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BOOK REVIEW

We Can Do I.T.: Women in Library Information Technology

Edited by Jenny Brandon, Sharon Ladenson, & Kelly Sattler

2018 | Library Juice Press | 246 pages, hardcover | ISBN-13: 978-1634000536 | U.S. \$22.00

In *We Can Do I.T.: Women in Library Information Technology*, editors Jenny Brandon, Sharon Ladenson, and Kelly Sattler bring together more than 40 female and male contributors to discuss their personal experiences in the library technology field and candidly reflect on what it means to be “I.T.” in the library as a woman. The tone of these essays ranges from biographical to prescriptive, and as expected from the title, many of the authors have adopted a mentoring voice with the unmistakable intention of inspiring a new generation of women to adopt the “we can do it” attitude of Rosie the Riveter.

The editors’ choice to organize these stories into topic-based sections denoted by hashtags like #Advice, #Observations, #CareerPath, #Challenges, and #ChangeAgents gives the reader a good indication of the collection’s scope and content. However, the inclusion of the hashtags does not serve to underpin a broader narrative structure, as they are general enough for most of essays to contain elements of all five major topic tags. The additional author-sourced hashtags and the inclusion of the hashtags in both the table of contents and chapter headings at times push the device to the point of gimmick, which unfortunately undermines the serious and introspective nature of more than one essay in the collection.

Despite the undeniable presence of positivity, this work is not defined by its optimism. Many of the women share their incredibly personal trials of self-doubt, inequality, and discrimination that were endured in the struggle to achieve the success they describe. Even in anecdotes of discovery and skill building, many contributors echo the sentiments shared in editor Jenny Brandon’s introduction that the joy of their experience was always tempered by fears they might “be viewed as incompetent or unintelligent” (p. 1) by their male colleagues as they sought to develop as professionals. This darker narrative of discrimination emerges



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as a destructive and occasionally formative force in the women's unique journeys through the library and information technology fields.

The authors' painful truths are balanced in the text by the success they have achieved in spite of those obstacles, and most chose to end their essays with positive observations, encouragement, and advice. Many of the contributors describe their I.T. experience as a journey and credit the quality of *confidence* with initiating their entry into or defining their success in the library I.T. field. Although the push for women to be bold, lean in, or, as Denise A. Garofalo writes, "speak up and make your voice heard" (p. 24) is not without its critics, it does appear align well overall with the inspirational spirit of this collection. While the observations and advice of some contributors should probably be ignored at the reader's discretion, the buoyancy of their enthusiasm for the work coupled with the personal tone of the anecdotes succeeds overall at having an uplifting effect.

Perhaps the most engaging essays are those by the women that helped shape the history of library technology. Essays like "Library IT is Never Boring" by Tari Keller contain fascinating accounts of beta testing the OCLC Cataloging Micro Enhancer and installing the first network connections in their system's eleven library locations (p. 104–105). Others discuss in detail the development of the first Integrated Library Systems (ILS) and library websites, or more broadly the experience of watching the library rapidly become a place of technological discovery for librarians, staff, and patrons. Their experiences are valuable reminders—as we continue to examine gender roles in our professional environment—that not only can women do I.T., they have been advancing and shaping it from the beginning.

BIOGRAPHY

Jenn Stayton is the Student Engagement Librarian at the University of North Texas and has previously worked in information technology through various roles in academic libraries, nonprofits, and business settings.