

Library issues about public image gender

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Stereotyping is not actually a bad thing. However, the consequences of stereotyping are the ones that are important and matter (Marinelli and Baker, 2000). The people may ignore the existence of these stereotypes but the effects of these on the people are very crucial. Image, on the other hand, is an issue and problem everywhere but the social situation is different from one place to another.

The image of librarians was being molded as early as the 1870s. Married women and men already had jobs and positions in the society. However, the single, unmarried women were left out and had no position in the society. These women engaged in professions such as: librarianship, nursing, social work and elementary school teaching which were not restricted to any gender and to civil status. Librarians' work consisted of uplifting the morals of a middle-class home through books and to rescue people suffering from moral and intellectual poverty. (Garrison as cited by Engle, 1998)

Reed (1995), on the other hand, said that librarianship was initially a job for men and was only feminized in the late nineteenth century. Even if the women were able to enter the profession, the men were retained but were able to advance to higher positions, administrative ones. Also, men comprised and dominated the American Library Association in 1876. The women were attracted to the profession because of the limited employment possibilities. The feminization of the profession came about as women were believed to be able to change the atmosphere in the library. Specifically, women are believed to soften the environment of stacks of books.

Green (n. d.) conducted a survey that led to the stereotyping of the librarian as a woman, usually having old age, fair skin and single and there were no specifics on hair color. Marinelli and Baker (2000) and Goldstein (1977 as cited by Reed, 1995; Kneale, 2004), on the other hand, typecasted librarians to ladies with hair arranged in a bun, wearing chained spectacles, with a body covered up with a dress, hushing when noise is being heard and with a worried expression. Men librarians, alternatively, are being questioned with regards to their masculinity. They are usually characterized to be ineffectual, effeminate and unathletic (Reed, 1995).

Surprisingly, in Green's study if the all aforementioned characteristics would be expected to be present in a person to be able to define a librarian, there would be no librarians at all. The characteristics may be present at one person at a time, but not all. Thus, stereotyping is not true in the study.

In the same manner, only the spectacles hold as a true characteristic of a librarian in Marinelli and Baker's (2000) study. The impolite attitude of the librarian only holds true for some cases. And, the generalization of the unfriendly manner of the librarians may be attributed to the silent atmosphere of the library.

It can therefore be said that the characterization of stereotypes does not come from the characteristics of real-time librarians. Marinelli and Baker (2000) justified stereotyping has a function in the society. The aged women, spectacles and being single are features that people do not want to emulate, but can somewhat be a convenient representation of the unattractive, meek and rejected. In addition, the dominance of the women in the profession also

contributed to the negative overtone in the stereotype (Carmichael, 1992 as cited by Marinelli and Baker, 2000). Similarly, other professions that are dominated by women are also being criticized.

The characteristics of the librarian as said on the previous paragraph can be credited to the public librarians. They are the image keepers of the profession as they are the ones that people frequently see and look at (Marinelli and Baker, 2000). Also, the public are not much aware of special librarians or archivists. These people are also librarians but cater a specialized clientele. Although the public librarians constitute only a small portion of the total librarians, the stereotype has been used in many types of media, including films, that it became persistent characteristics.

The forms of literature are one of the possible causes of stereotyping of librarians. Most literature often associated librarianship to lonesome characters in both men and women (Marinelli and Baker, 2000). Only a few have explored the possibilities of other characteristics of librarians, one of which is: “ sexy librarians”, a novel written by Edith Wharton in 1918.

Films, on the other hand, characterize librarians differently (Raisch, 1993 as cited by Marinelli and Baker, 2000). Films’ portrayal of librarians vary from spinsters (Donna Reed in “ It’s A Wonderful Life”, Hilda Plowright in “ Philadelphia Story” or the librarian in “ Breakfast at Tiffany’s”), repressed ladies (Barbara Stanwyck in “ Forbidden”), mean archivists (Bertha in “ Citizen Kane”) to innocent blondes (Carole Lombard in “ No Man of Her Own” or Goldie Hawn in “ Foul Play”).

And some also feature male librarians (John Rothman in “ Sophie's Choice”, Jason Robards in “ Something Wicked This Way Comes” and Peter Sellers in “ Only Two Can Play”). However, the actors and actresses that play librarians are often attractive people (Katherine Hepburn, Parker Posey, Peter Sellers) that their portrayal is not seen to reflect the real thing.

The specialized training of librarians that is not publicly known may be a factor that affects the public perception on librarianship. Their tasks such as referencing, checking and shelving are seen simply as clerical tasks.

Nevertheless, there is a Masters in Library and Information Science that is a sort of requirement in the field of professional librarianship. Those without the degree may not be able to advance to the professional level but still be a librarian.

Sadly, librarians are much affected by the negative typecasting of their profession. Distress and denial are the two main reactions of librarians regarding the negative stereotyping in their profession (Engle, 1998).

Librarians had to be weighed down by the emotional stress of the typecasting. These in turn cause social pressures on the librarians and cause further dismal attitude.

Real-life librarians, actually, do not like the stereotyping of their profession because they personally do not want to be attributed to something unattractive and restrict the entrance of males in the profession (Morrissey and Case, 1988; Carmichael, 1992 as cited by Marinelli and Baker, 2000). Also, Wilson (1982 as cited by Marinelli and Baker, 2000) said that stereotyping might have caused real librarians to not like librarians, including

themselves. This is because the librarians react to their occupational identity, instead of reacting as an individual. Due to the typecasting, the librarians are being forced to act as a minority group.

The negative stereotyping also causes librarians to think poorly of their profession, especially those on the public libraries and schools (Marinelli and Baker, 2000). The pride of the profession is being lost in the issues.

Librarians nowadays are not immediately associated to being professionals. They are just people who look after publications in a room or building.

Also, these cause downbeat on client perceptions, status and organizations. The clientele of the librarians may decrease because of the negativity on the profession. Both the status of the people and the organizations that are currently in the profession is also being prejudiced without proper exploration.

Furthermore, funding and recruitment for new librarians are being affected. Due to the issues on librarians, people who are interested in entering the profession may reconsider. Only those who work as special librarians in private institutions are properly paid. Some also feel that they are being less valued by the society as compared in 1988 (Bobrovitz and Griebel, 2001).

Conversely, there are still librarians that are satisfied with their profession (Bobrovitz and Griebel, 2001). They believe that they are valuable to their employer, with respect to their skills, but are still being subjected to issues causing them to think that they are underappreciated by the society. Despite the negative typecast on the profession, their morals are still up but seek the

improvement and image of the career, to change some misinformation for every librarian's sake.

Yet, the negative connotation on the stereotype characteristics of the librarian can also be beneficial. Lately, the issues caused them to make an effort in improving the quality of their work. Through some changes, they believe the public's perception of the librarians will change and will enable the creation of another stereotype for the profession (Paul and Evans 1988 as cited by Marinelli and Baker, 2000; Bobrovitz and Griebel, 2007).

However, the librarians must collectively make this effort in order to overhaul the typecast set on the profession. Even the slightest mistake of only one librarian is very crucial because instead of putting up a good image, things may go for the worse. This made the stereotyping more than an individual behavior.

There had been actions to lessen the negative publicity regarding the librarians. McCormack, since the 1987, had been advocating protest for negative ads of librarians (Marinelli and Baker, 2000). Through the American Libraries' column, "Image: How They're Seeing Us", pictures have been revealing both the negative and positive images on librarianship. Through the revelation of some of the extreme negative publicity, there had been realizations of too much prejudice in the society with regards to librarianship. Somehow, the images that show the goose-stepping and hushing librarians have decreased in number.

Chances of redeeming the status of the librarian profession is very likely because of technological advancements, faculty status for librarians,
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unionization and contracting (Marinelli and Baker, 2000). Due to technological advancements, librarians are now taking up positions such as technology managers and information specialists. Although machines also pose as a threat to librarian employment, computers are essential in making information more available and convenient to clients. After all, librarians can employ themselves as consultants and trainers.

Also, there have been changes in the perception towards librarians as 10 years before. The business of librarianship is also being appreciated more. However, the term librarianship holds some kind of stigma that corporations appreciate the profession more without mentioning the word librarian. (Kneal, 2006)

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