

**The Glass Escalator – Male career paths in NZ  
libraries**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

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*This study examines the theory of the glass escalator in the context of the library and information management profession in New Zealand. The glass escalator theory proposes that men who work in female dominated professions, such as libraries, teaching and nursing, experience benefits due to their token status as men. These benefits translate into faster promotion as the organisational and society pressures encourage these men into working into more masculine and gender typical roles, e.g. management. In this study, the researcher interviewed a small group of men who are currently employed in managerial and senior roles in New Zealand libraries in order to assess their experiences in working in a profession that is predominately staffed by females. The results of the interviews were compared with conclusions from existing research into the glass escalator theory in order to determine how much influence the glass escalator had on their careers. The results showed that there is some evidence that the experiences of these men could be related to the glass escalator; however, the participants did not attribute their success in the profession as being related to their gender. There is a need for further research and a wider sample size in order to address the theory in a New Zealand context.*

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## 1.0 Introduction

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There is a social relationship between gender and perceived suitability for a job or profession that can be surmised into two generalisations. Professions or roles that are typically associated with danger, physical strength, pressure or technical adeptness are perceived as masculine professions, and positions in these professions are predominately held by men. The list of these professions includes law, medicine, law-enforcement, and most trades. On the other hand, professions that are associated with either low risk scenarios or include a degree of caring and nurturing, and are supplementary to primary roles, (including librarianship, nursing and pre-school and primary school teaching), are typically associated as being roles suitable for women. The problem with these generalisations is that they are somewhat erroneous and based on old information (for example, there has been a dramatic increase in female law and medicine graduates in recent years). However, men and women are steered by societal pressure into professions that suit their gender, and those who go into professions atypical to their gender are often pressured to pursue employment that is more suitable. This is where the concept of the glass escalator is introduced, as this theory explains some of the processes that are used to correct men in gender atypical employment. The glass escalator, first coined by Williams in 1992, is the theory that men who are working in female dominated professions are subjected to positive discrimination from within the workplace (internal) and negative discrimination from outside the workplace (external). This causes them to either move or be pushed into either more gender typical roles in the profession (e.g. management) or out of the profession altogether into more gender typical employment.

Gender research in the library and information management profession still has a lot of scope and potential. Libraries are traditionally associated as being a female dominated profession; historically that has not always been the case, though women have dominated the US library profession in numbers since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, before then the profession was typically seen as a male profession. However, even though they are now a minority, men continue to hold a disproportionate amount of administrative

roles in the profession (Green & Record 2008, p 193). There is an awareness of gender inequality amongst library and information professionals, and while these differences are not as extreme as in other professions, there is still considerable room for improvement in gender equality. There is some evidence to suggest that men in the library profession receive invisible benefits due to their gender, though at the same time, this evidence could be considered nothing special considering, generally, men are preferred across all professions, not just female ones. There is a distinct lack of authoritative empirical evidence, mostly due to the lack of male respondents to the surveys, (see Budig, 2002) and data is largely dependent on word of mouth and anecdotal accounts. While there is considerable research documenting the gendered landscape of the profession, these studies are often only useful as a retroactive account of profession, and there have been only a few practical suggestions on how to reduce the gender-gap. Future research should have practical and measurable goals in order to inform and educate in the best ways to aid the reduction in the gender-gap in this profession.

Existing research on the theory of the glass escalator is primarily focused on how it affects female experience in the workplace, especially on how it has contributed towards discrimination against women in decisions relating to promotion and salaries. Aside from a few scattered studies, the male experience has been largely ignored since Williams' pioneering study, which was conducted nearly 20 years ago (see Green & Record, 2008). Since then, a new generation of people have entered the workforce and there have been drastic changes in the information society that has greatly affected the nature of the profession. There is a need to assess the experience of these new male librarians and the older, longer serving librarians in order to determine how much of an effect that glass escalator is having on the experience of working in the library and information management profession.

Currently there are no published studies examining in detail the glass escalator theory in a New Zealand context. Conducting this kind of gender-divide research in a New Zealand context could be prove to be interesting, as New Zealand has a fairly unique precedents of gender equality in society. Socially and politically, New Zealand has been a pioneering nation for women's rights, yet at the same time has a very ingrained sense of typical

frontier-man masculinity, which makes for an interesting scene in which to analyse the role of men who work in female dominated professions.

## **2.0 Research Objective**

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The objective of this research project is to provide an exploratory study of the glass escalator theory in the library and information management profession in New Zealand. The study examines how a small sample of men in the library and information management profession advanced their careers, and compared their experiences to aspects of existing glass escalator research and theories. From this comparison, the conclusion can be drawn whether or not there is currently any evidence of the glass escalator in the profession.

Secondly, as this is an exploratory study, the results of this research could be used to as the basis to form more research into the glass escalator theory in the New Zealand library profession.

Therefore, this is not an exhaustive study into the glass escalator – as the focus will be on only a small group of male managers and senior librarians who are currently employed in the library and information profession. The focus will be on their employment experiences and the motivating factors that brought them into the profession, what motivating them to move into their current role and what challenges they faced when during their time working in libraries.

## **3.0 Literature Review**

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### **3.1 What is the Glass Escalator?**

Williams (1992) first coined the theory of the glass escalator; a theory that token men in female dominated professions, such as teaching, nursing and librarianship, enjoy invisible benefits due to society innately rewarding masculinity. These benefits manifest as quicker promotion into managerial roles and larger salary increases. These advantages compensate for disadvantages (for example, societal suspicion of the masculinity and their

sexual orientation) of being a token male in a female dominated workplace. Williams concludes that both men and women who enter workforces that are not traditionally associated with their gender face discrimination, however, men in female professions are more likely to face discrimination from outside the organisation, in forms of social stigma (Williams, 1992, p. 263-264). Williams' study is the archetypal study of men working in female dominated environments, though her selective sample size may have influenced her results. In particular, she interviews men that have been successful in advancing in a female dominated workplace, thus non-gendered factors, such as technical competence or seniority, could explain their advancement in the profession.

Hultin (2003) also adds to the empirical evidence surrounding the glass escalator by a large-scale quantitative study of Swedish employment trends over 26 years. During this period, Sweden's labour market underwent considerable changes to bring equality to the workplace; there was a strong governmental push to have women re-enter the workforce, (Hultin, 2003 p. 54). However, this study showed that the gender gap between men and women in supervisory roles was quite significant, especially in the case of female dominated professions, where evidence suggests that the glass escalator theory is true in the Swedish workplace (Hultin, 2003, p. 52). Similar findings were also found in 2006 study that interviewed female law librarians in the United States, and found numerous accounts of favouritism for males in the field of law librarianship. However, in this case, the review was exclusively focused on how the glass escalator discriminated against women, rather than advantaged men (Rumsey, 2006, p. 17).

An example of what effects the glass escalator had on the library and information management profession from when the concept was first coined can be found in Hildenbrand's research in the late 1990's. She showed that there were significant disparities in pay between male and female library staff, which was puzzling for a profession that was almost 80% female (Hildenbrand, 1997, p. 45). Hildenbrand attributed this towards the libraries beginning to take on characteristics of the private sector, an area not historically favourable towards women, with its practises of downsizing and outsourcing. An area she is particularly concerned with is the introduction of



automatic technologies. Automation typically targets middle management; the level aspiring women tend to reach in the library world. While introducing new technologies into the library environment helps solidify the status of the librarianship as a serious and cutting-edge profession, Hildenbrand questions worth of this status (Hildenbrand, 1997, p. 45). She further extrapolated on this theory two years later, and identified the growing trend of libraries to downplay the term 'library' in favour of 'information'. Society passively accepts the status quo of information and technology as masculine concepts and the growing usage of computers and the development of the information age will result in a regression in equality amongst genders in the library profession (Hildenbrand, 1999 p. 46-47). This is also evident in Simpson's (2004) findings, as male librarians had a tendency to refer to themselves as 'information scientist' or 'researcher' in order to downplay the feminine association with their roles, and distance themselves from the stereotypical image of the librarian as a 'dowdy, cardigan-wearing woman' (p. 359-360).

Further investigations into the male perspective on gender issues in libraries can be found in Piper and Collarmer's (2001) survey of 118 male librarians from both public and academic settings. While the librarians that were surveyed did perceive that men had advantages in terms of promotion, they also believe that they felt pressured into taking administrative roles, even though 48% of public librarians and 59% of academic librarians expressed no interest in assuming these roles. Although, at the same time, the respondents felt that the profession was equitable for both genders, and that men had no great advantages in terms of pay – though research has proved that men earned 5.8% more than their female counterparts in the 1990's (p. 444). The researchers also expected to find that male librarians would express some level of displeasure with working in a female dominated profession, yet the majority of respondents were content with their roles, and did not even identify the librarian profession as being dominated by women. It was inconclusive if this perception was due to how men hold a disproportionate amount of power in librarianship, or if they the men polled genuinely did not define the profession in gendered terms.

### **3.2 Explaining the Glass Escalator**

Once the theory of the glass escalator was defined, there has been a more research into the effects, and an attempt to understand what factors cause men to succeed in female dominated professions. Simpson (2004) studied men who work in the same female dominated fields as Williams did (nursing, teaching, and libraries) in order to find how they redefined their own and the professions' masculinity in order to cope with being a minority in the workplace. One important discovery she made was that men who work in libraries are more likely to be what she describes as 'finders' – people find themselves in the careers by making general career decisions, rather than those who actively choose to work as librarians (known as 'seekers' in the study). The men from her sample generally chose to work in libraries due to a lack of desirable alternative, or even because they were denied other career choices. However, Simpson also found that librarianship was one of the professions where males holding junior positions were groomed for senior roles, by supervisors giving them more responsibilities and opportunities for learning. However, men do not always welcome the fast track to management – those who sought to work in female professions are sometimes resistant to the benefits that they receive due to their token status (Simpson, 2004, p 355-360) – however this group included nurses and teachers, but not librarians. If men who work in libraries are generally ambivalent towards working in the library, then it is reasonable to conclude that they would take the opportunities to advance as they came, as there are no strong ties to the role where they are currently employed. Librarians were one the few groups of men in Simpson's study that expressed a desire to work in management, with the majority of teachers and nurses preferred to stay working in their current roles, despite facing equal amounts of pressure to move into management (Simpson, 2004, p 356).

While Simpson's study provides valuable insight into those men who find themselves in library work, it is important to understand the motivations and ambitions of those who actively sought a career in libraries. Goulding and Jones (1999) examine the career attitudes of library and information management students to see if this explains the prevailing assumption that women set their own restrictions to their career paths, which leads to the

management positions to be filled by men. Their findings thoroughly debunk this myth, showing that a higher percentage of male library and information management students aspire to be librarians with few managerial responsibilities, and women are much more likely to aspire to lead a library or information service. Women were also twice as likely to expect promotion in their first two years of employment. Their findings clearly showed that women were much more ambitious at the beginning of their library careers, but they still do not occupy the higher management positions. They identified two social constraints that might mitigate this ambition and prevent women from seeking higher positions. They are more likely to put their family ahead of their careers, electing to take options that are more flexible in the workplace, effectively limiting their opportunities for career advancement. Family ties also contribute to the second barrier – they are less likely to change their geographic location for the sake of work at the risk of disrupting their family life, so they are limited to roles that are available in their geographic proximity. This is contrasted by the male attitude towards the family/work dichotomy – men typically place lesser emphasis on their family life, and make more career focuses decisions. Alternatively, they see their role in the family as being a provider and an earner, so they make more sacrifices in their family life in the trade-off of advancing their careers in order to secure higher wages and job security.

If men enter the library and information management profession without the same level of ambition of their female peers, then it could be suggested that they have been placed on the glass escalator after their careers have started. This could be coupled with an increase in responsibility and pressure to develop a respectable career in their chosen field. The evidence of this can be found in a study by Taylor (2010) that found that as the percentage of women in a general workplace increases, the men in that environment report a higher level of workplace support. At the same time, the level of support experienced by women is inverse to this trend (though not as dramatically). Likewise, when the percentage of women in a profession decreases past 50 percent, the level of support the women report also decreases, while with men it increases. Her research is primarily focused on the female experience in the workplace, and concluded that women who are

segregated into female dominated professions are going to experience low pay and status, and those who break the mould are going to run into glass ceiling barriers. However, this also asks the question of how men translate the experience of working in a predominately female workplace into the perception that they receive a high level of support.

Elsesser and Peplau (2006) in their study into barriers in cross-sex friendships and mentoring relationships in workplaces, (or as they call it, the glass partition) suggest an interesting theory on how the glass escalator operates. Their findings conclude that cross-sex mentoring relationships are difficult to form, due to a number of different factors including a lack of common interests and paranoia that other workers will view the relationship as romantic. As a result, people tend to gravitate towards forming mentoring relationship with co-workers of the same gender. They also concluded that people (regardless of gender) are more successful when they have male mentors rather than female mentors. Hence, the hypothesis that can be drawn from this is that men who rode the glass escalator to the top of a female dominated profession will develop mentoring relationships with the men who have recently entered the profession and then help them on their way up. This suggests that the glass escalator is a self perpetuating cycle, and in this regard similar to a literal escalator in that it is the same set of stairs carrying different people to the top.

Kmec, McDonald & Trimble (2010) also offer an interesting hypothesis on what causes the glass escalator to function. A study of employment trends of men and women who were not actively searching for jobs who were working in atypical environments to their gender, labelled by the researchers as “misfits”, yielded results that complemented the glass escalator theory. They found that men were channelled out of female dominated work groups and into male dominated ones, by their superiors and co-workers (the reverse, channelling women into more female-typical areas was noted, though not as prevalent). (Kmec et al, 2010, p. 227) This is consistent with some aspects of the glass escalator theory, in that men in female dominated professions need to work to stay in place, as ultimately societal pressures will try to correct their atypical employment choices.

However, not every study conducted on the experience of men in the female dominated professions concludes that men are advantaged because of their token status. As most of these studies are primarily focused on personal accounts from male employees who work in female professions on how they are perceived, there is little evidence on how these organisations tangibly reward these token employees (Budig, 2002, p. 261). Budig's study demolishes glass escalator research by analysing the earnings of men in female dominated professions, with hypothesis this that there is no special advantage to men in female professions - men earn more over every profession. Findings showed that this hypothesis is correct, (Budig, 2002, p. 274), but throughout the research, it was discovered that men in female professions has no significant advantage over women in terms of promotion or status, which is completely contrary to previous glass escalator research. This discrepancy is attributed to previous researchers not sufficiently comparing male and female dominated professions (Budig, 2002, p. 275). What this study shows is that the perception that men are advantaged in female dominated profession might just be that – a perception. One that does not hold when analysing the actual benefits to pay, but nevertheless, still part of an overall bleak picture of a society that rewards its male workers over its female workers, no matter which profession.

Secondly, how men perceive their own experience of working in female dominated professions does not always agree with the concept that they are privileged or advantaged by being the minority. Carmichael (1994) conducted a survey of American male librarians in 1991 to capture their sentiments about gender issues in the profession. He found that 45% of respondents did not believe that men had any advantage in advancement in the profession, and 51% did not believe that scarcity of men improved their chances for promotion. While only 10% believed that being a man caused them to be disadvantaged, many write in comments contradicted this figure indicating that dissatisfaction with the way that men are treated in the profession is a lot more widespread. In addition to this, respondents also reported a number of other complaints and criticisms of their work environment, such as an expectation that they will perform menial and distasteful tasks, such as cleaning, heavy lifting and dealing with problematic customers. The

respondents also reported double standards where men were disadvantaged when commenting on topics including sexual harassment, affirmative action and gender stereotypes. However, as demonstrated in the Piper and Collarmer 2001 study mentioned earlier, the perceptions expressed in Carmichael's study contradict the extensive research that proves that male librarians earn more and achieve promotions faster (Piper & Collarmer, 2001, p 406). This refutes the notion that the profession is equitable that the men express in both their own and Carmichael's study but this suggests that there is some concern over the way men are treated in the organisation on a personal level. The most interesting thing about the Carmichael study is how it was presented in *American Libraries* journal – inset into the article were the opinions of three prominent female researchers and librarians who have published on gender issues in *Libraries* (including Suzanne Hildenbrand, cited in this literature review). While these researchers expressed that the bitterness and resentment needed to be addressed and rectified, but they speculated that unfavourable working conditions expressed in the survey were more likely the result of under-resourced libraries, or not that different to female experience in libraries.

## **4.0 Methodology**

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### **4.1 Research Sample**

The research sample for this project was made up of six men who currently hold positions as managers or senior librarians (i.e. librarians with staff management responsibilities and/or a high-level focus on a collection). There was a wide range of experience; some participants had only been appointed into their roles within the last year, while others had long careers spanning decades in senior management roles. Five of the participants were currently holding roles in public libraries (though only one had not worked outside of a public library in their career) and one was currently employed as a corporate librarian.

Participants were selected on an ad hoc basis through professional contacts of the researcher – I had met all of the participants before in a

professional environment, and for most of them, continue to have a professional relationship. This may call into question the validity of the results from the data, as there is a possibility that answers to the interview questions given may have been influenced by my prior relationships with the participants.

There are two notable omissions from the sample group should be addressed here, women and men who have held nothing but junior roles in the library and information management profession.

The decision to exclude female interview subject is based on how the primary focus of the research is an exploration on the male perspective experience in the library and information management profession. Admittedly, the contributions that their female co-workers would bring would help develop a fuller picture of the general career progression in the library and information profession. Secondly, the glass escalator is just as much a female issue as it is a male one, so no exhaustive study of the theory would be complete without the female perspective. However, this research will only focus on the male experience in the library profession, and further research into how this affects librarians of both genders is recommended in the conclusion.

A second omission of this sample group is the lack of men who have long careers working in junior roles, e.g. library assistants or shelvers. According to glass escalator theory, this group would have been experiencing pressure to move into gender typical positions yet they have resisted the pressure and worked to stay in place. However, the study has relied on the experiences of the recently promoted, as well as the retrospective experience of the long serving participants, to speak for the experience of the junior librarian. However, a point of interest for follow-up research may be to explore the lack of influence that the positive and negative discriminatory factors of the glass escalator theory might have over men who hold long-term positions in junior librarian roles.

## 4.2 Interviews

The interview was split into two parts. The first part gathered data on the career progression of the participant. The aim of gathering this information was to track the experience of the participants, as well as to determine the wider picture of how the career librarian and information professional is formed, and the work that they put into moving through their career. This data was used when analysing the experiences of the participants that were documented in the second part of the interview, in order to discover if there any common themes that arose from the experiences could be linked to their career paths.

The second part was focused on exploring their experiences and observations from throughout their career on what motivated them and encouraged them to make the decisions to move forward in their career. This was designed to test the validity of the glass escalator theories against the personal experiences of the participants. The second part was split into three sections as follows.

The first section was focused on the participants' motivation to enter the library and information management profession to begin with. The questions were centred on the motivation to enter a gender atypical profession, the types of challenges they first faced, and how their friends and family from outside of the profession feel about their decision to start library work.

The second section explored what motivated them to enter into their current role (which would be a senior/managerial role) and asked questions about the challenges and encouragement that they received when they had established themselves inside the library. There was also a question focuses on academic studies in library and information management.

The final section asked the question on if they had changed career focus from their library and information management careers, why, and what motivated them to re-enter the profession. This section aims to capture the experiences of men who have at some point in their careers decided to take a break from the library and information management profession, but also to capture their motivation and the contributing factors that caused them to return.



Finally, the research was conducted with approval from the School of Information Management's Human Ethics Committee, so the research project in its entirety, including interview schedule and confidentiality measures met the standards set by Victoria University of Wellington.

#### **4.3 Data Analysis - Grounded Theory & Narrative Analysis**

The interviews were conducted under the grounded theory research method. This research method for a free flowing interview and data analysis process that accurately captured the experiences of the participants of the study, and allowed conclusions and further theories to be developed out of the data. However, in this study there are some deviations from Strauss & Glaser's grounded theory method of research and data analysis in exploratory studies.

1. Before the data was collected, there was a preliminary literature review conducted (See section 2.0), so there was some pre-existing basis for hypothesis. However, as the study is more concerned with applying an existing theory, rather than developing a new one. The literature was also conducted in the spirit of grounded theory research, in that it was constantly updated through out the entire research project (rather than before data collection commenced).
2. Interviews were taped, though is this more of a reflection on the poor note making and handwriting of the researcher rather than any deliberate deviation of the grounded theory method. However, there is the benefit of being able to provide direct quotes from the interviews in order to illustrate outcomes of the research without relying on the researchers interpretations. This also allowed for a more precise analysis of the data from the interviews.
3. Interviewees were given a brief introduction to the glass escalator theory, which was done mostly to adhere to ethical concerns of full disclosure of the intent of the research.

The data from the interviews was coded into fragments, and from these fragments. The data was coded during the data collection process, but

analysis of the coding began after the interviews were complete, and participants had an opportunity to withdraw from the study. The list of codes was diverse as each participant approached the interview questions very differently, and while there was an interview schedule, I felt it was important to let the participant explore the questions I asked in their own way. Nevertheless, some key themes emerged from the coding that included encouragement from within the profession, encouragement from outside of the profession, how mentoring relationships were formed, and the self-motivation of the participants.

The results of the interviews were analysed and compared to the information that was learnt from the review of the literature in order to determine their relevance to the glass escalator theory.

## **5.0 Results**

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The key result from the interviews was that not a single participant expressed that they faced any preferential treatment or discrimination in their library careers that was based on their gender. That being said, every participant was aware of their token status, but they did not see it translating into benefits or discrimination that pushed them up the ranks of the profession. However, there was evidence that could have been attributed to the glass escalator, but the participants did not attribute these instances as being related to the gender, and being a token male in a female dominated profession.

Every participant interviewed in this study started in an entry-level position, except for the one that had an MLIS degree. However, he had previous experience in a corporate information management environment. This is relevant as each participant (save one) had to work their way up from the lowest entry point in the library profession to get into the senior role that they held at the time of this study – whether they rode the glass escalator or not. Consistent with Simpson's study, over half of the participants 'found' themselves in librarian work. Only two participants made direct decisions to pursue libraries as a career. However, there was a variety of different circumstances where the participants found themselves in library work. The

most popular situation was that work in a library began when the participant was completing their tertiary studies (non-library-related qualifications), and then once they completed their studies, they decided to stay working in the library environment. Other times, family members recommended working at the library to them; they applied, and were successful in securing library work.

Interestingly, for one of the participants who actively chose to work in libraries as a profession, of the main motivating factors was that library was complementary to their primary interests that were outside of work. So even those who were choosing to work in libraries as a first choice, it was still not their primary vocation.

Attitudes towards the profession from external parties were generally positive - some participants claimed that people were supportive of them choosing libraries as a career, though some also reported that their friends and family were somewhat surprised, and one participants' family was simply indifferent to their career choice. For the most part, participants generally had at least one champion from outside of the profession who they identified as being supportive of their career choice. This was usually a relative, though not always from their immediate family. The less than positive reactions towards the participants' career choice were transient and it did not cause the participants any serious misgivings about their chosen profession, as demonstrated by the following response:

*How did you friends and family members react when you decided to become a librarian?*

They pretty much laughed. People used to ask me what I did I do, and I said [librarian], they'd ask me again "Sorry, what?" It sort of bothered me at first, but now it doesn't because I can explain to them what I actually do.

With these minor circumstances aside, none of the participants expressed that they faced some form of discrimination that made them want to leave the library profession. The environment that they were working in was supportive, and they were welcomed into the profession. As mentioned above, family members and friends were generally supportive of their choice to work in libraries. For those participants who did report that people external

to the profession were surprised or not overly supportive of their career decisions, they also showed that this reaction did not bother them.

Only one participant had taken a break or changed focus in his library career, and the reason behind the change was related to following work interests, and the change in ultimately led him back to the library profession. Some participants remarked on the dissatisfaction in the remuneration of library staff, (especially true in the case of those who were supporting families), however this was not enough to make them leave the profession in order to find more lucrative work.

While there clearly nothing pushing the participants out of the careers – they were comfortable and established in their chosen career since they first entered – however, the same could not said of their attitude towards studying library and information management. There was a pattern seen in the participants who established themselves in the library environment without formal qualifications. They did not see the value of continuing studying, or if they obtained older qualifications, they did not see the need to continue their education, and rather focused on other things in their lives. Even the most recent graduate saw his studies as a means to an end in order to secure employment in the library environment. From people outside of the profession, there was a different attitude, as one participant noted:

My friends have always pushed me, if you are planning to stay in the libraries, why not get a qualification, so if you do decide to go for the management roles later on – you can't just bank on one degree which is not even library related.

Also, one participant had begun studies, but had taken a hiatus due to other commitments. In explaining the decision to cease studying, he made the following remarks:

"I discussed it with a couple of lecturers... and they said that maybe you should stop now and try another time... One of my friends asked why did you stop? And that's sort of brought shame on me.

While none of the participants faced any discrimination that pressured them into correcting their gender-atypical employment selection, all of them

reported at least one experience that could fit into the glass escalator theory. There was one instance where the participant knew that male candidates were preferred for his role, and other roles in the same library. The manager of that library was actively seeking to employ men into gender atypical roles, though the participant was not sure why. One claimed that he felt that because he was male, he was expected to have some skill sets (e.g. IT related) from his older, female colleagues, and that these perceived set of skills made him respected in the workplace. Probably the most telling result was that most of the participants at some point in their career worked in a job that they felt they did not have the experience to fulfil - however encouragement from colleagues, and an attitude of "what can I lose?" rationalised the decision to apply for the role. However, they did not stay in these roles for a long time – they quickly moved (backwards or laterally) into comfortable roles.

Mentors also played an important part in the motivation and encouragement of the participants throughout their careers. All participants interviewed identified with at least one mentor in their careers, though younger participants or those with shorter careers did not identify mentors as being as important as the elder participants did. Mentors were usually the direct managers of the participants from some point of their career, and by being their direct manager, there were some instances where the mentor was able to influence the participants' advancement through the library profession. For example, there were instances where a mentor-manager would send the participant to a meeting in their place, in order to help develop the participant, and prepare them for the career ahead. Mentors also shared some similar traits:

- They were female.
- They were identified as not being very vocally supportive.
- They tended to have corrective and directive management style.

However, not all encouragement and mentoring came from managers, as this quote demonstrates:

[Encouragement] didn't necessarily come from my manager I think it was forces sort of in the periphery. Feedback from customers or colleagues, how they were saying what a good job I was doing.

Every participant stated to relate well to his or her colleagues, and treated them with respect and equality, regardless of their gender. No participant actively sought male contact and friendships, nor showed any preference to working with men over women. There were some differences in the way they related to other men socially, e.g. more likely to engage them in conversations about sport. However, what was more surprising to some participants was that their female colleagues had no problems discussing feminine issues (e.g. menopause) in their presence or even with them directly. There was a consensus amongst the participants that they did interact with their female colleagues differently, it was a sub-conscious, and certainly did not influence their respect of their colleagues. Though when responding to the question relating to how they related to their colleagues, some interesting comments came out that addressed an issue that research into the glass escalator theory does not: how men who are promoted into management roles fare once they are there. One participant remarked:

I think that [men] have a different experience at work, and I'm sure that draws a different response from me, and the way I coach those people... I have [known] men in library settings who are to some degree or another, sometimes bullied, sometimes slightly belittled and made fun of. And are sometimes, as a result a bit uncertain about where they stand in that group. They have found it difficult to find the right way of connecting with their peers. I have worked with people who have been given quite a lot of leeway, quite a lot of space, to make comments, to be who they are, to be a bit boyish, but then at other times when they need to be able to influence others... and they are not very able to do that.

There was also an observation that men who work in female dominated professions might enjoy early success and promotion, but this does not play out over whole careers.

I think men get to a level quite fast, then they plateau in terms of their influence.

However, some evidence came through the interviews that demonstrated that the glass escalator might be limited in terms of its locus of control of these men's career progressions, as there were some fairly convention explanations for their motivations to advance their careers. Attitude towards work played a major part in how the participants advanced their career. One participant remarked that there was only one place to be – the top. This demonstrates a significant level of ambition amongst male librarians that might not be as prevalent in graduates, as per Goulding and Jones' study in the ambition of library school students. This ambition might manifest after they have begun their career.

There was some degree of pressure to support families that focused some of the candidates (those who had dependants) into progressing their careers, indicating that personal commitments were a key driver in these people's career choices. Pressure to support a family seems strangely absent from glass escalator theories.

Lastly, there was a strong feeling that throughout the 70's and 80's the library environment developed into a meritocracy, so the long serving librarians were more likely to put their promotions down to their skills and experience, rather than those who had less experience. It was reported that there was a shifting gender make up of the library and information management profession – men are beginning to occupy the lower, junior levels of the profession and women are taking the high-level positions. The more senior participants noted that they often find themselves in high-level meetings where they are the only male, but this was something that they noticed, but it did not faze them.

## **6.0 Discussion and conclusions**

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For the most part, the glass escalator theory does not seem as straightforward in the current library and information management profession in New Zealand, as what it may have appeared in the research from the previous two decades. The attitude of the men who were interviewed for this exploratory study towards their experiences in the library and information

management profession was quite varied. However, there were several common elements identified in the results – and many of them had some relation to elements of the glass escalator theory.

One participant had no idea what the glass escalator was, and initially thought the project was going to be related to library architecture. He may have been being facetious, but this is a fair indication on how the seriously participant took the idea of gender advantages in his own employment experiences (i.e. he did not). Never hearing of the glass escalator theory before was not unusual amongst the participants. However, when the basic concept was introduced, participants were at least aware of the issues, as one put it “It’s something we’ve all wondered about at some point of our careers”. This suggest at some base level that men who succeed in female dominated professions are completely aware of the gender issues that come with being a part of being a token male in a female profession. However, the challenges that the men faced when they entered the profession did not have anything to do with their gender – they never felt marginalised because of their gender, or did they feel that they were working against a gender archetype. Those who did acknowledge that they were a gender minority never identify it as a problem that needed be overcome.

This brings us to one of the more interesting results is that when discussing the glass escalator theory with the participants; some began to evaluate the movements and decisions that were made during their careers against theory, causing the theory to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Even though no participants explicitly stated that they received preferential treatment due to their gender, once the theory of the glass escalator was presented to them, they automatically assumed that it was true. The reasons why the participants would do this are unclear, if it were a correct assumption or self-realisation, or if it were self-deprecation from a lack of confidence, feigned or otherwise. It is a strong suggestion that future researchers take great care around discussing the topic of the glass escalator with participants in order to prevent influencing the results of the study.

While all the mentors and managers that were influential to the participants’ career advancements were identified as female, the qualities of these mentors could be described has having an old management style –



typically male manager qualities – of being directive, not overly supportive and results oriented. This might go to explain how these women went to move ahead in the library organisation in their careers, as well as explain how the participants did well while working for these women. It is possible that men respond better to directive leadership, and this is why the glass escalator exists. However, it has been documented that in today's organisations, there is shifting preference of management styles from directive and objective management to supportive, empathic management – qualities that have been more associated with feminine management styles (see Robbins, Bergman, Stagg & Coulter, 2005, p. 594). It could mean that the days of the glass escalator are numbered, and that as organisations become more supportive and adaptive to the needs of their employees. Based on Elsesser and Peplau's glass partition theory, male managers might have a reluctance to mentor and develop females – as the perception is that could be construed as romantic interest – but this apprehension might not be as common amongst female managers.

The attitude that the participants showed towards studies in library and information management seemed neutral – they did not see further studies into libraries as important in developing their careers. Interestingly, even though the participants did not place a high level of value on studying library and information science, they all held, or intended to obtain, tertiary library qualifications. This demonstrates that the internal and external pressure towards achieving qualifications is at least pushing men into undertaking study that may lie outside of their interests.

The glass escalator theory is primarily concerned with how men find their way into management roles in female professionals, but one factor it does not address is how these men fare when they do reach the management roles. This was a key concern that the participants expressed, as they often felt like they were promoted quickly, but they were not always sure they possessed the necessary competencies to do the job. In addition, participants noted (though none personally experienced) that while men can occupy the management roles, sometimes their influence over the organisation was limited to the point where they were not able to achieve their goals. This is an alarming response as a possible side effect of the glass

escalator could be that men who are not competent to perform a particular role might be appointed into it only through the virtue of being male. On the other hand, they could be completely competent to do the role, but are unable to achieve their goals due to an unfair level of resentment from colleagues who may perceive that the only reason they were appointed was because they were male.

One of the key limitations to this study was that it only focused on a select group of men – those who held senior librarian or management positions, and as a result, this limits the conclusions that can be drawn from this research. However, one thing is clear from this study is that there is scope for further research into the theory in a New Zealand Libraries setting. This research would benefit from expanding on the demographics in the sample group to include women at all levels of the profession, men who have held nothing but junior positions and men who have left the profession and never returned. This will ensure that the results of any further research are balanced and comprehensive.

The final recommendation that can be drawn from this research is in order to address the glass escalator theory, researchers should focus on the hiring trends inside the profession, and how libraries train and develop their staff so that they are able to progress with their careers. Removing the negative effects of tokenism in gender-dominated professions could be as simple as having fair and equitable hiring practices and training and development opportunities.

To conclude, the glass escalator theory may have some effect on the career motivations of the men working in the library and information management profession in New Zealand. However, these effects are very small and subtle, and in many cases are not the main motivating factors that cause men to advance their careers. While men who work in the profession do have an awareness of being a gender minority in the profession, they are unlikely to attribute their advancement as being related to their gender. There is a need for further research for definitive conclusions to be drawn there is a need for much wider research into the theory and how it applies in hiring decisions and career advancement.

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## 8.0 Appendix I – Interview Schedule

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### Opening

Introduce self, the study and the research objectives.

Go through consent form, and have the participant sign two copies – one for their records and one for the researcher's.

Offer to answer pre-questions the participant may have.

### Career information of the participant

How long have you worked in the library/information management profession?

- What year did you start working in the profession?
- Did you start at an entry-level position?
  - Please give details of your first role.

How long have you worked in your current role?

- Please give details of your current role.

### Research objectives

What motivated you to enter the library and information management profession to begin with?

- What kind of encouragement did you receive when you first entered the profession?
- Did you face any challenges when you entered the profession?
- How did the people who you know from outside the profession, i.e. friends and family, respond when you became a librarian?
- How do you relate to your co-workers?
  - Are they predominately male or female?
  - Do you think that makes a difference to the way you relate to them?

What do you think motivated you to apply for your current role?

- Did you receive encouragement to move forward within the profession into your current role?
- How about challenges?

Do you hold, or are working towards, a library related tertiary qualification?

- If so, when did you acquire it, and what kind of support did you receive from colleagues/supervisors/friends and family?

Have you taken a break or changed focus from the library/information profession?

- If so, what caused this change?
- Why did you choose to re-enter the profession?

### Closing

Thank the participant for their time.

Offer to answer post interview questions.

Explain the post interview process.

- When the data analysis will start
- Completion of the assignment.

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