



Dear Editor,

Where has this emphasis on the way a librarian *looks* come from? I have noticed it creeping into professional discourse for some time now in various guises. Not only in an emphasis on how a librarian looks/should look/must not look but also in articles, notes and so on, all usually from young librarians telling the profession how it must change if it wishes to include the author amongst its membership. On the one hand, big tick for chutzpah – on the other, is this narcissistic thinking or what!

What has finally drawn me to the proverbial pen is the Jan/Feb 2014 issue of *INCITE* as well as the *ALIA Weekly* vol 2 issue 6 (12 Feb 2014) with its link to *This is What a Librarian Looks Like*, where we are told the photographs are “part of a project to address stereotypes as well as budget cuts and understaffing problems”. In the place of any information about the project on budget cuts and understaffing – surely two of the more fundamental problems facing the profession within the Anglo-American world of librarianship – we are told that what librarians look like doesn’t matter. To which the accompanying images rather give the lie. Not only that, it then goes on to reinforce particularly strong cultural stereotypes, such as the ideal image of women or women in a particular type of profession whilst at the same time valorising youth.

I don’t have a problem with the images as such in either *INCITE* or in *This is What a Librarian Looks Like*, but I do have a huge problem with the messages behind both projects.

So – have I missed something? Is this some kind of post-modern equivalent of fiddling while Rome burns?

It is a great shame that our professional magazines are buying into it so uncritically. Yes it is true that some older librarians dress ‘funny’ – and so do some younger librarians. But so what? Really and truly – so WHAT? What is the sub-text of all this?

The whole discourse is internally-generated and propagated. The stereotyping of women within the profession, if pandered to, can be nothing but a destructive. It works to divide us at a time when broad communal strength, commitment and activism are needed to ensure a strong position for librarians and libraries into the future.

There are matters more deserving of our engagement than some current fashion or fad, matters that should be of concern to the whole of our profession. They include pay equity, the under-resourcing of libraries, the deprofessionalisation of librarianship and the undermining of the profession from within.

Perhaps we, as a profession, could begin turning our minds to such things? Dress however you like at work but please stop attempting to marginalise women in the profession who don’t dress the way that you do and please, please begin seriously addressing the real threats to our profession and to our libraries.

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Dear Editor,

I am writing to comment on “our profession’s enduring stereotype”. I address this specific issue with the Master of Information Management students at RMIT University in The Professional Experience course.

The tutorial always engenders stimulated and spirited discussion from students of all ages and opinions and I generally conclude the class with the statement that if they want to know what a contemporary librarian looks like, “Just look in the mirror, because it’s you”.

This remains the truth regardless of the temporal period we are in. As *INCITE* January/February 2014 suggested, it’s what librarians do that matters and this certainly is in continual evolution.

Thank you for an interesting issue and for the opportunity to smell like an old book following the purchase of the perfume mentioned on page 34. It arrived this week in time for the new semester: glasses, pearls, cardigan, sensible shoes, and old book scent – tick!

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Do you have an opinion or comment on something you’ve read in *INCITE*? We welcome letters to the editor. Email us at incite@alia.org.au. (Letters should be no more than 250 words and include a postal or email address.)