

THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS AS A POTENTIAL BARRIER TO RURAL ACCESS

by

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When Melvil Dewey (1876), writing in the premier issue of *Library Journal*, proclaimed an end to the librarian's image as "a mouser in musty books," he likely would not have imagined that negative stereotypes would continue to plague his profession more than 100 years hence. Yet, in the 1990s, damaging stereotypes and misguided caricatures persist in dominating the public's generally misinformed view of what it means to be a librarian. This paper will examine some of these stereotypes as serious barriers to rural information access and will offer strategies for improving the public image of our rural libraries and of the people who keep them functioning.

From the turn of the century, librarians have frequently been portrayed in our popular culture, and with varying degrees of insensitivity, as awkward souls characterized by personality flaws ranging from sullen introversion to bizarre eccentricity. While positive representations may occasionally be identified in pre-war literature and film, they are the exceptions; the positive popular images of librarianship which did manage to survive until the 1950s have since been effectively squashed under the cultural jackboot of television. A now infamous 1981 episode of the game show *Family Feud* typified television's perpetuation of negative professional images when contestants were asked to

match five personality characteristics of librarians. The correct responses were glasses, quiet, single, mean/stern, and stuffy (Merrill, 1984).

Today's librarian has inherited a disturbing legacy of public misunderstanding which seems to be inextricably woven into our societal fabric. While some in our ranks would have us take this institutionalized image-bashing as "all in good fun," the fact is that "the image of the librarian ranks among the top five concerns of the profession" (Wallace, 1989). While the issue of image has, since the time of Dewey, periodically reached a flashpoint in the library literature and been put to rest, it arises, uglier with each incarnation, from its own ashes to haunt us anew.

To document the fascinating and complex evolution of the librarian's negative public image is a task well outside the scope of this essay and one which has been adroitly tackled by such scholars as Pauline Wilson (1982) and Rosalee McReynolds (1985). However, it is useful to consider the most commonly encountered stereotypes which today continue to reflect the media view of our profession which negatively impacts our identity.

THE UGLY DUCKLING

I had not seen a good friend for a year or so and, having gotten together over lunch, he was excitedly describing to me his latest love interest. "She's like 'The Librarian'," he declared sheepishly and, of course, I knew precisely what it was that he was saying. It was a reference to a stereotype which apparently stems from a 1937 film called *Navy Blues* 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" (McReynolds, 1985, p. 28). What my friend wanted me to understand was that his lady friend, although appearing

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at first glance to be a dull, bespectacled prude (an implicit requisite for librarians), was in fact a beautiful and quite “normal” woman underneath this prim exterior. The suggestion is that the librarian is somehow symbolized by a frustrated and sexually ambivalent woman, who, in the right hands, is freed from her priggish confines and self-actualizes into a more agreeable persona. What had really been said was not that she was like the librarian, but that she was like one **stereotype** of a librarian; glasses, ostensibly plain, slender, and with long hair held up in a bun.

While resulting, perhaps, in a minimally negative image, this device became such stock fodder for televised situation comedy that it has inaccurately molded the public’s opinion of librarians for several generations. The impact of such a portrayal, although difficult to measure, may be especially profound among rural library non-users, whose only conception of a librarian may be based upon such a distorted portrayal.

THE FUDDY-DUDDY

This one surfaces over and over like a recalcitrant child that refuses to go to bed. He usually makes his appearance on police dramas or in detective movies and is immediately recognizable by his wildly unkempt hair, impossibly thick eyeglasses and his frumpy suit or threadbare cardigan. There is no mistaking the fact that we are in the presence of a brilliant, albeit quirky, man; the **only** man who is capable of producing the precise arcane bit of minutia required for our hero to crack the case. Yet, as he mutters and ineptly bumbles among the teetering heaps of documents and ‘musty books,’ the status of his character is reduced to the level of a comedic buffoon.

Men in librarianship face a double stigma. They are negatively stereotyped not only as librarians but because they have deliberately

selected a profession which has been historically dominated by females (Morrisey and Case, 1988). This is a condition which causes more than a little anxiety among male librarians. Janette Caputo (1991) observes:

When both men and women work in a profession that is stereotyped as essentially feminine or essentially masculine, they may encounter pressures to conform to the expectations generated by these strong occupational stereotypes. Thus, society may expect male librarians to be more effeminate than men in other types of business organizations...p. 25.

“Effeminate,” in this context, means exhibiting the stereotyped behaviors and personality traits falsely ascribed to female librarians. We, as a society, are presented with what amounts to a softened, male characterization of our most pernicious and enduring stereotype, a masculine version of the stuffy, bespectacled and embittered hag.

THE HARRIDAN

She's 60-ish, single, humorless, and with her stern countenance, omnipresent bifocals, hoary mane drawn up into a severe bun, and with a cadaverous index finger pressed against seamy, pursed lips she is instantly identifiable, even by young children, as a librarian. It is an image we have carried like an albatross hung around our collective necks and, despite decades of positive effort, it is a portrayal which persists in damaging our self-esteem and accessibility. While some in the profession maintain that we make too much of this stereotype's supposed negative impact, others wish mightily that it would finally and forever disappear.

But the image steadfastly refuses to die. It seems to be thoroughly entrenched in our mass psyche as we devise novel methods for imprinting each successive generation of potential library users. For instance, any number of today's computer graphics packages offer clip art for

adorning newsletters and such. We find the entry for “librarian” on the menu, hit the Print key and stand in horror as the stereotypical manifestation appears, one line at a time. Technology has designed yet another means of promulgating a damaging professional image which batters the status and self-confidence of fledgling librarians. In fact, it was found that younger librarians complained more frequently about being negatively stereotyped than did those who have been in the profession for 10 or more years (Caputo, 1991, p. 62).

WHY DO THESE STEREOTYPES ENDURE?

It cannot be disputed that the negative images discussed here are a part of today’s public consciousness. But why is it that librarians continue to be, as a professional class, so radically misunderstood? Janette Caputo (1984) explains:

The historical age of an occupation has been shown to be a determinant in the development of stereotypes, so that well-established, familiar occupations (such as that of librarian) are defined much more sharply as stereotypes, with far more resistance to change, than newer, comparatively unfamiliar occupations (such as that of information manager). p. 13.

This is consistent with the fact that the medical and legal professions also carry particularly damning stereotypes.

It has been reported that, while the public recognizes the media’s role in contribution to the ‘old maid’ image, the image is perceived as being “based on reality” (Wallace, 1989, p. 23). That is to say that the public actually does, to an extent, see us as fitting the stuffy and dull stereotype. Further, the professional literature points to “recent research studies by librarians, about librarians, which have shown that “many of the stereotypical attributes of librarians actually do exist in a large number of librarians” (Caputo, 1984, p. 14).

While it is ludicrous to suggest that a singular "type" of person is drawn to librarianship as a vocation, it is possible that patrons who have had negative experiences with librarians allow such encounters to color their perception of the profession as a whole. It has been noted that adults, and especially men, frequently cite negative impressions of librarians which stem from their childhood experiences (Wallace, 1989, p. 24). This may possibly be attributed, for the time being, to the fact that today's adults remember school libraries which offered considerably less than the dynamic media centers found in many contemporary school settings. There is some evidence that children are now beginning to view us in a more positive light (Duffy, 1990, p. 303).

Our image is further denigrated by the fact that the public tends to be painfully unaware of the level of education generally required to become a professional librarian (Romanko, 1986, p. 88). Where incredulity is the common response to learning that a Master's degree is the current standard professional requisite, there exists a most fundamental public relations deficit. The unfortunate perception appears to be that library science courses are concerned with such inane matters as "how to change the date-due machine" (Kies, 1989). The popular press does its share to ensure that such myths are sustained. An article appearing in the *Detroit Free Press* offered advice for teens seeking summer jobs which were classified as "unskilled." "Librarian" was one suggestion followed by the banal comment, "It's slow, but you get to see the good magazines" (*American Libraries*, 1986, p. 58).

This is linked with the prevailing public view that librarianship consists largely of insipid hours spent shelving books, stamping cards, and other such seemingly mindless tasks. Many library users, and particularly those using smaller public libraries, maintain such an opinion because these are activities which are highly visible. "The public assumes, out of ignorance we have never corrected, that anyone who

works in a library is a librarian” (White, 1986, p.58). Hence, a reinforcement of the notion that librarians are minimally trained and must face a numbingly boring daily routine.

When librarians are viewed by the public as boring, it projects a dull image on the library itself and this should be of great concern to us. In truth, we should be less worried about the public’s perception of our physical image and more interested in the perception of how necessary we are to them as providers and interpreters of information (Schuman, 1990). Cosette Kies (1989) points out:

If the individuals who work in libraries are not viewed as knowledgeable professionals, then the images of the places in which they work suffer as well. Perhaps we have done our self-service concept in libraries **too** well: it has been made so easy for patrons to use libraries that there is no reason for them to suppose that librarians have any particularly special expertise to offer.

WHY SHOULD WE CARE?

Astonishingly, there are those in librarianship who believe that vocal opponents of our negative public image are misguided and that in calling attention to the issue, we do more harm than good. But how can we do **more** damage when the negative image seems to be the only one that the media depicts and that the general public embraces (Romanko, 1986)? Damaging stereotypes of librarians serve to sap out self-esteem, impede our initiative, mar our credibility, diminish our respect within the community, and discourage new recruits from entering the profession (Morrisey & Case, 1988). As one librarian wrote in an open letter, “I sometimes wonder if I would have chosen to become a librarian if I had realized how frequently I would be subjected to cracks, comments and, worse, the unspoken prejudices” (Kies, 1989).

This leads into a very serious aspect of the image problem, the issue of professional status. In a 1989 study it was found that, of 12 listed professions, graduate library science students ranked librarianship as the lowest in occupational status (Kies, 1989). Such findings raise the possibility that we are institutionalizing a self-image of professional inferiority and that, for whatever reasons, "we lack regard for our own profession and its importance" (White, 1986).

This suggestion is clearly evident in males who frequently are evasive about admitting to others that they are librarians and who tend to describe what they do by using alternate titles such as "information specialist" or educator" (Morrisey & Case, 1988). A remarkable 1988 study showed that male librarians have a perceived image that is actually **more** negative than the image ascribed to them by the general population (Morrisey & Case). These findings may relate to the fact that librarianship is a strongly sex-stereotyped occupation but they also reflect a general lack of perceived professional status which affects both genders.

Another indication of our comparatively low professional status is evident in our salaries. Entry-level academic librarians in positions requiring an MLS, and increasingly a subject Master's degree as well, can expect to earn an annual wage comparable to an individual holding an undergraduate degree in many other fields. The salaries for all libraries remain, in most cases, well below those recommended as starting salaries by the various professional state and national library organizations. In most regions, public librarians draw salaries which range from substandard to abysmally low. This unhappy circumstance is extremely detrimental to our sense of self-worth and, consequently, can negatively impact our spirit of public service.

When the public holds an unfavorable and unrealistic perception of librarians and of libraries, it serves as a barrier to information access in that it discourages individuals, if only subliminally, from making use of library resources (Boyer, 1987). How many rural Americans feel intimidated by the prospect of directly interacting with what the media has taught them waits behind the library's doors? How many others are of the impression that the librarian, being preoccupied with shushing patrons and stamping due-dates, has neither the time nor the expertise to lend any meaningful assistance? A 1989 Gallop Poll indicates that "three-quarters of adults rarely visit libraries" (Wallace, 1989).

So, in a societal climate where library school graduates beat themselves up, where our public has no clear understanding of the librarians' professional role, where library funding is continually threatened, where the majority of our community recognizes no need for library services and where the media persists in fueling depreciatory stereotypes of librarians, how can we complacently downplay the importance of our public image? There are indications in the library literature that the issue is, once again, being taken seriously.

For instance, the Special Libraries Association (SLA) Inter-Association Task Force submitted a report on image in 1990. But the upbeat findings of the Task Force - based upon their survey of "community leaders, local elected officials, corporate executives, government officials, academics, and entertainment and news media writers, editors, producers" (Marcus, 1990) - scarcely reflect the views of the general public. *American Libraries* has responded to the issue by running a regular "Images" feature since 1985 but this generally serves to tell us what we already know too well, that we are, as librarians, sorely misunderstood by the media and by the general population.

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

Neal Edgar (1976) in his often-cited essay "The Image of Librarianship in the Media," remarked that "(U)nder present conditions a favorable image of the librarian may be impossible." Indeed, a decade and a half later, the situation has improved very little. But the continuing outcry in the library literature for a recognition of our negative public image suggests that we are, as a profession, in need of moving toward solutions. Those scholars who believe we are making too much of the issue take a myopic view. What should disturb us is not so much that the public envisions librarians in terms of a ridiculous caricature, but the realization that "what people think of us not only limits our status and salaries, but also the growth of our profession and the funding and use of libraries" (Schuman, 1990).

And what people think of us, not as individuals but as a professional body, is shaped primarily by the media, with television being the most powerful influence. Television has the potency to reach vast audiences and to reinforce stereotypes over a prolonged time period. In our contemporary culture, when we are told that we do not "look like a librarian" (Romanko, 1986) this is meant to be taken as a compliment. Few, if any, other professions can point to so flagrant an example of wholesale typecasting and, regrettably, the distorted image of what a librarian is *supposed* to look like has largely been formed by the visual media. The image is so virile that it colors the perspective of people who should know better. For instance, it has been observed that some academic guidance counselors tend to direct students who demonstrate characteristics of timidity, tidiness or bookishness toward a career in librarianship when what is really needed for success in the field is assertiveness and extraordinary interpersonal communication skills (Romanko, 1986). If highly educated professionals having considerable personal contact with librarians maintain such erroneous perceptions,

how much more thoroughly ingrained might these images be in the minds of the rural population whose only exposure to librarianship may come in the form of a potato chip commercial or an inane situation comedy?

When we encounter harmful stereotypes in the media, it behooves us as librarians to let our displeasure be known. As obvious as it may seem, in order to be effective efforts should not be limited to our own literature, but should be directed toward the non-library periodicals and the popular press (Edgar, 1976). Letters written to companies which exploit negative images of librarians should focus not so much on the issue of status but rather on economics. The president-publisher of a popular magazine was quoted as saying about women, "...if we don't approach them as honest-to-goodness real life human beings and not caricatures, we just aren't going to be able to sell them anything" (Merrill, p.17).

Librarians and other information professionals in the United States and Canada number in the hundreds of thousands and represent a considerable sphere of influence. In an age of ever-increasing public awareness, advertisers and publishers commit a cardinal sin of marketing when they deliberately alienate a significant component of their consumer base. However, they sometimes may need to be reminded of this fact.

On the positive side, one facet of the media is offering evidence of an enlightened and more sensitive editorial view of librarianship. When a stereotype analysis of three major national newspapers was conducted, the authors concluded that "(W)hile the stereotypical library roles are still being presented by the press, there is sufficient coverage to the contrary to suggest that libraries are succeeding in presenting

librarians as vital, active, and progressive” (Bourkoff & Binder, 1986/5, p. 62).

This is an encouraging beginning, but until we can document this as a trend across all of the media, we must remain vigilant in promoting public awareness and in cultivating positive images of our profession. There is one interesting, yet perhaps misguided, view that our prevailing negative stereotype is so distinctive that its loss would actually be detrimental to our unity (Stevens, 1988, p. 848).

If, in putting to rest the images which have disquieted us for more than a century, we risk threatening our professional identity, it is a gamble worth taking. The loss of so negative a professional identity is, in fact, no loss at all.

What about the public’s perception of the library itself? Certainly, elements of the physical environment create a “mood” or “feel” to the place which can have a tremendous impact on how receptive the public will be in continuing to use the library. A drab and stuffy facility reinforces the stereotype of the library as a boring place operated by dull people. While much has been written on this in recent years, the importance of maintaining a dynamic and colorful library environment deserves emphasis. Potted plants, timely artwork, locally-relevant displays, skylights, and comfortable seating can all serve to encourage the development of a positive library image which surely projects a favorable image upon the acting librarians and support staff. But aesthetic and practical improvements to the physical library environment can only go so far in communicating a warmer image where a large segment of the rural population seems to avoid the public library as a matter of course.

When Bernard Vavrek (1990, p.2), who has become something of a champion for rural libraries, investigated rural public libraries in

Pennsylvania and reported that "seven out of ten library clients are women," it was a disturbing revelation. The reasons for the relative lack of library use by rural men are not entirely clear, but the library's community image must certainly play a major role. Rural women have identified information needs which differ from those of their male counterparts and they perceive the rural library as a place where those needs may be met (Vavrek, 1990, p. 2). Men, conversely and aside from whatever negative misconception they may have about librarians, may have an image of the rural library as a place which caters primarily to women and which specializes in Harlequin romance novels, cook-books, and children's books.

There may be some truth in this view. Carol Hole (1990, p. 1976), who has written eloquently on the "feminization" of the public library, proclaims that "we have made public libraries—and to a certain extent all libraries—into institutions that are hostile or useless to most males." Further, she points to our libraries' "long, depressing history of hostility toward working-class people" and suggests that librarians inadvertently have created an atmosphere which keeps men "away from the library in droves."

If we suspect that rural men have an image of the public library as a place which provides meaningful service only to women and children, then we have identified a formidable, yet surmountable barrier. Vavrek (1990, p. 37) alludes to a gap which exists between rural residents and their actual information needs and justly concludes that, in many of the rural public libraries, "(C)urrent sources of information, primarily those relevant to local needs, are not being identified for clients."

What is required, then, is a concerted effort on the part of rural librarians to systematically survey the information needs of their patrons and, more importantly, the needs of non-users, and then build,

promote, and maintain a more appropriate and gender-balanced collection.

But the development of a locally-appropriate collection can only enhance the library's image to a limited degree; its perceived worth will ultimately be based not on its holdings, but only how its collection is utilized. To define a library solely by the scope and currency of its collection is to suggest that professional librarians are not a necessary component of meaningful library service and that good libraries can exist independent of good librarians (White, p. 58). Information, like any commodity, will not sell itself, but must be packaged and advertised before it meets with wide acceptance and use (Boyer, p.6). The same may be said for librarians in terms of promoting their own recognition, credibility, and value within the community.

John Marcus (1990, p. 69) a member of the Special Library Association's Task Force on Image, observes:

Librarians are still seen as 'protectors of books,' hence their perceived stature as authoritarians, but they are also historically thought to be studious 'book-worms,' resulting in the idea that they are more comfortable with books than people. These fallacious caricatures persist not because they are so firmly entrenched in the cultural foundation as to be immovable, but rather because individual professionals have neglected to act in unison to eradicate them.

If we are somehow discouraged from acting in unison on the image problem, our lack of professional self-identity is an exacerbating factor. We are restrained by a collective sense of inferiority regarding our occupational status which is deeply rooted in a substandard wage scale, institutionalized media-bashing and the perceptions of an uninformed and ambivalent public. Librarianship has not been able to attain the distinctive characteristics which are necessary in order to

establish it as a true and recognized profession, nor has it been able to assert with any confidence its critical role to society (Reeves, 1980, p. 7).

One partial solution, which has been met with opposition by the various library associations, is a policy of professional certification for the regulation of access into the occupation (Regan, 1987, p. 297). Although such a notion would likely be anathema to many library paraprofessionals, it would serve the dual function of boosting the self-esteem of credentialed librarians and would allow for a clear delineation of technical, clerical, and professional roles in the workplace (Regan, p. 297).

This single action could establish a basis for the cultivation of a new and positive professional image for public librarians, just as it has done for many librarians now working in the medical and legal fields. A credentialing policy would lay a foundation for the development of a clear and formal definition, both to ourselves and to the general public, of what it means to be a librarian.

The potential impact of library professionalization upon rural communities could be massive. Like the state or county rural extensionist and the home health nurse, it would enable the rural public librarian to, with some self-assurance and poise, assume the role of an expert possessing specialized knowledge and being capable of offering to rural constituents a useful, if not crucial, array of services. As the community librarian develops a highly-visible public profile, the positive images of the profession can begin to directly and effectively overshadow a century of demoralizing role ambiguity (Vavrek, 1985, p. 23).

In order to further dispel negative images and to improve and increase community accessibility, it is necessary for rural librarians to aggressively market positive aspects of the library and its services

(Boyer, 1987). Too often the rural librarian focuses public relations efforts on the promotion of programs which have already been proven successful and popular, such as children's story hours and adult literacy campaigns. And frequently, the actual marketing strategy is limited to notices placed on bulletin boards located near or inside the library itself. Truly effective marketing must be based upon the actual needs of the constituency, not upon the librarian's personal view of what will best serve the community. The real information needs of rural constituents will surface only where a two-way dialog exists between the rural library and its host community (Kies, p. 26). In order to accomplish this, the importance of fostering constructive relationships with local media cannot be underestimated.

Joseph Grunenwald (1989, p. 23) has offered guidelines for a three-pronged marketing approach for the enhancement of the rural library's image which consists of:

1. the selection of an image which is based upon the identification of actual need and which is both realistic and locally-appropriate;
2. the incorporation of this image as a theme which is perceptible in the daily activities of the library, and;
3. the sensitizing of library personnel to their image, not as an inner perspective but rather in terms of an "other-oriented view."

In marketing the image of the library and its staff, rural librarians must strive to change the community's perception of the library as being simply a book repository which occasionally offers children's programs. Part of the professionalization process is the promotion of librarians as "possessors of unique and specialized knowledge rather than as dispensers of books" (Richards & Elliot, 1988, p. 424). Further,

it is essential for rural librarians to recognize the fact that the rural public library is facing ever-increasing competition as a primary information provider. In order for the rural public library to thrive, its focus must move away from one of passive and reactive service toward a projection of an assertive, proactive, and dynamic image (Paul & Evans, 1988, p. 13).

The onus of this responsibility ultimately rests upon the individual librarian. While negative library stereotypes are far too ingrained to be vanquished by the assertive skills of rural public librarians, the development and implementation of a proactive spirit of service can boost professional identity and help librarians demonstrate their role as essential community leaders (Caputo, p. 16). Conversely, the negative actions of just one dull, stuffy, or socially-inept librarian can utterly devastate the ability of a given library to market a positive community image (Paul & Evans, p. 13).

We must periodically remind ourselves that it is the patron and not the collection that deserves our utmost consideration. A librarian who appears, to the public, to be continually preoccupied and busy with tasks other than involving direct patron interaction alienates users and generally discourages approachability (McMurdo, 1982). This can be especially true in rural communities where a positive human element may be an important integral component of public service expectations.

It has been remarked that the relatively recent social emphasis which has been placed on the value and importance of information has not resulted in an "increased recognition of the librarian as an information professional" (Schuman, p. 87). However, as technologies for improved and individualized information access such as online services, faxing of documents, post-coordinate CD-ROM searching and

automated public access catalogs become more publicly visible, so too will the role of the librarian as an information manager. Unfortunately, due to economic realities this change will be slower in coming to rural areas. But even in rural communities, if their libraries are to compete and survive, there must be an evolution in public perception away from stereotypes of traditional librarianship and toward a vision of holistic information services.

There are those professionals who advocate that the time has come to retire the occupation's label of "librarian" altogether (Regan, 1987, p. 292). It is true that the word takes its root from the Latin "leber" (book) and, if we are committed to swaying the popular conception of the library as a "book place" and of librarians as mere keepers of books, it would seem that the professional moniker of "librarian" may well have outlived its appropriateness. With a new collective identity as "information managers" and "information specialists," we divorce ourselves from a long legacy of degrading stereotypes, proclaim our independence from negative public preconceptions and much more accurately, indicate the true scope of our role in contemporary society.

Our major concern regarding the entire issue of public image should be that when a community accepts distorted and unfavorable stereotypes of its library or its librarians, it represents a barrier to information access which is every bit as disheartening as a censored book or a padlocked entrance. As the rural population is particularly vulnerable to misconceptions which discourage reliance upon the library as a primary resource, we, as information professionals, need to make the permanent dismantling of this barrier a priority.

SUMMARY

Librarians and libraries within our present cultural context are historically linked with a number of unfavorable stereotypes and nega-

tive images. Negative public perceptions not only cause considerable anxiety among library professionals and hinder professional development, they may also serve to directly limit our public accessibility.

Although some attention has been devoted to the impact our negative public image has upon the profession and its practitioners, little has been done to accurately assess the extent to which a poor professional and institutional image impacts rural library use. Of particular interest would be an assessment of rural non-users' attitudes toward the community library and libraries in general. Until we obtain such data, the influences of negative library stereotypes on rural patron attitudes will remain speculative.

In the meantime, rural librarians must strive to consider the image of themselves and their libraries from the viewpoint of the patron. Efforts should be made to improve, where possible, the physical environment of the library in order to project an atmosphere of equity, dynamism and vitality. Local media must be allied with the objectives of the community library and educated away from the perpetuation of damaging stereotypes.

Rural librarians must also learn to capitalize on new technologies such as online searching services, document faxing and inter-library loans in order to help dispel the "stamp and ink pad" perception of the profession. Strategies for the marketing of a positive library image should be incorporated into daily operations, should involve all staff and volunteers, and should encourage local participation wherever feasible.

Finally, serious consideration should be given to the possibility of moving away from the traditional rural library image and toward a more holistic identity as a true rural community information center. Although die-hard librarians will view this as a draconian measure, it is

the surest method of encouraging rural accessibility, generating a spirit of professional integrity, and distancing ourselves from a century of public misconceptions.

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