NEW VISION OR OLD STEREOTYPE: THE IMAGE OF THE LIBRARIAN ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB
- IS THE PROFESSIONAL IMAGE CHANGING IN THIS DIGITAL MEDIUM?

by
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Approved by:

_____________________
Advisor

This study examines a sample of photographic images and art work depicting librarians in World Wide Web documents. The images were analyzed to ascertain whether the negative stereotype of the library profession was evident in this medium.

Analysis of the WWW images revealed that positive and realistic portrayals were predominant, with only a fraction of the images reinforcing the stereotype. The study also found that depictions of librarians in Web documents were infrequent for both library and non-library sources. Factors contributing to this phenomenon were addressed, along with the underlying meanings behind the images in the sample.

Headings:

Librarians -- Status

Librarianship -- Psychological aspects
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Introduction

Professional image, whether negative or positive, impacts the credibility and status of any group by influencing public perceptions. In an age of shrinking budgets and increased competition for funding by various organizations and departments, a negative or inaccurate image of librarians and their professional skills could contribute to the loss of financial support from a sponsoring agency. It can even affect a community's use of library resources. Negative stereotypes of library professionals serve to discourage college students from exploring a career in librarianship and can harm the profession in other ways (Wilson, 1982).

The negative stereotypes about librarians do not logically reflect the truism "knowledge is power." The library as place has generally maintained a powerful image over time, but the professionals who create and manage the library have been viewed with mostly negative stereotypes (Radford & Radford, 1997). This stereotype is well known. For women, it is that of the humorless, elderly or mid-life spinster in drab clothing who sports a bun and glasses. This individual is obsessed with order and books, and lacks interpersonal skills. The stereotype conveys an individual who represents tedium and rigidity. Men in the profession are seen in a similar light, although they are also viewed as comical and ineffective.

These public images have been of concern for the profession for many years. They are
in stark opposition to the continuing evolution of librarianship, which demands a greater level of knowledge, adaptability and technological savvy than ever before. The negative stereotypes also fail to take into account that books are but one part of the modern library collection.

All visual media - film, television and photography - have so far played a large part in shaping and perpetuating the negative stereotype (Radford & Radford, 1997; Spaulding, 1989). The World Wide Web (WWW), both visual and textual in nature, continues to become ever more prominent in the lives of all sections of modern society. Its unique features include instantaneous communication with computer networks anywhere on the globe, the use of hypertext and hypermedia files, and the capability of dynamic connections (hyperlinks) to other WWW sites.

Gauging how the visual image of the librarian is portrayed on the World Wide Web at the beginning of the 21st century could provide information to indicate whether the professional image is in transition in this new communications channel. The literature indicates no such studies have been conducted.

Librarians have established a presence on the WWW. Could this positively influence how the public may perceive the profession? Have librarians made use of the opportunities available in this medium to present images which are more representative of the profession as a whole? If not, how is librarianship presented on the WWW and by whom? The question remains, is the image in transition in this medium, or does the negative stereotype
persist?
Literature Review

It has been postulated that the longer a profession's existence, the more enduring and fixed its stereotype. The negative stereotype of the librarian has unfortunately remained with us since Dewey’s era (MacDonald, 1995). Feminist theorists propose that the negative image of librarians originates from the fact that women dominate the profession and their work is consequently undervalued by society as a whole (Radford & Radford, 1997).

The Information Broker's Handbook, by Rugge and Glassbrenner (1995) goes so far to suggest that librarians rename themselves and become "information professionals" in an attempt to avoid the traditional negative image of the library profession. Anecdotal reports have indicated that salaries for MLS graduates are higher if they gain a job title other than "librarian". Librarians generally are paid proportionately less than professionals in other occupations with equivalent education (MacDonald, 1995).

Why should librarians be concerned with their professional image? Some believe librarians should ignore the phenomenon and focus their energies on providing exemplary service. Yet if image is unimportant, why did American businesses as a whole increase their advertising budgets 91% from 1983-1988? In recent years, organizations representing family physicians spent $5.1 million dollars to promote a positive image (Blackwelder, 1996). The literature indicates images in any medium convey meanings
which can supersede any textual content, hence the importance of visual advertising for commerce (Goldman & Papson, 1996; Williamson, 1978).

Some in and outside the profession have believed the negative image reflects an unfortunate reality, that librarians as a group did harbor the very traits which were cast in the stereotype (Scherdin & Beaubien, 1995). Consequently, a stereotype that reflects the truth cannot be altered. In an effort to understand whether the phenomenon corresponded to any real evidence, researchers have studied the personality traits of librarians as a group. In one example, Scherdin and Beaubien (1995) detailed Scherdin's study of librarian personality traits which was conducted in 1992. At that time, 1600 librarians from the United States completed the Strong Interest Inventory, the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (a revised version), and a demographic questionnaire. Participants were randomly chosen from the membership rolls of the American Library Association and the Special Libraries Association.

Results showed that librarians commonly exhibited traits related to innovation and introversion. In general, the personality traits of librarians differed markedly from those found for the general public where the extroversion trait dominated. The study found that librarians were not confined to any one personality profile, nor to a profile that reflected the negative stereotype. Scherdin's results contradicted those of a similar study by the Center for Applications of Psychological Type which was conducted between 1971 and 1984. That study seemed to demonstrate that librarians did exhibit some of the traits
characterized by the negative stereotype (Scherdin, Beaubien, 1995).

Interestingly, Scherdin noted that the two most commonly found personality profiles for librarians were also commonly found among computer specialists, chemists, electrical engineers, executives, attorneys and judges as well as physical scientists, dentists and school principals. These professions are primarily male dominated.

Image has the potential to affect the actions of patrons and sponsoring institutions. If librarians are viewed in a negative light, how will this affect people's impressions of the library? A study of rural library use found that 70% of patrons were women. It was proposed that rural men believed their public libraries primarily served the needs of women in the community (MacDonald, 1995). Such distorted perceptions discouraged rural men from utilizing library resources. Here, an erroneous impression of the library affected user behavior.

Blackwelder and Dimitroff (1996) surveyed both Wisconsin health professionals and medical librarians to gauge their perceptions of health science librarians and hence their professional image. Both groups completed an identical questionnaire which was a modified version of a Special Libraries Association task force survey originally used to measure the image of librarians among the general public. Almost 26% of the health professionals sample returned the survey, and nearly 60% of the health sciences librarians did so.

The results showed that health professionals gave librarians positive ratings on
factors which are in opposition to the negative stereotype. These included perceptions that librarians were approachable, responsive, open to change, supportive and people oriented. When asked to identify the skills most important to the work done by librarians, health professionals identified communication, interpersonal and technological skills. It was evident that the image of librarians held by the health professionals surveyed more accurately and more positively reflected the reality of the modern library and its professional staff and were in contrast with the negative stereotype.

A study of the librarian image among children consisted of a survey administered to two fourth grade classes (Jordan, 1991). All of the respondents had had contact with librarians at some time. The results showed that both girls and boys impressions of librarians did not conjure the negative stereotype. The characteristics measured using the survey instrument included appearance, knowledge level, helpfulness, fondness for children, and friendliness. All of the factors received very positive ratings from the children. It was evident that the school media specialists and children's librarians who have provided services to these young patrons did very well in representing themselves and their profession. Interestingly, this was only the second such study of its kind (Jordan, 1991).

The visual mass media, particularly television, serve as instruments in promoting social learning (Spaulding, 1989). In order to explore television's portrayal of the librarian and the library, Black (1993) used the Annenberg Television Script Archive, with a repository
of more than 32,000 television scripts, as the source for her research material. By searching the collection's indexed database, a total of 144 scripts were identified which depicted archivists, librarians or libraries. Most of the scripts were written between 1976 and 1984, with a few penned between 1984 and 1990. All types of library workers as presented in the scripts were included. Black used content analysis to examine the following categories: sex; sexuality; race/ethnicity; age; physical attributes; marital status; locales; types of librarians; types of libraries.

Quotations from particular episodes illustrated the author's conclusions. Black (1993) found that the television librarian was depicted as young, white, single and childless, attractive but conservatively so, and naive and inexperienced concerning romantic relationships. The television librarian frequently silenced others, was not helpful to patrons, and was obsessed with order. Additionally, computers had not yet entered the television library, and libraries generally were places where 'everything but reading goes on'.

Because an entertainment medium such as television often purposefully distorts or exaggerates, predictably a minority of the scripts examined presented positive and realistic portrayals. This characteristic of the medium does not negate the fact that television images may influence viewers. Unfortunately, the majority of scripts reviewed for the study did not serve to promote libraries, literacy or librarians (Black, 1993).

In contrast, Hall (1992) identified realistic and positive portrayals of librarians by
authors such as Charles Goodrum *(Carnage of the Realm)*, John Mortimer *(Rumpole and the Age of Miracles)*, P.D. James' *(A Taste for Death)*, and Le Carre *(The Spy Who Came in from the Cold)*. A positive portrayal was even highlighted from the comics -Randall & Leonard's *Secret Origins*. These depictions showed librarians in a variety of ways: as individuals with a full range of emotion and personality; as valued professionals; and as people with lifestyles and life goals that were both diverse and real.
Methodology

The study examined visual representations of librarians on the WWW, which included photographs and drawings (GIF or JPEG files) placed in Web documents. A content analysis tool based on Black’s (1993) was adapted for this study. Black’s tool was designed to analyze a visual medium’s (television) representations of librarians.

A pilot study was conducted to identify the potential sample size, determine the most appropriate Web sites for review, and refine search terms/strategies. In addition, the pilot study provided information needed to further develop the content analysis tool. The need for a comparison sample of Web sites lacking images of librarians was determined. The pilot study also confirmed the need for customized search terms as opposed to a single strategy which could be repeated across search engines.

The study sample was drawn from the WWW using seven major search engines: AltaVista, Excite, Hotbot, Looksmart, Lycos, Webcrawler, Yahoo, and three meta search engines: InferenceFind, InternetSleuth and Search.com.

The Web sites appropriate for the study were as follows: 1) sites about the library profession, regardless of the source; 2) educational web sites presented by librarians in which a visual representation of the librarian is presented regardless of the topic; 3) professional pages of library staff members; 4) library sites; non-library sites which presented images of librarians; 5) library association sites. All of these sources were
included for it was felt that they would depict the work of librarianship and those who work in the profession.

Web sites excluded from the study were personal home pages of librarians if their content was characterized as non-professional or personal in nature (e.g. resumes, family/hobbies). Library vendor and library education sites were also excluded. Personal home pages without clear representations or references to the profession were eliminated from the study. Library vendors were excluded since these sites were deemed likely to be commercial in nature and would only portray librarianship in a positive light. The third category, library education programs, were deemed as more closely allied with professional images of academia rather than librarianship, particularly to the general public.

Since several types of the Internet search engines were utilized for the study, the need arose to develop more than one keyword search. The search terms were pilot tested for recall results, with those offering the greatest number of documents chosen.

The search terms "librarian, professional, people, gif, jpg, JPEG" were used in Excite, Hotbot and AltaVista. This strategy was altered in Lycos and InferenceFind by dropping the jpg, JPEG and gif suffixes from the string. In Looksmart, the query word "librarian" was coupled with the graphic suffixes jpg and gif. In Yahoo, no subject link for "librarian" was available from a list of professions, thus a search of the site was done using search term "librarian and people". The queries used with Webcrawler and Search.com were
simply the word "librarian". The Photofinder Filtered Search, a unique option offered by Alta Vista, allowed for the retrieval of visual images on the Web. The word "librarian" was part of a query that requested retrieval of color and black and white photographs and art work.

The sheer volume of documents retrieved by all of the search engines made it impossible to review each item. Therefore, the top four levels of documents were examined to locate photographs and art work depicting librarians. Since the retrieval results are ranked, with the most relevant at the top of the list, the review was limited to those documents at the top of the rankings. The one exception to this approach was the examination of all images retrieved through AltaVista's Photofinder. This search option located a manageable number (171) of images relevant to the search.

For the content analysis, the following characteristics of pictorial images were examined: age, sex, race/ethnicity, and physical attributes such as attire and facial expression. The age categories were defined as follows: 1) young, indicating those under 40; 2) middle aged, individuals aged 41 to 65; 3) elderly, those over age 66; 4) sources in which several age groups were shown (Appendix A). Estimation of age was based upon the subjects appearance, unless specific textual information about age was supplied.

Facial expression categories included: 1) those considered positive, indicating friendliness, interest and a sense the individual was approachable; 2) those considered negative, indicating hostility or dislike; 3) neutral expressions; and comical or self mocking
facades. The "other" category was reserved for situations where facial expression was not present or could not be determined (see Appendix A).

Attire was examined because it can influence the perception of viewers. A range of possible appearance was recorded, including unconventional dress and an "other" category for images where attire was not visible, or was lacking.

The sex of individuals was recorded. If the sex of the individual could not be identified, and if more than one sex was depicted, these factors were also coded.

The race or ethnic origins of the librarians shown was also studied. The range of choices is presented in Appendix A. Estimation of race or ethnicity was based upon the closest approximation possible from the images as well as textual information, if available.

A comparison of the Web sites included the source or creator (librarian, non-librarian, unidentified), and geographic location. The list of Web sites is presented in Appendix B. Examples of images located through the study are presented in Appendix C.

Problems Encountered

One problem posed by the Web sources was the sheer volume of documents on the Internet. There were potentially thousands of sites which could be reviewed to find documents which might fit the criteria for the study. Current technological shortcomings for search engines and the lack of organization in this medium pointed to a high probability that relevant material would be missed. Conversely, the search engines retrieved documents which were completely unrelated to the search terms. In addition,
replication of the study would be problematic due to the constantly changing nature of both Web site content and search engine technologies.

The actual number and types of web sites on the Internet which depict librarians and librarianship through images was unknown, thus presenting challenges in interpreting the results. The sample size was too small to document trends with any certainty, but as an exploratory attempt, the study did identify patterns of image use on the WWW.
Findings

Eighty-four Web images—photographs or art work—depicting librarians, were identified within 67 English language Web sites. Thirty-nine Web sites lacking such images also were examined and used as a comparison group.

Approximately fifty-eight percent (39) of the images were located on sites associated with individual librarians or libraries (Table 1). Approximately thirty-eight percent (26) were from non-library sources and only 3% (2) were from unidentified sources (examples in Appendix D).

Table 1. Nature of Web Sources for Librarian Images

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>58.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-library</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The types of libraries with Web sites presenting librarian images included school or university, corporate, public and government. Images were also found on some library
association sites and personal professional pages (Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library Source</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School/University Libraries</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>51.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Libraries</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Libraries</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Librarians</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Libraries</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Associations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The non-library organizations represented in the sample were commercial establishments, non-profit organizations, government, and educational institutions. (Table 3).
Table 3. Nature of Non-library Web Sites with Images

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational Institution</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit Organization</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Establishment</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of the images themselves, nearly two thirds were retrieved from sources in the United States (Table 4).

Table 4. Images by Location of Web Source

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>70.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-U.S.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the comparison group, 87.2% (34) of Web sites lacking images of librarians were located in the United States (Table 5). Web sites in the comparison group, that did incorporate photographs or art work in their documents presented books, library buildings, bookshelves or furniture, library reading rooms, and patrons. International sites tended to have more images of librarian than did United States sources (Tables 5 and 6).

**Table 5. Location of Sites Without Librarian Images**

(Comparison Group)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sites Without Images of Librarians</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>87.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-U.S.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6. Location of Web Sites with Images

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>73.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-U.S.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearly thirty-seven percent (31) of librarian images represented individuals under 40 years of age (Table 7). Fifty percent (42) of all images shown depicted individuals aged 41 to 65. A small percentage (3.6%) of sites had group images showing multiple ages. Only 4.8 % (4) presented individuals over age 66. Just under five percent (4) of the graphic or photographic representations made age identification impossible.
Table 7. Ages Depicted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 40</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>36.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-65</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 66</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than one age group</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undetermined</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of race and ethnicity, a vast majority (79.8%) of photographs or art work depicted White individuals (those of northern European heritage). Only 6% (5) of the image sample were Blacks, 4.7% (4) Asians, 3.6% (3) Hispanics or Latinos, and a mere 1.2% (1) were Native Americans or aborigines (Table 8). Out of the total number of images where race or ethnicity could be determined, only 15.5% of the librarian images presented were members of U.S. minority groups (Table 8). The only Web sources in the sample which had Asian librarians were international sites.
Table 8. Race/Ethnicity in Images

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>79.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Amer./Aborigine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undetermined/Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>84</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Librarians in Web images were predominantly female (59.5%), with one third male (Table 9). Both male and female individuals were depicted in six percent of the sources. Both U.S. and non-U.S. sites had nearly the same proportion of male to female librarians in their images (Table 10).
Table 9. Gender Images

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>59.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undetermined</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10. Subset: Male and Female Images and Location of Web Source

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>Non-U.S.</th>
<th>Non-U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>64.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>53*</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>25*</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Both sexes” and “undetermined” categories were excluded.
In terms of other physical attributes, the majority (59.5%) of the librarians shown wore business attire (Table 11). Those in casual or neat dress consisted of 29.8% (25) of the sample. Only one person (1.2% of the sample) was dressed in an unkempt manner. Unconventional attire was noted in 3.6% (3) of the images. Nearly three quarters (61) of the pictorial representations displayed had positive facial expressions (Table 12). Just 21.4% (18) were characterized as neutral, while 4.8% (4) appeared as comical or humorous. Only 1.2% (1) presented a hostile or unfriendly demeanor.

**Table 11. Attire in Images**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style of Dress</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>59.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual/Neat</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unconventional</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drab/Unkempt</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 12. Facial Expression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approachable/Friendly</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>72.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comical</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostile/Unfriendly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

The study demonstrated that several predominant characteristics were associated with images of librarians on the WWW. While there was no difficulty locating Web sites about libraries and librarians, the study found that visual images of librarians were not particularly abundant in this medium. Interestingly, approximately 80% of all library sites reviewed had no images of librarians, even on Web page links with a title such as "Ask the Librarian". Most library Web sites had either no images at all, or used GIFs or JPEGs of inanimate objects when the subject was the library or the library profession. Library pages commonly had pictures of their building's exterior or interior, books, or patrons. Images of staff or representations of staff were infrequently used. Photographs of librarians assisting patrons were rare, while photographs of librarians at computer terminals or near computers represented approximately one sixth of the images.

Library association pages tended towards no images at all. Only three library associations, one each in Texas, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand, included images of librarians. With the United Kingdom example, there were several subfiles of the main Web site describing the work of a variety of librarians entitled "A Day in the Life". Presented in magazine format, each page included a photograph of the particular librarian and details about the duties each performed.

When there were images present, it was common for the librarians' image to be that of
the library director. This could account in part for the predominance of images in the sample depicting middle aged individuals and a significant portion of the male librarian images.

It is not surprising that images of librarians were most often located within the Web sites of educational institutions. Often, photographs of these librarians were found on library staff professional pages developed by the library. That international Web sites were more likely to have photographs of librarians regardless of the source was an unexpected finding.

Among sites which did portray librarians, the predominant characteristics of the librarian was that of a professionally dressed, middle aged white female who was welcoming and approachable. Countering the stereotype of librarians as elderly or middle aged, young and middle aged individuals combined represented 86.9% of the sample. Although they represent 25% of new entrants to the profession (Carmichael, 1994), male librarians were presented in one third of the total number of sample images. In terms of approachability and perceived attitude, photographs and art work showing positive or neutral facial expressions represented 94% of the sample.

This general pattern failed to confirm that a negative image of librarians was dominant on the WWW. The negative stereotype of the librarian did not emerge as the dominant portrayal in this medium. The difficulty in identifying a larger sample of Web site with images of librarians was notable. Relatively few images of library professionals seemed to
be available on the Web, even when the sources were exclusively from library or librarian created Web sites. The reasons are unknown although one could conjecture causes that are complex.

In one context, there has been a long history of labor-management conflict in the United States (Filippeli, 1990). The experience in this country has been characterized by significantly greater tensions when compared to the histories of other Western nations (Filippeli, 1990). This cultural phenomenon may affect who or what is chosen to represent the work of organizations, and expresses itself in the tendency to present only directors or products rather than rank and file staff. The format used on a number of Web sites was remarkably similar to that of the annual organizational report, where customarily only the director/CEO's photograph is prominently shown. Excluding staff from publications, whether on the Web or elsewhere, may be another expression of this phenomenon.

Such decisions in presentation may not necessarily be manifestations of a negative attitudes towards staff by libraries per se, but may only reflect the cultural context of organizations in the United States, and the standard means by which they present themselves in most media. In contrast, American educational institutions, having less rigid hierarchical structures, seemed less constrained in presenting a greater number of staff librarians in Web images.

Another aspect of the reluctance among librarians to present images of the people in the profession was the very existence of the negative stereotype, and an effort by some to
avoid image presentation. Harris (1993) has described this concern.

The literature has reported a sense of "self-consciousness" and discomfort within librarianship concerning its identity as a female profession (Harris, 1993). Harris wrote about how this has provoked a sense of undervaluation of the profession, not only within a male dominated society, but also among subgroups of librarians. Wilson (1982) stated librarians have at times tended to blame themselves for the negative stereotype's existence. She also pointed out that librarians on occasion have inadvertently perpetuated the negative stereotype in their own writings.

Compounding the sense of uncertainty with professional image and the related concept of role, is the competition that exists between librarianship and other disciplines for the information realm (Harris, 1993; Spaulding, 1989; Wilson, 1982). This sense of uncertainty due to role conflict with other groups has been enhanced by recent changes experienced within the profession as it both embraces and reacts to technological change (Nichols, 1995; Harris, 1993).

It is important to understand the image and its subtle relationship to advertisements. For the viewer, images are, in a sense, a form of advertising since viewers have been conditioned to perceive images in this manner. Williamson (1979) discussed how images, as used in advertisements, create "structures of meanings", which themselves evoke subtle emotional and intellectual responses. An image, the "signifier" calls out to those who view it, the "signified", for the purposes of engagement and involvement (Goldman & Papson,
Goldman (1992) described how impressions from the signifier (image) are rapidly created in the mind of the signified (viewer). Through strategic advertising, images can be recontextualized and transformed to represent other meanings. Images and advertisements have had a significant impact on public perceptions (Goldman, 1992; Goldman & Papson, 1996, Radford & Radford, 1997; Spaulding, 1989; Williamson, 1978).

Unfortunately, our culture has at times created negative images for those in its midst who devote themselves to intellectual pursuits. The stereotype of the "nerd" superimposed upon those in the sciences or engineering is one obvious example. Yet this particular stereotype is in transition thanks to corporate advertising, a topic that will be addressed shortly.

The librarian stereotype has evoked a generally negative response in observers when presented. On a certain level, anticipation of such a response could make the presentation of librarians in any form on the WWW too threatening. There has been a call by some information professionals to completely avoid the issue of stereotype and professional image (Harris, 1993). A fall back to the safer images mentioned earlier, may be perceived as the more cautious route to chose.

The stereotype has disregarded the library profession's innovation and contemporary standing. This signifier generally evokes a sense of the past, a sense of rigidity, protectionism, isolationism and marginality. Librarians may be sub-consciously more comfortable using the image of the library, which in contrast has held a sense of power and
prestige (Radford & Radford, 1997). It is also a masculine image. Images of books, or patrons themselves, would seem safer, as they evoke consistently positive reactions in those signified. Our culture has developed a fondness for books, which bring to mind thoughts of leisure, education, and the power of literacy. Patrons as images contribute to feelings of nostalgia, comfort and familiarity. If the patrons shown are children, thoughts of memorable library experiences from childhood are evoked.

What other underlying meanings did the Web images in the sample present? Several of the more unusual images will be discussed, along with the more conventional forms.

In terms of unique presentations, one animated GIF called the "dancing librarians", displayed a cartoon of a male and female librarian in motion. This signifier highlighted a humorous look at the profession. Its benign meaning presented librarians as people who, like everyone else, can enjoy a variety of activities, including dancing, and, by implication, dating.

Another unusual site was the "Lipstick Librarian". Here, the images shown are black and white photographs of women in the hair and styles of the 1950's. The attire includes both business and evening wear of the era. Our culture has associated this era with distinct meanings. Regarded as politically conservative and pre-feminist, it was in a sense a "black and white" decade. It has been perceived as a time noted for clearer definitions of role and status. After taking manufacturing jobs during WWII, the 1950s brought a more limited role for women in the workplace. The image on this Web page of the woman clad in
evening wear shows an individual, although confined to the home front, still going out into an interesting world. The subtle message in using such an image to represent a woman librarian was that the librarian's workplace was akin to an evening on the town, exciting and liberating. There was a suggestion of non-conformity, of breaking away from the mold. This is an image of non-conformity for the 1990s, in terms of actual dress, as well as one for the 1950's in terms of its symbolism. Piess (1986) and Goldman and Papson (1996) have described similar uses of cultural and political expression in dress style.

Repressed sexual desires or implied homosexuality are aspects of the male librarian stereotype (Charmichael, 1994). Only one site was found implying such a characterization. Wearing glasses and a comical expression, a cartoon character identified as a librarian is seen in a comic story board on the same page. The story told is that the character is more interested in inanimate objects than members of the opposite sex.

The classic negative stereotype of the female librarian was found on one commercial non-library site. This individual with glasses with hair pulled back, faces the viewer with a look of anger. She was "shushing" for silence.

A space alien was the image used in a Web document describing a male librarian. Placing this image next to the Web page's title heading, which was the individual's name, juxtaposed one common image of the "outsider" next to someone identified as a member of the library profession. The viewer might ponder whether this is how this particular librarian sees himself, or how he perceives that others see him. A self mocking tone was
Aside from unusual examples, what of the remaining images and the meanings these signifiers provoked? In showing images of young librarians on WWW documents, particularly individuals in their 20's, such depictions demonstrated that recruitment of library professionals does occur within younger segments of the population, despite the implications of the stereotype. As noted previously, the librarian stereotype is devoid of youth (Radford & Radford, 1997). The constructed meanings associated with youth reflect the potential of the future. Youth implies a future exists. A natural, expected career path for any profession includes the young. The images in the sample of groups of librarians from a range of ages shows a continuum for the career path, with distinguished looking middle aged individuals evoking the image of the mentor or leader. Despite the one exception, male librarians were depicted in the images retrieved as individuals, without a sense of gender confusion or effeminate undertones.

The casual dress of many images of librarians brought forth impressions of individuals comfortable and relaxed in their work. Such attire evoked thoughts of casual Fridays, that perhaps, every day was Friday in some librarians' places of work. The most common attire seen in Web images, business or career wear, was symbolic of a variety of meanings, including competence, status, responsibility, stability, leadership, wealth, and conservatism.

The public has related images of technology to the concepts of progress and problem
resolution thanks to years of corporate advertising (Goldman & Papson, 1996; Williamson, 1978). Individuals associated with the sciences and technology have been presented in corporate advertising as humanitarians, men and women whose work with products can lead to an improved world. Results of public opinion polls have found that the strategy has indeed shaped public opinion in the direction intended (Goldman & Papson, 1996), thereby diminishing the comical "nerd" stereotype of the technology and science professions.

Images of computers and technology in advertisements have futuristic connotations (Goldman & Papson, 1996), an aspect lacking in the traditional stereotype of the librarian (Blackwelder & Dimiroff, 1996; Radford & Radford, 1997). WWW images in the study which juxtaposed librarians and technology created the constructed meaning of librarianship as a contemporary profession. This choice of presentation associated librarians with technology workers and scientists, eliciting resulting associations with altruism and with work that offers effective solutions to the issues of the times.

When librarians are shown using technology, the profession is potentially associated with these positive constructed meanings. Overall, the general public has been found to lack a clear understanding regarding librarians and their relationship with the new "Information Age" (Bales, 1998; Spaulding, 1989). A new presentation of librarianship along these lines could contribute to a greater understanding of both librarians and their work.
Conclusion

The image of a profession can shape the attitudes of patrons and potential patrons. It can also influence the perceptions of sponsoring or funding organizations and their responses to library services. The negative stereotype of the librarian has remained with us, and fails to reflect the nature of the profession or the variety of individuals who work in the field. Yet there are many examples of positive images of the library professional which currently exist in print and visual media, and among patrons. These positive images can be cultivated in new media.

The WWW provides an new arena for the profession to be portrayed, for better or worse. Unlike other forums, librarians have open access to the WWW and currently hold have a significant presence through their library home pages and online catalogs. These are potential channels through which librarians can project a positive and realistic image of the profession.

The study found that portrayals of librarians are found infrequently on the WWW, even though libraries and librarians themselves were primary sources for information about the library profession. The study results suggest that librarians are not using the opportunities afforded by the WWW to present the profession in a more realistic and modern light. Since images can convey meanings to those signified (the viewer), the
WWW is one medium where visual images of the profession could be used to establish accurate portrayals, as it has the potential to shape public attitudes. Given the importance of image in our society, the negative stereotype's past, and potential future impact on librarianship, there is every indication that such action is warranted.
References


### Appendix A. Content Analysis Codes

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APPENDIX A

Explanation of Content Analysis Codes

Source:
Library/Librarian - Identified as created by a librarian or library
Non-Library/Librarian - "       "  not created by a librarian or library
Unknown - Creator cannot be identified clearly

Age:
Young - Appearing to be between the ages of 15 and 39
Middle Aged - Appearing to be between the ages of 40 and 64
Elderly - Appearing to be older than 65

Race/Ethnicity:
Appearing to be one of the ethnic or racial origins described (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, Other)

Sex:
Male, Female, Unidentified.

Attire:
As described. Unconventional would include costumes, bizarre clothing or formal evening wear.

Facial Expression:
Unfriendly/Hostile- would depict the emotions of anger or fear (scowling, furrowed brow).
APPENDIX A. Explanation of Content Analysis Codes, continued

Friendly/Approachable - would depict the emotions of happiness, joy (smiling, raised eyebrows).

Comical - clownish expressions (self-mocking expressions).

Neutral - None of the above, no emotion expressed.

Other
Appendix B

Web Sites with Librarian Images

2. Eric Morgan: http://www.lib.ncsu.edu.80/staff/morgan.html
7. A. Klavannoa http://www.bvu.edu/~klavanoa/
10. Meet the Director http://www.imcpl.lib.in.us.director.htm
11. U. of Malaysia Library http://www.umlib.um.edu.my/INDEX.HTM
16. Lipstick Librarian http://www.teleport.com/~petlin/liplib
Appendix B. continued

17. J. Milles  http://lawwww.cwru.edu/cwrulaw/faculty/milles/milles.html

23. E. Schnell:  http://bones.med.ohio-state.edu/eric.html
27. NAL Director:  http://www.nalusda.gob/director.html
31. Electronic Librarian:  http://home.earthlink.net/~electronlibr/
32. Internet Librarian:  http://www.wenet.net/~leita
35. Young Juneau Librarian  http://pix.corbis.com/pixasp?id=ow001041
Appendix B. continued


37. Day in the Life:
http://www.patronville.k12.mo.us/schools/parkwood/projects/careers/librarian.html

38. Bronx Beat:
http://moon.jm.columbia.edu/BronxBeat/indices/031097/librarian.html


40. Atlanta Technical Instit.: http://host118.atlanta.tec.ga/LIBRY.HTM


42. Mira Costa College: http://www.miracosta.cc.ca.us/home/mkelly

43. Bloomsburg Freenet: http://townhall.bafn.org/library

44. Armagh Observatory: http://star.arm.ac.uk/staff/staff.htm

45. Soros Fdn.: http://www.soros.org.ba/~media/staff.htm


47. Maynard Web: http://web.maynard.ma.us/library/more.htm

48. St. Peter's College Lib.: http://spcuna.spc.edu/library/po131.html


52. New Zealand Law Librarians: http://www.knowledge_basket.co.nz/nzl/g/speakers.html

53. S. Texas Border Region Health Educ.: http://www.uthscesa.edu/stbi/circuit.htm
Appendix B. continued


55. San Bernadino Co. Library:
   http://www.co.san-bernadino.ca.us/library/newtitle.html


57. Stockholm School of Economics: http://www.cic.hhs.se/about/photo_album.asp


59. Kavila H.S.: http://www.kavila.k12.hi.us/~abs/


61. U. of California, Irvine: http://www.uci.edu/~inform/journal.spring97/circle/01.html

62. Saskatoon Public Libr.: http://www.publib.saskatoon.sk.ca/director.html

63. Alex the Librarian: http://tin.mi.us/~krentzin/alex.htm

64. Heritage Project: http://www.edheritage.org/dc.htm

65. Turn to Texas: http://turntotexas.com/library_travel.htm

66. U. British Columbia:
   http://www.library.ubc.ca/home/about/friends/spring97/message.htm.

67. New Jersey State Library: http://www.state.nj.us/statelibrary/admin.htm

Sites Without Images:


Appendix B. continued


5. Video Librarian: http://www.videolibrarian.com


10. Nebraska Libr. Assoc.: http://www.state.ne.us/home/NLA/


12. Ask the Librarian: http://www.indiana.edu/slizzard/asciiPWP/ask_a_librarian.html

13. Catalog Dept.: http://www.library.nwu.edu/catalog/


17. Professional page: http://osu.orst.edu/dept/library/davidsoj


Appendix B Continued

20. Internet Public Libr.: http://www.ipl.org/about/bios.html


22. Ask the Librarian: http://www.hammond.lib.in.us/askthelibrarian.htm

23. UNC Wilmington: http://coast.lib.uncwil.edu/askref.html


28. Progressive Libr. Around the World:

http://www.germany.net/tielnehmer/100/115/158/adresse.htm

29. ALA: http://www.ala.org


34. New York Public Library: http://www.nypl.org

35. Boston Public Library: http://www.bpl.org


37. Folger Shakespeare Library: http://www.folger.edu

39. Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and Humanities, Research Library. Los Angeles
Appendix C. Image Examples
The Lipstick Librarian!
"Becoming a Librarian"
BOOKS FOR PEOPLE:

Lou Della Elliot, librarian at West Farms public library, has built a community at the library, as well as helped to rebuild the surrounding area.

Photo: Rachel Dickler