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In the Picture: Representations of Librarianship in Children's Picture Books Published in the UK between 1994-2014

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ABSTRACT



This study examines representations of librarianship in children's picture books published recently in the UK. Representations of libraries and librarians have been gathered from both the narratives and illustrations in a set of eight children's picture books published in the UK between 1994 and 2014 using a novel data-gathering framework. It was found that depictions of libraries and librarians have been more favorable in the present century than they were in the last. Even when stereotypical aspects were detected, they did not produce a negative view of the profession, and no correlation was found between stereotyping and the overall view of librarians. The textual analysis corroborated literature review findings of a lack in differentiation between professional and para-professional staff, which may be causing misunderstanding of the level of skills and knowledge that librarians possess.

KEYWORDS

Picture books;
representation of librarians;
children's fiction;
hermeneutic analysis

Introduction

If, following [Lincoln and Guba](#), it is not possible to separate cause from effect, as all entities are in a state of simultaneous shaping, depictions of librarianship in children's literature are likely to be influencing children's views. If those portrayals are based on outdated or incorrect stereotypes, and/or negative or incorrect interpretations of the role of the librarian, this may be having long-reaching detrimental effects not only on library use, but also on young people's desire to enter the profession, and key stakeholders' understanding of the assets that librarians can bring to the modern workforce. Furthermore, a surprising number of children's picture books featuring libraries do not include librarians, even in their illustrations (for example; [Thompson](#), *How to Live Forever*; [Cleminson](#), *Otto the Book Bear*; [Coelho](#), *Luna Loves Library Day*), which may be compounding the opinion that librarians are unnecessary and dispensable. The information profession

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has long been conscious that negative stereotypes may be damaging their reputation (Cassidy; Elhard; Pagowsky and Rigby; Radford; Schuman; Stevens; Tancheva; Tannenbaum; Teicher; Wilder; Wendi and Benefiel).

A number of studies have been undertaken to assess how libraries and librarians are perceived, using a range of primary sources including films (Radford and Radford; Shaffer and Olga; Tancheva), cartoons (Highsmith), mass media (Luthmann; Shaw) and children's books (Heylman; Maynard and McKenna; Stevens; Review: Librarians and Libraries for Children; Tannenbaum; Yontz). However, no research has yet analyzed a sample of picture books in this way. Most recent research has found that the public view of libraries is positive, but that the role of the librarian is not always understood. This paper seeks to add to the research by examining a sample set of children's picture books published between 1994 and 2014, which are set in a library and contain at least one librarian, in order to explore the representation of librarians and their professional skills and attributes.

The image of the librarian in popular culture

Although there have been a number of studies of librarians in popular culture, children's books have generally not been used in the analysis of the cultural history of librarianship (Yontz). In addition, there is little research on the representation of librarians in picture books. Most of the literature that reviews children's books focuses on US publications, and few undertake analysis of the text, and/or images, in a qualitative way. It is worth examining the representation of the profession in children's books however, as the books we read as children play an important role in framing our understanding of the world and the library, indeed, a 1990 study by Schuman noted that 62% of key policy makers "formed their image of librarians in childhood" (87), even though over half had used a library in the past year. This would suggest that the images that children are exposed to could have a significant effect throughout life.

Despite librarians considering themselves to have a negative public image (Arant and Benefiel; Heylman; Highsmith; Luthmann; Mosley; Posner; Radford and Radford; Shaw; Shaffer and Olga; Schuman; Tannenbaum), overall the literature suggests that librarians are generally portrayed positively. (On the other hand, the literature also finds that at least part of the stereotype of the middle-aged, white, female librarian persists (for example, Heylman; Maynard and McKenna; Peresie and Alexander; Stevens; Tannenbaum; Yontz, who observed that librarians are often depicted as "spinster, cold, stern, timid, shy" whilst also being "intelligent, well informed, and helpful" (28)). Given that CILIP and ARA's mapping of the workforce in 2015 found that 78.1% of library and information professionals are female, 55.3% are aged 45 or over, and 96.7% identify as "white" (CILIP/ARA 2), it might be argued that the stereotype is actually a fair reflection of the average librarian.

In a study that focused on mass media depictions of librarians, [Luthmann](#) found that although depictions of librarians are generally positive and often subvert the stereotype, the public perception still carries a negative stereotype (776). In another media focused study, Shaw examined the representation of librarianship in UK newspapers and found that that 58% of articles studied made no mention of duties performed by the librarian. However, when skills were mentioned, it was found that the most common were accurate professional accomplishments: knowledge of content, technological competence and collection development ([Shaw](#) 561). Shaw also found a lack of awareness of the level of education and knowledge that librarians possess, as well as deficiencies in understanding of the professional role (62, and [Schuman](#)). Descriptions of ineptitude were found to have decreased over time (563).

Stevens' 1999 review of librarians in children's books found an increase in US publications which include librarians. These books tended to offer positive representations of their importance in promoting reading and intellectual growth. Stevens suggested that even when a stereotypical librarian was presented, its purpose was to undermine the stereotype, given that in general, as the story progresses such librarians are shown to be more helpful and pleasing than anticipated. Miss Merriweather in *Library Lion* is a good example of this, as is Spud from *The Legend of Spud Murphy*. This hypothesis is corroborated by Graham, whose literacy-based study claimed "authors and illustrators seldom present stereotypes or one dimensional characters unless that is the point of the story" (8). In a study of how the role of the librarian has been depicted in US children's books over time, Yontz found depictions generally followed professional trends. However, she and others ([Highsmith](#); [Luthmann](#)) also noted a propensity for librarians to be shown carrying out nonprofessional tasks, such as shelving books. It may be argued that this is because such tasks are considered "visual shorthand for the librarian" ([Luthmann](#) 776).

There is little research on the representation of librarians in children's picture books in the UK, however [Maynard and McKenna](#) examined picture books as part of their triptych of children's books. In their project, one picture book is reviewed in depth, alongside one book for emergent readers and one young adult title. As they explain, picture books may provide the first images of libraries and librarians that a child sees, making them significantly influential (122). [Maynard and McKenna](#) found an increase in children's books by leading authors that include libraries and librarians, and argued that both tend to be shown in an overall positive light. However, they also concluded that "the image of the library has changed in a different way from that of the librarian," with the stereotype of the librarian being "fixed . . . with the result that no new positive stereotype has emerged to replace it" (128).

Shaw (555) cites a number of sources which agree that the representation of a profession has an impact on how they are viewed by others, by themselves and (perhaps most importantly in today's climate) by those who influence their pay, status and ultimately their presence in society. This paper analyses a sample of children's picture books that contain librarians with a view to complementing the existing discussion about the representation of librarians in children's books. While it considers stereotypical representations, the major focus will be on the depiction of professional duties and interactions with library users, as suggested by Schumann and Shaw. Further, this study considers whether a wider analysis of picture books will corroborate Maynard and McKenna's finding that the negative stereotype of the library has improved in recent years.

Adult or child is generally the first level of categorization for books, with most public libraries having different sections (sometimes separated by walls or even floors) and collections for adult and children's books. The gulf that can sometimes exist between the two areas is described by Alan Bennett in *The Library Book* "Ahead was the Adult's Library, lofty, airy and inviting; to the right was the Junior Library, a low, dark room made darker by the books" which had been re-bound in "grim packaging" (27). This sentiment is echoed by Colfer in young adult novel *The Legend of Spud Murphy*, where William and Marty are directed by the Trunchbullesk librarian to the junior section and instructed not to move. When, having read all of the books in the junior section at least once, William decides to carefully tiptoe into the adult section, the librarian is softened by William's desire to read and rewards him with his very own blue library card, entitling him to read any book in the library.

With authors such as Philip Pullman stating that they do not write with a particular audience in mind but "to please himself" (Counihan; Margaronis), the decision of whether to classify something as for children or adults is not simple. It is hardly surprising then that much literary research discusses the characteristics that may designate a given book as one for a child (Hunt; Hollindale; Nodelman; Stephens; Watson). Hunt describes children's literature as, "a species of literature whose boundaries are very hazy". Hollindale comments that as children's authors post-second-world-war started to introduce more intricate language, and found it well received, it has become more challenging to differentiate between children's and adult's fiction on narrative grounds. So if we are unable to use the authorial intention or the narrative itself; what can we use as distinguishing principles to define a book as one for children? Hunt suggests that the children's book "species" is determined not by the author or the text but by the reader, which demonstrates the closeness and importance of this relationship. It also highlights the importance of the intermediary readers, such as publishers, librarians, booksellers, parents and teachers, who may influence such categorizations.

The first known picture book, the *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*, was created in 1658 by Jon Amos Comenius and employed woodcut illustrations to teach children Latin, by relating it to their everyday lives (The [British Library](#)). Although there are examples of other early children's books, it was not until the 19th century that they began to flourish with "a move towards universal education" (Cotton), and the publication of more creative and imaginative literature rather than traditional fairy tales. Improved technology and an increasingly well-traveled middle class enabled illustrated books to thrive. "British illustrator Randolph Caldecott (1846–1886) is widely credited as the first author and artist to develop interplay between picture and text" (Cotton 6; Hunt), and he was the first to make the pictures say more or different things from the text (BBCa).

In the 1930s the readership for children's books changed. Until then the main audience had been middle class children, but as the public library service "really got going" (Shirley Hughes, in BBCc, 15:43 mins) it enabled all children to become book consumers, even if they could not afford to purchase them. Titles thus began to be written about a broader range of society. Picture books became recognized as a genre of their own in the 1960s, and thence became "more established within educational literature in their own right" (Cotton 17–19). Moreover, according to Hunt: "the picture book is the one genuinely original contribution that children's literature has made to literature in general, all its other genres being merely imitative [of adult literature]" (our addition, 2001, 288).

Nodelman defines picture books as: "a series of many pictures combined with relatively slight texts or no texts at all . . . The pictures in picture books are literally 'illustrations' – images that explain or clarify words and each other . . . and bear the burden of conveying most of the information" (6). The authors have used Nodelman's definition to separate works of illustrated fiction (i.e. where the few illustrations are used to assist the reader in imagining what has been described in the text, rather than "conveying most of the information") that may otherwise have been in scope for this paper (such as the beautifully illustrated *I believe in unicorns* (Morpurgo, 2006)), from children's picture books. A key theme that emerged from BBCFOUR's 2008/09 three-part *Picture Books* documentary is that the most important aspect of a book for children is the portrayal of the real world, and particularly real world relationships; regardless of its age-range or genre. Many academic studies corroborate this insight, suggesting that the polysemic nature of picture books, and the interplay between text and image allows children to bring their own understanding of the world into their reading, which in turn allows them to make connections between the book, their life and the act of reading (Baird et al.; Cotton and Daly; Cotton; Graham; Hunt; Stephens). This implies that any reading of a book involving a library and/or librarian needs to be backed up by personal experiences to make them meaningful. Additionally, Baird et al.

suggest that even if the place and/or person is presented in a stereotypical way in the book, the child will add their own contemporary (and hopefully positive) impressions to those given in the story.

In contrast to most research about picture book reading in young children, [Ganea et al.](#) studied pre-school children's transfer of knowledge learned through picture books to the real world, and found a significant correlation. This suggests that in addition to [Baird et al.](#) and [Cotton and Daly's](#) findings, even if a child has never been to a library or met a librarian they may still learn about them through picture books. However, if a negative representation is not backed by a real life positive experience, it is unlikely that the child will be left with a positive overall impression. Developmental psychology demonstrates that visual exposure in the form of picture books "increases toddlers' interest in stimuli" with positive effects ([Butler](#); [Houston-Price et al.](#) 99; [Simcock and DeLoache](#)), and promotes language development and literacy skills ([Ohgi et al.](#)). This would suggest that children who have been exposed to libraries in multiple picture books may be more interested in libraries and librarianship than those who have not, even if the representations are not what the profession might consider complimentary. Visual shorthand and codes that present librarians in an outdated or incorrect way in picture books can still provide children with a positive overall impression of the profession, particularly if enhanced by reassuring interactions with their co-reader ([Ohgi et al.](#)), and real experiences of excellent librarianship. Much examination of children's books has found that "writing for children is usually purposeful, its intention being to foster in the child reader a positive apperception of some socio-cultural values" including "what a particular contemporary social formation regards as the culture's centrally important traditions" ([Stephens](#) 3). This theme is also discussed in, [Cotton](#); [DeWitt](#), [Cready & Seward](#); [Hunt](#); [Stephens](#); [Watson](#); [Yontz](#)). That depictions of libraries and librarians have been found to be increasing is therefore promising.

Methodology

The eight sample books chosen for this study represented a range of years to ascertain whether the way that librarians are represented in children's books has changed or remained static over time. Complex in their own right, [Nodelman](#) (18) says of picture books "The means by which pictures communicate, the codes they evoke and the contexts they imply, may well be infinite in number. Furthermore, these codes and contexts work simultaneously to create the effect of the whole." This renders a dual approach, including both the text and images in each picture book, essential to producing a thorough analysis. Hermeneutics was selected as the method for interpretation of the sample texts because it assists "in mediating and determining our experience of cultural objects" ([Burnard](#)). Children's books are prime examples of cultural

objects, since they are used to reflect society to children in order to help them make sense of the world as they explore it. Hermeneutics is also used “to explain those Others who created them [cultural objects] but also to explain ourselves and our tangled reactions to them. In this complex business, hermeneutics has an important social function, not simply in broadening and enriching individual experience of the world, but also in motivating social coherence and social change” (Burnard). The study required the creation of a customized framework for gathering data, and also a custom coding grid to aid analysis. The design process for these apparatus was iterative. It was initially informed by methodologies deployed in similar studies discovered during the literature review (DeWitt, Cready & Seward; Heylman; Rafferty; Schuman; Shaw; Yontz).

The sample texts were chosen through a process of relevance sampling (Shaw 559). An original bibliography of books containing libraries and/or librarians was compiled through the literature review process, consultation with public librarians and colleagues, and a variety of online bibliographies. The resulting list of seventy eight titles was first reduced to books published primarily in the UK (forty eight titles), then to picture books (twenty eight titles). Picture books were selected because of the interesting interplay between the illustrations and the written words, which according to Nikolajeva (252) “makes a connection between the vicarious emotional experience and its verbal description,” and due to Hunt’s assertion that “more than any other texts they [picture books] reflect society as it wishes to be, as it wishes to be seen, and as it unconsciously reveals itself to be” (2). Picture books are thus felt to provide the closest possible reflection, in literature, of how libraries and librarians are viewed by society, and are deemed most pertinent to the aim and objectives of this study due to their ability to affect behavior. The sample was further narrowed to just stories in which a library is the main setting (i.e. over half of the action takes place in a library) (sixteen titles) and which feature at least one librarian (eleven titles). The final selection resulted in the following list of eight unique titles covering twenty years of UK publication from 1994 to 2014 (see the Bibliography section for a complete list of the sample books).

Data analysis

The data analysis procedure developed for this project was informed by a number of earlier research projects, specifically; DeWitt et al., who analyzed the representation of parental stereotypes in three hundred picture books; Yontz, who examined representations of librarians in thirty-five children’s books published in the US between 1909 and 2000; Heylman, who reviewed the representation of librarians in US juvenile literature; Rafferty, who used a “cultural-materialist approach to genre” (262).

Defining the primary characteristics and job tasks of the librarian, library tools, and the dependent variables was necessary prior to data collection. Shaw's list of skills and duties (559) was adapted for this purpose, combined with the work tasks and tools used by Yontz, and contemporary additions and adjustments. Following Shaw (557), the focus was placed on the perceived value of the librarian to the story and what tasks they were shown performing. However, since the stereotype of the librarian is key to both the representations and the resulting public image of the profession this has also been included despite Shaw and Schuman's reservations. Questions regarding how the libraries and librarians are depicted at the start and end of the stories tested Stevens' hypothesis that stereotypes are frequently used with the purpose of discrediting the ideologies they represent.

Rafferty recorded an ideological stance in relation to positive, neutral or negative attitudes, which could be evidenced by the plot, character representations, or clues in the narrative or style of discourse (266). This approach has been developed for the current purpose, with the addition of options such as partially or unknown for some questions. The framework was further refined during the data gathering process, particularly to capture information relating to the images since they were central to the contribution that this study makes to the literature.

Data relating to each of the eight sample books was initially input into a Word template of the framework (see Table 1). Once this process had been completed, most of the questions from the template were transferred into the left-hand column of an Excel spreadsheet, with short-hand of the data for each title entered as a separate column. Those questions that were not suitable for translating into shorthand, such as Question 3: who are the main characters, were not entered into the spreadsheet. Several of the responses were color-coded, and totals were gathered in the far right-hand column. This process was completed to enable easier cohesive analysis of the whole set, and used in combination with the more in-depth analyses in the Word documents to produce the findings in the following section.

The requirement to analyze both the images and text of each book dictated that the coding approach had to be human-coded, whereas alternative research methods may afford less bias (Shaw 560). In an attempt to limit bias and maintain consistency, the data gathering and coding was performed by one researcher over the course of one day. The combination of an initial hermeneutic and semiotic qualitative method of data gathering, with a more quantitative coding process helped to tease out key themes in the findings that may have been missed if only one of the two approaches had been undertaken. The use of Rafferty's categories was helpful in simplifying responses to questions such as Question 5: How are librarians represented at the start of the story?

Table 1. The initial data gathering framework.

Setting and characters	
1.	Is the library the only setting in the story?
a.	If not, what are the other main settings?
2.	Who is the narrator?
3.	Who are the central characters?
4.	What style of illustration has been used?
Representation of librarians	
5.	How are librarians represented at the start of the story? (Positive; neutral; negative; unknown)
6.	Has this changed by the end of the story? (Positive; neutral; negative; unknown)
7.	Is the librarian a main character in the story? (Yes; No)
a.	Is the librarian male/female? (M; F)
b.	Age? (Young; indeterminable; middle-aged or older)
c.	Ethnicity? (White; African; Asian; Hispanic)
d.	Are they attractive looking? (Attractive; So-so; Unattractive)
e.	Do they conform to the stereotype? (Hair in bun, glasses, middle-aged, dowdy clothes) (Y; N; Partially)
f.	Are they friendly and helpful toward borrowers? (Competent, friendly and firm; Impatient, dismissive; Nasty, suspicious)
8.	Is the librarian shown or described performing the following tasks? (Y; N)
a.	Circulation: Stamping books; Sending overdue notices; Shelving
b.	Classification of books
c.	Acquisition of stock
d.	Cataloging and processing
e.	Reference: Reader's advisory; Helping people find books
f.	Telling people to be quiet
g.	Enforcing rules
h.	Reading books for Storytime
9.	Does the librarian help to affect a positive ending to the story? (Yes; Uncertain; No)
10.	Is more than one librarian depicted? (Y; N) (If so, answer questions 6–8 for each librarian, giving the name/description of each in Q6) N
Representation of libraries	
11.	How is the library represented at the start of the story? (Positive; neutral; negative; unknown)
12.	Has this changed by the end of the story? (Positive; neutral; negative; unknown)
13.	Are the following tools depicted? (Y; N)
a.	Books
b.	Date stamp
c.	Self-issue machine(s)
d.	Borrower card
e.	Computer(s)/internet
f.	Card or electronic catalog
g.	Photocopier
h.	Microfiche
i.	Audiovisual materials
j.	Magazines and newspapers
14.	How is the library organized?
a.	Different spaces for quiet study and social interaction (Y; N; U)
b.	Different sections for children and adults (Y; N; U)
c.	According to genre (Y; N; U)
d.	Alphabetically (Y; N; U)
e.	Using a standard form of classification (Y; N; U)
General impressions	
15.	General impression of librarianship left by book (Positive; Neutral; Negative)
16.	General impression of libraries left by book (Positive; Neutral; Negative)

(Positive; neutral; negative; unknown) for cohesive analysis via the spreadsheet, that could then be expanded by the narrative responses in the Word documents.

Results

Of the eight titles, six are narrated in the third person, the remaining two are narrated by their central character: the young boy (in *Sorry, Miss!*) and Delilah (in *Delilah Darling*). All the books contain a cast of just a few central characters (i.e. who are named, mentioned by the text and/or depicted in several illustrations), with the range being between four and six. The style of illustrations varies across the set, with some illustrators using thick bold lines and bold color washes (Cowell, , *Cousins*) and others using more tentative strokes and soft watercolor shading (Rogers, Joos, Hawkes, Denton). No correlations were found between illustrative style and representation of the profession.

Representation of librarians

Four titles demonstrated a positive attitude toward librarians at the start of the book, with six ending in a positive representation (see [Table 2](#)). *B is for BOOK* is coded as finishing on a neutral footing because the librarian has considerable difficulty controlling the class, though the story she tells about “The Haunted Library” literally comes alive for the children and satiates their thirst for a horror story. The collaboration between teacher and librarian sets them apart from the children and there is an implication that the telling of the ghost story was planned by them as a way of getting the children to behave. *Little Bo Peep* was judged to end with a negative representation of librarians because of her inadequate response to Little Bo Peep’s request for help finding information.

Of the fourteen library workers depicted in the books, seven are unambiguously described as librarians in the text. Only the three assistant owls in *The Midnight Library* are unequivocally not librarians. The remaining four characters depicted as library workers were analyzed with the expectation that as they are portrayed as a library worker, most lay-people reading the book will assume that they are librarians. However, in the six animorphic characters

Table 2. Representation of librarians.

Representation of librarians								
Short title	B is for BOOK	Sorry, Miss	Little Bo Peep	Library Lion	Delilah Darling	Maisy	Midnight Library	Library Book for Bear
Publication year	1994	1998	1999	2006	2006	2007	2013	2014
Start of story	positive	positive	positive	negative	neutral	neutral	positive	neutral
End of story	neutral	positive	negative	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive

many aspects of the librarian stereotype are unclear or rendered irrelevant, with the exception of Mother Goose who wears clothes, has a name and is referred to by the narrator. Mother Goose is therefore included in the following discussion of stereotypes, whereas the other five animorphic characters are not (see Table 4). Nine characters are discussed in terms of interpretations of the librarian stereotype, and twelve are included in the discussion of librarian tasks (see Table 5). The three assistant owls have been included as one since they are indistinguishable (see Table 3).

Table 3. Library characters.

	Name	Pub. date		Librarian?	Animorphic?	Consider re stereotype?	Consult re tasks?
1	The librarian (1)	1994	B is for BOOK	yes	no	yes	yes
2	Miss Folio	1998	Sorry, Miss	yes	no	yes	yes
3	Mother Goose	1999	Little Bo Peep	yes	yes	yes	yes
4	Miss Merriweather	2006	Library Lion	yes	no	yes	yes
5	Mr McBee	2006	Library Lion	unknown	no	yes	yes
6	The story lady	2006	Library Lion	unknown	no	yes	yes
7	Library Anne	2006	Delilah Darling	yes	no	yes	yes
8	Ostrich	2007	Maisy	unknown	yes	no	yes
9	Peacock	2007	Maisy	unknown	yes	no	yes
10	The little librarian	2013	Midnight Library	yes	no	yes	yes
11	The 3 assistant owls	2013	Midnight Library	no	yes	no	yes
12	The librarian (2)	2014	Library Book for Bear	yes	no	yes	yes

Table 4. Representation of librarians.

Book title	Representation code	Reason
Rodgers (1994)	Neutral	Little about the profession in the book. However, as The librarian (1) remains smiling and friendly (seeming) throughout, the book has been given a neutral rather than negative rating.
Furtado and Joos (1998)	Neutral	Little impression of librarianship. In relation to the overall analytical framework, Miss Folio gives a positive impression, however depictions of her do not provide adequate material to elicit a positive overall impression of the profession.
Cowell (1999)	Negative	Although Mother Goose is described as “the helpful librarian” (p.6), she is stern and serious and does not help Little Bo Peep find the book she was seeking. This unhelpful and unfriendly demeanor imparts a negative overall impression of the profession.
Knudsen and Hawkes (2006)	Positive	This book shows that even librarians who may seem imposing and rule bound are friendly, welcoming and happy to break the rules sometimes; they also read engaging stories that make you want to keep coming back!
Willis and Reeve (2006)	Positive	Library Anne is very friendly and helpful, whilst also being firm about the library’s rules throughout.
Cousins (2007)	Positive	Maisy and her friends enjoy storytime and continue playing the characters from the story when they go to the park.
Midnight Library (2013)	Positive	The little librarian and assistants ensure that each patron finds the “perfect book” (p. 3).
Library book for Bear (2104)	Positive	The stereotype of the ‘shushing’ librarian is parodied by having other characters ‘shush’ Bear, whilst The librarian (2) is very friendly and welcoming. However, reading a book for storytime is the only task depicted.

Table 5. Representations of libraries.

Book title	Representation code	Reason
<i>B is for BOOK!</i> (1994)	Neutral	The space is bright and welcoming. Little representation of libraries in the text or illustrations.
<i>Sorry Miss!</i> (1998)	Neutral	Little impression of libraries so not coded as positive, but no mention of overdue notices or fines for the persistently late return of the book that the boy loaned, so not coded as negative.
<i>Little Bo Peep</i> (1999)	Positive	Little Bo Peep finds a book, which she loans from the library and it helps her solve her problem. The sub-plot (in the illustrations only) is positive as the wolf is repeatedly foiled in his attempts to catch Little Bo Peep.
<i>Library Lion</i> (2006)	Positive	The library is shown to be friendly and welcoming to all.
<i>Delilah Darling</i> (2006)	Positive	Delilah explains that "The library is full of extremely interesting books: some have pictures, some have words and this one has a squashed baked bean on page 5" (p. 7). At the end of the book she tells the reader the library was: "extremely fun [emphasis made with larger type in book]. And I borrowed a lovely book called TROPICAL DISEASES." (p. 27).
<i>Maisy</i> (2007)	Positive	Maisy's friends all borrow a book by the end. Maisy finds a book about fish, and "it was sparkly" too (p. 10) Maisy and friends find lots of things to do in the library (pp. 6–8), and enjoy storytime (pp. 16–20). The book as a whole destabilizes the stereotype of libraries being boring, silent places, and as Maisy and her friends have such a lovely time the book is considered positive overall, even though it was rated neutral for its ending as Maisy had to leave to find "a nice quiet place" (p. 1) to read, which had been her initial reason for going to the library.
<i>Midnight Library</i> (2013)	Positive	Everyone is able to find the perfect book at the library and to read it in a nice quiet environment, or go to the activity room and play their instruments as loudly as they like. They leave the library clutching books, and wave at the library staff when the bell rings at dawn (pp. 15–16).
<i>A library book for Bear</i> (2014)	Positive	Mouse tells Bear "there are many delightful books in the library" (p. 6), and when Bear worries that the library is excessive and has "far too many books" (p. 10), Mouse assures him "Oh no. It's quite exciting" (p. 11). In the end Bear concedes and not only goes home with the story time book, but six others too (p. 34–36).

Eight of the nine characters are female, with Mr McBee being the only male. Four characters are estimated to be middle-aged, four are considered young and one (The little librarian) is a child. With the exception of the animorphic Mother Goose, the entire cohort are white. (It is interesting to note that greater diversity was found in books published overseas, such as Bruss; Kirk; and Winter) Only Library Anne and The little librarian were coded as being attractive, with all of the other characters being considered neutral in this respect, however none were considered unattractive.

Miss Merriweather is the only character who conforms to the stereotype of middle-aged, white female, plain looking, wearing glasses and with her hair in a bun. However, three characters carry some stereotypical traits: Miss Folio is white, middle-aged, neutral in relation to physical attractiveness, and wears small-rimmed glasses, however, her hair is long, loose and unruly, while Mother Goose is female, wears glasses perched on the end of her beak through which she peers at Little Bo Peep, and an old-fashioned, fussy bonnet. Although male, Mr McBee is also somewhat stereotypical, with his bow-tie, glasses and smart but plain clothes.

Of the nine characters analyzed, six present a positive attitude toward borrowers: the librarian (1), Miss Merriweather, Library Anne, The little librarian, the librarian (2) and the story lady, while all of the representations were coded as neutral. Mother Goose was coded as “impatient, dismissive,” Mr McBee started off “nasty, suspicious” but later became friendly, and Miss Folio started off “competent, friendly and firm” but also showed signs of being impatient and suspicious at times (to be expected given the storyline). Of most significance is that none of the characters’ interactions with library users were portrayed negatively overall.

Representation of librarians’ duties

This section discusses the representation of the twelve library workers depicted across the eight titles studied, with the assistant owls counted as one. Eight characters across all eight books perform circulation duties. None of the characters are shown executing any classification, acquisition or cataloging responsibilities, and only three perform referencing duties: Library Anne, The little librarian and the three assistant owls all help patrons to find a book to take home. While Little Bo Peep asks Mother Goose where she can discover a book about how to find sheep (6), Mother Goose does not actually help her to find it. None of the other characters are asked, or offer, to help their library users in this way.

Six of the library staff are represented “shushing,” while five ask their users to be quiet. Of these, three enforce additional rules: Miss Merriweather (running), Library Anne (eating, running, climbing up the shelves), and Mr McBee (running). Six characters are depicted reading stories to patrons, of whom four do so as part of an organized storytime offering. The little librarian and her assistant owls take Miss Wolf to the “storytelling corner” (13–14) and the little librarian also reads the owls a bedtime story at the end of the book, however unlike the other examples, this is not representative of the planned sessions available in public libraries. Additionally, Delilah tells Library Anne that at the libraries in her land “We all bring our blankets and bears and a beautiful princess reads to us until we fall asleep” (23–24), but there is no suggestion that Library Anne’s library offers anything similar.

Eight of the twelve library workers affected a positive ending to the story, with Miss Folio, Mother Goose, Peacock and The story lady having no notable role in producing such an ending. Five books are considered to provide a positive overall view of the profession (*Library Lion*, *Delilah Darling*, *Maisy*, *Midnight Library*, *Library book for Bear*), two are neutral (*B is for BOOK!* and *Sorry, Miss!*), and one is negative (*Little Bo Peep*). Those that provide a positive view are the most recent publications, all having been published between 2006 and 2014.

Representation of libraries

Six titles begin with a positive representation of the library (see Table 4), with two coded as neutral: *Little Bo Peep* and *Library Lion*. Little Bo Peep goes to the library at Little Boy Blue's suggestion rather than of her own volition (p. 4). As she appears to know where the library is, and goes there happily when it is suggested, it appears that she simply had not thought of using the library in this way, which is therefore neutral. In *Library Lion*, the neutral rating has been selected not because of the central character's prior view of the library, but because the building is depicted as quite imposing, being a red-brick, Carnegie style building with a flight of stone steps flanked by two stone lions, with a traditional, large front desk for issues and returns (p. 1). None of the people are represented as welcoming the lion (1–2). All of these impressions combine to leave a neutral initial view.

The representation of libraries at the end of six books is coded positive. Of the two that are not, *Sorry, Miss!* has been coded as unknown and *Maisy* as neutral. *Little Bo Peep* and *Library Lion* are both coded as representing a positive view of libraries by the end of the book. Little Bo Peep found the book she wanted, was able to take it home, and found her lost sheep as a result of reading it. In *Library Lion* the image on the final spread (37–38) is light and colorful, with everyone looking jubilant. The reader is led to assume that the Lion will continue helping in the library and enjoying storytime.

Sorry, Miss! is difficult to rate since it does not end in the library but in the librarian's home, and after the first spread, the images and illustrations only really relate to Miss Folio herself and not the library (although the "Children's Library" logo suggests that is where she is). Therefore the code given to the impression of libraries at the end of *Sorry, Miss!* is unknown. *Maisy* has been given a neutral rating since although Maisy found the book she wanted and had fun with her friends at storytime, she had to leave the library in order to find a nice quiet place to read her book, which had been a main reason for choosing to go to the library at the beginning.

Unsurprisingly, all of the books studied depicted library stacks full of books. Five titles depicted a date stamp being used, while none of the books described or showed self-issue machines. Three books referred to a borrower card, and only four portrayed computers. One book (*Library Lion*) included a catalog, but although published in 2006, it was in the form of a card catalog. In these ways the traditional ideology of the library is upheld. None of the books mention the catalog as an information retrieval tool. Two books showed different areas for quiet study and social interaction, whilst five depicted separate sections for children and adults, complete with storytelling corners. Four of the libraries appeared to be classified by genre, but none were depicted or described as shelving the books alphabetically, and none were overtly using a standard form of classification. However, the illustrations in three books have white rectangles toward the base of the

spines that are suggestive of spine labels, and therefore some system of classification (*Library Lion*, *Maisy* and *Library book for Bear*. These are blank, however, and not mentioned in the narrative. Considering the didactic nature of picture books, there are several missed opportunities here, which may be symptomatic of the lack of contemporary understanding of information retrieval, circulation and classification systems by authors and/or illustrators.

Six books presented a positive overall impression of libraries, and none were felt to give a negative overall view, but two were considered neutral. Neither *B is for BOOK!* nor *Sorry, Miss!* offers enough of an impression of libraries to rate them positive or negative, so both have been rated neutral. In contrast to the overall impression of librarians, the overall impression of libraries provided by *Little Bo Peep* is positive since Little Bo Peep finds “exactly the book she was looking for” (18.)

All the books describe libraries as welcoming places, with the users depicted enjoying themselves. *Maisy* had to leave the library to find somewhere quiet to read her sparkly book about fish (10), but she and her friends find lots of things to entertain themselves with at the library and clearly enjoy their time there. The destabilization of the stereotype of libraries being silent, boring places caused the book to be rated positive overall, despite receiving a neutral rating for the impression of libraries at the end of the book. *Delilah* also finds the library “full of extremely interesting books” (7) and “**extremely** fun” [emphasis made with larger type in book] (27). Similarly, *Mouse* tells *Bear* “there are many delightful books in the library” (6), “It’s quite exciting” (11). Despite his initial reservations that a visit to the library would be “Completely unnecessary” (5) since “he had all the books he would ever need” (1), *Bear* greatly enjoys storytime and not only goes home with the storytime book, but six others too (34–36).

In summary, the analysis of a selection of eight children’s picture books published in the UK between 1994 and 2014 discovered that both libraries and librarians have been more favorably depicted in the 21st century than they were in the 20th century. This study has found that the overall impression of the library profession in the five books published between 2006 and 2014 was positive, whilst the three published in the 1990s presented neutral or negative views of the vocation. Furthermore, eight of the twelve library staff affected a positive end to their respective stories. Only one character was felt to conform with the librarian stereotype, whilst three partially conformed, and the remaining five did not. Despite this, eight of the nine characters were female and all were white. Moreover, the character that did conform was presented in a very positive light by the end of the book, and was always firm but fair. Therefore the presence of the stereotype is not considered negative. No correlation was found between the level of stereotyping and overall view of librarians, however the way in which they were shown to interact with their

patrons did affect this. Six books presented a positive overall portrayal of libraries, and although the two oldest titles were classed as neutral, none of the books were considered negative toward libraries.

Discussion

The literature review found that there is general agreement that picture books are extremely important in teaching children about the world that they live in, with stories often created with the intention of teaching the child about a particular aspect of their culture (Cotton; DeWitt et al.; Hunt; Stephens; Stevens; Watson; Yontz). Since “pictures reflect the values of the society that produces and ‘uses’ them” (Doonan 8), this form of book more than any other can be said to represent the views of the culture they come from. Brown claims that “The best people writing for picture books are those who trust the illustrator to tell part of the story . . . The illustrations in a picture book are there to do what the words cannot do” (Brown). It is the unique combination of visual, verbal and esthetic experience that picture books provide, which “gives form to ideas” (Baird et al.; Cotton; Cotton & Daly; Doonan 7; Graham; Hunt; Stephens), and allows their readers to attach their own ideas and experiences to them (Baird et al.; Cotton; Cotton & Daly; Hunt; Graham; Stephens). Although Ganea et al.’s study suggests that a child who has never set foot in a library may learn about them through picture books, clearly a positive personal experience combined with a favorably presented story would be even more powerful. Further, the more exposure that children have to libraries and librarians (both via picture books and personal experiences) the more interest they will have in them (Butler; Houston-Price et al. 99; Simcock & DeLoache).

This study found that there are several facets to the librarian stereotype:

- (a) demographic profile (female, middle-aged, Caucasian)
- (b) role, level of education and skill set
- (c) personal attributes
- (d) tools operated

This research found that the demographic profile depicted in children’s picture books is consistent with the stereotype. However, CILIP/ARA’s 2015 workforce mapping indicates that this is an accurate portrayal of the profession, which is predominantly female (78.1%), aged 45 or over (55.3%) and primarily “white” 96.7% (CILIP/ARA). When the stereotype was detected (four of the twelve characters), in all but one case the view of the librarian at the end of the story was positive, corroborating Stevens’ study. Heylman, Stevens, Yontz and Maynard & McKenna also found that the stereotype of the middle-aged, white, female librarian persists, however none related this

back to contemporary research on the workforce. This suggests that the reason for the stereotype is not so much that it is an ingrained or negative stereotype, but is more likely because it is a true reflection of the majority of librarians in the UK. It may be that authors and illustrators of children's books are more likely to employ such stereotypes to make their characters more recognizable to young readers.

The role and skills of the librarian have been found to be misrepresented and underrepresented in the books analyzed, which might suggest some misunderstanding of professional roles and the skills. Librarian characters often carry out nonprofessional tasks, for example eight of the twelve librarians performed circulation duties. There was no mention or illustration of any classification, cataloging or acquisition work, and five librarians were depicted asking patrons to be quiet. Considering that the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's recent report found that the most popular things for children to do at the library were: choosing books (83%), reading or being read to (68%), reading activities (61%) (CIPFA), it is also significant that only three librarians were shown or referred to assisting with reference queries or helping characters find the perfect book. Overall, there is little differentiation between professional and para-professional roles and skills in the books analyzed. A recent picture book, not included in the research set because it was not based in a library, aims to encourage children to read for pleasure and includes six "librarians" saying that they can help find the perfect book (French and Baines). This is perhaps a more encouraging representation of librarians and one of their key skills.

Arguably, amongst the most important activities provided by public libraries for pre-school readers of picture books are storytime and rhymetime sessions. Indeed CIPFA's study found that 50% of children visiting public libraries were attending storytime, and 45% rhymetime (25). Five of the books studied included a storytime session and depicted this being a central aspect in patrons' enjoyment of their trip to the library. None of the books mentioned rhymetime.

The personal attributes that are generally associated with librarians within children's books are largely veracious and positive, and contrary to the historic stereotype of a stern, matronly character who seeks to protect "her" books from the dirty hands of the outside world (Schuman 87). Modern librarians are shown to be friendly, welcoming and helpful; and this is corroborated by CIPFA who found that "libraries are perceived as being highly welcoming for children with an average score of 9.2 out of 10" and "the single highest scoring factor is **the helpfulness of the library staff.**" [original emphasis] (22). With the exception of *Little Bo Peep*, which is the only picture book that this study has in common with Maynard and McKenna, the present findings contradict the latter's assertion that "the old-fashioned stereotype [of the librarian] is much more fixed [than that of the library]," with "no single memorable

positive image” (128). All of the librarians depicted in the remaining seven picture books analyzed in the present study are welcoming, friendly and provide a predominantly positive experience for their patrons. Furthermore, improvement was detected in the books published from 2006 to 2014, over those published between 1994 and 2005. The books published from 2006 onwards depict libraries as fun and exciting, which upholds Maynard & McKenna’s conclusion.

Portrayals of the tools that librarians use were found to be outdated. The only mention in text or images of a library catalog was found in *Library Lion*, and this was a card catalog. Five books included reference to a date stamp, while none featured a self-issue machine. This may be a reflection of ACE’s finding in *Envisioning the Library of the Future* of participants battling a contradiction between nostalgia for libraries of the past, and criticism that libraries were not keeping up with change. It is perhaps this dichotomy between a desire for libraries to retain their traditional grandeur and a need for them to become more technologically savvy and open to community needs that causes some of the tensions to be found in children’s books set in libraries.

The results of this small scale study would suggest that portrayals of libraries and librarians have changed and improved over time, with librarians creating positive experiences for their users, and libraries presented as enjoyable, interesting and exciting places. The study found very little evidence of librarian skills being presented in children’s picture books, which is commensurate with Shaw’s 2010 study in which 58% of UK newspaper articles studied made no mention of the duties performed by librarians. However, Shaw also found that when duties *were* mentioned, professional skills were highlighted. It is perhaps somewhat disappointing that a book published as recently as 2006 still depicts a card catalog (*Library Lion*), and that only three titles studied make any reference to a librarian assisting a library user to find information. Indeed, one of those three titles (*Little Bo Peep*) portrays a decidedly negative response from the librarian when asked for help finding information. None of the books take the opportunity to explain library catalogs or methods of classification, whereas *Topsy and Tim at the Library* handled classification extremely well with Miss Page, the children’s librarian, explaining “They were all in A B C order. Books of a kind were kept together . . . ” (Adamson and Adamson 12).

Conversely, it was pleasing to find that although the practice of “shushing” was found in five of the eight books, in each case it has been handled in a sensitive way. In two cases, there is some critique of this conventional stereotype. The Lion (in *Library Lion*) roars “very loudly” (8) when he is told that “storytime is over,” bringing Miss Merriweather “marching out of her office” to tell the Lion sternly “If you can’t be quiet, then you’ll have to leave (9). However when a little girl asks “If he promises to be quiet, can he come back for storytime tomorrow?” Miss Merriweather agrees. Although she

may be stern, the librarian is firm but fair. Later, when the Lion roars at Mr McBee to get help for the hurt librarian, it is recognized that “sometimes there was a good reason to break the rules. Even in the library” (39–40). The book thus exposes the stereotype only to provide the modern professional sentiment that while being quiet might be the ideal, that there are times (and in some libraries, places) where this rule can be broken. Similarly when Bear roars at Mouse, the librarian (2) in *Library Book for Bear* smiles at him, whilst a “mother squirrel squished an angry finger against her lips, and an old raccoon said sternly, ‘Quiet in the library’” (20–23). When Bear later bellows at Mouse “QUIET VOICES IN THE LIBRARY,” the librarian ignores the outburst and merely invites Bear and Mouse to join storytime (28–30), challenging the stereotype in an amusing way. *Midnight Library* includes the only separate activity room, where a noisy band of squirrels are told they could play “as loudly as they liked” whilst “silence settled upon the library once more” (5–7).

This study corroborates Highsmith; Luthmann; Yontz in finding that librarians are often depicted performing nonprofessional tasks such as shelving books, which Luthmann suggests is “visual shorthand for the librarian” (776). The fact that there is an established stereotype and associated librarian tasks such as shelving, stamping, shushing, suggests that there is a conventional visual code that helps people recognize a character as a librarian, and it could be argued that this is a good thing. Many professions have “tools” or “tasks” that popular culture connects with them (e.g. teacher – chalk board; firefighter – yellow helmet and fire engine; doctor – stethoscope). Some professions have no recognizable objects, for example estate agent, or book publisher. Some, as with librarians, are outdated: author – typewriter (not computer!), and most teachers now use interactive whiteboards. Uniforms also help us identify people’s role and this is not seen as a negative thing; perhaps the librarian stereotype should be considered in a similar way. Further, DeWitt et al. (100)’s assertion that “picture books embrace tradition” may be a contributing factor to some of the more old-fashioned trappings being regularly depicted in favor of modern tools; the date-stamp, for example, rather than the self-issue machine. A picture book published in late 2017 (Coelho, *Luna loves library day*) includes an illustration of a self-issue machine, however although predominantly set in a library the book does not include a single reference to librarians in the text or illustrations (which excluded it from this study’s sample set). The young child and her father checking their books out on a machine therefore actually highlights this deficit.

Radford and Radford apply Hall’s cultural studies approach to stereotypes, arguing that they are a result of a culture’s need for signifiers to aid common understanding; suggesting that the use of the book stamp may be a signifier for the librarian. Furthermore, picture books contain both iconic (illustrations)

and indexical (textual narrative) signifiers that may enhance the effect of stereotyping. However, as children's picture books are used to teach children about the society they live in, this may be positive rather than negative. The signifier is negative when it produces an adverse response in the child toward the librarian, such as a child being afraid of visiting the library because they think librarians are not friendly, or later not considering entering the profession. In general, however, the findings of this study demonstrate that librarians are consistently presented in positive ways in children's picture books in the current century, and that this is an improvement upon depictions from the last decade of the 20th century. The propensity of picture books to depict real-world relationships (BBC), and the fact that the interplay between the narratives and illustrations allows children to bring their own understanding of the world into their reading (Baird et al.; Cotton; Cotton and Daly; Graham; Hunt; Stephens, suggests that these findings demonstrate a positive perception of authors, illustrators and ultimately children toward the library profession. The findings also suggest an endemic lack of understanding of the librarian's role and key skills. Nodelman & Reamer suggest that "If people can find ways of becoming aware of the assumptions about themselves and one another that their culture's ideology may have manipulated them into taking for granted, then they can think clearly about those assumptions." (81). It may therefore be helpful for the profession to explain that librarians do not stamp books or wear their hair in a bun, and that these representations are not accurate, whilst explaining what librarians actually do.

Concluding remarks

Underpinning this study was the hope that it might help librarians understand how they are being depicted by children's authors and illustrators, and how they are therefore perceived by the younger generation. The consideration of various aspects of the librarian characters and their depictions facilitated an exploration of the librarian stereotype and found that the demographic profile and attributes were portrayed accurately; whilst the role, skills and tools were not. Encouragingly, representations are increasingly positive in more recent publications.

To date, CILIP and other organizations have focussed advocacy campaigns on libraries, but this research suggests that it would be valuable to direct advocacy efforts toward the communication of the knowledge and skills that librarians have to offer society. Although books such as Cassidy are excellent for challenging assumptions about what a librarian looks like, it is just as important (if not more so) to help people understand what librarians do and the value we can offer to society. French and Baines' *The Covers of my Book are too Far Apart! (And other Grumbles)*, which includes six librarians in its quest to dispel nonreaders' excuses for not reading, is very useful for

achieving this aim. However, it still only covers one librarian skill, albeit voiced by several, diverse librarians. A campaign where librarians describe their favorite part of their role could perhaps be used to both tackle ideological issues and promote librarianship to the future workforce. That Baird et al. found a child will add their own impressions to any stereotypes validates Schumann and Shaw's assertions that librarians and the policy makers would be wise to do all in their power at local, national and international levels to improve the public's understanding of the skills and knowledge that librarians possess.

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