

Pink Collars and Glass Escalators: The Role of Femininity in Librarianship

Taylor Schuler

Dr. Simon L. Aristeguieta;
Amanda K. Desimone-Shabrack
Research Methods LIS 5810
School of Library and
Information Sciences



NC Central
UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

A **Pink-Collar** job is the name given to occupations in which the majority of the workforce is female, such as the fields of nursing, beauty, teaching, social work, and - of course - librarianship. Pursuing any of these fields carries with it an assumption of feminine traits. These traits are based in stereotypes, and while not all negative, it can still place a difficult expectation to both live up to or reject. For instance, emotional sensitivity, care, communication, and affection are all generally traits attributed to women. Any gender is capable of either having or lacking these qualities, but extricating oneself from them has proven difficult.

It is well researched that society generally does not value femininity or jobs typically worked by women (Hunt, 2005). Children, in particular, tend to see pink-collar jobs as “less than,” which insinuates that these stereotypes are ingrained in us from an early age (Puzio, 2022). Women are more suited to these inferior jobs, while it is a man’s responsibility to take on a blue collar job as a mechanic, for example. Additionally, children see men in white collar jobs or senior positions in fields such as law/

Men in pink-collar occupations are in a unique position. Whereas women with these occupations make less money and have less prestige, men benefit from what is referred to as a **Glass Escalator** (Hickey, 2006). This is the opposite effect of how women face a metaphorical glass ceiling, unable to reach high-level positions in their field. Men, especially in fields like nursing and libraries, will rise up the ranks much more quickly than a woman would.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Ideally, the following exploratory research will discover whether or not femininity has an effect on how pink-collar jobs are perceived in society. Given that research on the disparities between men and women in professional fields is not new, the tactic for this research is a three pronged approach:

1. **role of men and women in pink collar occupations**
2. **role of men and women in white or blue collar occupations**
3. **how these roles alter in the perceptions of different age groups**

I intend to conduct qualitative research and gain an understanding of why men and women feel the way they do about their profession and their place in the field. The studies analyzed for this research utilized surveys to clarify how men and women, and boys and girls view gendered occupations.

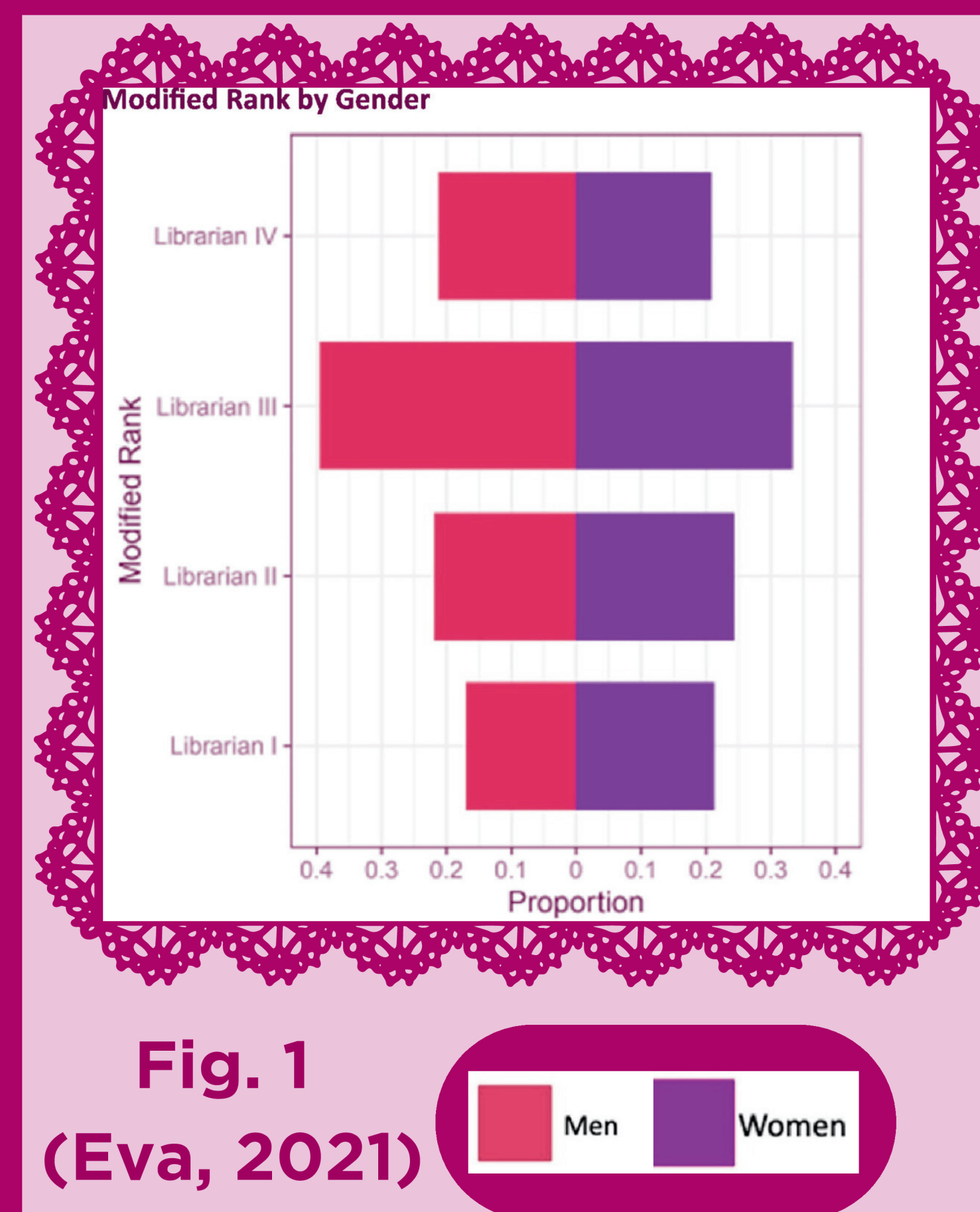


Fig. 1
(Eva, 2021)

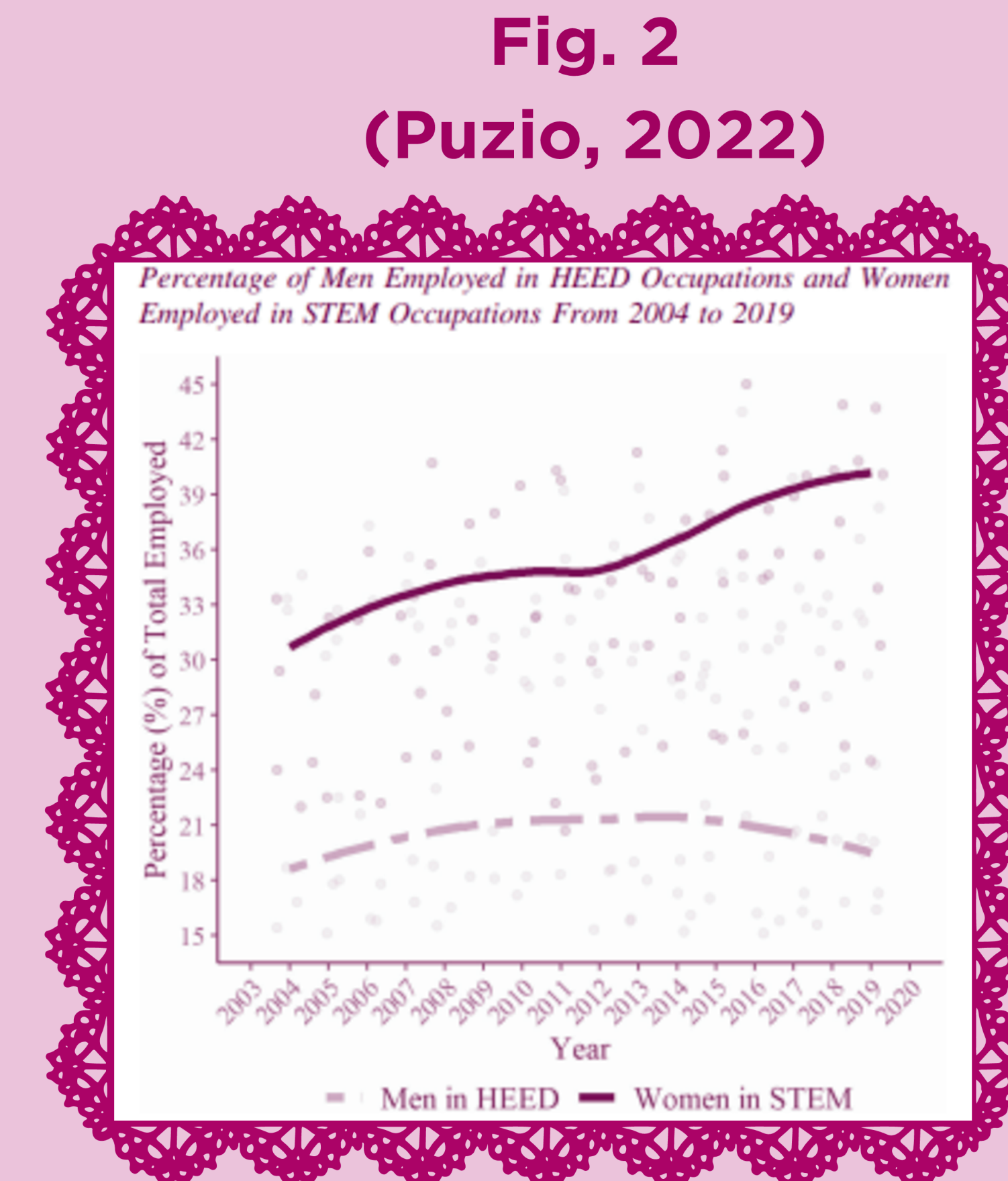


Fig. 2
(Puzio, 2022)

RESULTS

As evidenced in Figure 1 (Eva, 2021), this graph visually displays the differences between men and women in the LIS field. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of men and women within each rank of Librarianship. Men in the field, more often, will be found in higher ranking positions. In terms of salary, men, naturally, are also more often on the higher end of salaries.

This data is difficult to refute, but this research aims to uncover the causes behind this. I assert that the close link between a “feminized profession” and “feminine qualities” plays a large part.

Hulme (2006) explored this idea when researching women who work in blue-collar occupations, working assembly lines or as mechanics. This study unveiled how women in male-dominated fields express their desire to not be seen as women. They want to be viewed as “one of the guys” and even when being acknowledged as a group, they didn’t want to be accommodated and instead operate under the assumption that they are also a “guy.”

Another study (Kalokerinos, 2017) explored stereotype threat and whether men in women-dominated fields face any discrimination simply for being men. While the study revealed stereotyping plays a role in their work (such as being the “man” expected to engage in masculine job-relevant tasks, such as dealing with an angry or violent patron) they ultimately did not feel disadvantaged by it.

CONCLUSION

Where do we go from here? In reviewing literature, a worthy first step is changing how librarianship is viewed, even by children. Having more men in this female-dominated field should be a priority to revalue the profession, increasing salaries and legitimacy of the work. This, however, does not mean that women should diminish themselves or shrink their femininity, quite the opposite. Embracing what women do and who they are is essential in re-framing how society views women. Men, are admonished from the beginning, with traits such as sensitivity and communication scolded out of them when they are children, so they avoid entering these pink-collar occupations in the first place and risk being seen as feminine or often a fear among male librarians, homosexual.

When the idea of bringing more men into pink-collar jobs is brought up, there seems to be a lack of empathy towards these men due to the glass escalator phenomenon. What this view lacks is the acknowledgment that desegregating feminized fields affects both men and women in an intersectional way.

As Figure 2 (Puzio, 2022) shows, there is more of a focus on desegregating STEM fields rather than HEED fields. More of a push should be made to change this.

It is clear that women in traditionally male-dominated professions must be seen as sufficiently masculine to be seen as competent, and sufficiently feminine to be perceived as likable, but for these two to co-exist, as it should and does in most people, changes must be made from within and our thoughts must be challenged.

Scan QR Code for References

