STARS

Faculty Scholarship and Creative Works

Tracing the history of discourses on professionalism in the "sister professions" of librarianship and social work in the United States

Rachel E. Trnka
University of Central Florida, rachel.trnka@ucf.edu

Original Citation

Showcase of Text, Archives, Research & Scholarship

Tracing the History of Discourses on Professionalism in the 'Sister Professions' of Librarianship and Social Work

Abstract

In *Whole Person Librarianship: A Social Work Approach to Patron Services*, Zettervall and Nienow (2019) aptly refer to librarianship and social work as 'sister professions,' highlighting their gendered histories and similar professional values. Both librarianship and social work emerged as service-oriented, female-dominated professions in the late nineteenth century. Questions about professional identity have concerned librarians and social workers since those early days, with scholars and practitioners in both fields examining markers of professionalism, such as training, associations, and values. This article compares the historical development of professional social work and librarianship by tracing the changing discourses on professionalism, attending to the role gendered language plays in debates about professional status. The analysis focuses on the works of early pioneers in American social work and librarianship and the public debates about professionalization in the early 1900s to provide context for collaborations between librarians and social workers and look towards the future.

Keywords: history of librarianship; social work history; professionalism; discourse; gender

Introduction

A review of recent publications in library and information science (LIS) journals

demonstrates strong connections between contemporary librarians and social workers.

Practitioners and scholars argue that public and academic libraries should employ more social

workers and social work students while also praising efforts to train librarians and library staff in

social work practices, like trauma-informed care and cultural humility.[1] LIS scholars often trace

the beginning of formal collaborations between librarians and social workers to 2009 when the

San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) hired a full-time social worker as a staff member and the

San Jose Public Library started its Social Workers in the Library (SWITL) program,

collaborating with social work students and faculty at nearby San Jose University's School of

Social Work.[2] However, informal relationships have existed before then, and others have

recognised historical links between social work and librarianship. In *Whole Person*

Librarianship: A Social Work Approach to Patron Services, Zettervall and Nienow (2019) refer

to librarianship and social work as 'sister professions,' highlighting a historical connection while

also recognizing the role of gender in debates about professionalization of these female-

dominated fields.[3] Both librarianship and social work emerged as service-oriented professions in

the late nineteenth century in response to the Industrial Revolution, and questions about the

professional status of both fields have been debated since those early days. In addition, Zettervall

and Nienow (2019) claim that librarianship and social work 'share significant overlap in our

professional ethics,' including a 'shared motivation to provide excellent service to patrons and

clients.'[4] Miles (2017) draws another parallel between the professional ethics of the two fields,

claiming that 'the language of librarians is the language of social workers: we both want access,

advocacy, engagement, development, wellbeing and inclusion;' she highlights the discourse on

professional values codified by professional organizations like the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the American Library Association (ALA).[5]

To understand the current relationship between social work and librarianship and look toward the future, it's necessary to examine the history of both professions, including their evolving discourses on professionalism. The development of both librarians and social workers as professionals follows a similar timeline in terms of establishing expert societies, developing formalized education, and adopting professional codes. Historically, both social work and librarianship have been female-dominated professions, which in turn has influenced their questionable status as professions. Simpson and Simpson (1969) characterise social work and librarianship as 'semi-professions' and argue that the prevalence of women in both fields contributes to them not being viewed, like the more-male dominated careers of doctors and lawyers, as full professions.[6] Garrison (1979) draws a direct parallel between social work and librarianship, tracing the movement of educated middle-class women in the late nineteenth century out of the home and into 'occupations where the linking of professional roles and sex roles resulted in the creation of the "feminized professions"—notably public school teaching, nursing, social work, and librarianship;' she contends the feminization of library work fueled doubts about its professional status.[7] While the claim that there are significant parallels between the professional development and gendering of social work and librarianship is not new, closely analysing the changing discourses on professionalism in both fields is a novel approach to the topic. This analysis will examine the origins of discourses on professionalism in each field, focusing on early debates defining professional practice and training. Speeches and writings of pioneers in the early development of American social work and librarianship in the late nineteenth century, including Mary Richmond, Jane Addams, and Melvil Dewey, will provide

historical background and establish the terminology and standards which subsequent writers will later adopt and transform.[8] Two canonical works from the early 1900s that sparked public debates about professionalism in social work and librarianship--Abraham Flexner's 1915 speech at the National Conference on Charities and Corrections and C.C. Williamson's 1923 'Training for Library Service' report—question the professional status of social workers and librarians and further develop the discourse on the value of formalized training, grounded in the sciences, for both fields. In addition to examining the rhetoric in those historical documents, the paper will also discuss changing definitions of what constitutes a profession and the role gender plays in those conversations.

Theoretical approaches to professionalism and professional discourse

Those writing about professions and professionalism have often defined them by a set of static characteristics, referred to as the 'trait theory' approach; this method identifies characteristics that distinguish professions from non-professions.[9] However, contemporary scholars find fault with that method, embracing a social constructivist approach that recognizes the role discourse plays in constantly shaping and reshaping professional identities. Working from a social constructivist perspective, Heite (2012) and Drabinski (2016) trace the history of professionalism and development of professional discourse in social work and librarianship respectively.[10] Heite (2012) explores how social work's quest for professional status has challenged existing power structures throughout its history, while Drabinski (2016) examines how professionalism has been defined and redefined in discourses on librarianship from the late nineteenth-century through the twenty-first century. Both scholars analyze not only the changing definitions of professionalism but also the gendering of professionalism, and their work provides a framework for the analysis that follows.

Before exploring the work of Heite (2012) and Drabinski (2016) further, a brief discussion of earlier theoretical approaches to professionalism is necessary to provide context for the social constructivist approach. Carr-Saunders's (1967) 'Metropolitan Conditions and Traditional Professional Relationships' illustrates some of the trait theory claims about professionalism that both Heite (2012) and Drabinski (2016) challenge and introduces the term 'semi-profession' to the discourse on professionalism.[11] Carr-Saunders (1967) begins with a discussion of 'the universally regarded' professions of the 'law, medicine, and the church.'[12] He then identifies two defining characteristics of those professions: 'their practice is based upon the theoretical study of a department of learning' and its members 'feel bound to follow a certain mode of behavior.'[13] In contrast these established professions, Carr-Saunders (1967) presents three other categories of modern professions: new professions (chemists and engineers), semi-professions (nurses, midwives, social workers), and would-be professions (hospital managers, sales managers).[14] He claims that semi-professions 'replace theoretical study by the acquisition of technical skill,' implying that theoretical study is more important than technical skill for a professional.[15] This category of 'semi-professionals' is the subject of Etzioni's (1969) *The Semi-Professions and Their Organization: Teachers, Nurses, Social Workers*.[16] While the aim of Carr-Saunders's work was to create a hierarchy of professions, the aim of Etzioni's was to analyse the existing hierarchy of professions at that time from a sociological perspective. Etzioni's preface employs similar language to Carr-Saunders's taxonomy of modern professions. Etzioni explains that his work

> focus[es] on a group of new professions whose claim to the status of doctors and lawyers is neither fully established nor fully desired. Lacking a better term, we shall refer to those professions as *semi*-professions. Their training is shorter, their status is less legitimated,

their right to privileged communication is less legitimated, there is less of a specialized

body of knowledge, and they have less autonomy from supervision or societal control

than "the" professions.[17]

Etzioni repeats the common claim that doctors and lawyers represent prototypical professions

and defines the semi-professions against the various characteristics of those professions. Unlike

Carr-Saunders, though, Etzioni acknowledges that the labor force of the semi-professions is

mainly female and that this affects how the semi-professions function and how they are viewed

by society.[18] Although librarians are not included in the subtitle of Etzioni's work, they are

mentioned in one of its chapters, entitled 'Women and Bureaucracy in the Semi-Professions.'[19]

In that chapter, Simpson and Simpson (1969) connect their observation that semi-professional

organisations are more bureaucratic than professional organisations to the prevalence of women

in these semi-professions, including social work and librarianship.[20] In 'Professionalism and the

Future of Librarianship,' Abbot (1998) explicitly includes librarians in the category of semi-

professions and questions the validity of trait theory approaches; he also highlights the role of

gender in professional status, claiming that 'the conceptual difference between profession and

semi-profession probably has more to do with the difference between men and women than with

anything else.'[21]

Heite (2012) and Drabinski (2016) challenge these types of claims about the established

professional status of doctors and lawyers and the tenuous position of the 'semi-professions' of

social work and librarianship while considering gender's role in professional debates and

discourse. In her article, Heite (2012) analyses the boundary between professions and non-

professions in relation to social workers by drawing upon multidisciplinary frameworks from

philosophy, gender studies, and science studies. According to Heite (2012), the ongoing debate

about social work's professional status is connected to social work's challenging and crossing of a related set of boundaries, including science versus non-science, male-coded versus female-coded characteristics, and unpaid voluntary work versus paid professional work. In the nineteenth century, demarcating between activities that could count as scientific and those that could not helped define what was considered professional. Heite (2012) contends that definitions of what should count as science versus non-science and, by extension, professional versus non-professional, are gendered: 'male-coded aspects such as objectivity, distance and rationality are regarded as characteristics of both science and also of (scientifically informed) professions…female-coded factors such as caring, motherliness and closeness are regarded as unscientific and as characteristics of non-professions.'[22] This is a challenge for social work because, as Heite (2012) claims, non-scientific, stereotypically feminine characteristics of 'emotionality, care and empathy have been central arguments in establishing social work as an influential factor in handling social problems.'[23] Thus the very characteristics that were first used to justify the creation of social work to confront social problems became problematic when viewed through a lens of professionalism defined by scientific and masculine standards.

For Heite (2012), an important component of this gendering is the historical connection between the beginnings of the women's movement and the origins of social politics and the welfare state. She connects the development of social work as a female profession to the emergence of the 'social question' in early 19th century Europe. The 'social question' was concerned with 'the paradox of increasing poverty in an increasingly productive and prosperous economy' that resulted from industrialisation and the rise of capitalism.[24] In the United States, religious reformers who had focused on anti-slavery issues before the Civil War turned their efforts to addressing the urban problems caused by industrialisation that arose after the Civil

War.[25] However, by the late 19th century, the increasing influence of business and technology meant that a scientific framework was increasingly applied to responses to social problems: 'it was regarded as necessary to deal with such phenomena in a systematic, publicly organized fashion, on the basis of scientific knowledge.'[26] Feminists began linking the 'social question' to the 'women question,' as more women were encouraged to volunteer for this type of work. What had formerly been 'volunteer work' began to change, first into a vocation and then a profession.[27] Heite (2012) credits part of this transformation to the development of professionalized training in universities, what she refers to as the 'academization' of social work.[28]

Like Heite (2012), Drabinski (2016) interrogates the history and validity of discourses on professionalism but in relation to librarianship. Drabinski (2016) criticizes the trait approach to professionalism and takes a social constructivist stance; she argues that the educational requirements for librarians to possess an ALA-accredited master's degree reinforce the socio-economic inequality between professional librarians and paraprofessional library staff. She demonstrates that in LIS literature the trait approach often identifies a set of characteristics of professionalism based on stereotypically male-coded definitions and then shows how librarianship fails to meet those standards. Drabinski's (2016) approach highlights the key role discourse plays in the construction of professionalism as a value of librarianship: 'professionalism is continually produced and reproduced in the library discourse, always in response to an urgent present or impending future that required a new form of consolidation.'[29] For Drabinski (2016), characteristics and definitions of professionalism do not exist *a priori* outside of the discourse, as trait theory implies; instead, they are defined in response real and imagined threats to the future of the profession.

The main object of her discourse analysis is the ALA 'Core Values of Librarianship' (2004).[30] She argues that the ALA code fails to define professionalism: 'professionalism is left as an empty signifier, to be filled by the library discourse.'[31] Indeed, the definition offered in the 'Code of Values' is tautological: 'The American Library Association supports the provision of library services by professionally qualified personnel who have been educated in graduate programs within institutions of higher education.'[32] Aside from requiring a graduate degree, the code fails to define specific characteristics of professionalism. Drabinski (2016) examines key moments in the history of librarianship, including the founding of the American Library Association in 1876 and the publication of the United States Bureau of Education's report on *Public Libraries in the United States of America* also in 1876 to demonstrate the development of the discourse on professionalism. She also examines the role formalized training plays in constructing professional identity, particularly Melvil Dewey's founding of the School of Library Economy at Columbia University in 1887 and the ALA's Committee on Library Training report from 1903. Drabinski (2016) argues that the ALA report led to recommendations that would be repeated throughout the professional discourse to reform and transform professional education, which had the effect of minimizing concerns about equity and inclusion.[33] In his influential 1923 report, Charles Williamson would echo the need to reform librarian education by distinguishing between professional and clerical work and the training required for each.

Origins of professional discourse and practice (1880s)

Both Heite (2012) and Drabinski (2016) argue that definitions of professional social work practice and librarianship are shaped by the evolving historical discourses on professionalism. To begin to analyze the boundaries between professional work, which is often coded as scientific and masculine, and non-professional work, coded as unscientific and feminine, it's important to

examine the historical context in more detail. Both social work and librarianship originated as responses to the social problems caused by industrialisation in the late 1800s.[34] In the United States, the development of social work as a profession is often traced to two voluntary efforts to address these urban problems: the Charity Organization Society (COS) and Settlement House movement.[35] One of the first cities to establish charity organization societies was Buffalo, NY, in 1877; Buffalo's organization was modeled after the London Charity Organisation Society.[36] The COS movement focused on applying the concept of 'scientific charity,' adopting measures to improve efficiency borrowed from business models.[37] The application of the 'scientific charity' model illustrates Heite's (2012) claim regarding the power and value ascribed to scientific knowledge and processes in the late nineteenth century. Most work of the COS in the 1880s was done by female volunteers, referred to as 'friendly visitors,' but paid employees began to replace the volunteers at the turn of the century.[38] Mary Richmond, appointed the first woman general secretary of the Baltimore COS in 1891, is one well-known figure associated with the movement. In a speech delivered at the annual meeting of the Charity Organization of Baltimore in 1890, shortly before her appointment as secretary, Richmond (1890) explained the charity worker's role as a 'friendly visitor:'

> in districting our city and finding out the condition of the unfortunate in the districts, we have aimed to send to each family that needs an uplifting hand, a patient, persevering, faithful friend, who, by the power of that stronger thing on earth, personal influence, will gradually teach them habits of industry and self-control.[39]

Even as Richmond (1890) asserted that the relationship between the charity worker and the poor must be as natural as possible, the rhetoric implies a moralistic hierarchy; she characterized the charity worker as a 'teacher' who provides an 'uplifting hand' to the 'unfortunate' by instructing

them in good moral habits. At the end of her speech, Richmond (1890) asserted that 'only two things are necessary in order to do good work amongst the poor: one is much good will, and the other is a little tact.'[40] For Richmond (1890), a charity worker's personal values of 'tact' and 'good will,' stereotypically defined as feminine characteristics, were more important than professional education or training. Garrison (1979) contends that the idea that 'women were so naturally designed as agents of charity that required no special training' was a way to encourage women to provide unpaid or poorly paid labor.[41] It is significant that Richmond (1890) does not use the word 'profession' or 'professional' at any point in her discussion of charity work. Her focus was on recruiting many female volunteers not in training a small number of skilled workers.

However, by 1897, Richmond's description of the charity worker volunteer as a 'friendly visitor' was changing as arguments about the need to create a professional training school for charity and settlement workers came to the fore. During this time, charity workers and settlement workers began to join forces in organisations like the National Conference on Charities and Corrections.[42] In her speech, 'The Need of a Training School in Applied Philanthropy' (1897), delivered at the National Conference of Charities and Correction, Richmond (1897) claimed:

> In these days of specialization, when we train our cooks, our apothecaries, our engineers, our librarians, our nurses—when, in fact, there is a training school for almost every form of skilled service—we have yet to establish our first training school for charity workers.[43]

To codify charity workers as 'skilled service' professionals, Richmond (1987) argued that formalized education and training was required. Richmond (1897) notably included librarians in her list illustrating other professions that have benefited from formalized training, highlighting a later timeline for the development of professional discourse for social workers than librarians. In

this speech, unlike in 'The Friendly Visitor,' Richmond repeatedly uses the terms 'profession' and 'professional' in relation to charity workers: 'surely, they have a right to demand from the profession of applied philanthropy (we really have not even a name for it) that which they have a right to demand from any other profession; further opportunities for education and development.'[44] Richmond (1897), like others writing about professionalism at this time, turned to the medical field as a model profession for philanthropy and charity work. She compared social workers and medical professionals:

 but is it not probable that the profession of medicine owes a large part of its inheritance

 of knowledge and principles to its schools, which have established the tradition that the

 members of a liberal profession should be not only practitioners but teachers.[45]

According to Richmond (1897), a professional was not only educated in the field's 'knowledge and principles' but also taught other professionals in training. This push towards requiring specialized training for the development of the profession is in line with Heite's (2012) description of the 'academization' of social work and also reflects the high professional value ascribed to doctors at the time. Professional training for charity workers did develop towards the end of the nineteenth century, when the New York Charity Organization Society established the Summer School of Applied Philanthropy in 1898. The Summer School later transformed into the New York School of Philanthropy in 1904, and then was renamed the New York School of Social Work in 1919.[46] However, it wasn't until 1930 that social work was officially classified as a profession in the US Census.[47]

Alongside Richmond, Jane Addams is also considered a key figure in the early development of American social work. Addams was associated with the Settlement House movement, founding Hull House in Chicago in 1889. Settlement House workers were mostly

middle-class and affluent volunteers who resided in immigrant districts in urban centers.[48]

Addams believed that settlement houses could bridge the divide between the social classes by

providing needed services to the poor and a sense of purpose to the middle and upper-class

volunteers. In 'The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements,' Addams (1893) argued that the

settlement house movement 'is an experimental effort to aid in the solution of the social and

industrial problems which are engendered by the modern conditions of life in a great city.'[49] The

isolation of the poor from other social classes and resources associated with cultured society,

Addams argued, required resources, such as libraries. Wahler et al. (2020) trace the history of

collaboration between social workers and librarians back to Addams, noting that Addams

founded a public library at Hull House.[50] Indeed, Addams (1893) characterized the mission of

the settlement house as educational:

> It is needless to say that a Settlement is a protest against a restricted view of education,
>
> and makes it possible for every educated man or woman with a teaching faculty to find
>
> out those who are ready to be taught.[51]

According to Addams (1893), the settlement house provided young, educated men and women

the opportunity to use their knowledge and experiences for a specific, humanitarian purpose.

Addams (1893) criticised the 'restricted view of education' and described college-educated

young people as being 'buried beneath mere mental accumulation with lowered vitality and

discontent.'[52] She characterised settlement house workers as both teachers and students: 'many

residents must always come in the attitude of students, assuming that the best teacher of life is

life itself, and regarding the Settlement as a classroom.'[53] In Addams's view, the Settlement

House was a classroom for both residents and volunteers and, as such, demonstrated the

interconnectedness of the social classes and the benefits of democratizing the social classes.

The rhetoric of education, both in terms of training professional social workers and in the use of analogies between teachers and social workers, is also employed by early proponents of the professionalization of librarianship, namely Melvil Dewey. Dewey's role in the development of professional education for librarians is widely acknowledged; Garrison (1979) goes so far as to say that 'Dewey so molded library education that the whole period before 1923 is called the 'Dewey period.'[54] Prior to 1850, there had been no formal training for librarians, and it was only between 1850 and 1875 that most librarians began to be trained through apprenticeships.[55] The 'Dewey period,' between 1876 and 1923, was therefore critical to the development of library education.[56] The year 1876 marked its beginning with the first formal meeting of librarians in Philadelphia and the founding of the first professional association of American librarians, the ALA. Dewey was elected as the organization's secretary and was instrumental in creating the first professional journal associated with the ALA, the *American Library Journal*, which would eventually become *Library Journal*.[57]

One of Dewey's most well-known works, 'Librarianship as a Profession' was published in that first issue of *The American Library Journal* (1876). In that work, Dewey (1876) asserted that 'The time has at last come when a librarian may, without assumption, speak of his occupation as a profession.'[58] Dewey (1876), unlike Richmond (1890) in 'The Friendly Visitor,' asserted the professional status of librarians clearly in the title of his work, and he repeatedly used the terms 'profession' and 'professional' throughout his essay. He placed the value of the work of librarians alongside 'preachers and the teachers.'[59] Librarians, Dewey (1876) argued, had a moral obligation to ensure that they were providing 'the best books on the best subjects' to the general population.[60] While the development of settlement houses and charity organization societies in response to growing poverty, social inequality, and other problems resulting from

industrialization articulated one response to the social question, Dewey proposed another. For

Dewey (1876) the way to assist and elevate the masses was to provide them with appropriate

reading materials, which in turn would lead to good social behavior.[61] As with Richmond's

(1890) characterization of the 'friendly visitor' as a teacher who will instruct their pupil on

principles of Christian charity and a strong work ethic, Dewey contended that if a librarian was

'competent and enthusiastic, he may soon largely shape the reading, and through it the thought,

of his whole community.'[62] This enthusiastic persona and service to the community

distinguished an older form of passive librarianship—'a librarian was a mouser in musty books'-

-from Dewey's newer form of active librarianship. Dewey explicitly compared librarians and

teachers: 'the time is when a library is a school, and the librarian is in the highest sense a

teacher…Will any man deny to the high calling of such a librarianship the title of profession.'[63]

Dewey rhetorically makes a case for the value of librarianship, referring to both the 'highest'

sense and the 'high' calling.[64] Dewey's rhetoric is similar to Addams's lofty claim that

settlement workers could promote the good of humanity by removing distinctions between the

social classes. Dewey's work helped shape a new identity for librarians, illustrating Drabinski's

(2016) claim that 'professionalism can alternatively be understood not as the acquisition of traits

but as the production of an identity, made and remade in part through the discursive contestation

of Professionalism itself.'[65]

  Dewey would go on to argue, like Richmond (1897), for formalized, professional

training. After being appointed head librarian at Columbia University in 1883, he advocated for a

professional librarian school.[66] While at Columbia, Dewey delivered a speech to Columbia

alumnae in 1886, titled 'Librarianship as a Profession for College-Bred Women.'[67] As the title

implies, this talk was intended for a particular target audience, and Dewey's charge was to

convince his audience that librarianship was a desirable and achievable profession for college-educated women. A key part of his argument was contrasting the old concept of libraries and librarians with new ones that appealed specifically to a female audience. He characterized the rooms in the old library as 'unattractive, dark, damp' (10) while the rooms in a new library were 'attractive, bright…lighted and warmed.'[68] Dewey (1886) cast the library as a cozy domestic space, drawing upon the connection between women and the home, with female librarians as genteel hostesses. To appeal to his female audience, Dewey (1886) explicitly compared library work to that of schoolteachers, the other profession available to educated young women at the time. While the librarians in the past may have functioned as 'a sentinel before the doors, a jailer to guard against the escape of the unfortunates under his care,' the new librarian would be an 'educating force in the community.'[69] Dewey (1886) argued that being a librarian was preferable to being a teacher because Dewey library work 'avoids much of the nervous strain and the wear and tear of the class room.'[70] This implied that women's delicate natures must be protected from harsh work environments. The characterization of libraries as pleasant domestic spaces for women to work supported his argument.

In addition to explaining why librarianship was preferrable to teaching as a profession for women, Dewey (1886) also had to address the issue of low pay for women working in libraries if he wanted his audience to believe that that 'libraries offer to women both employment and a profession.'[71] He tackled this issue by distinguishing different motivations of professional workers. Dewey explained why certain physical and psychological characteristics of women make them less desirable employees than male workers and stressed the power of education to train professional women librarians. According to Dewey (1886), one distinguishing aspect of 'professional' work was that it encompassed a mental and moral plane: 'on the mental plane I put

all those who do the work from a personal ambition to make a reputation or to gain a salary. It is the plane of most business men, lawyers, etc.'[72] In contrast to men working in business and the law who were motivated by their own self-interest and by monetary concerns, Dewey (1886) positioned the librarian as one who 'puts his heart and life into his work with as distinct a consecration as a minister…It is his vocation,' focusing on the moral not the mental plane.[73] The dichotomies Dewey set up between the mental and moral, profession and vocation, the desire for material wealth and a quest for humanity's moral improvement connects to the multiple boundaries related to professionalism described by Heite (2012), and they are based on gender stereotypes. Dewey (1886) contrasted the ambition and self-interest, characteristics stereotypically attributed to successful professional men, with the loftier, moral value of service to the community, stereotypically ascribed to women, of professional librarians.

However, the use of masculine pronouns complicated Dewey's appeal to his female audience. This is one example of many contradictions in Dewey's speech. Dewey (1886) discussed how the clerical side of library work can be 'one of the pleasantest avocations for a woman fond of books.'[74] Even though this type of work was often poorly paid, it was readily available to women. He argued that such work could be a 'stepping-stone to something better.'[75] However, he also recognized that the salaries of women working in libraries were lower than those of men. Dewey (1886) attributed this to a variety of deficits on the part of female workers, claiming women have 'poorer health…and are more crippled by physical weakness,' 'women lack business and executive training,' women's plans 'lack permanence' because they will leave to get married and start a family, and women require more assistance to accomplish tasks than men.[76] Dewey (1886) claimed that women already possessed 'natural qualities most important in a library…accuracy, order (or what we call the housekeeping instinct)'; a library school

education would help them gain the additional skills they needed to succeed in library work.[77]

Even though Dewey asserted that libraries offered college-educated women their best option for

a fulfilling professional career, he does not provide sufficient evidence to back up his claim.

Dewey's School of Library Economy at Columbia, the first professional school for librarians,

would open in 1887, but it would close in 1888 after disagreements regarding admitting women

failed to be resolved between Dewey and college administrators.[78]

Critiques of Professional Status: Flexner and Williamson

Richmond, Addams, and Dewey helped define the language and skills associated with

professional social work and librarianship. All three stressed the importance of specialized

training to position these emerging professions on similar footing as other more established

professions, particularly in medicine. The works of these early practitioners also employed

educational rhetoric, comparing professional librarians and charity workers to teachers and

libraries and settlement houses to schools. As more options for specialized training emerged in

toward the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, debates

emerged regarding the quality of that education. Abraham Flexner's 1915 speech at the National

Conference of Charities and Corrections and C.C. Williamson's 1923 report on 'Training for

Library Service' stand as two influential critiques of professional training in social work and

librarianship respectively.[79] These two works are most often cited in analyses of professionalism

in the latter part of the twentieth century up until recent times.

The field of social work continued to develop in the early 1900s, with schools of charity

and philanthropy established in five American cities.[80] Simmons College partnered with Harvard

University in 1904 to establish the Boston School for Social Workers. The Russell Sage

Foundation was founded in 1907 to support the development of the social work profession, and

Mary Richmond joined the foundation in 1908 and served as its director for the next twenty years, developing the theoretical and conceptual foundation for social case work.[81] Along with this movement to develop the social work profession, there were also persistent doubts about the field's legitimacy, illustrated by Flexner's speech. Significantly, Miller (2015) identifies Flexner's speech as 'the distinct point in time that marked the beginning of the profession's ongoing and colorful discourse about its own professionalization.'[82] Flexner, the Assistant Secretary of the General Education Board of New York City, was influential in the field of medical education in the United States. In 1910, he published a report sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation, titled *Medical Education in the United States and Canada*, that criticized medical education's professional standards, and Morris (2008) contends that Flexner's reputation as an expert of professional education was the reason he was chosen to speak on the topic.[83]

Flexner (1915) acknowledged his lack of experience on the topic at the outset: 'I must confess a very genuine doubt as to my competency to undertake the discussion. My acquaintance with social work…and with social workers is distinctly limited.'[84] The fact that the conference organisers chose a medical doctor rather than a practicing social worker to answer the question speaks to the authority granted to doctors and medical educators. Flexner's medical background is evident in the standards he used to define professional practice and the examples of professional activity he provided. His approach embodied the trait theory, as he derived six criteria from what he refers to as the 'few professions universally admitted to be such—law, medicine, and preaching' and then goes on to explain how social work fails to qualify as a profession because it does not meet all the criteria.[85] Flexner's claim that professions 'derive their raw material from science and learning' directly connects to Heite's (2012) argument regarding the connection between scientific activity and professions.[86] Flexner's language was

decidedly gendered when claiming that 'a profession is a brotherhood.' [87] He identified

stereotypically masculine-coded characteristics of individual agency and autonomy as markers of

professional practice.

For an occupation to be a profession, Flexner (1915) also claimed that it must 'involve

essentially intellectual operations with large individual responsibility.'[88] While he admitted that

social work activities were intellectual, he explained that those activities did not involve

individual responsibility. To illustrate this claim, he made an analogy between nurses and social

workers. He claimed that a nurse displayed knowledge but not agency:

> She must possess knowledge, skill, and power of judgment…it is to be observed,
>
> however, that the responsibility of trained nurse is neither original nor final. She, too,
>
> may be described as another arm to the physician or surgeon…The trained nurse plays
>
> into his hands; carries out his orders; summons him like a sentinel in fresh emergencies;
>
> subordinates loyally her intelligence to his theory, his policy.[89]

The female nurse, like the social worker, is characterized as subordinate to other professionals.

The use of female pronouns to describe the non-professional work of nurses, in contrast to a

professional 'brotherhood' of the male physician or surgeon, is significant here. The nurse

functions as 'another arm' who 'carries out his orders' and 'subordinates...her intelligence.'

Flexner (1915) also faulted social work for lacking a clearly defined field of study and practice,

which made it impossible to provide organized professional training. Even though Flexner

(1915) concluded that social work was not a profession, he ended his speech with a concession.

He claimed that the noble aims of social work embodied what he referred to a 'genuine

professional spirit': 'the unselfish devotion of those who have chosen to give themselves to

making the world a fitter place to live in can fill social work with the professional spirit and thus

to some extent lift it above all the distinctions which I have been at pains to make.'[90] Flexner

(1915) distinguished between professional scientific training and activity, which comprised the

bulk of his speech, and a vaguely defined reference to concept of 'professional spirit' at the end.

The altruistic motivation Flexner (1915) described, ironically, connects social work to those

female-coded characteristics of empathy and caring discussed by Heite (2012), seemingly calling

social work's professional status into question rather than affirming it. This science versus spirit

distinction recalls Dewey's discussion of the 'mental' and 'moral' plane of professional work.

The gendered language used by both Flexner and Dewey implies that men are connected to the

science and mental aspect of professional work while the moral, spirit of that work is connected

to women.

Like Flexner, C.C. Williamson gained a reputation as an expert in professional education.

In 1915, the same year Flexner delivered his speech, the Carnegie Corporation appointed Alvin

Saunders Johnson to assess the Carnegie libraries. Johnson's report revealed serious issues,

including inadequate training for library staff.[91] This report, in turn, led to the Carnegie

corporation funding a major study of library education, what became known as the 'Williamson

Report.' While Williamson did have experience working in libraries as the head of the Economic

and Social Division of the New York Public library, he was a trained economist, with a PhD in

Economics from Columbia. Williamson's report, similar to Flexner's speech, found fault with

the system of educating library workers in the early twentieth century. A key component to his

argument about the need to reform professional education for library work was his designation of

'two distinct types [of work] which, for want of better terms, we call "professional" and

"clerical".'[92] One of the main problems with educating library workers at the time, according to

Williamson (1923), was the conflation of clerical with professional work: 'an attempt to give

manual labor of a pure clerical and routine nature the dignity and importance of professional work.'[93] Williamson (1923) clearly conveyed a hierarchy between the two types of work, with professional work having 'dignity' and 'importance' unlike the 'routine' 'manual labor' involved in clerical work. These two types of work required different types of training: training for a professional required a bachelor's degree plus 'at least one year's graduate study in a library school properly organized to give a thorough preparation' while clerical work required a high school diploma plus 'a course of instruction designed to give a good understanding of the mechanics and routine operations of a library.'[94]

Williamson (1923) claimed that distinguishing between professional and clerical work and training would improve the salaries for professional librarians and provide a greater appeal to college-educated men and women.[95] His contention that professionalizing library work would improve salaries echoed a similar claim, more than thirty years before, in Dewey's (1886) 'Librarianship as a Profession for College-Bred Women.' Later in his report, Williamson addressed women working in libraries in more detail. He conceded that women trained in library schools tended to remain employed at libraries in greater numbers than men.[96] Even so, he pointed out that there is a 'rather high proportion of women graduates who marry and leave the profession,' again repeating a similar sexist claim as Dewey that women are often unreliable workers because they will leave to get married and start a family.[97] Stereotypes about library work as a feminine profession and female library workers as unreliable underlie Williamson's argument, particularly in his analysis of existing library schools. The mostly female library instructors fail to provide adequate professional training, according to Williamson: 'library school instructors are seldom forceful and convincing speakers. Most of them are women, which tends to confirm the impression that library work is a feminine vocation.'[98] Williamson's critique

marked the beginning of calls to require graduate-level education for librarians, a requirement which is now part of the definition of professionalism from the ALA Code of Values. As Drabinski (2016) warns, professionalism, as defined in the discourse of librarians in texts such as the ALA Code of Values, has some benefits but also 'produces and inscribes inequalities in the library workforce.'[99]

Conclusion

Examining the early discourses on professionalism in both library science and social work demonstrates how Heite's (2012) characterization of the professionalization of social work as boundary crossing work applies to both fields. Distinctions between science and spirit, mental and moral, male and female, volunteer and vocational work all play into definitions of professional social work and librarianship since the development of both fields. Historically, both professions emerged from a desire to serve populations affected by industrialisation and the rise of capitalism in the late 1800s. 'Friendly visitors' visited the poor and instructed them in the principles of good behavior. The Settlement House workers lived alongside the populations they served and took on the roles of both teacher and student. Early librarians selected the best books for their patrons, indirectly instructing them in good behavior and proper morals. Early texts in social work and librarianship link the feminine characteristics identified by Heite (2012) of emotionality, care, and empathy to the values and mission of social workers and librarians, thereby providing justification for women entering the workforce without disrupting the work of men or their employment prospects. It was argued that a feminine desire to serve humanity, rather than a desire for personal or financial gains, made women uniquely suited to both charity and library work, particularly since such work was usually unpaid or poorly paid. At the same

time, though, those very characteristics were seen as non-professional in a system defined by scientific, masculine professions like doctors. Social work and librarianship became 'semi-professions,' constantly existing at the border between professional and non-professional work. The persistence of debates about professional status throughout the history of both fields supports Drabinski's (2016) description of an on-going crises of professionalism produced and reproduced in the professional discourse. To escape from the on-going crisis, it's necessary to step back and examine the historical roots of the debate and the rhetoric, question assumptions about professionalism that magnifying inequalities, and look forward to a new model for valuing the unique characteristics and contributions of both social workers and librarians.

Notes

[1] See Samantha G. Hines, 'Connecting Individuals with Social Services: The Academic Library's Role,' *Collaborative Librarianship* 9, no.2 (2017), 109-116; Anne Ford, 'Toward a Trauma-Informed Model,' *American Libraries* 50, no.6 (June 2019), 22-23; Sarah C. Johnson, 'MSW Interns and Public Libraries: Enhancing Services through Interdisciplinary Collaboration,' *Public Services Quarterly* 15, no.1 (2019), 13-23.

[2] Hines, 'Connecting Individuals with Social Services,' 110; Sara K. Zettervall, Mary C. Nienow, *Whole Person Librarianship: A Social Work Approach to Patron Services* (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2019), 8.

[3] Zetterval & Nienow, *Whole Person Librarianship*, 1.

[4] Ibid, 4, 5.

[5] Deborah Miles, 'A Social Worker in the Library,' *Incite* 38, no.3/4 (2017), 20. The NASW code of ethics includes 'service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence, while the ALA's core values include "access, confidentiality/privacy, democracy, diversity, education and lifelong learning, intellectual freedom, the public good, preservation, professionalism, service, social responsibility, and sustainability. National Association of Social Workers. 'Code of Ethics,' https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English (accessed 15 September 2022); American Library Association. 'Core Values of Librarianship,' https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/corevalues (accessed 15 September 2022).

[6] Richard L. Simpson and Ida Harper Simpson, 'Women and Bureaucracy in the Semi-Professions, in *The Semi-Professions and Their Organization: Teachers, Nurses, and Social Workers*, ed. Amitai Etzioni (New York: The Free Press, 1965), 196-265.

[7] Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 197.

[8] The works of Richmond, Addams, and Dewey were selected for analysis due to the frequency that those texts are often referenced in the scholarship in both fields. However, one must also recognize the limitations of such an approach, which minimizes criticisms in both social work and librarianship scholarship about the whitewashing of social work and library history. For more detailed discussions of the problematic status of social work and library icons, respectively, see Kelechi C. Wright, Kortney A. Carr, and Becci A. Akin, 'The Whitewashing of Social Work History: How Dismantling Racism in Social Work Education Begins with an Equitable History of the Profession,' *Advances in Social Work* 21, no.2/3 (2021), 274-297, and Anne Ford, 'Bringing Harassment Out of the History Books,' *American Libraries,* 49, no. 6, (June 2018), 48-53.

[9] Stephen Ackroyd, 'Sociological and Organisational Theories of Professions and Professionalism,' in *The Routledge Companion to the Professions and Professionalism*, eds. Mike Dent, Ivy Lynn Bourgeault, & Ellen Kuhlmann (Abingdon: Routledge, 07 July 2016), https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315779447.ch1, accessed 12 September 2022.

[10] Catrin Heite, 'Setting and Crossing Boundaries: Professionalization of Social Work and Social Work Professionalism,' *Social Work & Society* 10, no.2 (2012), 1-13; Emily Drabinski, 'Valuing Professionalism: Discourse as Professional Practice,' *Library Trends* 64, no.3 (2016), 604-814.

[11] Alexander Morris Carr-Saunders, 'Metropolitan Conditions and Traditional Professional Relationships,' in *The Metropolis in Modern Life,* ed. Robert Moore Fisher (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967), p. 279-288.

[12] Ibid, 280.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid, 281.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Amitai Etzioni, 'Preface,' in *The Semi-Professions and Their Organization: Teachers, Nurses, and Social Workers*, ed. Amitai Etzioni (New York: The Free Press, 1969), v-xviii

[17] Ibid, v.

[18] Ibid, vi.

[19] Richard L. Simpson, Ida Harper Simpson, 'Women and Bureacracy in the Semi-Professions,' in *The Semi-Professions and Their Organization: Teachers, Nurses, and Social Workers*, ed. Amitai Etzioni (New York: The Free Press, 1969), pp. 196-265.

[20] Ibid, 197.

[21] Andrew Abbott, 'Professionalism and the Future of Librarianship,' *Library Trends* 46, no.3 (Winter 1998), 431.

[22] Heite, 'Setting and Crossing Boundaries,' 8.

[23] Ibid., 7.

[24] Paul H. Stuart, 'Social Work Profession: History,' in *Encyclopedia of Social Work*, (National Association of Social Workers Press and Oxford University Press, published 26 March, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.013.623, accessed 12 September 2022.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Heite, 'Setting and Crossing Boundaries,' 5.

[27] Ibid., 19.

[28] Ibid., 8.

[29] Drabinski, 'Valuing Professionalism,' 606.

[30] American Library Association. 'Core Values of Librarianship.'

[31] Drabinski, 'Valuing Professionalism,' 606.

[32] American Library Association. 'Core Values of Librarianship.'

[33] Drabinski, 'Valuing Professionalism,' 610.

[34] Zetterval & Nienow, *Whole Person Librarianship*, 1.

[35] John G. McNutt, 'Social Work Practice: History and Evolution,' in *Encyclopedia of Social Work*, (National Association of Social Workers Press and Oxford University Press, published 03 September, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.013.620, accessed 12 September 2022.

[36] Stuart, 'Social Work Profession: History.'

[37] Roy Lubove, *The Professional Altruist: The Emergence of Social Work as a Career, 1880-1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 6.

[38] Stuart, 'Social Work Profession: History.' The terminology to describe these early practitioners is complicated and includes 'philanthropist' and 'friendly visitor' and then later 'social caseworkers.' The term 'social work' was coined at the turn of the century and derives from the concept of 'good works' or 'social works.' See Jessica Gladden *Social Work Leaders through History: Lives and Lessons*, (New York: Springer, 2018), 9.

[39] Mary Richmond, 'The Friendly Visitor,' in *The Long View: Papers and Addresses by Mary E. Richmond*, ed. Joanna C. Colcord (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1930), 40.

[40] Ibid, 42.

[41] Garrison, *Apostles of Culture*, 199.

[42] Barbara E. Brand, 'Librarianship and Other Female-Intensive Professions,' *Journal of Library History* 18, no.4 (1983), 400-401.

[43] Mary Richmond, 'The Need of a Training School in Applied Philanthropy,' in *The Long View: Papers and Addresses by Mary E. Richmond*, ed. Joanna C. Colcord (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1930), 99.

[44] Ibid, 100.

[45] Ibid., 101.

[46] Stuart, 'Social Work Profession: History.'

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Jane Addams, 'The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements,' in *Philanthropy and Social Progress: Seven Essays*, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Company, 1893), 22. *PRO: Philanthropy Resources Online*, https://indianamemory.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/PRO/id/5102, accessed 12 September 2022.

[50] Elizabeth A. Wahler, Mary A. Provence, John Helling, Michael A. Williams, 'The Changing Role of Libraries: How Social Workers Can Help,' *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 101, no. 1, (2020), 34.

[51] Jane Addams, 'The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements,' 10.

[52] Ibid, 16.

[53] Ibid, 24.

[54] Garrison, *Apostles of Culture*, 192.

[55] Richard Rubin & Rachel G. Rubin, *The Foundations of Library and Information Science*, 5th edition, (Chicago: ALA Neal-Schuman, 2020), 272.

[56] Ibid., 272.

[57] Ibid., 274.

[58] Melvil Dewey, 'Librarianship as a Profession,' in *Books, Libraries, Librarians: Contributions to Library Literature*, no.1, ed. John David Marshall (Hamden; CN: Shoe String Press, 1960), 179. check citation

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid., 180.

[61] Rubin & Rubin, *The Foundations of Library and Information Science*, 273.

[62] Dewey, 'Librarianship as a Profession,' 180.

63 Ibid., 181.

64 For a detailed analysis of the religious associations of Dewey's rhetoric on vocation see Fobazi Ettarh, 'Vocational Awe and Librarianship: The Lies We Tell Ourselves,' *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, (2018), https://doaj.org/article/ac54c4e4511046f9933ac8b33c5508e5, accessed 12 September 2022.

65 Drabinski, 'Valuing Professionalism,'607.

66 Rubin & Rubin, *The Foundations of Library and Information Science*, 275.

67 Melvil Dewey, 'Librarianship as a Profession for College-Bred Women,' Boston, MA: Library Bureau, 1886, 1-24, *Nineteenth Century Collections Online*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/AXWLGQ622096199/ NCCO?u=orla57816&sid=bookmark-NCCO&xid=29fad16b&pg=1, accessed 20 July 2022.

68 Ibid., 10-11.

69 Ibid., 11.

70 Ibid., 23.

71 Ibid., 18.

72 Ibid., 18.

73 Ibid., 19.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid, 20-21.

77 Ibid, 21.

78 Rubin & Rubin, *The Foundations of Library and Information Science*, 275.

79 Abraham Flexner 'Is Social Work a Profession?' *Research on Social Work Practice*, 11, no.2, (March 2001), 152-165; Charles C. Williamson 'Training for Library Service: A Report Prepared for the Carnegie Corporation of New York,' New York: D.B. Updike, 1923, HathiTrust, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015033875256, accessed 12 September 2022.

80 Stuart, 'Social Work Profession: History.'

81 Ibid.

82 Shari Miller, 'Professional Socialization: On Becoming and Being a Social Worker,' in *The Social Worker's Desk Reference* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 9.

83 Patricia McGrath Morris 'Reinterpreting Abraham Flexner's Speech, "Is Social Work a Profession?" Its Meaning and Influence on the Field's Early Professional Development,' *Social Service Review,* 82, no.1, (March 2008), 29-30.

84 Flexner, 'Is Social Work a Profession?' 150.

85 Ibid., 153-154.

86 Ibid., 155.

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid., 156.

89 Ibid., 158.

90 Ibid, 185.

91 Rubin & Rubin, *The Foundations of Library and Information Science*, 279.

92 Charles C. Williamson 'Training for Library Service,' 3.

93 Ibid., 4.

94 Ibid., 4.

95 Ibid., 5.

96 Ibid., 77.

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid., 107.

99 Drabinski, 'Valuing Professionalism,'605.