






FemiLISm now!: Identifying and exploring feminist theories and methods in CAIS/ACSI and ASIS&T conference proceedings, 1993-2021

FemiLISm now! : identifier et explorer les méthodologies et théories féministes dans les actes des conférences CAIS/ACSI et ASIS&T entre 1993 et 2021

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Article abstract

This paper reports on a systematic literature review of CAIS/ACSI and ASIS&T conference proceedings to identify, analyze, and map the application of feminist theories, methods, and epistemologies across a sample of LIS research. We seek a better understanding of feminist theories in LIS to a) identify how/where it has been taken up (and not taken up); b) identify feminist research themes and influence over time and across subdomains; and c) to consider how to build on intersectional feminist theories and praxis in LIS to move toward a critical intersectional femiLISm movement that is embraced and embedded within our field.

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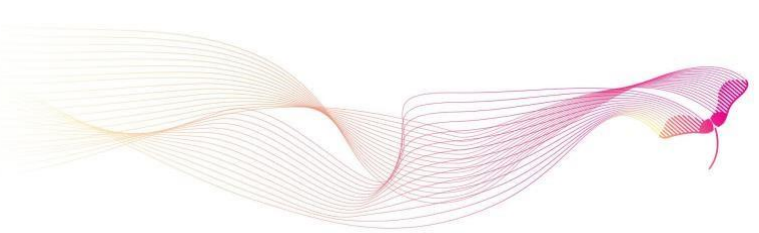
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Abstract: This paper reports on a systematic literature review of CAIS/ACSI and ASIS&T conference proceedings to identify, analyze, and map the application of feminist theories, methods, and epistemologies across a sample of LIS research. We seek a better understanding of feminist theories in LIS to a) identify how/where it has been taken up (and not taken up); b) identify feminist research themes and influence over time and across subdomains; and c) to consider how to build on intersectional feminist theories and praxis in LIS to move toward a critical intersectional femiLISt movement that is embraced and embedded within our field.

Keywords: intersectional feminisms, Library and Information Studies, systematic literature review

Résumé : Cet article rend compte d'une revue systématique de la littérature des actes des conférences CAIS/ACSI et ASIS&T pour identifier, analyser et cartographier l'application des théories, des méthodes et des épistémologies féministes à travers un échantillon de recherche en sciences de l'information (SI). Nous cherchons à mieux comprendre les théories féministes en SI pour a) identifier comment/où elles ont été reprises (et non reprises) ; b) identifier les principaux thèmes de recherche féministes et leur influence dans le temps et dans les sous-

domaines de recherche ; et c) considérer comment s'appuyer sur les théories et les pratiques féministes intersectionnelles en SI pour évoluer vers un mouvement féministe intersectionnel critique qui est adopté et intégré dans notre domaine.

Mots clés : féminisme intersectionnel, bibliothéconomie et sciences de l'information, revue systématique de la littérature

Introduction

Emerging out of women's rights movements, feminist theories and methods are a rich and diverse set of critical theories that have generated from and been taken up across many disciplinary fields. Despite their wide interdisciplinary application outside of Library and Information Studies (LIS), feminist theories and methods have not been broadly taken up within LIS or any of its subdomains. This article reports on a pilot study of a systematic literature review of the Canadian Association of Information Science/l'Association canadienne des sciences de l'information (CAIS/ACSI) Conference Proceedings and the Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T) Conference Proceedings that identifies, analyzes, and maps the presence and application of feminist theories, methods, and epistemologies across LIS subdomains. We seek to better understand the application of intersectional feminist theories within LIS in order to a) identify how/where these perspectives have (and have not) been taken up; b) identify feminist research themes and influence over time and across subdomains within LIS at CAIS/ACSI and ASIS&T conferences; and perhaps most importantly, c) to consider how we might build, amplify, and augment critical intersectional feminist theories and praxis in LIS.

Taking the feminist stance ourselves that our work is never value neutral and should always strive for justice and social liberation for equity-deserving and vulnerable populations, we conclude by making recommendations to both a) further develop this research project to understand the past and future of intersectional feminism(s) in LIS, and b) move towards a critical intersectional femiLIST movement that is embraced and embedded within our field. Originally presented at the CAIS/ACSI conference in 2022 (Allard, Oliphant, and Chambers 2022), this article elaborates the themes identified in that extended conference abstract and offers a more thoroughly articulated path forward towards a critical intersectional femiLISm.

Background

This project was conceived when two of the paper's authors, along with their colleague Angela Lieu, began a research project about sexual harassment committed against library workers by their patrons (Allard, Lieu, and Oliphant 2020; Lieu, Allard, and Oliphant 2019). Although we knew that there was not an extensive body of feminist scholarship in our field, it became very obvious that a feminist anti-violence lens and a feminist understanding of the feminization of library workplaces was urgently needed to fully comprehend both why sexual harassment was so prevalent in libraries and how to address it. We also observed that our attempt to offer these feminist lenses was met

with resistance by some LIS scholars and practitioners. Looking around the LIS field more broadly, we noted many places where intersectional feminist orientations could shed light on specific gendered, classed, and racialized contexts but were not present. Indeed, we also found important examples where feminist theories were being applied, such as in areas of archival studies, knowledge organization, and data and Internet studies. We became interested in better understanding where feminisms were both present and absent. However, we further suggest that the present social moment demands an intersectional feminist lens. With the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in the United States, ongoing challenges to drag queen storytimes, increasing book bans in libraries, and prolific online harassment and abuse of trans and cisgender women, gender diverse, and racialized folks, we suggest that now more than ever, LIS needs feminist thought and praxis to understand both the problems and interventions required in the context of proliferating gender and racial injustice.

Feminism is both a social movement and a set of theoretical and methodological frameworks (Bromley 2012). Much feminist scholarship generates from the field of women's and gender studies, but it also originates across disciplines and is applied within many disciplinary fields. While tracing the complex history of feminism(s) is outside of the scope of this article, the feminist movement and scholarly traditions are rich, long, diffuse and contested, and transnational in scope. Suffice it to say, there are many feminisms. Well-known feminist scholar bell hooks (1984) defines feminism as the movement to end sexism, sexual exploitation, and sexual oppression. Extending beyond this, many feminisms also offer critical frameworks to examine intersecting racialized, colonial, ableist, heteropatriarchal, and transphobic systems of oppression (Razack 2005; Davis 1981; Combahee River Collective 1978). This work also acknowledges the historical absences of race, class, disability, and trans issues within feminist movements and thought, insisting that we recognize how these absences have excluded many groups and framed the movement in ways that privileged dominant white perspectives. Our own critical intersectional feminist politics and orientation aligns with Cifor and Wood's definition of feminism as "an intersectional political philosophy committed to the dismantling of heteronormative, capitalist, racist patriarchy" (2017, 2).

Theory use in LIS

Although theory conversations in LIS have a rich history (Hjørland 1998), there is no unifying theory underpinning the field nor is there a unifying theory of information (Furner 2010). Discussions about theory in LIS often revolve around the development and use of metatheory (Lor 2014), including a social justice approach (Mehra 2022; Mehra and Rioux 2016; Rioux 2010), theory generated within and across the field (Mueller and Urbach 2017), or these discussions identify a lack of theory use in LIS research (Lor 2014; Pettigrew and McKechnie 2001). In addition, researchers have pointed to the lack of uptake of theory generated within the discipline by those outside of the field (Bates 1999; Pettigrew and McKechnie 2001). Because LIS is interdisciplinary, theory or metatheory is often imported into the field. However, imported theory's use or application is not necessarily appropriate across all LIS

subdomains such as archives or data studies. Furthermore, Nicole Cooke and Vanessa Kitzie (2021) argue that paradigms employed in LIS (and their theoretical underpinnings) obfuscate critical discussions about race, gender, class, disability, and sexuality by privileging and upholding Western ideals of “neutrality” in addition to erasing historical and current contributions of underrepresented and marginalized scholars in the field by not fully acknowledging and appreciating their work. We suggest that feminist theory and feminist epistemology can inform theory conversations in LIS by contesting theoretical “neutrality” in understanding and examining the erasure and obfuscation of the contributions of LIS scholars that Cooke and Kitzie (2021) point to, and by highlighting feminist theory’s applicability and potential to contribute to theory generation within the field and across various subdomains. Indeed, a number of important LIS contributions have explicitly applied feminist theories and methods: for example, to examine classification systems (Olson 2008; Olson and Ward 1997), library leadership and instruction (Accardi 2017; Lew and Yousefi 2017), children and youth literature (Lundin 1996; Vandergrift 1996), Google algorithms and digital technologies (Noble 2013; Sweeney 2016), mainstream and community archives (Cifor and Wood 2017; Lobo 2019), information practices (Light Costello and Floegel 2021), and data (Cifor et al. 2019).

Importantly, within library scholarship specifically, there is also an extensive body of work about women’s library labour that does not explicitly self-identify as feminist, but has shaped how librarianship understands itself in ways that are supportive of women’s rights. Roma Harris (1992), for example, examines and critiques the feminization of librarianship. Others examine the presence of the glass ceiling for women academic library administrators (Eva, Lê, and Sheriff 2021). While this work has a feminist orientation, it also raises questions, discussed below, about how we identify and define feminist work in our field and why it is important to do so. Indeed, we postulate that the LIS field has not adequately taken up feminist theories, either implicitly or explicitly. Our aim is to both surface what is valuable about feminist thought for and across LIS and to identify and support explicitly feminist contributions found within the conference proceedings under examination.

Method

The purpose of this pilot study is both to formulate a methodology for identifying and exploring the presence of feminist theories and methods in LIS publications and to generate a broad understanding of their application across the conference proceedings under examination. Using broad keyword searching, we searched the Canadian Association of Information Science/l’Association canadienne des sciences de l’information (CAIS/ACSI) Conference Proceedings (1993-2021) and the Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T) Proceedings (2000-2021). We limited our search to these two conference proceedings because CAIS/ACSI is a small conference hosted in Canada where experimental, innovative, and works in progress are often presented. Alternatively, ASIS&T is a large, top tier international conference with representation across all subdomains in LIS. We also acknowledge that not all LIS

subdomains are equally represented by these conference proceedings. Indeed, domain areas such as information behaviour are well represented but archival studies, for example, is not. CAIS/ACSI and ASIS&T conference proceedings were searched in December 2021 and January 2022. Query terms and results are described in tables 1 and 2. ASIS&T proceedings from 2000-2021 were searched through the ASIS&T digital library located at <https://ASIS&Tdl.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/>. Because CAIS/ACSI conference proceedings were not indexed in bibliographic databases and the website that hosts them does not have any search functionality, a Google search for proceedings written between 1993 and 2001 was conducted. In total we reviewed 978 CAIS/ACSI and 3053 ASIS&T conference records. Of the 4,031 records, once duplicate records were removed, 87 citations were identified in total that contained our query terms.

ASIS&T Conference proceedings (n = 3,053)			
Query	Fields	# of results	Date of search
"feminism"	title, keywords, abstract	15	31 December 2021
"intersectionality"	title, keywords, abstract	8	31 December 2021
"feminists"	title, keywords, abstract	2	31 December 2021
"feminist"	title, keywords, abstract	34	31 December 2021
"women's rights"	title, keywords, abstract	1	31 December 2021
	SUB-TOTAL	60	
	DUPLICATES	11	
	TOTAL	49	

Table 1. ASIS&T query terms and results

CAIS/ACSI Conference proceedings (n = 978)		
Query	# of results	Date of search
(feminism OR feminist OR intersectionality OR "women's rights") site: https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/ojs.CAIS/ACSI-acsi.ca/index.php	44	31 December 2021
féminisme site: https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/ojs.CAIS/ACSI-acsi.ca/index.php	0	12 January 2021
SUB-TOTAL	44	
DUPLICATES	6	
TOTAL	38	

Table 2. CAIS/ACSI query terms and results

The records consisted of extended abstracts, panel submissions, short papers, and long papers. The data for all 87 records was downloaded into an Excel spreadsheet. Studies were eligible for inclusion in this review if they met the following strict criterion:

- The study authors explicitly named and drew from feminist theories, epistemologies, or methodologies.

Our exclusion criteria were also strict. Studies were excluded when:

- The focus of the study was on gender rather than advancing feminist theory (e.g., proceedings that described the information behaviour of teenage girls but did not use feminist theory or analysis).
- The focus of the study was a site for feminist research (e.g., women's studies listserv), the researcher identified as a feminist, or feminist work was cited, but the study did not itself explicitly apply feminist theory or methods.
- The focus of the study related to feminism, such as decolonization and queer theory, but was not explicitly positioned as feminist. This work uses critical theory, is often connected to feminism or is itself feminist, but was excluded when such connections were not explicitly stated.

We followed this strict inclusion and exclusion criteria to highlight the work of scholars who are using feminist approaches explicitly and self-consciously rather than indirectly, to serve as an example and potential model for others interested in this research area, and to demonstrate how such theories and methods are taken up across the subdomains of LIS represented within the conference proceedings. Our strict criterion means that we may have missed some work in the field that is, indeed, feminist. For example, two of the author's own CAIS/ACSI conference proceeding about patron-perpetrated sexual harassment in libraries was excluded because we did not explicitly

situate the work as feminist (Oliphant, Allard, and Lieu 2021). Figure 1 below outlines the number of articles retrieved and the final total of articles that were analyzed according to our inclusion and exclusion criteria.

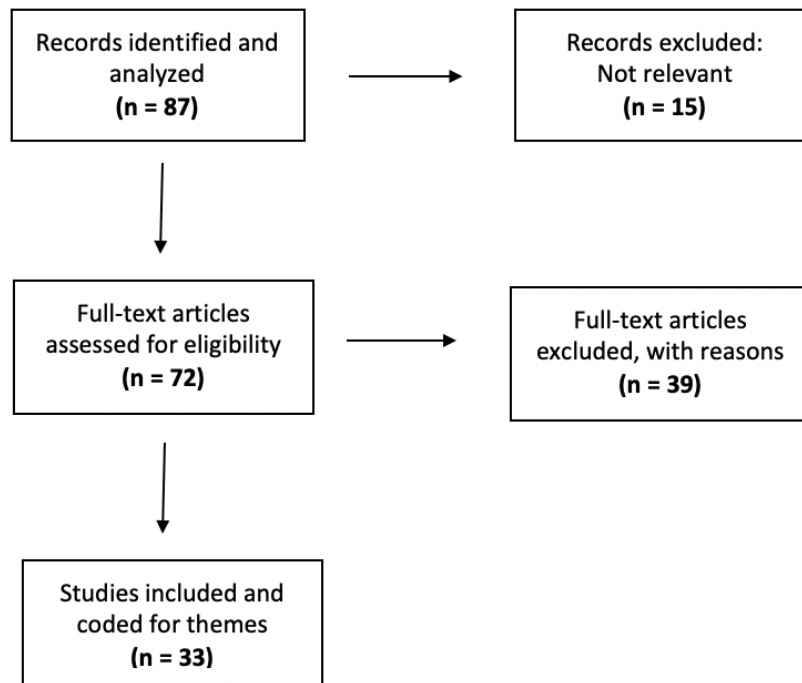


Figure 1. Number of articles that fit our inclusion/exclusion criteria

Data was extracted using a standard data extraction form. In total, we fully analyzed and coded 33 conference proceedings. Nineteen of the 33 fully analyzed publications came from ASIS&T and 14 came from CAIS/ACSI. These were coded according to the feminist epistemologies, methodologies, or theories identified by the author, the subject domains of the work presented (e.g., knowledge organization, LIS history), year of publication, and additional themes identified by coders. Coding was done independently by two members of the research team and then discussed to reach consensus on inclusion and exclusion criteria and coding. Disagreements were resolved through discussion and where necessary, the third author, Thane Chambers, was brought in to offer her perspective.

Findings

Nineteen of the 33 fully analyzed publications came from ASIS&T conference proceedings and 14 came from CAIS/ACSI. Table 3 below depicts the number of feminist publications included in the study by subject domain. Decisions about labelling and creating subject domain categories were made by the research team. Some subject domain categories are discrete and well represented such as “knowledge organization” because, as noted above, scholars such as Hope Olson have consistently applied feminist approaches to their work in this domain area. Other subject domain categories

contain more than one related subject domain such as “data studies/policy/data management.” Grouping these subject domains together provided a fuller picture of how feminism was taken up in these related subject domains.

Subject domain	Number of publications
Archival studies	4
Data studies/policy/data management	4
Information behaviour/practices/reading	7
Internet Studies/STS/digital libraries	5
Knowledge organization	4
LIS theory, history, community, origins, intellectual freedom	5
Library labour	3
Methods/methodology	1
TOTAL	33

Table 3. Number of publications using feminist theory, methodology, and epistemology by subject domain

While there is a fairly wide range of subdomains in LIS represented in our categories and within our small sample, these findings indicate that in general, feminist theories and methods are infrequently used (particularly given that there are thousands of CAIS/ACSI and ASIS&T conference proceedings in total). Subdomains not represented in the data include, for example, information retrieval and bibliometrics. There is also a marked absence of conference proceedings that considers LIS education, management, or organizational culture through a feminist lens, which is surprising because much LIS research engages with the feminized profession of librarianship. It may be that CAIS/ACSI and ASIS&T are conferences where feminist research is not being presented. Because we know that these two conferences are not representative of the whole field, future work will include additional conference proceedings and both professional and academic publications. Figure 2 below outlines the number of CAIS/ACSI and ASIS&T conference proceedings per year that included an explicitly feminist approach.

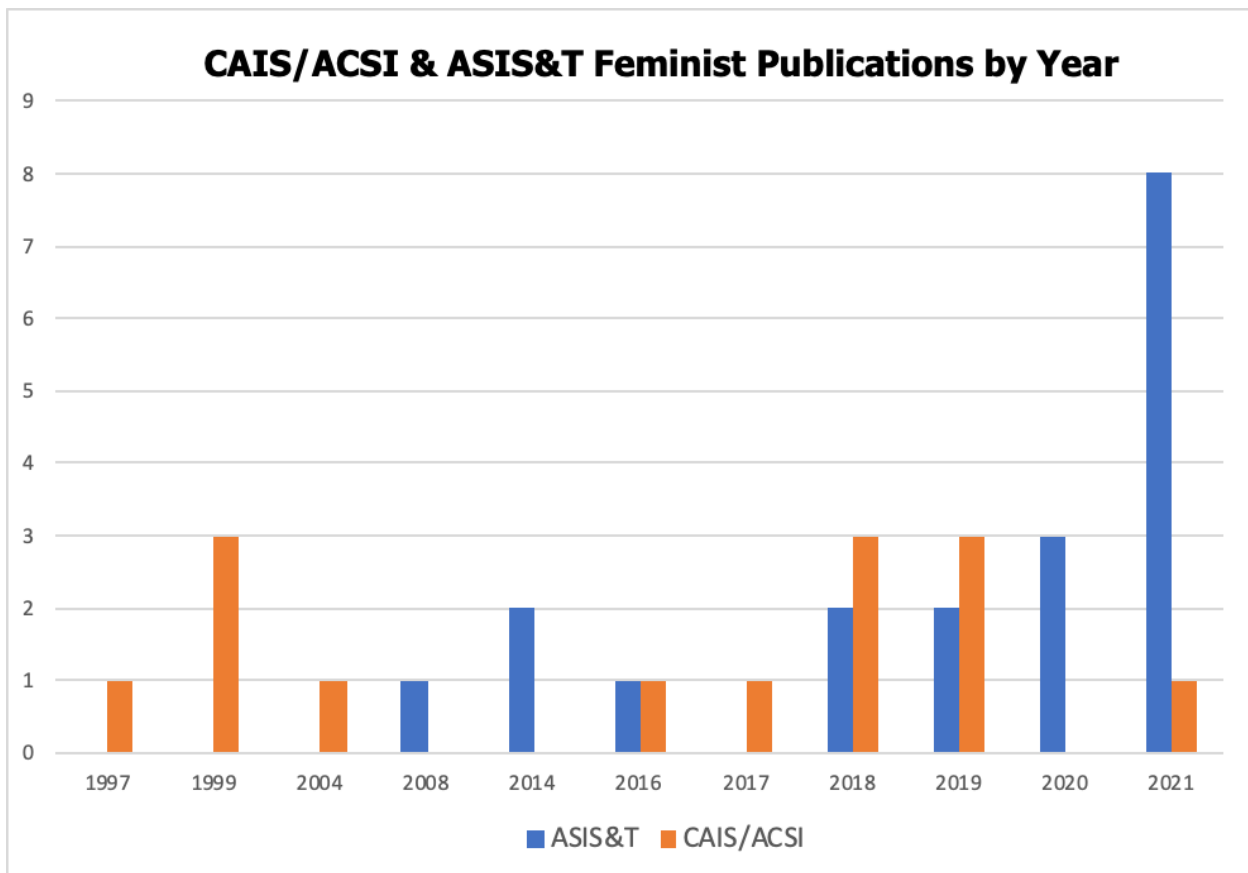


Figure 2. CAIS/ACSI and ASIS&T publications using feminist theory, methodology, and epistemology by year

Of note, the CAIS/ACSI conference is much smaller than ASIS&T, yet CAIS/ACSI conference proceedings have been relatively consistent in presenting explicitly feminist content from scholars such as Hope Olson and Pam McKenzie (among others). Across both conferences, there has been a more substantive uptake of feminism(s) in recent years, particularly at ASIS&T conferences from scholars such as Beth Patin and Laverne Gray (among others). In the ASIS&T proceedings in particular, intersectional and critical feminisms were often described in panel presentations suggesting that such panels might be a venue where cutting edge and boundary pushing work first emerges and can be presented. These results indicate that CAIS/ACSI and ASIS&T conferences have taken up different kinds of feminist research at different times.

Feminist themes identified through close reading

Of 4,031 total articles, only 33 were determined to have explicitly feminist content. The smallness of our final dataset confirms that feminist theories have not been substantively taken up at CAIS/ACSI and ASIS&T conference presentations. That said, through our close reading of conference papers we have identified feminist themes that cut across disciplinary subject domains and represent key elements of feminist thought. Each feminist theme is briefly introduced and representative conference paper examples are elaborated below.

Privileging perspectives of marginalized knowers particularly about issues of gender equity

Traditional feminist thought highlights, amplifies, values, and shares the experiences, knowledges, voices, and stories of marginalized knowers, particularly those who identify as women. This has long been a central feminist priority to correct the overrepresentation of male, specifically white cis males', perspectives and representations in history and public discourse. Topics that emerge from this focus on women's lives are often described as women's issues and/or women's rights issues and have traditionally included such issues as child care, reproductive rights, gender-based violence, and workplace equity. Importantly, contemporary transfeminism expands this focus to include gender equity and gender identity issues more broadly and includes the experiences and voices of folks who identify as gender diverse, trans, and non-binary. Relatedly, feminist epistemologies highlight and amplify ways of knowing that centre the experiences and perspectives of these knowers. Several articles within the CAIS/ACSI and ASIS&T conference presentations described examples of gender equity issues as they relate to a variety of information related issues, including:

- privacy and surveillance within the home and housework (Doty 2020)
- caregiving and the information practices of caregivers (Dalmer 2018; Dalmer and McKenzie 2019)
- sexual harassment of library workers by patrons (Lieu, Allard, and Oliphant 2019)
- information communities of African American mothers in a public housing community (Gray 2020)

For example, Nicole Dalmer's work discusses the information practices of caregivers noting that "characterizing caregivers' information practices as work brings attention to the time, effort, resources, etc. that are often made invisible in literature and policy, owing to the construction of caregiving as a gendered concept of social and familial responsibility" (Dalmer 2017, 647). This quotation highlights how a feminist lens can reveal otherwise invisible, yet important issues.

Other articles generate and/or apply feminist epistemological frameworks and methods. These frameworks and methods include:

- epistemic injustice (Patin et al. 2020)
- "Black feminist epistemic lens" (Patin et al. 2021, 631)
- institutional ethnography (Dalmer 2018)
- queer reader response (Rothbauer 2004)

These conference proceedings highlight the knowledges of equity-deserving groups and what is learned when applying methods that seek to unearth marginalized experiences focusing on what is differently revealed when moving away from a traditional positivist, male-centric lens. As noted by Patin et al. (2021), these approaches are important to LIS research and praxis because "the urgency of both inclusion and recognition of such knowledge liberates the totality of the LIS field by

inviting orientations that challenge and resist the white normative structures in understanding libraries and the communities they serve” (631). Examples of this theme were found across all sub-fields. More broadly, numerous articles acknowledged the need for a more concentrated focus within their study area on the information experiences of equity-deserving communities. Many scholars noted that equity deserving groups were under-researched and unacknowledged in their research areas.

Rejection of neutrality and gender essentialism

Many feminist theories reject the notion that categories of gender are fixed or essential. They argue instead that gender is socially constructed and ascribed social value. Femininity then is devalued exactly because it is understood as the dialectical opposite of masculinity. Similarly, critical theories more broadly reject assumptions of social neutrality, look to expose what is unmarked and unnamed, and seek to identify social power and its consequences, especially where this power is being obfuscated and rendered invisible. To be clear, this is not a discussion about library neutrality, but rather about making visible how raced and gendered social categories are constructed, understood, and responded to.

Taking up a feminist perspective that rejects neutrality, several articles explored how technology (Sierpe 1999; Sweeney and Brock 2014), data (Burns et al. 2018), and classification systems (Olson and Ward 1997) are gendered and raced. Such perspectives strive to make visible the often-hidden relationship between power and gendered and racialized technological systems, classification and organization structures, and information institutions. This perspective was most prominently located in the subdomains of data studies, internet studies, and knowledge organization. For example, the quotation below from Burns et al.’s (2018) panel about critical data studies explores how algorithms and software for data processing are imbued with power:

While related to the methodologies and exigencies of Big Data as it is practiced and imagined, the concerns raised in these and other works highlight the need to continually engage new technical regimes with critiques from feminist, queer, critical race, and social theory...The implications of this research extend beyond data into the socio-spatial inequalities and unevennesses of algorithms and software for data processing, and the ways in which power functions through them (Dalton et al., 2016; Noble, 2018). (657)

Conversely, Sweeney and Brock place their focus on the “cultural beliefs powering institutional and individual technology use” (2014, 1) rather than focusing on the technology itself. They advocate for employing critical cultural frameworks such as feminist theory to move beyond normative and analytical orientations to technology. They argue that “racism, sexism, and other cultural ideologies can and should be clearly identified in the technologized social contexts that SI [social informatics] studies” (3).

All four of the conference proceedings that were categorized in the subdomain of knowledge organization took a critical stance toward neutrality and persuasively demonstrated the harms invoked when knowledge and knowers are marginalized

(Olson and Ward 1997; Olson and Schlegl 1999; Rayburn 2021; Allard et al. 2018). These researchers contest concepts of universalism and neutrality and suggest that feminist, anti-colonialist, Indigenous, and other critical frameworks make power visible in LIS systems and contexts.

Ethics of care, emotional labour, and information work

A feminist ethics of care framework privileges the development of empathetic and caring relations in professional practice and beyond. This framework was applied in the areas of library and archival labour and pedagogy (Dalmer and Campbell 2018; Ghaddar, Allard, and Hubbard 2016; Poole and Zhang 2021). In the following example, Poole and Zhang (2021) discuss the possibilities inherent in an ethics of care approach to archival education pedagogy:

Care represented both value and practice for these educators; they showed an embryonic feminist ethics of pedagogical care. This ethical approach offers inspiration and direction for future pedagogy in archival and Library and Information Science education alike. (322-323)

In the excerpt below, Dalmer and Campbell (2018) call for an ethics of care approach to information provision to library patrons about dementia and to those who have dementia:

Drawing on the feminist work of Gilligan (1982) and Tronto (1993), we argue that the communication of information in dementia settings is best approached through a lens that emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships, reciprocity and empathetic benevolence. Within a frame of four ethical elements (attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness) (Tronto, 1993), an ethic of care is a way of thinking about the world that argues for the de-privatization and de-gendering of care (Sevenhuijsen, 2003) and calls for the recognition of care as a human need. From this perspective, information studies has a rich heritage and tradition of providing empathetic and helpful communication in complex and cognitively demanding situations. (2)

Both examples demonstrate that an ethics of care approach allows for a clear analysis of how centering care, relationships, and empathy can provide positive direction for archival and LIS pedagogy and professional practice.

Relatedly, emotional labour was often framed as a counterpoint to an ethics of care approach (Lieu, Allard, and Oliphant 2019). Hochschild defines "emotional labor to mean the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value" (1983, 7). While a feminist ethics of care highlights and values caring work, the notion of emotional labour shines a spotlight on how caring work can become an unacknowledged and unwanted burden within feminized workplaces such as libraries.

Other scholars highlighted the ways that care work and information work are both gendered and *forms of labour* even when information work as an element of caregiving is taken for granted and undervalued (McKenzie and Dalmer 2016).

Although caring may be an act of love, feminist scholars also acknowledge that “care is a labor; it is work even when it goes unremunerated” (Feder Kittay, Jennings, & Wasunna, 2005, p. 444). Much of the work associated with caring consists of what Star and Strauss (1999, p. 10, emphasis in original) call articulation work, “work that gets things back ‘on track’ in the face of the unexpected, and modifies action to accommodate unanticipated contingencies. The important thing about articulation work is that it is invisible to rationalized models of work. (McKenzie and Dalmer 2016, 2)

McKenzie and Dalmer cite Roma Harris’ work as an important articulation of the information work performed by women when seeking health information on behalf of others.

Harris (2009) is one of few scholars to illuminate the hidden work performed by women seeking health-related information on behalf of loved ones: “regardless of where it takes place, the health-informing support women provide to others is work, although it is a form of work that is seldom acknowledged...information management, self-care, and health maintenance remain largely invisible and underarticulated” (Harris, 2009, p. 80). (2016, 2).

To understand information work as labour and the ways that labour is gendered across LIS subdomains (e.g., professional practice, information-seeking behaviour), the authors included in our sample used an ethics of care approach, evoked the concept of emotional labour, and analyzed the aspects of information work that are, in fact, forms of labour whether the labour is expected, taken for granted, or remunerated. These studies clearly articulated care work and information work as gendered forms of labour. A deeper understanding of the complexities of labour is particularly welcome in a feminized profession where job “performance” is based upon the often unconscious or tacit gendered job expectations noted above.

Liberatory and social change goals

An important dimension of feminist research is the centrality of feminist praxis—putting feminist theory into action with the express goal of liberatory social change. Indeed, as noted by Bromley, “feminist politics demand a transformation of the existing systems of power, which are complicated by debates about what it means to end oppression and exploitation” (2012, 8). Feminist research is social change oriented and social movement driven. In this way, feminist theories are similar to other critical theories such as critical race, decolonizing, and queer theories. These frameworks are often applied intersectionally and in tandem. This orientation towards liberatory social change was identified across subfields and was often explicitly stated as part of the identified conference proceedings’ project goals and/or objectives. Examples of stated project objectives that support liberatory social change include:

- “data justice” (Burns et al. 2018, 658)
- “to ameliorate marginalized knowledge domains” (Olson and Ward 1997, 20)
- support queer readers’ identities (Rothbauer 2004)
- oppose sexual harassment (Lieu, Allard, and Oliphant 2019)

In their conference proceeding on critical surveillance, Floegel and Doty draw on feminist literature such as the *Feminist Data Manifest-No* and *Data Feminism* to understand how “data ethics around surveillance tech ‘explicitly seeks equity and demands justice by helping us understand and shift how power works’ (Cifor et al., 2019, n.p.)” (2021, 155). Floegel and Doty see direct links between libraries and surveillance and explicitly call for critical library and critical surveillance scholars to work together to mutually strengthen both areas of scholarship. In particular, Floegel and Doty (2021) view library values as relevant to critical surveillance studies and as an essential tool to move toward social liberation: “in this way, the ‘L’ in LIS is more relevant than ever before, as library values and ethos are vital to any fight for justice within the ‘IS’” (158).

In LIS we already put theory into practice in our work in many ways. What distinguishes the conference proceedings listed above from much practice-oriented LIS research is the absence of an expanded discussion about social justice, liberation, or social change. The conference proceedings in our sample explicitly call for social change through praxis. This approach emphasizes practice, theory that supports praxis, and is complementary to the practical and professional dimensions of LIS scholarship.

Feminisms and related critical theories

As we note in our introduction, there are many feminisms. Our own feminist orientation supports feminisms that interrogate how multiple systems of oppression interlock and support each other. Specifically, the theory of intersectionality offers a robust framework to examine interlocking racialized, colonial, ableist, and heteropatriarchal systems of power and oppression (Combahee River Collective 1978). While intersectional theory was explicitly applied by CAIS/ACSI and ASIS&T scholars (for example, Winberry et al. 2021; Lieu, Allard, and Oliphant 2019), we also observed that feminist theories were often used in conjunction with other complementary critical theories, such as decolonization, critical race, and queer theory. Applying an intersectional lens can make visible and facilitate exploration of specific frameworks of social power and their consequences for information and research contexts. Examples of critical approaches identified include:

- Black feminism (Gray 2020)
- “feminist and Indigenous data practices” (Rayburn 2021, 811)
- “critiques from feminist, queer, critical race, and social theory” (Burns et al. 2018, 657)
- “critical pedagogy and Black and transnational feminism” (Patin et al. 2021, 631)

Intersectional feminisms and the presence of co-occurring critical theories were more frequently present in recently published conference proceedings. More research is needed to understand the relationships between feminisms and critical theories, including how these frameworks are related, distinct from each other, overlapping, complementary, and often intersectional.

Discussion

The following discussion explores three broad conversations that emerge from our study findings: (1) we examine how feminisms are taken up within LIS and across LIS subdomains within our sample; (2) we highlight what we have learned from our pilot study methods; and (3) we offer practical suggestions and concrete next steps for building a critical intersectional femiLIST movement.

Conversation 1

This pilot study points to a dearth of LIS researchers engaging with feminist theories, epistemology, and methodology and reveals major gaps in the application of specific feminisms to LIS. For example, Black feminisms, disability feminisms, decolonizing feminisms, transfeminisms, transnational feminisms, postcolonial feminism, Arab feminisms, and eco-feminisms are nearly or entirely absent from the proceedings. That said, feminist theories identified in more recent ASIS&T and CAIS/ACSI conference proceedings frequently applied feminisms intersectionally and in conjunction with other critical theories. This fits in with the overall CAIS/ACSI conference proceeding trends that were identified by both Lynne Howarth and Ali Shiri in the 2022 CAIS/ACSI opening plenary presentations who persuasively argued that CAIS/ACSI should be—and indeed is—moving towards more inclusive community driven and often qualitative research and conference presentations.

The five feminist themes we identified represent common aspects and discussions within feminist thought and point towards a shared application of some feminist theories and methods in LIS. Our findings reveal that LIS subdomains offer different sites of feminist argumentation where feminist theories are applied in different ways. For example, the use of feminist theory in the subdomain of knowledge organization and classification provides the opportunity to counter universalism and gender essentialism—the idea that people have intrinsic, “fixed,” and innate characteristics based on their gender—rather than understanding gender as socially constructed. Knowledge organization is not the only subdomain where feminist theory can help understand how categories such as gender have power. Library work and the professional practice of librarianship, for example, do not often employ a feminist approach to practice despite librarianship being a feminized profession with gendered job performance expectations and despite many in the field being very interested in library labour. More research is needed to nuance this early analysis, to consider how intersectional feminist theories and methods can and should be applied more fully in the LIS field, to understand more fully what feminist theories are used across the various subdomains, and to identify the liberatory goals of this work.

Conversation 2

Here we make some recommendations for moving forward with this research project based on what we learned from this pilot study. To do this research, we first need to extend beyond CAIS/ACSI and ASIS&T conference proceedings to examine a bigger sample of LIS publications, both academic and practitioner, to better understand our past and current publishing practices and feminist activities and commitments.

What we learned from using the strict inclusion criterion is that defining feminism and adjudicating authorial intent according to whether or not the author(s) explicitly used feminist theories or methods as our sole selection criterion may have excluded scholars from our study sample who believe their work is feminist and who identify as feminist. On the one hand, we are politically committed to clearly identify what is specifically and self-consciously feminist in our field. On the other hand, it is also important to recognize how definitions of feminism have shifted over time, how disciplinary fields constrain authors from positioning their work in specifically politicized ways, and that it is important to legitimate and/or reclaim feminist works not specifically identified as such. Our ongoing discussions continue to grapple with these tensions that foundationally shape how we conduct related systematic literature reviews and analysis.

We are currently in the process of expanding this project to provide a more detailed examination of how feminisms have been applied (or not) historically over time and across LIS subdomains, and to connect and map feminist theories and methods to other liberatory and critical frameworks in LIS to better understand how they intersect, promote, and work alongside each other as well as disagree. This will also require a deeper examination of how LIS subdomains have differently generated, imported, and taken up a variety of theories and praxis. We are deeply considering how to improve this project to recognize and document the exciting shifts towards critical perspectives taking place in the field and the ways that we can embrace these shifts purposefully to move towards critical intersectional femiLISm.

Conversation 3

We conclude with recommendations for building an intersectional femiLIST movement that allows for mutually beneficial coalition building and is active, dynamic, political, goal-oriented, and practical. To begin, LIS must address how feminisms can serve our work while being honest and transparent about the limitations of some feminist orientations. White feminism is the preoccupation within feminist movements of issues and concerns that primarily impact middle- and upper-class white women. It is the historical and present failure of feminist social movements to widen the lens of analysis and praxis to account for the concerns, experiences, and oppressions of others, particularly women of colour.

White feminism maintains and reproduces white supremacy by focusing on the concerns of middle- and upper-class white women, disregarding the oppression faced by women of colour along the axes of race, class, and sexual orientation and actively excluding and silencing activists who push back against what bell hooks called feminism's "party line." (Watson 2017, 146)

Connecting white femininity and librarianship, Schlesselman-Tarango's (2016) work on the historical archetype of Lady Bountiful—the white embodiment of "ideal" femininity—explores how the convergence of whiteness and white supremacy with femininity has become a dominant perception of library work held by the field of librarianship and library patrons. Similarly, Watson (2017) argues that white feminist discourse, along with contemporary notions of neoliberal feminism, are fundamental to

mainstream LIS praxis, “sanitizing the field’s conversations about diversity and equity by focusing on demographics rather than power structures, and reinforcing false ideals of colour blindness, meritocracy, and individual exceptionalism” (Oliphant, Allard, and Lieu 2020, 100). Although prevalent within the LIS field, these dimensions of white feminism are in opposition to the values of critical intersectional feminisms.

We know that to build a femiLIST movement, students and educators must be involved. We have noticed that students are entering our classrooms who view critical and anti-oppressive frameworks as important for understanding LIS and the practice of librarianship. Many LIS students, educators, and researchers are applying critical concepts and theories such as vocational awe (Ettarh 2018) and critical race theory (Leung and López-McKnight 2021), but intersectional feminisms are often absent from these conversations. Elsewhere we have called on MLIS education to more fully enact intersectional feminist and critical race pedagogy and praxis in the LIS classroom (Oliphant, Allard, and Lieu 2020). Indeed, we can make feminisms more visible across the field and in MLIS programs by introducing and embedding feminisms and critical theories within MLIS education by engaging with and building upon the work of scholars and practitioners who have provided critical scholarship and interventions in this area. Even our small pilot study yielded a number of conference proceedings that advocated for the use of feminisms and critical theory in LIS education and professional practice.

We can normalize identifying social justice goals in our publications to make clear the links among feminist praxis, our research projects, and practice. We can also promote feminisms and critical theories by identifying and building coalitions between domain experts and the many feminists within the LIS field. In this spirit we offer some suggestions that we might collectively take to immediately promote femiLISTm(s) when creating conference proceedings and other publications. We can raise the profile of feminist theories and methods by explicitly naming them in our conference abstracts, publication titles, and keywords. This “librarian’s knowledge” builds on our own disciplinary expertise of indexing and knowledge organization.

We can also build intersectional feminist networks by attending each other’s presentations and actively seeking out and committing to citational justice practices such as those outlined in the Cite Black Women Movement—a campaign created by Christen A. Smith that seeks to “push people to engage in a radical praxis of citation that acknowledges and honors Black women’s transnational intellectual production” (Cite Black Women 2022). In LIS, the Citational Justice Collective draws on feminist and critical theory to analyze the politics of knowledge production and to explain why citational justice matters (Ahmed et al. 2022). In our pilot study, many conference proceedings appeared feminist to us as readers but did not identify themselves as such. Naming our publications as feminist, engaging in citational justice practices, applying feminist and critical theory scholarship in our classrooms, publications, and practices, and building feminist networks all help to identify feminist work and raise the research profile of intersectional feminisms in the field.

Conclusion

Our pilot study revealed that a small number of CAIS/ACSI and ASIS&T conference scholars are applying feminist frameworks to their work. While small in number, the conference proceedings provide examples of the many possibilities for feminisms in LIS research and practice across a variety of LIS subdomains. We are hopeful that intersectional feminisms will be taken up by more scholars, educators, and practitioners in the field as a viable theoretical site to both make visible gendered oppressions within and beyond the field and offer ways forward for our shared liberation. We also hope that the field embraces a deeper understanding of how feminisms can work alongside other critical theories.

As we consider expanding and deepening this project and thinking about ways to continue building an intersectional femiLIST movement, we are moved by the career long contributions of scholars such as Hope Olson and motivated by the exciting, innovative papers and variety of feminisms employed by LIS scholars across the field. We hope to work with others to build upon this work and to contribute to a critical intersectional femiLIST movement.

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feminisms are used in LIS and how this can possibly change the work culture in academic libraries, particularly for racialized librarians.

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