Call for papers on librarian style, stereotypes, and image

Beyond the Bun: Librarian Valuing through Perception and Presentation (An edited collection)

Perceptions of librarians is the current zeitgeist in the library community. Hipster librarians have become a common human interest piece in the news, sexy librarians are pervasive, and reactions are mixed. The topic of librarian stereotypes and the portrayal of librarians in the media cycles through the professional discourse, yet there is little scholarly examination of the material effect of these portrayals. Likewise, although we assume users do have certain perceptions of librarians, we don’t always know what really comprises those ideas and how they impact library use, interaction with librarians, and ability and willingness to engage with information literacy.

The mostly user-submitted blog, Librarian Wardrobe, has been documenting what librarians wear to work since 2010, and through this challenges stereotypes to show librarians as not always fitting into what the public might assume an information professional looks like. The blog’s popularity generated enthusiasm for a standing-room-only Librarian Wardrobe Conversation Starter on perceptions of librarians at ALA Annual 2012. Based on that great success, a webinar was later offered through ALA TechSource, for which over 300 people registered to participate. This is clearly a hot topic. Nicole Pagowsky, the creator of Librarian Wardrobe (and editor of this collection), has been invited to give presentations and serve on conference panels on topics related to the blog. She continues the conversation within Librarian Wardrobe as well through interviews and other mediated posts. Miriam Rigby (editor) served as moderator for the Librarian Wardrobe conversation starter and has a background in cultural anthropology. Though the blog is a good visual medium for exploring perceptions, stereotypes, and current style, we would like to go beyond images and interviews to more in-depth research to cover these topics.

Examples of research speaking to these areas:


Objective of this book
Through this edited collection of chapters, to be published in Spring 2014, we hope to go beyond popular media stereotypes and classifications of assumed public perceptions, and move into research and impact: how do users truly perceive librarians, what effect do these perceptions have on libraries, and what, if anything, do we need to do to use these impressions positively?

Target audience
The target audience for this book is librarians and other information professionals at any type of library, museum, or archive interested in exploring perceptions of librarians and how to use these perceptions to improve interactions with users and library services.
Suggested topics include, but are not limited to:

• New stereotypes and their impact on traditional stereotypes and user perceptions

• Thin-slicing and person perception: how they play out in public assumptions of librarians?
  o Do users truly judge librarians based on what they wear? Are they more open to library instruction or reference service if librarians look a certain way?
  o Does the “trendiness” of librarians impose additional expectations? Does it diminish what users expect? Does it attract users?

• Investigation on how the historical and current underpinnings of demographics in the profession impact stereotypes and how to overcome these when attempting to attract more diversity to the profession
  o The sexuality and sexualization of librarians: how are librarians gendered within librarianship and by others? How do race and age tie in to these notions?
  o How have librarian demographics evolved in relation to diversity? Where are the pitfalls, where have gains been made? What is needed for the future?

• Perspective on service and user experience through an examination of user demographics
  o How do students perceive librarians, and whether positive or negative, how does it affect information literacy efforts on campus?
  o How do faculty perceive librarians? Do current stereotypes help or hinder these relationships, or is it a non-issue?
  o How does the public's perception of librarians impact programming efforts, and is programming one way to reverse negative stereotypes through action? How can this be accomplished?

• What is the future of stereotypes and perceptions of librarians? Will they always exist? Will they change drastically depending on the climate and greater adoption of technology?

Submission procedure
Please submit abstracts and proposals of up to 500 words and a short author’s statement to libwardrobebook@gmail.com by February 1, 2013, with notification by April. Final manuscripts of between 1500 and 5000 words will be due August 1, 2013.

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