

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: FROM OLD MAIDS TO ACTION HEROES:
LIBRARIANS AND THE MEANINGS OF
LIBRARIAN STEREOTYPES

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This study examines the history of librarian stereotypes, the responses of librarians to them, and the resulting negotiations as librarians try to work beyond the stereotypes. Chapter One frames the study, which takes a cultural studies approach, and sets out research questions and methodology. Chapter Two looks at the history of librarian stereotypes, examines library literature on stereotypes, and analyses websites that feature representations of librarians. Chapters Three and Four present public librarians' discussions of stereotypes. By looking at librarian stereotypes through a combination of lenses, namely cultural studies, material and visual culture, and ethnography, I expand upon the ways in which librarian stereotypes have typically been examined. Chapter 5 concludes that librarians negotiate daily and in multiple ways with images and stereotypes of librarians that are maintained by society and culture and as well as by the library as institution.

**FROM OLD MAIDS TO ACTION HEROES: LIBRARIANS AND THE
MEANINGS OF LIBRARIAN STEREOTYPES**

by

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Chapter One Framing Librarian Stereotypes

In this thesis I use multiple lenses, most importantly cultural studies and focus group work, to move beyond one-dimensional stereotypes and images of librarians in order to explore and demonstrate clearly librarians' feelings about how they are represented, and their own work in light of a profusion of reductive stereotypes. Unlike many images of librarians in film, television, literature, and advertising, libraries and librarians are multidimensional. Librarians recognize that factors including patriarchy and hegemony, along with issues of class and pay in their feminized profession, feed and maintain negative, inaccurate, or simplistic images of librarians. Librarians react in numerous ways to such images, from active rebellion to quiet resentment to good-humored acceptance. In the focus groups, the librarians express what they really feel and experience when it comes to stereotypes and their work. While cultural studies can help us see just how stereotypes and representations operate in people's lives generally, the focus group work with librarians can help us understand their understandings of, thoughts about, and negotiations with stereotypes.

This chapter, Chapter One, consists primarily of the background for this thesis. It introduces the librarian focus groups with which I worked and situates this work in cultural studies. I take a cultural studies approach in considering librarian stereotypes for several reasons. It provides a space in which to examine hegemony operating within the library field by considering how librarians negotiate their relationship with stereotypes, including how they identify themselves amid stereotypes of librarians that the popular culture and mass media recycle and reconstitute decade after decade. Cultural studies' concern with action outside the text helped me in the focus group aspect of this study, for

example, by leading me to probe and think about whether and how the librarians I was working with were confronting or contesting stereotypes in their everyday work. This aspect of cultural studies also prompted me to analyze online representations of what I call “alternative” librarians to try to determine whether these representations operate in a counter-hegemonic way. I pay particular attention to Stuart Hall’s and Richard Dyer’s work on stereotypes and stereotyping. In this chapter I also discuss ethnography’s influence on my focus group work, as well as on my larger project. Much of my drive for this thesis stems from the fact that I am a librarian, and have many of my own questions and concerns about librarian stereotypes.

Ways of Looking at Librarian Stereotypes

The concept of a librarian stereotype dates at least to 1909, when a female librarian, writing in *Library Journal*, objected to the portrayal of librarians in works of fiction. This librarian observed two extremes of fictional images of librarians: either they were “old fogy bookworms,” or overly efficient and attractive younger librarians.¹ The stereotypes of the old fogy, or old maid librarian, and the overly efficient librarian are among the most prevalent popular culture representations of librarians; young, attractive librarians are more difficult to find in popular culture. Other frequent librarian stereotypes are those of the fearsome librarian, who imposes order and threatens her patrons with overdue fines, and the sexy, liberated librarian, released, usually by a man, from her fussy bun, eyeglasses, and sensible clothes. Although stereotypes of librarians have been overwhelmingly female, there are also stereotypes of male librarians, the most pervasive of which is that of the de-masculinized, gay man—a man working in a

¹ Rosalee McReynolds, “A Heritage Dismissed,” *Library Journal* 110 (1 November 1985): 25.

feminized profession. More recently, librarians themselves have been devising representations of librarians that differ from the usual stereotypes. Among these are the many images of librarians on websites created by younger librarians who embrace the trappings of other marginalized groups and subcultures. The Internet is also the most likely place to find images of young and attractive librarians. For example New Jersey librarians, who figure prominently in this study, have designed a new (female) librarian, in their technologically savvy, youngish, sexy Super Librarian, whose home is on the New Jersey State Library's website. Some state librarians created the Super Librarian as a marketing tool for the state's libraries, in particular for the technology available to users of these libraries.

Before discussing the specifics of librarian stereotypes, I want to define the terms stereotype and representation for the purposes of this study. According to Stuart Hall, "our picture of who the person 'is' is built up out of the information we accumulate from positioning him/her within these different orders of representation."² Hall delineated three effects of stereotyping. First, it "reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes 'difference.'" Second, it "fixes boundaries, and excludes everything which does not belong." Third, it "tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power."³ Richard Dyer, in *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations*, notes that stereotypes are a form of representation. He stresses that "representations are presentations, always and necessarily entailing the use of the codes and conventions of the available cultural forms

² Stuart Hall, "The Spectacle of the 'Other,'" in *Representations: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 257. Much of my understanding of how cultural studies, in particular the work of Stuart Hall, can be used to look at both librarian stereotypes and libraries comes from Marie and Gary Radfords' 2003 article entitled "Librarians and Party Girls: Cultural Studies and the Meaning of the Librarian." Their work set the theoretical groundwork for this study.

³ *Ibid.*, 258.

of presentation.”⁴ Dyer considered reality versus representation, noting that “reality is always more extensive and complicated than any system of representation can possibly comprehend, and we always sense that this is so--representation never ‘gets’ reality, which is why human history has produced so many different and changing ways of trying to get it.”⁵

Stereotypes in Library Literature

Much of library literature, especially that produced prior to the 1990s, tends to assume certain attributes of the librarian stereotypes. First, it assumes stereotyping is invariably negative and damaging. But as Dyer noted, stereotypes are not one dimensionally negative. They can be read in multiple ways, and read differently by different people. Second, library literature also very often assumes that librarians are female, and white, which speaks to Stuart Hall’s assertion that stereotypes fix and essentialize. It may indeed be that librarians are overwhelmingly female, and overwhelmingly white, and I do not at all mean to suggest that stereotypes ought to be applied equally to male librarians and to librarians of color. There are certainly nuggets of truth in what stereotypes purport to portray, or they would not exist. But if librarianship is fixed in the public’s mind as solidly white and female, it may for example lead to lack of interest in the profession by those who are not white and/or female.

A search of relatively recent library literature using the terms “librarian stereotype,” “librarian image” and “librarian representation” reveals a spate of articles on librarians’ “image problem.” Most of this work appears in professional, non-academic library journals, such as *Library Journal*, *American Libraries*, and *School Library*

⁴ Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

Journal, but has spread into scholarly journals including *The Library Quarterly* and *Library and Information Science Research*. Although they all discuss the images, the authors' directions and intent vary. The bulk of this work deals with images or representations of librarians in mass media and popular fiction, e.g., "The Image of Librarians in Modern Fiction" by Sandra I. Olen (1987); "Reel Librarians Don't Always Wear Buns" by Jon Brooks (1997) and "Discussing the Librarian and Libraries' Image Problem by Analyzing the Content of Mass Media" by Wu Shau-chun (2003).

Surveys make up another significant portion of the literature on librarian images and stereotypes. One of the few pieces of work on male librarianship consists of the results of a survey by James Carmichael, entitled "The Male Librarian and the Feminine Image: A Survey of Stereotype, Status, and Gender Perceptions," which was published in *Library and Information Science Research* in 1992. Other surveys focused on public relations and stereotypes, for example, "Still Mousy After All These Years: The Image of the Librarian in the 21st Century: Survey Results from Alberta" by Jennifer Bobrovitz (2001) and children's perceptions of librarians, including "Images of Librarians and Librarianship: A Study; Views of Young People Aged 4 to 15" by Joan R. Duffy (1990).

There are several theses and dissertations as well on librarian images and stereotypes. William H. King wrote his 1990 thesis on "The Celluloid Librarian and the Portrayal of Librarians in Motion Pictures." Winifred Fordham wrote a thesis entitled "Exploring the Image of the Librarian Through Themes of Identity and Self" (2000), and Yvonne Duke authored "New Vision of Old Stereotype: The Image of the Librarian on the World Wide Web, Is the Professional Image Changing in the Digital Medium?" (1999).

In my review of the literature, I found comparatively fewer books on the subject. Several authors have included considerations of the stereotypes in their histories of libraries and librarianship. Historian Dee Garrison, in her landmark 1979 study *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920*, claimed that:

It was the elitist nature of public library leadership that interacted with the predominance of women in the profession to produce the 'library hostess' of the late 1800s. And it is this respectable middle-class lady who does indeed demonstrate some of the stereotypical traits of that grim, prim, spinster librarian who has become a commonplace figure in American popular thought.⁶

Christina D. Baum has noted that Garrison's view of librarians and feminism has sparked heated debate in library literature. In her book entitled *Feminist Thought in American Librarianship*, Baum discussed reactions to Garrison's take on librarianship as a feminized profession. Baum alluded to feminization as feeding the stereotype in quoting Garrison's statement that "'the prevalence of women would profoundly affect the process of professionalization and the type of service that the library would provide,' and that this process 'would serve to perpetuate the low status of women in American society.'"⁷ Indeed, Garrison did not blame only Melvil Dewey, the 19th century library leader who created the decimal system of classification in 1876, but the women themselves. She saw the "overwhelming presence of women in librarianship" as one reason that librarians could not present themselves as intellectual scholar-librarians. As Garrison stated:

Modern librarians have laid the blame for their general passivity and inferior status upon various factors: the lack of a scientifically based abstract body of knowledge, the public's lack of differentiation between the "professional" librarian and the library clerk, and the inherently weak position of the librarian as implementor (sic) rather than

⁶ Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), xiv.

⁷ Christina D. Baum, *Feminist Thought in American Librarianship* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland & Co., Inc.), 18.

creator of intellectual and cultural advance. Rarely given its due as a determinant is the overwhelming presence of women in librarianship. The negative traits for which librarians indict themselves-excessive cautiousness, avoidance of controversy, timidity, a weak orientation toward autonomy, poor business sense, tractability, overcompliance, service to the point of self-sacrifice, and willingness to submit to subordination by trustees and public-are predominately “feminine” traits.⁸

Christina Baum also presented a content analysis of the impact of different kinds of feminism on “the thought and political agenda of American library women from 1965 through 1985.”⁹ Although she did not mention stereotypes in any direct way, Baum relates her subject to librarian stereotypes in that she looks in part at how various feminisms over the decades have played a role (or not) in female librarians’ approaches to their work.

In *Reclaiming the American Library Past: Writing the Women In* (1996), editor Suzanne Hildenbrand and other scholars presented biographies of pioneering women librarians as well as issues in librarianship. In a nod to stereotypes, they worked from the viewpoint that historians traditionally have silenced and blamed professional women, ascribing “‘piety and purity’” to women who worked in what they deemed conservative and socially acceptable women’s fields.¹⁰ Specifically, Christine Jenkins did spend some time discussing stereotypes in her chapter entitled “‘Since So Many of Today’s Librarians are Women...’ Women and Intellectual Freedom in U.S. Librarianship, 1890-1990.” She considered what some believe women’s “True Nature” to be, i.e., “submissive, domestic, nurturant, and pure,”¹¹ and stated that

While research has shown an increase over time in women librarians’ intellectual

⁸ Garrison, 189.

⁹ Baum, xi.

¹⁰ Suzanne Hildenbrand, *Reclaiming the American Library Past: Writing the Women In* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Company, 1996), x.

¹¹ Christine Jenkins, “‘Since So Many of Today’s Librarians are Women...’ Women and Intellectual Freedom in U.S. Librarianship, 1890-1990,” in *Reclaiming the American Library Past: Writing the Women In*, ed. Suzanne Hildenbrand (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Company, 1996), 44.

freedom activism within the profession, some troubling stereotypes remain. Historical and survey research on librarians and intellectual freedom advocacy reveals more similarities than differences between the anti-censorship stands of women and men, but the empirical evidence...cannot in itself eradicate the lingering assumptions in the minds of those who agree with...statements regarding 'natural' willingness to censor and unwillingness to defend library materials against others' censorship attempts.¹²

There has been comparatively less work on minorities in librarianship and, therefore, less work on whether and how minorities experience librarian stereotypes. This gap may be a reflection of the fact that librarianship is still overwhelmingly white.¹³ The essay collection *The Black Librarian in America Revisited* included only the merest mention of librarian stereotypes. Contributor (and former American Library Association President) Carla Hayden noted in her essay entitled "New Approaches to Black Recruitment" that it is the generally negative public perception of the profession that in part deters African Americans from entering librarianship. She quoted a colleague in stating "this is an additional deterrent to efforts on the part of the profession itself because 'an occupation that lacks an attractive image to the majority culture is understandably reluctant to welcome as members minority groups.'"¹⁴

In a more recent collection of essays by minority librarians entitled *In Our Own Voices: The Changing Face of Librarianship*, stereotypes are slightly more prominent. Here, a number of essayists explained that in their professional work, they have had to combat what they view as the traditional librarian stereotypes in addition to racial and ethnic stereotypes. Lisa Pillow, in her essay "Academic Librarianship: A Personal

¹² Ibid., 243.

¹³ The American Library Association last reported on race and ethnicity in librarianship in 1998. Their report, "Racial and Ethnic Diversity Among Librarians" resulted in the following percentages for public library make-up: White, 86.55; Black, 6.33; Hispanic, 2.95; Asian/Pacific Islander, 3.93; American Indian/Alaskan Native, .25. For information on how the survey was conducted, see <http://www.ala.org/ala/hrdr/libraryempresources/raciaethnic.htm>.

¹⁴ Carla D. Hayden, "New Approaches to Black Recruitment," in *The Black Librarian in America Revisited*, ed. E.J. Josey (Metuchen, NJ and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1994), 59.

Perspective,” relayed her experiences learning to negotiate academic librarianship not only as a woman of color, but as a young librarian in a graying profession. She demonstrated the pervasiveness of the old maid stereotype, and sympathized with other young librarians who might be easily “dismissed as having little or no experience” by some patrons.¹⁵

Considerations of Librarian Stereotypes in Other Literature

Outside of library literature, Abigail Van Slyck, in her book *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries and American Culture, 1890-1920*, considered how culture, power, and gender intersect with library architecture. Van Slyck covered roughly the same time period and similar territory as Dee Garrison, but from the perspective of architectural history. Issues of multivalence appeared in her work, as she demonstrated that library buildings have different meanings for the “philanthropic fathers” who initiated building these 19th century bastions of culture, the architects who designed them, the librarians who worked there, and the people who used them. Multivalence¹⁶ in material culture is the idea that an object can have multiple meanings for different people. Van Slyck looked at librarians and the ways in which they interacted with library buildings, and the implications of librarian design on librarian stereotypes. She paid most attention to stereotypes in a chapter entitled “Working,” in which she included a discussion on Newark, New Jersey’s pioneering Progressive Era library director John Cotton Dana’s stripping of any intellectual aspect of librarians’ work in applying it to women.

¹⁵ Lisa Pillow, “Academic Librarianship: A Personal Perspective,” in *In Our Own Voices: The Changing Face of Librarianship*, ed. Teresa Y. Neely and Khafre K. Abif (Lanham, MD and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1996), 202.

¹⁶ Multivalence is an idea first introduced to me by Mary Corbin Sies in a course on material culture theory. In the context of the course, we focused on multivalence as meaning objects do not represent identity in essential ways.

According to Van Slyck, Dana based librarianship on instinct rather than intellectual knowledge or skill. Even if he meant to welcome women to the library profession, he focused on conventional stereotypes, for example, innate helpfulness, pleasantness, and malleability, as the reasons women were suited for library work. Van Slyck touched on issues of power when she observed that “to the extent that these innate skills were defined as devoid of any intellectual spark, it helped to rationalize the lower pay offered to women in the field.” Further, she noted that “by denying women the opportunity to exercise professional authority even over the reader, this definition of women in librarianship virtually guaranteed that most women would remain subordinate in the hierarchy of the library staff.”¹⁷ The social reality of librarianship is that it has often been accorded the low social and financial status of other stereotyped professions, traditionally pink collar professions including nursing and teaching. The realities of low librarian pay, budget cuts, and lack of respect can only serve to feed certain librarian stereotypes.

Ways of Thinking About Librarian Stereotypes

Two scholars, in particular, have helped me think about my direction in this thesis. Wayne A. Wiegand, whose own work serves as part of what inspired me to pursue work on librarianship, made such a call in an article entitled “Tunnel Vision and Blind Spots: What the Past Tells Us about the Present; Reflections on the Twentieth-Century History of American Librarianship,” which appeared in *Library Quarterly*, with a briefer version published in the American Studies Association’s newsletter. Wiegand, a professor of both Library Science and American Studies, lamented that the library

¹⁷ Abigail Van Slyck, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries and American Culture 1890 -1920* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 165.

“remains one of the most understudied of American institutions.”¹⁸ He asserted that the “constant reexamination of our past from alternative perspectives” has great value. And despite his concern over the lack of analytical, mature, and deeply contextualized existing library literature, he took hope in more recent works such as *Cultural Crusaders: Women in the American West, 1900-1917* by Joanne E. Passatt and *Good Books in a Country Home: The Public Library as Cultural Force in Hagerstown, Maryland, 1878-1920* by Deanna B. Marcum. Wiegand is primarily concerned with “the multiple roles that libraries of all types have played and are playing in their host communities.”¹⁹

Richard Dyer primarily worked with film images that he views as negative, of “out” groups, namely women and gay men, in his book *The Matter of Images*. He encouraged a close and critical reading of stereotypes, which prompted me to try not to rush to judgment about the effects of librarian stereotypes, as well as to examine librarian stereotypes closely and carefully. Dyer considered the complexity of representations by looking at why images, or representations, matter, how they are constructed, and the reality they purport to represent. Particularly important is what Dyer explained as the deceptive simplicity of stereotypes:

An image of a member of a group is taken as representative of that group, how that group is represented in the sense of spoken for and on behalf of (whether they represent, speak for themselves or not), these all have to do with how members of groups see themselves and others like themselves, how they see their place in society, their right to the rights a society claims to ensure its citizens.²⁰

According to Dyer, the accepted simplicity of representations can lead to discrimination, harassment, and other negative consequences.

¹⁸ Wayne A. Wiegand, “Tunnel Vision and Blind Spots: What the Past Tells Us about the Present; Reflections on the Twentieth-Century History of American Librarianship,” *Library Quarterly* 69, no.1 (January 1999): 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁰ Dyer, 1.

In fact Richard Dyer made a similar point in his discussion of Walter Lippman's (who coined the term "stereotype") definition and explanations of stereotypes themselves and his use of "we" and "us." Dyer found this the most problematic thing about stereotypes, and asserts that one has to ask "who exactly are the 'we' and the 'us'..."²¹ As Dyer maintained in the introduction to his book, "much image analysis seems only to demonstrate that everything is the same and it's all awful. There is something deadly about such reductive work: it tells one little and thus does rather little politically."²² Dyer observed that "it is not stereotypes, as an aspect of human thought and representation that are wrong, but who controls and defines them, what interests they serve."²³ Questions of power and hegemony are key, then, in looking at stereotypes. Who controls and defines images of librarians? In what ways are images of librarians shaped and manipulated by society and culture?

In addition to the importance of Stuart Hall, Richard Dyer, and Wayne Wiegand to this study, I have also drawn on the work of Psyche Williams-Forsion in framing my thesis. Her American Studies dissertation "*Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs*": *African American Women, Material Culture, and the Powers of Self-Definition*, looked at "the ways black women (and men) have forged their own self-definitions and relationships to 'the gospel bird,'" or, chicken.²⁴ Williams-Forsion gave space to negative associations between black culture and chicken imagery, but focuses on the complexities of representations and stereotypes. Through the use of ethnography, she gave voice to black women and demonstrated how they defy conventional representations, exert agency

²¹ Ibid., 14.

²² Ibid., 1.

²³ Ibid., 12.

²⁴ Psyche Williams-Forsion, "Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs": African American Women, Material Culture, and the Powers of Self-Definition" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 2002), abstract.

in different and unexpected ways, and, despite the difficult power structures that oppress them, define themselves. Williams-Forsion's work has led me to ask questions about the meanings librarian representations hold for librarians, and what relationships the librarians have with these stereotypes.

The Action Figure and the Super Hero

My own reactions to and readings of two recently created popular culture representations of librarians were important in my decision to not only conduct this work, but to use focus groups to delve more deeply into stereotypes and their meanings—in other words, to investigate possibilities of multivalence. Archie McPhee & Co., which produces toys and novelties, including Freud and Jesus action figures, among others, also created the Librarian Action Figure. The librarian figure is based on an actual librarian, Nancy Pearl, who recently retired from the Seattle Public Library. Pearl, who is also a published author and National Public Radio book reviewer, is now somewhat famous, at least in library and book publishing circles, and she and her plastic imitation have been the subjects of heated debate on library listservs, in library journals, and in the media.²⁵ Her plastic likeness has become downright infamous among librarians. Some love the figure—they are drawn to its tongue-in-cheek nature (the amazing shushing action!) and appreciate the attention librarians have garnered through its existence. Others are critical of the figure because in part because they feel it only serves to fuel the stereotype of the shushing, dowdy librarian. Pearl the action figure wears a shapeless, style-less, navy blue jacket and skirt. She wears glasses (although to be fair, the real Nancy Pearl does wear glasses), and her shoes, plain gray flats, are decidedly sensible. Many librarians have

²⁵ From my own observations on archives and library listservs, journal articles, conversations with colleagues.



Figure 1. The Librarian Action Figure, modeled after real-life librarian Nancy Pearl.
© 2004 Archie McPhee & Co. Used by permission.

questioned whether Pearl dresses this way in real life, or whether she approved the clothing selection, not to mention the shushing action (which more than a few disgruntled librarians have pointed out make her look more like she is about to insert her index finger into her nose). I received the librarian action figure as a gift, and although I laughed upon unwrapping it, I was not really sure how I felt about her. At my place of work at the time, an archivist who also received the figure as a gift brought her into work, and poor plastic Nancy Pearl resided for some time upside-down in a glass in the kitchen area, frozen in shushing mode.

On a trip to New Jersey while still contemplating my thesis subject, I stopped into a public library where I once worked. Upon entering, I came face-to-face with a poster featuring the New Jersey State Library's Super Librarian. The Super Librarian is a serious-looking woman with flowing, raven hair who bears a resemblance to Wonder Woman. She wears a purple Spandex cat suit with "NJ" on her chest. She too wears glasses, albeit a modern-looking pair with dark frames. She stands atop an oversized computer mouse like it is a surfboard. Perhaps the most striking thing about the Super

Librarian is that she is very muscular. Obviously, she is meant to be completely opposite of the dowdy, meek librarian. It is the 21st century and the athletic Super Librarian rides the information highway. Before I left the library that day I grabbed a bookmark with the same librarian image. I would find out later that the state library conducted something of a media blitz with this image--an entire section of its website is devoted to Super Librarian as an arbiter of 21st century librarianship. In New Jersey libraries, she also created a stir--a 2004 issue of *Library Journal*, required reading for most public librarians, featured Super Librarian on the cover, and in an article in that issue, her creative team of library administrators and marketing executives answered questions about their superhero and why she was so controversial. Super Librarian is meant to educate New Jersey citizens about its 451 libraries, as well as fight popular ideas about what libraries and librarians are. Some librarians found the image too flip and unprofessional.²⁶ I was unsure of how I felt about this representation as well, but for different reasons. I wondered if money spent on an advertising campaign to try to change the image of the librarian (though still female, with glasses) that might only truly be appreciated by librarians themselves, might better have gone to fund more computers at, say, my hometown library. I would come to learn much more about Super Librarian and her history in the focus groups I worked with.

²⁶ Tina Keresztury, "Super Librarian to the Rescue!" *Library Journal* 129.9 (15 May 2004): 32.

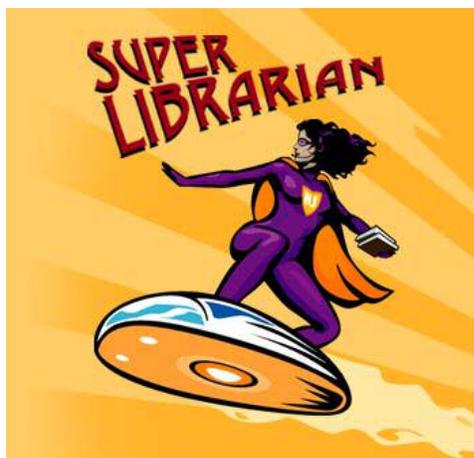


Figure 2. The New Jersey State Library's Super Librarian
© 2003 New Jersey State Library. Used by permission.

If these representations made me cringe, how did other librarians feel? Why couldn't these representations drop the more familiar trappings of librarian stereotypes? Furthermore, did they have to be women, and did they even have to be white? Are sexy and shapely representations (like Super Librarian) the way to go? Or will that somehow reinforce or create a new stereotype? Was everyone reacting like me, or was I overreacting? And did it matter? What about these representations of librarians that come out of the library profession itself? Do librarians ambiguously represent themselves? Focus group discussions would help me see more clearly that these representations could indeed hold multiple meanings, as well as have a political edge.

Librarians and Media

So much of the writing on librarian stereotypes exists today on websites and Weblogs (or blogs) created by, presumably, younger librarians. This writing is not

scholarly; primarily, the creators use humor in addressing, examining, and deconstructing librarian stereotypes. Some of the websites I consulted for this thesis research include Warrior Librarian Weekly, Renegade Librarian, Librarian Avengers, Lipstick Librarian, Leather Librarian, Modified Librarian, and even the Belly Dancing Librarian. These librarian webmasters and bloggers have borrowed from marginalized groups, invested them with power to resist and combat stereotypes of what many consider to still be a marginalized profession.” As Dick Hebdige has discussed, style can be used as a signifier and the creators of these online librarians display differences from stereotypical librarian representations. One might argue that any real work on combating stereotypes is going on in cyberspace. Indeed, Bettina Hasan wrote her 2001 University of Wales dissertation, *Digital Image: The Stereotype of the Female Librarian and Images of and by Librarians on the Internet*, on this phenomenon. While I believe these sites have their place, and probably do their part to create camaraderie among librarians, and maybe even bring a new perspective on librarians and librarianship to a wider group of people, as I clicked through them I found myself also thinking of Wayne Wiegand’s call, wishing that librarianship and its accompanying representations were indeed looked at more critically.

In a series of articles on librarian stereotypes, Professor of Communication Gary Radford and Professor of Library and Information Science Marie Radford have worked to bridge the gap between library science and more theoretically oriented fields. They do use more cultural theory to look at stereotypes, but have helped me think about the fearsome librarian stereotype in using Michel Foucault. The Radfords assert that representations of librarians in the media “are made possible by, and decoded within, the structures of a discourse of fear, a practice of speech and symbols that equates the control

and fear of discourse in fundamental ways.”²⁷ They consider the library as institution along with the librarian as gatekeeper of the orderly institution.

Focus Group Methodology

I have chosen to use focus groups to explore whether and how male and female “real life” librarians respond to and experience librarian stereotypes, and I am interested in librarians on the “front lines.” So much of the extant literature on librarian stereotypes is editorial in nature. Aside from surveys, we do not hear many librarians’ individual voices. Survey work comes closest to the work I conduct here; however, surveys do not allow for discussion among participants and I think the discussions the librarians had among themselves during focus groups sessions provided some of the most fruitful information regarding their feelings on stereotypes. The focus group discussion is a forum for librarians of different genders and racial and ethnic backgrounds, who work in different public libraries, in very economically and demographically different towns, to express the multiple ways in which they read representations of librarians. The group context has provided a space for individual librarians to express themselves in concert with or against popular culture’s librarian representations. The groups are also a place for librarians to come together and through interaction (discussion, sharing of anecdotes) produce new insights²⁸ and bring any hidden narratives to light.

²⁷ Gary P. Radford and Marie L. Radford, “Libraries, Librarians, and the Discourse of Fear,” *Library Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (July 2001): 299.

²⁸ Sue Wilkinson, “How Useful Are feminist Groups in Social Research?” in *Developing Focus Group Research: Politics, Theory and Practice*, eds. Rosaline S. Barbour and Jenny Kitzinger (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 64-78.

I began the focus group process by selecting two New Jersey public libraries from which I would form two focus groups of professional librarians. New Jersey is important to me as a place, especially as it is where I received my graduate degree in library science and where I began my own career as a librarian and archivist. The libraries I selected each serve diverse and differing communities. Library A serves a suburban township of over 37,000. According to the latest census information, approximately 26,600 of the population are white, 2,975 are African American, and 1,918 are of Hispanic or Latino origin. Library A has eight librarians, and its holdings consist of over 140,100 items. Library B serves a city of over 48,000. Of those, 23,701 are white, 11,185 are African American, and 18,947 are Hispanic or Latino. There are ten librarians on staff. I decided to restrict my work to public libraries in large part because I think public librarians are really the “face” of librarianship for the general public. In popular representations (two examples, the beleaguered librarian in *It's a Wonderful Life* and the mean and condescending librarian in *Sophie's Choice*, come into play in the following pages) it is often the public librarian who is stereotyped. I do not purport to suggest that the public librarians of New Jersey speak for public librarians everywhere, or even in other parts of the state, and my conclusions can only be drawn from the groups I have worked with. That being said, I do not think the public librarians of New Jersey are so different from other public librarians working today.

I informed contacts at each of the libraries of my intent to speak with librarians in focus groups for thesis research. These librarians in turn notified their colleagues of an opportunity to participate in a focus group. In assembling the groups, I only asked my contacts that we have no more than ten participants per group, and that the groups be

varied by sex, race, and age. As I have noted, part of my concern in so much writing on librarian stereotypes is that it assumes “white,” as well as female. I wanted to be sure to include librarians of color, male librarians, and librarians of differing sexual orientations, if possible, and as long as the participants were comfortable talking about their sexuality (or, for that matter, race and sex). When we met I gave the librarians a questionnaire that they completed as we settled in (Appendix A). The questionnaire sought basic data that I wanted to collect in order to define the groups according to age, sex, length of time in librarianship, and reason for entering librarianship.

I used the open-ended questions in the focus groups, and they included the following: how do librarians experience librarianship, and how do they see themselves as librarians; do librarians view librarianship today as a gendered profession, and if so, how do they experience it as a gendered profession; do the stereotypes of librarians and perceived gender divisions that exist in popular culture representations of librarians appear within the librarians’ workplace; if and how race, class, and sexuality matters, and if and how power relations and hegemony operate in the librarians’ response to and understandings of librarian stereotypes. Since representations of librarians emanate from popular culture as well as from the library profession itself, I examine whether librarians feel in control of the stereotypes. I am very interested in the impact of stereotypes, if any, on real-life work, and vice versa.

In my focus group work, I concentrated on quality rather than quantity, what has been called “qualitative sampling.”²⁹ Qualitative sampling “emphasizes diversity,” and

²⁹ Rosaline S. Barbour and Jenny Kitzinger, eds., *Developing Focus Group Research: Politics, Theory and Practice* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 22-24.

makes “particular efforts to consider the voices which might be excluded,”³⁰ thus helping me accomplish one of my primary goals. In their book *Developing Focus Group Research*, Rosaline Barbour and Jenny Kitzinger discussed an aspect of focus group work that particularly appealed to me because I hoped to get at issues of race, sexuality, and class, not to mention power relationships. I wanted to explore “how focus groups can be used to unpack the social construction of sensitive issues, uncover different layers of discourse and illuminate group taboos and the routine silencing of certain views and experiences.” Additionally, I intended to go beyond “pre-rehearsed shared public knowledge.”³¹ I wanted to give librarians, male and female, some relatively new to the profession as well as veterans, of different ethnic and racial backgrounds, the opportunity to discuss stereotypes in an open manner, and to focus on what was important to them, individually but also collectively, as far as stereotypes. I chose focus groups as a method in part because so many of the articles I read that discussed librarian stereotypes talked *about* librarians, and the articles written by librarians so often use “we” and “us” to discuss opinions on stereotypes, making sweeping generalizations without actually gathering information directly from librarians they purport to speak for or describe. Focus groups can help us get away from the positivism and essentialism of so many texts that lump librarians together into one group, often assuming that librarians either hate the stereotypes or consider them to be nonsense. Sue Wilkinson, in an essay in *Developing Focus Group Research*, stated that a focus group “enables research participants to speak

³⁰ Ibid., 7.

³¹ Ibid., 156-157.

in their own voice, to express their own thoughts and feelings, to determine their own agendas.”³²

Focus groups also allow participants to be each others’ audience. They allow for a richer perspective, as the librarians themselves could and did ask questions, both rhetorically and of each other, tell stories, and comment on each other’s experiences and points of view. I almost prefer the term discussion groups to focus groups, because it is in the discussion that, I believe, we all learned the most about where librarian stereotypes come from and what they mean to the men and women who work in this profession every day. Group members questioned one another on subjects I did not anticipate in developing my questions, and they kept up their own momentum. This sort of open discussion can be the starting place for librarians who do want to work to change their popular image.

There are several issues relating to focus group research that are important to address. The groups with which I worked were pre-existing to some extent, in that they each consisted of staff from the same library, albeit from different departments. These librarians may not all work together on a daily basis, but probably have at least some interaction each day, and do indeed all know one another to varying degrees. Pre-existing groups have been looked down upon by some researchers because of a potential “polluting or inhibiting effect.”³³ On the other hand, some researchers argue that emotional or testy moments that might occur within pre-existing groups allow the possibility of even greater insight.”³⁴ One method I utilized to allow focus group

³² Wilkinson, 71.

³³ Barbour and Kitzinger, 9.

³⁴ Ibid., 9.

members to get some space away from the group was distributing the questionnaire they completed before the discussions began.

There has been some concern about working with people or places with which one has a connection. One way I tried to avoid this issue was to make initial contact with just one person at each library beforehand. In one case, I did not know the contact at all but was introduced (via e-mail) by a colleague. In the other case, I did have a previous relationship with the contact. These contacts alone solicited participants from among their colleagues. It is my hope that in quoting the members of the groups, truly allowing their voices to populate much of this thesis, I am limiting the influence of my own connection.

Further study might be done with samples of librarians from different states, and libraries other than suburban upper middle class and inner city. Additionally, I think a study such as this one would benefit qualitatively from comparing librarian focus groups with non-librarian focus groups, composed of regular library users as well as non-library users.

In the focus groups, I was able to draw on my own experiences in ethnography, including self-ethnography. I cannot ignore my own identification as a librarian and as someone who has encountered librarian stereotyping firsthand in my own educational and professional experience. I am an archivist, but I began my career as an adult reference librarian in a public library. Several years after receiving my master's degree in library science, people still occasionally tell me that I do not look like a librarian. My immediate reaction to this sort of comment is to say "thank you." I often wonder what that says about my own opinions of my chosen profession. I suspect that when people say that,

they have in mind the bespectacled, old maid, fuddy-duddy librarian. In other words, one of the librarian stereotypes. Indeed, I would hear from the librarians in focus groups that many of them hear the same thing, and that I am not alone in being grateful that people do not think I look like a librarian.

Outline of Thesis

In Chapter One I have included a review of some library and critical theoretical literature in order to frame my examination of librarian stereotypes. In Chapter Two I present librarian stereotypes by reviewing previous library literature that has dealt with varied librarian stereotypes that have been established in literature, film, television, and advertising, including old maid, fearsome, overly-efficient, and sex-kitten librarians. In the second part of Chapter Two, I use the work of Clinton R. Sanders, Dick Hebdige, and others working in the area of cultural studies to analyze representations of librarians on the Internet that appear to combat librarian stereotypes by appropriating the styles of other marginalized groups.

Through the use of focus groups, the results of which I discuss in Chapters Three and Four, I have attempted to understand how librarians relate to stereotypes, created and perpetuated by librarians and non-librarians alike, in or through the librarians' lived experiences and their work and personal lives as librarians. In addition, like the minority librarians writing in the collection of essays entitled *In Our Own Voices*, I wanted to keep librarians' voices in the discourse on stereotypes, and make a contribution to a body of library literature that refrains from editorializing and using the collective, essentializing "we." Thus, Chapter Three presents the librarians' views on stereotypes and what they

think the stereotypes get wrong or miss. Chapter Four presents the librarians' thoughts on where and how work on stereotypes should proceed. I conclude this study with further thoughts on librarian stereotypes and their meanings from what was gleaned in the focus groups.

Chapter Two Librarian Stereotypes Over the Decades

Librarian stereotypes are almost as old as the library profession itself. In this chapter, I review library literature that discusses the origins and development of these stereotypes over time. For the most part, scholars locate the beginnings of the stereotypically repressed, stern, de-sexed female librarian in the threat perceived by the entrance of women into in the formerly male-dominated profession at the end of the 1800s. Next, I review the work of commentators like Marie and Gary Radford and Jody Newmyer who look more deeply into the reality of the library profession to see if there is anything inherent in the way that librarians conduct their work that promotes particular stereotypes. Finally, I discuss the efforts of contemporary librarians who have tried to redefine and empower themselves and their profession by appropriating modes of dress and behavior from traditionally *avant-garde* or marginalized groups. The questions I raise in this chapter about librarian representations and the many ways librarians contend with these representations form the basis for many of the questions I asked the librarians who participated in this study.

Representations and Stereotypes throughout the History of Librarianship

In her 1976 article entitled “The Image Problem of the Librarian: Femininity and Social Control,” Jody Newmyer explored the feminine image of the librarian. She examined the origins of the assumption that “librarians, male as well as female, are ‘feminine.’”³⁵ She was interested in how the assumption is maintained and whether it

³⁵ Jody Newmyer, “The Image Problem of the Librarian: Femininity and Social Control,” *The Journal of Library History* 11 (1976): 44.

corresponds to “the changing realities of the profession,” and pointed out that there is “nothing inherently ‘female’ about librarians.”³⁶ At the end of the 19th century, women moved into the profession quickly and in large numbers, but were not valued or paid in the same way as men. In fact, prior to 1870 the public expected librarians to be men, not to mention grim, grouchy, and eccentric. By the 1880s the “rapid influx of women into the profession and the terms on which they accepted their duties laid the basis for the feminine image of the librarian as ‘an inhibited, single, middle-aged woman.’”³⁷ Nineteenth century feminists saw economic subservience as the “root of female oppression.”³⁸ Could the lower pay have also prevented librarians from obtaining fashionable clothes and hairstyles?³⁹

Melvil Dewey wanted to do away with the mousy librarian image, but he was also obsessed with efficiency and scientific management, which likely led to the image of the overly efficient librarian, who is concerned with order and even silence (e.g., the shushing librarian). Yet, in this image we can also see the submissive female librarian who attended male-run library schools, who was not in the higher echelon of library employment, and who therefore was paid less than men. Abigail Van Slyck noted that a “highly gendered library hierarchy” has been in place since the early 20th century. Men held the executive and management positions, and therefore the power, while women mostly worked in the lower-paid positions that did not offer as much prestige or responsibility. Yet, “the image of the profession was so strongly tied to the women who dominated it, the situation seemed irreversible since the last thing anyone expected or

³⁶ Ibid., 44.

³⁷ Ibid., 44-45.

³⁸ Ibid., 46.

³⁹ Brewerton, Antony, “Sex Lies and Stereotypes,” *Assistant Librarian* 86, no. 2 (February 1993): 25.

wanted was for females to display masculine characteristics like aggression or ambition.”⁴⁰ Do today’s librarians play out, or rally against, their expected roles, and is there still a sense of hierarchy that affects how they perform day-to-day tasks?

Even John Cotton Dana, a proponent of women in librarianship, believed that women could only aspire to work in assistant, subordinate positions.⁴¹ Men may have accepted women in librarianship because men perceived the sort of library work women did to be similar to that of the domestic sphere. Also, the public perceived librarianship as more a part of a cultural sphere that included literature and art, and therefore a suitable atmosphere for women. Abigail Van Slyck also stated that women were drawn to librarianship because they saw the library as a place where they could “exercise their natural aptitude for disseminating culture.”⁴² Further, librarianship did not necessarily require physical strength, and it generally kept women away from the rougher segments of society. Librarianship in the latter part of the 19th century was a new, fast-growing profession in need of new recruits, and women could be counted on to save money, as they might in the home, in a profession that was primarily supported by taxes and donations. Prior to World War I in particular, librarians and library assistants alike felt pressure to “emanate qualities of kindness, dignity, and selflessness,”⁴³ qualities that might very well be expected of wives and mothers in the home.

After World War I, when libraries switched their emphasis from education to recreation, librarians began searching for a new image to accompany that change. But, a lack of library literature regarding the image of female librarians of that era raises some

⁴⁰ Ibid., 26.

⁴¹ Van Slyck, 164.

⁴² Ibid., 162.

⁴³ McReynolds, 26.

questions. Were these women confident in their positions? Was there something about libraries themselves at this time that boosted female librarian confidence? In thinking about how the appearance of the library might connect to representations of librarians, I would probe the focus groups on this subject.

Male librarians of the early 20th century, though, attempted to return the image of the library to its masculine roots by writing articles in which they compared librarianship to male-dominated professions. These men tried to compare libraries to banks or detective agencies. It seems feasible that a librarian's work and even physical actions could be compared to a detective's, for example. At a very basic level, they both hunt down and follow clues and information and rifle through files. Could that sort of comparison, to possibly more respected professions, have improved overall negative stereotypes of both male and female librarians in the early decades of the 20th century?

A battle of the sexes raged in library journals throughout the 1930s. Some male librarians thought women merely considered their library work a stopgap measure before marriage and indeed, some men were thankful that marriage would remove women from the profession, enabling the work to become more masculinized. Women librarians were not amused, and eventually decided the best way to combat their negative image was to "leave behind the persona of a genteel and unworldly lady." But, by doing so, did these female librarians reject "an important part of their history?"⁴⁴ Librarians of the 1930s began to disavow their predecessors, not realizing that some of them were pioneers in their own era. In 1887, for example, seventeen women entered Melvil Dewey's school of library economy at Columbia College, against the wishes of the male administrators.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ibid., 27.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 27.

Although female librarians of the 1930s tried to put forth a young and modern image, the old stereotypes remained. Into the 1940s, female librarians complained that media representations of librarians lacked drama and excitement. Some librarians looked to models outside the library profession, including Hollywood, for hope and inspiration. A librarian in 1942, for instance, required colleagues to read two books: *How to Be Attractive* by Joan Bennett and *On Being a Real Person* by Harry Emerson Fosdick.⁴⁶ The September 1943 issue of *Mademoiselle* featured a young, attractive cover model, a “reader’s advisor,” expressing the fun of working in the modern library.⁴⁷ Library administrators followed their employees’ lead and began to focus on recruiting attractive young women into the profession. In fact young women flocked to army base libraries, where there was a possibility of meeting eligible bachelors.

The gendered idea of librarianship, at least for the non-managerial positions available within the library, and the influence of Melvil Dewey’s scientific management on personality testing in libraries and library schools came into play in the 1950s. The human relations school of management held that instead of changing the jobs they offered to suit employees’ interests and satisfaction, employers should seek employees who fit the jobs they had available. During the 1950s, personality tests were given not by library administrators, “but by other librarians undertaking library surveys or doctoral research. The personality of the rather old womanish librarian which emerged from these test results seemed for the first time to give the old stereo-typical image a scientific basis.”⁴⁸ These tests may have served as a springboard for the explosion of literature on the librarian image problem. In the 1960s and 1970s, personality tests became part of the

⁴⁶ Ibid., 29.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 29.

⁴⁸ Newmyer, 53.

admission criteria for library schools. Administrators simply believed that certain personality profiles make better librarians. At this time some eminent librarians argued that the library should indeed guard its feminine qualities, but some critics contended that libraries needed a more masculine personality.⁴⁹

The results of these personality tests implied that feminine types or personalities make better librarians, but the tests' arrangement allowed both men and women to score high in femininity.⁵⁰ The personality inventory can be seen as the "logical culmination of the social control aspects of the Progressive Era, its delight in the use of science to promote social order."⁵¹ This sort of testing and results may have encouraged library administrators to place employees in existing positions to work for existing goals, in a business-like framework. In addition, the tests may have led library administrators to hire female employees—in fact and in testable trait—whose "alleged personalities can give managers the comforting illusion that they secretly want to be dominated."⁵² Library administrators of the era seemed to overlook the fact that they too were included in that "feminine, manipulable category."⁵³ Sex discrimination may have been and remained "the major reason that women librarians still do not hold more administrative positions," but the center of the negative image problem may be society's underlying belief that "there was something distasteful about growing old, being plain, never marrying."⁵⁴ The stereotypes that society and some library administrators have constructed for women and women librarians over the decades have fed the othering and marginalizing, and even the

⁴⁹ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 56-57.

⁵¹ Ibid., 60.

⁵² Ibid., 62.

⁵³ Ibid., 62.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 30.

mistreatment, of women librarians. The stereotypes work to deny female librarians' agency as educated professionals.

Sex (or Lack Thereof) and the Single Librarian

Into the 1990s and beyond, scholars have explored the ways in which the stereotyping that began in the 19th century has continued and spread in new directions and in different forms of media. Librarian Antony Brewerton opened his 1993 article entitled "Sex, Lies, and Stereotypes" with a scenario from the Frank Capra film *It's A Wonderful Life* that harkens back to McReynolds' observation of society's problematic underlying belief about spinster librarians. It is also a scene that would be noted in the focus groups. This scene is an effective portrayal of librarianship as a socially marginalized profession, and as a result, of the social marginalization of women in the profession. In a fantasy sequence, George Bailey, played by Jimmy Stewart, discovers how things in his family and town would have been different had he never been born. He desperately wants to know what happened to his wife, Mary, played by Donna Reed. Bailey's guide through the world of what would have been, Clarence the angel, is at first reluctant to show George what became of Mary. After George pressures him, Clarence finally exclaims, "She's just locking up the library!" Not only is Mary a librarian, she is an old maid. She wears glasses and a bun, and she pulls her coat and purse close to her, frigid and frightened as George approaches. Hollywood here has linked "librarian" symbolically to spinsterhood, plainness, and solitude. Simply by making Mary into a librarian, Brewerton noted that Frank Capra made the audience understand the plight Mary would face without George. As Marie and Gary Radford have observed, it is only

when George sees what has happened, or what could happen, to Mary that he decides not to commit suicide.⁵⁵ All is well later, when George returns to his real life, with Mary beside him as his wife and the mother of his children, radiant in their home. The message is clear: as is Foucault's "delinquent," unless women marry, engage in child-rearing or express their identity in terms of sex, they are not understood by society. Marriage and family, not career, are still to some extent the norm for women. Women who pursue careers become the other; they are on the margin.

Brewerton moved on from *It's a Wonderful Life* to briefly describe other cinematic instances of negative librarian images. He noted that elements from orderliness to submissiveness to meticulousness have been enumerated as librarian stereotypes. But, Brewerton focused on sex, or lack of it. He lamented the dearth of sexy librarian images in popular culture. He cited a few -- for example Marilu Henner's character in *Hammitt* and Carole Lombard's character, specifically her legs, in *No Man of Her Own* -- but these images are few and far between. He also suggested one reason librarians are not portrayed as sexy is that librarians exist as role models. Here Brewerton acknowledged that old truths and myths have a firm hold on society, which suggests that he might have seen a grain of truth inherent in stereotypes. Brewerton saw male librarians generally described as being "short on sex appeal,"⁵⁶ and asserted that librarians have best been represented in gay media, including film and magazines such as *Gay Times*. He cited some examples of what he considers attractive, appealing gay and lesbian librarians, but he gave representations of these librarians little space in his piece

⁵⁵ Marie L. Radford and Gary P. Radford, "Power, Knowledge, and Fear: Feminism, Foucault, and the Stereotype of the Female Librarian," *Library Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (1997), 261.

⁵⁶ Brewerton, 25.

and does not attempt to figure out why, at least in his opinion, librarians have more positive representations in gay popular culture.

Brewerton may be commended for confronting librarian stereotypes, but do librarians need to be sexy, like, for example, the New Jersey Super Librarian? Brewerton apparently believed that unless or until librarians are portrayed by Tom Cruise and Michelle Pfeiffer, the dowdy image would stick. In some ways his thinking was like that of the 1940s librarians who decided they needed to “glam up” the profession in order to gain respect. But, attempts to glamorize the profession did not eradicate the stereotypes then and may have just reinforced a belief that there is certain essential femaleness that librarians “should” display.

Janine Liladhar and Evelyn Kerslake took a critical look at this sort of thinking in their examination of a heterosexually attractive librarian who is just waiting to be emancipated, usually by a male, from her fussy, nerdy image. Rosalee McReynolds cited the 1937 film *Navy Blues* as emblematic of this pervasive stereotype. The movie contains a scene in which “a sailor meets a drab librarian and charms her into taking off her glasses and letting down her hair, thus revealing the beauty that lies beneath.”⁵⁷

In their essay entitled “Jilly Cooper vs. the Government: Romantic Discourses of Femininity and Women’s Library Employment,” Liladhar and Kerslake discussed a more recent spin on this male fantasy. They analyze a 1972 Smirnoff Vodka advertisement that depicts a former female librarian in her new job as an actress on the set of a Western, portraying a “saloon gal.”⁵⁸ Her long hair is tousled, her dress is hiked up so high that

⁵⁷ McReynolds, 28.

⁵⁸ Janine Liladhar and Evelyn Kerslake, “Jilly Cooper vs. the Government: Romantic Discourses of Femininity and Women’s Library Employment,” in *Gendering Library History*, ed. Evelyn Kerslake and

much of her legs are exposed, and she wears lace-up boots. This former library employee has a look that is decidedly “heterosexy.” Indeed, the authors compared the advertisement to a pin-up. Liladhar and Kerslake asserted that the advertisement is about “reinforcing sexist discourses which limit women’s employment since they position the woman in the poster as a sexual object rather than a subject in the workforce.”⁵⁹ Interestingly, the authors noted that a (male) Smirnoff manager insisted that the ad was about emancipation, a woman breaking out of a tedious and boring job and finding freedom in film work. She had to be removed, “emancipated,” from the library before she could experience, even enjoy, her womanhood. The *Navy Blues* librarian and the Smirnoff saloon gal allow males to dominate them, and therefore can also be considered submissive librarians. When the librarian is removed from her “librarianness” she is normalized -- society and the media can understand a woman in sexualized terms better than they can as a mousy old maid.

The Old Maid Reconsidered

Katherine C. Adams argued for style and aesthetics as weapons in the fight against librarian stereotypes in her reconsideration of the old maid stereotype in an article entitled “Loveless Frump as Hip and Sexy Party Girl: A Reevaluation of the Old-Maid Stereotype.” In looking at the independent film *Party Girl*, Adams saw the party girl of the title, Mary, as undermining the librarian stereotype. Mary, a downtown New York party hostess and club-goer, aimless and irresponsible, turns to her aunt, a librarian, when she finds herself in need of employment. Her aunt provides her with a clerk position at a

Nickianne Moody (Liverpool John Moores University and the Association for Research in Popular Fictions, 2000): 160.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 18.

New York Public Library branch. Disappointed in Mary's failure to take her job seriously, her aunt criticizes her for her lack of maturity and for abusing her position. Mary spends a soul-searching night in the library and after smoking a joint, discovers her inner librarian and decides to get serious. Adams argued that by gradually adopting the look of the old-maid librarian, but adding her own touches, Mary plays with the stereotype to make her own meaning out of it. I argue, however, that Mary's transformation can also be read as caving to the expectations of what a librarian is supposed or expected to be. When Mary becomes a librarian, she also appears to drop her old habits (partying, pot smoking, heavy social drinking). The filmmakers, though farsighted enough to see that there is no reason a party girl cannot be a librarian, rely on the old stereotype to demonstrate that Mary has settled down, found new librarian friends more staid than her old ones, found a "nice" man, and pleased her efficient and dedicated librarian aunt. Adams was concerned with librarians retaining a distinct identity; however, assuming, or re-assuming, the distinct identity of the "shriveled-prune" representation may cause this marginalized group to only continue to essentialize themselves and reify their images in popular culture.

Adams failed to consider that librarians who embrace and combat the old-maid stereotype through mimicry and parody may have the same effect of only reinforcing the stereotype.⁶⁰ Adams stated that "instead of debating whether or not the stereotype is an accurate representation of librarians, we could work to uncover the mechanisms through which the stereotype creates meaning and, via ironic appropriation, thwart the semiotic

⁶⁰ Michael Taussig, in *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* states that "the wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power" (xiii).

systems that produced it in the first place.”⁶¹ Adams feared that not embracing some sort of recognizable librarian image at a time when librarians focus more on technology than books would cause librarians to be lumped in with other information professionals and knowledge workers, thereby losing any distinctiveness as librarians. Adams limited her discussion to “the shriveled old spinster” stereotype as a part of the history librarians might reclaim,⁶² and she looked to the online Lipstick Librarian (discussed later in this chapter) as an example of how to appropriate the old stereotype and use it in a positive way. In drawing on the work of Judith Butler, Adams observed that “one may question whether parodying a dominant norm is enough to displace it. There is no necessary link between parody and subversion.”⁶³ In summarizing her work, Adams acknowledged that “real-life librarians, of course, are complex, contradictory, multifaceted people who cannot be constrained by a stereotype,” and that “meaning does not reside in a representation alone but is actively created, in part, as viewers interact with (and even make fun of) a stereotypical image.”⁶⁴

Fear and Loathing in the Library

In their 2001 article “Libraries, Librarians, and the Discourse of Fear,” Gary and Marie Radford presented the library as a site of control and limits, in part because of its organizational procedures, and they situated the librarian in the Foucaultian discourse of fear. The Radfords used discourse to refer to the practices of speech, “what it does, what it enables, and what it excludes...content is only made possible in the practices that give

⁶¹ Katherine C. Adams, “Loveless Frump as Hip and Sexy Party Girl: A Reevaluation of the Old-Maid Stereotype,” *Library Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (July 2000): 294.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 288.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 297.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 298.

it shape, context, meaning, and truth value.”⁶⁵ They drew upon Foucault’s example of the examination in the context of a prison, and the practice of examining prisoners as part of the totality of the prison system. The Radfords analogized from there to the library, stating “it is not the contents of the library that inspire awe; it is the practices that occur within the institution.”⁶⁶ Interestingly, they conceived of the library structure itself, through both its architecture and furnishings, as a monument to order and control. Notably, the members of my focus groups spoke differently on this point. But, for the Radfords, the library is an embodiment of both sides of what Foucault calls a control-fear relationship. Libraries, with classified and cataloged items in designated spots on shelves, security devices to prevent theft, and rules and regulations, are secure. Librarians can decide who is allowed to access these items and to what extent (e.g., through closed or open stacks, borrowing privileges, etc). But, as the Radfords asserted, these “control mechanisms are contextualized and made possible by a discourse of fear.”⁶⁷ The librarian can dole out punishment, thereby inducing fear over unpaid fines or returning a book to the wrong place, for example, and public humiliation on the part of the user. A discourse of fear is invoked “within the fearful architecture of the library building, under the fearsome gaze and surveillance of the fearsome librarian.”⁶⁸

In the second half of their piece, the authors demonstrated their ideas by examining a number of representations of librarians and libraries as structured by the discourse of fear. Using an example from the novel *Sophie’s Choice* (also a film) by William Styron, the Radfords invoked a particularly powerful example of librarian fear

⁶⁵ Radford and Radford, “Libraries, Librarians, and the Discourse of Fear,” 302.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 303.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 313.

and surveillance. Sophie has just immigrated to the United States after spending time in a Nazi concentration camp. She comes to the library for a book of poetry, having just discovered Emily Dickinson in an English language class. In seeking assistance from the librarian, Sophie misstates Dickinson's name, and the unhelpful, imposing librarian reacts with condescension and hostility. Moreover, he raises his voice at her, breaking the silence of the library and humiliating Sophie in public, causing her to tremble and finally faint.

Beyond public humiliation, the Radfords contended that the "library police" are the "ultimate manifestation of the discourse of fear." The library police lurk in the imaginations of fearful library users and threaten punishment for failure to return overdue books or the invasion of chaos in the library's orderly space. The Radfords presented a humorous example from an episode of the television sitcom *Seinfeld* in which Bookman, a hard-boiled library investigator, comes to Jerry Seinfeld's apartment in search of a very overdue book. The Radfords observe important features of the discourse of fear in the Bookman character, namely his "brusque and lecturing tone" and his "condescending attitude toward Jerry."⁶⁹ Bookman brings an element of surveillance to Jerry's life (Jerry is on Bookman's "list") and makes clear the "importance of keeping the collection of the New York Public Library intact."⁷⁰ The real fear here lies in a secret belief that the library police not only have the ability to humiliate, but to inflict bodily harm.

Following Foucault, the Radfords asserted that "it does not matter if the librarian you know at your public library is friendly and comforting. It does not matter that you, personally, really enjoy working in the library. It does not matter if your students find the

⁶⁹ Ibid., 321.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 321.

library and its function a place of comfort. The discourse of fear is a cultural form, not a part of individual or social psychology.”⁷¹ Importantly, the Radfords considered how their viewpoint might actually benefit the library profession. They state that Foucault brings “the insight that discourse is constitutive; that who we are is determined, in large measure, by how we speak, and that how we speak stands in a reflexive relationship to how we act.”⁷² It is somewhat frustrating, however, that the authors apparently did not see the way out of this discourse of fear; consequently they denied librarians agency. The Radfords insisted that “in examining popular-culture treatments of the library, one does not see the library as a metaphor of light, happiness, comfort, or even joy. Even if one did, these metaphors would be set against the prevailing horizon of the discourse of fear.”⁷³

Stereotypes of Male Librarians

Comparatively little work had been done on male librarian stereotypes. The most recent work has revolved around surveys of male librarians. In 1992 James V. Carmichael conducted a study considered groundbreaking by some working in the area of gender, librarianship, and stereotypes. Carmichael gave male librarians voice on such subjects as assumptions about male and female librarians, women as administrators, discrimination, and sexual harassment. He found in his responses, taken from a random survey of 655 male librarians, with 482 useable responses, that “gender denial, gender backlash, and gender privilege still affect the library profession to a degree that might surprise those who think of the women’s movement as a historical fact rather than as a

⁷¹ Ibid., 323.

⁷² Ibid., 323-324.

⁷³ Radford and Radford, “Libraries, Librarians, and the Discourse of Fear,” 325.

living force for social change.”⁷⁴ Carmichael pays particular attention to the stereotype of male librarians as gay because the librarians he surveyed believed that librarianship has a greater proportion of gay men than in society at large; however, only 9% of his survey group reported that they are gay. Carmichael interprets these findings as “reason to doubt that there are any more gay men in the library profession than in the population at large. The fact that male librarians seem convinced otherwise may perhaps reflect their general feelings of insecurity about societal perceptions of librarians as ‘marginal.’”⁷⁵

In their 2001 article in *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, Paul Piper and Barbara Collamer built on Carmichael’s survey by conducting their own pilot survey of male librarians.⁷⁶ They worked from a perspective of concern over the lack of discourse on male librarianship and a feminist angle that argues for social equality for women and men. Piper and Collamer found that male librarians were actually quite content in their profession. The sample reported that despite there being more women in the profession, men “did not consider librarianship a women’s profession.”⁷⁷ Piper and Collamer, who questioned the men on issues of bias and stereotype, comfort, work community, and the glass escalator (forced advancement), explained the comfort level as possibly due to men still retaining some of the more powerful positions in library systems, or that men simply do not see the profession as being male or female.⁷⁸ Why is work on male stereotypes

⁷⁴ James V. Carmichael, “Gender Issues in the Workplace: Male Librarians Tell Their Side,” *American Libraries* 25, no. 3 (March 1994), 228.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁷⁶ Paul S. Piper and Barbara E. Collamer, “Male Librarians: Men in a Feminized Profession,” *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 27, no. 5 (September 2001), 406-411.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 411.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 411.

more technical/social science-based in nature? Are these surveys reliable—for example, were the men responding about their sexuality in Carmichael’s survey all being truthful?

Librarian Stereotypes in a Digital World

Contemporary websites that feature representations of “alternative” librarians, for example the Lipstick and Leather Librarians and Librarian Avengers, provide a forum for intersections of librarian stereotypes as observed in the previous examples I have laid out. The creators of these online librarians attempt to assign power to their alternative librarians by dressing them in the styles of other marginalized groups, thereby emphasizing their otherness. One might be inclined to immediately read these images as efforts to combat librarian stereotypes, in particular the meek, mousy attributes often assigned to the old-maid stereotype. Closer inspection might lead one to think these are simply manifestations of a tongue-in-cheek playfulness that poke fun at those who assign or believe in stereotypes. All of these alternative librarians, though, exercise agency and power to varying degrees.

These alternative librarian images, and their otherness, can function and be read in multiple ways. The attempts of the creators of the alternative librarians to combat, critique, or poke fun at librarian stereotypes may actually be more problematic than helpful, as I noted in my discussion of Katherine Adams’s article on the appropriation of the “loveless frump” by librarians. As Clinton R. Sanders states in *Marginal Conventions*, “for the deviant social group as well as the taste public, this process of

education, innovation and borrowing can have both positive and negative consequences.”⁷⁹

The Lipstick Librarian (<http://www.lipsticklibrarian.com>) plays to the more fashionably-minded information professional, but honors the work that all librarians do regardless of how they dress. The site announces, “She’s Bold! She’s Sassy! She’s Helpful!” A Lipstick Librarian can look sharp and stylish while hunting down answers to reference questions. She is full of useful tips, including ways to use what is at hand in the library to look fabulous. A visitor to the site can take a quiz to find out to what extent one is a Lipstick Librarian. The Lipstick Librarian even doles out advice to librarians in need of help on the job or in life. The website itself is pastel-hued and populated with images of women with a decidedly 1950s look. Some of these women do have the stereotypical librarian attributes (cat-eye glasses, neatly coiffed hair, conservative suits) while others are very glamorous and look ready for a day in the city or a night on the town.

For the most part, the website’s play on the lipstick lesbian is in the title alone, although the site femmes up a stereotypically bland professional look. The Lipstick Librarian is kin to the 1940s librarians who tried to combat their dowdy image by using style as a weapon. The sassy, stylish librarian is in turn related to the blonde, voluptuous librarian played by Virginia Mayo in the film *Wonder Man* and the young, stylish, attractive library cover girl from the 1943 issue of *Mademoiselle* who stated how much she enjoyed working in the modern library.

⁷⁹ Clinton R. Sanders, “Introduction,” in *Marginal Conventions: Popular Culture, Mass Media and Social Deviance*, ed. Clinton R. Sanders (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1990), 9.

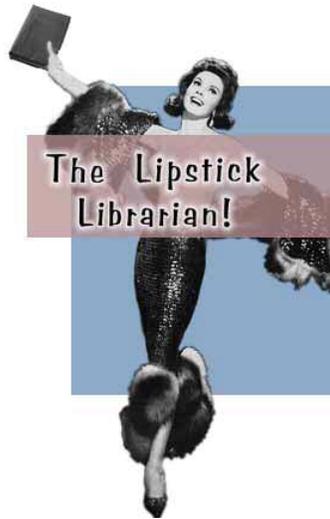


Figure 3. ©2002-2004 Linda Absher. Used by permission.

Against a backdrop of crushed red velvet, the Leather Librarian (<http://www.leatherlibrarian.com>)⁸⁰ takes a decidedly different stance against the meek, mousy librarian stereotype. The Leather Librarian is a voluptuous, leather-clad woman with long black hair and heavy make-up. Her entire outfit--revealing bustier, skintight pants, stiletto-heeled boots, and gloves that reach beyond her elbows--is black. She holds what appears to be a whip, and stands astride an open book, flames shooting from its pages. Her website's URL even flames across the top of the web page. The Leather Librarian is "dedicated to librarian assertiveness training." She tells the librarian viewer to "Stop dreaming and become the librarian you've always wanted to be! Ditch those cat glasses, take down that bun and release the surly vixen inside." Here again is the heterosexy woman ready to be unleashed from her librarian exterior. The difference is that she is doing the unleashing herself through self-improvement. Unlike the Smirnoff saloon gal, the Leather Librarian encourages women to go ahead and be that suppressed

⁸⁰ As of this writing, the Leather Librarian website is not available.

woman all the time, even at work in the library. But, the Leather Librarian knows that she is up against a tough stereotype. At the bottom of the page is a button labeled “Attitude” that links to books and websites on assertiveness, public speaking, relationships, and ending the habit of people-pleasing. An “Image” button links to an array of sites on the librarian stereotype, as well as websites of other alternative librarians, including the Lipstick Librarian, the Modified Librarian (tattooed and pierced), Biblia the Warrior Librarian, and the Belly Dancing Librarian. Finally, her “Compensation” button sends one to a list of career sites that include salary and raise information. The Leather Librarian combats the stereotype of the submissive librarian through style as well as substance. She encourages librarians to work not only on their assertiveness but on their pay scale as well. The Leather Librarian, like the Lipstick Librarian, is concerned with librarian style (even if the styles are very different). No sensible shoes or cardigan sweaters for either of these women.

In the case of Librarian Avengers (<http://www.librarianavengers.org/worship.html>) only one section of the larger site focuses on the librarian image, but it sets the tone for the entire website. Librarian Avengers confronts librarian stereotypes by informing the viewer that librarians have advanced degrees and immeasurable amounts of knowledge, and are arbiters of wisdom and culture. They can also look, and be, very punk and tough. People also had better not mess with a librarian, but rather “fall to their knees and worship” her. The image of the Librarian Avenger on this page has a comic book or graphic novel look.⁸¹ The downright surly-looking, pouty-mouthed young woman glares

⁸¹ In fact the Librarian Avenger image is the character “Katchoo,” from Terry Moore’s comic *Strangers in Paradise*.



Figure 4. The Librarian Avengers avatar.
©TM 1999-2004 Terry Moore. Used by permission.

out at the viewer from behind strands of her unruly blonde hair. The Librarian Avenger tells the viewer to “Look it up.” Not only does she come across as a strong woman, she puts a positive spin on the image of the efficient librarian—as a previous incarnation of the Librarian Avengers website asserted, librarians are great exactly because they know what they are doing, and do it well.

What does appropriating the style of a subculture, or a marginalized group, mean for the creators of the alternative librarians?⁸² The Lipstick Librarian, Leather Librarian, and Library Avenger each appropriate the style of another marginalized group. Stuart Hall and Paul Willis have asked what style signifies to the members of the subcultures themselves.⁸³ The Lipstick Librarian has borrowed to some extent from femme glamour of “lipstick lesbians.” Also, her stylish hair, clothing and accessories announce that this is no dowdy, stay-at-home, shrinking violet librarian. The more roughly hewn Librarian Avenger has the look of a “tough chick” out of a comic book or graphic novel. She is visibly angry, and she is out to seek vengeance on behalf of librarians everywhere who are thought of as meek and mild. And, the Leather Librarian is a dominatrix.

⁸² Claude Levi-Strauss originated the idea of homology as a correspondence or similarity in position, between a concept and an action.

⁸³ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. (London: Methuen, 1982), 114

In their attempts to combat, satirize, or otherwise comment on librarian stereotypes the Librarian Avenger and to some extent the Leather Librarian, for example, reinforce the fearsome librarian stereotype. Despite her positive take on efficiency and knowledge, the Librarian Avenger can come off as the unhelpful, impatient librarian who would prefer the patron “look it up” than ask her for assistance. Librarian Avengers will “kick the crap out of anyone” who says that librarians do not “bring order to chaos,” “bring wisdom and culture to the masses,” or “preserve every aspect of human knowledge.” Both the Librarian Avenger and the dominatrix Leather Librarian play to the image of the librarian “capable of handing out punishment in the form of public humiliation.”

To see how one stereotype might replace or even perpetuate another, we can use the example of a caricature assigned to black men to read the multiple meanings of the Leather Librarian and the Librarian Avenger similar to the way that Liladhar and Kerslake read the Smirnoff advertisement. In his examination of the relationship between power and fantasy, Stuart Hall sees a double-sided nature of power and stereotyping. Hall uses the example of black men who have responded to infantilization (being called “boy” or “son”) by taking on a different caricature, a “hyper-masculinity and super-sexuality with which they had been stereotyped.”⁸⁴ Instead of helping, though, the assumption of this characterization only confirmed a white fantasy, trapping these men in another stereotype even while they tried to oppose and resist the stereotype. As Hall notes:

Stereotypes refer as much to what is imagined in fantasy as to what is perceived as ‘real.’ And, what is visually produced, by the practices of representation, is only half the story. The other half—the deeper meaning—lies in what is not being said, but is being

⁸⁴ Hall, 263.

fantasized, what is implied but cannot be shown.⁸⁵

The online image of the alternative librarian that speaks most powerfully to this stereotype is, I think, the Leather Librarian. Her sexy, dominatrix image may perpetuate a fetishization or fantasy of the female librarian, further marginalizing the professional female librarian. The Leather Librarian plays strongly into the male fantasy explicit in the film *Navy Blues* and in the Smirnoff Vodka advertisement. The hyper-sexualized, leather clad librarian takes an assertive, combative stance. The Leather Librarian herself is, like the Librarian Avenger, strong, assertive, and in-your-face. Because she is a dominatrix, even more so than the Librarian Avenger, she plays into a heterosexual male fantasy. And, she more than the Librarian Avenger beckons for someone to fall at her knees and worship her. The Leather Librarian is a heteronormative representation of a sexy, aggressive woman. Even though she calls for librarians to liberate themselves, she can also be read as the sexually aggressive woman lurking under the buttoned up mousy librarian exterior in the male's stereotypical librarian fantasy.

These images also play to the idea that sexiness equals power, or the power of the styles of the marginalized groups they appropriate, but Marie and Gary Radford demonstrated that that adage can be undone. The Radfords stated that “the female librarian is presented as fearsome, but, beneath the stern exterior, there is nothing to fear: this is only a woman.”⁸⁶ Furthermore, “the power of the librarian is the power of the woman: it is recognized as present, but is afforded little respect.”⁸⁷ These fearsome online librarians play right to this image, and like the librarian (and library) in *Sophie's*

⁸⁵ Ibid., 263.

⁸⁶ Radford and Radford, “Power, Knowledge, and Fear, 261.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 361.

Choice, do not help or improve the public's or the media's image of the librarian in any way. The Librarian Avenger and the Leather Librarian can serve as the intimidating gatekeepers of the knowledge institution.

This cyber community of alternative librarians appears to be attempting to enact, in the words of Paul Willis, the “critical and creative transformation of these representations,” by which I mean the standard librarian representations and stereotypes.⁸⁸ A number of these online personas appropriate from other marginalized groups and manipulate the marginalized personas in an attempt to give themselves, as librarians, power through the styles and attitudes of other marginalized groups. Clinton Sanders may help explain how and why these images can work:

Popular cultural taste groups and deviant subcultures revolve around the shared interests and knowledge of their members. Cultural publics and subcultures provide access to valued activities and objects, contact with like-minded others, protective insulation from negative judgments and actions of ‘outsiders,’ and an evaluative typology members can use to maintain positive understandings of themselves and the social objects to which they and their fellows are committed.⁸⁹

Dick Hebdige noted the relationship between the means of representation and the object represented.⁹⁰ The use of technology to maintain a discourse on librarian stereotypes raises numerous questions about the relationship between the object represented and the means of representation here. Is the Web an effective arena for

⁸⁸ Paul Willis, *Common Culture: Symbolic Work at Play in Everyday Cultures of the Young* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 3.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 118.

combating or commenting on librarian stereotypes in the 21st century? Online librarians still seem primarily focused on the old maid stereotype. Is that where the focus ought to be? Are these online images really assigning power to female librarians? Are there really any differences between earlier stereotypes and online librarian images?

Outside of questions related to technology, the work of the creators of the online alternative librarians raises other questions. Are the creators simply replacing one stereotype with another? Why do they focus so strongly on female librarians? The alternative librarian creators, at least the online alternative librarians that I came across, are not challenging gendered, raced, or classed identities of stereotypes. How do white, black, Hispanic, male and female, etc. relate to these stereotypes and perceptions of librarianship from without and within? Why, with so much technological (and other) change in the library field, are the stereotypes still misrepresenting librarians? What are the forces keeping these stereotypes in place?

In the following chapters, I present public librarians' thoughts and feelings about librarian stereotypes, including the multiple and contradictory ways that representations and stereotypes can be read. I consider the librarians' reactions to early librarian stereotypes as well as images on the Internet today and images that librarians themselves are producing. I think it is most important to consider how these images might play out in real life library work. If, in the Foucaultian sense, the library is an institution of power, and if the librarian stereotypes or creators and perpetrators of the stereotypes wield power, have the librarians behind these images found the best method of resistance, the best forum for discourse? I also draw on Dick Hebdige's argument that "different

youths bring different degrees of commitment to a subculture.”⁹¹ The Lipstick Librarian, the Leather Librarian, and Librarian Avengers each convey their commitment to combating librarian stereotypes. It would be worth exploring to what extent the creative minds behind these images, as well as other librarians who try to bust the librarian stereotypes, work to combat stereotypes in their everyday professional lives. Are librarians indeed dissatisfied and unhappy about their popular image and stereotyping, and if so, is their subversive activity confined to the text?⁹²

⁹¹ Hebdige, 122.

⁹² Paul Oldfield, “After Subversion: Pop Culture and Power,” in *Zoot Suits and Second-Hand Dresses*, ed. Angela McRobbie (Austin, TX: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 258.

Chapter Three Librarians and What the Stereotypes Get Wrong

The librarians I worked with in this study questioned and analyzed librarian stereotypes, and in doing so considered points and intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, class, age, and issues of power. While there were many similarities in how the librarians feel generally about librarian stereotypes, their discussions also revealed some differences in how the male and female librarians reacted to stereotypes. Also, their conversations illuminated individual differences in precisely what the librarians see as problems with stereotypes and images of librarians. All participants asserted that there is not one typical librarian, as stereotypes and representations of librarians, with their tendencies to essentialize and fix, might lead one to believe. The focus group librarians emphasized that their daily duties range from developing collections, answering reference questions, and teaching classes, especially library technology classes, to maintaining websites, creating and overseeing programs, and solving an array of problems. At the beginning of our sessions, I asked the focus group participants to name their current positions, and the Library A participants took the opportunity to list all of the things they do as part of their jobs. Not one of them did only what their job title implies.⁹³ For example, one librarian described her job as follows:

Carol⁹⁴: “I’m in charge of outreach and bookmobile, I’m a reference librarian, I’m in charge of, I guess, although nobody knows it including my staff, the interlibrary loan program, since (name of former assistant director) is gone I’m supposed to be supervising all the programming, but that doesn’t work very well, and I guess for the bookmobile I do everything there from hiring the people, and ordering the books. For outreach we’re starting a new books to homebound people so that’s a new program we’re doing, I’m editor of *Check it Out* (library newsletter), jack of all trades, master of none, I’m helping with the library expansion program, I do everything that (the

⁹³ For a complete list of focus group participants and their jobs, see Appendix C.

⁹⁴ All names used in this study are pseudonyms.

library director) asks and everything that everybody else asks, including this weekend putting up signs about vandalism and calling the police about vandalism...well, it's a little of everything."

Librarian Heroines?

The focus group participants were very interested in analyzing and discussing two representations that I first described in Chapter One, namely the New Jersey Super Librarian and the shushing Librarian Action Figure based on real-life librarian Nancy Pearl. The Library A librarians used these two models as a jumping-off place for their discussion of the realities of librarianship and the stereotyping they encounter in their daily lives. The Library B librarians turned to these representations toward the end of their discussion in part to summarize their feelings about where and how librarians can work to change their own images in positive ways. I present the librarians' comments on the Super Librarian and action figure here, and lay out their ideas for change related to these two representations in Chapter Four.

The Library A group saw the New Jersey Super Librarian as symptomatic of a larger problem with misrepresentations and misunderstandings of what a librarian is and does. Their feelings reflected Richard Dyer's assertion that representations do not present the layers and complexities of reality. They expressed disappointment that the Super Librarian was created by librarians themselves, and thereby implicated some in their own field in the misrepresentation of librarians. In their discussion of the Super Librarian, some Library A librarians took issue with some of her characteristics and what they saw as some of the thought or intention behind her creation.

Carol "We all felt that it was very sexist. That they chose it to be a woman in a cat suit. I mean nobody looks like that. Maybe that's their point. It doesn't look like any librarian. First of all, couldn't they come up with a duo that was one man and one

woman or something. I mean, *why* is this super librarian a woman?”

Melissa: “But, I think all of the women, most women anyway, resented the fact that she was Barbie doll-sized with Spandex.”

Tom: “But, you know, if they put a skirt or dress on her then everyone would say, ‘oh, it’s just softening the frumpy look.’”

Melissa: “Pat?” (A reference to the androgynous *Saturday Night Live* character.)

Tom: “That would have been good!”

Both the males and females in the group agreed that the sexiness of the Super Librarian was ridiculous and unhelpful. In fact in part because of the femininity of the Super Librarian, one male librarian said that he felt alienated from her and the advertising campaign. As he stated, “I thought it would be nice to appreciate the men who work in the profession.”

The librarians in both groups sincerely want their users, and the greater public, to understand that librarians are so much more than stereotypes would have people believe. Despite their concern that the public generally misunderstands their field, both groups of librarians did not address the state of their field without a sense of humor. Although they expressed some concern over whether the Super Librarian and similar images help or hurt when it comes to the public’s perceptions of librarians, they did not take the character too seriously. The librarians’ recommendations for dealing with their image and their profession will be noted in Chapter Four.

Issues of sex and sexuality in their everyday work, however, are quite serious, in particular for the female focus group participants. Some from Library B raised the problem of male patrons who perceive women librarians who are nice or friendly or helpful as flirtatious.

Linda: “I’ve been given to understand that in pornography, the librarian is really a favorite treat, you know (laughter), takes off her glasses and you ravish her...of course as a woman, you’re nice to men and they think you’re immediately flirting with them has been my experience. Even now that I’m middle-aged, and all that stuff, so I don’t know whether it’s just being nice means to a lot of men you’re flirting, because I like being nice. “Why did you become a librarian?” Because I like to be nice to people. But, I think then when you fold in, “Oooh, what a challenge, it’s like a virgin or something, ravish her.” It’s pretty weird. So that bothers me a little bit. Not that I’m necessarily against pornography, although I’m not keen on it in the library, it bothers me when somebody is a little too friendly to me.”

Henry: “Yeah, I’ve noticed that, and I think that’s a very interesting point, whether especially male patrons perceive friendly, caring female librarians as flirtatious or something. Of course one part of it is that so many public servants are so *rude* these days...Some of our librarians are so nice and caring and careful with the patrons, but I worry, I think gee, what is the guy thinking? But, I guess it’s not like they’re going to jump over the desk and attack the librarian, so...”

Linda: “I beg your pardon! (Name of librarian) rescued me once. Yeah, and it’s not just once, but things have happened to me.”

Jenny: “Yeah, sometimes I find that myself. You want to be friendly and you want to be helpful but then sometimes you just get a bad feeling and you need to back off. There was a patron who asked me out a few weeks ago who was back again yesterday. I wasn’t particularly friendly at all. And, then I was like well, am I changing my whole personality because of this? But also you don’t want to encourage him. Sometimes I feel a little intimidated.”

These librarians express a real-world wariness and carefulness that one does not find in the fantasy world of the Super Librarian or for that matter the worlds of the “liberated” Smirnoff saloon gal or the online Leather Librarian. In their discussion they implied their underlying awareness that images of “heterosexy” librarians can be misinterpreted, and that can spill over into real life.

Librarians poked some fun at the Librarian Action Figure, but accorded her more respect than they did the New Jersey Super Librarian. They found the action figure to be more tongue-in-cheek, and did not feel they were expected to take her as seriously.

CL: “What about Nancy Pearl?”

Julie: “Well, she does look just like that. But, she really is a super librarian.”

John: “I think it’s a humorous attempt at self-mockery, which I like.”

Melissa: “I liked it for that reason too.”

Librarians at both libraries brought up the issue of sexuality in relation, in particular, to the stereotype of male librarians being gay. Participants from Library A expressed concern that male librarians are disproportionately portrayed as gay. One Library B librarian relayed a couple of experiences related to that, one personal:

Henry: “I wish I could remember, it was someplace that really surprised me, like a very recent *Library Journal*, and they were talking about a young female librarian who was getting married to a male librarian she met in library school, and she says, ‘I’m so happy I met’ whatever his name is, ‘because he was the only straight male in library school.’ (Laughter). And once somebody called me up with a sports question, and I didn’t know it off the top of my head, and he said something like, ‘faggot’ and hung up the phone.”

In a specific example of how the stereotype differs from reality in the case of sexuality, the same librarian also pointed out that one of the first librarians he worked with was “a big, bulking ex-Marine...who had a family and children.” Some of the librarians saw their profession’s lingering association with women’s work as one basis of the stereotype of the gay male librarian.

Stereotypes and the Self

Several of the librarians found it humorous also that they have been told that they do not look like a librarian. One Library A librarian mentioned the surprise her husband’s friends expressed when she decided to become a librarian.

Melissa: “Most of them were just astonished A. that you had to go to school to be a librarian and then B, they were like well, you don’t *look* like a librarian. I have a very attractive friend who is, she’s gorgeous, and she’s a children’s librarian and every day it’s like, ‘You’re a children’s librarian? Wow, I should have gone to the library more

often.’ And my husband makes jokes-I would have gone to the library if I knew there were people like you there.”

Other librarians concurred and shared their experiences.

John: “People say that to me too, you know, you don’t look like a librarian.”

Tom: “Whenever I meet anyone and it gets to that whole thing, like what do you do, I’m like you’ll never guess. You’ll never guess! Because I don’t look like a librarian at all, I hope!”

John: “And, also we’re very self-deprecating as a profession. And, Julie and I will sometimes talk about (Julie’s son) was going to be a...(Julie’s other son) wanted to be a roofer and you said something like well, better than a librarian! And I laughed and I was thinking this is really sad, you know, because I like what I do, I really do. But, the image is embarrassing sometimes.”

Julie: “But, (son) still wants to be a librarian. And he doesn’t know anything about the bad image of being a librarian.”

John: “Well good.”

I was interested in the self-deprecation, even guilt, issue conveyed by some of the librarians, especially because Dee Garrison, in *Apostles of Culture*, placed much of the blame for librarianship’s “bad image” and librarians’ low self-esteem on women in the field and what she called their “feminine” traits, including self-sacrifice and timidity. The focus group librarians, both men and women, are clearly aware of such issues. But it seems that they are implying something of a trickle-down effect from the public in addition to image problems among librarians. In light of the focus group librarians’ comments, I would posit that it might be difficult for many librarians to accept Katherine Adams’ recommendation, for example, that librarians embrace with irony the old maid or frumpy librarian stereotype. As another Library A participant stated, “It’s almost like you feel you can’t put your hair in a bun, because (laughter) it’s like ‘Oh God!’ I can’t look like a librarian.” Despite any guilty or sheepish feelings, as well as their

disappointment that a bad or negative image of librarians lingers in popular culture, these librarians are generally pleased to hear “outsiders” tell them that they do not look like librarians. But, when one Library B librarian explicitly acknowledged that she thought “we have a lot to do with” the image of librarians, she started to delve into an area that Library A librarians would also: how to make themselves more attractive and appealing to the public in a way that is not so focused on appearances. Their ideas and suggestions will be presented in Chapter Four.

Stereotypes and Professionalism

Many of the issues surrounding self-esteem and self-regard also tie into issues of professionalism. Library B librarians talked a good deal about society and the profession both constantly changing what librarians and libraries do, and that the stereotypes do not acknowledge that fact. One Library B librarian called librarianship a “strange profession” because she felt that on the one hand people are (still) surprised that one needs a master’s degree to become a librarian, or think people can do so much better than go into librarianship. Alternately, they feel the people assume that librarians know everything, and that they are disappointed when librarians cannot answer questions off the top of their heads. Library B librarians discussed this matter with great concern.

Jenny: “I sometimes do think that people look down on us, but then sometimes I think people think of us as being smart...Some people think you don’t even need a degree, but some people think you’re smart and you know everything. You kind of get both.”

The Library A participants also alluded to a certain type of librarian they recognize in their field, the opposite of the overly efficient librarian—the unhelpful,

unhappy librarian, who detracts from a professionalism they would like to see in their ranks. They noted low salaries as a major contributing factor in this problem.

Carol: “I noticed at this library, everybody here is talented. Everybody here is intelligent and that makes so much of a difference to me, to be able to work with people that I respect and people that I learn from. Whereas you know, the people in (another county) are not well-paid, so they don’t get qualified people. As a patron at (another county) I can’t stand the people I have to use as a librarian. And so they tend to not be, because they’re not well-paid, they’re not well qualified. They tend to hide at their desk.”

Tom: “And you don’t get satisfaction from them.”

Carol: “No, I get lousy responses, as a patron I can’t stand to use that library.”

Julie: “And we’re more demanding too, because we know what quality service is here.”

Carol: “And we’re well enough paid, I mean we’re still librarians, but I think that maybe that even ought to be told to the board, we do have quality here because we make the NJLA minimum and raises are good. I think that maybe just breeds getting, having good staff here perpetuates that because it’s much more enjoyable to work with people who are intelligent and have a good sense of humor and deal with the stuff better.”

Library B participants noted that stereotypes completely ignore the fact that librarians have to perform non-professional tasks. The librarians felt that as a result, the public considers them to be in a lower echelon of professionals, certainly not in the same sphere as doctors and lawyers, if the public even realizes that librarians are indeed professionals. The librarians’ awareness of that public perception feeds some of their own low self-esteem.

Henry: “Another consideration that occurs to me, and this has always been said of librarians, that they do spend a lot of time, many of them, doing non-professional things. That can be boring, I don’t know to what extent the public’s aware of it, but I think we are aware-sorting mail or something. The reference desk I think is always interesting, but frankly some of the off-desk stuff is kind of depressing.

Mike: There’s something about our career that we go to library school and we learn the basics of reference and all of that, but there’s always something in librarianship/service provider there that carries more than that. We feel it sometimes when we work in the library and we’re here, actually sometimes as you mention we do things that are not even librarian stuff, we carry over that extra service kind of a thing. That may have

that connotation.”

Library Hierarchies and Power

I have noted in the previous chapters that stereotypes of librarians come from both outside and inside the profession. What does this say about power issues in libraries? It may be, as Richard Dyer states, stereotypes tend to occur where inequalities of power are great. Administrators tend to be male. Working librarians tend to be female. Yet, librarians wondered why there are not more representations of male librarians. And specifically, when male librarians are portrayed, they would like to see them as other than administrators. A librarian at Library B suggested that the society’s lingering stereotypes of men and women in general might feed the public’s perceptions of men and women librarians.

Linda: “Not just our library, many libraries, the community might feel more comfortable with men. You know, they know how to do business and running a library is kind of a business. ‘Well, you know, it’s nice to give the ladies a chance, but let’s get some experience because we want it done right, ‘ whatever it happens to be. I hear that even now.”

Library A librarians mentioned a contest where people voted for a new Barbie, and one option was a librarian Barbie. One librarian in particular was disappointed that librarianship was named as a career option for Barbie.

Carol: “Now frankly, on that one I didn’t vote for the librarian because Barbie should be breaking into a male profession, an all-male profession. Women are already librarians. It’s not a role model for girls. Barbie should be an architect, which is a hugely male profession. So you know, I kept thinking don’t make her a librarian, that’s already a women’s role. It’s like make her something that’s an aspiration for kids, for girls, make her something where there aren’t enough women. You know (name of librarian) just kept voting for librarian like thousands of times over and I said don’t do that, that’s not right for...society—here corporations, namely Mattel—are maintaining the status quo, not opening new roles for women.”

In discussing class and gender and librarianship, the librarians brought up another way that librarianship's association with women's work has operated. They noted the lingering perception that women librarians have husbands who work, and therefore do not need great pay—an extension of the home and housework issue that still clings to the profession. And it is interesting that librarians felt this problem exists in light of all the stereotypes of old maid librarians. As Dee Garrison noted in *Apostles of Culture*, the late 1800s “library hostess” image has persisted.

The focus group librarians had a good deal to say about perceptions of librarians and librarianship within their own ranks, including inequalities in pay between administrative librarians and reference and other librarians. Library B participants see negative perceptions and stereotyping being connected to class issues within and among libraries. They feel they are looked down upon by some other librarians in the state, something they are particularly cognizant of when they are at meetings with other librarians. Library B is a statewide resource, a “go-to” library when other libraries do not have particular resources to answer questions. Yet, some Library B librarians sense that their reputation for “helping people live their lives” actually puts them in a negative rather than positive light. Stereotypes, or representations, they agreed, do not even go near this issue.

Linda: “There’s a contrast in purpose with the recreational aims of other libraries but I do think some of our colleagues across the nation say “oh, you work in (name of city), I guess you help people with—it’s not really professional work—help people find places to learn to read.”

Henry: “It’s more like social work, they get that connotation, we’re helping.”

Linda: “Or, you know, you help people with the *World Book Encyclopedia*, which, you know, sometimes actually could be a little challenging now and then, but it’s not oh, well, we happen to be the statewide resource for blah, blah, blah, and we’re

answering *your* tough questions.”

Library B librarians have experienced negative stereotyping in association with the population they serve, which is primarily inner city. Library B librarians sense that some other libraries and librarians in the state, and even across the nation, perceive them in a negative way by associating them with the demographic they serve.

Linda: “...something that I’ve heard that may contribute to the stereotype also. The public sector in this Republican era takes care of the have-nots. Those people, oh, compassion fatigue, we have a computer at home, only *those* people need the library for computers. And so we by association with this welfare institution, we also are in the Republican mindset...we are guilty by association, we too are like oh, not so smart, clean, you know whatever people think about poor people, that’s what we are now. The way people who work in prisons, and so forth also, you know, ‘well you couldn’t get a real job in a real hospital, so you’re working as the prison doctor.’ It’s funny.”

Jenny: “People in (library where she previously worked, in an upper middle class community) use the library for pleasure reading. We had a very good following for programs, programming on Sunday afternoons, which we got a good crowd for, and then the children’s, the story time coming in. It’s hard, something like this, the situation (here) is so different, it’s like apples and oranges. Here, I feel like we’re helping people live their lives, helping them complete...you know finding jobs. I was helping a guy yesterday doing an online application at (large corporation). You help people with FAFSA forms and that sort of thing, whereas in...”

Mike: “That doesn’t even appear.”

Jenny: “Occasionally, but it was not at all like here. So it’s kind of hard to make a general statement about libraries. It’s just so different.”

Linda: “But, you know, I think the majority of non-urban libraries, the library is this nice thing, like sort of a socialite, having nice little parties, programs, and the leisure reading. So that’s another kind of guilt by association. It’s a frill. Nobody wants to get rid of libraries because we do kind of associate them with Plato and Shakespeare. At the same time how many smaller libraries are used is the relaxation, pleasure, recreation stuff with an afterthought to oh yeah, Johnny you need to get your homework done, go to the library. So for kids, it’s serious but for adults...and then so we’re “juvenilized,” that’s another stereotype. We are sort of you know, yeah, housewives kind of. Just, you know, I’m just a housewife, I’m just a librarian. It’s very old-fashioned. That seems to operate, don’t you think?”

Henry: “It’s interesting. I guess some people may perceive us inner city librarians as pitiable, you know, what are they doing in there with all those minorities. And then

more liberal elements of the society may say these are very useful people in our society. So regarding the perception of librarians, there may be a big split. I never really thought about it.”

When it came to questions about the predominance of white librarians, the focus group librarians ruminated over a number of possible causes for the overwhelming whiteness of the profession, and their discussion illustrated how race, class and ethnicity intersect in the challenge of attracting minorities and the problem of whiteness in representations of librarians. They discussed the fact that much of the population served by libraries today is multiracial and multiethnic, and struggled with questions about why American society’s changing demographics are not more fully reflected in their profession.

Melissa: “I’m always going to the schools and I see a huge assortment of kids that I never see that are never here in the library, so maybe it’s just a matter of not enough of those kids are in the libraries so they don’t get to think of a library as a possibility for a profession.”

Carol: “The pay is so poor.”

Melissa: “That’s a big thing.”

Carol: “Why would they, if they have opportunities to get an education...”

Tom: “Why would they go all the way through graduate school for a career that doesn’t pay much.” (All voice agreement.)

One of Library B’s librarians, who is from South America, stated that he never experienced stereotypes, was not really aware of them, until he came to library school in the United States.

Mike: “I wasn’t born here, I wasn’t born in New Jersey, I guess that’s another part of the stereotype. I don’t carry it with me. I was born in Peru, I lived in New York for six-seven years, I went to university there. So if you factor that in, I don’t know, I’ve never given it that much thought, because I felt like when I came here, I just wanted to immerse myself into the culture.”

Concluding Points

I have noted that gender tends to be over-privileged in discussions of librarian stereotypes, but that it is still of the utmost importance in examining and understanding how stereotypes operate. Gender informs all of the problem areas that the librarians identified. In parts of their discussions, the librarians commented directly on gender issues in stereotyping. For example:

Linda: “I just always thought that we held onto that thing from way back when. It may no longer be true, but it’s I think really mean to middle-aged women who are more about what we do than what we look like.”

In all, the librarians noted that despite stereotyping and judgments, much of what they encounter on a daily basis in their work can be attributed to individual beliefs, attitudes, preferences, prejudices, and habits. For example, one Library B librarian talked at length about being discriminated against because she looks so young, a facet of librarianship that stereotypes also seem entirely to overlook. This librarian talked about her experiences of library users choosing an older librarian when she works with another at the reference desk. Library users sometimes doubt that she is a “real” librarian. It is interesting to note that Lisa Pillow, who I noted in Chapter One, found negotiating the terrain of academic libraries as a younger librarian in a graying profession to be difficult because many patrons almost expected to see the stereotypical old maid librarian behind the desk.

Other librarians observed similar library user choices when it came to choosing between a male and female reference librarian, or a Caucasian librarian and a librarian of a particular race or ethnicity. The focus group librarians are able to handle those

encounters, for the most part, with a grain of salt, and, perhaps more importantly, discuss them openly with one another, looking to each other for advice, ideas, and support. Some of their shared suggestions for change in their profession, and how they present themselves as librarians to the public and encourage others to present librarians, come to light in the next chapter.

Chapter Four Improving the Image and Eliminating Stereotypes: Librarians' Suggestions

When the focus group librarians identified what they believe stereotypes misrepresent and misunderstand about librarians and librarianship, they presented suggestions for positive change. I was interested in particular in how the focus group librarians thought they could convey a major aim in fighting and maybe eventually doing away with stereotypes, namely, who librarians are and what librarians really do. How can librarians demonstrate that they are much more than stereotypes? Improving librarians' salaries was a common theme that ran through the librarians discussions of gender, race, ethnicity and class. As one Library B librarian stated, "I've always thought stereotype isn't just these interactions, but also about money. Salaries and so forth." The librarians saw the salary issue as an important starting point for improving both librarians' self and public images.

Despite their many ideas and their conviction that librarians have to decide what they want to be in the 21st century, how they are going to demonstrate what 21st century librarians are and do, and their occasional assertion that librarians should not worry so much about the stereotypes, in our discussions the focus group librarians did truly struggle with their image and how to improve it. As one librarian stated:

Margaret: "I think we need to work on our own image, because if people have that image that you're the first to dismiss, they'll keep it if you don't do something to show that you are valuable. If you dismiss me, like the teachers do, you'll have 2,000 kids running through the city (laughter) so give them whatever they want, whenever they want. And I think that we have to work on our image, I really do. Sometimes we just become comfortable with it, 'oh that's just what they say.' But, I don't think we can ever become comfortable with it, especially if the image is a negative one, it's not producing good things for you. And once people have a good image of you..."

Rescuing Super Librarian

Several of the focus group librarians had considered entering the New Jersey State Library's contest to design the New Jersey Super Librarian. When asked to tell about how they would have designed a more accurate representation of librarians, they took a tongue in cheek attitude, but did think seriously about what it would take to be a accurately representative super librarian.

Carol: "Oh, we had all kinds of things, it was like wearing armor, and having all kinds...like twenty hands to do everything, a big giant smile that always said (sarcasm in voice) 'Yes! Of course you're right!' What else did we have...I was really all set to do it, there was just no time to do it."

CL: "Would it be a woman?"

Carol: "That's interesting. No, I think it was going to be generic."

John: "Octopus."

Linda: "I've always felt like this in a library, of course maybe other people do too, maybe especially women. I forget which goddess it is in India, with many, many arms, and she's doing it all."

Mike: "Sheba, I think it is."

Most of the librarians agreed that depicting a team of librarians that included librarians of mixed sex and race, was desirable but unrealistic. After all, they felt that the creators of Super Librarian were indeed just following along with the stereotype that librarians are women. Library A librarians discussed this problem.

Tom: "I think she would have to be a woman just because most of the profession is women. And if you made it a team..."

John: "I like the team idea."

Tom: "But, we're not always thought of as working in teams, even though we do."

John: "There's such a collaborative..."

Carol: "I think so..."

Tom: "But, the perception of us is not that. School librarians or corporate librarians, they typically just work alone. There should have been one of each. You know, like Barbie comes in different colors." (Agreement voiced.)

John: "So few librarians are."

One of the Library A participants even ruminated about intellectual differences between librarians. He implied that this is more of an internal perception that the general public may not pick up on.

John: "I was thinking this a lot lately. I've been a librarian now for, well, I started here eleven years ago. And it seems to me there's two kinds of librarians. There's librarians that know lots of factoids and bring that stuff with them. And then there's other librarians that seem to be good at the overall picture of how things fit together."

Improving the Public Image of Librarians

Many of the librarians believed that misconceptions and misrepresentations come from the fact that the public actually does not know what librarians do. Library B librarians focused on fixing that problem, and in doing so obtaining a better public image, through increasing their outreach.

Linda: "It's just like you're triggering in my mind something that I think is really important. We're talking about people don't come to us, we have to come to them a whole lot more. Like your department, community library services, you go to meetings, you go to board things, you go to city hall, you're there, we...sit and wait. We think ok, we've got a web site, but still people have to come to it. Every year I resolve to do more of that and every year shyness gets the better of me, or time, we don't have time to do one more thing it seems. But, we should, we have to."

Many of the librarians felt that before reaching out in an attempt to affect change, they should first look inward

Tom: "A lot of people don't even know what libraries can do."

John: "And that's partly our own fault." (Agreement voiced.)

Carol: “Well, we’re too busy putting up Super Librarian rather than saying what we’re doing. I mean does Super Librarian say you can come here and we can help you? No it says we just look better than we used to. We don’t do anything...we stand on our mice.”

Julie: “Yeah, we ride the mice around the library.”

Carol: “I don’t know, that image didn’t improve the understanding of what we do, we’re just so concerned about our physical image to the public rather than our...”

John: “A lot of people fault ALA (the American Library Association) for concerning itself with high-fallutin’ intellectual issues. I think there should almost be two organizations, or two parts to ALA. One deals with things like Patriot Act, etc. and the other you know, militates for our..”

Julie: “Like a teacher’s union.”

John: “Yeah.”

Carol: “Then they’ll no longer have the perception of the people who work there as bun-wearing old women.”

Julie: “Right. What they remember from their childhood.”

Melissa: “Part of that is also in order to fund that you would have to pay your librarians better, because like Tom said, you’re not going to go, there’s few people who go through a master’s program and end up with ungodly amounts of debt, speaking personally anyway, when you get into a profession, I mean a doctor, if you come out of that with \$100,000 in loans, you know you’re going to be making somewhere at least in the \$80,000 a year to start. So you come out of a library profession with \$50 to \$60,000 in loans and you’re looking at making \$20-30,000 a year depending on where you start. There are so many people going to the teacher’s union.”

Carol: “Well I think if we were out there campaigning to the country what we do, rather than what we look like, then they’ll understand that we’re better...we’re not bun-wearing people anymore.”

After spending time discussing steps that can be taken within librarianship, the librarians looked outward again.

Margaret: “You can have basic things, but as the information world is changing, so are our jobs changing. And I think we have to work on the image that’s out there, and it has to change as well as society is changing. Because if you have a really bad,

negative image, people come to you if they need you, but they really don't appreciate what you do for them like they should. They'll come into the library because they need information and someone said go there, when they don't really appreciate it."

Henry: "I don't know if library schools really taught much about being proactive and extending yourself to the public. Which doctors and medical schools do now, that's a big thing. Relating to your patients."

Margaret: "I think that's a very good point. Those who don't know enough about libraries. And a lot of people really don't care to know that. They just want, when they come in, do you have what they need, are you able to help them. They figure that's something you're supposed to know. You're supposed to know how libraries work. You're supposed to keep it working correctly. And just very few people are really interested in that. I think that if there was more interest, maybe we would also operate a little differently."

Improving Self-Image

As I noted in Chapter Three, the focus group librarians expressed some concern over a lack of self respect and a sense of pride among librarians. A number of the librarians are trying to figure out this challenging area of which the general public might not be so aware, but which the focus group librarians witness and even experience themselves. One Library B librarian voiced her frustration about this aspect of librarianship, and also offered her advice.

Jenny: "I think everyone just needs to relax. That's my motto for the new librarian. Just don't take it too seriously. But, at the same time, have a little self respect. Like we're talking about the apologizing thing. Don't apologize for yourself, do the best you can but don't take yourself too seriously either."

Interestingly, the Library A librarians all agreed that in general, they feel very positive about their team of librarians and work environment, and thus feel some element of pride in being librarians where they work. In their conversation, two of the librarians put an interesting spin on Dee Garrison's assertion that librarians have themselves to blame for their image and treatment.

John: "I've always liked the fact that in this library we've always seemed to have sort of more hip librarians than in other places and this might get me in trouble but when I was in library school, I think some people actually fall into the image and perpetuate it. When I was in library school on days I was like really grumpy, I'd say oh, I bet that's got to be a library student and usually I was right. I think some people fall into the stereotype."

Tom: "Or, there are some people who are just frumpy who say well what am I going to do with myself, well, I look like a librarian, I'll go become a librarian!"

John: "I'm telling you, it has an impact!"

Diversifying Librarianship

During the librarians' discussion of Super Librarian, one librarian noted that she would have liked to have seen an ethnic Super Librarian.

Melissa: "I also thought, but not 'til afterwards, that it would have been nice if they had made her a different ethnicity. Because if they were going to go ok, we can't do this, we can't..."

Tom: "What would you make her?"

Melissa: "Just anything. They could have just made her a tan and not specified what her ethnicity was. Because there's many people, especially in this area, that are multi-ethnic."

Again, however, just like some of the librarians felt that Super Librarian's creators would not and did not make the Super Librarian anything other than female because women make up the majority of the profession, they would not make her anything but white because so many librarians are white. The focus group librarians, too, did acknowledge that librarians today are still mostly women, and in doing so did acknowledge a basis of truth in the stereotype. So rather than appeal to the majority that is already stable and continues to grow, I wondered if the librarians saw any viable ways to use representations of librarians to bring more men, as well as people of different races and ethnicities, into the profession? Some of the librarians suggested that creating a

greater number of representations (in advertising campaigns, on library-related websites, etc.) of librarians of different races, ethnicities and/or gender may serve a couple of purposes. First, broadening representations in such a way might help force a change in the overwhelmingly white and female profile of the profession. Second, it could draw in more members of the multiethnic, multiracial population that libraries today serve.

One of Library A's ideas for promoting the profession to those of other races and ethnicities included encouraging children to use the library.

Melissa: "Well I think also part of it...it could be the stereotype but if you look there's been a big push with children's stuff on getting more of the lower-income which happens to be highly ethnic into the libraries because too many people don't realize, you know, if you look at the population you know we have a good population of this, that and the other but how many of them actually come into the library and use it..."

John: "Right."

Tom: "Mm-hmm."

Melissa: "...more than just 'I need a homework assignment, give me my books' and they go. And, even that is a low percentage of the ones that are actually out there. I'm always going to the schools and I see a huge assortment of kids that I never see that are never here in the library, so maybe it's just a matter of not enough of those kids are in the libraries so they don't get to think of a library as a possibility for a profession."

As I have repeatedly noted, salary connects to so many issues that librarians felt were key to improving their image. The issue of low pay arose again in librarians' discussions of beginning minority recruitment into the field at a young age.

Carol: "The pay is so poor."

Melissa: "That's a big thing."

Carol: "Why would they, if they have opportunities to get an education..."

Tom: "Why would they go all the way through graduate school for a career that doesn't pay much." (All voice agreement.)

One of the librarians raised the issue that libraries in the United States might need to promote what libraries do and have to offer specifically to potential users from other countries:

John: "I just want to say about ethnicity, I have a fair amount of familiarity with Mexico. Public libraries don't fulfill quite the same role. A lot of countries, I remember being shocked the first time I went to a public library in France. It's better now, this was ten years ago, it was this teeny little dinky thing. I mean, the United States does have a really strong public library service compared to a lot of other countries. So it's not like people come from other countries knowing this is such a great thing."

Emphasizing Professionalism

One Library B librarian argued that he thought technology is helping librarians seem not only more professional but more hip or cutting edge; however, some others were not so sure.

Margaret: "I don't know because I've been to meetings and I've heard people say well with the Internet, why do we need the librarians. They don't even understand the difference. They don't understand the information on the Internet, the ability to evaluate information. Always when I'm having a class I tell them to use the Internet, but what you need to look for."

Does changing the title from librarian to the more technology-oriented information specialist help or hurt when it comes to librarians seeking more respect as professionals? Outside of public libraries, could something as simple as a title change help do away with some of the other problems the focus group librarians noted, such as schools use of their librarians as study hall monitors and lawyers' poor treatment of law librarians?

Margaret: "I think that the image, we have a lot to do with it. And, I know a lot of people who are working on the image, they don't like to be called librarians. Everybody's an information *specialist*. It sounds better, it *is* more attractive to the public. "I want to go to this specialist." That person's still a librarian, but you

know...”

Library B participants in particular noted a professional/paraprofessional divide that they have observed in some libraries that contributes to a public perception of librarians as being mean and unhelpful. They did note that, once again, a lack of decent pay for paraprofessionals in libraries can be a contributing factor to the lack of good service as well as the stereotype.

Linda: “I think the first people everybody always encounters are the circulation people, which can be a whole different culture. I’ve worked at circulation myself.”

Mike: “I was going to ask, do you always know if it’s a librarian or a non-professional.”

Linda: “Well I don’t necessarily know, I think I’ve got a good sniffer. But, I can’t be sure because some really amazing people, before they get an MLS, are doing the job and then other times there are librarians who should have chosen something else perhaps.”

Margaret: “I guess it also depends on what desk you’re at maybe. Because when people said are you really a librarian, are you trained, upstairs at the reference departments people know they’re going to Arts and Humanities, many of them don’t know what humanities means, but it sounds like a big impressive thing. But, when you were in the branch, or sometimes even African-American Room, it may or may not be a librarian, right, an MLS?”

Mike: “Well it really goes along with the state of affairs of libraries. They’re poorly paid and everything. I always remember when I was living in New York going through library school, going to a library to do some homework with some other of my colleagues, and walking into New York Public Library, going to the third floor, if I’m correct, walking there and there’s a desk, the elevator door opens and this woman’s sitting there and of course the place is bustling and we wanted to know where certain periodicals were so we go and ask where we can go and get them. The woman said, “You see this sign?” We couldn’t understand what she was saying at first. She said, “You see this sign?” I said, “What sign?” And, she was pointing to a little sign on the side of her desk saying something about reference is not here, reference is down the other side of the room. We were just stunned at the way she was talking. She was angry. So that was my experience with New York Public Library. I said oh my God, this place is, this is my first experience with them. I don’t want to pick on them but many times when I was going down there seeing that type of public service, it was really horrible.”

Linda: “I think of *Sophie’s Choice*, remember she comes up, says, “I’d like to read the poetry of Emily Dickens.” And, the *man* librarian (makes angry face), “There is no such thing.” (Laughter.)

Space and Power

The librarians explored issues of hegemony and power in particular in their discussion of the need for more women library directors. They seek to change the attitude that one female librarian still comes across in the field.

Linda: “Not just our library, many libraries, the community might feel more comfortable with men. You know, they know how to do business and running a library is kind of a business. ‘Well you know, it’s nice to give the ladies a chance, but let’s get some experience because we want it done right,’ whatever it happens to be. I hear that even now.”

Library B librarians, in particular, were interested in exploring the possibility of running a library somewhat on the model of a Borders or Barnes and Noble bookstore. This proposal has been a point of contention since Borders, Barnes and Noble, and other bookstore/coffee shop hybrids opened and, in some librarians’ views, began infringing on libraries’ business. The stores often surpass aging libraries in the space and amenities they offer, with their pleasant surroundings, comfortable seating, pleasant lighting, and access to multiple copies of books that can be browsed in a café. And, as the Library B librarians noted, even librarians are going to the bookstores and finding them more hospitable than some libraries. I drew on some things the Library A librarians started discussing after our official focus group session was over. Might a change to a bookstore model make a library more like a community gathering space, and is that a necessary or desirable change?

CL: “That’s similar to what came up yesterday. Someone said that they don’t think of the image of the library is going to change until librarians decide more what they’re going to be as a library. In (Library A) they’ve been pushing to be more of a

cultural center. Despite the fact that they're in a fairly well-off township, there's still a lot of the tax help, there are people who come in and really need assistance with filling out a job application, for example, so they do that too. They really think that they can put themselves out there as not just a library, and get those comfy chairs and have areas where they can...everything, yeah. Areas with the comfy chairs where they can sort of sit and help with the job application."

Jenny: "I often think (about a local Barnes and Noble) this place is packed, and why, what can we do, to get these people at the library instead? My sister said to me that if the library had books set up like they do at Barnes and Noble, she'd find it easier to find stuff, but we do have our new books when you first walk in. I don't know in terms of marketing..."

Mike: "But, the difference comes when you, something comes to your head and you want to ask a question, and you hit a wall. They're not librarians, they're not going to find you that information. That service is not there."

Margaret: "But, even though the service isn't there, there's such an attraction to draw you in, and I think that if libraries would focus more on that, on bringing the people in, once we get them in the door, then we'll work with them."

Mike: "Well there is that element that we should imitate or we should get that Borders thing or whatever that's going on with them to make our libraries more appealing."

Margaret: "Right, it's like we want you here, we want you to come into the store, so we put comfortable chairs for you..."

Linda: "Clean bathrooms!"

Margaret: "...so you can browse the books. And, even if you stay a little bit too long, go over and have a latte. Enjoy yourself. But, you know, they're a business."

Mike: "In a way it really brings you back to the point you mentioned. They're really running a business. A director of a library really has to turn it into more of a business operation without losing our main..."

CL: "Somehow you still have to maintain that service..."

Mike: "You have to strike a balance in there."

The librarians' discussion of library space also connects with issues of professionalization and public image. The librarians felt that the public should know clearly the differences between trained, professional librarians and other staff, which can

be at least partially reflected in the layout of the library (for example, clearly marked circulation and reference desks). The Library B librarians also briefly noted that they had made efforts in recent years to improve their building and its public spaces. The Library A librarians expressed their concern with clutter, which they felt they could reduce in order to create a more professional look for their library.

Some of the librarians raised the issue that better images of libraries and librarians could be obtained and promoted through better and stronger library administration. Some of the Library A librarians mentioned another New Jersey library where the director has a marketing background. They thought that fact might trickle down to the staff somehow in that fairly highly regarded and respected library. The Library B librarians discussed this as well, and brought the subject back around to the state's Super Librarian advertising campaign.

Linda: "Our state librarian doesn't have that background, I think she is a former teacher actually. But, she seems to have learned so much as a director going to the chamber of commerce and Rotary Clubs, she's just really, really keen on interacting with business. Of course, she demanded that the state library come up with the marketing campaign that includes the Super Librarian."

Margaret: "I think that probably, back to your question, it *would* be helpful. I know that they do have the masters/JD combinations, they do have other combinations I remember from library school but I didn't see one in business, and I think that would be very good. People who aspire to get to the top, they need that, they need to have a great background in marketing because to make the library more visible in the community and also attractive. People come in, they like...we've made great strides here over the years. I've seen them make changes to make it more attractive. I think it would be better. To their advantage. The more you know, the less mistakes. You don't find out later, you know at the beginning."

Concluding Points

Often the librarians identified problems, but appeared to be at something of a loss for how to solve the problems, but are certainly actively thinking about how to improve their profession's reputation. They generally agreed that there is not much one can do in situations where a patron discriminates on the basis of age, gender, or presumed sexual orientation, for example, except to keep doing your job. As much as librarians emphasized change within their own ranks, they also saw some of the onus as being on the user and what he or she brings to the reference interaction.

A number of the focus group librarians indeed do want to take proactive steps to put librarians and librarianship in a better light; they do want, in other words, to step outside the text.

Linda: "I do it to make people comfortable. I will walk up to teenagers and say, 'Here I am, your typical librarian, just reminding you that people are trying to concentrate here, and people have been telling me, it's not about me, it's about some other people in this area, they are telling me that they're having a little difficulty doing so.' And, they'll say to me, 'Yes, Miss Librarian,' and they'll imitate my voice and everything. And, you know what, if I've gotten them to, I know they're going to forget pretty soon, because that's how you are when you're a teenager, but if I can get them to be happy get the other people to be happy for a while, here I am!"

In our discussions, librarians said a couple of things that, I think, sum up the focus group discussions on changing stereotypes and misrepresentations by changing and even re-defining librarianship. One of the librarians spoke to many of the issues covered in the discussions when he said that:

"They should ease on the stereotype thing. They should approach it with humor. I think every profession has their own stereotypes, and we really more worry about our own partly because of salaries and I guess our identity in many communities is really pretty low and we're not really treated nicely by the cities. We're the first ones to be dismissed. That's part of the complex I guess."

Another librarian, in speaking to diversifying the profession in particular, summed up what these librarians really want the public to know, and what they would like other librarians to keep in mind when facing stereotypes:

“We want to be as diverse as our communities and diverse as all the different jobs we do. We’re no one thing.”

Chapter Five Conclusion

Female librarians have been represented in literature, film, television, and advertising as sexless frumps; severe, bespectacled, martinets; or repressed sex bombs. The media has tended to show male librarians as mincing, persnickety homosexuals. Every day actual librarians must confront these stereotypical images and the prejudices they reflect and generate. How librarians dress, wear their hair, correct their vision, walk, talk, and conduct their professional duties represent a negotiation, either implicit or explicit, with stereotypical images that pervade the popular culture. Some librarians strive to look and behave in ways that are diametrically opposed to the popular depictions of librarians. Rather than wearing buns, female librarians wear tattoos. They eschew cats-eye spectacles for pierced septums. Others reappropriate stereotypical modes of dress and reclaim them for themselves as badges of identity and nonconformity. These librarians seek out particularly severe glasses, extraordinarily sensible shoes, the dowdiest of cardigans, in a knowing and ironic assertion of ownership of what had formerly been imposed. And some opt out of the style wars completely and just try to do their jobs in as competent and humane a manner as possible.

The focus group librarians who participated in this study may not have all the answers to how images of librarians can be improved and how stereotypes of librarians can be eradicated. However, they are engaged in thinking creatively and critically about what does need to change about librarianship and libraries in the 21st century before any positive change can occur among the images and stereotypes.

There is no reason why images of librarianship in the media and popular culture need be stereotypical. Cognizant of this fact, librarians are negotiating images, and

forums for those images, that do not succumb to stereotypes. The New Jersey focus group librarians discussed images that can foster positive and accurate portrayals of librarians and the work they do. They suggested, for example, that images of librarians working in teams would more accurately represent how they work. By making an effort to broaden their representations, librarians can combat the essentializing and reifying tendencies of stereotypes.

Librarians fight against one-dimensionality of stereotypes also in their efforts to demonstrate that librarians, and libraries for that matter, are more varied than stereotypes imply. Librarians find stereotypes so problematic in part because stereotypical representations do not acknowledge differences among types of librarians or types of libraries, or among populations served by librarians and libraries. Stereotypes do not acknowledge the range of specific types of librarians, from catalogers to subject specialists to technology experts, nor do they recognize the wide variety of tasks performed by any particular librarian on a given day. Librarians do more than just shelve books and hush patrons. Furthermore, libraries are not just one thing to the populations they serve. As librarians from both focus groups in this study made clear, libraries provide an enormous variety of service from advising readers about what they might like to read next to assisting patrons with employment applications. Librarians serve an extraordinarily varied patron group including young children, new immigrants, high school and college students, and senior citizens. And libraries are part of the fabric of diverse and divergent communities that range from inner cities to the wealthiest suburbs.

Class and pay play very large roles as both foundations for and propagators of stereotypes. Whether the librarians work in a city or suburb, they are viewed by many as

helpers, or as one Library B librarian put it, “do-gooders.” Librarians from Library B also noted the tendency among some of their colleagues to associate them negatively with the inner city population they serve. Librarians take pride in being service-oriented professionals, but they are strongly aware of the fact that in a capitalist and staunchly individualistic society, service, especially not-for-profit public service, is not always highly valued by the elite. Librarianship’s place in the non-profit sector is reflected in stereotypes of dowdy, frumpy, impecunious librarians. Libraries have had difficulty escaping the negative image of a publicly funded social welfare program, no matter how vital that program might be to the community.

To fight stereotypes and negotiate preferable images, some librarians are harnessing the power and presence of the World Wide Web to play with and counter stereotypes of librarians. Younger librarians, faced with lingering negative stereotypes, have tried to re-invent the image of the librarian or ironically reclaim the old stereotypes. The Lipstick Librarian, Leather Librarian, and other representations counter the bespectacled and gray-bunned or stern and shushing librarian representations.

Although librarians may question whether some alternative images of, for example, sexy librarians only serve to reinforce certain stereotypes about librarians, they appreciate the fact that there are efforts afoot to challenge accepted notions of librarianship. The alternative is that stereotypes will continue to feed the public’s images of librarians. Historical stereotypes underlay the images of librarians today, and Hollywood has wielded great power in maintaining those stereotypes. This study and the librarians who are part of it have acknowledged a wealth of stereotypes in films from *It’s a Wonderful Life* to *Party Girl* and how powerful those stereotypes are. For example,

they noted that occasionally a patron will come into the library with expected notions of how a librarian is supposed to look or act, and others will respond in disbelief when they find out a person who looks nothing like their concept of a librarian is indeed a librarian. Librarians from Library A believe that stereotypes of librarians can be so powerful that some librarians, consciously or not, even develop an image that fits the stereotype. Even more damaging is that a stereotype, such as that of the gay male librarian, could affect someone's image of librarians to such an extent that it leads a patron to mistreat a librarian based on his own biases, as one of the Library B librarians experienced.

Gender, through a combination of images and institutions, is a thread that runs throughout so many of the stereotypes of librarians and the public's image of libraries. Perhaps the most common stereotypical librarian is a woman in late middle age in a non-administrative position. She is not a supervisor and wields power only over patrons who will not be quiet. And this stereotype reflects the reality that although more women than men are employed as librarians, more men than women continue to hold administrative positions. Focus group librarians identify librarianship's continued association with women's work—helping and organizing in a nurturing and safe environment—with the lingering belief that librarianship is a profession for women who do not have other options.

From its origins, the traditional image of the sexless old-maid librarian derives in part from an attempt by patriarchal forces to punish women who preferred for whatever reason to pursue a life of letters and the intellect rather than to raise a family. As late as the 1950s, librarianship was one of only a few professions generally open to women. Whereas nurses were stereotyped as sexual creatures because of their connection to the

bodily and the private, librarians were portrayed as stern and sexually barren. In some cases the stereotype went so far as to suggest that beneath the façade of persnickety order and control, the female librarian was a seething inferno of repressed lust just waiting for a man to take down her bun, remove her glasses, and liberate the sexy woman within. And male librarians have been portrayed as de-sexed and feminized. Librarians feel challenged to find a way out from such a gendered history of librarianship. Part of the solution might be, again, to put forth images of librarians and librarianship in their multiplicity, but clearly more work is needed in this complicated area.

Librarians know how much librarianship has changed in the last couple of decades. It has, for example, harnessed so much technology, venturing, even morphing at times, into information science. But a new, more positive image has not followed the changes. It is possible to see how, for example, having technology, namely public computers, in libraries can lead to what patrons may view as a form of surveillance. As Marie and Gary Radford might argue, between librarians' easy access to electronic patron records and patrons' access to the Internet, often having to sign up for use in public libraries, a discourse of fear dominates and feeds a stereotype.

Librarians know that they have to continue to be strong advocates for who they are and what they do before their image and stereotypes will change, and think critically about what purposes they want and need to serve in a rapidly changing world. But what is keeping the old stereotypes of librarians in play? Capitalism discounts the efforts of helping professions. Patriarchy discounts contributions of women that are not clearly sexual, or more accurately, do not aggrandize male sexuality. Although life is better

today for professional women, society continues to marginalize women who choose to engage in intellectual pursuits.

Cultural hegemony functions on numerous levels to keep stereotypes in place. Again, for example, the centralization of the control of the image in Hollywood, the image of the old maid or the sexually liberated librarian replayed over and over via television and video, constantly reinforce and regurgitate librarian stereotypes. Cultural hegemony also operates in the Super Librarian and Librarian Action Figure. They are outlets for an ideology, for society's beliefs and assumptions to be passed on to the public and to librarians as well. Adding insult to injury is the fact that even highly gendered, stereotyped representations come from within the ranks of librarianship. Librarians are bound to some extent institutionally and economically mostly male library administrations and boards of trustees. Again, more work is needed to unpack the ways in which damaging images are manufactured and disseminated.

The process by which stereotypical images of librarians have been created, distributed, assimilated, and resisted is very complex. But clearly, every librarian who participated in this study grappled either explicitly or implicitly with those images. Portrayals of librarians in films, books, television programs, and advertisements directly affect the working life of professional librarians across the country. And it can be argued that even the attempt by libraries to counteract negative stereotypes with supposedly positive ones, as in the case of the New Jersey State Library, reinforces the original image as it attempts to counteract it. Librarians make life and work decisions with these stereotypes in mind. Particularly energetic and engaged librarians try to defang stereotypical images by re-appropriating them or counteract them by putting forth

counter-images. Others make do as best they can in a world that determines their value based on a decades-old patriarchy-infused falsity. But this study has reinforced the notion that we live in a culture whose boundaries are defined by or in reaction to images. Understanding this "truth" is fundamental to any attempt by librarians to push back those artificial boundaries.

Appendix A

Focus group replies to introductory questionnaire

Note: Pseudonyms are used for all focus group participants.

Library A

Name	Age	Race or Ethnicity	Length of time as a librarian
Tom	35	White	10 years
Julie	40	White	13 years
John	42	White	11 years
Carol	46	White	8 years
Melissa	34	White	5 years

Library B

Name	Age	Race or Ethnicity	Length of time as a librarian
Linda	54	White	23 years
Jenny	29	White	2 ½ years
Margaret	64	African-American	39 years in library/8 years professional librarian
Henry	60	White	33 years
Mike	44	Hispanic	18 years

Appendix B

Focus Group Questions

What is your current position?

What do you think are some of the stereotypes of librarians?
Are there any common stereotypes? Others?

I have heard librarians say that people have told them things like, “You don’t look like a librarian” or “you’re a librarian? You don’t look like a librarian!” What do you think it is about librarians’ identities that may be coming out in stereotypes?

How do you think being a woman/man affects the way the public sees librarians? Have you personally encountered or observed any stereotypes of male librarians?

What is it like to be in a traditional women’s or gendered profession?

Do you think there are any stereotypes related to the fact that librarians have been predominately women?

What are your reactions to librarians’ stereotypes in films, books, the media, etc.?

Do the stereotypes matter to you?

Do you think the physical appearance or space of the library affects how users perceive librarians? If so, in what way(s)?

If you could design a representative librarian (this question relates specifically to the New Jersey State Library’s Super Librarian) what would you do?

What are your thoughts on library directors having business or marketing backgrounds—might this have any effect on stereotypes?

Appendix C

Note: Pseudonyms are used for all focus group participants.

Library A

Tom: I'm the head of the Information Services Department and that can mean a lot of different things on a lot of different days. I help the public at the desk and help with everything from A/V collections to programming to interlibrary loan to all sorts of stuff.

Julie: I'm the head of the Circulation Department so I supervise a large group of non-professionals, mostly part-timers, a lot of my job is training people in the use of the computer system, doing too much of checking out books myself, ordering fiction books, paying bills, scheduling, scheduling and more scheduling, and problem solving with customers and making sure everybody's happy.

Melissa: I am the...I'm in a slash position, I'm the young adult/programming/reference person. I do all of the young adult programming and coordinate all of the teen volunteer programs and serve as I guess sort of minor outreach with teens, and then I do reference work and I do programming for adults, although minimal due to time constraints, and I order young adult fiction and recommend non-fiction and I think that's it...lots of volunteers, yes.

Carol: I'm "slasher" librarian no. 2 (laughter). I'm in charge of outreach and bookmobile, I'm a reference librarian, I'm in charge of, I guess, although nobody knows it including my staff, the interlibrary loan program, since (name of former assistant director) is gone I'm supposed to be supervising all the programming, but that doesn't work very well, and I guess for the bookmobile I do everything there from hiring the people, and ordering the books. For outreach we're starting a new books to homebound people so that's a new program we're doing, I'm editor of *Check it Out* (the library's newsletter for patrons), jack of all trades, master of none. I'm helping with the library expansion program, I do everything that (name of director) asks and everything that everybody else asks, including this weekend putting up signs about vandalism and calling the police about vandalism...well, it's a little of everything.

John: I am senior network librarian, I do reference, I do online reference for New Jersey Q&A, I make sure the computers are running properly, my co-worker (name of other librarian) and I share this responsibility, for computer security, ant-virus, software, hardware, making sure everything runs properly, setting up new computers, especially in the public areas and staff areas. We design and keep the internal web page up to date. I was the original designer of the old web page, and it needs revamping and (name of other librarian) and I are going to be taking over that.

Melissa: I'm working on the teen page. And you order books on tape, don't you?

John: And I order books on tape.

Julie: And replace books on tape after I find out people stole them.

Tom: And I pay bills and do scheduling too! (Laughter.)

Library B

George: “Reference librarian, Arts and Humanities, or supervising librarian”

Mike: “Principal librarian, Business, Science, and Technology Division.”

Margaret: Manager, African American Room

Jenny: Librarian, Arts and Humanities Division

Linda: Supervising Librarian, Arts and Humanities Division

Library A

Carol: There was a contest about designing a little sketch of a librarian (the NJ State “Super Librarian”) and we didn’t have enough time to do that and we really wanted to because we really wanted to depict what we thought a librarian was.

Tom: If you go onto the NJLA website you can see some of the entries, that’d be an interesting stereotype...

CL: What did you guys want to design?

Carol: Oh, we had all kinds of things, it was like wearing armor, and having all kinds...like twenty hands to do everything, a big giant smile that always said “Yes! (sarcastically), of course you’re right!” What else did we have...I was really all set to do it there was just no time to do it, it was really disappointing because I think it would have been really fun.

CL: Would it be a woman?

Carol: Uh, that’s interesting. No, I think it was going to be a generic,

John: Octopus.

Carol: you know, it certainly wasn’t going to look like Super Librarian in NJ, that’s for sure.

Tom: I hope she’s getting into your paper...

CL: Yeah, well, since we’re on that topic...

Julie: Where did they get that from? Why? Who’s idea was that?

Melissa: From what I’ve heard from Bonnie at the state library, they really came up with the idea to try and combat the stereotype and yet they’ve perpetuated it and pushed it further and now there is a big thing, because I’m on the committee that’s helping because I can’t say no, they’re doing a teen contest to do a back story for the Super Librarian because everybody has a back story in comic book history, which is you know, Superman came from yada yada yada...they had to use a man’s back story interestingly enough because most of the female characters in comic books have pretty trashy histories (laughter) so it’s going to be a contest that you have to turn in the entries during Teen Read Week and they will announce...so this summer we have to get set the rules and regulations and what the contest details will be, and when, how they’ll be entered, then they’ll be entering their stuff in October, in December they’ll be making a decision and what the grand prize is they haven’t decided yet. They’re thinking that if they have the money they’d like to publish it. A comic book. But if they don’t have the money for that

then it just might be some generic oh look, Joe Schmo won this contest and Jane Schmo helped him write it and “Yeah! Look, librarians has a back story.”

Carol: I stumbled onto the Super Librarian page, in fact I e-mailed it to myself here so I could show it to everybody because it’s a lot of people complementing the idea and showing what they do with it in their libraries and showing the cutout, it standing in their libraries and pictures of it and everything. It’s really an amusing page, and there were lots of things on there that I thought we would all get a kick out of looking at.

Melissa: It even made the cover of *American Libraries*.

John: That’s right.

Carol: But the page is just...these people need to get a life (laughter).

Tom: We might be a little bit of an elitist library focus group! I mean just all of us...we’re not your typical...librarians.

Someone: I don’t know if there is a typical librarian.

Julie: Or we think we’re not.

Tom: Am I being stereotypical?

Julie: I don’t know. I don’t know that there is a typical librarian.

Carol: We all felt that it was very sexist. That they chose it to be a woman in a cat suit. I mean nobody looks like that. Maybe that’s their point that it doesn’t look like any librarian. First of all couldn’t they come up with a duo that was one man and one woman or something, I mean *why* is this super librarian a woman..

Tom: ...or a dog.

Carol: Yeah, well, maybe, because I find it offensive. I mean if any kid came out and said “You don’t look like *this*”...To me it’s just...you know.

Tom: You need a cape, you’ve got purple on. (Laughter)

Carol: Yeah that’s it! To me it’s just...I don’t buy into...I just don’t buy into that...

Tom: Barbie image.

Carol Yeah, that’s kind of what it is

John: Well, it's sort of a, they wanted her to be sexy on the one hand, but they made her look sort of intellectual on the other hand by giving her glasses. I felt alienated from the whole thing.

Julie: You don't feel sexy or intelligent? (Laughter)

Carol Why does being sexy make you, you know, super?

John: I think they were trying to combat the stereotype of frumpy. I'm not saying I agree with it.

Julie: The opposite of the shushing librarian.

Melissa: The idea was, from what I heard, all they wanted to do was generate conversation. As far as they're concerned this is a huge hit because everybody whether they like it or hate it has an opinion on her. I think it was interesting that teens pointed out that super librarian has all this super technology with the little headset and stuff yet she can't afford contact lenses.

Tom: Which is true!

Julie: That pay scale didn't address the stereotype at all

Tom: I like the glasses!

Melissa: I just thought it was funny that that was the comment from the kids. They've never seen a librarian that looked like that either. They all thought it was funny that she had all this technology and yet she's wearing old-fashioned black tortoise rim glasses.

Carol: That assumes that she chose to...that she couldn't afford to...she may have chosen that because it enhanced her...dark tresses...he Pocahontas hair!

Tom: They're just fashion accessory glasses, she doesn't even need them.

Carol That's right, she's wearing contacts underneath there, they're just clear or something. They match her outfit. S. also: Like Clark Kent! CAROL Takes his off—she puts hers on. (Laughter.)

John: She's actually a man!

Melissa: I like that—a hermaphrodite super librarian!

Julie: OK, so say they had made super librarian a male, would all the women be pissed off because...

Tom: Yes.

Julie: ...men are already all the directors, why the hell are they making the librarian a man?

Tom: Especially if they're going to call it *super* librarian, then they're saying in order to be a super librarian then it has to be a man.

Melissa: But I think all of the women, most women anyway, resented the fact that she was Barbie doll-sized with Spandex. I think if they wanted to make her saucy they could have...

Julie: Somewhere in between Nancy Pearl and super librarian.

Tom: But if they're going to dress them in Spandex then they sort of have to look like that.

Melissa: I know but they could have done something besides Spandex. But they wanted the superhero image...

Tom: But you know if they put a skirt or a dress on her then everyone would say oh, it's, just softening the frumpy look.

Melissa: Pat? (Referencing the androgynous SNL character). (Raucous laughter.)

Tom: That would have been good!

Julie: Robin could be the pat (Referencing Batman's sidekick)

Carol: "Robin—Librarian Wonder!" (Laughter.)

CL: What about Nancy Pearl?

Tom: I have her on my desk, I was going to bring her...

CL: I was going to bring mine.

Julie: Well she does look just like that. But she is really a super librarian.

Tom: I would like to say that the shushing action is very disappointing to be honest.

Carol: Makes her look like she's picking her nose. (Laughter & agreement.)
It's not a particularly well-crafted toy.

John: I think it's a humorous attempt at self-mockery which I like.

Melissa: I liked it for that reason too.

Carol: Did Barbie end up being a librarian, when they had the big voting?

Tom: No. She didn't become a librarian.

Julie: What did she become?

Melissa: They had a big thing, vote for Barbie the librarian, but the librarian lost.

Carol: Now frankly, on that one I didn't vote for the librarian because Barbie should be breaking into a male profession, an all-male profession. Women are already librarians. It's not a role model for girls. Barbie should be an architect, which is a hugely male profession. So you know, I kept thinking don't make her a librarian, that's already a women's role. It's like make her something that's an aspiration for kids, for girls, make her something where there aren't enough women. You know Ginny just kept voting for librarian like thousands of times over and I said don't do that, that's not right for...

Melissa: I think they should have voted for Ken.

Carol: Well exactly, yeah, that would have been fine. It would have been better. Ginny kept saying "I want to see what kind accessories they'll give her." They'll give her books, I mean what else are they going to give her? A computer and books! It's like, that's not going to be any fun for a kid!

Julie: Would there be a little library that she gets to live in...

John: Barbie's Play Library?

CL: Jeff you said it (super librarian) offended you...

J: No, I didn't say it offended me. I said I felt alienated from it. Because I thought it would be nice to appreciate the men who work in the profession. I'm not involved in administration, so...

Julie: We don't have to resent you—we can just appreciate you for the contribution you make.

John: I didn't give it that much thought either. I actually thought the whole thing was kind of dumb because she just seemed like a caricature.

Tom: I think she would have to be a woman just because most of the profession is women. And if you made it a team...

John: I like the team idea.

Tom: But we're not always thought of as working in teams, even though we do.

John: There's such a collaborative...

Carol: I think so...

Tom: But the perception of us is not that. School librarians or corporate librarians, they typically just work alone. There should have been one of each. You know, like Barbie comes in different colors. (Agreement.)

Melissa: I also thought, but not 'til afterwards, that it would have been nice if they had made her a different ethnicity. Because if they were going to go ok, we can't do this, we can't...

Tom: What would you make her?

Melissa: Just anything. They could have just made her a tan and not specified what her ethnicity was. Because there's many people, especially in this area, that are multi-ethnic.

John: So few librarians are.

Melissa: Not librarians, but it just goes back to stereotyping. You need to be this way or act this way or dress this way to be a librarian.

Carol: Why is it that librarianship isn't more ethnically diverse?

John: I don't know.

Julie: How about in --- (large city library)?

John: There were definitely more Hispanic and Black.

Tom: Paraprofessional or professional?

John: No, both. But it's funny, sometimes I'll look around librarian meetings and think we really are overwhelmingly white.

Julie: Yeah. You kind of want to push them all out and start all over. (Laughs.)

Tom: But I think in some minorities, the percentage that even have any kind graduate degree is very low. So if you think about it that's a low percentage, then how many of them would actually have a library degree.

Carol: But are they, like, turned off by the stereotype of being a frump (laughs) and they don't want to...

Melissa: Well I think also part of it...it could be the stereotype but if you look there's been a big push with children's stuff on getting more of the lower-income which happens

to be highly ethnic into the libraries because too many people don't realize, you know, if you look at the population you know we have a good population of this, that and the other but how many of them actually come into the library and use it...

John: Right.

Tom: Mm-hmm.

Melissa: ...more than just "I need a homework assignment, give me my books" and they go. And even that is a low percentage of the ones that are actually out there. I'm always going to the schools and I see a huge assortment of kids that I never see that are never here in the library, so maybe it's just a matter of not enough of those kids are in the libraries so they don't get to think of a library as a possibility for a profession.

Carol: The pay is so poor.

S: That's a big thing.

Carol: Why would they, if they have opportunities to get an education...

Tom: Why would they go all the way through graduate school for a career that doesn't pay much. (All voice agreement.)

(Side chat about how they ended up in the profession:

Tom: Because we're all WASPY people who didn't have to suffer...

Carol: I'm not a WASP and I did suffer as a child!

Tom: So did I but...

Carol: Well how did you end up here?

Tom: I'm a nerd!

Julie: I was in a lower paying position so this was a step up!

John: Me too.)

John: "I just want to say about ethnicity, I have a fair amount of familiarity with Mexico. Public libraries don't fulfill quite the same role. A lot of countries, I remember being shocked the first time I went to a public library in France. It's better now, this was ten years ago, it was this teeny little dinky thing. I mean, the United States does have a really strong public library service compared to a lot of other countries. So it's not like people come from other countries knowing this is such a great thing."

Julie: “Except we did have a guy from Singapore come in and was like, you know, we were so much lower as far as technology.

John: Oh Really? Oh, well.

Julie: Because they’re the cutting edge.

John: Right. Do we get to talk about other things like sexual orientation?

CL: Anything you want to talk about.

JMP: Because there is that stereotype of male librarians...

J: Of male librarians all being gay.

CL: That’s something I’d like to get to.

John: Some of them are straight. Not the two here, but... (laughter)

Tom: I find that a lot of the stereotypes really do reflect the reality of the industry.

Julie: The reality exists. It does, I mean you go to an ALA meeting, PLA, you see at least 70% of them meeting the stereotype.

Tom: But traditionally it was a second job type thing for a woman who was not the breadwinner for the family.

John: Who wasn’t a school teacher?

Carol One of the reasons it’s kept the salaries down is because there’s a lot of women whose husbands earn the salary and they’re willing to take the jobs.

Tom: A lot of them work part time because that’s all they want and that works well with the industry too. And, you know, they’re people who are educated and had some advantages in life that they don’t need to work full time and they don’t want to work full time.

John: It’s changing a little bit.

Carol: A *genteel* profession.

Tom: It’s changing but all the people going through now aren’t really going to the public library.

Carol: No, they’re going corporate.

John: Yeah.

Carol: Or school.

Julie: I find that the people I know going into the profession are a lot of women my age who had a first career and then they left to raise kids and maybe their first career was too involved. Like I have a friend that was a journalist for a long time and had been doing freelance while her children were growing. Now they're older and she's trying to think of what profession to do and she thought of librarianship. She e-mailed me to get the positives and negatives but part of her fear is that she'll turn into a bun-wearing, comfortable shoe, shushing person.

John: Really?

Julie: And she wanted to make sure that wasn't going to happen.

Carol: Did you use me as an example? (laughter)

John: How does that reflect on you?

Julie: It still exists. I guess it's seen as a profession that doesn't suck you dry if...well, some days...but generally it's not a job that you take home and sucks everything out of you and you're working 70 hours a week so you can have a family.

Tom: But it can.

Julie: It can, but you can choose for it not to be. For instance, you can't be a lawyer and expect to have a 35 hour work week and 12 municipal holidays off. You can't be a reporter and have weekend-free work. I never had any holidays off. I was always there until 11, 12 o'clock at night so that's not conducive to raising a family. But public libraries is more conducive I think.

Carol: There's a misconception about what librarians *do*.

John: That's for sure.

Carol: Not only the image...

J: What they look like...

CAROL ...but the role of a librarian.

Melissa: So many times you hear you need a *degree* to be a librarian?

Julie: Because they think that everybody that works in a library is a librarian.

Melissa: Yeah, they just walk up and they think everybody who works here is a librarian and they can just walk up to the desk and say hi I want to be hired and I can stand behind this desk and answer questions and they don't realize the scope of the job.

Carol: Or, some people that do ask questions, they say you can do that in a library? I didn't know you can ask questions. (Agreement voiced.)

Tom: A lot of people don't even know what libraries can do.

John: And that's partly our own fault. (Agreement voiced.)

Carol: Well, we're too busy putting up Super Librarian rather than saying what we're doing. I mean does Super Librarian say you can come here and we can help you? No it says we just look better than we used to. We don't do anything...we stand on our mice.

Julie: Yeah, we ride the mice around the library.

Carol I don't know, that image didn't improve the understanding of what we do, we're just so concerned about our physical image to the public rather than our...

John: A lot of people fault ALA for concerning itself with high-fallutin' intellectual issues. I think there should almost be two organizations, or two parts to ALA. One deals with things like Patriot Act, etc. and the other you know, militates for our..

Julie: Like a teacher's union.

John: Yeah.

Carol: Well I think if we were out there campaigning to the country what we do, rather than what we look like, then they'll understand that we're better...we're not bun-wearing people anymore.

Julie: When you see those commercials to become a teacher...

Julie: Right!

John:...for better pay in New York City schools, that's really positive, and they don't look like anything special but what they're doing is special.

Tom: Right.

John:...and that's what they're emphasizing and we don't do that at all.

Carol: And that's the thing, if we let the public know our qualifications and what we do and what you can get at the library, and what the new library is about

Julie: Right, yeah.

Carol: Then they'll no longer have the perception of the people who work there as bun-wearing old women.

Julie: Right. What they remember from their childhood.

Melissa: Part of that is also in order to fund that you would have to pay your librarians better, because like Tom said, you're not going to go, there's few people who go through a master's program and end up with ungodly amounts of debt, speaking personally anyway, when you get into a profession, I mean a doctor, if you come out of that with \$100,000 in loans, you know you're going to be making somewhere at least in the \$80,000 a year to start. So you come out of a library profession with 50 to 60,000 in loans and you're looking at making \$20-30,000 a year depending on where you start. There are so many people going to the teacher's union because they need the money.

Carol: You need to run this little focus group just with people outside of the profession and what their perception of librarians is and ask how many people know that librarians need to have a master's degree. I bet...I don't think people know that we mount up debt going to school.

Julie: Oh I know they don't.

Melissa: Most of my circle of friends...

Carol: Your circle know because they know you.

Melissa: No, but my husband's circle of friends and the circle that I had before I got into professionals and met fellow people in the field were all, you know, average blue collar people like I was before I became a librarian and most of them were just astonished A, that you had to go to school to be a librarians and then B, they were like well, you don't *look* like a librarian. I have a very attractive friend who's, she's gorgeous, and she's a children's librarian and every day it's like "you're a children's librarian? Wow, I should have gone to the library more often." And my husband makes jokes—I would have gone to the library if I knew there were people like you there.

John: People say that to me too, you know, you don't look like a librarian.

Tom: Whenever I meet anyone and it gets to that whole thing, like what do you do, I'm like you'll never guess. You'll never guess! Because I don't look like a librarian at all, I hope!

Carol: Ah, see now look at that comment there!

Tom: Because of the stereotype out there!

John: And also we're very self-deprecating as a profession. And J. and I will sometimes talk about L. (J's son) was going to be a...P. wanted to be a roofer and you said something like well, better than a librarian! And I laughed and I was thinking this is really sad, you know, because I like what I do, I really do. But the image is embarrassing sometimes.

Julie: But L. still wants to be a librarian. And he doesn't know anything about the bad image being a librarian.

John: Well good.

Melissa: My niece wants to be a cowboy librarian.

John: Well, there's a packhorse librarian.

CL: (Boyfriend) has the same issues.

John: Really?

CL: He is like, he feels, apologetic for telling people he's a librarian. He just had this big crisis because he was going to go to his college reunion and they're all lawyers, they have high-fallutin' positions in the government, his groups of friends, and he's like how am I going to go up there and say I'm a law librarian?

John: Just say I work at (name of institution) and...with the law professors.

Tom: Information professional.

Melissa: But it's the same issue.

Carol: Well that's exactly it. You've changed the title. I think that's why all the schools are all doing this information science stuff. Because it makes it sound like something better, you're an information scientist.

Melissa: Yeah, and I think that it's a lot of things. If you perpetuate, it's almost like you feel you can't put your hair in a bun, because (laughter) it's like Oh God! I can't look like a librarian! It's like there's the little stereotype that sits there right over your head. So that you're worried, and I get comments all the time, how do you work in those shoes

Julie: I always wonder how you walk in those shoes, not work in them!

Melissa: You know I'm the only one with like bright purple nails...

John: But you know what, two things. I'm proud of what I do, I hate the stereotype, but I really am proud of what I do because I feel like we help people. But the other thing is I've always liked the fact that in this library we've always seemed to have sort of more hip librarians than in other places and this might get me in trouble but when I was in

library school, I think some people actually fall into the image and perpetuate it, when I was in library school on days when I was like really grumpy, I'd say oh I bet that's got to be a library student and usually I was right. I think sometimes people fall into the stereotype.

Julie: You mean they become more of a librarian.

John: Yeah, like they're frumpier

Tom: Or there are some people who are just frumpy who say well what am I going to do with myself, well, I look like a librarian, I'll go become a librarian!

John: I'm telling you, it has an impact.

Carol: Well I remember when I went down to ALA it was in Washington and you had the politicos, the movers and shakers, and all the librarians in-between. You could definitely tell who was a librarian and who wasn't. Everybody was sort of meandering between meetings, you know, and all these people were dodging around them. I mean you could see it would be like librarians in New York. (laughter)

Tom: I went to ALA in New Orleans, and it was a very quiet week in New Orleans! It wasn't exactly, like, Mardi Gras.

CL: Archives conventions are the same way.

Carol: Yeah.

John: Yeah I bet.

Carol: Yes archivists are Even more so mole-like I guess.

Julie: That's probably a worse stereotype than librarians.

CL: I have to talk to you about *The Rule of Four*, by the way, the stereotype of archivists that's in there.

Carol: But you know, every time you hear it in a movie or something they still perpetuate it. The other, since I used to be in the architecture profession, these stereotypes of architects are false as well.

Julie: They're not snobs?

Carol: No, but they show them as being these glamorous jobs. You know the latest five years when they want a glamour job they make the person an architect. It's like no architect can afford to live like that or be like that.

Melissa: Well it's also, it's funny that one of the biggest things I think is that people get intimidated because they think that to be a librarian you have to know everything.

Carol: You do!

Melissa: It's not that any of us are geniuses, well, except maybe J., but the rest of us have to figure out where it is. Even on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* when they had a male librarian everyone's like yeah a male librarian! But he was still perceived to be this really intellectual person talking at a high level and everybody else is down here and he didn't know slang and he didn't know any of the...and it didn't help that they made him British. But it was just so many people have that, my own family, you have a question, just call up S. and say hey! What is the capital of Belgium. I don't know this off the top of my head I have to look it up. And it can be intimidating for people.

Tom: You have to be more of a detective than...especially in public, you have to have some kind of contact or understanding of common culture.

John: You have to be an intelligent person to be a good librarian.

Carol: It helps to be a generalist too. (Agreement)

Julie: So you know where to look!

John: Yeah, you have to know where to look.

Tom: I'm not an intellectual at all, and sometimes I feel I should be, because I'm a librarian, I'm supposed to be.

John: I was thinking this a lot lately. I've been a librarian now for, well, I started here eleven years ago. And it seems to me there's two kinds of librarians. There's librarians that know lots of factoids and bring that stuff with them. And then there's other librarians that seem to be good at the overall picture of how things fit together. There's other kinds of librarians too...

Julie: The bluffing librarians.

Carol: Specialized.

John: There's specialized librarians too. When I went into this profession I thought it was all about sort of knowledge but I've been in it long enough to see that you need people who know...there are very few people I think in general that are good administrators. And libraries I think need more of them. I mean Tom, you say you're not an intellectual but I think that you have administrative talent. So even though your IQ is relatively low (laughter) I think Tom is very smart.

Carol: He needs to put those glasses on...

John: He's smart in one way...

Melissa: I know myself personally in a lot of the children's areas they're having the hardest time because you need to be really a people person, like hardcore people person to work in children's services in any perspective, young adult or children's and that's hard to find someone who is that good with people and chooses to be a librarian and chooses to specialize. It's hard to find there's like a plethora of jobs out there, people begging, salary's low but it's also the fact that there are a lot of people who are like eww, I don't want to work with kids, I want to sit at a desk and do sedentary work not realizing that that's not what reference does either. There are many niches for many different kinds of people and I think that's one of the things that I've always loved about the library. But there's definitely people who are great at this part and people who are better at this part.

John: Yep.

Tom: Yeah.

Melissa: I couldn't take a computer apart if you took a gun to my head. But I also think J. in front of a bunch of teenagers, he'd probably be a little...

John: I tried it.

Carol: Has there been a study of how many librarians have come from other...I mean it seems to be a profession where that's prevalent, where people come to librarianship as a second career. Because it's definitely...

CL: Just going through school so many people I met were in a second career.

John: You went right out of undergrad...

Melissa: Within two years, so I tried to find a job with an undergrad degree and couldn't, so...

Tom: When you go to library school no one is right out of undergrad. Practically no one. I think our library for some reason tends to be the exception. I think our staff is very, like you said, hip, very, I don't know, you go to most libraries they don't have men on staff and they don't have anyone under 30 on staff. And we at least started when we were under thirty.

Carol: I've stayed because I noticed at this library, everybody here is talented. Everybody here is intelligent and that makes so much of a difference to me, to be able to work with people that I respect and people that I learn from. Whereas you know, the people in --- County are not well-paid, so they don't get qualified people. As a patron at -- County I can't stand the people I have to use as a librarian. And so they tend to not be, because they're not well-paid, they're not well qualified. They tend to hide at their desk.

Tom: And you don't get satisfaction from them.

Carol: No, I get lousy responses, as a patron I can't stand to use that library.

Julie: And we're more demanding too, because we know what quality service is here.

Carol: And we're well enough paid, I mean we're still librarians, but I think that maybe that even ought to be told to the board, we do have quality here because we make the NJLA minimum and raises are good. I think that maybe just breeds getting, having good staff here perpetuates that because it's much more enjoyable to work with people who are intelligent and have a good sense of humor and deal with the stuff better instead of...the people in other libraries are just dull because they're not...

Melissa: Well it's also, I know in Pennsylvania they just had a huge budget crisis and they're losing people left and right and they cut hours. I know my local library lost 20 hours so they lost eight staff members, three professional, three non-professional so they're like when you funding wise when you're at a crisis point and you can't, I know even us with the don't go over these hours and make sure you don't this...it does increase the stress level. In a huge way when you're standing there saying ok I now have to do the work of four people because we can't afford to hire any more people.

Julie: And I can't do it in the way that I want to.

John: Right.

Melissa: Or, you know, I need this to work and I can't get it to work and I can't get the funding and I can't afford the help to get it to work.

Julie: Or we can't afford a toner cartridge to make the printer work!

Melissa: So we can joke about it but it's really sad. This is the hardest budget year I've seen and I've been here five years. It makes it stressful when you're standing there going ok, can I go to this meeting or will it put us behind because what if it can't replace you or somebody's on vacation and how do you rework the hours to make sure without bringing in someone extra.

Library B

CL: What do you think are some librarian stereotypes, any common ones you come across, any ones that particularly bother you, any images of librarians that you like, anything that has struck your fancy lately as far as images of librarians that you've seen in popular culture or the library field that you want to bring up. This should get us into things.

Margaret: Well, since you're all looking at me (laughter)...I'm not sure if you've heard the same ones I have. When I was growing up, I remember in school the librarian, she would always sit at the desk, she was female with a bun, and she would constantly say, "Sh! Sh! Sh!" I would say my, we can't even talk when we're trying to do our homework. I know I have met some people even here who are like that. A few, but only a few. It's changing, I've been here so long, I've seen the changes. For the better. Definitely for the better. I don't like thinking that you have to wear a bun...I've gone from bun to a ponytail now...but we'll change. Also, they don't understand why you need a master's degree, "all you do is read, why do you need that? You went to college to be a librarian?" Yes. I don't like that. And people who say "and you're so intelligent." Do you think librarians aren't intelligent?

Henry: Well, I've never been too concerned about it. My initial job in a library, I guess I was in high school, as a page in the biggest public library in (library in New York). Most of my contact was the head of reference who was a big, bulking ex-Marine named...who had a family and children. So I never considered it to be a problem in the sense that Margaret's saying it's a problem. I think there was some disappointment in my family, my mother wanted me to be an attorney, and I think my father thought I should have a more responsible position somehow. But outside of that, I haven't been affected much by worries about stereotypes I guess.

Mike: It may be the fact that we're males. I don't know, stereotypes usually come from actual facts. I don't know what the ratio is, male-female for librarianship, but many times I find myself in meetings or someplace and I look in the room and it's just like gee, four, five guys and seventy-seven women, so (laughter) you know. There's a reason I guess for that to a certain extent, that it's female. But the stereotype I guess is always, the word that keeps coming up of course is a very stern woman who is shushing everyone and doesn't want anyone to make any noise in the place. In my case it hasn't really, for obvious reasons, affected me that much. I'm a male, although as I say I feel actually uncomfortable, a few times, as I say if I go to a room that is largely female. In some cases in which everyone is a female. It gets to me sometimes. Linda wants me to mention the fact that I wasn't born here, I wasn't born in New Jersey, I guess that's another part of the stereotype. I don't carry it with me, I was born in Peru, I lived in New York for 6-7 years, I went to the university there, (name) and (name) for my library science program. So if you factor that in, I don't know, I've never given it that much thought, because I felt like when I came here, I just wanted to immerse myself into the culture.

Linda: Well, I remember this because it made me so uncomfortable, on several occasions in the old days when you worked at our desk, people would come to me instead of you because you looked as though you came from another country. You didn't meet the stereotype and I find actually that lots of people are, in public, are really, really-they make fun of it- but they're very comfortable with the stereotype. It's relaxing, they know what to expect, it's a known factor, and that's, you know, so much in life is very confusing, if they can decide that librarians are like this, and men are like that, and middle-aged African American women are like that, they think, "oh, ok, I know what to

expect, I don't have to be surprised." Although, of course we do sometimes surprise them.

Mike: You see, maybe it bothered you, maybe you're more conscious about those things, I do notice sometimes, and I observe it too, when you're on the desk, and many times it's two of us at the reference desk, could be another female or another male, you know some people will go to a certain person, they have a certain preference, they want to talk to a male, they want to talk to a female, maybe feel more comfortable talking to an older female or a younger one, so really, I don't see it. I really don't, the way you're expressing it.

Linda: Well, it's true, people sometimes...

Mike: Have their own preferences.

Linda: ...it's true, pick Henry because he's a man.

Jenny: For me, I guess the stereotypes don't really bother me, but I find that sometimes when I tell people what I do, they're shocked, they can't believe that I'm a librarian (laughter). I mean I'm 29 but I look like I'm 16, so I think they think, "oh, librarians are supposed to be middle-aged women with buns and sensible shoes." It's funny yesterday at the reference desk I was with..., who is an older gentleman in the department, and a man came up and we were both looking at him, and he said, "Oh, I'm going to go to him, he knows more." That didn't bother me, I thought it was funny, actually. And so did (librarian name) and so did the guy. Occasionally stuff like that happens, but the thing is that happened in my job I worked at before I even became a librarian, stuff like that would happen. People would choose to go to the other person because they just assumed that person would know more. So I don't think that that's particularly a librarian thing. But I find people are actually usually quite interested when they find out I'm a librarian and they're curious as to why. What made me become a librarian and that sort of thing. Yeah, for me the age thing is the biggest thing that I've noticed.

Henry: I think I felt that people expect a certain gravities now from me now that I'm sixty.

Mike: Older and wiser?

Henry: Like, "oh, he must know more." Actually someone was referred to me from the book information desk, this lady was sent up to see [me], he's been here thirty years. So I said actually, this was an art thing, I haven't worked with them since '97, yeah, I think that's true.

Mike: I think that we all do it. Just brings to mind, a few days ago I went with a friend of mine to a store and he was buying paint, it was a weekend and the person manning that desk was a young man so we were asking questions about you know, you need to get the right color of the paint and I kept saying to my friend, I don't think he knows. And here I

was saying it because maybe some of the body language, not knowing or not giving enough information. But I remember saying to my friend, we should probably come back when the older person is here. And to make it worse of course, we get the paint, and it's really wrong. So I said see, I told you, so we go back and indeed on the regular day it was a person who had more experience, an older person, and he corrected the problem. Actually when I'm, I mean we find ourselves believing that sometimes, I do it too.

Margaret: I hear people saying what bothered them. When I brought up the stereotypes--I don't like them, but I never allowed them to bother me. Because when I came to the library, I was a library assistant, I was size 5, and mini dresses were in (laughter) and no one thought that, they just thought I was a person using the library, they didn't think I was working in the library. And then when they did, they didn't take me seriously. You know, they'd ask you for something, and then they'd go, "Yeah, honey..." (laughter). If they could see me now they wouldn't know who I was back then, but it's different, whether or not you let those stereotypes bother you and keep you from doing your job. I think it's just bad to have all those negative stereotypes because oftentimes you have those quiet people, and people think you're not, there's something wrong with you because you don't fit what they have been told a "librarian" should look like.

Linda: I've always thought stereotype isn't just these interactions, but also about money, salaries and so forth. "You know, they're just girls, they have husbands." These old fashioned "Leave it to Beaver" things? And you know I know this interview isn't for us but I can't wait to read your paper because I bet you know the history of this. I always think, how did this get going? And I think about movies in the, let's say thirties and forties, where I would guess that the schoolmarms and the librarians were people who, maybe this is an out of joint sense of history, but I imagine that maybe when they were young, WWI was happening and their fiancées died and they just ended up being single women without much money. And so they didn't have, they couldn't be lipstick librarians because lipstick would be too expensive actually for a single woman on a terrible salary, probably. I've got this big feminist thing going...I just always thought that we held onto that thing from way back when. It may no longer be true, but it's I think really mean to middle-aged women who are more about what we do than what we look like. But also I have been thinking about growing my hair out and putting it in a bun! Because I think they're pretty (laughter).

Henry: I guess it also depends on what desk you're at maybe. Because when people said are you really a librarian, are you trained, upstairs at the reference departments people know they're going to Arts and Humanities, many of them don't know what humanities means, but it sounds like a big impressive thing. But when you were in the branch, or sometimes even African-American Room, it may or may not be a librarian, right, an MLS?

Margaret: Right, there might not be. There are some branches that are manned and I used to handle branches before I had my MLS. So it's true. I was at, I remember (name of branch) once I was working and this gentleman was asking me for a lot of literature and I was giving it to him and he said, "thank you very much, what do you do?" and I said

“well, I’m in charge of this branch now,” and he says, “oh, you’re in charge? I would never give a woman a job to be in charge...”

Mike: He said that...?

Margaret: He said it right to my face and I said, “well, we’re all different.”

Linda: After you just helped him too.

Mike: You should have said give me that back.

Margaret: Well it was fine that I could help him, he just didn’t like the fact that I was in charge. He just thought it should be a male.

Henry: What do you think he did for a living? Like he was into some very traditional job? Was he...probably not college educated, I’d guess.

Margaret: I think he was, yes.

Henry: Oh really?

Margaret: That’s just the way he felt.

Henry: Because usually you think that better-educated people are broader-minded...

Mike: Not necessarily. It’s amazing.

Margaret: Yeah, it is amazing. You don’t let that get to you. But you experience...as a woman I’m going to experience different things than you would, because women just do.

Linda: Yeah, it’s interesting, actually, we do but sometimes actually people will say things about women to men that they wouldn’t say to us, or they’ll say things to me about other races that they wouldn’t say to your face. I recently had the opportunity to ponder whether I represent the public library, that lovely generosity, that politeness that you expressed by saying we all have different opinions or what I did say when he said, “you didn’t understand that word, did you?” I said, “yes, it’s just too ugly to respond to.” He wasn’t talking about race there, he was talking about a person on staff her perceives to be a gay man. And he used a really ugly word, I don’t like it.

Henry: We might touch on that. I wish I could remember, it was someplace that really surprised me, like a very recent *Library Journal*, and they were talking about a young female librarian who was getting married to a male librarian she met in library school, and she says, “I’m so happy I met” whatever his name is, because he was the only straight male in library school (laughter). And once somebody called me up with a sports question, and I didn’t know it off the top of my head, and he said something like,

“faggot” and hung up the phone. But usually you don’t get that, people in libraries are usually the more refined people in the society, you’re not...more educated people or...

Mike: We get all walks of life in the public library.

Linda: And you haven’t worked on Q&A NJ.

Mike: Oh my God, that’s another one.

Henry: But that’s usually the kids, from what I understand.

Linda: The ruder ones. Yeah, kids testing boundaries I suppose.

CL: It’s fascinating that that perception’s there, even among library students and librarians, because really, that was not, really not the experience in my cohort in library school, definitely. But they still say it.

Linda: So it is true about, to go further into gender, that our profession is only now changing in terms of library directors. Our library has never had a female director.

Henry: What about Miss (name)

Linda: Oh, Miss (name), how could I forget!

Henry: She was so Teutonic and forceful it was...

Linda: Yeah.

Henry: She was noted all around the country because she was female. It was the big exception.

Mike: She was an exception, really.

Linda: Not just our library, many libraries, the community might feel more comfortable with men. You know, they know how to do business and running a library is kind of a business. “Well you know, it’s nice to give the ladies a chance, but let’s get some experience because we want it done right,” whatever it happens to be. I hear that even now.

Henry: Makes me wonder, combining the two factors, should it be a straight man?

Linda: Oh yeah.

Mike: So to really get to the top, if you’re a straight male in library science, you’re going to do very well...

Linda: There you go George! Your mother will be proud!

Mike: Yeah, because I bet a gay male is not awfully well-received, at least in public libraries as a director or...

Linda: I think lots of them could be closeted. I know even on our staff I remember a person talking about helping somebody, this was a man, and I forget what the situation was but he said, "well, you know, I'm a man working in a library, they probably think I'm"—for the tape recorder, notice a limp wrist, is that what you do? (Laughter.)

Jenny: I was thinking, I don't really have any historical facts to back up what I'm saying, but I just was thinking about women, and say before, just before I guess my mom was growing up, women basically in the workforce, you were going to be a librarian, a teacher, or a nurse. I'm making a broad generalization. Or a secretary. Those were your choices. And in general, when you got married, you quit your job. Both of my, well my one grandmother worked in a factory, but my other grandmother was a teacher, and when she got married to my grandfather, she quit her job. So talking about there being a grain of truth in the stereotype, if you were a librarian still working, well maybe it's because you went to that profession and you never got married so you became a middle-aged woman with a bun and sensible shoes. Just as a matter of that you never stopped working. And I'm making generalizations and I have nothing to back up...

Linda: So all librarians are lesbians!

Jenny: No! But I'm saying they never got married. You can be a spinster.

Mike: I was going to say, librarians, teachers, nurses, but for some reason librarians, in the media, it seems to be harsher. I always think of the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, remember that scene...

Jenny: Yes!

Mike: It was the worst thing that could have happened to her, it was my God, poor woman, she was a librarian and she was not married, she was miserable.

Jenny: He never came to marry her.

Henry: There was something in there that just implies that she was a miserable woman.

Henry: Mm-hm.

Mike: And an ugly streak, I don't know how many other films have been made in which they portray librarians in that...such a wonderful movie, actually, such a theme in there...

Jenny: The same thing in *Music Man*. Marian is the librarian until he comes to town, Professor Harold Hill comes and marries her and she doesn't have to be a librarian anymore!

Mike: I know there's another movie, for instance something new, I never saw it, *Party Girl*, but they say it breaks stereotypes, but I don't know about that.

Linda: And what I was thinking also is before I was talking about the comfort level of having stereotypes of the world, I've been given to understand that in pornography, the librarian is really a favorite treat, you know (laughter), takes off her glasses and you ravish her...of course as a woman, you're nice to men and they think you're immediately flirting with them has been my experience. Even now that I'm middle-aged, and all that stuff, so I don't know whether it's just being nice means to a lot of men you're flirting, because I like being nice. "Why did you become a librarian?" Because I like to be nice to people. But I think then when you fold in, "Ooo, what a challenge, it's like a virgin or something, ravish her." It's pretty weird. So that bothers me a little bit. Not that I'm necessarily against pornography, although I'm not keen on it in the library, it bothers me when somebody is a little too friendly to me.

Henry: Yeah, I've noticed that, and I think that's a very interesting point, whether especially male patrons perceive friendly, caring female librarians as flirtatious or something. Of course one part of it is that so many public servants are so *rude* these days. I recently was calling a state office relating to the (name) school district because I wanted to find out some information about (nearby town) which is in (name) school district. The person who answered the phone at the regional office, I mean she just said, "Yeah?" You know it's just like oh my word. Some of our librarians are so nice and caring and careful with the patrons, but I worry, I think gee, what is the guy thinking? But I guess it's not like they're going to jump over the desk and attack the librarian, so...

Linda: I beg your pardon! (Name) rescued me once.

Mike: Really? Oh my God.

Linda: Yeah, and it's not just once, but things have happened to me.

Jenny: Yeah, sometimes I find that myself. You want to be friendly and you want to be helpful but then sometimes you just get a bad feeling and you need to back off. There was a patron who asked me out a few weeks ago who was back again yesterday. I wasn't particularly friendly at all. And then I was like well, am I changing my whole personality because of this? But also you don't want to encourage him. Sometimes I feel a little intimidated.

Mike: Well you have a right to be intimidated and unnerved, really, by that experience. You feel vulnerable there.

Henry: I felt that Business, Science, and Technology librarians, excluding female librarians, are a bit colder toward the public.

Mike: There's more of a business type?

Henry: Yeah, more business-like!

Mike: Yeah I noticed that when business came in, I work in the business, science, and technology department, it used to be social science, education, well anyway, business combined with us and yeah, a lot of the staff who came in have brought that business type approach to the patrons and sort of, I don't know, a detached politeness? It can work in your favor sometimes I guess, depending on the situation.

Linda: I just...I can't do that.

Mike: I know, you're in the humanities, you're more service-oriented.

Linda: Well, you know, our library, unlike (other library I interviewed) has too few signs, people look lost, life is big, it's confusing. I would rather take the flirtations of whoever and help the majority than be cold. I can't do that, I just can't.

Jenny: Yeah, I don't want to change my personality, change the way I behave. But I do feel sometimes that I'm too friendly.

Linda: No!

Mike: No, actually, we hope you don't lose that.

Jenny: Well, I hope not too. I worked in the county clerk's office, well I'm comparing, being a public servant, it's basically the same thing but a different environment. I became very cold and hard-hearted. People were a lot meaner there than they are here.

Mike: You adapt to the environment.

Jenny: Yeah, you adapt to the environment. But I'm just saying sometimes I feel like I need to keep more of a distance for safety reasons, basically.

Henry: Yeah, well it might be a consideration.

Linda: I've seen you modulate your behavior, depending on the situation. I think that's appropriate. Sometimes we need to in a way educate people about how to *be* in the world. It's not in our job descriptions, but we've just got to do it. You don't tell me you have nice looking thisses or thats (laughter).

CL: This is kind of off a little bit, but something that we talked about yesterday too, getting back to even the library space again, signage and whatnot. Someone brought up the fact that there's another library in central Jersey where the director has a marketing background, or the former director, I'm not sure. They thought that maybe that was affecting, sort of trickling down to the staff somehow. The person does have an MLS, but really came from a marketing background first. We talked about maybe library schools

should offer an MLS/MBA track, or MLS with marketing, something like that. Do you all have any thoughts on that, or think maybe that would...if more of the people running libraries were women with these degrees, do you think that might have any impact on how the public perceives library staff? Could you envision that?

Linda: Our state librarian doesn't have that background, I think she is a former teacher actually. But she seems to have learned so much from as a director going to the chamber of commerce and rotary clubs, she's just really, really keen on interacting with business. Of course she demanded that the state library come up with the marketing campaign that includes the Super Librarian. Some librarians have told me, "Oooo, I'd look like a bunch of grapes if I wore that" (laughter).

Henry: I don't think the public generally knows enough about what goes on in libraries to really form judgments. I got a master's in public administration with the GI Bill and sometimes I think that makes me take a more pragmatic approach than some people. I think what's the cost-benefit of this particular approach or something. But I don't think the general public really knows exactly where the money's going. If they knew, really, how small a percentage in most libraries is going towards materials, they'd probably close us down.

Margaret: I think that's a very good point. Those who don't know enough about libraries. And a lot of people really don't care to know that. They just want, when they come in, do you have what they need, are you able to help them. They figure that's something you're supposed to know. You're supposed to know how libraries work. You're supposed to keep it working correctly. And just very few people are really interested in that. I think that if there was more interest, maybe we would also operate a little differently. But the fact that people don't express anything, unless something goes wrong, then they're, "I'll tell the director!" then they'll go off. Otherwise they just want their problem connected, their need met, and as long as you meet their needs, they don't seem to really care. The people that I've dealt with don't ask questions about the budget or the administrator or anything like that. Just do you have what I need? And I think that probably, back to your question, it *would* be helpful. I know that they do have the master's/JD combinations, they do have other combinations I remember from library school but I didn't see one in business, and I think that would be very good. People who aspire to get to the top, they need that, they need to have a great background in marketing because to make the library more visible in the community and also attractive. People come in, they like...we've made great strides here over the years. I've seen them make changes to make it more attractive. I think it would be better. To their advantage. The more you know, the less mistakes. You don't find out later, you know at the beginning.

Jenny: I think the attractiveness is important. When I was in library school, at Rutgers also, I am embarrassed to admit that many Friday nights I would go to the Borders because I wasn't doing anything else that exciting, but at the Borders in (town) they'd have musicians on a Friday night playing...

Mike: A café environment.

Jenny: The café, there's music playing, people wandering around, and the place would be *packed* on a Friday night, packed, with people at Borders. And I was like alright, there's a lot of dorks like me, hanging out at Borders on a Friday night. I always think that, sometimes I'll go the Barnes & Noble in (town name) which also has a little café, and they've got the nice easy chairs, which, I realize here, would last about two weeks before they'd be ruined, but I often think, this place is packed, and why, what can we do, to get these people at the library instead? Maybe it's because of the evenings, but it can't, you go there in the middle of the day and it's so crowded. I think part of it is they tend to be open and bright, and the thing is here, if you have one copy of a book, well here usually it's lost or missing, or it's checked out, and if you don't get that book you can't find it. Whereas at Barnes & Noble they'll have five copies on the shelf. Maybe that's part of it. My sister said to me that if the library had books set up like they do at Barnes & Noble, she'd find it easier to find stuff, but we do have our new books when you first walk in. I don't know in terms of marketing...

Mike: Isn't it that everything smells newer there

Jenny: That's it too...it's not that musty smell.

Mike: You walk in, and it's this wonderful place, even though it's business-oriented and they don't care too much about you unless you buy the book. But, you do get that sense of you know, what a nice place I can sit down here, how about a cappuccino, and every book you go through, the shelves are clean...

Jenny: Nice and neat.

Mike: You have quite a few choices.

Linda: They have targeted the main thing that people think about in terms of libraries as opposed to librarians, this is, which is books, or now it's books and music and DVD's.

Mike: We worry about the collection.

Linda: The collection. And we are trying to do the collection but also answer questions and teach classes and have programs and give resume assistance and all kinds of stuff. Not that Barnes & Noble doesn't do programs also, but between, "Eww, I don't know who touched that book before me" and the focus on the main thing that people associate frankly with libraries, the collection, and think that's the secret to their success. For sure if you asked a reference question of those people, maybe I'll be nearby and say, "Oh, you know what? Here, use this book, here, let's find it together." I'm being the librarian for Barnes & Noble.

Mike: That's when you hit reality. The distinction is you're at Borders, right. By the way I really don't like going shopping at malls, I have no patience for a store, except Borders or Barnes and Noble. It's a nice place to hang out. But the difference comes when you,

something comes to your head and you want to ask a question, and you hit a wall. They're not librarians, they're not going to find you that information. That service is not there.

Margaret: But even though the service isn't there, there's such an attraction to draw you in, and I think that if libraries would focus more on that, on bringing the people in, once we get them in the door, then we'll work with them.

Mike: Well there is that element that we should imitate or we should get that Borders thing or whatever that's going on with them to make our libraries more appealing.

Margaret: Right, it's like we want you here, we want you to come into the store, so we put comfortable chairs for you...

Linda: Clean bathrooms!

Margaret: ...so you can browse the books. And even if you stay a little bit too long, go over and have a latte. Enjoy yourself. But you know, they're a business.

Mike: In a way it really brings you back to the point you mentioned. They're really running a business. A director of a library really has to turn it into more of a business operation without losing our main...

CL: Somehow you still have to maintain that service...

Mike: You have to strike a balance in there.

Henry: I think one thing that we have a big advantage, recently, over the bookstores is our public internet connections. It's really evident in a little library like (name) across the river, it used to be the deadest place, it was an embarrassment. And now, you walk in, they have like twenty computer terminals, that's the library. And there's a few books around the sides of the room. But it's such a lively place now. I think maybe by association that rubs off on the librarian. And even in terms of what MARGARET was saying about having business degrees, and that type of thing. I think computer experience is maybe even more important now. If I were a board member and I was looking for a library director and I knew like some past catastrophes, I know like when (other library) computerized their catalog, they lost all their records and things, I think people really want, does this person know computers? I think if you know computers it adds status, I think if you have computers in your library it adds status.

Linda: But you know in a way what you're saying also makes me think of something that I've heard that may contribute to the stereotype also. The public sector in this Republican era takes care of the have-nots. Those people, oh, compassion fatigue, we have a computer at home, only *those* people need the library for computers. And so we by association with this welfare institution we also are in the Republican mindset--there again, here I go with my own mind--we are guilty by association, we too are like oh, not so

smart, clean, you know whatever people think about poor people, that's what we are now. The way people who work in prisons, and so forth also, you know, well you couldn't get a real job in a real hospital, so you're working as the prison doctor. It's funny.

Jenny: Yeah, the computer thing, before I worked here I worked in (town name), a lot more affluent community and people really didn't use the computers. You might have one or two. We had four computers set up there, at the...never at the whole time I worked there, did I see all four computers in use at the same time. And I would say nine times out of ten they were immigrants using the computers. It was not your average resident. I looked at the census, I think (town name) has like 91% white, it wasn't...people in (town name) use the library for pleasure reading, we had a very good following for programs, programming on Sunday afternoons, which we got a good crowd for, and then the children's, the story time coming in. It's hard, something like this, the situation (here) is so different, it's like apples and oranges. Here, I feel like we're helping people live their lives, helping them complete, you know finding jobs. I was helping a guy yesterday doing an online application at (large corporation). You help people with FAFSA forms and that sort of thing, whereas in...

Henry: That doesn't even appear.

Jenny: Occasionally, but it was not at all like here. So it's kind of hard to make a general statement about libraries. It's just so different.

Linda: But you know, I think the majority of non-urban libraries, the library is this nice thing, like sort of a socialite, having nice little parties, programs, and the leisure reading. So that's another kind of guilt by association. It's a frill. Nobody wants to get rid of libraries because we do kind of associate them with Plato and Shakespeare. At the same time how many smaller libraries are used is the relaxation, pleasure, recreation stuff with an afterthought to oh yeah, Johnny you need to get your homework done, go to the library. So for kids, it's serious but for adults...and then so we're "juvenilized," that's another stereotype. We are sort of you know, yeah, housewives kind of. Just, you know, I'm just a housewife, I'm just a librarian. It's very old-fashioned. That seems to operate, don't you think?

Henry: It's interesting, I guess some people may perceive us inner city librarians as pitiable, you know, what are they doing in there with all those minorities. And then more liberal elements of the society may say these are very useful people in our society. So regarding the perception of librarians, there may be a big split. I never really thought about it.

Jenny: I loved my job in (town name) and I loved the people I worked with and I had good patrons and stuff but I feel like being a librarian here, whereas there I felt like a social director, I didn't feel like I was ...

Linda: When you applied I remember you said I'd do anything, but I really kind of prefer not to run programs. There's a contrast in purpose with the recreational aims of other

libraries but I do think some of our colleagues across the nation say “oh, you work in (name of city), I guess you help people with—it’s not really professional work—help people find places to learn to read.”

Mike: It’s more like social work, they get that connotation, we’re helping.

Linda: Or, you know, you help people with the *World Book Encyclopedia*, which, you know, sometimes actually could be a little challenging now and then, but it’s not oh, well, we happen to be the statewide resource for blah blah blah, and we’re answering your tough questions. “Oh, yeah, that’s right, you have all the old stuff, they tell me.”

Henry: Hmmm.

Mike: Oh my God.

Linda: The old stuff. Which we do. But we’re not top notch in some people’s minds. I go to a lot of meetings so...

Mike: And what is the perception?

Linda: What I’m describing sometimes takes place. That’s one reason I try to talk about us, because I do want them to for their sake, for their patrons’ sake, use us for the statewide resources and other questions because you know like for literature, we don’t have the contract, but we’ve got way more than (name of county) library which is an okay library and all, but we have more. We even have a staff, I think, that’s more expert in that kind of stuff.

CL: That’s similar to what came up yesterday. Someone said that they don’t think of the image of the library is going to change until librarians decide more what they’re going to be as a library. In (name of other library interviewed) they’ve been pushing to be more of a cultural center, despite the fact that they’re in a fairly well-off township, there’s still a lot of the tax help, and there are people who come in and really need assistance with filling out a job application, for example, so they do that too. They really think that they can put themselves out there as not just a library, and get those comfy chairs and have areas where they can...everything, yeah. Areas with the comfy chairs where they can sort of sit and help with the job application.

Mike: Community service.

CL: Yeah, still a library, but so much more. It sounds like (this library) is doing so much more with the community.

Mike: My perception of libraries, what comes to mind sometimes, I like to travel a lot, I go many places in the states and other places and many times you go to a town and you see the libraries. You don’t go out of your way to go to the libraries...

Linda: I do!

CL: I do too.

Mike: ...some people. That's not really in my mind, the fact that I happen to believe the library's probably the friendliest place in town. If you think of a town that you don't know, you don't know anyone there, and you want to get information or anything, usually the library in that particular town or city will be there. We are friendly, we are a place for people to come in and ask a question.

Linda: Interestingly enough, that's not always my experience. And maybe it's because again, I'm seeing who I am, and here I am talking so much and all but, I'm really such a shy person and I think that shy people are often drawn to our profession. So I'll often go to libraries...

Mike: You have poor experiences?

Linda: People have their heads down. They're not like us. We're pretty proactive by comparison to a lot of other places I've visited. Once I engage them though, I find that they will talk.

Mike: Oh, you're talking about specifically the librarians themselves. I'm talking in general, the culture of a library is...

Linda: I think the first people everybody always encounters are the circulation people, which can be a whole different culture. I've worked at circulation myself.

Henry: I was going to ask, do you always know if it's a librarian or a non-professional.

Linda: Well I don't necessarily know, I think I've got a good sniffer. But I can't be sure because some really amazing people, before they get an MLS, are doing the job and then other times there are librarians who should have chosen something else perhaps.

Henry: I don't know if library schools really taught much about being proactive and extending yourself to the public. Which doctors and medical schools do now, that's a big thing. Relating to your patients.

Linda: Since I think in the '80s remember (name) even came here to talk about marketing in the '80s?

Mike: I remember that, yeah.

Linda: So since then I think marketing, customer service, a lot of librarians put our heads down and say, "If I wanted to go into business I would have gone into business. What do I have to do this for?" Now we have Barnes & Noble, Borders and the Internet, and we know we *do* have to do those things.

Margaret: I just have to say, you said that the librarians yesterday were saying that we have to find out what you're going to do as a librarian, know what you're going to do. Well the society and the field is constantly changing what you do. Certainly when I went to library school, I didn't know anything about computers. And that was my first class I took, Introduction to Library Technology. And I thought oh, I'm going to learn a little bit. And it was all this heavy computer stuff, the ones and the zeros and I was like, "What?" I didn't even know how to turn a computer on, much less how to use it. There was just so much to learn, and it's constantly changing. I'm sure they're teaching different things now than when I went. So it's very difficult. I mean you can have basic things, but as the information world is changing, so are our jobs changing. And I think we have to work on the image that's out there, and it has to change as well as society is changing. Because if you have a really bad, negative image, people come to you if they need you, but they really don't appreciate what you do for them like they should. They'll come into the library because they need information and someone said go there, when they don't really appreciate it.

Linda: It's just like you're triggering in my mind something that I think is really important. We're talking about people don't come to us, we have to come to them a whole lot more. Like your department, community library services, you go to meetings, you go to board things, you go to city hall, you're there, we...sit and wait. We think ok, we've got a web site, but still people have to come to it. Every year I resolve to do more of that and every year shyness gets the better of me, or time, we don't have time to do one more thing it seems. But we should, we have to.

Margaret: I think that the image, we have a lot to do with it. And I know a lot of people who are working on the image, they don't like to be called librarians. Everybody's an information *specialist*. It sounds better, and it *is* more attractive to the public. "I want to go to this specialist." That person's still a librarian, but you know...

Mike: One of the things that I think maybe will change what people perceive of librarians' image is technology, probably, eventually. You say librarian, you still get that, eh, someone working in an old building with no computers. Which in reality could be out there a lot, all over the place. But the advent of the Internet and computers and all of that maybe will make librarians be more respected I guess, or have that, give them that edgy thing. I don't know, that hip or that kind of feeling about them.

Margaret: I don't know because I've been to meetings and I've heard people say well with the Internet, why do we need the librarians. They don't even understand the difference. They don't understand the information on the Internet, the ability to evaluate that information. Always when I'm having class I tell them to use the Internet, but what you need to look for.

Mike: Right.

Margaret: We do a lot of teaching students how to use the Internet. There's so much to be done. The role of a librarian is changing so much. You went to library school for one thing and you learn this and then you come and you find your job is moving and things are changing and it's incorporating so much more. For instance, people come to you and they say what's the stock market value on this right now. You can tell them. Doctor said I have this illness, what is this, you say here. You're a person, you use those computers, but you're able to know how to access that information, and a lot of them don't, so they come to you. I don't think computers are replacing librarians, I don't think they ever will. But people are thinking that.

Jenny: I think computers have changed the way at least kids who have grown up with them, it changes the way they...learn. I don't know how to phrase it because when we do Q&A NJ, the electronic reference service, the kids will ask a question, and you'll give them a website to answer the question. "Well, can you give me a list?" They don't want to read this page and pick out the answer. They want the answer there.

Linda: Yeah, we've had students who said I need to get definitions of these words and then please give me sentences for each word. Especially the academic librarians get very, very unhappy about that. No, we don't do it for you. I sometimes will, but...

Jenny: I think that's part of the reason why...that really annoys me on Q&A, when the kids can't read the page. But I think that's part of it. Maybe I'm going too far but like ok, they'll give you a book, but then I have to look in the book for the answer. Whereas if you can look on the Internet and find it there...I'm being very broad, like MARGARET said, they can't always figure out what's good and what's bad and the best place to find it and that sort of thing. There's just impatience? I don't know.

Mike: No, some are just plain brats.

Jenny: I agree with you on that one.

Linda: I don't think that people expect that kind of "one term paper well done" from their doctors or lawyers, or social workers, even. Although, a little bit more from the social workers, because guess what, another female profession. I don't need a whole lot of respect, I just don't, but I would like not to be sworn at.

Henry: One thing which is changing very rapidly that's not being written about is the big drop-off in males not going to college. It's being suggested increasingly that we're going to be a two level society of female-led professions, I think they predominate now at medical schools and very close in law schools. Guys, their good-paying jobs are going to be like installing Comcast networks or something for cable TV or something like that.

Linda: They want to be Donald Trump's apprentice, or...

Henry: Well they're not going to be because I know a bunch of boys in (town name) and (town name), the girls are going to college and the boys are, well, at this point they're

floundering. But if they're getting anything, for the most part maybe they can put wires together and they're going to try to get money to get a truck and there's a big need for people to install cable so they're going to get a job that way. So I think this is changing.

Mike: Do you think this is an urban phenomenon? Just this area, maybe?

Henry: No, this is nationwide. The guys are falling way behind. They project it forward that eventually in some year there's going to be the last male going to college (laughter).

Linda: But I thought a lot more men still are getting the MBA's and such.

Henry: Maybe in business.

Linda: Not going into the so-called professions, but...you know one thing that we always talk about in our field is we all, we're too white or too whatever, we're too old. The oldest profession, we are. Tell somebody who is an undergrad struggling oh, yeah, you have to spend all this money on your MLS and then pay it back, and you're going to earn this compared to what you could earn selling cars. Go find a Lexus dealer and sell Lexus, and you'll make more money. Money isn't everything of course but if you're thinking about stuff.

Henry: That's a tricky question, salary, and I thought we should get into that because a lot of people, you get status in this country if you're well paid. But it's so hard to get a grip on. If you look at teaching, and maybe librarians are similar to teachers, since people are paid by the local school district, there's a tremendous variation. In (town name) they're making 70, 80,000 teaching in the high school. In (town name) they don't have a high school but in the grammar school, one of the lowest-paid, they're making \$30,000. So I think maybe the public, maybe they don't know what we're making or don't realize the variation. Some librarians are making pretty good dollars these days and some are still, based on their education and what they're doing they're not nearly being compensated the way they should be. I think this creates confusion for the public, you know. What exactly, how do I size these people up and evaluate them? What are they making?

Jenny: Yeah but if you look at, you can make the generalization that professions that were stereotypically, predominately female, you make less money than male-dominated professions. Social work, librarianship, teaching. Nurses I think are making more now (agreement voiced) because really there's such a high demand for them. It's like your work isn't valued as much. Here, you have to have a master's degree and to live (in this area) is not cheap. You don't make any money! You wind up living with your parents when you're twenty-nine years old! (Laughter.)

Mike: I think it's one of the highest standards of living in the area, and we pay for it. We pay dearly.

Henry: I must say there are many, many years, it took a long time to get up to a high salary for me. Many years at \$12,000, \$13,000, \$14,000, going up through the '70s. I guess maybe when you consider the time put in, it's not very high paying.

Margaret: I think those salaries of course are affected by, of course again, the image that people have of librarians. I don't have any documentation either, but you were talking about as a women's profession and the professions you were talking about, or jobs. I think that people look at librarianship among women as an extension of nurturing their children. Like as a nurse, you just continue nurturing. Teacher, you continue nurturing. And they just look at it as "it's just what women do." It should be like a woman's job, you just continue to nurture. I mean, "what do they want, you weren't paid when you were at home nurturing, you're at least getting something now. What do you want?" They don't understand. Of course there are others who don't understand why you need a master's degree anyway.

Linda: I think in my utopia, people would be paid in reverse order of the status of their jobs, so that garbage collectors would be paid as much as Bill Gates. And Bill Gates would be paid as much as garbage collectors, and librarians would be somewhere in-between that. Of course, you know, that's just utopia and who would create the formulas, I don't know.

Margaret: You know I was listening to the news and they were talking about a homeowners rebate in New York coming up, and the first thing they said was well, we'll have to get the money from somewhere, they'll be cutting funds to the libraries. First thing that came up.

Mike: Again?

Linda: They always do that in New York.

Mike: I think New Yorkers are notorious for killing libraries.

Margaret: Right. And they're going to do it again.

Linda: Now there's a place, I'm sorry, if you go to a New York public library, the staff isn't awfully nice. They're grumpy.

Mike: The service...

Linda: And they do have the attempt to look like Borders but it doesn't work. It's a mess. With leftover furniture, we know, we've done that too, you're making a display that is totally ugly and crowded and unappealing.

Mike: Well it really goes along with the state of affairs of libraries. They're poorly paid and everything. I always remember when I was living in New York going through library school, going to a library to do some homework with some other of my colleagues, and

walking into New York Public Library, going to the third floor, if I'm correct, walking there and there's a desk, the elevator door opens and this woman's sitting there and of course the place is bustling and we wanted to know where certain periodicals were so we go and ask where we can go and get them. The woman said, "You see this sign?" We couldn't understand what she was saying at first. She said, "You see this sign?" I said, "What sign?" And she was pointing to a little sign on the side of her desk saying something about reference is not here, reference is down the other side of the room. We were just stunned at the way she was talking. She was angry. So that was my experience with New York Public Library. I said oh my God, this place is, this is my first experience with them. I don't want to pick on them but many times when I was going down there seeing that type of public service, it was really horrible.

Linda: I think of Sophie's Choice, remember she comes up and says, "I'd like to read the poetry of Emily Dickens." And the *man* librarian (makes angry face), "There is no such thing." (Laughter.) So I mean, we have really bad statistics. Actually there are studies on how 50% of the answers librarians give are wrong. Of course I've come to learn also that other professions have very similar statistics, but somehow it seems like when we make the mistake it's, I don't know, we're know-nothings. I guess they sue doctors and lawyers. Not always.

CL: I was interested in what you had said earlier, I think it connects up with this latest round of subjects. The guilt thing, the librarian guilt thing.

Margaret: I think it's right because you have the... "I'm *just* a librarian." Just. I think that's the image there.

Jenny: There's somewhat of an inferiority complex, but I feel like there's two extremes. You have the inferiority complex, but some people take themselves way too seriously. The thing that drove me *insane*, and LINDA knows because I complain about it all the time, on the Infolink listserv about the stupid *Woman's Day* competition. I thought, what a cute idea, do you know about this? In *Woman's Day* magazine they had a competition. You could be a librarian for the day, and you could go and work at a library. Now I thought, what a great idea! People's responses were like oh, that's great, I love the library and stuff. Now, people were like you know...

Linda: It wasn't people. It was male librarians.

Mike: Male specifically?

Linda: Specifically male.

Jenny: Going on and on about...

Mike: Complaining?

Jenny: Complaining, "This is a horrible idea..."

Linda: They said, you know, “and all I got was this lousy t-shirt which was worth fifteen dollars. No, the prize was the opportunity to work in a library, but all these men said “what does this say about the value of our work, fifteen dollars a day...” Two men in particular, I know them well!

Jenny: I was like dudes, relax. You take yourselves way too seriously. It was cute. And the thing is I have friends who are in other professions. My best friend is a photographer, but she always talks about how she loves the library, she goes to the library all the time. There are a lot of people who love the library, and for them to have the chance to spend the day...I mean obviously, it didn't go into detail about what they were going to be doing. Obviously they weren't going to be answering detailed reference questions, they'll probably check out a few books, maybe tell a story at story time. And I thought wow, what a great idea, so many people got so excited. But they were like nuts! I was like, you just need to relax.

Mike: Were these people burnt out, or...?

Jenny: I think totally burnt out.

Linda: No, I don't believe so, I think it's just that male ego, if you'll forgive me for saying so.

Mike: You think so?

Linda: I do.

Mike: Have you actually statistically proven how many men...

Linda: I don't think that all men have male egos.

Mike: I'm just teasing you.

Linda: Oh okay. But these two. I'm going to be on a committee with one of them.

Side conversation leading to:

Linda: I worked in a law library at a university. Already the law faculty had an imperiority complex because people were pretty much saying to them, “those who can, teach.” And they sort of lord it over the librarians. Very strange.

Henry: As public librarians I guess we don't really have anybody to feel inferior to. I know a librarian (name) he went to a private law firm library as a librarian in New York City and he really didn't like it. He said he was really treated poorly. He knew pretty quickly he was not considered to have much worth as a human being.

Mike: You know attorneys' places, there must be some cultural aggressiveness there. Here we go! Remember (colleague name) works with lawyers...he seems to be overwhelmed by the place. The same way probably with school librarians. It's one librarian against like twenty-seven teachers and there's that element of being the lone, aloof person in a school environment.

Linda: Although school librarians are oftentimes used to be study hall teacher, essentially. "Oh, I've got to have a prep time. I'm sending my students to you!" This is when I ran all those teacher institutes. That was burnout city. And of course a lot of them didn't have library degrees.

Henry: Another consideration that occurs to me, and this has always been said of librarians, that they do spend a lot of time, many of them, doing non-professional things. That can be boring, I don't know to what extent the public's aware of it, but I think we are aware—sorting mail or something. The reference desk I think is always interesting, but frankly some of the off-desk stuff is kind of depressing.

Mike: There's something about our career that we go to library school and we learn the basics of reference and all of that, but there's always something in librarianship/service provider there that carries more than that. We feel it sometimes when we work in the library and we're here, actually sometimes as you mention we do things that are not even librarian stuff, we carry over that extra service kind of a thing. That may have that connotation.

Henry: I mean I find myself mending books sometimes just because it's inconvenient to find somebody and try to talk them into mending a couple books.

Linda: It's easier to do it yourself.

Henry: But I don't know, maybe other professions...

Mike: We're the do-gooders.

Linda: Then there are other times when I think that people who, life is changing all the time, and every time I'm ready to be tired I think, "just learn this! Use your master's degree!" So sometimes there's that other end.

Jenny: I think though, too, there's also, the lawyer thing got me thinking about this. I sometimes do think that people look down on us, but then sometimes I think people think of us as being smart.

Mike: That's another stereotype too.

Jenny: That's a stereotype, exactly.

Linda: You've ready every book in the library!

Jenny: I've actually been asked that. Someone said did you have to read all the books in the library to be a librarian. I used to work in the county clerk's office and I dealt with attorneys on a daily basis, real estate attorneys accepting real estate documents. They were so nasty.

Linda: No wonder...no wonder you had an attitude!

Jenny: And then dealing with them on the telephone. They wore you down. I feel like here, here and my other job, I definitely have had bad interactions with patrons. But generally, people are nice and polite.

Henry: It's kinder and gentler.

Jenny: Yeah. If you treat them politely, they'll treat you politely back. You definitely have problems and you definitely get grief. But I think in general people, even if you don't have what they're looking for, if you're nice to them, generally, they'll be ok with it. But in that service you just kind of got beat down. Like people expected you not to know anything. And I did. When I worked at that desk I knew my job. Just because you're a lawyer doesn't mean that you know better than me. But I think in that sense in librarianship I think people do think of you as being...I guess it's different people...some people think you don't even need a degree, but some people think you're smart and you know everything. You kind of get both.

Henry: I read a satisfaction survey of lawyers, and it's very low, generally. People who become lawyers are pretty unhappy with their profession.

Mike: Well their workload is like sixty-five hours or something a week.

Linda: Well I sometimes work that and I'm very satisfied.

Mike: Well Linda, you are an exception to every rule (laughter).

Linda: Thank you. No, I have this big project coming up that I have to get going with.

CL: I'll ask a final question because I got some cool answers yesterday from this one. I didn't ask it, I got the idea from them talking about it. If you were to design the New Jersey librarian, the image that's going to represent librarians in New Jersey, or wherever, what would you come up with? They were actually going to enter a submission for the NJ State Library contest, but they were too busy to get around to it.

Linda: I was going to enter too myself, but this was joking. One was, I actually polled Arts and Humanities and I decided ok, I don't watch too much television so I forget his name, who was, that popular TV show about the mafia family?

Mike: Sopranos?

Linda: Yeah, I was going to do just the face of Tony Soprano with a stick figure, and that was going to be the new librarian.

Mike: Oh my God.

Linda: Sure, I forget what phrase he had but I was going to...

Mike: Every other word would be bleeped, actually (laughter).

Linda: Yeah, it was bleep and then it had something rather, I thought funny and, I thought, great for this. He wasn't a professional librarian, exactly, but he got the job done, I figured. Then the other image I had was, and I've always felt like this in a library, of course maybe other people do too, maybe especially women, I forget which goddess it is in India, with many, many arms, and she's doing it all. She's doing it all.

Mike: Sheba, I think it is.

Linda: Is it Sheba?

Henry: Yeah.

CL: That's very similar to what they wanted to submit. Somebody with lots of arms. And they were going to try to do a, make it gender-neutral, like Pat from Saturday Night Live or something (laughter).

Linda: But you know what definitely we don't want, we want to be as diverse as our communities and diverse as all the different jobs we do. We're no one thing. And I know I do it, once again, I do it to make people comfortable. I will walk up to teenagers and say, "Here I am, your typical librarian, just reminding you that people are trying to concentrate here, and people have been telling me, it's not about me, it's about some other people in this area, they are telling me, that they're having a little difficulty doing so." And they'll say to me, "Yes, Miss Librarian," and they'll imitate my voice and everything. And you know what, if I've gotten them to, I know they're going to forget pretty soon, because that's how you are when you're a teenager, but if I can get them to be happy and get the other people to be happy for a while, here I am! Oh maybe I should be Jesus on the cross, that should be my image, because I've sacrificed my image for the good of the community. (Laughter.) I hope that's not too sacrilegious

Mike: We could have Linda on the cross...

Linda: Super Librarian!

Henry: Maybe there's some animal that would...

Linda: Like a mascot?

Mike: An owl of some sort?

Henry: An owl! An owl, yeah.

Linda: (Librarian name) used to describe (librarian name), she said, "You're just a little terrier going after the information." I think maybe if we used a lot more humor, but humor is very difficult, especially, again, for women, because people think that it's not right, it's not ladylike, and as much as we can...in the world it's hard. Yesterday at this meeting I was at head of (a state library organization) said, "let me stand in front of this table with my back to the other significant people in this particular case. They're used to seeing me from all directions, and this will be a new angle." And I just couldn't help it, I said, "Well as long as you don't invite them to kiss it."

Mike: Boy you're bad.

Linda: And everybody was just so shocked. I thought well, I'm from (name of their city) (laughter). They were shocked but they were happy to be shaken up. Some people like to be comfortable with the stereotype and some people are really, really happy to shake it up. And that's all I have to say about stereotypes.

Linda: I just thought of another...The Thinker, we could be The Thinker.

Jenny: Rodin. I don't know, I think it's just so difficult. Going back to the *Woman's Day* thing, and if you read the literature, like *Library Journal*, you read the little things. People are just, I think everyone just needs to relax. That's my motto for the new librarian. Just don't take it too seriously. But, at the same time, have a little self respect. Like we're talking about the apologizing thing. Don't apologize for yourself, do the best you can but don't take yourself too seriously either. LINDA just kind of covered everything.

Mike: Who came up with the Super Librarian?

Linda: I guess it was probably a committee and an advertising agency. At the state library the person who ran the whole campaign is (name) who is temporary development head while they look for another person, I don't think she wants the job.

Mike: They should ease on the stereotype thing. They should approach it with humor. I think every profession has their own stereotypes, and we really more worry about our own partly because of salaries and I guess our identity in many communities is really pretty low and we're not really treated nicely by the cities. We're the first ones to be dismissed. That's part of the complex I guess.

Margaret: I think you're right. And I think we need to work on our own image, because if people have that image that you're the first to dismiss, they'll keep it if you don't do something to show that you are valuable. If you dismiss me, like the teachers do, you'll

have 2,000 kids running through the city (laughter) so give them whatever they want, whenever they want. And I think that we have to work on our image, I really do. Sometimes we just become comfortable with it, "oh that's just what they say." But I don't think we can ever become comfortable with it, especially if the image is a negative one, it's not producing good things for you. And once people have a good image of you...

Mike: They should have something humorous, like they should still show the older librarian with her glasses and all that, and then the next minute...

Linda: (exclaims something.)

Mike: Wait a minute! She gets transformed, she does the Wonder Woman twist and this super woman librarian comes out with information.

Linda: I was just thinking of like the Black Panthers or something. That's what gets respect, just talking tough and acting tough.

Henry: I think the important thing is just to be proactive and not worry so much about our image. If we're, if it's not doing what Linda said she's found in some libraries, just kind of hiding behind the desk, but finding out, do a cost-benefit analysis--what does your community need, what can you do efficiently to improve situations and going out and doing it, the image will take care of itself.

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