

Our Image in the 1980s

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Introduction

THE ORIGINS OF THE library profession's cautious concern with its image are shrouded in mystery. Some unrevealed research shows that Petsis, a sublibrarian at Alexandria, complained to his superiors that the hieroglyph for librarian contained at least one element that suggested a certain, now undecipherable, inferiority that he felt was unwarranted. Alas, no action seems to have been taken to correct that tragic flaw and the ensuing centuries have seen librarians concerned with their image.

Perhaps it was the reinforcement provided by Melvil Dewey's infamous reference to the librarian as a "mouser in musty books" in the very first issue of the *American Library Journal* in 1876,¹ even though he clearly suggested that it was the image of a time past, a past that set American librarians on the path of self-destruction that has been pursued for well over 100 years. Periodically the furor subsides and we go about our business without the least concern about how we see ourselves and how others see us. The right things are said and we applaud. Then for some unknown reason the issue is revived by a new generation anxious to improve their status and prove themselves. The mid-1980s seem to be such a time as indicated by a spate of local and state library association meetings taking the image of librarianship as a theme. Can anything be done to lay this untoward concern with our outward appearance to rest once and for all? Probably not, and indeed we may not wish to do so. After all, there is only so much one can do with library automation to amuse and entertain the profession. If nothing

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else, our periodic obsession with image offers a rich opportunity for us to be entertained and—if we have the right spirit—to laugh at ourselves.

What Melvil began others continued. There are two alternative themes that we may choose from as we deal with the broad concept of our image. The first, which dates from 1907 when it was enunciated by Edmund Lester Pearson, holds that there is some unique intangible essence that sets a librarian apart and makes him or her instantly recognizable. The other, enunciated by Lawrence Clark Powell in 1962, is that there is among librarians a diversity of personality that makes each of us unique and indistinguishable from our fellow citizens. These contrasting themes are the yin and yang of the image of librarianship. The passive femininity of one and the active masculinity of the other should, without reference to the actual sex of those involved, certainly be regarded as an essential ingredient of the dichotomy and dilemma of our constant dillydallying over what is, after all, a minor aspect of our professional reality.

In his column "The Librarian" for 14 August 1907, Pearson clearly set forth the essence of the single image view of "Our Profession." In that column he wrote:

"We saw you on the train," said one of a group of librarians at Asheville, to another who had just been presented to them, "and we knew you were a librarian." "The effect of two nights on the sleeper," said the other, "I usually look healthy." Such a cynical reply opens a startling line of inquiry. Is there some particular look of weakness or ill health that marks librarians as a class? Some astigmatism, stoop of the shoulders, pallor of the complexion or general dustiness of appearance that labels us like one of our own books? That is a horrid idea, and one which we believe is without any real foundation.²

For at least the next fifty years the literature was rampant with the strangest assortment of pieces on the image of the librarian that one can imagine. The pros and cons of every conceivable aspect of the question were debated endlessly. Nasty presentations of librarians as little old ladies, especially by commercial advertisers, were vigorously attacked. Yet all too often the views expressed only served to reinforce the stereotype. They were singularly unique and only suggested that the image was wrong while offering few if any alternative suggestions as to the proper way of viewing librarians.

At last in 1962, Powell, whose views in many respects still remain those of a prophet crying in the wilderness of Arizona, wrote what should have been the definitive statement embracing pluralism. So powerful was his presentation that it should have laid the concept of singularity to rest once and for all. In his column, "On the Grindstone,"

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he wrote: "If I could have a captive national audience for an hour, to whom I was to portray the 'Librarian's Image,' I would parade...a hundred...disparate dazzlers, librarians all and all unlike, until total bewilderment was achieved and the audience admitted that the image exists not."³

Then for a time the almost constant concern with image vanished from our ken. We took the more healthy attitude of putting it into the perspective, which indeed it deserves, of being only one aspect—and largely an incidental aspect—of a larger sense of professionalism. Now the serpent rears its head once more. Speculating about why it has done so is pointless. Instead, let us examine, in an impressionistic fashion, how the three major national American library journals (*American Libraries*, *Library Journal*, and the *Wilson Library Bulletin*) have been presenting us and our image—directly and indirectly, advertently and inadvertently—in the 1980s. But before we do this we must examine—and dismiss—the strictures of Pauline Wilson over our right to do so. Poking fun at ourselves has become serious business. It can no longer be regarded as a natural right.

The Perils of Pauline

The Scrooge who would deprive us of the innocent pleasure, or the real anger, so often associated with almost any aspect of the image of the librarian is Pauline Wilson. In her otherwise useful—and in most respects definitive—study entitled *Stereotype and Status*, Ms. [is that now a part of our image?] Wilson offers some peculiar views on how to combat the worst evils connected with the examination of this ever-present question. Her quantitative analysis of journal articles, news items, and book chapters dealing with the stereotype of the librarian as depicted by members of our own profession in our own literature for the period from 1921 through 1978 has much to recommend it. She has done an excellent job of identifying, categorizing, and analyzing all of the relevant material. That information is valuable as well as entertaining. If only she had stopped there. Her conclusions leave a good deal to be desired especially when viewed from the perspective of a writer who wants to treat this serious subject with the levity that it deserves. Because of the overall quality of her analysis, we may be tempted to treat her recommendations seriously. Most troublesome is her peculiar recommendation on how best to combat our own bad habit of providing our own bad press. "A first step toward getting rid of the habit is to stop writing about the stereotype. Persons should not write about it unless they have something to say that will be helpful rather than hurtful."⁴

Egads! That schoolmarmish chastisement certainly says something about our image. Shh! Shh! Shh! Be quiet please! That also smacks of censorship. Is ALA to have a committee for the prevention of hurtful image presentations by librarians? Who is to decide what is helpful and what is hurtful? Are we to be lashed to the railroad tracks if Wilson should decide we are acting improperly? Sometimes librarians just want to have fun. Fortunately this is still a free country, and we have every right to ignore Wilson's fatuous advice. Still, writers should heed good advice. Perhaps then the solution lies in defining helpful and hurtful. Surely humor is always helpful. A lighthearted look at our image can do no harm. Shouldn't we simply laugh at our colleagues, just as we should laugh at the item in question, who, for want of concern with more important social issues, becomes outraged over the portrayal of the librarian in the Tears for Fears music video "Head Over Heels" as a mousy (shades of Melvil) unattractive female with glasses who is intimidated by a strange assortment of users in a fable without meaning? In his 14 August 1907 column, Edmund Lester Pearson commented on the badge by which one knows the librarian. He wrote: "As for the sex which in numbers predominates the profession we resolutely decline to be drawn into a discussion of that phase of the subject, other than to note their curious fondness for a pince-nez that is fastened to the hair by a small golden chain."⁵ Shouldn't we just treat that comment, as Pearson intended us to, as a joke? Even the many outrageous examples that Wilson cites now serve mainly to entertain. To be too serious about matters that don't deserve to be taken too seriously is a mistake. Goodbye Pauline. What follows is intended to be helpful and amusing. Make of it what you will.

An Idiosyncratic Impressionistic Analysis of the Recent Literature

Despite my making light of her recommendations, Wilson did do a careful and useful job of analyzing over fifty years of professional literature in an attempt to determine how librarians dealt with their image. At some point it may be useful for someone to extend her study backward and forward in time. It would be fascinating, for example, to be able to pin the blame on the very first American librarian to make negative comments in print about our image. It would also be useful to know whether the literature from 1978 to 1986 is different in any way than that from 1921 to 1978. Bringing Wilson's study forward in time would require real research. Such a study might be modeled after her study and involve content analysis, tabulations, and the like. It would

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certainly pick up where her study left off in mid-1978. It would continue, however, to be largely a reflection of the way in which individual librarians have dealt with the image question.

This author has had neither the time nor the inclination to undertake such a study. Besides, to a considerable degree, the image of the librarian in the professional literature in recent years is not so much a reflection of individual views of various authors but more a reflection of an editorial view of our image. If we look broadly at the contemporary professional library journals what image do they convey? Do they reflect the singular readily identifiable view suggested by Pearson or the pluralistic diverse view of Powell? Is there some message about our image that is being conveyed? An extensive study would look at those questions in terms of a wide range of national, regional, and state journals and newsletters. This impressionistic view examines only the three major national journals aimed at the general library audience—*American Libraries*, *Library Journal*, and *Wilson Library Bulletin*. They, after all, reach the widest total audience and are most likely to have an impact on helping us shape our view of ourselves. This idiosyncratic analysis consists only of a broad overview and some general observations based on what has been presented. It begins with 1 January 1980 and continues through June 1986. The dates were selected arbitrarily in order to keep the project to a manageable size but the dates do also reflect the theme of this issue of *Library Trends*.

This analysis reflects personal views only to a degree. Each of the three major journals has been edited by the same white male in the period selected for the study. In an effort to determine whether or not for each of those three journals there is either a broad written or unwritten editorial policy on the image question or the editors themselves have any sense of the image they have conveyed, a letter of inquiry was sent to them and subsequently a brief telephone interview was held. The results of those interviews have been incorporated into the analysis discussed later. So much for the preliminaries.

American Libraries

Throughout the 1980s, Art Plotnik, with considerable assistance from his crew at *American Libraries* and his readers, has almost inundated us with a wide variety of images—often wild and crazy—of the librarian and of information about and relevant to the image question. In typical Plotnikian fashion, there has been no stuffy analytical feature article on the subject but no lack of briefer messages in advertisements, cartoons, covers, features, letters to the editor, news items, photographs, and the like that deal directly and indirectly with what is clearly (one

might well think) the most important professional question of our time. There is so much that represents the image of the librarian in those six-and-a-half-years of *American Libraries* that were examined that it is simply impossible to deal with it all here. What follows then is a variety of aspects of *American Libraries'* views and visions of the librarian.

Apart from some passing references in several editorials to Plotnik's positive attitude and sense of humor that give a clue to his breezy and lighthearted approach to librarianship, two of his post-1980 editorials speak directly to his approach to the image issue. One 1982 editorial takes the form of a self-interview. He first admits that he does, indeed, take a positive view of librarianship in attempting to meet the challenge of presenting what is "decent, excellent, enduring, and beautiful." Later in that same editorial he asks himself about the possible elimination of our stereotype and replies that that is not likely to happen largely because people "get a chuckle out of stereotypes." He doesn't think that "users take the stereotype as seriously as we do."⁶ In a later 1982 editorial dealing specifically with several recent image goofs in the media to which the Public Information Office of ALA has responded, Plotnik takes a more serious view of the matter. He suggests that: "Among librarians with a sense of humor, the temptation is to laugh at these distortions and hope they'll go away before they hurt us. But they *have* already hurt us, and the old-maid image will endure until the last Carnegie-era memories have faded."⁷ On the basis of those two somewhat different views one might well ask if the real Art Plotnik would stand up. The pages of *American Libraries* reveal an Art Plotnik who appears to favor the former rather than the latter view. It is certainly clear that, under Plotnik, *American Libraries* embraced the Powellian view of librarians with fervor and presented the wildest assortment of librarians imaginable.

The very covers of *American Libraries*—except for that dismal period in 1981 and 1982 when they were devoted to portraying beautiful library buildings—speak to that diversity. Individual librarians and family groupings have been presented to show the librarian as the average person. The unashamedly yuppie wholesome white married couple, complete with smiling faces and matching sweaters, on the January 1986 cover so markedly presented that view that it, and the accompanying article on librarians as married couples, drew several protests from alternative lifestyle librarians.⁸ Fred Glazer as a cartoon Uncle Sam, a black-belted male librarian in a karate pose, a mob of librarians at an ALA conference fun run, and numerous other covers have offered diverse views of what the contemporary librarian looks

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like.⁹ Most telling of Plotnik's tolerance, if not admiration, for the stereotype is to be found on the April 1983 cover—the color photograph of a construction by Plotnik and Mary Phelan representing a modern day version of Arcimboldo's famous portrait of the librarian as a pile of books complete with books, glasses, and bookmarks to suggest a certain stereotype.¹⁰

We have all learned in library school, naturally, that you cannot judge a book—or even a magazine—by its cover, but that you need to examine its contents as well. The contents of *American Libraries* from January 1980 through June 1986 do tell us a good deal more than the covers and editorials do of Plotnik's conception of the contemporary librarian's image.

The inclusion in *American Libraries* of cartoons, and/or line drawings to accompany articles, has increased considerably in the past few years. These have provided a substantial opportunity to depict—and to poke fun at—our image. In many cases the cartoon characters consist of stick figures or crude drawings that hardly suggest any real picture of a librarian. There is no shortage of other cartoons which contain a predominance of female characters, age, clothing, glasses, hairstyles, and plainness that, individually and collectively, demonstrate the extent to which the stereotype persists even when the character is seated at a modern computer terminal. What we do may be up-to-date but what we are may not be. To some degree, especially by 1984, diversity creeps into the cartoons as odd accouterments such as earrings, fancy hairstyles, futuristic glasses, hiking boots, machine features, plaid shirts, etc. Even there, however, as in one of Gary Handman's wonderful cartoons, elements such as the stereotypical space creature as the stereotypical librarian with extended ears, a third eye, and a bow tie, sometimes surface.¹¹ The old somehow carries over into the new.

The many photographs that accompany articles offer a distinctly Powellian view to a greater degree than do the cartoons. Librarians in the photographs are shown in a variety of colors, nationalities, sexes, shapes, and sizes, and appear in a truly bewildering assortment of professional and nonprofessional activities, clothes, and informal and formal poses and postures.

One diverse assortment of candidate photographs for the ALA Council is accompanied by the telling note that “appearances, of course, are irrelevant to capacity.”¹² If we only truly believed that! In very few of the photographs, elements of the stereotype visibly persist. That is most true of those accompanying the few brief historical articles that ever find their way into *American Libraries* such as the one on early

ALA conferences that is enlivened by a picture of a group of librarians taken on a train en route to Waukesha in 1901. That picture, and others like it, suggest how Pearson's report and inquiry may have originated.¹³

Other odds and ends of written pieces occasionally deal with image and stereotype even if several of them must be discounted here as being redundant or as somehow creating a conflict of interest, since they were written by or relate to me and represent personal views. Most notable of those written pieces is my review of Pauline Wilson's *Stereotype and Status* where it is suggested that her all too serious look at image only helps to reinforce the stereotype. In that review I wrote that "the greatest advance we could make would be to totally ignore the fact that there is any kind of stereotype."¹⁴ That would hardly be any fun so I continue to choose to ignore my own advice.

One of the most revealing of other occasional pieces was the report by Mary Jo Lynch of the results of a 1985 opinion survey which demonstrated that 69.5 percent of the respondents to a questionnaire sent to a random sample (if such a thing is possible if the stereotype does indeed exist) of ALA members felt that improving the public image and the status of librarians was important and ranked it tenth in importance out of thirty-two items.¹⁵ Clearly others are also disregarding my advice about ignoring the stereotype!

Perhaps responding in some degree to that perception in an institutionalized fashion has been the appearance of a small boxed feature called simply "Image" edited by Edith McCormick in each issue of *American Libraries* since January 1985. That feature began as a long-awaited opportunity for librarians to call attention to the numerous stereotypical—and by implication unfair—portrayals of librarians that still appear in the public media and to vent their anger at the betrayal implicit in those depictions. As always the question is whether or not such a feature does more harm than good but all in all the first year was simply good clean fun. In January 1986 the scope of that feature was broadened to include positive portrayals of librarians by others. The American Floral Marketing Council, music videos, *People*, and *TV Guide*—among an assortment of villains—have been singled out for showing us with our glasses on a chain, our hair in a bun, wearing practical shoes, and "shhhshing" as we ask "which way to the Future Librarian's Club?"¹⁶ Billboards, editorials, and newspaper columns that praise us, emphasize glamour, and suggest that "librarians are just like everyone else" have been applauded in more recent columns.¹⁷ While there is now an attempt to provide a balance, the negative still tends to be cited and remarked upon more often than the positive which

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only suggests that perhaps that is what the many contributors are looking for and may even—in a masochistic fashion—prefer to find.

The regular “Library Life” segment in *American Libraries* contributes a somewhat different and more delightful view of us in our own world. Designed to emphasize the human aspects of contemporary librarianship in a practical setting, “Library Life” features short pieces on what we have been doing that is different and noteworthy. Here diversity clearly rules. Where else in our contemporary professional literature will we find depictions of the smiling compassionate librarian as a hug therapist or the Amazing Fully Booked Band of the Pasadena Public Library marching in the Doo Dah Parade?¹⁸

Another feature of *American Libraries* that deals with our image is the “Who We Are” series that appears sporadically. Originally that feature emphasized our external attributes in such wondrous tales as that of the life of a female technical services librarian in a public library who flies airplanes, runs, is a body builder, and has pet snakes.¹⁹ More recent versions of this feature have emphasized what we do in contrast to who we are in an effort to “define who we are as professionals”²⁰ and, in doing so, have had less to say directly about our image.

There are at least two aspects of the content of any professional journal which the editor does not necessarily exercise total control over and which reflect the views of others. One is the letters to the editor and the other is advertisements. The content of the journal presumably does have a direct effect on the content of the letters to the editor and the editor presumably does exercise some control over what letters are actually published. *American Libraries*, in the period under study, shows increased emphasis in the regular contents on the image question, especially since the start of the “Image” column in 1985 and that is clearly reflected in the letters. The number of such letters, which is much larger than what is to be found in *Library Journal* or the *Wilson Library Bulletin*, indicates both the extent to which *American Libraries* serves as the professional journal and the extent to which—directly and indirectly—the content and style of *American Libraries* has drawn attention to the question of image and stereotypes. It may even indicate in some peculiar fashion that the results of Lynch’s random sample of ALA members bear some relationship to what librarians are in fact concerned about.

In the period since January 1980, some thirty letters that deal in one fashion or another with the image question have been published—excluding a spate of correspondence on the relevance of the M.L.S. degree which addresses the question of our brains and not our looks.

Approximately two-thirds of those letters have been published since the start of the "Image" column in January 1985. Most, as one might inevitably expect, offer only the same old whining about our media image with only the occasional unusual twist and turn of thought, phrase, or potential solution. In 1980, Triolo insisted upon the "right of librarians to freedom from vocational defamation."²¹ Restrepo asked in 1982 if the root of our problem might not lay in "our failure to let people know what we are really like."²² Croft, a library school student, suggested in 1985 that the answer lies in certification and in the use of degree initials after our name²³ while in the same year Musico suggested that it is "about time we used our lobbying power to squash the image of media specialists as frumpy, boring, staid, and nonsexual."²⁴ The start of the "Image" column drew both negative and positive responses including McReynolds's attack on the very idea of the "Image" column. In endorsing Pauline Wilson's doctrine, she asked that *American Libraries* "spare your readers from these sad little diatribes about our image."²⁵ Only a few writers have taken the view that these are silly worries, that we protest too much, or that we show too little sense of humor. In 1985 Fairchild did have the audacity to suggest that "protestors have no appreciation of the status that is conferred when one is satirized in the comics."²⁶ In two cases Plotnik has been duly taken to task for allowing stereotypes of others, not librarians, to creep into the pages of *American Libraries*.²⁷ Two letters deserve mention because, without explicit reference, they do support Powell's doctrine and succinctly restate it. In defending the real image of librarians, Branch in 1983 pointed out that: "They come in all descriptions: enthusiastic, dull, fat, skinny, bespeckled [and bespectacled?], freckled, friendly, unfriendly, short, tall, dedicated, and not so dedicated."²⁸ Finally, the most elegant restatement of Powell's view was that of Sanders who simply wrote in 1985 that: "We're a diverse bunch. If we just all act ourselves, the oversimplification will dissolve into as many pieces as we have members."²⁹

Ads are quite another matter. The editor has no control over them and even the publisher, assuming they aren't libelous or in utterly bad taste, has little control over them. *American Libraries*, because of its audience and its approach to librarianship, carries a substantial number of ads intended to sell librarians goods and services. Between January 1980 and June 1986 there were slightly less than 100 ads in *American Libraries* in which the advertisers chose to depict librarians in some fashion. One would assume that since an advertiser is seeking to have the potential buyer identify with, or at least accept, her product that she

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would elect to use a portrayal of a librarian with which the audience might identify readily. Whether or not that is actually the case is a good question.

Only a few of the ads, which appeared in 1980 and 1981, used our old stereotype. Most notable is a 3M ad that appeared in the September 1980 issue, for example, which shows a librarian as an older white female with glasses.³⁰ More telling is a Library Binding Service ad in the March 1981 issue which shows a close-up of an older white woman wearing half glasses and actually holding a pencil to her lips!³¹

Some ads are just out-of-date enough to suggest the librarian as a fuddy-duddy who has not quite kept up with the times. That is most noticeable in a Science Press ad in the January 1982 issue which shows an older white male and an older white female both looking somewhat dowdyish.³² A Gaylord ad in the December 1985 issue portrays a youngish white female who somehow manages to convey the essence of a librarian from the 1960s.³³

A number of the advertisers have sought to avoid the problem of being tagged with using inappropriate representations by instead using, and naming, real people from either their own staff or satisfied customers. The best example of such ads is a 1983 and 1984 CLSI series headed decision-makers which portrays five different real live librarians. Of those, three are white males, one is a black male, and one is a white female. All are older, undoubtedly in deference to their role as administrators and decision-makers, and, on the whole, represent a diverse lot and hardly suggest a particular image and certainly not the old stereotype.³⁴ Where that stereotype emerged most vividly was in several ads that use actual historical photographs. The best example is found in three such ads, all in sepia, which Gaylord ran during 1983. One shows Melvil Dewey complete with thirteen of his straight-laced female students; one shows a dour Cutter probably pondering his rules; and the third shows Theresa Elmendorf as the first female president of ALA in 1911 with five white males.³⁵ Although probably intended simply as a reminder of our past, these pictures, and the way they are presented, certainly suggest the standard stereotype and highlight its probable origins.

Since early 1983 there has been a noticeable increase in the depiction of librarians in ads in *American Libraries* and, at the same time, the clear emergence of a strange new stereotype. No matter who the advertiser is, the same picture is presented. Just as librarianship is subtly merging with information science, so librarians—at least in these ads—are merging with information scientists or, more likely, with the average young upwardly mobile professional. This new stereotypical

librarian—who is more often and more vividly a female—seems to have first appeared in the September 1982 issue of *American Libraries*. In a Dun's Marketing Services ad one finds a happy young white female librarian with plain shoulder length hair. She is wearing a frilly white blouse, a skirt, and a mannish tailored jacket. Her glasses, which may be intended to serve as a carryover from our old stereotype, are not worn but are nearby on a table as though to suggest that they may be on the way out.³⁶ After that, numerous similar ads appear in rapid succession until, by mid-1986, they are found in almost every issue. Often, as in a September 1984 Institute for Scientific Information ad, a tie of some kind is added to the outfit.³⁷ The glasses seem to come and go but when they are present they are seldom worn. While in numbers, as is true in the profession, the fair sex predominates; the male is sometimes portrayed in these ads and he too always in the same fashion. In an Engineering Information ad in December 1983, he is depicted as a white male, wearing a suit, a white shirt, necktie, and carrying a pair of glasses.³⁸ There is remarkably little variation in either the female or the male representation. Only occasionally, as in a December 1985 OCLC ad, is anyone shown in an informal manner as is this white male with a beard, wearing a plaid shirt and no jacket.³⁹ We may be gradually losing one stereotype but we are certainly rapidly gaining another which is in many ways much less satisfactory especially because it leaves us indistinguishable from the members of other professions. Our old stereotype, especially in the classic female version, was unmistakably recognizable as a librarian at first glance. The new stereotype, whether female or male, may be a librarian, an information scientist, a computer engineer, or who knows what. One has to look carefully to find the glasses to be certain that it is, after all, a librarian and, therefore, somebody we can comfortably identify with.

While the image of the ads cannot, of course, be attributed to the editor, there appears to be some slight evidence that, under Art Plotnik's leadership, *American Libraries*, in other respects, is quietly moving, for better or for worse, toward that new more professional image. Certainly *American Libraries*—to a far greater degree than *Library Journal* or the *Wilson Library Bulletin*—consciously continues to emphasize the image of the librarian. In a telephone interview following up a letter of inquiry, Plotnik indicated that he does receive perhaps as many as three or four articles a year on the image of the librarian but that most of them are rejected. That is undoubtedly because of their poor quality and their inability to add anything new and/or positive to the question and not to any natural aversion on Plotnik's part. He did after all initiate the

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“Image” column specifically to deal with such matters. He noted, incidentally, that there has been some opposition to that column primarily from what could be characterized as the Wilsonian fringe of librarianship. Basically Plotnik indicated that in portraying librarians he seeks to show us as well-rounded humans and attempts to use, all else being equal, role models that will make us feel good about ourselves.

That positive approach is important to him even though he is pessimistic about ever substantially changing the image of the librarian. Plotnik feels that it is essential to attempt to alter and improve our image for some very basic reasons. Our image, he argues, is how we are perceived and how we are perceived is the reality of who we are. Until we are somehow perceived as we want to be, we haven’t done enough to improve our situation. That improvement, it follows, is essential in respect to such important matters as status and salary. Nobody is likely to pay our old stereotype adequately. Plotnik also feels that we live in an age of image and that a bad image leads to bad treatment. We are, he would argue, what we look like.⁴⁰ All of that is clearly reflected in the content of *American Libraries*, especially in the past couple of years. It should be noted, however, that Plotnik’s sense that people do get a chuckle from stereotypes has not totally disappeared. From time to time the old image may crop up in amusing and entertaining ways. It should be noted that there is such a Powellian diversity of images presented that the reader is left to develop his or her own idea of image and his or her own sense of the image message being conveyed by *American Libraries*.

Library Journal

Throughout the 1980s *Library Journal*, under John Berry’s editorship, has paid scant attention—either directly or indirectly—to the librarian’s image. It is as though the question did not exist and almost as though librarians are not people. The value and place of books in the library remains, as it has for years, a dominant theme of *Library Journal*. In the past few years an added emphasis on the applications of technology in libraries has emerged. In the treatment of books, authors are sometimes presented as people, as in the regular coverage of new authors. In the case of technology, however, it is almost as if the people behind the technology do not exist. Another emphasis of *Library Journal* during this period has been on library news including not only regular brief news notices but also regular coverage of library events of each year and regular reporting on a variety of library conferences and meetings. In each of those areas, the emphasis is predominantly on facts, figures, and events but seldom on the people involved. As a journal that

concentrates, to some degree, on library news reporting, *Library Journal* has a reputation—which an examination of its portrayal of the image of the librarian appears to confirm—of depicting the downside of librarianship. There is certainly little in its pages to convey the image of librarians as vibrant human beings.

In the 15 January 1980 issue of *Library Journal*, Berry dealt with his editorial policy in general terms noting that it was his intent that “no fact, no event, no interpretation, no opinion...[be] left without a forum in which it is brought before the entire profession.”⁴¹ With a few exceptions the image of the librarian has not been in any way a regular feature of that forum. Indeed in only one editorial, in July 1985, did Berry touch directly on the image question. In the editorial, in lamenting the fact that public librarianship was no longer in fashion, he attributed this to a lack of emphasis on the challenges and rewards of that component of the profession. He cited a recent program of the Public Library Association as being uninspiring and cited in particular one segment of that program on fashion which he characterized “a phony ‘dress for success’” program that conveyed the wrong message.⁴²

That overall lack of interest in the image question is revealed throughout the contents of *Library Journal*. In the entire period reviewed, for example, only one of a substantial quantity of news items dealt with it. That was a short item on a complaint sent to CBS by the Newspaper Division of the Special Libraries Association in response to the depiction of a newspaper librarian on the “Lou Grant Show” as “inept or bumbling.”⁴³

In general, news coverage and stories about library conferences and other events are accompanied by various black and white photographs depicting some of the people involved. Almost all are candid photographs that represent, in one sense, a mixed and diverse assortment of people; but for some unknown reason they all seem to have a bland sameness. Of the people pictured in relatively formal activities and settings it is a somewhat dreary lot for the most part—plain pictures of plain people.

Much of that sense of plainness is conveyed by the covers of *Library Journal* when those covers depict librarians. The covers more typically emphasize books, aspects of librarianship other than people, and often things that have nothing to do with the field at all. In the entire six-and-a-half-year period there are only nine covers which feature librarians or representations of librarians. Three such covers are photographs or representations of a group of librarians at a national conference. In each of those there is a mixed assortment of individuals, largely

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in formalized settings, totaling thirty-eight librarians in all, but they are an uninspiring lot.⁴⁴ Five of the covers are cartoon representations of librarians that present an intriguing if dismal picture. Those representations are of plain people. None are the familiar old stereotype but none present a positive image. Typical is the 15 April 1982 cover which pictures a beleaguered plain white female librarian of uncertain age at an information desk; she has stringy hair and is wearing a blouse, skirt, and the usual plain shoes. Her expression and overall appearance are definitely intended to portray the hazards of librarianship. The 1 September 1981 and 1 November 1982 cartoon covers depict faceless librarians.⁴⁵ In startling contrast, because it is so unlike any other *Library Journal* cover, is the 1 January 1982 cover which depicts a slight, but muscular, youngish white female runner who, it turns out, is a media librarian and the author of the feature article in that issue.⁴⁶

Only four feature articles in this period shed any light on the image question and only three deal with it directly. In a 1981 article, "Priorities for ALA" reports on a survey of the ALA members, the council, and the executive board about how much importance the American Library Association should give to particular topics; there is no suggestion that the status and image of the librarian is of any concern.⁴⁷ That is quite different from the 1985 survey cited earlier which gave image a high priority. The difference may be a factor of the way questions were posed, but it may also reflect an emphasis on a different agenda.

In the middle of the period examined, *Library Journal* began a regular series "How Do You Manage" that presented fictional case studies of a particular library management issue which typically involved handling staff with responses in each case from several librarians indicating how they would deal with the issue. The entire series, in some amusing ways, depicts the personality of librarians and suggests a great deal about our image, but only one study is directly relevant to the issue at hand. A 1983 case, "Librarians Do It in the Stacks," discusses the incident of a popular young male young adult services librarian who wears a button to work with that suggestive slogan. The complaints that are received and the damage that wearing such a button does to the image of the librarian and the library are at issue. Two of the three librarians responding to the case study suggest that the librarian is a role model and that he should somehow be told, or persuaded, to mend his ways and cease wearing such an offensive button. Only the last respondent suggests the possibility of proceeding with caution.⁴⁸ One has to ask if such an act is such a big issue. Does wearing such a button or worrying about one who wears it say more about our image?

A 1984 feature article, "Winston the Librarian," is a discussion of Orwell's *1984* and begins with a sad lament about Orwell's depiction of a public librarian in an earlier novel of his, *Keep the Aspидistra Flying*, as an "infamous stereotype in an incarnation more pure than Marian the librarian herself." That image is then related to the bureaucratic image of the characters of *1984* including Winston Smith who is seen as a librarian. The main thrust of the article is a discussion of the professional role of the librarian and/or information specialist of the future in contrast to the role that Winston Smith plays in *1984*. Orwell's bleak image of the librarian, which is no bleaker than his image of others, is happily not mentioned again.⁴⁹

Strangely enough, given Berry's apparent lack of interest in the subject, the only article which specifically deals with the image of the librarian in any of the three major national professional journals during this period appeared in *Library Journal*. The fact that only one such article has appeared in six-and-a-half-years tells us that the image is either not of major concern to librarians or that those who write about the image seldom produce publishable articles.

Rosalee McReynolds's "A Heritage Dismissed" in the 1 November 1985 issue of *Library Journal* suggests that the latter may be the case. Ostensibly an article on the depiction of librarians in American popular culture from 1876 to 1950, her article is, in fact, a mixture of at least three themes. First there is a mention of the attitude of librarians at the turn of the century toward the image including a reference to Edmund Lester Pearson's suggestion that novelists tended to present "preposterous caricatures" of librarians. Next there is some discussion of the image as presented in a personal and random selection of novels, advertisements, magazine covers, movies, plays, and the like. Finally, in her attempt to tie all of that together and make some sense out of it, McReynolds offers a complex argument about professional attitudes toward the role of women—and especially older women—in librarianship. Her conclusion is that, by the mid-1930s, librarians as a profession had developed "chagrin over the stereotype of the middle-aged spinster. In their crusade to disavow this image, librarians, male and female, betrayed a belief that there was something distasteful about women growing old, being plain, never marrying. It may not have been a concept that librarians invented, but the zeal with which they embraced it surely hindered the profession and the women in it."⁵⁰ Unfortunately her entire argument is pure speculation, and McReynolds presents little concrete evidence to support her view. Her article is consistently tinged with speculation about the motives of librarians in dealing with the issue of the image as

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it has been presented in popular culture. It is entertaining but it is no more relevant to our real concerns with the issue than all of Pauline Wilson's admonitions. It is a splendid example of the kind of article that might not have been published if Berry had only taken Wilson's admonitions to heart.

Perhaps because it was so difficult to comprehend, that article brought no published letters to the editor. Indeed, but not surprisingly, throughout the 1980s *Library Journal* has published only a very few letters on the image question. The infamous Miss Piggy poster brought a letter in 1981 from Cohn who deplored it as "hardly representational of today's woman in the profession."⁵¹ One would hope not! Her letter in turn brought a brief response from Benck who deplored our and Cohn's loss of a sense of humor.⁵² In response to an article about burnout among librarians, in 1983 Horvath suggested that the fact that "the old maid image hangs on" only complicates, in some inexplicable fashion, the question of burnout.⁵³ Is it perhaps that the stereotypical librarian has so much character and strength that we cannot imagine such a person experiencing burnout? A letter from Miller in 1985 complains about a couple of incidental illustrations to an article as fitting the stereotype too well.⁵⁴ Finally, Berry's infamous editorial on dressing for success brought a spirited defense from another Miller who argued that "since perception often supplants reality, the librarian whose appearance is professional is usually regarded as being more professional, and the library in which one works can take its rightful place among the vast array of information providers."⁵⁵ Heady stuff. Just think what a new image, or even a new suit, might do for us.

Berry's limited concern with image is also demonstrated by the fact that he published only the briefest of reviews of Pauline Wilson's landmark *Stereotype and Status*. In that review, Blake observed that Wilson offered little explanation as to why society regards librarians as unimportant thus advancing her own social concerns and ignoring what Wilson had set out to do.⁵⁶

On direct evidence then, it is clear that *Library Journal* has not paid a great deal of attention to our image. The photographs and illustrations that accompany its articles and stories are not numerous but do convey a definite impression. As has already been suggested, the actual photographs that accompany articles and stories have presented a rather staid and bland image of the professional librarian. The cartoons and/or line drawings that have accompanied articles in *Library Journal* are not, in most respects, very different. A casual examination of some fourteen different illustrations in the period under study suggests that

Library Journal does tend to take a somewhat bleak view of librarianship since in most cases those illustrations show unhappy rather than cheerful librarians. In those fourteen examples, eight white male and thirteen white female librarians are depicted. All of the men are wearing shirts, ties, and jackets, and two wear glasses. Of the thirteen women, nine are wearing a white blouse, ten have short straight hair, and four wear glasses. They are all a plain lot who suggest—even if they do not exactly represent—the same old stereotype. They surely do not present any diversity.

To an even greater degree than in *American Libraries*, where the image of the librarian is now featured in various forums, or in the *Wilson Library Bulletin*, which ignores the image question and carries few ads, it is the image presented in the ads in *Library Journal* which otherwise pays limited attention to the whole matter of what we look like. It should be noted again that the editor has no control over the ads and that the advertiser presumably wants to offer a representation of the librarian with which we will all readily identify. The approach is the same; there is substantial duplication, and the conclusions to be drawn are the same as in and from the ads in *American Libraries*.

Overall, given its emphasis on books, it is not surprising and must be noted that the vast majority of the ads in *Library Journal* are for books. Those are straightforward ads which seldom, if ever, feature librarians. There are various products and services for libraries and librarians that do tend to favor depictions of librarians as a part of their sales pitch presumably, as has been suggested, on the notion that a potential buyer might identify with the image presented. In the period from January 1980 through June 1986 there were approximately 140 ads in *Library Journal* which depicted librarians, imaginary or real, in some fashion. If one discounts the 1983 Gaylord ads—which are the same as those appearing in *American Libraries* and *Wilson Library Bulletin*—that featured sepia photographs of Cutter, Dewey, and Elmdorf, the old stereotype is seldom evident.⁵⁷ The few Gaylord ads—which also appeared in *American Libraries* and the *Wilson Library Bulletin*—that portray contemporary white female librarians who still somehow look as though they come from the late 1950s and that hint at the stereotype are one exception.⁵⁸ The other notable exceptions are in a few parodies—such as a BRS ad in 1980 depicting the female librarian as a bag lady⁵⁹—that make deliberate use of that image. A substantial number of the ads use living contemporary librarians in real life settings. Many, such as the CLSI series, are the same as those in *American Libraries*.⁶⁰ All present a clean-cut professional librarian,

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usually white who, in his/her plainness and sameness, is indistinguishable from any other professional.

That image, and the emerging new stereotype, is even more evident in those ads which utilize models as librarians. There, with extremely few exceptions, the image presented is of two librarians. One is a young attractive white female with short straight dark hair. She may wear, or carry, glasses, perhaps as a symbol of her link with the past but is more likely to wear pearls. She is invariably wearing a white blouse—perhaps with a mannish tie of some kind—and a jacket. The other is a handsome young white male wearing a white shirt, tie, and suit. Librarians, or at least information scientists, are now, it would seem, the usual attractive young white professional who is dressed for success and is obviously successful. The old image at least set us apart.

In an odd way, given those ads and the new image that is subtly emerging, Berry, in a telephone conversation, reflected somewhat the views of McReynolds. He feels that there is no need for us to cast aspersions on what librarians may look like and that, in particular, there is nothing wrong with the librarian as an unmarried older woman. Berry suggests, as his editorial reflected, that a concern with dressing for success is self-defeating since it places greater emphasis on costume and cosmetics than on the substance of librarianship. The effectiveness and efficiency of library service, which remains a real bargain, is more important, Berry argues, than a gnashing of teeth over what we look like or how we are depicted. There is, after all, nothing wrong in looking like the people we serve and representing the same kind of diversity among librarians as is found among patrons. Finally, Berry noted that *Library Journal*, under his editorship, has not given a great deal of attention to the image question. He feels that expressions of concern tend to have a negative rather than a positive impact thus reflecting—although he did not cite—Wilson's attitude.⁶¹ All of those views, with the clear exception of his points on diversity that are not born out in the illustrations and photographs that appear in *Library Journal*, are largely an accurate reflection of the image of the librarian as it is presented in *Library Journal*.

Wilson Library Bulletin

For Milo Nelson—who has served as the editor of the *Wilson Library Bulletin* throughout the 1980s—and his editorial staff, it clearly appears, judging from the contents of that journal in the 1980s, as though the image question of the librarian is not a major issue of our time. The direct coverage has been minimal. There have been no feature

articles on the subject, no news stories, no suggestion that ALA and other conferences may have had programs on this topic, and only occasional mention in columns and stories of the image and our old-fashioned stereotype. One significant editorial in the June 1981 issue, which helps explain this absence of coverage, is the most extensive direct reference to the image question. Overall, the indirect evidence tells us a good deal more about the vision of the librarian than the *Wilson Library Bulletin* projects than does the direct evidence.

The direct evidence is so slight that the following discussion covers almost every appropriate reference that has appeared in the *Wilson Library Bulletin* in the past six-and-a-half years. In a feature article in the February 1983 issue on a city official directly responsible for the supervision of a California public library, he is quoted as saying that, "many librarians still have a turn-of-the-century self-image."⁶² It, of course, promptly drew one published letter of complaint.⁶³ In his column "Dateline Washington" in the September 1985 issue, Dale Nelson, a regular columnist, described, but did not comment upon, protests from local librarians on a story in the *Washington Post* on an attempt by the District of Columbia Public Library to recover overdue books that was illustrated with a librarian in a high-necked Victorian dress with her hair in a bun and how the *Post* had compounded the error by publishing two of the letters under the headline "Shh! Be Nice to Librarians."⁶⁴ That note brought one letter from a Virginia librarian defending the *Washington Post* primarily because of its generous gift to her library.⁶⁵

In my column "Our Profession," which began in September 1982 and reviews the current professional literature, there have been two references to appropriate titles. In the review of Janette S. Caputo's *The Assertive Librarian* in a November 1984 column, I made some self-deprecating references to shy librarians.⁶⁶ In March 1985 I gave a mixed review of "*Shhh*" *Is a Four Letter Word*, a book of cartoons by Andy Gibbons and Jeanne Nelson. The book relies heavily on stereotypical portrayals of librarians and jokes based on our image.⁶⁷

By far the most frequent references to our image have appeared in Will Manley's column "Facing the Public" since its appearance in January 1981. That is not surprising since Manley, a conservative, is a throwback to an earlier age of librarianship and tends to discuss issues, such as the role of the public library in circulating nonbook materials, that were popular in the early 1900s when our image was also a more widely discussed issue. To Manley's credit he has not yet addressed the image issue as the main theme of his column (although he probably will

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one of these days). He has, rather, on several occasions, used it as a lead in to the topic that he is discussing. On five separate occasions Manley has commented directly on the image of the librarian. Two of those references, one to Fred Glazer's peculiar clothing and manner⁶⁸ and the other to the reaction of an airplane seat companion who discovers Manley is a librarian,⁶⁹ are truly incidental. On three other occasions he has referred to the image in terms of: "little old ladies with pencils sticking out of our hair buns";⁷⁰ "walk[ing] into that great land of 'Sssshhhhh' and whisper[ing] your troubles to that stern, bespectacled woman at the desk";⁷¹ and the "little old lady with the bun, the shawl, the wire specs, and the pencils sticking out of her hair."⁷² In point of fact, even with those references (the second of which is actually a quotation from a Phoenix newspaper) Manley is rejecting the image but uses it to make a point of the need to project a more positive attitude and image.

Those few direct references to the librarian's image are not surprising when viewed in relationship to Nelson's editorial "Miss Piggy Unjustly Upbraided" which is the only piece in the *Wilson Library Bulletin* in the entire period that is devoted entirely to image. The editorial was prompted by a complaint by librarians about a National Library week poster with Miss Piggy, the famous Muppet, portrayed as the once typical librarian. Nelson took a wholesome approach by suggesting that, both in terms of our own self-conscious concerns and our tendency to protest negative images in the media, we have perhaps at last begun to put those issues behind us. His two concluding paragraphs state a positive Powellian view of our present universe:

The once popular image of librarians as brittle custodians sitting at desks with spindles and pots of glue was never meant to be malicious. We are freed from that perception every time the public visits a modern American library. We are now at that desirable point where the public itself is willing to make fun of the image we were once assigned. It might be the moment, at last, to cease brooding about the past and to stop challenging ourselves to conjure up injustices in the present.⁷³

A respectable and worthy view and one, in a manner not often common among editorial writers, that the *Wilson Library Bulletin* has definitely put into practice.

Sometimes, however, what we say we mean may not be precisely the message conveyed and after all, as every schoolchild knows, the message is in the medium. Apart, then, from looking at what the exact content of the *Wilson Library Bulletin* says about image, there is the question of the other ways in which it conveys something about us. There are only a

few negative images offered in the six-and-a-half-year period not all of which can be blamed solely on the editor. Typically the covers of the *Wilson Library Bulletin* are (and have been since before 1980) sophisticated artsy color photographs that have absolutely nothing to do with librarianship. My long-awaited analytical exposé of the covers of library journals will, when it finally appears, examine that matter in the depth it deserves. Only on the rarest of occasions, as in May 1984, does the cover in any way suggest that this is a library journal. That particular cover is a cartoon which portrays a white, middle-aged male with glasses and a sweater being particularly obnoxious to Alice, from Wonderland, about her overdue books. It is clearly a stereotypical portrait and, in any case, is not especially funny.⁷⁴ Beyond that there are several questionable ads but presumably editors are not likely to reject ads because of the image of librarians presented. A black and white ad for the H.W. Wilson Company in the April 1983 issue includes a photograph of old HWW himself and another of the early female staff of the *Cumulative Book Index* all looking properly plain and librarianish.⁷⁵ Gaylord seems to be the chief offender. Its black and white interior ads of January and April 1983 include a photograph of a stern Melvil Dui and a small group of his dour and plain female library school students.⁷⁶ In one back cover full-color ad in November 1985, and another in February and March 1986, Gaylord uses a contemporary female librarian in a library setting to extol its products. While both of the women are attractive, they are somehow just not quite attractive enough to be anything but librarians.⁷⁷ Scattered through the six-and-a-half-year period are a variety of cartoons most of which are in keeping with the tenor of Nelson's June 1981 editorial. A couple of dubious drawings accompanying an article in the May 1983 issue show a back view of a female librarian in such a way that her long hair, glasses, and dress clearly indicate that she is indeed a librarian.⁷⁸

Throughout the period, the pictures of librarians used to accompany features, stories, or the news of appointments present a wholesome diversity. The frequent feature stories on librarians themselves and on library and library-related institutions and organizations contain only strong positive images of individual librarians. They include, for example, extremely few references to such things as individual physical characteristics. The layout, the presentation of material, the quality of the writing all convey a positive image of librarianship.

That, in large measure, is undoubtedly directly attributable to a conscious editorial policy. Nelson indicated, in a telephone conversation following up a letter of inquiry on the subject, that when he became

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editor of the *Wilson Library Bulletin* he decided he would not publish articles on the image of the librarian nor feature items that dealt with that issue. It was, he suggested, almost the last subject he wanted to deal with in any way since he had always personally suffered undue agony while reading the numerous tortuous articles on the subject that have been published over the years in the professional literature. Initially he received about six articles a year on image but now—perhaps because somehow the word got out—he receives relatively few. They still all go back to the author marked as unacceptable. Nelson was, and remains, an adherent of Wilson's admonishment and if he can't say nothing nice he doesn't say nothing at all. Nelson recalls clearly his 1981 editorial and indicated that, because of the basic editorial decision he had made about dealing with the image question, he gave considerable thought to writing and publishing that particular editorial.⁷⁹

Clearly Nelson has accomplished what he set out to do in regard to the treatment of the image of the librarian as presented in the *Wilson Library Bulletin*. That does undoubtedly contribute to the somewhat too staid and stodgy image of the *Wilson Library Bulletin*. More levity at the expense of our image might not be amiss and would still be within the bounds of Nelson's pronounced editorial view on the subject.

Envoy

What, then, are we to make of all of this? Has the conflict between Pearson and Powell been resolved at last? Do we have an image which we can be proud of or at least one which we can accept? Have we decided how to deal with all of this? The answers, unfortunately, are not entirely clear.

Although, in any direct fashion, the question of our image has been fairly consistently ignored by *Library Journal* and the *Wilson Library Bulletin* throughout the 1980s, there is no doubt but that, as an issue, it is alive and well. That is demonstrated by Lynch's survey as well as by the coverage, and also the response to that coverage, of the image in *American Libraries*. It is also demonstrated by the resurgence of interest in our image as a theme or topic for local and state library association meetings such as the 1986 Louisiana Library Association meeting whose theme was "Image Busters."

On the whole the positive Powellian view of diversity now prevails. Only lingering remnants of the old Pearsonian view of distinctiveness remain and these, at last, have begun to fade at least in terms of our own presentations. The old stereotype lingers in some strange ways both within our journals as well as in the popular culture. Recent featured

appearances of the old-fashioned librarian on the Kellogg's corn flakes box and a Garbage Pail Kids card show just how enduring and endearing our old image is. The diversity of librarians is best presented in *American Libraries* in large measure as a result of a conscious editorial decision on how to present "Our Profession" to ourselves. There, librarians in all shapes and sizes regularly appear in a wide variety of activities and poses. That diversity is much less evident in *Library Journal* and the *Wilson Library Bulletin* where the image, while consciously ignored, is unconsciously presented in a bland and plain manner.

Most distressing is the quiet emergence of the new stereotype which represents the librarian as the contemporary professional lacking all distinction. Most noticeable in the ads in *American Libraries* and *Library Journal*, where it first appeared in 1983, is that new image which destroys the diversity that Powell promoted without retaining any of the distinction that Pearson noted. Although not yet dominant other than in those ads, the image frequently portrayed in the photographs that accompany articles and news stories in *Library Journal* and the *Wilson Library Bulletin* have begun to move in that direction. It would be unfortunate to eliminate—or lose—a distinctive stereotype only to become merged with a nondistinctive one. In another twenty years will we be able to look at a depiction or description of a librarian and realize that that is who is being portrayed?

We have not yet formally adopted the Wilsonian view which calls for us to deliberately ignore the question of our image unless we have something useful to say about it. To some degree *Library Journal* and the *Wilson Library Bulletin* have adopted that view but, fortunately, even in those journals the question rears its head from time to time and, even more fortunately, *American Libraries* continues to tackle the issue head on. In doing so it strikes a responsive note from its readers. There is still, one senses, no clear idea of how best to respond to the question of our image especially in respect to images based on the old stereotype, or which otherwise in an unflattering manner portray—if not betray—librarians as something less than the kind and caring professionals with a true interest in service to the public which we all are. Responses include anger, frustration, acceptance, rejection, protest, boycott, hurt, humor, and sometimes even delight. The variety of responses is as diverse as our image and the reality of our appearance.

What, if anything, is to be made of all this? Not much. The old image persists even as a new—and even less desirable—image emerges. Different presentations are made and different responses to those presentations are forthcoming. Pearson and Powell exist side by side while Wilson lurks in the background, her finger poised at her pursed lips.

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The interest in, and attention paid to, this question varies from journal to journal and from time to time. As a profession we are no closer to any resolution of how to deal with this most important and vexatious of all professional questions than we were in 1876, 1907, or 1962. The issue of our image will persist and will undoubtedly be no closer to resolution in another decade or two than it is now. We will simply have a more extensive body of folklore and literature to deal with. We should certainly hope that will be the case. To lose an issue that for so long has furnished our profession with so much anger, concern, enjoyment, and laughter—especially if it should come about as a result of the loss of identity threatened by the new stereotype—truly would be a shame.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This article was suggested by the late Hugh Atkinson shortly after a chance encounter with him at the Louisiana Library Association meeting in March 1986. It is dedicated to the fond memory of that "disparate dazzler" who displayed several different professional images. I recall how he often appeared at one session of a meeting in a business suit and at another in his motorcycle outfit complete with an outrageous t-shirt. He was always—as we should always be—simply himself.

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