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Topic #7:
The Librarian's Image Throughout the Twentieth Century

Topic 7 Question

A new millennium is an opportune time to reflect on the changes that have occurred in our profession during the past 100 years. Perhaps a good starting point for this reflection is tennis star Andre Agassi's assertion that "image is everything." Accepting this premise, just how has the public image of librarians in the United States been transformed since 1900? In your opinion, has the correspondence between image and reality during this interval narrowed or widened?

Introduction and Context

Ten years ago tennis star Andre Agassi was paid millions by Canon for his "image is everything" commercials; no doubt those millions helped sustain Agassi's own personal image with "flashy" cars, clothes and tennis rackets (Finn, 1990). Agassi's advertising pun implied that with Canon's equipment one could achieve a better photographic image, presumably sharper, clearer, more focused. It is ironic that Finn's interview with Agassi depicts a much more subdued, conservative lifestyle than the tennis star's perceived persona. Still, given that a true representation is most desirable for both a photographic image and a profession's public image, how well has the librarian's image throughout this century given a true picture of the profession?

In contrast to Agassi's income at the time of $6-8 million just from his advertisements (Finn, 1990), the average starting salary for library graduates of 1990 was $25,306 (Zipkowitz, 1993). Such an income would have done little to re-outfit the still-lingering stereotype of a spinster who wears "heavy shoes and hair-buns" (Bacchus, 1992, p. C2), nor would it have done much for the wardrobe of her unmarried male counterpart. A further contrast can be drawn between the independent tennis champion "who thumbs his nose at the establishment with his fearlessly fluorescent Nike clothing line" (Finn), and the librarian whose job has hinged on the whims of a Board of Directors, a College President, or a publicly voted tax measure. If the librarian has left the millennium still seemingly clothed more in library-binding buckram than gold-trimmed silk, perhaps that is simply a reflection of the roles of those who serve the unwashed masses versus the positions of those whom the jet set pays to perform. Even though

librarianship and the prestigious hi-tech industry now appear to be developing more and more in tandem--even to the point of convergence in the field of Information Technology--one must keep in mind that the image of a Microsoft is wrapped in its ubiquitous presence in the commercial sector, not in its founder's persona or its programmers' wardrobes. Indeed, computer "geeks" and "nerds" seem cut from the same bolt as the librarian stereotype.

Throughout the last century, an image of the librarian has endured that is very real in the minds of many, an image that is more than just a stereotype. Has this image, then, in the last 100 years grown further or closer from the librarian it represents, and how has each changed? Although extreme fabrications range from Melville Dewey's harem (Garrison, 1979, pp. 153-156) to Dr. Laura Schlessinger's pornography purveyors (Margolis & Glick, 1999), the typical librarian image has really moved a very little distance from the center point of the average librarian's identity or from its original construct. Moreover, the image of the librarian in the mind's eye of the public has been a composite of the negative stereotype, the helpful service provider, and the wise sage. These observations, if true, and which the following facts attempt to substantiate, might imply that as gatekeepers to the information stores of society, librarians have retained their essential roles throughout a century of great social and technological change. The day might dawn that publicly-accessed, electronic indexes to full-text databases can do everything a librarian can do, as well as a librarian can, and maybe even better. Then there might remain only the memory of the image of the extinct Librarianus Bunus-Heavyshoelace, perhaps as a sort of Einstein within Mother Theresa.

Currently, the image associated with the title "Librarian" is slightly negative and not very high in status--regardless of hope or hype to the contrary. An examination of the causal relationship between this image and the actual librarian throughout the 20th Century in the United States can assist in determining how like the real thing is the image. An international study of the

topic might have effected the outcome of the conclusions, but that is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, while looking at Librarianship in the United States in these ten decades, the themes of gender, credentials, social archetype, income, and political structures will be lightly dissected to reveal the underlying forces that have kept alive images such as the Librarian-Crone. Because these forces come into play in various ways at various times, a longitudinally chronological approach to this topic will not be strictly enforced, neither will the view be historically unidirectional. Instead, cross-sections of the issues over time will be utilized to fully demonstrate the causal relationships of specific social constructs. Examples from popular media will be cited along the way to give form to the stereotypical image of the librarian, if not actually prove that she really existed. And, while that image and others will not fade throughout this paper, their evolution within a culture will become obvious as they are defined and delineated. Finally, conclusions of any tendency toward widening or narrowing of the gap between image and the reality will be presented.

<div align="center">Early Feminization of the Image</div>

Although other components than gender are at the heart of the librarian image, femaleness is such a consistent trait that its origins are best examined at the outset. The 20th Century dawned as an imminent change of gender make-up was facing librarianship, especially in the United States. By 1919 Andrew Carnegie's library grants in the United States had amounted to $45 million dollars spent to create "some 3,000 libraries" (S. Jackson, 1974, p. 407). Combined with Melville Dewey's vision for subject indexing, this endowment made obvious the need for many educated, skilled, and underpaid workers to attend to all the duties of cataloging and circulation. Dewey can be credited for trusting women in an area in which his infamously paranoid, controlling personality might just as readily have bred distrust, and at a time when the intellectual abilities of women were rarely given merit (Garrison, 1979, p. 123).

The resulting feminization of librarianship in the United States was so complete in the century that it has been accepted as an inherent trait. However, in the century's first decade England had a mere 12% female librarians in its public libraries while in the United States women made up 95% of those librarians (S. Jackson, p. 415).

According to Garrison (1979), a primary factor that contributed to the mixed-blessing of feminization in the early 20th century was the scarcity of "suitable" employment for the newly-educated ranks of genteel young women. There was also the perceived need of the 'old rich' (and now newly poor) to instill their own values and culture on the nouveau riche and the uneducated immigrants, and libraries were the venue of choice to accomplish this task. Victorian mores were still the norm and a woman's duties included fostering the cultural values of her world; as Garrison succinctly explains, "Libraries held books and books denoted Culture with a capital *C*" (p. 177). Thus the typical librarian in the United States at the beginning of the century could probably be accurately described as a female ostensibly in the role of controlling a physical collection of printed material and attempting to control the intellectual growth of the library's patrons.

The Victorian woman also wore the bun, and if she did not invent it, she ensured its acceptance for quite some time. If one assumes that writers of fiction will publish stories about characters whose prototypes were observed by the authors as early as twenty years previously, then one would expect to see the depictions of the bun-bearing Library matron at least through the 1930s. Not only is this found to be true, but the percentages of each gender's categorization in fiction as they appear by date of original publication as recorded by Burns (1998) in his *Librarians in Fiction* appear to be legitimate, with males predominating in the earlier publications, and with female librarians almost taking over the role after the 1930s. The Boston Public Library did not hire a woman until 1852, but by 1910, nearly 80% of United States library

workers were women (Garrison, 1979, p. 173). One can speculate that such a large influx of women into a public service position had a jarring impact upon the heretofore largely male workforce. This effect would have given impetus to the creation of the crone librarian in popular culture, just as the jocularity of the "whoops, there goes the neighborhood" attitude is really a thin veneer for prejudice based upon a perceived threat of loss of territory.

Burns (1998) cites a fictional reference librarian from a 1931 novel whose attributes include a "thin, angular and rather ill-tempered old lady…[with]…sharp tongue…like many of her type" who was also a "repressed neurotic, whom life had soured" (pp. 39-40). It easy to imagine that she was tired of the Victorian image herself, and ready to take it out on any unsuspecting patron. After quoting similar passages from a novel published in 1936, Burns surmises, "Like other authors [this one] seems to have had some unpleasant library experiences in her formative years" (p. 49). Indeed, one could assume that writers spent at least part of their youth as readers, with the ALA estimating in 1913 that 90% of branch circulation was to children (Garrison, 1979, p. 210). It is easy to surmise that some of these children grew up to be novelists who drew upon real memories of real librarians for their characterizations. Moreover, the children's area of the library was almost exclusively the domain of the female librarian (Garrison, pp.179-180), and disciplining children in the library was a part of daily routines (p.211). This influence was still evident into the 1980s when a librarian's informal survey turned up that, "every adult--especially men--mentioned having negative images [of librarians] dating from childhood (Wallace, 1989, p. 24.). Some of these later-remembered childhood images could be based in part on popular media rather than on encounters in libraries. Still, the consistency of the image in the first part of the century (which was virtually devoid of mass communication) suggests the reality of the original model, if not of her credentials.

Professionalism and the Image

One would expect a distinction should be made between the "librarian" who has an MLS or an MLIS, and the "librarian" who serves in that capacity with any amount of education, experience, or training. Yet, to the public, they have often been the same Shaffer (1968, p. 55). This is in part because, as reiterated by P. Wilson (1982) in *Stereotype and Status*, the majority of employees in small public libraries and school libraries throughout the century were "not [professional] librarians" (p. 20). Moreover, the practice of employing non-librarians as librarians had also existed in academic settings. Shiflett (1981) mentions that in the first decade of the century that an academic librarian might have been a professor, a student, or even a janitor (p. 223). While requirements for School Media Specialists began to change in the last years of the century, the images created by children's contact with non-professionals will persist for at least a generation more. As P. Wilson also asserts: "The stereotype of the librarian is a social fact." (p. 9). In other words, the image has a reality of its own that is not easily extinguished.

Things had not changed much in 1952 when Bryan (cited in Weibel, Heim, & Ellsworth, 1979) noted in *The Public Librarian* that the board of a small library required that "a single person ...perform both professional and technical-clerical tasks, but [the board] cannot offer salaries large enough to secure or to justify full professional training" (pp. 135-7). This practice still occurs in rural areas with low tax bases as observed by the author of this paper. In one rural branch library the "librarian's" formal education ended 20 years ago with a BS in Psychology. In a rural junior college library, the "Reference Librarians" include four "Library Assistants," whom have varying amounts of undergraduate library training.

The education and training of the person filling the role of librarian has had its impact on the image. Bryan reported in 1952 that research had indicated a positive correlation between professional training and commitment to public service (cited in Weibel, 1979, pp.135-6). Surveys revealed that the "sub-professionals" were not motivated by a desire to serve the public

when seeking employment in a library, whereas the professionals at least claimed to have a proactive service ethic. The patron, would not likely have been aware of Bryan's findings, and would probably have surmised that all those working in the library were "librarians." Of course, throughout the century, there may have been those without professional credentials who performed at least as well as those who held degrees. Regardless, the patron would retain a strong image of the surly "librarian," whether she was a professional librarian or an officious clerk--thus perpetuating the stereotype.

Further adding to the public's inability to determine whether they were dealing with a professional librarian has been the lack of distinction between the tasks of librarians and non-librarians. Shaffer (1968) cited a 1949 ALA study which reported that professional librarians spent about half of their time on clerical tasks while clerks spent about 10% of their time performing duties that would have appeared to the public to be professional (p. 54). These factors that contributed to a possibly distorted picture of the librarian were still present in the 1990s when students of the San Jose State University MLIS program discussed their employment in positions titled "Librarian." These employed students' varied duties included grant writing, original cataloging, selection, and budgeting, as well as a host of non-professional tasks such as cleaning tables. Thus it seems safe to conclude that the image know as "The Librarian" has remained a composite of all of those who were employed in that environment known as "The Library."

Moreover, the library profession itself has in part supported the composite image. Early in the century, library school curriculum amounted to little more than technical training (Garrison, 1979, p. 191; Shaffer, 1968, pp. 68-69). Looking at the 1980s, Auld (1990) pointed out in the *Library Journal,* "If transcripts for an LTA, an undergraduate major in library science, and an MLS are placed side by side and the names of the institutions and the degrees are covered

up, it is difficult if not impossible to identify which is which" (p. 57). As recently as 1993 and 1995, "paraprofessionals" were elected as president and secretary to two state library associations (A. M.Wilson & Hermanson, 1998).

In part the Where's-Waldo-the-Librarian scenario may be owing to the technological changes of libraries and the failure of some of those who obtained their MLS degrees to add the "I" component to their base knowledge. By 1980 the main concern of the ALA had shifted from librarians performing in lesser roles to the usurpation of professional librarian tasks by paraprofessionals (Reeves, 1980, pp. 26-7). Budget cuts for personnel would have created some of this concern. This shift would also have been a reflection of concern that those with technical expertise might not have a concept of the other elements of librarianship and therefore should not be placed in roles where content-based decisions were made. Still, technology had already become integral to so many libraries in the 1990s that a knowledgeable technician rather than an MLS might have often better determined policy changes for overdues, holds, and cataloging since software capabilities determine implementation. Even reference in an online environment is technologically driven, both in searching electronically and, more increasingly, delivering information electronically. The professionalism debates in librarianship were by no means relieved because the computer absorbed many clerical tasks as Shaffer had speculated in 1968 (p. 65).

<center>Social Constructs of the Librarian Image</center>

The grumpy-old-librarian image that seems to be a composite of various library workers through the ages coalesced during the 20th Century in the United States when freedom of expression and technological advances gave birth to huge quantities of both satirical and recreational materials. In the early decades of the 1900s, before the feminization of the librarian in the collective consciousness of the public, the main-character librarians of fiction that Burns

(1998) noted were frequently male stereotypes. The male librarian of a 1915 novel is described as living "a life of quiet scholarship" (p. 132) rather than as a person with the responsibilities of budgeting, negotiating, and managing. Another novelist's creation from 1914 incarnates the obsessive-compulsive cataloger, who is ultimately driven insane by unknown nocturnal visitors who "heap and scatter books in disarray" (p. 48).

The emerging publishing industry also allowed non-fictional, stereotypical librarians to be immortalized. A very real male librarian ("real" in terms of his physical embodiment, not necessarily his credentials or ethos) who worked at Oregon State University from 1902 until 1908 has provided amusing anecdotal history for readers of library science history. He was nicknamed "Two-Week" (Shiflett, 1981, p. 167) because of his policy of dealing with "students offending his sense of decorum in the library" by suspending their library privileges "with the cry of 'Two weeks for you!'" (p. 168). Thus, while the fictional stereotype might not have reflected the typical librarian, it was not necessarily out of line with a particular observation by an author. More importantly, the task of controlling access to materials was bound to generate an authoritarian image in the public's consciousness to which writers gave substance. As P. Wilson (1982) observes, people like stereotypes because they are "useful classification devices" (p. 191). Ironically, stereotypes could be especially comforting to those who employed them in a growing democratic society where classes and roles were not necessarily static, and identifying types was more difficult.

By 1920 Sinclair Lewis' novel *Main Street* had characterized an older female Head Librarian as "spinsterish," and had her pronounce, "As long as I'm in charge, the Gopher Praire library is going to be quiet and decent, and the books well kept!" (in Burns, 1998, pp. 74-5). It should be noted that a spinster would, by definition, in the early century, be a woman who controlled her own destiny to some extent rather than obeyed a husband, thus contributing to the

controlling image. Lewis contrasted the spinster with his protagonist, a younger, more progressive and service-oriented, female librarian whose marriage to a physician certainly elevates her status and contrasts with the self-directed spinster (Burns, pp. 74-5). Though the old maid librarian image has not disappeared over time in fiction, the helpful librarian image occurred more frequently throughout time as annotated bibliographies illustrated (Burns, 1998; Gantt, 1955; Raish, 1999; Schmidt, 1997).

It would be easy to presume the negative characterizations were not far from the truth for their time, given the toll taken on the dispositions of those with low pay and long hours. However, in the February 1937 *Wilson Bulletin for Librarians*, a writer from Oklahoma objected to caricatures of librarians, including an illustration in which the "old-maidish" librarian had a "face like an undertaker's horse" (E. Jackson, 1974, p. 406). This librarian's objection implies that at that juncture in history, during the Depression--and in the 'Dust-bowl' state--when many workers may have looked a little worn, still the stereotype was not acceptable to those whom it depicted, and perhaps not representative.

It is likely that the crone image initially arose out of society's chauvinism as the stereotype definitely has certain characteristics of dress and style that are just as reminiscent of the Victorian Era as a lace-trimmed wedding gown. Garrison (1979) noted that college educated women at the turn of the last century were considered "unsexed" and that "as late as 1920, only 7.4% of women librarians were married" (p. 176). In fact, Garrison stated that in 1938, at least a dozen "major" libraries had policies against hiring or retaining married women (p. 233). This would explain the popular images of librarians as either bitter spinsters or soon-to-be romanced young things--another frequent image noted by Burns (1998) and Raish (1999) in his filmography. For example, Raish described a 1921 film in which "a clerk at the public library, is saved from a life of poverty by the marriage proposal of a wealthy young man."

Indeed, winsome images of young, female librarians were also quite numerous in literature and film, especially before the 1930s. By 1992 in the unexceptional movie, *The Gun in Betty Lou's Handbag,* a youthful librarian appeared as married. However, this plot device only served to preserve her moral conservatism as she attempts to get attention--and break out of the mold of dowdiness--by pretending to have murdered a gangster. Still, this modern librarian character also depicts the feminist librarian: There is a tense moment in which she kneels outside a locked door in the dark with a library book on picking locks and succeeds in gaining entry and saving a life (Moyle, 1993).

Such character transformations have been common in fiction and can be interpreted as representative of the librarian's struggles between the roles of service provider and the authoritarian, as well as between the roles of sage and lower income employee. Even in cataloging there is the dichotomy of adhering to authority records for subject headings and then casually entering the table of contents information into the key-word searchable 505 field of the same MARC record. Betty Lou's somewhat schizophrenic role is not unlike that of a real librarian. But even when the librarian turns axe murderer or playgirl, it is only an effective character development ploy because the audience was so familiar with the original stereotype, and therefore duly shocked by the transformation.

Still, moments of intelligent heroism like Betty Lou's are not unusual in fictional librarians, and neither have positive opinions of librarians been rare among the general population. While P. Wilson (1982) did not deny the existence of the old maid stereotype, her work on the subject is filled with statistics and findings that indicate quite clearly that the public's image of the librarian has really been a mixture of positive and negative. Not only did a study reported in 1976 find librarians to be "sensitive to the needs of others" (p. 113), but patrons, when tested, also identified these and other positive traits that librarians saw in

themselves, including "pleasant" and "responsible" (p. 117). Those facts do not deny that the negative stereotype persisted throughout the 20th Century. However, they do indicate that the librarian "image" is not synonymous with the stereotype.

Still, the stereotype certainly seems to have been an underlying theme in most librarian images. Writing for the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1958, biographical researcher Catherine Drinker Bowen did a non-fictional piece titled "My Friends, the Librarians" which concluded that she was "in love with librarians" (p. 52). However, the piece mostly related anecdotes that described a variety of judgmental rule-enforcers who were no doubt very real librarians, and whom she learned to love only by virtue of her own forgiving personality. One gets the impression that she wrote the article as a sort of unsolicited attempt at public relations for the socially inept librarians.

Engle (1998), writing from the perspective of the male librarian, spoke of an archetype "Crone" that "is the dark side of the friendly, helpful librarian" which manifests whenever the librarian is particularly frustrated with patrons (The Archetypal Crone and Work, para. 1). Radford (1998) gave voice to the concept that the conflict between the librarian's goal of order and the patron's existence as a threat to that order is what causes the "Crone" to emerge. Similarly, Engle posited that ultimately the librarian is in conflict with self in the struggle to serve a public who is in reality the enemy who obstructs the librarian's objective of order. Schmidt (1997) described a 1989 film appearance of "Conan the Librarian" in which the character "slices another borrower in half for returning a book late." Schmidt (1997) claimed that "Conan is the librarian many of us have wanted to be," and just recently added that, "About once a year, my circulation staff put in a request for a sword for the front desk" (personal communication, April 10, 2000). In reality, these dramas have been visibly played out in the area of overdue books in which fines and threatening notices have been levied against the intruding

patron. The patron in turn has often been shocked or resentful to discover a bill for an item that he did not purchase. This goes against the norms of most business transactions and gives the sensation of being pulled to the side of the road for a traffic violation. It is no wonder that the stereotype has endured as long as the institution of the library has persisted.

Radford (1998), in his call for a new epistemology of library science, predicted that technology would instigate a fundamental power shift from the librarian to the user. Automated checkouts, if ubiquitous, would shift a lot of the onus for enforcing rules to an impersonal medium. By the end of century, however, patrons were still generally dependent upon the librarians' expertise in gleaning information from seemingly cryptically indexed databases. And given the time lag between experience and fictional characterization, it is not surprising that "cybrarians," had not yet arrived on the scene of contemporary fiction--though no doubt the authors of the next decades will place them into technologically driven plots. The fictional librarians of the 1990s were, for the most part, the same old characters dressed up in new rags, though perhaps a little kinder and gentler. For example, the MLIS student-heroine created by fantasy novelist Rosemary Edghill (1994) does not have a bun, but instead "long brown hair worn in a fashion ten years out of date" (p. 16). Though her life is rather spinsterish, she does show great compassion for (and some romantic attraction toward) a time-space traveler, who might be the personification of many unusual patrons.

De Candido (1999) wrote in *American Libraries* that the fictional television librarian Rupert Giles of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* "has done more for the image of the profession than anything in the past 50 years" (p. 44) even though he is computer illiterate and socially dysfunctional. DeCandido has not been alone in her fascination as she reported that the online Internet Public Library named all of its computers after the television show's characters. But the emperor has no clothes; many librarians are rooting for an ineffectual character played by a

reasonably attractive actor. In contrast to the Rupert Giles image, a study conducted in 1992 by the Association of College and Research Libraries found that 94% of 1600 professional librarians "enjoyed" using computers and 69% enjoyed it "very much" (Scherdin & Beaubien, 1995, p. 38).

<p style="text-align:center">Income, Status, Prestige, and Image</p>

Status and prestige are also factors in the creation of image, though Agassi's Canon commercial might like us to believe that the image can create the prestige. Female librarians have been classed among the lowest paid employed women since the beginning of the 20th Century (Garrson, 1979, p. 226). A. Wilson and Hermanson (1998) suggest that this was not an affect from the "women's work" issue, but rather that the social service ethic has determined library work to be priceless in the minds of society. However, if this theory were valid, one would expect doctors to have been paid less than they generally have been.

Still, within their gender, an equivalently poor economic status was found among academic male librarians as bemoaned by one himself in 1919 (cited in Shiflett, 1980, p. 243). However, this would not pre-date the feminization of librarianship as reported by Garrison (1979), and thus it would not negate her theory that feminization was the root of low status and wages (p. 167). Nevertheless, Shiflett (1981) also refers to early 20th Century practice in academic libraries of determining the salary of the librarian by whether "he was a professor, or the president,…the janitor, or a student" (p. 223). As members, then, of an economically low status group within the American society--perhaps for a variety of reasons--librarians would be an easy target of derision and understandably sensitive to it.

In 1985, as the United States was just entering an economic boom after a period of recession and uncertainties were still high, Van House (1985) articulated the self-esteem issue: "Low salaries take their toll in other ways as well….The librarians' self-image is fairly

negative….When your daughter the mail-carrier makes more than you the library manager, you begin to wonder" (p. 550). This anecdotal evidence gives the impression that the negative impact of stereotyping upon the librarian would be inversely proportional to the economic status of the librarian. However, an increase in salaries and benefits would not likely have altered the actual artifact that is the librarian stereotype if the experience of lawyers is typical. Moreover, the economic boom of the end of the century had little if any impact upon librarians' incomes (Zipkowitz, 1995), thus there was no opportunity to see the effect higher salaries might have had upon the librarian's image. As late as 1995 Scherdin pointed out that, "Library and information workers are among the best-educated yet lowest-paid professionals in the work force" (p. 38).

The low levels of financial remuneration for service have also had concrete negative impacts that helped perpetuate the stereotype. Underpaid has often meant understaffed, which in turn would equal poor service, as well as increasing the likelihood of a poor disposition. In a profession where all the behind-the-scenes work of acquisitions, cataloging, processing, shelving, and circulating in the end determines the quality of service, shortages of staff and poor quality of staff at any step would produce an inferior product. In an article she titled: "What's Wrong with Librarians?" in the December 1939 *Wilson Library Bulletin*, Wise used humor to relate tales of poor library service that surely contribute to the ridiculed image. For example: "One day when a patron returned *Rats, Lice and History*…[she asked] could she have another like it. So my librarian handed her *Of Mice and Men*, and off went the patron" (Wise, pp. 304-5). Just as the America Online corporation's poor performance gave birth to the "America On Hold" derision several years ago, so would inept employees in a library setting have encouraged the continuation of ridicule. Nevertheless, poorly paid clerks could not have been expected to uplift the librarian image.

Although clerical, technical training was the norm for many "librarians" in the early part

of the century (Garrison, 1979, p. 191), by 1923 Dr. Charles C. Williamson was at work on revisions in the educational process toward a professionalism in the field (Shaffer, 1968, pp. 80-81). Still, working conditions reportedly remained stressful and demeaning. In a 1941 letter to the editor of the *Wilson Library Bulletin*, a librarian decried poor status not because of lack of differentiation of tasks between herself and the "clerks," but because librarians "salaries are lamentably inadequate, their hours long and exhausting, their sick leaves few and grudgingly given, and their provisions for study and travel nonexistent!" (Marcus, 1941, p. 692). As this exclamation helps to illustrate, one cannot garner respect from the community if one serves in a capacity that depletes one's ability to serve at all. Agassi in a shiny red Corvette was miles in the opposite direction from the library assistant trudging home at the end of a wearying day of serving an unending stream of public demands. No wonder she was immortalized in literature as a snappish old woman.

<div align="center">The Library Environment and Image</div>

The larger social structures of the institution of the library had its influence upon the librarian and the image, and the public too played a role in this arena. While private, corporate libraries were not as likely to have served the downtrodden of society, some have (e.g., prison libraries), and public libraries did have their roots in serving the poor, even if the motives were not initially entirely humanitarian. Garrison (1979) eloquently wrote:

> The desire to mitigate class conflict was clearly tempered by fear. Without relief or direction the ignorant poor might band together in despair and upset the social system itself; at best the lower orders threatened the virtues held dear by the middle [and upper] class....The possibility that poverty of ignorance among the masses might be caused wholly, or in part, by the political and economic organization of society was not a major consideration of the new professionals in the early stages of the library. (p. 202)

Thus the early authoritarian role of the librarian was part of a larger social agenda.

By the Depression, it was as if the ghosts of library patrons past were still haunting public library buildings, knowing of these earlier librarians' subconscious motives. A letter to *The Saturday Review of Literature* in the 1930s described where many librarians spent the better part of their lives:

> All the chairs in the Magazine Room and Newspaper Room are filled with down-and-outers, the overflow from Bryant Park and Central [New York]. All the marble seats on the stairs are filled with more down-and-outers, their feet swathed in newspapers…I think it is the smell I resent the most rather than the actual presence of these people" (in Toth, 1991, pp. 110-111).

If writers frequented such places themselves, it is no wonder that the librarians of their imaginations might be driven to either violence or hedonistic escapades of escape (described in Burns, 1998 and Raish, 1999). Fictional librarians seem to live out the fantasies of the authors with whom they once shared the library edifice that served in part as a flop house. In any event, some of the library clientele were a contributing factor to the poor image of the librarian by virtue of either their lowering the status of the environment or by writing about it in an unfavorable light. P. Wilson (1982) suggested that librarians' own writings about the stereotype perpetuate it as well (pp.186-187), but that might just be more of blaming the victim.

However, the librarians might also look at certain aspects of their own roles as a cause of the negative image. The structure of the environment--both physical and social--has tended to require that librarians be alternately fascist dictators and friendly helpers, bouncers and beckoners. In an attempt to counter the revival of the old maid hag librarian in a Nabisco Chipsters ad in the early 1970s, a librarian suggested, "Let the noise level rise a bit more, …wear …beads and let our hair down, …sit on the floor…with our researchers" (McKinney, 1973, p.

457). However, she then felt it necessary to caution against sending patrons to the reference books with scissors to help themselves, and warned against failing to check I.D.'s. The function of the library by definition leads to this schizophrenic role playing. Including *Rolling Stone Magazine* in an attempt at liberalizing the collection invariably leads to putting it "On Reserve" to prevent that publication's vandalism or theft. As P. Wilson (1982) surmised:

> Librarians *are* charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the library is a functioning organization, that it works and works well for those who need it. And that perhaps is not without cost; part of the cost may be reflected in stereotyping. (p. 29)

In contrast to this authoritarian position is the reality of the powerlessness to determine or enforce policy. Reeves (1980) discussed the negative impact on the librarian's autonomy from government and businesses on which the library has been dependent for finances. These are the entities who have had the ultimate say in operating procedures. Moreover, at times they have had a greater real or perceived expertise in the subject areas which the library is trying to support (p. 103). P. Wilson (1982) wrote about the "role strain" (p. 183) that these dynamics have caused, which undoubtedly has manifested itself to the public in various unpleasant ways, both personally and in policies.

The autonomy problem has been slightly mitigated in the latter half of the century with the growth of "networking" among libraries (P. Wilson, 1982, p.66-7). Intra-library networks allowed many libraries, to some degree, to break out of the linear hierarchical pattern in which a non-library entity was at the top. However, modern networks were by nature reliant upon technology, and thus the librarians again found themselves in a role of second fiddle--this time to computer scientists and network administrators. Librarians could appear incompetent or technically inept when attempting to help patrons with an online catalog that had a poorly designed interface. Moreover, the role of gatekeeper between patron and information did not

change, and, correspondingly, neither did the image. In his bibliography of *Librarians in Comics*, Steven Bergson (1999) described a *Funky Winkerbean* comic strip from the 1990s: "The entrance to the media center, with an 'X' through the former name 'library,'" has the caption "In the media center students *want* to learn. Bruno [looks like Frankenstein monster] *makes* them want to learn." Bruno may not be an old lady, but the negative portrayal is oddly similar.

In the February 2000 issue of *Library Journal*, Hutchins, a 28-year-old male librarian, echoed Agassi ten years later and declared, "Image *is* everything" (p. 57). Hutchins reiterated a suggestion common to libraries of the 1990s, that is, dropping the "L" word and, he offered, begin using the title, "Public Information Consultant" (p. 57). He asserted that by use of the term "public" that the "service ethos" would be retained (p. 57). Hutchins and the many others who have agreed with this proposition have a point. Just as an immigrant to the United States might decide to Anglicize his or her name both to avoid confusion and to assist in cultural assimilation, so might a different title convey the occupation of the modern librarian more accurately and leave behind the librarian stereotype. Nevertheless, this begs the question of whether the new technology has in any way eased the role strain of the profession. It seems that service provider and authoritarian have still been rolled into one. The vengeful, sword-wielding version of Conan the Librarian (Schmidt, 1999) might just as easily be called Conan the Consultant.

Radford (1998) offered a deconstructed library model that was a virtual flea market of knowledge where patrons could feast at a potluck of information as free-text online searching replaced ordered stacks. But even in Radford's vision the librarian would likely have come to resemble the Wizard of Oz—the man behind the curtain, a somewhat schizophrenic character who terrifies one minute and bestows gifts the next as passwords and copyright restrictions frustrated the searcher. Technology has not yet, and will not likely, dissolve the image of the librarian as the Authority of Information.

Conclusion

Through the century, the image of the librarian has remained a blend of the grouchy stereotype with the helpful public servant. Over the same period, the librarian did not substantially change in economic or social status relative to society. While technology has by no means bypassed the library profession, the nature of its heavy impact did not serve to make librarians appear advanced. As one library director warned his staff after volunteering the library as the first site of installation of new software, "It's exciting to be on the cutting edge, but the cutting edge is also a painful and bloody place to be" (D. Freeman, personal communication, 1995).

In addition to appearing inept in times of such rapid change, organizers of information seem doomed to be type cast as obsessive-compulsive, and those who attempt to direct searches to be seen as controlling types. Society is not likely to give up having a stereotype for librarians, but the stereotype is only a portion of the image. People will continue to appreciate those who provide access to needed information. And, if Rupert Giles is any indication, there is a metamorphosis of the stereotype that parallels the new direction in information science. The stereotype will remain, however, an outdated model as long as authors and others have childhood memories of visits to libraries. Perhaps the best advice would be to laugh at the old stereotype when it reappears, even as something about us and our history is revealed, and sometimes to laugh with the many patrons who are grateful for our help.

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