

# HIPSTER LIBRARIANS: PLEASE EXPLAIN

It's the water cooler question for some of our colleagues. What, exactly, is a hipster librarian? INCITE asked two enthusiastic fans of a brand new stereotype to share their thoughts on why it makes perfect sense to them.

Holger Aman is the Acting Manager of the Law Courts Library in Sydney, where his personal style is part of his armoury for engaging with clients.

First of all, it's simply the way I dress and act anyway! It's also a conversation starter with our clients and it also seems to differentiate me from many other librarians, which can be useful for networking. People tend to remember someone different!

I'd say that a hipster librarian has come to mean a librarian with a number of traits: the hipster style of dressing (exposed ankles, sharp suits, vintage clothes), trendy hair, beards or moustaches and tattoos). I'm influenced by Romany Manuell when I say that I don't think that a hipster librarian attitude exists, but rather that most librarians actually unconsciously channel hipster ideas such as the importance of the past and a degree of intellectualism.

The label 'hipster librarian' has been stuck on anyone perceived as 'cool' but many hipster librarians I know are just 20-somethings that look, dress and act like other 20-somethings. I use the way that I dress and act as a tool to further engage with our clients and it seems to be successful.

## WHERE DID THE HIPSTER LIBRARIAN IDEA COME FROM?

Romany Manuell presented a simply fantastic paper at NLS6 on the rise of the hipster librarian that explored the more esoteric implications for the industry. I'd say that it really entered the mainstream consciousness with the article in the New York Times entitled *A Hipper Crowd of Shushers*. Tellingly, it was in the fashion and style section. There was a lot of backlash against this article, but I think that it was mainly just highlighting that young, 'cool' people are becoming librarians, not that librarianship is necessarily a 'hip' profession. The majority of the backlash seemed to be against the fashion consciousness of 'hipster librarians' but I think this is missing the point that this is simply the way that many people dress.

Librarians have always been a bridge between the old and the new. We use new technology to protect, access and disseminate knowledge, both old and new. The subculture of hipsters seems to be driven by nostalgia and the desire to worship the past. Librarians, on the other hand, try to bridge the gap between the past and present, while always embracing new technology.

The hipster subculture is also quite exclusionary. Things wouldn't be 'cool' if everyone knew about them. Librarians tend to hold the opposite viewpoint—on principle, we aim to allow everyone to know everything! While the archetype of the hipster librarian would celebrate the ironic use of things like card catalogues and date due stamps, the real librarian is aware of the importance of these technologies in the context of the professional narrative of librarianship.

## HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT BEING CALLED A HIPSTER LIBRARIAN?

I'm happy to be called a hipster librarian, mainly because it gives me a point of difference among my fellow librarians, which is almost always an advantage. However, I don't think that any of our clients would ever use the term 'hipster librarian'. I'd say it is definitely a library-centric term.

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Rachael Kuan is Fremantle City Library's Elibrarian. Not only is she a hipster librarian, she's also an award-winning zinester. Rachael says the match is not only perfect, it's obvious.

Let's face it—public libraries are punk rock. What we provide is influenced by a socially aware, do-it-yourself attitude. I became an elibrarian almost by default, being interested in making things with technology since an early age. But I was a zine maker (zines being self published, photocopied, small circulation booklets often about non-mainstream topics) long before I became a librarian, and together they make perfect sense. In the US, it's almost a stereotype to be a zinester (zine maker) and a librarian because this is the space where activism, art and reference collide, and these people were my inspiration during the time I was studying for my degree.

2013 was a particularly good year for me, both on the professional and personal front, but the biggest surprise was winning two Golden Stapler awards for Zinester of the Year and 2013 Zine of the Year. The Golden Stapler awards are nominated and voted for by Australian zinesters and readers. The actual awards themselves are gold spray-painted staplers, the stapler being the 'patron saint' of the zinester.

I also help run Aunty Mabel's Zine Distro with some friends. This involves an online shop, workshops, and selling zines at market stalls and events and we organise an annual zine fair, bringing together zine makers from Western Australia, interstate and abroad. In the past we've also had some involvement with state and public libraries with their youth programs and have helped them set up their own zine collections. The zine community in Perth is small, but we hope to encourage it to grow through our activities.

In my other spare time I play guitar in an instrumental rock band called SMRTS, sometimes described as "world music dying at the hands of garage rock," while having the ability to make people "both dance and head bang in the same set".

When I tell people about the things I do and about my profession, they sometimes seem confused, as if all these elements don't match up. I'll hang onto my favourite cardigan but I think it's time to celebrate loudly all the things that we do, as library professionals and in the community.

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HOLGER AMAN:  
THE TERM 'HIPSTER LIBRARIAN' IS LIBRARY-CENTRIC



RACHAEL KUAN WITH HER COVETED GOLDEN STAPLER AWARD:  
PUBLIC LIBRARIES ARE PUNK ROCK.