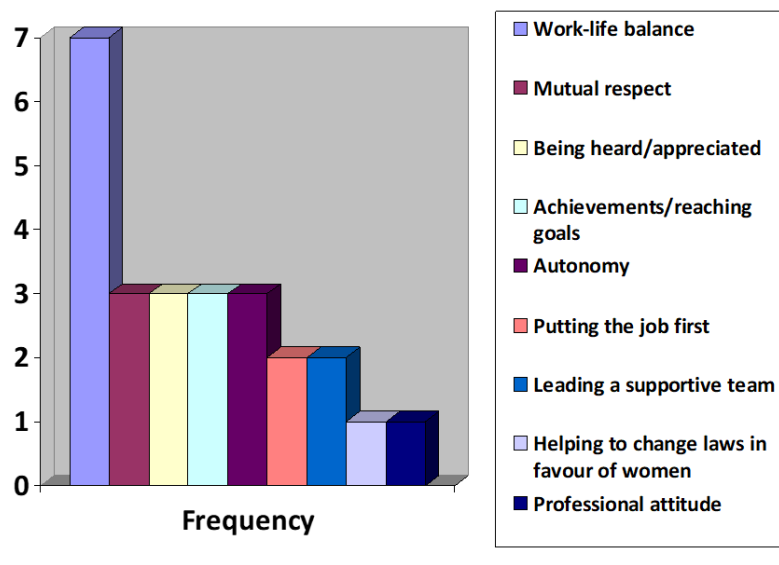
Gender quota is not appreciated by any of the interviewees. They believe that one should proceed through meritocracy. “We cannot employ women in certain roles based on their

gender but on their skills and qualifications and whether they are willing to work towards the improvement of the library”, (Interview 1). Furthermore: “Yes, I want to be here. Because I deserve to be here and not because there's a gender quota” (Interview 6).

As quoted previously, Bladdek lists the key factors for progress of library managers. These can also be true for our Maltese library leaders who have shown: “Professional activities, educational background, tenacity and perseverance”, (Bladdek, 2019, pg 525). Job mobility could improve with more openings, and mentoring could easily be introduced as a way of sharing one’s knowledge and experience, an important feminist library value as we have already seen, with newly qualified librarians.

The research question that I asked previously on whether women in Malta advance “because of their own capabilities and tenacity” or if it is the organisation that made it easy for them to do so, has been answered: both are important.

Theme 3 PERSONAL FULFILMENT



When asked whether being a woman helped or hindered their work, and what leads to self- fulfilment and job satisfaction, almost all the participants agreed that gender made no difference. It seems that in Malta the liberal feminist targets have been met and through proper legislation today women do enjoy equality, autonomy and as a result, personal fulfilment. Albeit not without some stressful situations as we shall see.

The participants' opinions on what brings them self-fulfilment are listed in the above graph in order of frequency.

Work-life balance was the value mentioned by 70% of the participants. It is indeed a very important aspect of today's working world. It is not just women, or mothers, who seek it but everyone. Young adults today are seeking employment that gives them enough spare time for travel, further education, going out with friends, sports, and other hobbies. Even salary is not deemed as important as work-life balance and a lack of it may also cause stress to employees.

Work-life balance depends also on factors such as family-friendly policies as we shall see later. For mothers, (still more than fathers), it is literally juggling work and children, making sure they give their utmost to both. "I'm a woman. I'm a mother. And balancing motherhood with your work most especially when you occupy a managerial position is not easy obviously, but I think by time you learn, you learn the skills, how to balance motherhood and your work", (Interview 4). Participant also admits that she has a lot of support from her extended family and makes use of the family-friendly policies available in her library.

When you are in a high position, work-life balance is tough: "We do not get more time for the family, especially if you have younger children", (Interview 8). It is important to keep both separate "don't take the family stress to the workplace or work stress to the family", (Interview 8), although it is important to prioritise.

Women may not "put the job first" in the way traditional men did but, if there is a deadline to reach or some urgent matter, then the work may take precedence. Since everything is web-based, "if I have things that I need to do, I can do them from home," (Interview 4). This tends to happen when one is on reduced hours, although to have a good work-life balance, one should only resort to this in exceptional circumstances. Being a service profession, when one is absent, the service is not given, especially when there is only one librarian in charge, "Sometimes I go in, even if I'm not feeling very well because if the library is closed it's very inconvenient - you feel as if you're letting them [users] down, (Interview 2).

Apart from younger managers with young children, one must also consider the work-life balance of older managers who may be taking on the role of care givers for elderly parents. As we have seen, one fifth of UK women over 50 take care of an elderly or

disabled family member. This is the case of one of my interviewees: “Since I am single, I had no problems re-work-life balance until a few years ago when I had to opt for teleworking in order to care for my elderly parents”, (Interview 10). Thankfully, in Malta, the option for family friendly policies is available in such situations, in line with Fegitz’s recommendations as reviewed previously. This ensures that older women continue to enjoy emancipation by working full-time while also taking on the responsibility of caregivers.

Being heard, being appreciated at work, by both higher authority and one’s team is another important source of personal fulfilment, as is building and leading the right team, with members who are cooperative and work towards the same goals. “Definitely seeing most of my colleagues as my family now, their support and willingness to help are really appreciated,” (Interview 9). When this is not the case, stress ensues.

Participants also mentioned seeing a project come to fruition, whether it is building a new library, becoming the leaders in Open Access in Malta, or introducing a new library information system incorporating a hundred public libraries. A sense of achievement, a proud moment, when all the hard work is rewarded: “When the project is final, is completed, obviously, that’s a satisfying moment”, (Interview 4).

The very nature of library work is satisfying to women: “to meet a lot of people from different backgrounds and being able to assist them makes my job worthwhile”, (Interview 9).

Being financially independent and autonomous, also factors of equality, are at the foundation of self-fulfilment. Having a professional attitude leads to respect by all.

It seems that librarianship in Malta is one of the foremost professions in which women have advanced, compared to other, male dominated occupations, where women may still be far behind. Women and mothers are perhaps not completely on equal footing as men culturally and in society either. More research on such topics is needed.

It is heartening to note that during these interviews the adjective “happy” was used by 90% of the participants to describe their frame of mind within their profession. Many reasons for this were given such as: “a rewarding job”, “library users give you satisfaction”, “having reached a top position in the library”, “how women are treated in the library sphere in Malta” and having worked “towards the advancement of women”.

60% consider themselves lucky to be in this profession where on the whole women are respected and where many library directors and higher management librarians in Malta are today female. Although this is positive, stating that one is “lucky” does have a connotation that other women are not. Are women in other, especially male-dominated professions, still a long way behind to reach the same level of respect that women librarians in this country enjoy today? The perception seems to be so, more research is needed to find out if this is indeed the case.

Theme 4 FEMINIST VALUES

List of feminist values mentioned by interviewees:

- Autonomy and power
- Fairness and Opportunities
- Collaboration
- Giving back to the community
- Diversity and inclusion
- Equality and equity irrespective of gender

Most participants do not believe in “feminist” values but rather in humanist ones. Women’s rights are of course human rights, not only because “women make up half of humanity”, (Interview 5) but also because they feel that we have advanced, we have equality, so we should not be fighting for women’s issues anymore, but rather for human ones.

This is parallel to Psychosocial feminism: it is not only sexism that leads to oppression of people, but all type of discrimination. The workforce, and indeed the library patrons, are not a homogenous group, and apart from gender differences, there are other demographics to consider: race, age, faith, sexual orientation, and ability. Feminism today must fight for the rights of all minorities, or indeed minoritized, groups: “We should be talking about human rights rather than women’s rights and human rights as being there for all humans. Females and males”, (Interview 7), as per the 3rd and 4th waves of feminism. Indeed the white male dominant or patriarchy oppresses both males and females.

Feminist values thus benefit everybody. “We are all humans and deserve to be respected and feel safe at the workplace”, (Interview 9). In the library, both staff and users benefit:

“No, definitely everybody. First of all, students are male and female, and I'm not going to empathise just with the girls and not with the boys”, (Interview 2).

The five feminist values devised by Rusaw (2005) as being valuable for feminist leadership were also mentioned by the interviewees.

As Rusaw suggests the aggressive, masculine style of management is not necessarily the best one. Still, a manager needs to have autonomy and power to get things done. These can only be attained through legislation, which in Malta is in place. It remains to be seen whether Maltese culture and employees are also so accommodating towards females in managerial posts.

The data gathered shows that autonomy and power are also connected to collaboration and teamwork: “I try not to come up with ideas just on my own... We (manager and the various departments reporting to her) develop the idea and then we present to higher management: in most cases so far these were accepted”, (Interview 7). This is pluralistic leadership, as opposed to autocratic, that Rusaw has explained, and true to 3rd wave feminism.

The position and autonomy that goes with it are given completely: “... both when it comes from our staff at the library and both from the [organisation] at large”, (Interview 4). Autonomy and power may be abused: “If leaders, be they men or women, abuse of these values, they are not likely to have any support by their staff”, (Interview 10). This comment is not unlike the study of power and privilege by D'Ignazio & Klein (2020) mentioned previously. Responsibility should be associated with power, as should fairness. “As a leader you need to care for your staff. If a person is hardworking and the opportunity for a promotion/scholarship comes up, the manager should work towards him or her getting it”, (Interview 1). A fair manager will lead a staff that is happy and engaged, meaning better library services as the employees will be enthusiastic on the job, going out of their way to help users.

Rusaw's value of “Commitment to care”, includes social responsibility towards people and the environment and a balance in social justice. This came out particularly in two interviews where, as library directors, “giving back to the community” was deemed as very important to them. “We are working towards becoming a community library which is like a dream come true for us... Opening to the community...”, (Interview 8). The library will be open to all upon registration, not just for students and academics. She also

mentioned how they could in turn learn from the community members, who would be invited to events or even organise lectures etc. The young learning from the old and vice-versa. Collaboration. The library going beyond the loan of resources to become a hub in the centre of the community, a meeting place where everyone is welcome. This interviewee also said, “I have a dream of having a small community library in my own place, my own birthplace, an open library so everybody can come, and then it's like charity?”, (Interview 8), since in her country of origin “we have a lack of libraries”.

The same ideas came from another interviewee: “in terms of trying to support the community, to bringing ideas, to open the library, workshops for externals, etc”, (Interview 3) is something she would like to put in place. This could also be a way of promoting inclusion: “Library needs to host events and become part of the institutional movement... the library can promote gender studies, databases, etc”, (Interview 3).

Inclusion must be promoted for library users and can be done in practical ways too: “We've tried to make the library accessible, there are all-gender toilets, so we do include different type of people and are empathic with students”, (Interview 7), also stating that the way the library is organized includes areas for groupwork and other quieter areas for students who prefer to study on their own. Inclusion means encouraging students who may have reading difficulties: “Come to the library. There are books that can help you”, (Interview 2). Yet another interviewee expressed the hope that inclusion should become an automatic common practice: “it should never be forced, but part of our day at work with colleagues and library users,” (Interview 6). “Diversity is very important. In fact, we do have, even though most of our staff is female, we have diverse staff, different age groups, foreigners from six or seven different countries”, (Interview 4).

Equality, and equity, have been stressed by the interviewees as all human beings being treated fairly and without discrimination of any sort. In Maltese libraries, there is equality of opportunity and no institutional bias.

Theme 5 LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

- Empathy
- Collaboration
- Respect

- Assertiveness
- Empowerment
- Adaptation and flexibility

As previously discussed, empathy, far from being a soft leadership skill, brings about the best business results. It is the most important leadership skill according to research and mentioned by all my interviewees. Empathy by higher authority in my opinion, goes a long way towards employees' well-being; being understood and supported in turn will ensure a happy and cooperative staff. "Emotional intelligence is also important, people aren't robots and sometimes they need that extra help", (Interview 9).

One interviewee highlights the difference of working under two types of management. Previous post, no empathy: "I was not happy there. I felt I was like working in a factory... Even if there are public holidays for example, you must see how you're going to cope... and my manager there was female" and, present post, following a trip abroad for husband's medical issues: "There was no one to replace me. But they were all the time telling me, "This is the least of your worries". So, my Head gave me full support and he was a male..." (Interview 2). There are two points to discuss here: first, a female manager was not emphatic, while a male manager was. Secondly, in time of personal difficulties, one does appreciate support from work, which in turn ensures the employee's loyalty to the company.

Perhaps a negative facet to empathy is when women expect a woman manager to "prefer them, to make exceptions towards them, you know... they think that since the manager is a woman like them, they would treat them differently", (Interview 6). Feminism is about equality, not women being preferred over men. Just as feminists have overthrown a patriarch, we do not need a matriarch in its stead.

Other feminist values mentioned earlier, such as collaboration and respect, were also mentioned as being leadership qualities. "Respect is 2-fold - the manager needs to respect employees and it has to be the other way around from the employees", (Interview 4). Interviewees believe that respect is earned: "a Manager should be a leader, I tend to lead by example, and it gained me respect from my colleagues", (Interview 9). Assertiveness may be needed in some situations: "You must gain respect. You are emphatic, you are thoughtful to others but then you need to assert your position", (Interview 6) and "I try to

be a good listener, to be empathic, but then, I show people like, “Listen, I do mean business””, (Interview 7).

Further to this, interviewees stressed that managers should know and appreciate staff talents and help them to develop them: empowerment, a leadership skill but also a liberal feminist value. Giving employees trust and encouragement is empowering them to advance and gain a sense of self-confidence and self-worth. Men and women may have different abilities but should be treated equally. When advancing to a managerial role, this is one of the more exciting parts of the job: “I can make a change. I can help people achieve their goals. And empower people to reach their goals”, (Interview 6).

Adaptation and flexibility were also deemed important leadership qualities: “Managing a library is not a one size fits all. I had to adapt to the existing staff’s culture and tried to slowly introduce change by clearly communicating the benefits clearly”, (Interview 9). Of course, a feminist librarian challenges the status quo.

Clearly, the most important leadership qualities for my interviewees are indeed those built on feminist values. Challenges are overcome through dialogue, good communication skills, empathy and earning respect both of higher authorities and juniors.

Theme 6 LIBRARY LEADERSHIP

Even though librarianship is considered a feminine profession, it is only recently that women are taking library leadership roles in Malta and abroad. Traditionally, most women moved up the hierarchy in the library through “drifting”, having gained skills and experience over time. Some get a higher degree in librarianship. Still, only the ambitious women reach top posts.

Once they get the post unfortunately some women, especially young ones, experienced co-workers not accepting them as leaders: “It was hard to bring people on board especially older men as they did not like having a female manager...” (Interview 9).

Men, but also women, found it hard to accept a female manager: “...some of my male colleagues... weren’t always very helpful and friendly to me. I don’t exclude the fact that it was because it was a woman who was ahead of them... And it wasn’t just males: female staff who would take orders gladly from a male, but not from another female because

unfortunately, sexism was part of our culture”, (Interview 5). These problems stem from the fact that, as we have seen according to Hildenbrand (2000), this “new woman” had to work within an organisation run by men who favour the status quo. Feminism challenges that. “As a manager, I make sure that no woman in our care gets abused or treated differently due to her sex” (Interview 9).

To the feminist leadership values of inclusion, empathy, and encouragement, one must add knowing your users and their needs, building a relationship, a connection with them. “I really love talking to the people in the library. So, what I do is I sit at the counter for one hour every day”, (Interview 8).

Based on users’ needs, outreach is implemented, and seminars/webinars, orientation visits and workshops for both students and parent organisation staff, help to bring users closer to the library. The library must be visible within the organisation, “Advocacy of the library is important to gain the respect of your institution. Because after all it's a two-way thing”, (Interview 2). Library managers need to be proactive and think outside the box to attract more patrons. Librarians should also be educators.

We have already investigated empathy as a leadership quality. This needs to also be extended to library users. “Empathising, understanding where the other person is coming from”, (Interview 2). When the same students keep forgetting to return books: “I never say, “Look, I'm not going to lend you books anymore”, I say no, that person is careless or problems at home and he gets up late or he's not followed and I will keep on allowing him to borrow books and chasing them to make sure that the books come back, because it's very, very important that they read”. Thus the librarian gives more importance to empathy, to making sure students read, then to getting books returned. Ours is, at the end of the day, a service profession.

The question regarding the idea of a female library manager network or sisterhood had mixed reactions. Some did like the idea of having a support system, others said it would only lead to further segregation between men and women, so a network yes, but not solely for women. One interviewee appreciates that the group of library managers she oversees are mostly women, so it is a sort of inhouse sisterhood which she values very much: “We are mostly women leaders in my entity. We always respected each other, kept communication open, learned from each other, and found each other in need of help. This could be described as sisterhood too”, (Interview 9).

Collaboration with other libraries is also something that library leaders in Malta look forward to. “I think our collaborations would be beneficial to hold discussions on what can be done better in our sectors. Even when it comes to work, like packages, licensing, or other tools that many different types of libraries in Malta may share. So far, collaboration has happened only with similar academic libraries to ours abroad”, (Interview 4). This is the “transformational leadership” type addressed by Phillips (2014), where organisational change is based on collaboration between libraries which is essential for improvement.

There is indeed an overlapping of feminist values and library values, which library managers are aware of and strive to implement in their libraries. Changes are easier to implement in some organisations than others and women managers are accepted better in those libraries that have a longer history of women in a leadership role.

It seems that in Malta, women library leaders are in Phase 4, the most inclusive, of Turock’s definition of library leadership (2001). They are leading in a feminist way, with collaboration and empathy, and have moved away from the autocratic male model of management.

Theme 7 DEALING WITH STRESS

In the 1970s women were obliged to leave their jobs upon marriage. This sexist law was a cause of stress - to be forced to leave a profession they loved and had trained for.

The single women who were left behind at the places of work, however, suffered another form of stress, although as we have seen earlier: “The fact that some women leave the workforce does not prove that the women who stay there will not do as good a job as any man”, (Williams, 2000, pg. 272). Still “there were also biases against women working because it was assumed, especially by men, that women were taking their jobs”, (Interview 5). This would be conducive to lack of cooperation by employees. Interviewee even said she had a moment of “crisis on the job” because of this. When she had to introduce computerisation in the library, for example, she was not respected by the technicians, who were not used to taking orders from “a soft-spoken woman”, nor supported by her library colleagues: “the male colleagues who were supposed to be supporting me had their own agendas”, (Interview 5).

One anecdote that she shared was that during one committee meeting where she was the only woman, she was asked to serve the by the chairman! ““Will you do your house wifely duties”, he said. I still remember those words... That was one of the most sexist instances in my career”, (Interview 5). This is the patriarchy, the domination of men over women, that 2nd wave feminism strove to fight against.

Sexism may bring about lack of autonomy, with employees not accepting the woman as manager. Self-fulfilment is lost. Females suffer from stress when work-life balance is disrupted, even when they are not mothers. Juggling motherhood, work and even training is stressful, although with proper time-management one may even come to enjoy it.

Harassment suffered by Maltese library leaders is not unheard of, especially when these are young women. “I've been criticised and accused of not having enough resources like I own the library or something!... I would fight with finance to get the money for the books, and I wasn't heard at all. So, faculty would come to me complaining I wasn't doing my job... They do not answer emails,” (Interview 3). An audit by a Higher Education board however, found that her work had been excellent: “they made like let's say, very fair and objective suggestions, but they didn't attack me in the first place. So, you know, I survived!”, (Interview 3).

“I was even experiencing problems with my male superior getting bullied”, (Interview 9). She was even sexually harassed and took the necessary disciplinary actions against her abuser. Fighting such serious issues is the objective of 4th wave Feminism: women are given a voice, they can speak up, they are empowered. Female dominant traits are seen as detrimental to men who may strive to defeat them, as Greer explains in *The female eunuch*. “I felt trapped” says Interviewee 9, “the way out” she found was applying and achieving the post of library director. She says no one should be subject to abuse or violence “due to their physical appearance and strength”. Her stubbornness and refusal to give up, earned her the highest post in her organisation where she can now make sure to protect other women or minority groups.

Another interviewee who was harassed in a previous post believes that “Knowledge is important, knowledge so that you can fight for your rights,” (Interview 3). “Knowledge is power, you need education about your situation, so you can stand up to the person who is not treating you well”, (Interview 8), who also believes dialogue with harasser can improve the situation. “Ah, for example, in my previous post, I had to fight for my leave...

I had to go to the authorities. I had to quote the law... you must know your rights and discuss”, (Interview 2).

Other causes of stress include the lack of recognition of librarianship as a profession. Nomenclature and job description should be well established for everyone to know the role of librarians within an organisation. Sometimes responsibility is given which is not commensurate with the salary, although when autonomy and respect are given fully, they may make up for it, still women should not accept such discrimination. Job openings, call for applications need to be frequent, as getting qualified with no option of advancing may also cause stress.

In my opinion, Bladdek (2019) could easily have been speaking about my participants here: “Tremendous professional gains that women academic librarians have made even as gender equality has remained elusive”. “Elusive” due to cultural and societal norms, perhaps? Still, with the right women at the top, gender equality will eventually be common to all libraries in Malta, with minimal stress to women over gender issues.

Theme 8 CULTURE ISSUES

Maltese culture

When embarking on this study, the first question to ponder upon was how many libraries in Malta are directed by women? What would their story be? Did they face challenges because of their gender, and how did they face up to such trials?

The laws are in place against discrimination on women. There are no salary gaps between men and women. Both genders are equally eligible for promotions, grants, scholarships, and family friendly policies. Still, it was intriguing to see whether the women in these positions were treated in the same way as men, by both male and female employees. The answers were diverse.

One of the first female deputy directors in such a library, did find difficulty and lack of support because in the 1980s, “sexism was part of our culture”, (Interview 5). People like her paved the way for the new generation of female managers to have a much better work experience. When asked about sexism at work, the deputy director in the same library today said: “I can say that women are treated as equally as men and our staff complement

is mainly made-up of women rather than men”, (Interview 4). The same sentiment was shared by other female managers in the same library.

On the other hand, those organizations which have mostly had males in senior management positions, present a tougher environment for recently appointed female directors, “Yes, sometimes I feel that men can get a bit intimidated by a female leader... They were even telling me to my face that they won’t work under a female manager”, (Interview 9). It was up to her determination and tenacity to break barriers and earn the trust of all her employees. Faced with this negative attitude, mainly from older men, she admits “My stubbornness I think helped me, as I wasn’t about to give up”, (Interview 9).

Remarkably, in the 1980s, negative attitudes towards a female boss did not only originate from men: “male colleagues who both actively and passively made obstacles, but you were also sometimes resented by female staff”, (Interview 5), “Perhaps, due to the ignorance and envy of some persons”, (Interview 10). The “glass ceiling” effect against women was unfortunately being upheld by other females. As we learn from feminist theory, men were not the problem, but patriarchy, sexism, and male domination were, and some women were reluctant to change the status quo.

Nevertheless, “the mentality - if you say a director, CEO, people automatically think you are referring to a man... but, it is also accepted nowadays, there is respect for a director being a female rather than a man”, (Interview 4).

Culture may also impact work-life balance, since at home, “there are some cultures which invariably they equally take responsibilities, but there are some cultures that do not take responsibilities equally,” (Interview 8). Furthermore, family friendly measures are still overall taken up by women, not men.

As Birkett and Forbes (2019) stated, policy change is not enough, culture and society need to change too. Family friendly measures are in place for men too but: “They don’t take them. ... we have a particular case with the wife having a better position than her husband so she can come to work, and he can stay home but they don’t do it,” (Interview 6). Thus, the reason for this is not financial but cultural.

Other cultures

Maltese society is more and more culturally diverse. So are library employees and users.

One such library manager coming from an EU country, says “It’s a culture shock for me”, (Interview 3), referring to Maltese culture (she cannot understand how abortion is still illegal, for example), and the subculture in her organisation (organisation higher management team come from countries where misogyny is accepted).

Users from such cultures too have difficulty accepting women librarians to speak to them with authority: “One of the [nationality] students. And this librarian, she told him off that “listen, there are the (COVID) rules, and you need to abide by them”. He didn’t accept it. She had to call the manager”, (Interview 6).

Feminism is all about inclusion, which in my opinion, should also mean that foreigners who come to our country need to learn respect for our laws, our libraries, and our women. A culture change is needed in society.

Theme 9 BEING A WOMAN

A feminist leadership means no individual is swept aside and ignored. Indeed some of my interviewees are aware that women in Malta, especially young women, might have a somewhat submissive nature. Thus, although they may have good ideas, they are reluctant to share them for fear of being thought too forward, for lack of self-worth: “Because they might feel like they are not up to it. Sometimes, especially the women. The girls here, they feel like... should I (speak up)?” (Interview 6). “One of the problems very often being a woman, is that we are submissive by nature... I do feel frustrated when I see certain women being ignored because they are silent or because they are perceived to be pushovers...”, (Interview 5).

The feminist leader gives such people a chance, empowers them: “When they take something on and you, you know, you push them... you give them a little push and they take off”, (Interview 6). “Even staff meetings where people can feel safe to express themselves. But again even negotiating, sometimes it's difficult even to face other people in the meeting. I mean we need a whole culture change actually,” (Interview 5).

Young women librarians may face a bad attitude by users. “When I was young and quite a junior member on the library staff, some older students resented being told to stop talking in the library... I was even insulted”, (Interview 5). We have seen a similar attitude by a certain ethnic group of students due to their culture of not respecting women in

authority. Not just users, but higher authority and management may treat young women badly: “It is because I'm a woman, because I'm young, and they consider I'm stupid, but it's a specific profile, [ethnic group]”, (Interview 3).

On the other end of the spectrum, are mature women, nearing retirement age. Feminism must fight ageism against women who still have a contribution to make: “Personally I never felt any frustration but always enjoyed inclusion and respect”, (Interview 10). It seems as if in Malta, respect to senior members of staff is present.

Two interviewees mentioned that women sometimes “shoot themselves in the foot”. One was referring to those women reluctant to further their studies after working hours: “You’ve got the chance of getting a qualification but you’re complaining... I think we have that mentality in Malta, that must change”, (Interview 2). We cannot expect to be chosen for managerial posts unless we have the right qualifications. The second interviewee, referred to the fact that sometimes women prefer working with men than with other women: “have you ever had a woman tell you I'd rather work with a man than with women? We are our own worst enemy sometimes. We want to be treated equally, but we treat each other differently”, (Interview 6) - sexism by women is a fact as we have also seen earlier. This difference in approach towards women may be positive or negative, by both men and other women.

Naturally, women have many positive characteristics such as taking initiative; learning on their own; being courageous; responsible; stubborn/strong in the face of challenges. These qualities truly make up the best leader not just manager. Having a vision and working towards it, no matter the challenges, is what library women of substance are made of: “So I am here to stay whatever they throw at me!” (Interview 9) - a sense of entitlement parallel to Reconstructive feminism, where women are no longer working in a man’s world, but believe they can do a good job on their own terms.

Theme 10 BEING A MOTHER

Today, the family friendly policies that feminists fought so long for are finally in place. These can take the form of childcare facilities at the place of work or policies such as teleworking and reduced hours.

Comparing mother librarians' experiences, one finds that not all had access to such policies. Furthermore, empathy for mothers in the 1990s was essentially non-existent: "So, there was no sense of this person has a family. This person has a child and my manager there was female", (Interview 2). Interviewee would eventually leave this post.

Today, although the policies are there, the senior nature of the work may not allow one to make use of them. When one interviewee landed a top managerial post, she says: "I was pregnant so you can imagine how challenging that was for me. I worked long hours and managed to work all my pregnancy days. A day before I gave birth, I was at [top government institution] at 9pm... I took the minimum of maternity leave and I still worked from home as I couldn't afford to lose control over the entity. A couple of male colleagues also used the status of being a mum against me as in their eyes I could not be a mum and a manager", (Interview 9) - another example of how women library leaders in Malta, are harassed at a time when they need support the most.

Happily, teleworking, and reduced hours, are today also available to older women taking on the role of caregivers to elderly relatives.

The policies help but one needs to also have the right skills: "I think time management is very important because you must balance a lot of tasks and projects going on. And juggling family and small children", (Interview 4). "I think if one is strong-willed s/he can conquer everything... what it takes is good time management. Today I am a mum of two beautiful children and managed to do quite a lot in libraries in ten years more than they (male directors) did in 40 years!" (Interview 10).

Unfortunately, policies are still being taken up by mothers much more than fathers. As per the UK study referred to earlier, the reasons could be financial, cultural, societal, and professional. In Malta, although the policies are there for both parents, it is generally the mother that falls on reduced hours or teleworking: "I'm working on reduced hours. Yes, I've been working on reduced hours since I had my second child", (Interview 4).

However, such policies, such "rights sometimes work against us", (Interview 6). This is because, if librarianship is mostly a female profession, and if mothers take up such policies more than fathers, there could be a situation: "I might not have the full complement of people, half the employees here are women and imagine one fourth of those are pregnant at the same time... And everybody's out on maternity leave or coming

in on reduced hours... (Interview 6). Do family friendly policies put a burden on the organisations?

Furthermore, in a service profession like librarianship, teleworking may not be possible for all employees: "I can do most of my work from home. The offices can perform most of the work from home. But then you're not being fair with other people who must be at their desks helping users, so for that fairness, there must be a policy that everyone must work from the office", (Interview 7). A very interesting point since both fairness and family friendly policies are feminist values, intended to help working women.

Another point that was raised is that in Malta there is no leave available for fertility treatment, for both married or single women, or those in same-sex relationships: "Also, type of contracts in Malta when you work... they're so restrictive to allow us to have maternity leave... like I want to do (fertility treatment), and I would like to be a Mum, so how I'm going to make it? I don't think I can make it in Malta. I'm a single person right now. I'm not thinking about getting married to be a mum, but it's a double effort", (Interview 3). This is discrimination. No woman should be denied the right to motherhood.

Benefits such as these go a long way for women to have job satisfaction. Discrimination against women who take up these policies is illegal and should not be tolerated. Still, there is a minority of women who feel that the policies should be extended to cover their needs as well. Not all women who become mothers are married or in a heterosexual relationship. This is indeed what the current movement of intersectional feminism means to address: equality for all members of the community not just for white, heterosexual women. As we have seen previously, gender is but one element of a person's make-up. A woman's (or man's) identity has many other layers that need also be considered such as sexual preference, race and colour, disability, and class.

Conclusion

Women librarians in Malta have achieved leadership roles. This has not been entirely without obstacles, but through perseverance, time management, speaking up and knowing one's rights, women are finally being recognised and accepted as capable library leaders with the right qualifications and skills to lead and empower their team, creating a professional climate, mindful of all employees' individual needs.

DISCUSSION

How does the Maltese situation compare to the situation abroad?

The main objective of this research has been to improve the understanding of what being a female library leader in Malta means. Some pre-conceived ideas were in fact, proven, others were not. What is true for their counterparts abroad may or may not correspond to the situation in Malta. In some respects, we are still lagging, in others we are way ahead. Ultimately, what unites all these women, is their love for the profession and, in a typical feminist manner, their vision to move forward and empower other employees to do so as well.

Remarkably, almost all the important libraries in Malta, are run by women. The number of female managers exceeded expectations. Academic libraries and public libraries have female CEOs, Directors, Deputy Directors and Managers, all leading teams made up of both men and women. Women have outnumbered men as directors and managers in libraries, a fact reminiscent of the ARL survey quoted by Bladek (2019): great strides have been made by women librarians in Malta too.

The matrix of domination does not therefore uphold the position of the dominant group (men) but has changed to embrace mainly women in leadership positions. D'Ignazio & Klein (2020)'s description of women as minoritized groups or Lombard (2018)'s statement that for leadership positions the male is favoured, does not hold true for Maltese libraries anymore. It is meritocracy, abilities, and qualifications, that gets you the post, and not your gender. Once women were given opportunities, they took them and attained leadership posts.

Another question that this research posed is whether women in managerial posts were accepted by the library employees and to what extent. What we have previously discussed as "institutional homosociality" (Nash & Moore, 2019), happens unfortunately. Some men, and even women, still prefer a male boss and do not like to work with females or have women in authority. This could be an antiquated mentality that men make better leaders, or perhaps some envy on the part of women who do not like to be subordinate to another women. Thankfully, this is not the case for each of the librarians I interviewed. Those librarians working within a more inclusive environment, believe their employees,

whether male and female, to be supportive of them, to the extent of being one cooperative and valuable team, practically a second family.

It needs to be said that women's experiences in Maltese libraries of thirty, forty years ago are not the same as today's, even within the same institutions. Institutions with a long tradition of women librarians in a leadership role have now arrived at a level of equality where male and female managers are treated in the same way by all employees, without any prejudice. Having a male or female director makes no difference at all. It is one's method of leadership that counts. The first women in such roles back then, faced the challenges, fought through, and made it much easier for women managers of today. Reconstructive feminism is seen here: the managers of today lead on their own terms, unlike their predecessors who had to emulate masculine managerial methods to be taken seriously.

Other library directors within institutions which have had, up to very recently, a traditionally male leadership, experience a more negative environment. They do not give up. As true feminists they contest gender discrimination within their libraries, by their actions if not by their words. They fight for their rights, they communicate with staff, they listen, and slowly start to gain the respect of everyone, even those who at first were reluctant to see them in their post. They challenge the status quo and bring a different, more personal, style of leadership.

These modern female library leaders must be called feminist in my opinion, since they appreciate feminist values, the most important of which being empathy. Furthermore, they empower their staff, they collaborate, they take decisions only after consulting and discussing with staff members. The pluralistic leadership of the 3rd wave feminism is precisely this. Feminist leadership is happening as described by Rusaw (2005) where good managers motivate staff to attain goals.

We have read how most women library leaders advance through "drifting", when they simply take the higher posts of retirees. In my opinion, the women forming part of this research were much more proactive than that. They all gave importance to higher qualifications, which, on top of their working day in the library and often, their role as mothers, was not at all easy to achieve. Still, they managed. Once the higher qualifications were obtained, it was time to aim for higher posts. Ambition, in varying degrees, is important. Certainly, it is useless being ambitious and preparing oneself academically if

the organisation makes it difficult for women to progress: in my opinion, both are important. In Malta, we cannot say women are underrepresented, as we have seen. This therefore means that our libraries have moved away from structures where only men can aspire to be directors.

“Knowledge is power”. All employees need to be aware of the organisation’s policies to make use of them, whether it is scholarships, family friendly measures, where to report harassment or seek help on other issues. Stress is part of life, yes, but feminist leaders seek to uplift every worker, whatever the background or situation s/he is facing. These managers are aware, and mindful of employees’ well-being. Work-life balance is possible where organisations have policies in place. We have seen how our library leaders do make use of teleworking or reduced hours, both when they had young children and when taking care of elderly parents.

What one must be careful about though, is the idea that women who make use of such policies are detrimental to the library. Since in general men do not take them up, we can easily fall into a discrimination against the women who do. I think management needs to prepare for situations where many staff members may be absent or working from home. For example, by introducing job sharing, as bell hooks suggested in 2000, libraries may ensure that family friendly benefits are taken fully by anyone who needs them, without any repercussions on the library. To be fair to all employees, I do not agree that such policies are taken away from everyone, but rather implement the right strategies. As Williams (2000) states, one cannot discriminate against all women just because some of them might leave work, in this case because of family commitments.

Feminist leadership dictates that individuals should not forget their uniqueness. Today, in Malta, diversity is everywhere: colleagues and directors may not necessarily be born here or might belong to a minority regarding ability, sexual orientation, race and so on. We have seen how our library managers are aware of the importance of inclusion. Inclusion, empathy, collaboration, and other feminist values will ensure the staff is happy and consequently, the library, and its services, will improve.

I do not agree that collaboration is really the “servant leadership style” as mentioned by Thomas, Trucks & Kouns (2019). Not only is cooperation important to my participants within their libraries but also with other libraries. Their goal is always to work with others for the good of the library.

The “glass ceiling” effect in Malta is slowly dissipating. If family friendly policies are taken up mostly by women, this should not, and does not in Malta, prevent women from attaining higher posts. The “unsatisfactory professional climate” mentioned by Hildenbrand (2000), has improved drastically in Malta, both nationally and within libraries.

Many of my interviewees said they felt “lucky” to be in this profession. I do not agree with the literature that “women were happy with their lot” despite the problems they faced at work. I believe that “lucky” for them meant they felt appreciated, they had achieved a good work-life balance, they felt proud of their achievements and worked in a pleasant environment overall. It is hoped that other minorities can also reach such fulfilment working in libraries.

From what I have heard through the interviews, library leaders in Malta value advocacy and sharing information with library users and staff. Feminism is shown through everyday practices that are the norm in the library, as well as other initiatives like displays and exhibitions, seminars and talks targeting both users and the larger community. Librarians as educators came up often in the conversation.

Although most of the librarians I interviewed had families, it does not seem to have affected their moving forward. This contradicts the literature saying that families make women lose out on career opportunities. This could be thanks to the structures in place to help mothers but also because in our culture, the extended family still helps and supports women who work.

Double binds have not been felt by my participants: assertiveness is needed at times, and this is not interpreted wrongly by employees, especially since feminist leaders value fairness in their treatment of others. When one has an open-door policy and engages in communication, awkward situations are diffused, and misunderstandings kept minimal. Lombard’s (2018) suggestion that leadership structures should move from hierarchical to horizontal may already be a reality in Malta and social capital, where men are favoured over women, has not been the case at all for my participants. Indeed, they felt that equality had been reached in their library structure - this challenges the literature stating that there is a cultural bias in favour of men. If an individual still rejects women managers, that is the problem of the individual. Of course, a feminist leader will try to bring everybody on board, by communicating and empathising as we have already seen. Lombard says that

hiring and promotion needs to be transparent, not subjective, not informal: in Maltese libraries, this has already been achieved.

It is said that a feminist type of leadership requires more time and is therefore inefficient. I disagree. Once the whole team feels included, has given feedback which was taken on board, feels empowered and engaged in proposals, then the team will work very hard to see projects to fruition. The time “wasted” by creating such a positive environment will reap good results, if not better, than a more traditional, autocratic style of management would.

The four phases described by Turock that female library leadership has passed through, is also true for Maltese libraries. Thankfully the posts given do allocate responsibility and authority in equal measures, unlike what sometimes happens abroad. Library directorship positions are not given to men with a managerial background and without library science qualifications. If women are “talked over” in meetings, they must be assertive enough to make themselves heard. When they do, respect is earned. As we have seen, sometimes Maltese young women tend to be pushovers. With the right support from management they can come out of their shell and give their valid contribution to the library.

I do believe that the Maltese library leaders I have interviewed create a dynamic environment, attracting dynamic employees. In turn, this will transform the library from the traditional entity to a modern, learning hub where all members of the community can gather and participate in events and activities conducive to gaining more knowledge and understanding. As the role of librarians moves with the times, so should library leadership. In my opinion, a manager with feminist values is the right woman, or man, for the job.

Summary

The situation in Malta is optimistic and encouraging. Most of the problems experienced abroad have been largely overcome. Women are accepted leaders, and feminist values an integral part of their leadership.

CONCLUSION

The Conclusion will include:

- Research questions and aims: to what extent have they been answered?
- Summary of and reflection on the research findings
- Study's main contributions
- Limitations
- Recommendations

Research questions and aims: to what extent have they been answered?

The central investigation to this research was: "To hear the voices of and describe the perspective of women library leaders in Malta". This aim was reached through interviews, where 10 female library managers working in Malta were given the opportunity to tell their stories. The analysis of the interviews has shed light on the working life of these managers, the positives, and the negatives, and presented their views on the progress of women in this profession: the "how?", "why?", or "why not?" asked in the Introduction.

Summary of and reflection on the research findings

The present situation for women library managers in Malta has improved greatly. Women are empowered and grasp opportunity by being adequately qualified and ambitious, and fighting for their rights when these are not easily available. Tenacity and "stubbornness", or a sense of not giving up in the face of adversity, were perceived. Apart from laws of gender equality and against discrimination, Maltese culture has also come a long way in accepting women as leaders. Where sexism is still present, it can be eradicated one step at a time, by slowly gaining the respect of all employees through discussion and understanding, leading to adaptation and flexibility.

The mentality of men, but also of some women, in Malta needs to change. All employees need to accept and support women managers. Women should take up opportunities of further education even if these are held after hours. Additionally, they should not allow

themselves to be ignored or sidelined but need to learn how to be assertive, rather than submissive. Feminist library leaders can help by empowering such employees.

The interviewees also give importance to other feminist, or humanist, values such as empathy, fairness, autonomy, and communication. These overlap library values after all. With power also comes responsibility for one's staff. The participants are concerned with the library's role to educate and give back to the community: social responsibility. Diversity and inclusion are not simply ideals, but awareness is spreading in our libraries, and work begun, to accept, include and help everyone whatever their background. This holds true for staff members and users.

Being a library manager does not mean one cannot have a family. Nor does having children or elderly parents mean one gives up one's managerial role. The library's family friendly policies are in place and are used. They may be teleworking or on reduced hours, but the work responsibilities of these library managers are far from diminished. Personal fulfilment is achieved through a good work-life balance and the satisfaction of a job well done. Not even pregnancy or childbirth can come in the way of duty to perform, especially when one holds such an important post of responsibility.

Ultimately, all the interviewees are aware that they form part of a service profession. Having reached the top ranks in the library does not mean that we forget the needs of our library users and employees. Through goodwill, a balance must be reached to give women their rights while still providing excellent library and information services to all patrons, whether students, academics, or the community at large.

Study's main contributions

The study has opened a window on a category of female professionals in Malta that have not been studied before. This research looks at what the career of library manager entails and will hopefully attract more women to take up such roles. Library values and feminism have much in common, a fact that all library leaders, whatever their gender, need to embrace.

Specifically the research highlights the progress that has been done in this profession. It also brings to light aspects that still need to be improved upon, mainly: to have a proper job description of librarians; to have a hierarchy, a scale of how one can progress further;

to have frequent calls for applications in conjunction with higher degrees available; to work towards the professional status of librarians.

Limitations

The number of interviews held may seem small, although for Malta it can be considered an appropriate measurement. Still there may be other library managers that were not interviewed, either because they declined the invitation to participate or because they were not contacted.

Furthermore, the present study does not “hear the voice” of all women librarians in Malta, but only those who have succeeded in attaining a managerial post. Perhaps, these women, who have not similarly reached a high post in their career, for whatever reason, have a different story to tell.

Today’s intersectional feminism would suggest one should not just study gender issues, but also the effects of sexual preference, race, disability, and class on library managers.

Recommendations

Other gender issues in Malta could be studied, following on from this dissertation.

Equality has been reached regarding female library managers in Malta. It would be interesting to study if this is also true for other female managers in other fields. What is the story of women working within other feminine professions or in male dominated professions?

Furthermore, does the unacknowledged barrier to advancement which library women faced up to recently, also affect other minority groups, in this profession or others?

The difference between female library managers working four or five decades ago, and today has been referred to in this report. A study on the history of libraries and librarians in Malta would surely delve deeper into the gender aspect too. Who were the first female librarians in Malta and what was their story?

Conclusion

A female librarian's journey takes her from first interest in the profession, to getting qualified and progressing in her career, to retirement. Along the journey, she may change status, want to have a baby, get pregnant and have a child or adopt. Or take on the role of caregiver to elderly relatives. She may work with people who support or harass her. She has ideas, enthusiasm, a vision for the library. She may be heard or ignored, but she never gives up. More than confrontation, she favours communication with her team, to introduce changes that she may deem important. She may need to juggle her dual role of library manager and caregiver. Looking back on her day, indeed on her lifetime career, she feels satisfaction for a job well done, for being much more than a librarian or manager or homemaker: she is a woman who has made a difference in the lives of many.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Sandra Gouder

MALIS

Women as Library Leaders

A) Context closed questions:

- 1) Education: Training and Library Qualifications
- 2) Present post: Type of library, rank/grade
- 3) Full time/part-time; Time at current institution
- 4) Previous professional library experience in Malta/abroad. Early career (0-6 years), mid-career (7-15 years) or late career (16+ years)? Are you the first female to hold this post in this library?

B) Open ended questions (used as prompts for free-flowing conversation)

- 1) What led you to become a librarian? Can you elaborate on your career progression which led to your development as library leader?
- 2) What skills and qualities do ideal leaders and managers possess, rate their value.
- 3) Challenges as a woman in this profession: does being a woman help or hinder your work? Elaborate on work/life balance, job satisfaction, stress at work, and personal fulfilment. Do you think they would be the same for a man?
- 4) What are your most cherished memories or greatest achievements in your library practice?
- 5) First impressions when starting out in the library profession vs. how you see your role today.
- 6) Does the staff (both male and female) treat you in a different way because of your gender?
- 7) Do library users, sellers, publishers etc. treat you differently because of your gender?

C) Feminist librarianship - how this helps in library practices.

- 1) Do you believe that women's rights are human rights? Why/why not?
- 2) Have you seen sexism in your library experience?
- 3) Do you agree that women could be sexist as well? Feminism has core values: do you agree that these are sometimes forgotten by women who reach top posts?
- 4) Autonomy and power: do women library leaders have support?
- 5) What feminist values do you consider to be also important librarianship values? (e.g. equity, inclusion, diversity, empowerment, fairness, empathy, respect, advocacy...) for both library staff and library users
- 6) Do you believe that feminist values do not just benefit women? How?
- 7) In our local Maltese culture, would you say that successful women are perceived as threats?
- 8) Do you feel frustration at the way women are treated in the library profession? If so, how can this be transformed into healthier energy? (Meetings, lectures, newsletters, projects...)
- 9) A network, or *sisterhood*, among female library managers in Malta: would you consider this? What would the outcome of such a union mean to future library women or those considering a leadership role?
- 10) Motherhood: Are there family friendly policies in place in your library? What experiences, difficulties and/or assistance have you observed or experienced for mother librarians.

Concluding words

- 1) What tips or advice would you have for a woman starting in this profession?
- 2) Is there any change or policy that you have made/intend to introduce, that would make it easier for women to aim higher?
- 3) Where do you see yourself in the future? (Aspirations within present library or beyond)

Thank you

APPENDIX 2

INFORMATION LETTER

Dear Madam,

My name is Sandra Gouder I am a student at the University of Malta, currently reading for a Masters in Library and Information Science. I am presently conducting a research study for my dissertation titled Women as Library Leaders; this is being supervised by Dr Marc Kosciejew, PhD. This letter is an invitation to participate in this study. Below you will find information about the study and about what your involvement would entail, should you decide to take part.

The aim of my study is to hear the voices of and describe the perspective of women library managers in Malta. It is hoped that this study will highlight the importance of feminist values in librarianship. A further objective is to encourage more women to take up such roles in this profession. Your participation in this study would help contribute to a better understanding of library women in our society, providing a further insight on the role of female library managers especially. Any data collected from this research will be used solely for purposes of this study.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to sit for a semi-structured interview. The questions will be sent to you ahead of the interview. The session should not take longer than 30-45 minutes. The interview can take place face to face or online through Zoom, whatever is more convenient for you. Time and place to be decided according to your availability. The questions will be merely a guide for our conversation as I am interested in each participant's story. The interview will be recorded and transcribed, with the transcript being sent to you when finalised.

Data collected will be treated confidentially and interviews coded to keep anonymity: e.g., Interview 1, 2 etc. Apart from the researcher, only the supervisor and examiners will have access to it, if the need arises. Once the study is completed and the dissertation submitted, all data collected will be erased within two years. Because of the sample's

small size of potential participants, there is a chance that some participants could be identified based on the identity of the relevant positions.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; in other words, you are free to accept or refuse to participate, without needing to give a reason. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for you. Should you choose to withdraw, any data collected from your interview will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.

If you choose to participate, please note that there are no direct benefits to you. Your participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.

Please note also that, as a participant, you have the right under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation to access, rectify and where applicable ask for the data concerning you to be erased. All data collected will be erased on completion of the study and within two years following publication of results.

A copy of this information sheet is being provided for you to keep and for future reference.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail or phone; you can also contact my supervisor over the phone: 23403746 (MAKS) or via email: marc.kosciejew@um.edu.mt

Sincerely,

Sandra Gouder

sandra.gouder.03@um.edu.mt

Dr Marc Kosciejew, Ph D

marc.kosciejew@um.edu.mt

Room 505 MAKS Building

APPENDIX 3

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I, the undersigned, give my consent to take part in the study conducted by Sandra Gouder. This consent form specifies the terms of my participation in this research study.

1. I have been given written and/or verbal information about the purpose of the study; I have had the opportunity to ask questions and any questions that I had were answered fully and to my satisfaction.
2. I also understand that I am free to accept to participate, or to refuse or stop participation at any time without giving any reason and without any penalty. Should I choose to participate, I may choose to decline to answer any questions asked. In the event that I choose to withdraw from the study, any data collected from me will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.
3. I understand that I have been invited to participate in semi-structured Interviews in which the researcher will ask questions and encourage conversation to explore and listen to the voices of and describe the perspective of women library managers in Malta. I am aware that the interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes, one session only. I understand that the interview is to be conducted in a place and at a time that is convenient for me, in person or online.
4. I understand that my participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.
5. I understand that there are no direct benefits to me from participating in this study. I also understand that this research may benefit others by providing a better understanding of women in our society, a further insight of the role of library women, encouraging others to take up managerial roles, and helping towards a greater perception of feminist values such as equality, fairness, empowerment and so on, particularly in a library setting.

6. I understand that, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, I have the right to access, rectify, and where applicable, ask for the data concerning me to be erased.
7. I understand that all data collected will be erased on completion of the study and within two years following publication of results.
8. I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and understand that I will also be given a copy of this consent form.

I have read and understood the above statements and agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Sandra Gouder

sandra.gouder.03@um.edu.mt

Dr Marc Kosciejew

marc.kosciejew@um.edu.mt

Room 505 MAKS Building

9. I am aware that, by marking the first-tick box below, I am giving my consent for this Interview to be audio recorded in the case of face-to face interview, or video recorded in the case of online interview, and converted to text as it has been recorded (transcribed).

MARK ONLY IF AND AS APPLICABLE

- I agree to this interview being audio recorded/video recorded.
- I do not agree to this interview being audio recorded/video recorded.

10. I am aware that extracts from my interview may be reproduced in these outputs, either in anonymous form, or using a pseudonym [a made-up name or code – e.g. respondent A].

11. I am aware that if Interview is held online; the researcher will use Zoom and will activate the *Require Encryption for 3rd party endpoints SIP/H-323* function. The researcher will video record the session.

12. I am aware that my data will be pseudonymised, i.e., my identity will not be noted on transcripts or notes from my interview, but instead, a code will be assigned. The codes that link my data to my identity will be stored securely and separately from the data, in an encrypted file on the researcher's password-protected computer, and only the researcher and academic supervisor and examiners will have access to this information. Any hard-copy materials will be placed in a locked cabinet/drawer. Any material that identifies me as a participant in this study will be stored securely for the duration of the study.

13. I am aware that my identity and personal information will not be revealed in any publications, reports or presentations arising from this research. Because of the sample's small size of potential participants, there is a chance that some participants could be identified based on the identity of the relevant positions.

APPENDIX 4

DMP: DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN

Research question: Women as Library leaders: To hear the voices of and describe the perspective of women library leaders in Malta.

Kind of data collection and methods used to collect it:

A maximum of 10 semi-structured interviews with library women in a managerial role. Video/audio recordings, approximately 30-45min long. Transcripts of the recordings will be made. The transcripts will then be analysed by mixed methods, mostly qualitative: phenomenology, narrative analysis, and transformative world view.

Anonymisation of the data is planned to protect the identity of the interviewees: each interview shall be assigned a number. Because of the sample's small size of potential participants, there is a chance that some participants could be identified based on the identity of the relevant positions.

A voice recorder shall be used for face-to-face interviews, while a recording of the Zoom meeting will be kept for online interviews.

Data management:

The student/researcher will be responsible for managing the data. Recordings and transcripts will be kept by the student until the end of the study. A backup for data storage will be kept as copies on external hard drive, in student's possession. The data will be stored up to 2 years following submission of the dissertation after which it will be erased.

Sharing the data:

The data will not be available for sharing. The analysis of the data will be available for perusal within the dissertation itself, kept at the University of Malta.

APPENDIX 5

OVERVIEWS

INTERVIEW 1

This interview was held face to face at the Librarian's place of work. A video recording was made.

Qualifications: Interviewee has 35 years of experience and has worked in Archives, Public libraries, and School libraries. Her qualifications are City and Guilds as well as a Diploma in Library and Information studies.

Career progression: She was officer-in-charge of [organisation] for 11 years and is at present full-time librarian in a post-secondary school.

Her love for librarianship began when as a little girl she was fascinated by the new books she would find in the public library which could not be found in bookshops. Also, a librarian friend working in Australia encouraged her to pursue this line of work.

Leadership qualities:

- trusting your staff, otherwise the entity cannot move forward.
- empowering your staff
- knowing your staff, everyone has talents which the manager needs to help develop.
- collaboration
- assertiveness one needs to be assertive in leadership positions. But not aggressive, never aggressive.

Personal fulfilment: Interviewee does not believe there is any difference being a male or female library manager. Today, many women work and have high posts. Personal fulfilment comes from your work being appreciated and your ideas are valued by others.

Cherished memory: The highest satisfaction would be to take on the project of a new library and seeing the work come to fruition when it is opened, and especially seeing it

used and enjoyed by users. This was when interviewee was officer-in-charge of [organisation].

Starting career vs now: Progressing in your career within the library sector in Malta is hard, not because of gender issues, but because the organisation is quite slow. Years pass before calls for applications are issued and so one is stuck in the same role. Today, it may be different since Malta Libraries is today an entity with more autonomy.

Unfortunately, this meant that the enthusiasm interviewee had when embarking on a career in librarianship, diminished somewhat during the years. It was disappointing to see managers who were only interested in what they could gain rather than improve the department.

They would not care about the well-being of the staff, since not being able to apply for promotions is quite frustrating.

Relationship with staff and outsiders: “I never had any problem with staff”. Whatever I needed them to do, they took on gladly. There was never a case of “she’s a woman” and so should not be giving us instructions. They loved their job. Women in a position of leadership may try to be more “bossy” and controlling, however, it depends on the person’s character.

“I was not a controlling type of manager and gave them the space to express their ideas”. A good idea was taken on wherever it came from. No problems with publishers or book sellers either.

Feminist librarianship: yes, women’s rights are human rights, because discrimination should never happen, everyone should be included.

Sexism: Never experienced sexism or discrimination. Direct superior was male, and he would help all the women heads of department which were many.

Women discriminating other women: Unfortunately, yes you might find women managers having a sexist attitude towards other women. However, it is more the character of the manager, rather than gender.

Feminist values and librarianship values: empowerment as already mentioned. Fairness is also important - that the manager is fair with her employees. If someone deserves a promotion or other positive feedback for his or her hard work, the manager needs to work

towards it. Of course, women should not be preferred just because of their gender, but on their qualifications and abilities: employees should be judged on both, qualifications only are not enough.

Feminist values are important for everyone, men, and women, and not just Staff but users too. Ultimately, if the Staff is happy, they will do their work well, enthusiastically, so the users will benefit. For example, if a student asks for help from Library staff members, there is a difference between just indicating where to find a book or going out of one's way to help and teach the student library skills that s/he would find useful next time.

A happy staff is automatically less stressed at work too. So, work-life balance is enhanced.

Equality, inclusivity should also be reflected in our collection.

Culture: Women in Malta are obtaining top managerial posts, so it is more and more accepted in our society. We even had two women presidents. Of course, there is always room for improvement, but we have come a long way.

Regarding misogynist comments on social media, these should be ignored. Keyboard critics looking for popularity should be ignored. In the library, we need to showcase women's successes and issues. For example, on Women's Day, an exhibition of successful women's biographies and on issues that are important to highlight.

A network of women librarians would be helpful to support one another.

Family friendly measures: "When I was Officer in charge at [organisation], I was always aware of staff having family issues and helped as much as I could. For example, one staff member whose wife was rushed to hospital to give birth, of course I had him go to her, without hesitation. This is empathy in practice".

What could be improved? Sometimes workers are transferred and any project they would have been working on will be shelved or back to square one.

Also, compared to other professions, librarians do not progress as much. Furthermore, librarians should be given professional status, and eliminate the perception that anyone can work in the library with no library training, something that does not happen within other professions. Conditions of work and salaries in the profession could be improved. Ideally the Diploma in LIS would open again as a part-time evening course. Job description and structure and scale made available, so beginners in this profession would

know the steps to progress and after a certain number of years of experience if one is good enough and always through an interview.

Advice to other women librarians: Library work is beautiful. Interviewee would encourage any teachers who want to become teacher-librarians.

Aspirations: Interviewee sees herself as remaining at [organisation]. There is always something new to prepare and look forward to within this library. The library is one of the most beautiful on the island.

The team of 7, 5 women and two men, are proactive, always thinking of ways to improve both outreach and library services.

INTERVIEW 2

This interview was held remotely via Zoom. A video recording was made.

Qualifications: Diploma at the University of Malta, done in order not to be transferred elsewhere within the Civil Service, as it was a coincidence that she was first posted as a clerk at the [institution] and loved it. Interviewee always wished to further her education but “because I am a woman and because I had a family, I did not want to go abroad”. The only courses available at the time were overseas, so a Diploma was the highest qualification one could get in Malta. Thanks to this qualification, interviewee did go up the ranks at the institution.

She read for her Bachelor’s when she was already a mother: stressful to juggle work, studying and motherhood but she really enjoyed the course. She decided to do her long assignment on school libraries, where she now worked, to learn more about what her new post could translate into. As a school librarian “you are wearing two hats: educator and librarian”. It is quite a vast subject as she tells her students, where she lectures on school librarianship part time.

Qualifications are important to give a certain status to the job, a status that, even though we are qualified, we lack in Malta.

With the Bachelor's degree under her belt, interviewee decided it was time for a Masters in Digital Records, which she read online with a university in Scotland. She is given a qualification allowance for it.

Career progression: Interviewee started her career in librarianship at the age of 18, around 40 years ago. Starting from the National Library of Malta, to a private company when she started a family, to her present role as a school librarian.

Her first manager who was male, encouraged her to continue her studies. Apart from him, she worked under two female managers. At no point did she have problems with one or the other because of their gender. In her role as research officer, she answered directly to the director, being second in command. She spearheaded the computerisation of the whole library department: Public and National, having gone abroad as chairman of the committee in charge of this project.

This meant she had a lot of responsibility, even if the salary was not commensurate! However, she enjoyed the autonomy and loved the work.

Motherhood: When interviewee had a child and wanted to reduce her hours of work, it was not an option at the time. Sadly, because of this, she had to leave the Civil Service, even though she believed she had a career there. Working full time hours was too much for her as a new mum, "I couldn't cope". Motherhood made her leave a job and career she loved.

She thus moved to a job, still within the information profession sphere, creating a database for researchers. She was rather unhappy, it was like working in a factory, one is sat at the desk and cannot get up until the work assigned to you is finished. There was no appreciation of "this person has a family".

Also, women should not miss out on the chance of getting a library qualification outside working hours, despite having family constraints. There should also be a job market for full time school librarians for those who obtain such qualifications.

Relationship with staff: In this new post her manager was female, qualified, but when the first Bachelor opened at UoM, she informed Interviewee that there was need to apply since she was already overqualified for the job. This had the opposite effect on the interviewee, who felt it pushed her to apply for the five-year degree course, which she

finished in 3 years since the Diploma she already had counted for the first two years. She also left the job and started at her present post of school librarian.

School librarians should be, as in Australia, qualified teachers who also have a degree in librarianship.

Status is also linked to the nomenclature that goes with your role: The job description. You can be a library assistant and progress higher where you need autonomy, whether male or female, since this is, at the end of the day, a managerial post.

The parent company with which she is employed, considers her post as on same level as teachers. Salary scales are the same. The Principal is a woman, very open minded and pushes all staff members to continued professional development. She supports any individual initiating to study and supports her lectureship at university, even acknowledging that she needs the time to research and prepare lectures.

Also, full support is given when a family medical situation occurs and time away from work is needed. Even though there is no one to replace the school librarian.

Today we have rights, we have come a long way as female employees. However, if these rights are not given, then “it’s up to you to fight for your rights”. It really depends on the individual more than gender.

Also, when the interviewee’s contract is renewed, every six years, it is up to her to change her job description and title, so she has been school librarian, library administrator and archivist and now is Library Administrator and Information Knowledge leader.

Over the years the library and librarian roles have evolved, and she feels she needs to move with the times. The school is moving towards “giving the students ownership to learn on their own”, through research, many of the subjects will be taught this way. “The library has to be the centre of this new method”. The library as the information hub and the person running it needs to be understood as having this role.

Leadership skills -

- Being proactive; One must “think outside the box” to promote reading; to continue library services during the pandemic.
- Earning respect.

- Adaptation: one cannot remain rigid, but must adapt to the situation, have empathy towards and know your users.
- Advocacy of the library - interviewee believes that she needs to push the library beyond book circulation. Education degrees need to have a module about school librarianship so they will know what to expect from their library. One cannot be a school librarian without any knowledge of pedagogy but also, teachers need to know about and use the school library. The library needs to be made visible, through social media, through participation in national Literacy activities etc.
- Knowledge of one's rights and fighting for them whether one is male or female. One must also not rely on the director's orders, but rather "know your rights and discuss".
- Knowledge of students, ones that score low marks on reading and encourage them to "keep it up and come to the library", other students may be dyslexic or have ADHD, the library must adapt to help these students. Students may also be high achievers. Librarian is involved.
- Empathising with such students and building a relationship with them is very important. Sometimes students do not return books, perhaps they are not followed at home or have problems, still books are loaned out as it is important to keep reading. Students who use the library as a refuge are referred to the Well Being team as it is not healthy for them to stay in the library alone every day.

Work-life balance - school hours, plus going in early or leaving late, hours are added to a time bank to be used later. Interviewee tries not to absent herself too much from school since there is no one to replace her.

Feminist values, they are also library values, benefit everybody. Students are both boys and girls. All skills mentioned in point 5 of C: equity, inclusion, diversity, empowerment etc.

Culturally, in Malta: yes, it may happen that seeing a woman in a top post is questioned. Interviewee has not encountered it or if she did, she stood up for her rights. In her previous role, she had to go to the authorities and quote the law to get her entitlement of leave.

School librarians in Maltese government schools should be full-time, not teacher-librarians. Since most librarians are predominantly women, it is a discrimination against women in a way, that there are no such posts for women who have a library degree.

Regarding an association, it would be ideal to push the profession forward, but not restricted to gender. Otherwise, it would be stating that this is a profession for women more than men. There is equality today, so the gender issue should not come into it.

The association should be for all librarians, not segregating school librarianship only. School libraries are just one aspect of the librarianship world.

Advice to other women: Interviewee would encourage anyone to go for librarianship as a career. Having worked in three different settings, she believes it is a multi-faceted profession that she loves. There are many different places that fall under the umbrella of information management. And specialised qualifications that nowadays need to be taken seriously. “It is only fair that if you expect to be at managerial level, you are as qualified as your peers”. Meritocracy is important in any workplace.

Future aspirations - at the age of 59 she hopes to remain where she is. There are plans to build a new library which she would like to be involved in. To turn it into a “learning Commons” environment.

“Always improving to give a better service always”.

INTERVIEW 3

This interview was held face to face at the Librarian’s place of work. An audio recording was made.

Qualifications: Interviewee has a PhD in software development and applications as well as a Masters in Psychological research.

When she got promoted to librarian, she asked for Library training since she now had increased responsibility. She asked for permission to reach out to International associations of librarians for help. She wanted to learn cataloguing processes. She follows forums on OCLC. It was an uphill struggle.

Finally, the change in management, who “really want to invest in the library”, agreed. She was now being encouraged to follow a Bachelor in Library Science and Computing. It did take a lot of learning and taking the bull by the horns to achieve respect in her role.

It is important that women obtain higher qualifications like Master's or PhDs. In turn, they should be allowed to "teach what they know". As librarians, sharing their knowledge with users is important.

Career: Librarianship was not her first choice of career. She was hired as a library technician during the pandemic when there was no librarian, so she took on the role. There was no development plan for the library, so she created one according to the [organisation]'s goals and objectives.

She coordinates the Library and acquisition of learning resources, having a double contract of Librarian and Academic Affairs officer. She is also the chief of the Library Commission.

She has no staff but is assisted by a student library technician.

She is employed fulltime including some lecturing duties. The Library is a very small one, more like a repository, developing gradually according to the number of students and programmes and adjusting to students' needs.

Interviewee has been at her present post for the past two years and a half. Her post was previously held by a female librarian and female library technician.

Support: A collection development plan was constructed, with the manager, together with a network of suppliers. She had to learn on her own, how the library worked and what other innovations could be introduced.

Regarding the technical aspects of the library, she asked for help from a very good online company based in the Netherlands which provide a huge customer support system.

There is still much that she would like to introduce, such as inter library loan, "a whole world we need to get into". For now, it is important to build up the library collection and create connections locally.

Does gender play a role in how she is perceived within the organisation? Unfortunately, yes in a negative way: "I was punished a lot. I wasn't heard." This was surprising considering she built up the library practically single handedly.

Furthermore, local media criticized her, accused the library of not having enough resources, as if the budget was her decision. She does acknowledge that this could be a criticism towards the parent organisation since it is quite a controversial institution.

Regarding budget, interviewee had to fight for it. She would ask management for money for books and was not heard at all. Then Faculty would complain that she wasn't doing her job. Plus, everything was blocked due to the pandemic. Her emails were ignored.

It was a difficult situation. She feels that being a woman, and being young, "they consider I'm stupid".

Recently they changed [director] and he is introducing gender policies, not just for the library but also for professors and female students and the transgender community. We do have gay and transgender in our community, so it is all about inclusion.

Outreach: to students and faculty takes the form of workshops (how to search information, avoid plagiarism etc) and orientation sessions. "We adjust to students' needs".

Culture issues: It is a specific type of profile that treat her this way: male professors, coming from a specific culture. This dismissive treatment affects her motivation and "it's just not cool". The [organisation] has policies in discrimination, but not policies that support women.

For the interviewee, who is not Maltese but from an EU country, there is a culture clash, both in the country and a subculture within the [organisation]. Not the new management, which is open-minded, but the community.

She has not really seen any change in the country since she has been here, despite the European laws that are in place.

Contracts in Malta are restrictive for women. Maternity leave is granted but what if a single, female librarian needs time off work to pursue medical interventions that would lead her to become a mother? Such rights are still lagging. And it is not just a problem in my organisation as it follows the Maltese standards in place in other similar institutions.

Gender should not be put into question anymore, but it happens. She was treated dismissively by the previous administration.

Women's rights are human rights. We should not be talking about this, but we still are. It is a matter of culture - abortion, for example, is still not allowed. We could have a database for this, have talks, invite external people to come in, transgender people who work for human rights in Malta, to come and discuss with us.

Discrimination: Salary also was unfair. Doing the work of a librarian and getting paid as a library technician. She had to accept lecturing to increase her wage slightly. There are ceilings in salaries.

There is discrimination policy in terms of human resources. There is data protection for students, a policy against abuse but there is nothing for women. The new [director] has now suggested to do a gender campaign. “If we had to do it, it would be just me and the student assistant doing it. But we need it, it is a step in the right direction. We could maybe reach out to the gender ministry”.

Some book sellers also gave the interviewee a hard time. Orders were delivered late, to the detriment of faculty and students. Could be due to the stigma against the [organisation] or simply because the voice on the phone was not of a male.

The status of librarians is not very much appreciated. Often needs to leave work very late at night, especially at the beginning of the semester for no extra pay. At the same time, it is a rewarding experience, very technical.

Librarianship values like inclusion etc the library could take part in events or host events. The library could provide access to databases on gender, sexuality, and culture. Or human trafficking, sexuality, feminism. The management would first need to invest in such databases.

Feminism today does not just include women but the multicultural and all types of sexuality, one cannot be binary. As a lecturer of [subject], she deals with gender and finds problems, again due to the culture of certain students, some of which even leave the lecture room if the discussion is on gender or transgender communities. We see everything under the functional perspective, the conflict theory, but we need to look at feminist theory and queer theory.

Never giving up: Two recent audits, one by the Malta Further Higher Education Authority and an institutional audit. They “never criticised my ability or capability to make it work”. They just made very fair and objective recommendations. “I survived!”

A network of women librarians would be welcomed as interviewee feels she would be supported. At the same time, she fears being criticized as she is not a formal librarian.

Aspirations for the future: Opening the library, “to support the community”. Workshops for external people not just students. There is none of this in place now.

Unfortunately, due to the way she was treated within the institution, Interviewee does not see herself as continuing in her present post in the future. It was a great experience overall, but she feels as things are now, she would not like to stay on. Many things would have to change. She would need to be given autonomy for example “to create policies and develop programs” within the library. That would be a future to look forward to.

INTERVIEW 4

This interview was held remotely via Zoom. A video recording was made.

Qualifications: Masters in Library and Information science, via distance learning and while in employment.

Career progression: It was not the interviewee’s first wish to work at the library. She was employed by the parent company and placed at the library. She has been working in this library since 2001.

She then wished to further her studies in the field to be able to progress further.

The organisation helped her to study by providing her with a scholarship. So, it did help her to progress in her career. The fact that she was a woman made no difference. The [organisation] issues scholarships on a yearly basis. Anyone can apply, there is a criterion and if one falls within the parameters of the criteria, one can get it, irrespective of one’s gender.

She has been Deputy Director for the past six years.

Autonomy: Interviewee believes that she does have autonomy in her post. Staff both at the library and in the parent company do listen to her ideas and respect her decisions. She has not experienced any negative attitude towards her being a woman and a manager.

The position and the autonomy that goes with it is given fully.

If one has the right to something one will attain it, if not, no, but there would be a justifiable reason why. Normally, collaboration as a team is encouraged as much as possible. Even the Director considers the managers’ input before taking decisions. The team debates, argues, but it is a collective effort and once the decision is taken, management supports it.

If the Director had to be a woman, there would not be any difference in autonomy or otherwise.

Staff complement male/female: The staff complement is mainly made up of women. The Director, the top position in the library is held by a man, however out of a team of five managers, three are women and two are men. There has never been a female Director so far. But Deputy Director prior to the interviewee was also female.

Relationship with employees: Very good relationship, possibly also because before occupying her present post, she was the colleague of her now-employees, so there was already a good relationship then.

Leadership skills:

- time management is one of the most important qualities to have as a manager. In this role, one needs to balance many tasks and projects going on, overlapping at the same time.
- communication a good listener but also delegate effectively.
- integrity
- empathy
- gratitude
- guidance

The level of importance may vary but all the above are important.

Work-life balance: Interviewee believes that as a woman, and a mother, she needs to balance motherhood and work. This is not easy to do when occupying a managerial post. However, in time one does learn the skills needed to balance both. Support from family members is crucial, in her case it is her mother who takes care of the children when they come home from school. Time management again is important here. You are juggling from one thing to another: work then kids, homework, extra-curricular activities, cooking and so on. You do learn to balance, at times it's tough at others it is smoother.

Having a family did not prevent her from applying for managerial posts, as she had the ambition to move up. After the birth of her first child, she still worked full time. It was when she had her second child that she started working reduced hours.

Still, many tasks are carried out from home, even if they are outside her working hours. Things that she needs to do can be done from home as everything is web-based. So, even though she is working reduced hours, no work is lacking, she keeps up with deadlines etc.

The organisation also gives employees, women, the possibility to work full time and carry out duties via telework. Interviewee preferred to work reduced hours, complementing them with work from home if the need arose rather than being bound to a rigid number of hours from home.

The fact that the organisation offers options and flexibility is a family friendly measure to be commended.

Cherished memories or satisfying moments: When a project is finally completed and implemented, that is a satisfying moment. Working towards Open Access, at the top of the agenda for all academic libraries, even on a national level, was something she learned through her career, not from her studies. It was a learning curve, participating in events, conferences and in European projects, until they became the leaders in the Open Access field. The library is constantly advocating in favour of Open Access and the results are very satisfying: from nothing to become leaders in this area locally.

Sexism in the library profession: Interviewee has never come across victims of sexism neither personally nor on other women. In her Library, women are treated as equally as men.

Relationship with booksellers and publishers: Never any discrimination. Library deals mostly with international companies since most of the books and journals are in electronic format.

Feminist librarianship: Women's rights are human rights. Women and girls are humans and are due the same fundamental rights such as education, the right to vote, and of course, to occupy senior management posts in different areas, most especially in librarianship.

Discrimination by women on women: This would depend on characters - a woman reaching a top post does not mean her character will change. Interviewee manages a complement of 60 members of staff, her approach will vary from one person to another, since she knows them very well, to reach her goals.

Feminist values within library practice: Diversity is one important value: the library staff is very diverse, and although the majority are female, there are different age groups, different nationalities (around 6 or 7 different nationalities). Empathy, fairness, respect which is two-fold: the manager needs to treat employees with respect and expect respect from them.

Advocacy is also important to communicate various elements with outsiders.

Users also need to be treated with respect, these come in contact mostly with our Circulation, Reference departments. Their needs and expectations need to be catered for. On the whole users do respect the staff, sometimes there are difficult users but very minimal occasions.

Everybody benefits from feminist values, the library, the users and even the [organisation] at large. Feminism today also includes people with different sexual orientation not just binary men and women and yes, at the [organisation] everybody is welcome and included. Whatever race, colour, nationality, or sexual orientation.

Maltese culture: The mentality is still in Malta that when one hears Director, CEO, a senior managerial position etc automatically one thinks it is a man. However, if it is a female, she will still be accepted and treated with respect.

A network of female library managers: An interesting idea which yes would be beneficial as there could be collaboration from different library sectors. This library is not the sole [organisation] library on the island. It could be a collaboration between MCAST, National library and other academic libraries. Perhaps all these libraries could share packages, licensing or some sort of tools that they could all collaborate on. “I think it is interesting and I would love to be part of a network if it is available”.

Tips and advice for other women: Librarians are keepers and disseminators of knowledge, having different roles and responsibilities. It is rewarding. It is dynamic. The library tries to involve its staff in all the different departments, so there is not the “boredom of repetitive tasks”. Staff may also replace, so will be performing duties that are not their normal daily duties. “They are trained of the various modes and operations of the library”. Plus, working with users gives you satisfaction.

Anything she would implement if she could: Interviewee would open up more posts, since it is a hierarchy with not much turnover, so possibilities for advancing may be limited or take very long.

Aspirations for the future: The only position she can aspire to within this organisation is Director of Library Services. She is happy and thinks her job was always rewarding. The problem to move to another organisation, is the limited possibilities in Malta. Abroad, there are many academic libraries and one can move from one to another, but here no. It's not like being an accountant, one can move from one firm to another, here there is that limitation as well.

INTERVIEW 5

This interview was held face to face. An audio recording was made.

Qualifications: Interviewee's first qualification was a Library Assistant Certificate obtained locally; a course conducted by Maltese professional librarians. She then did the ALA, an associateship of the Library Association, today CILIP, and became a Chartered Librarian. Following this was a British Technical Assistance Fellowship, administered by the British Council in London, where she lived for two years, the duration of the course, in the late 1970s. A decade later, she was sent to do a Masters in Librarianship in London. Both were supported by the [organisation], by scholarship, subject to signing a contract that she would return to work for the [organisation] upon completion of the course. At this point, she was already Deputy Librarian.

She was then asked by the institution to start lecturing and open a department for students of library studies. At this point, on her own motivation, she started thinking of doing a PhD. Encouragement and support came from the institution, her own supervisors and so she went for it.

Her immediate superior, the Librarian, was male but still encouraged her very much. They got on very well.

Career progression: Interviewee was the first female Deputy Director at this Library. She was followed by two males, who also became Deputy Directors, but she was the Senior Deputy Librarian. When asked whether she had to lean in to progress or whether she was

pushed to do so by staff, she answered that it was both: “you do have to have some ambition in order to get to places... But then of course you need, you need to have support from other people”.

She believes that she has been very “fortunate” throughout her career as people in the organisation from the Chief officer down, have always believed in her. They were all men and all supportive.

Leadership skills: An important quality is to have ambition and motivation to do the things you need to do.

Leadership can vary a lot. “You can have gentle leadership skills”, being assertive without being aggressive. You need to try and understand others, listen to others, you might not have the time to do so but it is very important. Empathy, the most important skill to have.

Work-life balance: Interviewee expressed the fact that her generation of women had to give up their job upon marriage. So, these women were already stressed because of this legal requirement to stop working. (Despite having studied to progress in their career and possibly enjoying the work that they did).

Then there were biases against working women because “it was assumed, especially by men, that women were taking their jobs”.

Looking back there were male colleagues who were not helpful or friendly towards interviewee, and she does not exclude the reason for this as being “because it was a woman who was ahead of them” in the organisation hierarchy.

Being a woman also has disadvantages even today. Since interviewee never married she was “spared” many of the problems that working mothers face even now.

The law has changed in favour of women working. Interviewee is happy to report that she was part of the change because she was appointed by government to the Commission for the Advancement of Women, in the late 80s. (Shows how respected she was by the highest institutions of Malta). And thus, she was worked within this committee to “change the position of women in society, in laws etc”.

Most cherished memories or satisfying moments: First peer reviewed article published. Each degree, each qualification is an achievement.

Also, having worked closely with the National Library, working on the National Bibliography, which eventually gave rise to the National Bibliographic Office.

Starting out in the profession vs today: Technology has changed work not just in libraries but in practically all workplaces. In the late 80s, the first computer in the Library, was just a personal computer, and “we debated where it should be placed”. We still “had to build that relationship to computers”. Then in 1996, we had Internet, which of course brought about more change. Now everybody thinks they are producers of information, on social media and so on. Even some Parliamentarians think that libraries are not needed since now we have Google. So, we need to market our profession well, that is one of our challenges today.

The “digital revolution”: whilst before certain information was only found in libraries, today it can be found online. Items from say, the British Library, can be downloaded now. I am sure all these big international libraries are facing drastic changes too.

Relationship with staff, users, outsiders: Books sellers, publishers were very helpful. But she did come across library users, especially when she was quite young, and a junior and new member of staff, who resented being told to stop talking in the Library for example. She remembers one instance where she was even insulted and ignored or silenced. Thankfully, this was not a general thing which happened. Most of the students got on extremely well with staff and she still meets some of them today saying those were the days.

Sexism: Some male colleagues did “either actively or passively, make obstacles”. It happened also that you were sometimes resented by female staff. It was not just males, but there were female staff who would “take orders gladly from a male, but not from another female, because unfortunately, sexism was part of our culture”.

On the other hand, sometimes being a woman in a top post does not help. One instance that interviewee recalls, is when as Deputy Director, she was given the task to liaise with Infrastructure, for computerisation of the Library. Infrastructure were all men, and “men who wouldn’t really listen to a soft-spoken woman”, urging them to finish by the deadline they had. It was a very difficult time for her. It led to her own “big crisis on the job”. The male colleagues who were supposed to be supporting her had their own agendas. Computing being quite a male dominated field “they could immediately communicate better with other males”. It was a time when she needed support and did not get it.

One instance that she remembers very well, is when, as Deputy Director, she went to a committee meeting for one of the sister libraries, representing the Director. She was the only woman there. When the tray with the tea came in, the Committee leader, asked her to do her “house wifely duties” and prepare the tea for everyone! “That was one of the most sexist instances in my career”. She answered politely that she was there in a “professional capacity”, but of course they could have a cup of tea.

Feminist librarianship: Women are half of humans so yes; women’s rights are human rights. Still, there are many countries in which being a woman brings many difficulties: “from being mutilated to being made invisible”. Perhaps women in these countries cannot even use libraries, maybe they are even illiterate. “Literacy may be restricted in many countries but definitely more so for women than for men”.

Interviewee hopes that core librarianship values are not forgotten by those women who do reach the top posts.

“Librarianship values are really human values which are also feminist ones”. They do not benefit just women. The fact that women have children and raise them, sometimes to the detriment of a career, benefits society in general. There would be no future society without that happening.

Maltese culture: Interviewee’s experience was a mix of both. She did have men supporting and appreciating her work, mainly older men who were either Directors themselves or running the [organisation]. They supported her for promotions, selected her for posts and perceived her to be a good person. The ones “above me usually supported me, the ones who are at par, a lot less”.

Glass ceiling: Perhaps in Malta, this is not felt as much in library posts. “I am happy to note that the National Librarian is a woman”.

Treatment of women in the library sphere: Interviewee does feel frustration when seeing woman being ignored because they are silent or perceived to be “pushovers”. Women tend to be submissive at times and thus receive such treatment, although it may work in our favour.

Staff meetings where people can feel safe to express themselves. Negotiating is difficult, some women find difficulty in facing other people in meetings, “we need a whole culture change really”.

A network of women librarians: would help, a sisterhood but depends on if there are enough women library managers to create one. It could be a good thing, but depending on the direction it takes, “it can be something that cuts you off”, instead of helping one to reach out, to branch out, so this is a question mark. ALA has all sorts of committees and causes, too many choices, difficult to choose which to attend during conferences. Although a sisterhood could maybe come up with good proposals too.

Family friendly measures: Even in the early days there used to be a kindergarten that kind of thing helps as it would be on the premises of the workplace. Reduced hours, all help.

Tips and advice to future women library managers: If one is attracted to the profession, then go for it. Today there are many sister professions like archives, information work and so one, which interviewee sees as congealing into one information profession as time passes.

Anything she would implement if could: The heads of department rotate today, irrelevant whether they are men or women. This is a policy which should be kept.

INTERVIEW 6

This interview was held face to face. An audio recording was made.

Qualifications: Interviewee has a Master’s level of education, with the main fields of study being Archives, Melitensia and Documentary Heritage.

Career progression: She has held the post of Manager in her Library for the past year. She has progressed from her initial Library Assistant post to her present post over 15 years of employment within her present Library. Her present post is of Manager 1. She has a staff complement of 11, males and females, and she herself answers to the Assistant Director and Director of the Library.

There were times when she was not considered for a promotion/call due to her not having enough work experience yet, never because she was a woman. The hierarchy at her place of work is quite rigid and one can only apply for a post after several years working in the company.

Leadership skills and qualities:

- Compassion and empathy, but also assertiveness: too much compassion may lead employees taking advantage, so it is important to be assertive when and if the need arises.
- Gratitude to your staff
- Appreciation by the manager, will motivate workers to give more and better.
- Encouragement and empowering staff: especially women sometimes need a little push to share their ideas. They do not feel up to the job or feel they shouldn't speak up for fear of being thought presumptuous. But when given support then they take off and do an excellent job. Encouragement does help them to grow in confidence and self-esteem. It is important that the manager is aware of this and does something about it. Maybe, being a woman, she sees herself in these young girls and thus, is willing to help them achieve their highest potential.

Discrimination: The parent company which the Library belongs to does not discriminate against women. On the contrary, they are pushed to apply for higher positions when calls are issued. The highest position at the Library, that of Director, has so far never been held by a woman. The Deputy director, is however, female.

Job satisfaction and personal fulfilment depend on the individual and not on gender.

Sexism at the workplace: the interviewee has never felt this to be present, not even in her previous posts always within information professions.

Sexism on women by women: She has seen women act against each other, more than men against women. She cannot really give a reason for this but believes it could be a matter of culture. She has often heard women say that they would rather work with men than an office full of women.

A woman may pass derogatory comments on another woman, it is not necessarily just men who pass such comments. She believes us women sometimes "shoot ourselves in the foot".

Did a woman manager need to prove she's "the boss" more than a man? Interviewee replied that it was the other way round: the female employees treat you differently because you have reached such a position: from bottom up not from manager to employees. They act sexist towards a woman in power because they expect her to prefer them since they

are women like her. That she should treat them differently, favourably, because she can understand more what they are going through.

Of course, this may put the manageress in an awkward position, since while she needs to be empathic, she cannot ever be seen to have favouritism with employees, whether they are women or men. The power she has needs to be exercised carefully.

Would men also expect a male manager to treat them favourably? Is it taken for granted that they do so? Camaraderie among men?

Most cherished memories or greatest achievement: the interviewee mentions that every project, exhibition that her team takes on with enthusiasm always brings her a sense of pride. They take on a project and make it their own. From project to project, the team grows professionally and seeing this happen is the best achievement.

Maltese culture: The fact that women need encouragement, perhaps shows that culturally, women in Malta keep back, do not express their ideas at the place of work, maybe thinking they are not up to scratch compared to their male counterpart, especially younger women.

Early career vs today: the interviewee's answer was clear: "Now I can make things happen". Before she would see things she would like to be done but she did not have a position of power.

This could very well mean that, as mentioned before with her employees today, she did not feel encouraged, empowered, confident enough to speak up and share her ideas. Maybe thinking she would be ignored anyway?

Interviewee confesses that it is "lonely at the top". Unfortunately, once a woman reaches the top, she feels that colleagues who were perhaps also friends, seem to move away. The fact that she can now make things happen and empower people to achieve their goals trumps the few negative, however.

Feminist librarianship

Women's rights are indeed human rights. Things have improved for women in general, women are autonomous, so we do not need to fight for our rights anymore.

Interviewee does not agree with gender quotas, for example. A woman should be holding a post because she deserves to be there, is qualified to be there, and has worked hard to

get promoted. There is a hierarchy and people, whether male or female, get the post because they deserve it.

Family friendly policies: these are in place and there is no problem to avail oneself of them. One can take 4 months paid maternity leave, then a year, two, three of unpaid paternity leave, there is no question that you are not allowed to take them.

It is mostly women who take up such policies. Sometimes employing women may thus bring a slight disadvantage when these have children. She stresses the point that in a team like hers where half the team members are female, imagine having half of these women pregnant at the same time. That would mean maternity leave or reduced hours for ¼ of the team, not having the full complement at work may cause problems or delays at achieving deadlines.

Interviewer asked whether men have the possibility of taking reduced hours when they have a child: the answer is, “Yes, but they do not take them!”

Once again, could this be cultural, as in a mother is always deemed the better parent to stay home with the baby? It happens that even though the wife had a better position and better salary, the husband did not take the parental leave available to stay with the child. It was the woman who did. Perhaps, despite all the advances we have made, women in Maltese culture who do not stop working when they have a child, are still frowned upon? Since the policies are in place after all, but few or no men take them up when they become parents.

Power and autonomy: do directors listen to her? Is the post given together with its share of autonomy and responsibility or is it just in name? Interviewee says her ideas are considered and accepted; however, this is something she has earned over time. They give you “the rope”, the opportunity, but then it is up to you to prove yourself and earn their respect. Furthermore, she feels that she must prove herself. It is as if it is something inbred in us women, maybe coming from our ancestors, that we always feel we need to prove ourselves: it is the culture of our country. Finally, we are seeing women in top positions, but it hasn't been the situation for very long historically.

Feminist values: the way to include these in our everyday work is to simply be ourselves, as such values should come naturally: equity, inclusion, diversity, it should never be forced but part of our day at work with colleagues and library users.

Feminist values benefit everyone but should not really be called feminist values but human values. For example, mutual respect, whatever gender.

Is a successful woman seen as a threat to men? Yes, but not just to men, also to women. That is why we need to be assertive, to gain everyone's respect. One is empathic, understanding, but also assertive.

Have you felt frustration at seeing the way some women, maybe not yourself, are treated on the job? Interviewee relates an episode when a female librarian told a student to observe COVID restrictions and wear a mask. The student did not appreciate being told off by a woman, and was very nasty towards her, so far that she had to bring in the manager to deal with him. It didn't end up nicely.

It needs to be said that in this instance, it could be a matter of culture since this student was a [nationality/religion] and perhaps was not used to women in position of power and telling him off.

Conversely, interviewee also said sometimes the foreigners are more respectful towards the librarians than the Maltese.

An association for women librarians not necessary, since one should get the job one deserves, not because she is a member of a group. Furthermore, it could accentuate the differences between men and women. There is no Council of Men, is there?!

Advice to women: "Follow your dreams". There may be stumbling blocks, but women need to overcome them, and they will succeed. We now have good family friendly policies and no more are needed.

What society needs to do, she adds, is to engrain in our daughters the assertiveness needed to succeed, even when and where most colleagues are male. Being a woman should not be a disadvantage, it should not stop us in any way, but we need to be assertive. Men tend to bulldoze their way around and zoom straight ahead to reach their goals. Women should also do so. They need to know what they want, what they want to achieve and not be afraid to work towards that goal.

Sometimes women tend to take the back seat and then complain. This should not be. Even in a meeting, do not be afraid to say, "I have listened to you, but I also have something to say. Please listen to me now". Once you gain their respect, colleagues, supervisors, and

employees, will stop, and listen, there is silence in the room and so you can make your point.

“This happens to me personally, if I am in doubt, I do not say anything, but if there is something that I can contribute to, I speak up and say it, and they listen. They listen because I do not speak just to hear my own voice! So, they know that when I speak it is because I have something important to contribute to the discussion, an idea that is good and should be reviewed and perhaps implemented”.

Aspirations for the future: she is happy to have come thus far and will probably still be in this position when she reaches retirement. She never imagined reaching such a high post in her career, although it was a wish she had when reading for her Master’s. I asked whether this was because she was a woman? But no, it is more the way calls are put out, sometimes it takes 14 years for a call to be issued and there are times when one feels s/he has reached a dead end.

INTERVIEW 7

This interview was held remotely via Zoom. A video recording was made.

Qualifications: Interviewee has a Diploma in Management and a Diploma in Librarianship, later reading for a Master’s Degree in librarianship. For her first post a library qualification was not necessary, but she was asked to follow at least a Diploma in Librarianship.

Career progression: Whilst in full-time employment, interviewee read for a part-time qualification where she used the library of the institution. She was pleasantly surprised as to how library services had improved since the days when she was a full-time student three years previously. She had never imagined being a librarian before but when she decided to change jobs, she looked at the vacancies offered at the time by the parent company, one of which was post of Library assistant in the institution’s library. When called for an interview upon her application, she remembers thinking “this is what I want to do”.

She was head of section with five employees, for several years within the same library. Present post is of Manager 1, which she has held for around one year. There are five

departments which report to her. The employees are a mix of men and women. The library employs 37 females and 29 males, and management is made up of Director (male), Deputy Director (female) and three managers out of which 2 are female. Library positions attract more females than males, so interviewee is happy to see males applying for such posts.

Support: Diploma in Library studies was a requirement upon appointment. However, management gave her time to finish the Diploma in Management that she was reading at the time. It was the male Director who encouraged and supported her. There was no discrimination, it made no difference that she was female, the management understood and supported her. This was also the case when interviewee showed interest in reading for a Masters, which she eventually got.

Leadership skills: A manager should

- lead by example,
- understand people (empathy),
- motivate them,
- treat employees as people, not as a simple cog in a machine!

One needs to be decisive, to confront employees whose output has decreased for example. One cannot let one's emotions get the better of one. But it is important to listen, to understand whether your employees are passing through a rough patch.

Employees might appeal to emotions of a female manager, more than a male manager. Then it depends on the manager's character how to deal with it. It is important to listen, to be empathetic, but then you need to show you mean business.

Work challenges as a woman: Being a woman does not help or hinder the work as such. "I very much believe that it depends on who you are, not what your gender is". How she deals with a situation will be different from the next person because of character more than gender.

Relationship with employees: There was one instance in which a male colleague mistreated interviewee: the problem was mostly that they were friends, and equals, before her promotion but now she was his manager, more than because she was female and the other person a male. It could have come from another female. This was one case, certainly not the norm.

Work-life balance: In general, it is still expected of a woman to do more at home. Especially mothers with young children needing to juggle between work and home. Interviewee is not a mother yet, so no dependants, but she believes work-life balance also depends on “the family dynamics”. If for instance the children are sick, the husband could also stay home and care for them, there should not be a difference between who does, mum or dad, just because of gender. “I think, there is room for improvement with work-life balance, both for men and for women”.

Friendly family policies do exist in the library and are better than other places where interviewee worked at before, still there is always room to improve. It is easier for managers’ office work to be done from home than the library assistants who work the service points. For the sake of fairness, a library value after all, policies have to be the same for everyone.

Regarding stress, again it depends on how one handles stress rather than one’s gender.

Interviewee has not experienced harassment at her place of work and agrees that perhaps in librarianship we are more aware of gender equality. This should also extend to include different sexual orientations, apart from equality between men and women, as we are not quite there yet. “We should stop talking about feminism and talk about humanism instead”.

Cherished memories, greatest achievement or satisfying moment: When moved to the [name of] Department, which she felt was more her line than manning a service point, and eventually becoming Head of section there. Also, finally putting together a team that she was happy to work with, was quite a satisfaction.

Relationship with booksellers and publishers, library users: There is no difference in the way librarians are treated by users, whether male or female since the users themselves are also male and female.

Again, booksellers are a mix of men and women, mutual respect at all times.

Acquisitions and inclusion: Books are bought according to academics’ requests, reading lists and according to the courses. This means that there is a section on feminism, gender studies, subcultures, since they form part of the courses taught at the institution.

Then and now: Interviewee has been employed by the library for 13 years. She has not seen many changes and believes there are still changes that should be done. There has

been the introduction of flexitime in the parent company, however it is not as easy to implement in the Library, since as a service point it should be open all day.

Feminist librarianship: More than women's rights we should be advocating human rights: for females and males.

Sexism: Interviewee has not encountered any such instances.

Discrimination by women on women: Interviewee and another female colleague were chosen for promotion over male applicants. The board was made up of males and females. The focus was on ability rather than on gender.

Autonomy: Interviewee's proposals were always accepted by higher management. However, the way she works is to first discuss the idea with the relevant head of department, as the library has a hierarchy. Once the idea is developed with input from the section concerned, then it is submitted to the Director and his deputy. In this way she puts into practice her ideal of listening to her employees. The result would be a team effort rather than an imposition from her as manager. So long as the idea was feasible there was no problem to have it accepted.

Feminist values within library practice: Inclusion, diversity: these are part of the library practice as the library has been made accessible to all. Bathrooms have been made all gender. The way the library is organised with sections for group work and others for students who prefer to study on their own without distractions. This is a way of being empathic with different students and their needs. Librarians at service points treat users with respect and are treated with respect.

"Feminist values are humanist values", so everyone benefits not just women. We speak of feminist values because it is taken for granted that it is easier for men than for women. We should work towards a culture where we do not really need them since equality would be reached. There is inclusion, we do not need to stop and think about it.

Maltese culture: Yes, there are still cases where women in charge are not taken seriously. Maybe not within the library profession but in other male oriented jobs such as female architects dealing with male builders. We are lucky that women managers are respected in the library sphere in Malta, "we are treated well".

A network of female library managers: Interviewee believes that there is no cause for such a sisterhood, since in Maltese libraries, there are many females who have obtained

managerial posts, even CEO. Such a network would benefit more a minority needing to fight for rights within the society at large. It is not the case for our profession. We should indeed showcase our profession as an example of female managers doing great work.

Tips and advice for other women: Interviewee does encourage other women to become librarians and seek managerial posts.

Anything she would implement if she could: Teleworking! Keeping in mind that ours is a service profession and fairness with all employees, if we could make it work, it is something to introduce.

Aspirations for the future: No desire to move to another library, she would like to remain in this library and see it taking new directions, collaborate with similar foreign institutions. The drawback in Malta is that there are hardly any similar institutions locally to collaborate with.

“Collaboration will improve the library services we could offer”.

INTERVIEW 8

This interview was held face to face. An audio recording was made.

Qualifications: Her first qualification is a degree in Mathematics, followed by a Library and Information Science degree. Also, a postgraduate Diploma in Library Science and another in Higher Education. A Diploma in Computer Science.

Interviewee believes in always learning something new, even if you do not have a certificate to show for it. Online education, within the institution itself or even listening to podcasts.

After finishing her degree in Mathematics, she decided to take up a Library Science course, in spite of everyone wanting her to be an engineer not a librarian! As a course it was less costly, so it meant that she did not need to depend so much on her parents, another reason for choosing it: independence.

Career progression: Interviewee has been a library professional for 31 years. She started to frequent the library while reading for her first degree. She would use it daily, even helping fellow students. The Librarian noticed this and became her mentor, introducing

her to other aspects of library work, beyond the issuing and returning of books. She was fascinated by the Classification of the whole world of knowledge into 10 categories: “That was my first ‘wow’ moment!”

She believes that it was 50/50, her own motivation plus encouragement from others. Everyone should have “a pushing force inside to motivate ourselves” otherwise we become static. However, if there is somebody to motivate or mentor us, this helps also.

Changing from a private company to a public one of her present post was not easy as she was not sure what to expect. The colleagues at her previous post encouraged her to try and motivated her to make the decision to move. “I’m here because of many people”.

However, once she is a public official, she is determined to help the community, even if at first, she did not know how she was going to do that.

Leadership skills: Organisational skills are the regular qualities needed, not just for managers but for any grade of the library profession.

- Communication skills, an open mentality to discuss with others, to accept that they may have more brilliant ideas than what you think.
- Teamwork
- Problem solving skills.
- Customer service for librarians is a very important skill. If library users are not happy, if librarians cannot help them, they will not come back. Libraries are changing today, they need to live up to users’ expectations. Librarians need to have a service mentality to help, to learn, to not remain static.
- Willing to learn librarians need to be willing to learn new systems as library service changes.
- Adaptability: Chat gpt, AI, will bring about another revolution, so we cannot say we do not want to change, change in libraires will be inevitable. We need to adapt.

Staff complement male/female: There are 8 members of staff, four male and four female. This is purely coincidental as Interviewee believes in employing people according to ability and not gender. If we lack male staff members, we will still employ a female if she is better suited.

She has never found problems as a women. Women represent the majority of library professionals, so that makes it easier for women to be leaders. Although, in top managerial posts one mostly finds men, even that is changing today.

The advantage we have as women managers, “we understand people a bit more, we are more empathic”, than male counterparts. The disadvantage is work life balance.

Work-life balance: A woman in a managerial role will not have more time for family, especially with young children, whatever profession one is in.

It also depends on different cultures: in some cultures, family responsibilities are shared equally between the parents, in others they are not. Balancing work and family do also bring stress upon a woman manager, depending on the situation. Still, one needs to know how to deal with stress since it is part of life.

“Don’t take the family stress to the workplace or work stress to the family”. Prioritise, balance, flexibility. Unless something from work is urgent, do not bring it home.

Cherished memories or satisfying moments: Greatest achievement is her current position of which she is proud. Being library director within the second biggest government institution in Malta. The exposure she is getting within the community around Malta is amazing. 30 years ago, when she embarked on this profession, she never dreamt of coming to Malta and being in such a post, although it was always her ambition to run a Library, to have a high position in a library.

Sometimes interviewee feels that not much has been done, that she does not know much. But she always gives her full potential to the organisation. Small steps that have been done, and positive feedback received from staff and students, so that is a satisfying moment.

New databases, a new quicker log-in process, dealing with customers’ emails within one hour, so quickly and efficiently. Reducing the time limit of ordering books from six to three months. We cannot do big wonders at once, but little steps at a time. Interviewee speaks very enthusiastically and passionately about these milestones that her direction has achieved for the library.

She would also like to lengthen the opening hours of the library but lack of human resources, lack of funding makes it a challenge. Organisation budget prioritises lecturers and teaching before the library resources.

Sexism in the library profession: She has never experienced it. She is given autonomy in the sense when her ideas are presented to improve the library, the organisation community, with solutions to problems etc then she is listened to and supported. She has never been ignored or not listened to because of being a woman.

Family friendly measures: Library have special childcare rooms for staff and students to bring their children to work when they do not have school for example. It would be good to provide this service to the community as well.

Relationship with superiors, colleagues, booksellers and publishers: The first three years her direct superior was the (male) Deputy Principal of Applied Research and Innovation Centre. Since last year it is a female Deputy Principal. The initial period is always a struggle to understand how they work. But once we can adapt to them and they understand and trust us, we can work with anyone. Comparing the two, of course they all have different types of abilities, behaviour and so on but we cannot say one is better than the other simple because of their gender.

Users and outsiders: no difference in the way they treat her because of her gender.

Feminist librarianship: “I do not like to be called feminist”, as she believes men and women are made for different purposes, have their own strengths and weaknesses, but not equal. At work, they should of course be paid equally but other than that no.

If a women is treated badly or inferiorly, that is the problem of the other person, it's his character.

It should start from the family to teach awareness that society needs to work together, to eventually change the culture of society.

Discrimination by women on women: Depends on the character of the woman who becomes the higher official.

Feminist values within library practice: Interviewee has the idea of “giving back to the community”, very close to her heart. She is pursuing the project of opening the library to the community. As an academic library, in the afternoons and summer the library is almost empty. By opening this beautiful new library, it is being used. The community came up with this idea, as people living around the library attend library events and did comment on wanting to become library users. Interviewee has taken this notion on board. In turn,

the community made up of educators, doctors etc can give a lot to the library, can teach the library. “The young generation can learn from the old generation”, mutual respect.

Being a director means less close contact with users. But an effort needs to be made to listen to problems, if you are not emphatic “you are not successful as a librarian”. Thus, interviewee makes it a point to sit at the counter for one hour every day, since “I really love talking to the people in the library”. Or talk to people over the phone. This gives one a feel of what’s happening first hand, rather than through your staff.

Awareness of how to treat women should start within families, to treat a son or daughter in the same way. Uplift the boys as they are growing up too - a feminist value - rather than be unkind to him to toughen him up. This can be done by parents, teachers, and librarians too. Whoever is feeling inferior within the community should be supported, be it a girl or a boy. In this way society will improve as society is made up of families.

Education will lead to awareness: if one is not treated well, one should stand up for oneself. Talk to the person who is not treating you well, explain: communication is key once again.

Know your rights: knowledge is power. Within the workplace, your superiors will know who is right, when the badly treated employee knows their rights and speaks up.

Maltese culture: Interviewee has never experienced any discrimination as a woman working in Malta.

A network of female library managers: Agree with this since it is difficult to find library qualified people, so such a network could recommend people. Discuss common library problems to come to solutions together. The salaries of librarians could be discussed to attract more people to the profession. And the perception that “anybody can run a library” eliminated. So this are some of the problems faced in this profession.

Tips and advice for other women: If you are passionate enough for this work, service minded, should consider this profession. Not for the salary. But to help others. It is so much more than sitting at the circulation desk.

Anything she would implement if she could: Give more importance to libraries, more importance to lifelong learning. Make younger and older generations aware of how important education and knowledge are. Knowledge, information is our profession after all.

Aspirations for the future: Wherever the future takes her it will be in a library. A library where everyone is welcome, knowing they can get help whether related to studies or other questions they may have about the locality, events. Even if people call for a phone number, we should help them out.

The academic library becoming more of a community library, with events where people can get to know each other, different personalities working together and helping the library in return.

Interviewee expressed the wish to open a small, community library in her birthplace, her native country where everybody can use the library, a charity. Giving back:

“we owe so many people for our life itself”.

INTERVIEW 9

This interview was done via email.

Qualifications: Interviewee holds a Diploma in Library and Information studies, a Bachelor’s degree in Librarianship and an MSc in Library Management and Information Science.

Career progression: Library Assistant (2002), then Assistant Librarian at [government department], Deputy Librarian, Director (2015 to date), being the first female and youngest to ever hold this post in Malta.

Interviewee left the course she was following at University due to a personal reason. She found a job in a government department and was placed in the library. She took the initiative to organise it and provide “a specialised current awareness service to the staff”.

Leadership skills: “I believe that a Manager should be a leader” - leading by example gains one respect from colleagues.

- Respect - everyone is worthy of respect.
- Open-door policy - listening is another skill and ensuring confidentiality where needed.
- Assertiveness - stubbornness is important sometimes, especially with superiors to show strength of character.

- Good communication skills - to lobby and communicate change to which employees may need convincing.
- Seeing strengths in people - working with them to find their potential.
- Emotional intelligence - people are not robots, sometimes they need that extra word of encouragement.

Challenges in this profession/Work-life balance: Being a woman came with challenges. “In the beginning, it was hard to bring people on board especially older men as they did not like having a female manager”. They would even say they would not work under a female manager. She also had problems with her male superior, as far as bullying. Her stubbornness helped her to not give up. She slowly gained her colleagues’ trust and started to compile a plan for the library that at the time seemed like a dream. However, she had no autonomy, so the best way out was to apply for the topmost post which she got. This happened at the time she learnt she was pregnant, so the challenge of her new post was even greater. She worked every day up until the eve of the birth when she was working till 9pm.

Maternity leave to a minimum and working from home as “I couldn’t afford to lose control over the entity”. A couple of male colleagues used her motherhood against her as they did not believe she could be a mother and a manager. Good time management and being strong willed is what it took to conquer everything. A young mother with two children, she “did quite a lot in libraries in 10 years, more than they did in 40!”

Most cherished memories or satisfying moments: Most of the colleagues she now sees as her family, their support and willingness to help much appreciated.

Others are the implementation of a library information system incorporating many libraries; rebranding of [organisation]; e-books through apps or online, also in Maltese. Updating of services for visually impaired and elderly; having books on the shelves in a short period of time; renovation of library buildings.

Relationship with staff: At her first post, her motivation and hard work was appreciated, with superiors giving her more responsibilities such as desk-top publishing and editing of all the Department’s publications. She was also encouraged to read for a Diploma in LIS. Her then manager predicted that she would reach the top post in librarianship.

Moving on to the post of Deputy librarian, it was extremely challenging due to backlog in work, lack of resources and overall lethargy of the library staff. Giving up was not an option and through training, communicating, and bringing her staff on board, they eventually trusted her. Three years later, she landed the post of Director and never looked back.

Does staff/outsideers treat you differently because of your gender? Sexism in the library profession: Many difficulties encountered as a female manager - even sexual harassment. She had to take a stand that she means business taking the necessary disciplinary action.

On the other hand, unintentionally some people treat her better or she managed to lobby for more because she was a woman.

Outsiders have not treated her any different.

In her role as manager, she makes sure that no woman is abused or treated differently due to gender.

Starting out in the profession vs today: “Managing a library is not a one size fits all”. At first, she had to adapt to staff culture to slowly introduce change through communication. Working within a government entity means one must lobby with the ministry.

The library has become an information hub, a community centre not just a store of books. The librarian is “an information mentor” helping patrons become independent researchers.

Librarians are still not recognised as professionals - we need to work towards this.

Feminist librarianship: Women’s rights are human rights: women are still not free to live life safely as men and not be “subject to abuse, violence, unequal treatment due to their physical appearance and strength”. Women are still lagging behind men in the workplace and in society.

Discrimination by women on women: Women can be sexist as well yes. Important to see staff as persons not focus on their sex or sexual orientation.

Feminist values within library practice: All feminist values are important in librarianship and should be towards everyone, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, age, nationality, race etc.

We are all human and deserve to be respected and “feel safe at the workplace”, everyone will benefit from these values.

Maltese culture, autonomy and power: Yes, sometimes women are perceived as threats, men can get intimidated by a female leader. We are lucky to have a female Permanent Secretary that offers support and understands us.

A network /sisterhood of female library managers: We have achieved a lot together and she feels happy about that and how women are treated. In her entity, there are mostly female leaders who have always respected each other, communicated, learnt from each other and found help in each other. This could be described as a sisterhood too.

Family-friendly measures: Flexibility and remote working, although more challenging for managers to make use of such measures because of the nature of the work.

Tips and advice for other women: To go for it as it is a fulfilling job. One meets a lot of people from different backgrounds and “being able to assist them makes my job worthwhile”.

Anything she would implement if she could: She treats everybody the same, no gender biases, support to all whatever their gender, so does not see the need for policies to help women aim higher.

Aspirations for the future:

To see the entity as a main consultative entity on libraries; to fully renovate the main library and include a book café. Once this is in place she can move on to a smaller library or retire completely.

“Today, I see myself more as a coordinator of business processes”.

INTERVIEW 10

This interview was done via email.

Qualifications

Participant is a qualified archivist with a foreign qualification. She was granted a scholarship to train abroad.

Career progression

Following encouragement by colleagues, she applied for her present post and was selected. After a satisfying career of 35 years, she will be retiring next year.

Leadership skills

One must be competent without being presumptuous and take wise decisions, always with a hands-on approach in dealing with issues that may arise. One also needs to know one's staff well, their individual qualities and weaknesses. Always ready to listen. She lists the following skills in order of importance: competence, humility, wisdom, kindness, and prudence.

A professional attitude and good working relationship with superiors and colleagues is what ensures that one is respected at work, regardless of one's gender. She has never experienced discriminatory treatment by colleagues or users, nor publishers, booksellers etc. Never observed sexism.

Work-life balance

Participant is not a mother but teleworks two days a week to take care of ageing family members. Her work was never a cause of stress and gave her fulfilment. The fact that she has the esteem of her colleagues and that she has helped countless researchers over the year is of great satisfaction.

Regarding mother librarians, many now run the library sphere she forms part of, so flexibility is one outstanding value.

Change over the years.

When embarking on her career she never had any ambitions to reach high posts. Her aim was always simply to provide the best service to the library's clients and help them in their research.

Feminist values

She does not understand how human rights and women's rights can be separate - as though women are not human! Autonomy and power may be abused by managers, whether male or female, and in such cases, staff may likely not support them.

Feminist values are important but apply to men too. She believes in personal competence and empathy with staff more than feminism.

Maltese culture

If women managers are perceived as threats, it is due to the ignorance and envy of people. Personally, she has always enjoyed inclusion and respect at work and knows of no female librarian who was treated badly.

Association

She does not believe it is needed. Each library manager should rely of his or her personal competence. Also, since the 1990s, she has observed that libraries are well dominated by women, so there is not much conflict with men.

Advice to other women

It is important to work hard, but humbly, at professional development. Listen to superiors and colleagues with respect and empathise with them. There are no policies that hinder women from aiming high within the entity.

“My only aim has been to assist our clients in their research”.